Social Media Representations of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, and their Relation to Metropolitan Domination: The Case of Attabad Lake

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Geography

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Abstract

This thesis links the colonial and post-colonial representational history of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan with new actors, emerging representational practices, and contemporary cellular, digital, and virtual modes of representation. The power-laden, partial, and exclusionary nature of colonial representations is well established; this thesis investigates the emerging role of new actors, virtual spaces, and altered representational practices in relation to colonial and post-colonial representations. In order to do this, the thesis examines the representational practices of a range of local and down-country Pakistani actors in virtual spaces, as they relate specifically to the Attabad Lake, a natural disaster turned tourist hotspot in Hunza, Gilgit-Baltistan. Situating Attabad’s touristification (itself a product of improved road links, cellular connectivity and the site’s visual attractiveness) against the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial representational practices pertaining to Gilgit-Baltistan, I analyze how virtual spaces act as institutional platforms for the production and reproduction of predominantly orientalist discourse. Using textual and pictorial evidence from four virtual data streams (two Facebook pages and two Instagram accounts), I develop the argument that contemporary online representations of Attabad constitute Gilgit-Baltistan discursively in ways that perpetuate (and sometimes disrupt) longstanding colonial and postcolonial portrayals of the region and its people. A significant effect of these online representations is to legitimate Gilgit-Baltistan’s political, economic and cultural domination and control by lowland Pakistan and the Pakistani state.
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Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

"The route is dangerous, (but) I'll take you along. Here, look at this."

He went to one corner of the room and bent (into) a wooden chest. When he returned he held an issue of the National Geographic magazine. This same issue was also resting on my book shelf at home in Lahore. There was an essay titled “High Road to Hunza”, which contained a travelogue through Hunza, accompanied by pictures.

"Look at this sir. This French sir came with his wife and child. From Passu I took them on to Shimshal as a guide. And look at this (picture) Sir! Here I'm helping the madam cross a wooden bridge. Do you recognize me? And here, look at this! They also published my interview in this essay."

True, it was Hunar Baig's picture. On a dangerous looking bridge, made of bare wooden planks fastened together, a Chinese looking acrobat (Hunar Baig) was escorting a white skinned, European woman (French sir's wife) to safety.

(Isn't it) weird? Last year I was staring at these pictures, particularly this one crossing the bridge, like a prisoner in captivity who yearns to see a sparrow, flying through the morning sky. At that time, Hunar Baig was just a distant picture on my book shelve and here I am today, standing in the home of my (cherished) picture.

"You should come Sir, I will take you to Shimshal."

Shimshal, such a beautiful name; it should be written in the palms of my hands (destiny). Thank you Hunar Baig, I will forever remember and cherish this beautiful evening.

Hunza Dasta'an – 1984

Guiding Principles, Objectives and Research Questions

This excerpt, written in 1984, marks the beginning of a travelogue titled Shimshal Bemisaal by Mustansar Hussain Tarrar, a well-respected writer, travel enthusiast, and TV show host who gained popularity among the Pakistani middle classes in the 1970s and 80s. Gilgit-Baltistan, a

1 Note: Translating this excerpt from Mustansar Hussain Tarrar’s (2000) travelogue Shimshal Bemisaal was harder than I anticipated. Just looking at the title itself, ‘Bemisaal’ is a compound word with two roots, ‘Be' translates to ‘without' and ‘misaal’ translates to example. Shimshal therefore is one of a kind, ‘without any example’ or ‘unlike another’, but that wouldn’t make much sense in English. Shimshal the unparalleled? Shimshal the unmatched? Shimshal the extraordinary?
province-like region in Northern-Pakistan where Shimshal 'the extraordinary' is located, is certainly no stranger to travel writers and adventurists. Butz (1993) traces a series of outsiders who ventured into Shimshal and played an integral part in 'discovering' it and, by extension, in constructing, representing, and harnessing it for the outside world. Dolphin (2000) focuses primarily on the accounts of travel writers, who often came as colonial administrators to gain control of the region, working in tandem with British imperial designs. However, that wasn’t all; outsiders came to the region for a wide range of reasons – to uncover the most hidden places in the world, to find the original Aryan race, to uncover the secret of longevity – all the while constructing and disseminating representations of the people and places that make up Gilgit-Baltistan in the service of their own interests.

Colonialism serves as the discursive foundation on which this amalgam of textual representations is built. The period of post-coloniality that followed presented newer representational challenges, introduced new actors, and altered modes of and motivations for representations of the region and its people. Tarrar’s travelogue is a good example of the ways in which representational interests are being served in the cultural sphere. In this travelogue the western outsider, the down-country Pakistani national, and the resident of Gilgit-Baltistan are all representing themselves and each other, in the service of their own interests. Ultimately, all these actors are embedded in an asymmetrical field of discursive power, which plays a significant role in determining the nature and potency of the representations that gain prominence. Although there is considerable literature that looks critically at both representational and material aspects of the constitutional, legal, and militaristic modes of control that Gilgit-Baltistan has experienced over the decades, scholarly literature that conceptualizes these socio-cultural representations is particularly impoverished (see Butz and Cook 2016; Hong 2013; Sökefeld 2005; Butz 1998).
Since 1947, Gilgit-Baltistan has been administered by a wide array of political and civilian forms of organization; parts of it were semi-autonomous, whereas others were ostensibly sovereign chiefdoms in their own right. It has been a zone of conflict and contestation vis-à-vis India, an economic node connecting China as an emerging super power with the Arabian Peninsula, and a region whose bio-diversity is both celebrated and under the constant threat of exploitation. For a region that has so many meanings and interests attached, there is a pressing need to conceptualize modalities of domination that its people and spaces have experienced over the centuries. Domination involves institutional decision-making through which rules of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are determined, most of the time without consulting the people who are most affected by those rules. Gilgit-Baltistan presents a case where entanglements of domination have continued for decades; colonial powers during the 19th and 20th centuries, and later the Pakistani state and a range of trans-national and local institutions, have engaged in institutional decision-making, which led to the discursive construction and subsequent domination of Gilgit-Baltistan. Although today Gilgit-Baltistan is increasingly considered a site for the production of social change and development, it remains under strict regimes of domination and control – legal, constitutional, militaristic and, I argue, socio-cultural.

A series of outsiders have exercised domination and control by formalizing, maintaining, and exercising power through a web of institutions and networks that shape the asymmetrical field of discursive power that produces representations of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. Sharp et al. (2000) argue that domination, exploitation, and subjection can be exercised at “the material, symbolic, or psychological level” (1) which is aligned with my own conceptual standpoint that Gilgit-Baltistan’s (GB) constitutional and legal liminality, its status of a zone of contestation, and its image as a bio-diversity reserve is linked to socio-cultural understandings of
the region and its people present in travel literature, and more recently in a series of virtual spaces. Sharp et al. (2000: 2) provide examples to elaborate their proposition:

This dominating power can be located within the realms of the state, the economy and civil society, and articulated within social, economic, political and cultural relations and institutions. Patriarchy, racism and homophobia are all faces of dominating power which attempt to discipline, silence, prohibit, or repress difference or dissent.

Without changing the definition of domination, orientalism\(^2\) can be added to this list of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia as yet another discourse and institutional practice that dominating powers use to construct, and by extension discipline and silence, difference and dissent.

My thesis is not an attempt to historicize constitutional, political, and militaristic forms of domination in Gilgit-Baltistan. Much scholarship has already documented these aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan’s history and political economy (Butz and Cook 2016; Hong 2013; Sökefeld 2005). Rather, I am interested in socio-cultural forms of domination that have been exercised as different actors employ representational practices to further their interests. Outsiders have exerted considerable influence over the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan over time, by representing them in certain ways: as savage, authentic, marginal, but somehow still integral to broader designs of the colonial enterprise or postcolonial statehood, depending on how they can be discursively useful at particular times. Similarly, locals have engaged with these colonial and

\(^2\) Orientalism is a style of thought premised upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘East’ (orient) and most of the time between the ‘West’ (occident). Said made this distinction apparent in *Orientalism* (1978) which looked at the discursive production of the orient in colonial contexts. It is appropriate and commensurate with Said’s theory to straightforwardly call western colonial representations of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) orientalist or orientalizing. It is, however, more problematic to call down-country Pakistani representations of GB the same, because GB is as much a part of the “Orient” as the rest of Pakistan. I acknowledge that down-country representations cannot be understood as orientalist in the same way as the western outsider representations, however, throughout this thesis I extend the notion of orientalist discourse beyond the West/East context in which Said developed, and use the same typology for both western outsider representations and down-country representations for two reasons: (1) down-country representations dovetail with the orientalist tropes codified during the colonial period, and (2) they have effects on GB that are analogous to the domination effects of orientalism.
neo-colonial representations of themselves to further their own interests, thereby contributing to historical representations, albeit in an asymmetrical field of discursive power, and with differential effects for differentially positioned subjects.

The primary aim of my thesis is to link this colonial and post-colonial representational history of Gilgit-Baltistan with new actors, emerging representational practices, and cellular, digital, and virtual modes of representation that reinforce, disrupt, or subvert forms of socio-cultural domination. The power-laden, partial, and exclusionary nature of colonial representations is well established; this thesis investigates the emerging role of new actors, virtual spaces, and altered representational practices in relation to the colonial and post-colonial representations. My focus is as much on the processes through which landscapes and people are continually represented and re-represented, as it is on the power effects these processes produce.

In this thesis I look at the representational practices of a range of actors in virtual spaces related to the Attabad Lake, a disaster turned tourist hotspot in Gilgit-Baltistan. A slope failure in early 2010 resulted in the formation of a 120m deep lake which “displaced 1650 individuals from 141 households” and claimed 19 lives (Cook & Butz 2013: 372). In the short run, people in and around the Attabad Lake were severely affected. Additionally, a 22 km stretch of Karakoram Highway (KKH) was completely submerged, which became an impediment for the 20,000 people who lived upstream. Inhabitants whose property was damaged by the landslide and flooding, or whose lives were disrupted by the highway’s destruction, unequivocally asked for the lake to be drained, and it was widely believed that not only would the original KKH be restored, but that the Attabad village farmland would also be reclaimed (See Butz & Cook 2011).

Keeping the lake as a mobility impediment in mind, travel bloggers from the Pakistani heartland started documenting and projecting their positive experiences while taking boat rides
across the lake in 2012 and 2013, at the same time as locals were trying their best to come to terms with the inconvenience of a shattered road link. Romanticized narratives on Instagram, reddit, and Tumblr, along with personal travel blogs, popularized the lake as ‘remote’, ‘dangerous’ and ‘hauntingly beautiful’. Within a couple of years of the landslide, meanings attached to Attabad had begun changing, predominantly in virtual spaces at first, but also in physical spaces because of the material implications of online representational practices. The disaster site was increasingly being understood as a destination worth seeing, with hints of both disaster and adventure tourism, which paved the way for its popularity. Situating Attabad’s touristification on the continuum of colonial and postcolonial representational practices pertaining to Gilgit-Baltistan, I analyze how virtual spaces act as institutional platforms for the production of discourse, and how these representations engage with traditional grids of power to reinforce domination and control.

**Research Questions**

To achieve these goals, I address a series of interconnected questions. Answering the first two questions sets the transcultural representational context of Gilgit-Baltistan through the colonial period into the post-colonial era, and addresses shifts in meanings attached to the materiality of Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape.

1) *How were Gilgit-Baltistan and its inhabitants represented in the colonial period to western outsiders?*

2) *How have Gilgit-Baltistan and its inhabitants been represented post-1947, during the era of post-colonial statehood, drawing on colonial tropes in tandem with emerging national narratives about what the region means to the nation-state?*
The final three questions relate to the Attabad Lake and how meanings attached to the lake have affected understandings of the Gilgit-Baltistan region, in virtual and physical spaces.

3) How do contemporary lowland Pakistanis/domestic tourists and bloggers discursively construct Attabad in virtual spaces, drawing on colonial tropes, nationalistic narratives and new ways of understanding the region, and to what effects?

4) How does the physical landscape and connectivity infrastructure in and around the Attabad Lake act as a representational resource for the production of discourse?

5) How has the Attabad landslide event been represented by the people of Gilgit-Baltistan who have been affected by it, and to what effects?

Mapping the Thesis

In the remainder of this introductory chapter I develop a conceptual framework to address these questions by drawing on post-structural, post-colonial, and new-media literature. Additionally, this chapter includes a short discussion of the data, methods, and methodology. The second chapter addresses my first two research questions by delving into Gilgit-Baltistan’s representational history starting from the colonial period to the present. The third chapter offers a deeper understanding of the processes shaping the Attabad disaster. Issues of scale and the landscape’s materiality are addressed as I frame Attabad and other aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape as discursive resources that play a significant role in constituting reality. I introduce pictures and captions sourced from virtual spaces, and justify the selection processes. Chapter four addresses the final three core research questions by analyzing four data streams with pictorial and textual representations in light of the conceptual frameworks and cultural tropes regarding Gilgit-Baltistan which have developed over different representational periods. The
fifth and final chapter frames these socio-cultural representations within the broader interests that are being served through this construction of Gilgit-Baltistan as a particular kind of oriental space. This paves the way for a discussion of the power and domination effects of Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization in virtual spaces. I conclude my thesis by summarizing my core arguments, discussing domination effects of Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization and highlighting avenues for further research.

Conceptual Framework

This thesis seeks to investigate contemporary digital and virtual representations of the people and spaces that make up Gilgit-Baltistan using Attabad as a core case study. Consequently, I begin constructing a conceptual framework for that analysis by developing a theory of representation along Foucauldian lines, whereby representations are primary components of discursive formations that constitute socio-material realities and shape human understandings and behavior. Subsequently, I draw on Edward Said’s concept of orientalism, to understand how the ‘East’ was discursively represented in the colonial era, and how post-colonial representations in digital and virtual spaces are co-constituted in relation to those colonial tropes, which have shaped Gilgit-Baltistan’s constitutional and legal liminality, experiences of militarism, and forces of social change and development. Next, I draw on the concepts of auto-ethnography (Pratt 1992, Butz & Besio 2009) and transculturation (Butz 2016) to understand how representations are co-constituted historically through the interplay of differently-positioned actors in an asymmetrical global field of discursive power. These conceptual resources are instrumental to understanding the complexity that Pakistani nationals add to the constitution of Gilgit-Baltistan by simultaneously othering and claiming ownership of its social spaces. I argue that virtual spaces
are reproducing and, in some cases, even strengthening the discursive web of socio-cultural domination in Gilgit-Baltistan that informs and is informed by political, economic, and militaristic forms of control.

Representations of Gilgit-Baltistan are substantially resourced by the materiality of its landscape, such as its lakes and mountains, and influenced by its transportation and cellular/digital connectivity infrastructure. I investigate ways in which the material environment provides resource and justification for Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization by informing representations that ultimately shape dominant understandings. In other words, I demonstrate how the affordances of a material environment inspire, shape, and provide resources for justifying certain representations. These analytic tasks are informed by a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and Said’s (1978) ‘Imaginative geographies’. I also propose that people and the environment are constituted in relation to each other, with neither privileged over the other. This breaks the ‘environmental’ and ‘social’ determinism binary that has been critiqued in contemporary geographies of exclusion literature.

Because virtual spaces are key to my argument about what new actors and representational modes are shaping tropes and understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan, I next focus on conceptualizing virtual media platforms as institutions in which discourses are produced and situated “within the established order of things” (Foucault 1971: 8). I look at implications of the “densification and complexification” of media technologies and their interaction with colonial tropes, nationalistic narratives, and re-worked ‘ways of seeing’ (Leppanen & Hakkinen 2012: 18). The virtual sphere is a relatively recent development everywhere, but in Gilgit-Baltistan it is extremely recent and still very much in process. Using these conceptual and theoretical tools, I analyze the changing meanings attached to Attabad landslide, through representational practices
in virtual spaces – from a disaster to a tourism destination – in order to identify and make sense of socio-cultural forms of domination that Gilgit-Baltistan has experienced in the past and continues to experience today.

**Discourse, Truth Effects, and the Socio-Spatial Temporality of Discourse**

Foucault’s concept of ‘discourse’ is instrumental to a theory of representation that explains how historical and contemporary processes construct the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as particular subjects and establish a relationship of domination and control between them and specific outsiders. Discourse is considerably more than the spoken or written word; it is a “historically specific system of rules … generated in particular institutional settings that structure how people think and act according to hierarchical forms of power” (Cook 2007: 17). A Foucauldian understanding of discourse focuses on the rules that produce meaningful statements and regulate them through institutional practices. In *Orders of Discourse*, Michel Foucault (1971) develops this framework to highlight the rules that create truth effects and enforce normalcy. These rules are discursively constructed and are characteristic of the dominant way of thinking at a particular point in time (an episteme)\(^3\) as they appear across a range of texts and emerge as forms of conduct at a number of different institutional sites within society (see Hall 2001a).

Discourses establish socially intelligible, ‘normal’, and ‘true’ ways to talk, write, and behave. Cresswell (2009: 211) provides examples from Foucault’s most celebrated works to show that discourses are performative; they are not simply ‘about’ something (politics, illness, sexuality, etc.) but actually bring these things into being: “Discourse does not simply describe

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\(^3\) In *The Order of Things* (1971) Foucault argued against the notion of absolute truth and asserted that knowledge (bound spatially and temporally) is premised upon unspoken and unquestioned assumptions of what is right and real. These founding ideas, or epistemes, constitute ‘truth effects’ on which discourse is based.
something that pre-exists, rather it brings it into being. In this sense it is more than a reflection of ‘reality’ that can be true or false but is in fact performing ‘reality’ and producing ‘truth effects’.”

Our understanding of different subjects – madness, sexuality, punishment – is rooted in and shaped by discourses about them. Our claims to knowledge and truth about those subjects are laden with power in ways that create ‘truth effects’ (Dittmer 2010; Mills 2004), such as the social construction of ‘normal’ ideas and behaviors (Cook 2007). Nancy Cook (2007: 18) establishes the link between these ‘true assertions’ and power: “By sanctioning ‘true’ assertions and ‘normal’ behaviors, and delineating what can and cannot be said, thought, meant, and done in a particular society, discourses are instruments (and effects) of power that provide frameworks for understanding the world.” Human beings think and act according to the rules of ‘normalcy’ and within the bounds of discursive ‘truth’, and as they enact this interplay of power and knowledge they become particular ‘normal’ subjects. Whereas discourses define intelligible ways of being and constitute humans as particular subjects, they also render certain subjectivities, thoughts, and practices socially unintelligible, marginal, invisible, and ‘abnormal’.

Sara Mills (2004) argues that discourses that shape a particular social issue do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are constantly challenged by a range of competing discourses, alternative knowledges and framings about an issue. Considerable effort is employed by institutional authorities to exclude and delegitimize these alternative, non-authorized knowledges, whereby dominant discourses invalidate or incorporate subordinated knowledges, in essence colonizing them. Drawing on Foucault, Stuart Hall (2001a) explains that competing and contradictory discourses about a particular subject like sexuality still share similar concerns, concepts, or themes: “events which share the same style, support a strategy…and a common institutional or
political drift belong to the same discursive formation”.

Mills (2004: 68) argues that discourses are not simply “a grouping of written texts within a particular discursive formation, but at one and the same time, the site of struggles for meaning”.

**Overcoming the Socio-Spatial-Temporal Specificity of Foucauldian Discourse by Introducing Said’s Orientalism**

Foucault’s theories of discourse and discursive formations pertain to European contexts in particular historical periods. He did not consider how discourse has produced and structured realities in the context of the specific asymmetrical power relations that are characteristic of colonial regimes and other neo-colonial transcultural interactions. Edward Said (1978, 1983) extends and refines Foucault’s thinking for this purpose to understand the production of discourse in the colonial context, the production of colonial discourse, and the discursive production of the ‘Orient’. Said (1978) draws on Foucault’s concept of discursive formation to introduce ‘orientalism’: a scholarly, imaginative, and institutional system of representations that created an ontological and epistemological divide between the ‘East’ (Orient) and the ‘West’ (Occident). Said’s work elaborates how the discursive formation of orientalism ‘othered’ and dominated ‘Oriental’ people and landscapes in a transcultural setting through discursive acts. At the core of Said’s claims and propositions about orientalism is the motivation to understand forms of domination and control that this East/West divide creates. Drawing on Said’s ‘imaginative geographies’ in *The Colonial Present*, Derek Gregory (2004) highlights the importance of identifying the ‘colonial past’ in the neo-colonial present; specifically, the way colonially-influenced representations and representational practices are used as apolitical images that play a central part in divorcing fact from fiction and the past from present. Gregory (2004)

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4 Discursive formations are social constructions with institutional origins and commitments. They are embodied in technical processes, institutions, and patterns of general behaviour.
elaborates on Said’s claim that culture is co-produced with more fundamental forms of domination and control, such as geographies of politico-economic power or military violence, as “culture underwrites power, even as power elaborates culture” (8).

Said’s (1978) central proposition, and the subsequent crux of both Butz’s (1995) and Gregory’s (1995) critical engagement with his work, is that orientalism is a discursive formation in the colonial context, based on an “ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident” (Said 1978: 2). This discursively constructed distinction – produced through academic, imaginative and institutional means – not only constructs the ‘Orient’, but also shapes Europe’s understanding of itself and its culture, its institutions, and its practices as fundamentally different from, and superior to, those of the Orient. A system of domination is thereby produced, based on a “flexible positional superiority, which puts the westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand” (Said 1978: 7). Similarly, orientalism constructs spaces of the Orient in particular ways, as exotic, erotic, empty, etc., just as it constructs the Oriental as the ‘inferior other’. In fact, orientalism is about both people and spaces. As Said (1978: 1) states at the beginning of Orientalism: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.” Othering the Orient renders it inferior to the ‘civilized west’, thereby justifying all forms of social, political, economic, and militaristic interventions of the former by the latter, and establishing and legitimizing domination and control.

Said (1978: 36) stressed how “streamlined and effective” this discursive divide between the Orient and the Occident became as it structured understandings and truths about the East across a range of discursive platforms. Everyone who engaged with the Orient, whether in a
scholarly, institutional or imaginative capacity, was discursively ‘producing’ the Orient. Foreign policy or history aside, even texts pertaining to literature, poetry, and other social sciences disciplines that were seemingly not related to one another, all played a pivotal role in representing and othering the Orient. Said (1978: 3) points this out in the following words:

No matter how authoritative a position Orientalism had, it was no one writing, thinking or acting on the Orient which resulted in this construction and subsequent domination. Orientalism is a whole ‘network’ of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when the peculiar entity “the Orient” is in question.

The brilliance of Said’s work, as Robert J. Young (1990) suggests, is in identifying a complex set of representations that for the west became the ‘Orient,’ and in explaining how seemingly non-coercive and non-dominative knowledge was used so effectively to create these representations and pave the way for ideological, cultural, economic, and political domination of the Orient and its spaces by Europe. Young (1990: 126) elaborates: “[Said] disclosed a closely interrelated web of writings that stretch from literary, historical, scholarly accounts to political, military, administrative ones. Said suggests that the former produced the Orient for the eventual appropriation by the latter”. The interplay of knowledge and power in discursively constructing the colonial world into two halves – ‘us – the civilized west’ and ‘them – the uncivilized Orient’ – justified material interventions that most often benefited the dominator.

Beyond Orientalism: Auto-ethnography and Transculturation

Although Said’s work is important to understanding the discursive production of the Orient in colonial contexts, he does not fully explore the ways in which orientalist knowledge shapes, and is shaped by, so-called ‘Orientals’, which makes his work insufficient for conceptualizing the transcultural co-constitution of discourse. Neither does Said investigate the multiple subject
positionalities that both ‘Orientals’ and ‘Occidentals’ can take, especially in post-colonial and highly globalized transcultural settings. These dimensions are pivotal to understanding the co-constituted nature of knowledge and forms of domination in Gilgit-Baltistan that new actors with multiple subject positionalities engender using virtual spaces. In order to develop an understanding of the co-constituted nature of knowledge and representational practices in this transcultural context, I turn to colonial discourse scholar Mary Louis Pratt (1992) and her concept of auto-ethnography. I draw on Butz and Besio’s (2009) development of Pratt’s ideas, in tandem with Butz’s (2016) use of the notion of transculturation to understand representational engagements and relationships in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Pratt (1992) adds the dimension of auto-ethnography to Said’s work in order to explore the engagement of ‘subordinated others’ with imperial and colonial discourses. She argues that subordinated others internalized and appropriated the terms of colonizers to speak back to the colonizers but also to speak among themselves. While reviewing late 19th and early 20th century colonial travel literature, Pratt (1992: 5) glimpsed “the ongoing ways in which empire was coded by those whose life in which it intervened – coded in ceremony, sculpture and painting, in dance, parody, philosophy, and history; in expression unwitnessed, suppressed, lost or simply in repetition and unreality”. Using the colonizers’ terms to rework their understandings of themselves is a fundamental aspect of auto-ethnography. Pratt’s view is that studying only what Europeans wrote regarding their subordinated others reproduces the monopoly on knowledge that the imperial enterprise yearns for, and strips subordinated others of their ability to react and respond to European representations of them. Similarly, it also disassociates these people from any organic impact that they have had on the knowledge that was produced.
Butz (2016) introduces the multi-layered “dance of transculturation” while conceptualizing his relationship with a longtime friend from Gilgit, Pakistan. Both actors consider themselves to be contemporary transcultural subjects mindful of Butz’s “flexible positional superiority” in this postcolonial field of power (Said 1978: 7). The representational chain that develops between them comprises self-interested identity work in which they each constitute themselves for themselves, and for an audience of one another (Butz 2016: 170-172). The knowledge that emerges out of this transcultural situation is not only co-constituted, but also affords these individuals multiple subject positionalities as they become “positive identity resources” for each other (Butz 2016: 170). In the fields of postcolonial and subaltern studies, themes of multiple subject positionalities vis-à-vis the subordinated other have been widely discussed in the work of Homi Bhabha (1983) and Gayatri Spivak (1988). For Bhabha, the notion of ‘mimicry’, for instance, represents a yearning to emulate the colonial master by creating and controlling other ‘subordinated others’ (Young 1990). The ‘white but not quite’ position provides some room for resistance, which is bounded within structures of civility pre-defined by the colonist (Young 1990: 143). Spivak identifies the pressing need to develop ‘subaltern histories’ and highlights the significance of having ‘subaltern historians’ in order to meet that end. Rather than framing her work as an attempt to somehow revive subaltern consciousness, Spivak makes an inquiry into subject-positions of the subaltern, “which are instrumental in forms of control and insurgency” (160).

My central argument throughout this section has been that knowledge is co-constituted, not just between differently positioned actors in an asymmetrical field of power, but also between the understandings that were developed during different epochs. Colonial tropes, cultural narratives, and complex transnational positionings all inform the knowledge and
representations produced through the interplay of people who reside in and around Attabad, including regional strategically positioned persons, tour operators and travel guides from Gilgit-Baltistan, down-country Pakistani bloggers and travelers, international tourists, federal government employees, and so on. Consequently, I have argued against the theoretical proposition that forms of domination are straightforwardly imposed by powerful groups of people on marginalized people and places. Instead, I argue that understandings are co-constituted over time, through the interplay of representations produced by different actors with a range of different interests, in an asymmetrical field of power in which some actors’ representations have more influence, but not the monopoly, to shape a dominant set of understandings.

Material Environment: A Resource for the Region’s Discursive Construction

A Foucauldian concept of discursive formation explains the existence of competing representations and the dominance of some over others. Said’s Orientalism signals the effectiveness with which dominant representations manage, control, and even ‘construct’ particular realities like the ‘Orient’. My focus, so far, has been on the discursive production of social reality through representational power and control. I continue that focus by exploring the impact of a place’s materiality on its very own partial and exclusionary discursive production. In other words, co-constituted representations are also informed by the affordances of the landscape and the infrastructural development that has taken place in that landscape (e.g., physical, cellular, and digital connectivity).

Representations are not free-floating, because they are to some extent shaped by the materiality of the phenomena they are representing. I make a distinction between two ways in which materiality shapes, or at least informs, representations and representational practices
pertaining to Gilgit-Baltistan. This distinction is significant as the conceptual resources required to make sense of each aspect of materiality are markedly different, and so are the modes of analysis. In the first case, the landscape itself acts as a resource, as a sort of pallet that fuels representations, a material platform that plays an instrumental role in making discourse socially intelligible. Snowcapped peaks, fresh water lakes, and a clear blue-sky act as material resources for discourses. Representations are thus influenced by the materiality of the objects of their representation. In the second case, materiality influences the process of and possibility for representations. Infrastructural developments that provide material connectivity between Gilgit-Baltistan and down-country Pakistan or act as material resources for cellular, digital, and virtual connectivity deeply influence the possibilities for representations, and have far-reaching implications on representational practices. The Karakoram Highway (KKH) makes the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan more accessible to down-country Pakistanis, and vice-versa, which has far reaching social, political, and economic implications for everyone involved. Similarly, virtual and digital connectivity infrastructure, a fairly recent intervention, is a material actant that facilitates the flow of representations in virtual spaces.

The snowcapped peaks, picturesque lakes, and lush green meadows of Gilgit-Baltistan are represented in ways that invoke feelings of wilderness, adventure, solitude, and authenticity among travel writers from the colonial period. These colonial tropes subsequently engendered ‘regimes of truths,’ and were representative of a certain way of thinking during the specific ‘episteme’ (see Foucault 1971). Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape was made socially intelligible through discourses about it, and these understandings were constantly reinforced and validated by the material existence of that landscape. Similarly, post-colonial representational activity reproduced many of the colonial tropes associated with the natural environment and also added
new nationalistic narratives to the mix. The landscape and the built environment provided a resource for the orientalization of Gilgit-Baltistan, and multiple layers of meaning were added, creating new regimes of truth (see Chapter 2). This situation highlights the mutually co-constitutive nature of material landscapes and the discursive colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial representations.

Affordances provided by the KKH’s connectivity and the effectivities of cellular and digital network infrastructure in parts of Gilgit-Baltistan enable representations and representational practices, which demonstrates the existence of a strong relationship between the material and the discursive. Infrastructure that makes the landscapes physically and virtually accessible is a material resource for providing greater access to a range of outsiders who are able to represent and construct Gilgit-Baltistan in the service of their own interests. At the same time, both the natural and the built environment act as representational resources that construct meanings and develop understandings, which inform behavior. In subsequent chapters, I show how the KKH, for instance, is a material resource that enhances the speed of movement and decreases friction for lowland Pakistanis, which shapes who gets access and is able to represent the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, and how and in what ways the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan are made socially intelligible. At the same time, the KKH is depicted as a marvel of engineering that has become a symbol of nationalistic pride. We see, therefore, how these material actants affect representational practices by enhancing the possibility for greater representations by certain outsiders, and by acting as a resource fueling a certain kind of representations, deeply implicating the natural and built environment in the exercise of representational power.
Introducing Virtual Spaces as Foucauldian Institutions

As the last link of my conceptual framework I look at representations and representational practices in virtual spaces to gauge their impact on existing discourses. I am specifically interested in investigating how virtual spaces reproduce, alter, and/or subvert existing forms of domination and control. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) document the global popularity of social media websites and the proliferation of textual and visual content, which is now at par with print media and television in terms of reach and impact. This makes virtual spaces an important source of information with tremendous power to shape and spread representations, informing understandings and influencing behaviors.

An aspect that differentiates virtual spaces from conventional print and television media outlets is their massive and diverse engagement footprint. Leppanen & Hakkinen (2012) introduce the concept of ‘superdiversity’ in virtual spaces, which explains the complex demographic entanglements in different online platforms. As the term suggests, virtual spaces “constitute forums and activities by people who are themselves super diverse” (18). Online platforms make Gilgit-Baltistan more accessible to a wide range of actors throughout the year. Add to that the mediated use of language(s), interplay of cultural practices, and pluralism in semiotic resources, that users and contributors employ to further diversify virtual spaces. Pictures that use Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape as a resource are often accompanied by textual captions from popular culture, travelogues, or poetry verses, which construct meanings, making these representations socially intelligible for a wide range of audiences. This diversity in content and the possibility of forging representational pathways, in conjunction with Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) claim that online content is predominantly user generated, makes virtual spaces worth
investigating for the production and re-production of colonial tropes, nationalistic narratives, and new ways of representing the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan have had digital and virtual connectivity for less than five years, in the context of severe state regulation and control. Before then, visual content was stitched together to forge distinct narratives only after down-country Pakistanis or foreign travelers had left Gilgit-Baltistan. The recent turn, in which the region itself hosts digital and cellular connectivity infrastructure, has far-reaching implications for the context of representations and the form of representational practice. For example, relatively immobile locals who rarely travel beyond Gilgit-Baltistan now have the means to shape, share, validate and/or negate representations of Gilgit-Baltistan; their inclusion in online discourse changes the representational spectrum considerably. Although virtual spaces are often considered to have a ‘democratizing’ impact on information exchange, Herring (2009) argue that recent research discredits this claim by showing that content generators still work within the bounds of discursive frameworks that shape dominant understandings and behaviors, even if they are not part of a publishing house or major news source. Therefore, virtual spaces can be understood as institutions in a Foucauldian sense, as something more than just passive platforms where representations are projected. Rather, they are a representational mode through which discursive formations are (re)produced, playing a pivotal role in “generating order in discourse” (Foucault 1971). Just like other social institutions, virtual spaces are sites of struggle for meaning and platforms that enact inequality and exclusion by controlling discourse.

Institutions are a central component of Foucault’s work on sexuality, madness, and governmentality. The clinic, for instance, is an institution that shapes expectations about healthy behavior, and produces certain truth effects that constitute human beings as particular kinds of
‘healthy’ subjects. Discourse is a historically specific system of rules generated in particular institutional settings such as the clinic. In *Orders of Discourse* (1971) Foucault starts theatrically by engaging in a dialogue with ‘institutions’ – in this particular case, the academy. He argues that institutions try to control discourse by the very gesture of giving it a place; they honor and disarm discourse and grant it the power and legitimacy to be accepted as ‘true’ (Foucault 1971: 7-8). In this way institutions engender ‘procedures of exclusion’ whereby they provide prominence to certain discursive formations and marginalize others. Another central Foucauldian concept that is pertinent to virtual spaces is ‘rarefaction of discourse’, also known as ‘citationality’, whereby institutions create the context to give prominence to a select group of discourses by constantly reinforcing them through a range of methods.

Virtual spaces act as institutions in a Foucauldian sense as they (re)produce discourses according to a set of pre-defined pathways. Hashtags, for instance, are used to sift through online, textual, and visual data, and organize it according to certain themes. Audiences engage with content in virtual spaces, subject to a set of pre-defined rules. Platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook allow people with minimal knowledge of blogging and website development to share their thoughts, through text and images, at the click of a button. Knowledge in virtual spaces is always in process and never complete; users continue to engage with textual and visual representations by adding comments, and are thereby active shapers and influencers of content they did not themselves load onto the virtual spaces (see Kinsley 2014). Superdiverse membership of virtual spaces adds a layer of complexity to their understanding as an institution, where they appear disengaged spaces of virtual congregation, but still have the power to shape understandings and inform behaviors.
In this section I identified how digital and virtual connectivity have had far-reaching implications for Gilgit-Baltistan’s relationship with down-country Pakistanis. I have also looked at how colonial tropes, adventure tourism jargon, and nationalistic narratives are being selectively employed to engender new ways of depicting the people and landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan by a range of actors who share an active interest in the region. Investigating content in virtual spaces requires different strategies than are used to analyze other genres of representational content. In the upcoming section I introduce an appropriate methodology to collect, organize, and analyze data available in virtual spaces, and elaborate on the co-constituted nature of knowledge and representations that have been placed in asymmetrical fields of discursive power. I also lay out strategies to collect data from super diverse online spaces where the content itself is dynamic – always in the process of becoming.

Overview of Research Methods and Methodology

I proposed earlier that representations are co-constituted by the interplay of differently positioned actors within an asymmetrical field of discursive power, and that understandings developed during the colonial and post-colonial period linger on as colonial and nationalistic tropes, and impact contemporary representations in virtual spaces. In this section, I develop a methodology and identify research methods by taking this conceptual standpoint into consideration. Attabad Lake – a disaster site – is currently in the process of being constructed as a tourism destination. This process of touristification constitutes a form of socio-cultural domination of Gilgit-Baltistan, and virtual spaces act as a new medium through which this socio-cultural domination is engendered, maintained, and reinforced. The section has three parts. First, I introduce the strategies to conduct discourse analysis whereby data collected from virtual spaces is framed
within the wider discourses surrounding Gilgit-Baltistan. Second, I introduce my specific data set, and identify strategies to conduct research in virtual spaces. Third, as a down-country Pakistani I share my own positionality to show how I’m implicated in both the representational and extra-representational aspects of Pakistan’s engagement with Gilgit-Baltistan.

**Discourse Analysis in Virtual Spaces**

In the conceptual framework I developed earlier, I argued that discourse is considerably more than the spoken or written word. Cook (2007: 17-18) introduces discourse as a historically specific system of rules that structure how people think and act according to hierarchical forms of power. According to Cresswell (2009), discourses establish socially intelligible, ‘normal’ and ‘true’ ways to talk, write and behave; that is, rather than describing things, they bring things into being by forging ‘regimes of truth’. Discourse analysis therefore is much more than sifting through and organizing heaps of raw data in order to code themes and provide an analysis; rather, it is about examining the context behind each stream of data to understand the discursive formations that made certain representations socially intelligible, as well as the associated truth effects. Jason Dittmer (2010: 274-275) argues that discourse analysis provides tools with which we can interrogate the “situatedness of knowledge”. What differentiates discourse analysis from other forms of textual and content analysis is that discourse analysts are interested in the “ways in which knowledge is formulated and validated by society as truth” (Dittmer 2010: 275). The premise for discourse analysis is that virtually all social activities are enabled through language and discourse. This is to say that ideas, representations, and material landscapes are made socially intelligible through discourses about them.
I understand textual and content analysis not as fundamentally different or distinct, but as part and parcel of discourse analysis. In textual analysis the intimate interaction between texts can be seen. However, seemingly more abstract overtones of structures, power, and discursive acts come to light in discourse analysis. Dittmer (2010: 275) elaborates on this by proposing that, “the shift from textual analysis to discourse analysis is about connecting the data set analyzed (through textual analysis) to the broader realm of geographical practice”. As a lowland Pakistani analyzing the touristification of a disaster site in Gilgit-Baltistan, I find myself implicated in the very discursive structures that I’m trying to deconstruct. As I embark on this project to understand the situatedness of knowledge about Gilgit-Baltistan, I have to be mindful of my own role in this situatedness. My discourse analysis of web-based content cannot help but be informed by my own positionality.

**Framing Data in the Overall Aims and Goals**

Gilgit-Baltistan has been represented by specific outsiders for decades, and its residents have engaged with these representations in various ways – by contributing to them, speaking back against them, or re-working them in some way – resulting in co-constitutive representations within an asymmetrical field of power. Over the years, the people representing and being represented, modes and motivations of representations, and representational practices have changed significantly. In this thesis I’m mapping the most recent change. I explain how virtual spaces – an agglomeration of new platforms and mode of representations – are being used by a range of actors, most prominently down-country Pakistani travel bloggers, to represent the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. My goal is to see how these representations reinforce,
disperse, suppress, or otherwise alter the historic exclusionary and ‘othering’ representations of Gilgit-Baltistan and its people.

My conceptual framework allows me to describe virtual spaces as institutions in a Foucauldian sense, whereby they provide context for discourses to emerge and play a pivotal role in creating ‘regimes of truth’ and ‘discursive formations’ (Foucault 1971). I also identified virtual spaces as a mobility platform for the construction and dissemination of representations (Cresswell 2011). Content in virtual spaces is the primary source of data analyzed in this thesis. Kim and Kuljis (2010) argue that web-based content should be understood beyond what shows up on the web, and analysis of data extracted from virtual spaces should be contextualized in the wider discourses that shape the content. This strategy falls in line with Dittmer’s (2010) proposition of understanding content analysis as the first step of conducting discourse analysis. Kim and Kuljis (2010) highlight the dynamic nature of online content, always in the process of being reworked and never available in a complete form. This requires constant observation and structural analysis. Moreover, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlight the user generated aspect of data and point towards the proliferation of data available online.

Herring (2009) argue in favor of content analysis as a systematic technique for coding a high volume of compounded data comprised of textual, audio, and visual content. A well-developed conceptual framework establishes strong linkages between analysis of the content extracted from virtual spaces and the wider discourses that constitute that content. The process begins with “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication” (Herring 2009: 1). Once a time-line for sampling has been established, data has been organized and coded, and patterns have been identified and described, the process of framing it within wider discourses begins. I presented a conceptual framework rooted in post-
structural, post-colonial, and new-media literature earlier in the chapter, which establishes my approach to understand the discursive structures that I aim to investigate through the content analysis of data in virtual spaces. In the upcoming chapter, I present a representational history of Gilgit-Baltistan, in order to provide an overview of the discourses surrounding the region, and outline the ways in which they have been shaped and reshaped over time. Chapter three introduces virtual spaces that I have selected to build an argument for this thesis, and further provides a preliminary content analysis of the data streams with which I’m concerned. The fourth chapter analyses this data in relation to the dominant discourses discussed in Chapter Two, in order to understand the ways in which contemporary on-line content disrupts or reproduces long-standing discourses of domination and control.

**Specifying the Data Set**

I collected data from a range of virtual spaces across two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. The decision to collect data from social media platforms rather than other forms of web2.0 platforms is based on two core reasons. First, content on these social media platforms is organized and dated uniformly, which makes comparative analysis relatively easy. Second, social media guarantees a wider degree of engagement, which means that anyone with an interest in the region can make contributions. Even in cases where data is uploaded by pre-defined moderators, users and followers can engage with it by commenting on and liking/disliking it. The structured organization of data ensures uniformity in the content sampled across a range of virtual spaces, and this also gives me an opportunity to frame the data in the context of material

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5 Web 2.0 is a term used to describe a variety of websites and applications that allow anyone to create and share online information. Platforms other than social media are typically hosted by a content generator, whereby, a web address has to be typed in order to access the platform; contrarily social media platforms offer the possibility of viewing content on the ‘newsfeed’.
changes that have taken place during a particular time period (e.g., road or tunnel construction, passing new legislation such as Gilgit-Baltistan reforms bill, etc.). A wide range of engagement ensures that multiple discourses can come to the fore within one cross section of the data set, which is helpful in understanding dominant discursive formations.

The data sourced is a combination of audio, visual, and textual content, which is quite often Geo-tagged, thereby providing an insight into the locational patterns of actors who have shared the content. The data I collected is diverse and dynamic, and differs considerably between platforms and actors. Different data streams presented by different actors within this asymmetrical field of power produce several ‘regimes of truth’. Some data streams are heavily engaged in conducting self-interested identity work, using the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as a resource to share a personal story, in which Gilgit-Baltistan is constructed and subsequently romanticized as a remote frontier far away from the reaches of metropolitan ideas. Others are engaged in a process of learning more about northern Pakistan, or enhancing cultural capital through evidence of travel and knowledge. Similarly, some actors, or groups of actors, frame the region with strong nationalistic leanings as ‘heaven on earth’ depicting the positive side of Pakistan, whereas others, usually with an intent to market their tourism services, frame it as ‘the only safe and secure’ part of Pakistan.

**Strategies for Data Collection and Analysis**

I categorize data sourced from virtual spaces in two main groups: visual and textual.
Visual Data: Photographs

Digital cameras have revolutionized photography by providing a vast range of options for image production and photo-sharing. Davies (2006) argues that image processing has become instantaneous, because of digital cameras and the digital nature of photographs that makes them easy to manipulate (color correction and Photoshop, etc.) and easier still to disseminate. These images are compatible with a wide range of output devices – mobile phones, PCs, and television screens – that heightens their likelihood of being shared widely. Another noteworthy aspect of digital photographs is that they are usually in the form of a ‘stream’ of pictures; this is precisely what I’m interested in, a data stream. Davies (2006: 219) argues that,

When photographs are placed with similar ones, for example in a group reflecting Muslim cultures, weddings in general, or military life, an individual picture can accrue resonance beyond its individual meaning, being representative of a wider demonstration of a range of cultural traditions and ceremonies.

These connections and affinities, gaps, and silences, and a range of other engagements between photos in a stream, provides the opportunity to place the content within wider discourses and grids of power.

Textual Data: Captions and Notes

Textual data almost always accompanies visual data in the form of captions. It serves to elaborate on the intended meaning and purpose of the picture. In the Attabad case, captions or notes along with photo streams provide a narrative of the journey towards or across the lake, the feelings the journey induces, and the experiences associated with the lake. Often captions also give information about how the photograph was clicked (Camera and equipment), particulars about camera work (lens settings), time of day and other details that lend credibility to the contributor of images and allows them to display cultural capital in the social field of photography. Davies (2006: 220) argues that “words can work to emphasize some features,
undermine others, and offer explanations”. In this sense, captions play a pivotal role in connecting the data streams to larger discourses of authenticity, wilderness, remoteness, and romantic attractiveness. Captions alongside pictures are in both English and Urdu and I have provided English translations for the Urdu captions that I present in my discussion.

**Selecting Data for Discourse Analysis: Rationale and Strategies**

I have selected a sample of data streams that exhibit the discourses I want to highlight and discuss in my analysis. I focus predominantly on social media platforms rather than web2.0 and digital news platforms, because of the ease with which contributors of content and audiences can engage with data on these platforms. Moreover, data in social media virtual spaces (in this case Facebook and Instagram) can only be presented with certain pre-defined institutional constraints set by the platform (image size and caption length). This is important as it ensures uniformity in data, and eases comparison between different data streams, setting the stage for a robust discourse analysis. Lastly, data from virtual spaces can also provide some insight into locational patterns of the contributors, through the description provided by the virtual space owners and operators, as well as locational tags with each post. Spatial insight helps in making the data analysis more nuanced. These three reasons make social-media my preferred platform for data selection as I gain deeper insight into who creates the content (and where), to what effect, and with what representational implications for Gilgit-Baltistan.

I have sampled data from Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, I sourced the data from two distinct sources. The first one is a community group titled *The Karakoram Club*, and the data from this group was sampled for 20 days in January 2018 and 20 days in May 2018. Two sampling periods ensure that representations in both summer and winter season are taken into
consideration, as sampling for extended periods of time on this particular platform is difficult because of the high volume of content uploaded here. The second virtual space on Facebook is a local travel agency titled *Hunza*, where the data was sampled from the 1st of January to 10th of May 2018. Similarly, Instagram data has been sourced from two distinct virtual spaces. *Hunza on Foot* is an unconventional adventure travel consultancy that emerged out of a social movement and a travel photography page, whereas *The Hunzai Lad* is an independently owned blog by a native of Gulmit (a village in Gilgit-Baltistan adjacent to the Attabad Lake) who has been studying in major cities in down-country Pakistan and currently resides in Karachi. The sampling period for both of these groups is much longer compared to the others, because the volume of content uploaded here is much less than that of other groups. Data from *Hunza on Foot* has been sampled for almost two years, from 23rd of May 2016 to 13th of May 2018, whereas data from *The Hunzai Lad* was sampled from 21st of January 2016 to 26th of May 2018.

**Reflections on My Relationship with Gilgit-Baltistan: Reflexivity and Positionality**

Gillian Rose (1997: 307-309) argues that the high moral and academic pedestal scholars claim by associating neutrality and universality with the knowledges they produce is at best misguided. Researchers can, and should, situate their knowledge through “reflexive consideration of the relations of power that operate during fieldwork process” (Mullings 1999: 348). Thinking of my own self through a binaristic insider/outsider lens is reductive and equally misplaced. However, disentangling the binary is itself fairly difficult. As someone born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan’s second largest city, I have interacted with the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as a tourist, a student, and a researcher. I’m aware that my analysis is inevitably informed by these positionings and the wider social, political, and economic forces that have shaped my ontologies.
and epistemologies. Using Rose’s term, the knowledge that I produce is ‘situated’ far beyond my own personal engagement with the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. Similarly, in this specific socio-cultural context my ‘ways of knowing’ also extend beyond the confines of my academic training, because of the implicit, mostly non-academic, learning and unlearning that is part and parcel of my positionality.

I visited Gilgit-Baltistan for the first time in the winter of 2012 with a small group of university students for almost 20 days. Since then, I have visited different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan almost every year as an adventure traveler. I usually spend no more than one or two nights in bigger cities and towns, preferring to trek and camp in areas that are less heavily populated. Although during the first few visits I did not maintain a public blog, quite a few of my travel companions shared visual and textual content in virtual spaces. During this time my interaction with residents of Gilgit-Baltistan was minimal, and I rarely spoke with anyone other than guides and porters.\(^6\) Over the years I became friends with several students who hailed from Gilgit and Skardu and were studying in the same university I attended. In the summer of 2014, I got the opportunity to conduct a month-long summer camp in a public high school in Skardu and an abridged version of that summer camp in Aliabad (Hunza) for middle and high school students. By this time, I had also gained an interest in the history, geo-politics, and educational development of the region, and pursued these interests through academic engagement by reading news, research articles and books, and through social engagement by speaking with friends and acquaintances. In the summer of 2016, I served as a Teaching Assistant for a course on the history and ecology of the Himalayas and took care of the logistical requirements in addition to standard academic responsibilities. Even though my positionality vis-à-vis Gilgit-Baltistan has

\(^6\) All interactions with residents and non-residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have been in Urdu, Pakistan’s national Language.
remained the same (i.e., I’m still a resident of down-country Pakistan), my positionality and the ‘situatedness’ of the knowledge I produce has altered remarkably, and I shed light on this shift in subsequent chapters.

In addition to clearly identifying their positionality, researchers also need to be self-conscious and critical with respect to their research. Reflexivity with respect to positionality, in this sense, plays into the selection of research topic and extends well into the data collection process, in addition to the writing and analysis stage. Rose (1997) argues that outward positioning runs the risk of developing a uniform gaze through which the researchers interact with their research questions, data, and participants, running the risk of stagnation and redundancy. Drawing on these ideas I highlight the ‘situatedness’ of my knowledge and identify my own ‘ways of knowing’ at several crucial junctures in this thesis, in order to understand and articulate how deeply implicated I am in the (re)production and dissemination of age old colonial tropes, cultural narratives about Gilgit-Baltistan and new ways of looking at the region, in virtual spaces.

**Conclusion**

This chapter marks the beginning of my investigation of the impacts of virtual connectivity on representations of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. I started by laying out my research questions and sharing the goals and objectives I intend to achieve. Further, I developed a conceptual framework by drawing on the concepts of discourse, orientalism, auto-ethnography and transculturation. Subsequently, I highlighted the significance of the landscape’s materiality on discursive formations and introduced virtual spaces as institutions in a Foucauldian sense. The latter half of this chapter provided a brief overview of the methods and methodology I employ to
collect and analyze data from virtual spaces. In the next chapter, I introduce Gilgit-Baltistan, and provide a representational history of the region. The third chapter deals primarily with data, its organization and analysis, whereas the fourth chapter pulls from all the earlier chapters to connect the discourses that have historically orientalized Gilgit-Baltistan with themes that gain dominance in virtual spaces. In the fifth and final chapter, I conclude my thesis by highlighting the domination effects that virtual representations create.
Chapter 2: History, Representations and the History of Representations

Representations of Gilgit-Baltistan that are circulated in virtual spaces constitute a form socio-cultural domination that works in tandem with, and provides resources for, constitutional, legal, militaristic, and political forms of domination and control. These representations orientalize the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in particular ways that contribute to their intersectional marginality. This orientalization of Gilgit-Baltistan in virtual spaces is neither new nor free-floating. In this chapter I provide evidence that the processes of Gilgit-Baltistan’s othering spans several representational periods throughout its colonial and post-colonial history. I do this by focusing on a small selection of prominent discourses. Framing the goal of this chapter in the overall flow of the thesis, I answer the first two research questions:

1. How were Gilgit-Baltistan and its inhabitants represented in the colonial period to western outsiders?

2. How have Gilgit-Baltistan and its inhabitants been represented post-1947, during the era of post-colonial statehood, drawing on colonial tropes in tandem with emerging national narratives about what the region means to the nation-state?

My conceptual standpoint from the introductory chapter is that Gilgit-Baltistan’s representational history has developed through the engagement of a range of local and non-local actors over several centuries within an asymmetrical field of power. Accounts of adventure travelers, writers, colonial administrators, foreign healthcare professionals, development workers, local intellectuals, linguists, and so on have been intertwined to produce a series of representational strands making Gilgit-Baltistan and its history inseparable from the representational work of a whole series of actors, networks, and institutions. Recognizing the mutually constitutive nature of local and non-local accounts helps in historicizing
representational practices of Gilgit-Baltistan, and in explaining the ongoing transformation of Attabad’s representations in virtual spaces.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section I trace representations of Gilgit-Baltistan’s people and spaces in travel literature from the colonial and post-colonial period. I start by analyzing representations of Gilgit-Baltistan in travel literature during the colonial period, including in the works of Biddulph (1880), Durand (1900), Visser-Hooft (1926), and Lorimer (1939). I then discuss travel literature written after the creation of Pakistan as an independent state in 1947, by foreign travel writers Clark (1956), Tobe (1960), Schaller (1983) and Jamie (1992), and domestic down-country Pakistani travel writers Tarrar (1991,1994) and Rashid (2011). I organize dominant representations thematically to chalk out different representational periods, starting from 19th century colonial accounts where the people and spaces are viewed with skepticism, and moving on to 20th century colonial accounts where common people are systematically disassociated from the ruling classes and romanticized for their health, self-sufficiency, and strong sense of community. In the post-colonial travel accounts several new representational strategies emerge in addition to the ones that were already deployed during the colonial period. For instance, the fear of western-styled development and modernity in a remote frontier is evident in the work of western-outsiders who traveled to the region after 1947. Similarly, down-country Pakistani travel writers reproduce some colonial tropes, but also engender new nationalistic narratives that harness down-country social capital and establish Gilgit-Baltistan as a site for the projection of Pakistani nationalism.

Reviewing travel literature in the first section is helpful in tracing representational periods. However, a range of nation building platforms also play an integral role in generating understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan, by representing the region and its people in particular ways.
In the second section, I outline the discursive production of Gilgit-Baltistan and its people through a web of national-level institutions, networks, and bodies of knowledge that intersect with and build upon travel literature, and contribute to the (re)constitution of discourse. Here, I look at the ways Gilgit-Baltistan is represented in Pakistani nationalistic discourses through a ‘peripherality lens’, by examining its subjugated history, invisibilized languages and culture, and subservient local economy, and through a ‘centrality lens’ by outlining the nationalistic construction of Gilgit-Baltistan as the ‘eco-body of the nation’ (Ali 2014). In each of these subsections, I also highlight local resistance to these representations and the social-cultural domination they enact, and identify ways in which the people of Gilgit-Baltistan engage in processes of self-representation that perpetuate and/or disrupt dominant discourse.

**Understanding Gilgit-Baltistan Socially and Spatially**

In an effort to trace Gilgit-Baltistan’s representational history, I look at literature that focuses on certain parts of Gilgit-Baltistan and on the region in its entirety. In the process, I jump spatial and temporal boundaries: from Shimshal (a village) to Hunza (a valley), and from Gilgit Agency (an obsolete colonial administrative district) to Gilgit-Baltistan (the most recent name given to ‘Northern Areas’ by the Pakistani state after much debate and deliberation) (see Kreutzmann 2015). As my objective is to understand the co-constitutive and intertwined nature of representations, it is essential to recognize the existence of multiple spatialities and temporalities that inform their production. Gregory (2004: 7) argues in favor of a conception of history that accommodates the “spasmodic of multiple pasts into a condensed present”. The co-existence of popular understandings developed over different representational periods has a significant impact on discourses that are dominant today. Working with this premise, Gregory (2004) presents a
conception of the post-colonial condition by providing a critical reflection of both the ‘colonial past’ and the ‘colonial present’, which can be used to explain the historic and contemporary changes in Gilgit-Baltistan. For instance, if the term ‘Gilgit Agency’ is used, a connection with Gilgit-Baltistan’s colonial past is evoked. That colonial past lingers on in the form of cultural and/or colonial tropes that are used in tourism promotion, travelogues, and history textbooks today – which is precisely the spatial-temporal entanglement I recognize and weave into my analysis.

Gregory (2004: 17) argues that orientalist discourses “fold distances into difference”, meaning that spaces ‘far away’ from the west are understood as fundamentally different from ‘western’ spaces. In keeping with orientalist geography, the spaces of present day Gilgit-Baltistan have historically been understood by western outsiders as remote and authentic, and by the Pakistani nation-state as peripheral borderlands. Significant representational work has gone into producing these orientalist constructions of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, a stark contradiction emerges when we consider newly developed connectivity infrastructure. Both real and perceived distances have decreased because of the quick and easy access that cellular connectivity offers within and beyond Gilgit-Baltistan. The reduction in perceived distance has strong material groundings. For instance, Kreutzmann (1991) traces the construction of the KKH, the arterial highway that runs through Gilgit-Baltistan and connects China to the Pakistani heartland. Similarly, the most recent infrastructural development in Gilgit-Baltistan is the provision of cellular network connectivity, which reduces communication barriers and establishes a strong media link between Gilgit-Baltistan and down-country Pakistan. Despite this reduction in perceived and actual distances, Gilgit-Baltistan is still understood by specific outsiders through

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the lenses of ‘remoteness’ and ‘authenticity’. This is precisely how discourse operates in
engendering truth effects and defining the social-intelligibility of different spaces. Framing this
alongside Gregory’s argument, Gilgit-Baltistan has been framed in popular discourse as ‘distant’
and therefore ‘different’ (2004), creating the representational groundwork for its orientalization
and multi-faceted marginality.

**Representations of the People and Spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in Colonial Travel Literature**

*Travel Literature During the Early Colonial Period (19th and Early 20th Centuries)*

Cultural tropes that gain prominence in travel literature during this representational period are
indicative of the position that Gilgit-Baltistan held for the two dominant colonial powers: Britain
and Russia. Travel literature from this era focuses primarily on the local ruling elite, casting
them in a negative light that was then extrapolated to the entire population:

> We see this in publications that speak of the shifty, sulky, rude, weak and childish tham
> (chief, king): traits that were often assumed to apply equally to all inhabitants (e.g.,
> Durand, 1900). Particular emphases were placed on the indigenous practice of raiding
> caravans and villages of adjacent territories, and subsequent slave dealings, and on a
> tradition of tribute exchange between Hunza and Chinese Turkestan. (Butz 1993: 136)

Representing locals as ‘savages’ and ‘degenerates’ created the discursive grounds for subduing
Hunza, and the call to civilize indigenous people served the material goals of colonial expansion,
exploitation, and subjugation. The representational work of orientalizing the people and spaces
of Gilgit-Baltistan demonstrates the productive power that discourse exercises in bringing socio-
cultural domination to fruition.

Dolphin (2000) demonstrates the intensifying link between orientalist representations of
the region and its people and the political goal of colonial expansion and exploitation.

Representational tropes, particularly in the late 19th century, categorize a number of negative
local ‘types’: the Wazir, the Tham (chief, king), caravan raiders, and slaves. Understandings of each of these types of people were developed, as well as strategies for western outsiders to deal with them. Durand (1899) for instance, describes the Tham, as “cowardly” and “shifty”, recommending that westerners be careful engaging with him. Similarly, Biddulph (1880: 22) characterizes the space as “difficult” and “dangerous”, describing at length the poor condition of the path that ran along the sheer cliffs right above the river (see Butz 1993). Said (1978: 7) argues that, “Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority which puts the westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand”. This process of constructing Gilgit-Baltistan as a ‘difficult’ space and categorizing the people as ‘savages’ highlights the discourses that gained dominance during this representational period and orientalized Gilgit-Baltistan.

Later Colonial Writings: Health, Happiness, and Authenticity

Over time Hunza became central to British imperial designs, partly to counter Russia’s growing interest in South Asia, and partly to forge a pathway into Central Asia. Colonial discourses about Gilgit-Baltistan and its people therefore changed after the 1891 conquest of Hunza by British troops. This marks the transition into a new representational period where discursive processes systematically disentangled Hunza’s landscape and people from its ‘barbaric and ‘despotic’ rulers, and represented common people and spaces more positively:

After the campaign was over, representations of the area and its inhabitants changed dramatically. Where before descriptions of the people as fierce and barbaric were prominent, this ferocity soon turned into something to be admired – they became a ‘proud’, ‘noble’ people. (Dolphin 2000: 113)

Hunzukuts (a colonial term that refers to the residents of Hunza) and Shimshalis, who were previously labeled as uncivilized and savage, were increasingly cast in a positive yet orientalist
light, as healthy, happy, and good humored. Locals were increasingly being admired for the value that they could add for western outsiders. Shimshali porters, for instance, were lauded for their “endurance” while carrying heavy loads in high altitudes (Dolphin 2000: 252). Similarly, the meanings attached to the space changed gradually at the turn of the 20th century, from ‘difficult’ and ‘dangerous’ (see Biddulph 1880: 22) to the Himalayan Shangri-La – a mythical space which had the perfect amount of remoteness and magic.

A new set of western outsiders, including adventure travelers and academics, began to contribute to this discursive landscape at this time. These European visitors included in their writings a wider range of ethnographic details as compared to conventional colonial accounts, but their observations were still reductive, and contributed to the wider cannon of orientalist literature on the region. Ascribing child-like traits to the people allowed these authors to construct them as ‘primitive others’ (Dolphin 2000). Butz (1993: 137) characterizes these positive representations within the asymmetrical field of power as neo-orientalist, marking a gradual shift towards a “gentler” and “more romantic” orientalism. Even in these neo-orientalist depictions, western outsiders maintain the relative upper hand, as the field of representational power remains configured to serve outsider interests. This representational transition highlights the changing priorities of colonial powers. Spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan were no longer insignificant buffer zones. Rather, they were central to colonial designs of expanding spheres of influence.
Post-Colonial Travel Literature: 1947 Onward

Foreign Travelers: Revisionist Romanticism, Experiencing Modernity, and Constructing Adventurism

Foreign travelers, including tourists, development workers, and conservation experts, continued to represent the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan after 1947. Dolphin (2000) introduces three distinct genres of representational content about Gilgit-Baltistan in the post-1947 context: revisionist romanticism, academic expertise related to the challenges of modernity, and Lonely Planet travel guides. Dolphin (2000) argues that the ways of seeing in this post-colonial genre of travel writing is still deeply hinged in the asymmetrical field of discursive power that developed in the colonial period. However, as outsiders’ interests in the region and their positionality with respect to these interests changed, so did the dominant cultural tropes in foreign travel literature. Consequently, some colonial tropes were reproduced and consolidated, whereas others were reworked to project new nationalistic narratives, signaling a shift in the asymmetrical field of power.

Texts written by John H. Tobe (a farmer and organic food advocate from southern Ontario) and Kathleen Jamie (a Scottish poet) represent certain spaces in Gilgit-Baltistan through the lens of ‘revisionist romanticism’. This representational practice is neo-orientalist in nature, depicting Gilgit-Baltistan as an amalgam of utopian communities, tucked away in a remote corner of the world, untainted by metropolitan ideas. Tobe’s (1960) sentimental narrative does not differ much from the ‘Happy Healthy Hunza’ representational strand that became front and center during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His primary objective in Hunza: Adventures in a Land of Paradise (1960) is to project the lifestyle of Hunzukuts as the healthiest in the world. Tobe (1960) uses his occupation as an organic agriculturalist, his engagement with the ruling class of Hunza, and an array of literature on the region to prove his point. He also uses the
term ‘Shangri-La’ to remove the region from its real-world context and to project it as a paradise tucked far away from the reaches of the modern world. The region is thereby presented as a mystical place, populated by oriental ‘others’. Representing the region as a timeless paradise insinuates that the people who inhabit these places are primitive and somehow more ‘natural’ (Dolphin 2000: 216).

Similarly, Kathleen Jamie’s work in The Golden Peak (1992) is characterized by revisionist romanticism, because she argues that the ‘real’ Hunza is situated in the past. In order to familiarize her readers with the landscape, she compares parts of Gilgit-Baltistan to historical Scotland and the Victorian era (Dolphin 2000: 243). Historical Scotland, just like Jamie’s (1992) Hunza, exists in the romanticized past; it is a mythical space that readers can relate to. Jamie represents the region’s social fabric as constantly threatened by western-style development. For instance, she is concerned about the effects of growing tourism on local cultural practice and hopes that Hunzukuts remain insulated from outside influence. Dolphin (2000) identifies this as the ‘vanishing primitive’ trope, whereby people in remote communities are represented as requiring protection from their own inclinations to disrupt local cultural landscapes under the influence of metropolitan ideas. This is orientalist in nature, because it not only ‘others’ the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, but also enforces a western outsider’s idea of what Gilgit-Baltistan’s venture into modernity should look like. Jamie (1992) highlights the region’s marginality vis-à-vis the Pakistani nation-state, arguing that the term “Northern-Areas”, is hardly the most imaginative of names for an area redolent with kingdoms such as Baltistan, Dardistan, and Kashmir, insinuating that the region’s culture and diversity has not been adequately valued by the Pakistani nation-state. Here she highlights the regimes of domination and control exercised
by the Pakistani state, which exemplifies the differences among the interests of multiple outsiders.

Western academic experts, Clark (1956) and Schaller (1983) use the legitimacy of their academic training and professional experiences to maintain flexible positional superiority, and to use this vantage point to ostensibly help the people of Gilgit-Baltistan transition into modern ways of life. Clark’s (1956) objective is to conduct a social experiment to gauge the impact of ‘western ways of life’ on a remote community, supposedly secluded in a kind of refuge from civilization. Hunza seemed to fit the description perfectly, so it became Clark’s field of choice. Unlike other travel writers who were intrigued by the region itself, Clark is interested primarily in using Hunza as a resource for his social experiment. Invoking and reproducing age-old colonial tropes, Clark organizes the people into subject categories, commenting on their ‘Asian-ness’, and arguing that they are unpredictable and inefficient (Dolphin 2000: 226). He also argues that his project of introducing them to ‘western ways of life’ might be hindered because of these character traits. Interestingly, these negative depictions of the people of Hunza come to full force when they differ in opinion or don’t co-operate with Clark. In this case flexible positional superiority is reproduced through the maintenance of scientific authority that is leveraged through Clark’s (1956) academic position. He makes essentialist claims about the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, and at numerous crucial junctures expresses his frustration with locals, claiming that “they were loud in expression and gratitude, but it felt at times that they were regarding me as just another foreign traveler to yield revenue as he passed by” (Clark 1956: 100). Clark believed that the locals had been backward for so long that they could not value the “modern precision” that he advocated (Clark 1956: 157). His work resonates with early colonial era travel literature representations, bearing resemblance to the work of Biddulph (1880)
and Durand (1900). He strengthens the colonial era discourse that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are incapable of managing their own affairs, and that western outsiders can play a significant role in bringing them up to pace with the modern world.

Schaller’s (1983) *Stones of Silence: Journeys in the Himalaya* exhibits a deep concern for the endangered wildlife species of Gilgit-Baltistan. With an active interest in preserving the region’s wilderness and natural authenticity, and documenting the status and spatial distribution of Marco Polo sheep, Bighorn sheep, Musk Ox etc., Schaller (1983) goes in search of areas that would serve as good national parks or reserves, and makes recommendations to government officials based merely on his travel observations, ignoring local views and silencing indigenous voices. Schaller (1983) is concerned about the future of the region, and claims that its wilderness and authenticity are under threat. Much like others before him, Schaller reproduces colonial tropes about subordinated others, and characterized them as ‘unpredictable’ and ‘suspicious of others’. His main focus is to devise a conservation plan where large reserves of land would be used to maintain genetic stock and protect wildlife of the region, but he devises his plan without delving into the details of landownership or having detailed conversations with local inhabitants about the ways in which grazing patterns and conservation efforts could coexist.

Dolphin (2000) argues that it is the authority with which Schaller speaks as a western outsider that strips people and spaces of their ability to speak for themselves. Travel writers during the early colonial period also enjoyed this unmitigated authority, which led to orientalist depictions of Gilgit-Baltistan. In an upcoming sub-section that frames Gilgit-Baltistan as the eco-body of the nation-state, I look at the role that the state has played in appropriating local grazing grounds to make national parks based on Schaller’s recommendations.
Dolphin (2000) also deconstructs several editions of the *Lonely Planet Guide to Pakistan*, travel guidebooks that cater to independent, mostly foreign travelers. Pakistan’s “impenetrable mountains”, its “interactable people”, and its “impossibly romantic cities” draw the attention of certain kinds of adventure travel enthusiasts (Dolphin 2000: 258). Focusing on selected spaces within Gilgit-Baltistan, *Lonely Planet* depicts Hunza through its trekking potential, which links contemporary adventure mountain trekking to colonial exploration. Early travel writers responsible for first orientalizing the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan were adventure travelers and trekkers who took pride in mastering the difficult terrain. *Lonely Planet* issues describe each trek stage by stage, informing travelers and travel enthusiasts of the sights to see, places to visit, and things to do, all the while disseminating neo-orientalist depictions of Gilgit-Baltistan. Dolphin (2000) argues that these representations reproduce colonial tropes about the ostensible character traits of different ethnicities, which over time become essentialized. Porters from Nagar, for instance, are characterized as “negligent” and “argumentative”, whereas Shimshali porters are depicted positively because of their “endurance” as high-altitude porters (Dolphin 2000: 262).

In addition to paperback travel guides, Dolphin (2000) also analyzes online foreign depictions of Hunza in travel brochures, health blogs/websites, and travelogues. She finds that the online travel content reproduces established colonial and orientalist discursive conventions that engender truth effects related to Gilgit-Baltistan, and perpetuate understandings of the region as remote, marginal, and wild, and its people as authentic, happy and healthy. Outsider representations are orientalist in nature, even if they are somewhat positive compared to the representations that emerged during the early colonial period. I argued earlier that these positive representations may be characterized as neo-orientalist, which means that they are a “gentler”
and “more romantic” form of orientalism (Butz 1993: 137). Othering people and space with positive connotations (re)produces domination and control whereby outsiders, by virtue of their flexible positional superiority, are able to define the modalities through which these people can be seen and known.

Domestic Travelers: Reproducing Colonial Tropes, Harnessing Socio-Cultural Capital and Engendering Nationalist Tropes

While Dolphin’s (2000) work is useful in delineating non-domestic ‘outsider’ representations of Gilgit-Baltistan and its inhabitants, it does not engage with relevant representational practices of lowland Pakistani travel writers. Down-country understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan are no doubt inspired and shaped by the colonial and neo-colonial discourses I have described. However, they are also informed by nationalist interests, and rooted in lowland social capital and cultural sensitivities, engendering a new set of dominant discourses that primarily serve down-country interests.

The recent surge in domestic tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan has generated unparalleled representational attention to the region. However, Gilgit-Baltistan is not new to down-country Pakistanis; they have been traveling to the region over many decades for a range of reasons given Gilgit-Baltistan’s administrative structure, status as a zone of conflict and contestation, and reputation as a node of economic connectivity. Lowland Pakistanis have worked there as army officers and sepoys, transporters and laborers, and public servants and traders. While these groups have certainly contributed to the process of representing the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, contemporary domestic travel writers and adventure enthusiasts are playing an increasingly pivotal role in this process, with mass representational consumption by down-country Pakistanis as the main goal. I return to Mustansar Hussain Tarrar, who I introduced in
the epigraph that starts chapter one, to examine his work in some detail as a way to introduce these more recent representations of Gilgit-Baltistan. His travelogues, written in Urdu, have circulated widely, and are admired for their simplistic style and witty humour. I also look at the work of Salman Rashid, an army veteran who has produced English language travel writing on the region.

The work of both authors is widely consumed, but by a different set of audiences due to differing linguistic mediums. Rashid’s books are replete with colonial references and serve to consolidate most of the colonial tropes Dolphin (2000) deconstructs. Rashid draws on his army connections to receive permission to travel across Pakistan, which generates a particular genre of cultural/nationalistic tropes that work in tandem with colonial tropes. Tarrar’s style of writing is structured like that of highly revered Urdu literary gurus such as Ashfaq Ahmad and Saadat Hassan Manto. He does not claim to be scientific, and often writes with an undertone of wit, humor, and sarcasm. The ‘ways of seeing’ in both of these cases differ markedly from the writings of western outsiders; even between these two authors the vantage point with which they approach Gilgit-Baltistan and its people is markedly different. However, we can see considerable overlap between the representational practices of foreign and domestic travel writers, including the representation of Gilgit-Baltistan as remote and peripheral, which contributes to its appeal for city dwellers.

Traveling extensively throughout Europe in the 1970s, Tarrar gained legitimacy as a traveler, explorer, and writer among his Urdu speaking readers. His first two books – *Pyrar ka pehla seher* (The first city of love/The city of first love) (1974) and *Undlas mei Ajnabi* (A stranger in Spain) (1976) – establish his representational authority, which he enjoys to this day.
Khanabadosh (Gypsy) (1983) documents his travels through the Middle-East and North Africa, providing Urdu readers a perspective on a region they associate with ideologically, but don’t understand well due to a lack of exposure. In the 1980s and 1990s, Tarrar focused closer to home, and wrote a series of travelogues on the Northern Areas; the most popular among them are Safar Shumal ke (Journeys of the North) (1991), K2 Kahani (K2 Story) (1994), and Hunza Daastan (The Tale of Hunza) (2004). My understanding of the region was, in part, shaped through Tarrar’s perspectives, and I would often read his travelogues to prepare myself for a trip to Gilgit-Baltistan. I purchased a paperback copy of Shimshaal Bemisaal (Shimshal the Unparalleled) (2000) before visiting Shimshal for the first time in the winter of 2012.

Looking at the general trajectory of his work, Tarrar himself is the active voice in each travelogue, which he constructs as a humbling bumbling down-country Pakistani, out in the remote frontier to re-discover himself, and to showcase Pakistan’s beauty and his own re-discovery to his down-country audiences. Gilgit-Baltistan is represented as a remote and authentic space that “offers an escape” from harsh city life (Tarrar 1991: 13). Representations of the landscape highlight its harsh conditions and steep slopes, and the difficulty of each trek through it. Tarrar’s experience is projected as both tiring and humbling. Just when he is about to lose hope, a glimmer of crystal clear blue water somewhere in the distance, or a breathtaking view of Mount Rakaposhi, motivates him to keep on moving. Tarrar also projects the landscape as something of a Shangri-la. For instance, in Safar Shumaal Ke (1991), he describes the KKH of the past as a path “made of silk” (122) traversing through the harsh terrain. Much like Clark (1956) and Jamie (1992), Tarrar’s ‘real’ Gilgit-Baltistan is located in the past, and his calling is to immortalize these simpler times through Afsana Nigar. Tarrar’s accounts keep the landscape
front and center, and the people as secondary actors who appear only when the plot of each short story requires local wisdom.

Locals who accompany him on these treks are represented as “simple” (Tarrar 1984: 7), “strong” (ibid.), and “cheerful” (Tarrar 1991: 116), contributing to neo-orientalist depictions dominant in earlier foreign travel literature. Tarrar’s work consolidates some colonial and post-colonial tropes, but it also introduces new ways of seeing the region through the comparison between Gilgit-Baltistan and lowland Pakistani urban centers. Representing the region as a space of the past, almost entirely empty and somewhat mythical Orientalizes it for down-country Pakistani audiences. Tarrar’s representational ability, which makes Gilgit-Baltistan socially intelligible for the vast number of people who communicate in Urdu, has a significant impact on forging understandings and shaping behaviors, with implications for the relationship of domination and control between Gilgit-Baltistan and the Pakistani nation-state.

Salman Rashid is a down-country Pakistani travel writer who has 10 books and a travel blog to his credit. His representational legitimacy stems from a range of networks, connections, and experiences, including his fellowship with the Royal Geographical Society, uncompleted studies at Lahore’s Government College, and officership in Pakistan’s armed forces (See Rashid 2003, 2011). His blog Odysseus Lahori builds an emotional narrative in which Rashid, a traveler “deeply interested in seeing the world” (Rashid, 2011) but crushed under the weight of his father’s expectations, joins a highly respected physics and mathematics program in arguably Pakistan’s most well-known university. Disappointed by the academic pressure, Rashid drops out and decided to ‘serve the nation’ by joining Pakistan’s armed forces, which he left after seven years. Several unfulfilling jobs and failed entrepreneurial schemes later, Salman started “roaming the wilderness”, and was approached by the Director of Pakistan’s Tourism
Development Corporation (TDCP) to serve as a contributor to its magazine; this marked the beginning of his writing career. Rashid claims that “People ask me where I did my PhD in history from! My knowledge base has developed through self-study and exploring places first hand” (Rashid 2011). Middle class, urban, and educated down-country Pakistanis can relate to Rashid’s struggles, and they empathize with him on multiple fronts, making him very popular among Pakistani middle-class audiences who prefer reading travel literature in English.

*The Apricot Road to Yarkand* (2011) is Rashid’s most recent book on northern Pakistan. Although he has written about numerous places across Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan remains the most prominent. While providing a historical background of the region, Rashid reproduces colonial understandings of locals, introducing the *Hunzukuts* as raiders who “haunted” the route to *Muztagh Pass*. Contrarily, his narrative idealizes Victorian cartographers and explorers like Godwin-Austen and Younghusband, who moved forward undeterred. Rashid views the era of exploration through a romanticized lens, and in the process a range of colonial tropes are reproduced for the consumption of a wide range of audiences, most notably Pakistan’s down-country middle classes. Perpetuating a set of orientalist representations of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in contemporary times legitimizes the view that people of the region have historically been untrustworthy, quick to fight among each other, and incapable of managing their own affairs. These orientalist representations of Gilgit-Baltistan serve as resources to justify a whole series of processes that produce multiple marginalities, which residents of the region must negotiate in their everyday lives. Rashid’s work establishes nature as the primary lens through which the spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan can be seen and understood, implicating the landscape in this process of orientalization (See Rashid 2003). Together, these tropes constitute a
mode of domination whereby ‘othering’ people and spaces adds to the constitutional, legal, and political marginalization that the region already faces.

Rashid also deploys his social capital to advantage by emphasizing the ease with which he is able to navigate Gilgit-Baltistan. In particular, he uses, and writes fondly about, his links with the armed forces, which gain him access to certain spaces, and signal a different genre of “flexible positional superiority” (Said 1978: 7). For instance, in The Apricot Road to Yarkand’s (2013) epilogue, Rashid provides extensive details of his meetings with Lieutenant Generals who provided him with funds to cover the cost of porterage and a helicopter. After getting approval and funding, he swiftly moves towards another wing of the army, where he meets two aviation officers who happen to be his course mates (people completing their army training in the same cohort). As Rashid states, “They could have dumped me on any glacier anywhere in Pakistan. ‘Even in mid-winter, if the day is clear’, said Roghani with a grin”. This ease of travel in Gilgit-Baltistan for a down-country Pakistani with just the right amount of cultural capital is telling of the regimes of power that facilitate particular outsiders and restrict others, with commensurate impacts on the discourses that gain dominance.

**Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistani National Imagination: Beyond Travel Literature**

Earlier, I reviewed colonial and post-colonial travel literature to trace the representational periods in which a range of outsiders and down-country Pakistanis construct the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization, its historic and contemporary socio-cultural domination by a range of outsiders, and its multi-faceted marginality cannot be attributed solely to understandings developed through travel literature. The discursive production of Gilgit-Baltistan and its people as particular kinds of Orients and
Orientals happens through a web of institutions, networks, and bodies of knowledge that intersect with travel literature to develop understandings and shape behaviors.

In Pakistan’s nationalistic discourses, Gilgit-Baltistan occupies positions of both peripherality and centrality, depending on how understandings of the region can contribute to the interests of the post-colonial state. In the first subsection I focus on Gilgit-Baltistan’s position of peripherality and marginality in nationalist discourses by stressing its subjugated history, invisibilized languages and cultures, and subservient local economy vis-à-vis the Pakistani state. In the second subsection I highlight Gilgit-Baltistan’s position of centrality, building on Ali’s (2014: 116) argument that the region is seen and understood through the lens of landscape and nature as the “eco-body of the nation-state”. Discourses of peripherality and centrality orientalize Gilgit-Baltistan, with different outcomes for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. In both subsections I highlight local resistance to these discursive interventions, and identify ways in which people of Gilgit-Baltistan engage in processes of self-representation that have various effects on processes of domination and control. Together, nationalistic discourses and interests are constituted in dialogue with travel literature representations to consolidate Gilgit-Baltistan’s marginality and domination.

Gilgit-Baltistan’s Position of Peripherality in Nationalistic Discourses: Subjugated History, Linguistic Invisibilisation, and Economic Subservience

Hussain (2015) argues that two opposing national narratives – The Indus Valley Civilization Theory and the Two Nation Theory – have been employed in the Pakistani state’s representational agenda. Both subjugate Gilgit-Baltistan’s local histories, and construct the region as spatially and temporally a homogenous part of the Pakistani nation-state. The Indus Valley Civilization theory discursively constructs a diverse, pluralistic, and all-accepting
Pakistan, whereas the Two Nation theory is invoked most often in opposition to India, discursively connecting Pakistan to its supposed Islamic ideological foundations. Hussain (2015) argues that these theories are an integral part of the Pakistani school curriculum. However, Ali (2014) argues that despite the state’s attempts to propagate these narratives through educational indoctrination, Gilgit-Baltistan remains invisible and misunderstood for the vast majority of down-country Pakistani students.

The Two Nation Theory asserts that Hindus and Muslims of South Asia are two distinct ‘nations’ with different beliefs, customs, and ways of life. The implication is that the existence of these two nations in one land will inevitably result in lifelong conflict. To solve this problem, Muslims demanded freedom, not just from the British, but also from the Hindus of South Asia. Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan lend credibility to this theory. In 1947, the British left the princely state of Kashmir and Gilgit-Agency in a state of legal and political ambiguity under the control of Maharaja Hari Singh, a Dogra Hindu who ruled over a majority Muslim population. Gilgit-Scouts, with popular local support, rebelled against the Maharaja with the intent of joining Pakistan. Soon afterward, Pashtun tribesmen and other post-partition militias responded to the calls for Jihad and Azadi to free their Muslim brethren from the supposedly despotic and non-Muslim Maharaja.

Both residents of Gilgit-Baltistan and down-country Pakistanis employ this narrative in the service of their own interests. The latter posit that a united Muslim front is invincible and transcends all ethnic and linguistic boundaries (see Dani 2001). Salman Rashid’s travel writings contribute to this national imagination, where Gilgit-Baltistan is constructed as an integral part of the Pakistani nation-state. Gilgit-based activists, on the other hand, use this theory and its
supporting historical baggage to highlight loyalties to Pakistan, and to push for their constitutional and legal rights to be accepted as full citizens of the Pakistani nation-state.

The Two Nation Theory served as an ideological resource for partition, and as a revisionist resource retrospectively to justify partition. However, it is clear that after the events of 1971 when Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) gained independence from Pakistan (formerly West Pakistan), the idea that nations are defined purely on the basis of faith lost traction. Given the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in Pakistan, the failure of the Two Nation Theory could potentially result in a series of secessionist conflicts. At this point, a new ideological hinge was developed through the Indus Valley Civilization theory, in which Pakistan’s pre-Islamic past is highlighted through rock carvings and other archeological evidence that suggests the existence of an ancient civilization in the Indus Valley. The theory extends beyond Moenjodaro and Harrapa, city-states associated with the civilization, to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan, where the river Indus emerges and feeds the rest of Pakistan. Colonial tropes about Gilgit-Baltistan’s remoteness and nationalistic tropes about its relation to Pakistan as part and parcel of the nation-state are reproduced in the Indus Valley Civilization theory.

It is hardly surprising that the Pakistani state has discursively constituted Gilgit-Baltistan for the consumption of down-country audiences, given how important the frontier is to the nation-state, and how uninformed the national polity is about Gilgit-Baltistan. One such attempt was made during General Zia-ul-Haq’s military regime, when the Pakistani government developed and carefully consolidated a nationalistic account that focuses on the Muslim identity of Gilgit-Baltistan’s residents without delving into sectarian differences (see Sökefeld 2003; Ali 2010). Hussain (2015) terms this “the Islamization of local history”, in which the narrative is built around a supposedly joint Muslim front that defeated the well-organized forces of the
Hindu *Maharaja*. Nosheen Ali (2009) looks at militarization as a state-formative process through which military ethos and structures become deeply embedded in state and society. Gilgit-Baltistan has acquired a position of centrality within Pakistani-nationalistic discourses, because of its implication in the Kashmir conflict, whereby “the military definition of reality becomes common sense for the nation-state” (Ali 2009: 82-104). Its people, who contribute to these military-nationalistic discourses, are revered as loyal heroes of the nation-state whose ultimate prize is *Shaheed* (martyr) or *Ghazi* (Conqueror). For instance, Havaldaar Lalak Jan, a light infantry officer of the Northern Areas who lost his life during the Kargil War in 1999, was given *Nishan-e-Haider*, the highest military award of honor in Pakistan. While soldiers who are recruited from Gilgit-Baltistan are hailed as heroes, the region itself is under strict regimes of military surveillance and control, is understood to be a region that needs to be ‘protected’ and ‘controlled’, and its people, or at least certain integral parts of their identity, are invizibilized or even invalidated.

Looking at the two nationalistic theories above, it is evident that the state has engaged in a considerable amount of representational work, and invested significant resources, to incorporate these theories into nation-building platforms such as school curriculums and state-sponsored media outlets. However, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan remain largely invisible and highly misunderstood for the average down-country Pakistani. Hussain’s (2015) informants from different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan claimed that down-country Pakistanis commonly view them as *Khan Sahebs*, an Urdu term used colloquially for ethnic Pashtuns from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Sökefeld (2005) aptly demonstrates the extent to which down-country Pakistanis are uninformed about Gilgit-Baltistan. While most Pakistani’s celebrate their National Independence Day on the 14th of August,
residents of Gilgit-Baltistan celebrate their own Freedom Day (Yom e Azadi) on 1st of November, which marks the date of their own struggle for freedom against the Kashmiri Maharaja, a date that holds no significance for down-country Pakistanis. While the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan are familiar with, and increasingly passionate about, Pakistan’s Independence Day celebrations, the vast majority of down-country Pakistani’s don’t even know there is a separate freedom day (Yom e Azadi) that Gilgit-Baltistan residents celebrate.

Language politics is another aspect of Gilgit-Baltistan’s marginal discursive position vis-à-vis the Pakistani nation-state. Kreutzmann (2017) highlights the linguistic diversity in Gilgit-Baltistan, and spatially represents language groups that are dominant in different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. He (2017: 255) argues that the Hindukush Karakoram region has been classified as a linguistic museum, and points out that 20 different languages belonging to Old Indic, Nuristani, Iranian, Atlantic, and Sino-Tibetan language groups are spoken in different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. Despite this linguistic diversity, Rahman (1996) notes that in Pakistan’s national census data all of Gilgit-Baltistan’s indigenous languages are categorized under the title “Other Languages”. Rahman (1996) further clarifies that Urdu, Pakistan’s national language, is generally used for inter-regional communication. Kreutzmann (2017) points out that all federal level reports and policy briefs are published in English, establishing a firm connection between Pakistan’s colonial past and its post-colonial present. Invisibilising indigenous linguistic diversity has far reaching implications for shaping representations and forging dominant understandings. Lack of acknowledgement of regional languages and their discursive silences in government issued reports are strategies of othering and invalidating cultures associated with those languages. Discursive silences in the National Population Census (2017) renders the region invisible in the Pakistani national imagination. These official government documents contribute
to understandings of the region, just as travel literature does, as a particular kind of remote place whose language and culture is subservient to the dominant languages of Pakistan.

Gilgit-Baltistan’s local economy is dependent on the Pakistani nation-state; the region’s government and civil service depends almost entirely on Islamabad for its budgetary allocations, further intensifying its marginality. Pakistan’s four provinces receive their share of funding after rounds of debates and deliberations through the National Finance Commission (NFC). The most recent (7th) NFC award focused on indicators such as inverse population density, relative poverty, and marginality to distribute federal funds to provinces (Adeney 2012). These indicators worked in favor of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), which has borne the brunt of the War on Terror, and Baluchistan, which suffers from acute poverty. However, Gilgit-Baltistan does not have provincial status, so it is left out of these deliberations, and funding decisions are enforced directly from the federal capital. Constitutional marginality serves to reinforce this economic subservience, and even in cases where the people of Gilgit-Baltistan can build an argument for equitable economic opportunities at home, there seems to be little success. For instance, the China-Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC), a small part of China’s One Belt One Road initiative, through which Pakistan has received more than US$50 billion in multi-sector investments, is viewed with apprehension in Gilgit-Baltistan. Karrar and Mostowlansky (2018) argue that the project is viewed with skepticism in Gilgit-Baltistan, as there is fear among locals that the center will reap benefits at the expense of its frontiers, turning Gilgit-Baltistan into a node connecting two economic centers.
Local Responses to Gilgit-Baltistan’s Position of Peripherality in Nationalist Discourses

For the longest time, mountain nationalists seeking to break free from the clutches of Pakistan, India and China have been dismissed by the state. However, slightly less revolutionary Gilgit (and Islamabad) based civil society groups advocating for Gilgit-Baltistan's right to govern its own affairs within the Pakistani polity are being taken seriously. The state has used soft power to deal with reformists, and exhibited an inclination to continue dialogue. At the same time, a purge has started against separatists, as Gilgit-Baltistan transitions from a frontier defined in opposition to India into one that is being defined in conjunction with China. Gilgit-based reformist intelligentsia are fixed on their demand to de-link Gilgit-Baltistan from the Kashmir issue, and to work towards a more localized governance system and greater financial independence in budgetary allocations. Kreutzmann (2015) and Hong (2013) identify different strategies that the state has considered and applied to meet these political and economic demands. A wave of reforms started with the Gilgit-Baltistan reforms package introduced by President Musharraf in 2007, turning the legislative council into a legislative assembly, and making Kashmir’s minister its Chair. Similarly, the shift in name from 'Northern Areas' to 'Gilgit-Baltistan' in 2009 was a strategic move that came out of the concessions made for emerging reformist groups. Kreutzmann (2015) claims that the popular response to these series of reforms has not been positive, and although they mimic ideals set by western liberal democracies, in reality underneath all this wordplay little has changed for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Another dimension of local resistance has emerged in the form of language movements, which protect and celebrate Gilgit-Baltistan’s cultural and linguistic diversity, and also serve as an act of resistance to the State sponsored ‘othering’ and invisibilization that is evident in
language surveys and census data. Rahman (1996) provides a brief overview of language movements starting with The Karakoram Writers Forum, a Gilgit-based literary club that started publishing in the *Shina* language in the 1970s. In 1979, Radio Pakistan started broadcasting in *Shina* from Gilgit. Similarly, language movements in *Burushaski* also emerged in the 1970s with the help of local intellectuals, particularly Naseeruddin Naseer, who established the Burushsaki Research Academy. Rahman (1996) identifies similar efforts that have been made for the *Wakhi* language. Organized movements for the protection or popularization of the *Balti* language have not been mentioned by Rahman. However, the work of several individuals working from Skardu, Gilgit, and Rawalpindi is highlighted. The most ardent supporters of these language movements appear to be residents of Gilgit-Baltistan who have out-migrated to the Pakistani heartland, most notably Karachi and Rawalpindi/Islamabad. Given the growing trend of outmigration to down-country Pakistan (Benz 2014) and a strong inclination amongst the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan to join down-country public and private institutions (Hussain 2015), these language movements and other avenues of local resistance are likely to pick up pace.

Locals have responded to discourses about Gilgit-Baltistan’s subjugated history with reservations, accepting some nationalistic histories while rejecting others in the service of their own interests. Hussain (2015) argues that Hunza’s caravan raiding⁸ past is widely accepted and endorsed, as this narrative places Hunza on an upward trajectory of social consciousness and development, starting from a supposedly shameful past to the present time where it now boasts one of the highest rates of education, health, and social-development in the country. This understanding of Gilgit-Baltistan’s past is aligned with both the dominant state narrative as well as the Agha Khan Foundation narrative, which characterizes the region as a remote ideal-type:

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⁸ In Gilgit-Baltistan’s context, for an analysis of the processes of characterization and representation of frontier people in colonial texts see Hussain (2003)
the ‘Shangri-La’ of the 21st century. Contrarily, the negative representation of Shimshalis, who are depicted as incapable of managing their own affairs, is actively opposed. I explain this later in this chapter by highlighting the self-representational project that Shimshalis initiated in the form of Shimshal Nature Trust, as they express their right to define the future of regional pastures and build a case for their stewardship of the pastures, dismissing colonial representations and actively resisting state sponsored masterplans to limit villagers’ access to grazing grounds.

Gilgit-Baltistan’s Centrality in Nationalist Discourses: Eco-body of the Nation-State

Gilgit-Baltistan’s constitutional and legal liminality, its subjugated history, subservient economy and linguistic invisibilization, give it a position of peripherality in the Pakistani national discursive imagination. This peripherality orientalizes Gilgit-Baltistan, and contributes to its multi-faceted marginality. Acquiring a position of centrality in nationalistic discourses, which comes to the fore in numerous institutions, networks, and bodies of knowledge, also plays a significant role in Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization, albeit in a completely different way. Nosheen Ali (2014) argues that nature remains the primary modality through which Gilgit-Baltistan is understood by the vast majority of down-country Pakistanis. The region has acquired a position of centrality in Pakistani nationalistic imagination as the eco-body of the nation-state. Down-country Pakistanis take pride in the region, even if they aren’t fully familiar with its political struggles and economic dependence, and the extent of its socio-cultural invisibilization. They understand Gilgit-Baltistan through its discursive production as ‘natural’, ‘wild’ and ‘authentic’. As Ali (2014: 115) explains, “Gilgit-Baltistan’s…magnificent peaks and breathtaking valleys invoke within Pakistanis a simultaneous sense of emotional attachment and proud ownership, permitting them to claim Pakistan as ‘beautiful’”.

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Ali (2014) analyses the discourses about Gilgit-Baltistan that are exercised in textbooks used in Pakistan Studies courses (a compulsory subject in all Pakistani schools), which focus solely on its landscape and environment; its people and culture are discursively silenced. She acknowledges that the quality of government school curricula is poor on many fronts, and that they ignore and misrepresent a wide array of social groups and spaces. Nevertheless, representations of Gilgit-Baltistan’s people are especially inconspicuous. This discursive power play ‘depopulates’ the region, and pushes Gilgit-Baltistan’s languages, cultures, and cuisines towards the margins of the state in the service of nationalistic interests.

This discursive strategy is not only deployed by the Pakistani state in public school textbooks. Ali (2014) demonstrates that textbooks used in private schools, where curricula are developed by international examination boards such as the Cambridge International Education (CIE) Board, also exercise the same narratives. Discourses that construct Gilgit-Baltistan as central to Pakistan as the eco-body of the nation-state, therefore, aren’t limited to certain schools, textbook boards, or even to the education system as a whole. An entire web of institutions and social practices discursively construct Gilgit-Baltistan for the consumption of down-country Pakistanis. These representations are not the result of carefully crafted narratives by purposeful politicians, military strongmen, and policy makers. Rather, they are also fashioned by teachers, travelers, and poets who reproduce colonial tropes and engender nationalistic tropes to make Gilgit-Baltistan socially intelligible for down-country Pakistan. In sum, as part of this complex web of institutions and social practices, a range of actors, both insiders and outsiders, contribute to the construction of Gilgit-Baltistan as the eco-body of the nation-state.
**Material Linkages as Resources for Gilgit-Baltistan’s Orientalization**

Discourses that frame Gilgit-Baltistan as the eco-body of the Pakistani nation-state have strong material linkages. Knudsen (1999) provides an informative example. He traces the events leading up to Khunjerab National Park’s (KNP) creation and provides an overview of the conflict between local villagers and the state regarding land ownership and land use rights. In 1975, Pakistan’s national assembly passed the Northern-Areas Wildlife Preservation Act, which gave the state the legal mandate to transform any area in its domain into a national park or wildlife sanctuary. In the same year, Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto embraced an American wildlife biologist’s proposal to change the status of Khunjerab, a traditional Wakhi grazing ground, to a ‘gazetted’ National Park. Knudsen (1999: 4) claims that well into the 1980s “the park was intended as a showcase of modern conservation, with little else than dotted lines on a map”.

Interestingly, this American wildlife biologist is George Schaller, whose work I discussed earlier. Schaller (1983) exhibited a deep concern for the protection of ‘nature’ and ‘wildlife’, and proposed the idea of a designated national park, even if it intruded on local grazing grounds. His underlying assumption, which relied on representations of Gilgit-Baltistan and its people established through colonial travel literature and formalized by the state, was that locals are incapable of understanding the true value of their environment, and unequipped to protect their own habitat (see Butz, 2006).

As time passed, the federal government’s intentions for the national park changed, from wildlife protection to administrative expansion and eventually political domination. In 1989, senior government officials, along with several foreign wildlife conservation experts, devised new management plans for KNP, which were rumored to limit land use by local villagers. Ali (2009) terms this process ‘ecological nationalism’ whereby the state makes active efforts to
protect and conserve ‘Pakistan’s natural resources’ by turning them into a symbol of national pride while disregarding the concerns of local villagers. Ali’s (2014) proposition is that locals had already been rendered invisible in school textbooks, whereas the spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan – this supposedly vast and open piece of land – were valued as beautiful landscapes, pristine environments, and homes for endangered wildlife (see Khan 1991; Rabbani 2003). In other discursive venues like travel literature, locals were represented as naïve residents of a remote area who were a threat to their environment, putting their future in jeopardy. Ali (2009) argues that ecological nationalism, while ostensibly enacted to protect valuable natural landscapes and wildlife, rather serves the purpose of establishing the state’s sovereignty over its frontiers. Under the guise of environmental and ecological protection, the state flexes its muscle over its frontier by limiting local land use and designating the region as a federally administered zone.

Butz (2006: 401) provides an overview of the ways in which residents of Shimshal organized to resist the state’s ecological nationalism and incursion into their territory through the KNP:

In 1997, after two decades of mainly material forms of resistance to the KNP management plan, the community engaged in a formal representational project of its own, which resulted in the formation of the SNT [Shimshal Nature Trust], and the production of a document describing the trust titled The Shimshal Nature Trust: Fifteen Year Vision and Management Plan.

Earlier resistance efforts by the community included physical force. For example, community members prevented government survey teams from entering Shimshal and its adjoining pastures in 1991, and closely monitored movements of foreigners who raised suspicion (Knudsen 1999). Butz (2006) argues that the Shimshal Nature Trust document represents the community’s capability to manage its own environment and resources by describing an age-old system of indigenous environmental stewardship (See also Butz 2002: 25-27). This self-representational
act is an attempt to show that residents of Shimshal, the village whose traditional grazing grounds were under threat of appropriation, are not dependent on metropolitan down-country master plans and foreign technological guidance to manage their own affairs (Ali & Butz 2003). Other communities have engaged in similar efforts to resist the imposition of external environmental management or expropriation schemes, with variable success.

**Conclusion**

Gilgit-Baltistan's orientalization has been co-produced and continually reinforced by representational practices and their material linkages from the colonial past and post-colonial present. The various meanings and understandings of the region constantly change with shifting regimes of power and their particular interests related to domination and control. However, they have similarly developed in an asymmetrical field of discursive power by differently positioned actors to construct a particular set of understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan. In this chapter I have traced this process by highlighting outsider representations of Gilgit-Baltistan that emerged in travel literature during the colonial and post-colonial period to show how Gilgit-Baltistan is represented by western and down-country Pakistani outsiders. I have thus developed a representational history of Gilgit-Baltistan by chalking out different periods in which the region and its people were discursively orientalized. Their position of centrality and peripherality in nationalist discourses extends their discursive domination by down-country outsiders through a web of state institutions, networks, and bodies of knowledge that articulate with travel literature to orientalize the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, intensify its marginality, and consolidate its domination by the Pakistani nation-state.
My primary purpose in this thesis is to link colonial and post-colonial representational histories of Gilgit-Baltistan with new institutional platforms that have emerged recently in the virtual sphere, as a consequence of cellular, digital, and virtual connectivity in the region. Subsequent chapters, therefore, will be framed by contemporary representations of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in virtual spaces. I investigate how new actors, virtual spaces, and altered representational practices reproduce, rework, subvert, or accentuate colonial and post-colonial discourses that constitute Gilgit-Baltistan and shape the dimensions of its domination.

In the next chapter I introduce Attabad Lake, a site of disaster that is increasingly understood in national discourse as a prime tourist destination. Detaching meanings of disaster from Attabad Lake serves the interests of some insiders, many outsiders, and a range of institutions. Consequently, positive associations with Attabad gain prominence over other narratives, perpetuating certain ‘regimes of truth’ that determine Attabad’s (and Gilgit-Baltistan’s) social intelligibility. This argument is significant because it shows that Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization in virtual spaces is hinged on frameworks of domination and control that have spanned several representational periods.
Chapter 3: Picturing Attabad in Virtual Spaces: The Data Set

I begin this chapter by describing the Attabad landslide disaster and subsequent touristification of the landscape produced by the disaster, in order to provide context for the online representations I later enumerate and analyze. Then, in the chapter’s main section, I share preliminary details about the platforms I sampled, and present selected pictures and captions from the data streams I sourced from virtual spaces. After identifying several dominant narratives characteristic of each data stream, I conclude the chapter by highlighting the ways in which social reality is constituted through picturing practices. This chapter does not directly answer any questions I set for this thesis. However, it helps to set up the discourse analysis I conduct in the fourth chapter. Discourses relating to the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, which have been (re)produced through the co-constitutive representational work of insiders and outsiders, have made Gilgit-Baltistan socially intelligible at a range of spatial and temporal scales. Data presented in this chapter will later be used to connect contemporary discourses in virtual spaces with the regimes of truth that have historically orientalized Gilgit-Baltistan and engendered and maintained its marginality. My focus is as much on the processes through which landscapes and people are represented in virtual spaces, as it is on the power/domination effects these processes produce.

Before 2010, the site of present day Attabad Lake was just another valley in Gilgit-Baltistan, peripheral to the Pakistani nation-state. In early 2010, a massive slope failure blocked the Hunza River, completely destroyed Attabad village, and partially destroyed an adjacent village named Sarat. Blockage of the Hunza River resulted in the formation of a 120m deep lake, which flooded parts of five villages, “displaced 1650 individuals from 141 households”, claimed 19 lives, and destroyed many fruit trees and much agricultural land (Cook and Butz 2013: 2).
Additionally, a 25 kilometer stretch of the KKH was submerged, resulting in a severe mobility impediment for the 20,000 people who lived upstream (see Figures 1 & 2). In 2018, the lake is understood as a popular tourism destination, or at least an integral material resource to frame experiences of adventure, authenticity, and wilderness associated with Gilgit-Baltistan. In what follows I outline how this disaster unfolded, and how it impacted local lives and livelihoods. I also trace the process of Attabad’s touristification, which occurred concurrently to the highway’s reconstruction. Touristification has helped remove disaster connotations from Attabad Lake, leading to the popularization of the ‘tourist destination’ narrative.

**Attabad: The Making of a Disaster**

It is helpful to see the unfolding of the Attabad disaster as a series of interconnected phases, where each phase affected different groups of people in different ways, garnered distinct reactions from a range of actors, and shaped behaviors and understandings differently. In the first phase, which started at the end of 2009, terraces and houses collapsed as cracks emerged, leading eventually to a major landslide on January 4, 2010 that damned the Hunza River (Cook and Butz 2011; Sökefeld 2012). Residents were gradually displaced as the water level rose over the next six months, inundating houses and marketplaces, and turning the valley into a massive lake (see Figure 1). The rise in water level continued for at least eight months as locals, administrative authorities, disaster management institutions, and international experts tried to rescue people, establish alternative living arrangements, arrange food supplies for both the people displaced because of the disaster and isolated because of the KKH’s disruption, and provide an alternative transportation mechanism.
Cook and Butz (2015) frame the Attabad landslide through a mobilities lens, and distinguish the 1,650 people who were displaced because of the disaster from the 20,000 individuals living beyond the lake in upper Gojal (see Figure 2). The latter group faced food shortages and restricted access to basic amenities such as healthcare and education because of mobility restrictions. When the KKH was washed way and vehicular transportation was cut off, a boat service was established to move locals and transport goods – albeit with great difficulty and after paying very high prices (Cook and Butz 2013). Consumer goods became scarce, and prices
skyrocketed. Access to basic facilities such as health care, education, and employment became severely restricted. Victims of both the ‘physical disaster’ and the ‘mobility disaster’ demanded that the government drain the lake, believing that the road link could then be restored and flooded farmland reclaimed.

Figure 2: Attabad Lake and adjoining villages (source: Butz & Cook 2016)
Attabad: The Making of a Tourist Destination

In 2012, while the residents of Attabad were relocating to other parts of Hunza valley and people from upper Gojal were coming to terms with the inconvenience of a new mobility regime, policy makers down-country were conducting a cost benefit analysis of the disaster site. Articles published in *Dawn*, one of the most widely read English language Pakistani newspapers, discussed the prospects of turning the lake into a tourist resort. Another newspaper article published in 2012 presented suggestions by the governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pir Karam Ali Shah, to convert the Attabad Lake into a dam that could add electricity to the national grid (Boone 2012). Suggestions and propositions by both government officials and down-country development pundits were rejected unequivocally by all local stakeholders. Residents of the most affected regions wanted the lake drained, so that their farmland, houses, and mobility could be restored. Despite local people’s initial rejection of such externally administered schemes (including tourism schemes), the location nevertheless gradually emerged as a destination that attracted a significant number of domestic down-country tourists.

In September 2015, the KKH was reopened, and five tunnels spanning seven kilometers were inaugurated by Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif (Haider 2015). The tunnels were constructed by the National Highway Authority and the China Road and Belt Corporation, predominantly through Chinese financial assistance. These tunnels not only eased the mobility constraints faced by Gojalis (residents of upper Hunza, the area north of the landslide), but also revived vehicular trade between China and Pakistan. After the road link was reestablished, Attabad Lake ceased to be a mobility barrier for locals wishing to travel from villages in Gojal to other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the body of water still remains, and so do a few of the
boats. As the lake’s meanings change, these material resources and the landscape itself come to serve different purposes. Instagram accounts and travel blogs now depict the journey across the lake positively, and boats that were previously indispensable for hauling cargo and residents living upstream have now become integral for tourists’ enjoyment of Attabad Lake. These positive associations initially emerged predominantly in virtual spaces, and contributed immensely to the normalization of a touristic understanding of the lake.

Attabad’s touristification ought to be framed within the larger shifts in tourism traffic trends within Gilgit-Baltistan. Watenabe et al. (2011) argue that foreign tourism to Pakistan dropped significantly in the aftermath of September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, as Pakistan found itself implicated in the US war on terror. Khan (2017) argues that sectarian clashes in Gilgit-Baltistan were already a cause of grave concern for international tourists. However, 9/11 exacerbated the region’s negative image. At the same time, domestic tourism to Gilgit-Baltistan saw a steady increase as more and more people from down-country Pakistan traveled to the region. According to a report published by the Planning and Development Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, in 2013 a total of 56,438 tourists visited Gilgit-Baltistan, of which only 4,524 were international tourists. Another report by the Tourism Department of Gilgit-Baltistan tracks changing tourism traffic over a three-year period (2008-2011); 86% of the tourists to Gilgit-Baltistan were domestic, whereas only 14% were foreigners. Although we do not know how many tourists have visited Attabad Lake over the last few years, we can get some sense of its growing popularity for those who have travelled to Gilgit-Baltistan. According to Trip Advisor – an international travel website – Attabad Lake is the 4th most highly reviewed destination in the entire Gilgit-Baltistan region. Attabad’s touristification is undoubtedly
informed by the changing demographic of tourism traffic in Gilgit-Baltistan, but also by widely circulating discourses that orientalize Gilgit-Baltistan.

**Reviewing the Data Set**

I grew up reading Urdu language travelogues written by down-country Pakistanis who had ventured through different parts of the country. I was also interested in reading the work of European travelers to South Asia; Rudyard Kipling was my favorite. Additionally, *National Geographic*, the *Discovery Channel*, and a whole range of regional and national travel channels gained popularity with the advent of cable television, and I followed these shows somewhat regularly. I was socialized into a whole series of networks, institutions, and bodies of knowledge that viewed the world at large, and Gilgit-Baltistan in particular, through an orientalist lens. Only during my undergraduate years was I introduced to the constitutional and legal liminality of Gilgit-Baltistan, its estranged relationship with the rest of Pakistan, and its strategic significance *vis-à-vis* India and China. Gilgit-Baltistan’s popularity among domestic tourists and the proliferation of representational content on virtual spaces is a recent occurrence, and I have followed both of these processes with great interest.

In order to access emerging understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan in virtual spaces, I need a data set that captures Attabad Lake’s virtual presence. A quick Google search shows that Attabad’s virtual presence is widely spread; it has been represented in multiple languages on a range of online platforms such as Web.20 sites, social media websites, and digital news platforms. Many streams of visual and textual virtual content represent Attabad Lake on its own or alongside a series of other tourism hotspots in Gilgit-Baltistan. These data streams have been created and shared by western outsiders, down-country Pakistanis, and locals of Gilgit-Baltistan,
who engage with it in the capacity of tourists, travel writers, photographers, and tourism operators. As outlined in Table 1, I have narrowed my representational focus to social media platforms, rather than web2.0 and digital news platforms, because of the ease with which content contributors and audiences can engage with data on social media platforms. Moreover, social media data can only be presented within certain predefined constraints set by the platform (in this case Facebook and Instagram), which ensures uniformity of data, and eases comparison between different data streams. Data on social media platforms is also helpful in locating contributors through descriptions provided by platform operators, as well as the locational tags of individual posts. These attributes of social media platforms allow me to understand who creates the content (and where), to what effect, and with what representational implications for Gilgit-Baltistan.

I selected data streams from Facebook and Instagram social media platforms that most down-country tourists, down-country tour operators, local bloggers, and local tour operators have used. On Facebook, I focused on a community group known as The Karakoram Club, and Hunza, the page of a local travel agency. On Instagram, I sourced data from Hunza On Foot, an unconventional adventure travel consultancy, and The Hunzai Lad, an independently owned blog operated by a native of Gulmit (a village close to Attabad Lake) who resides in Karachi. Content on each virtual space is similar enough to be understood as part and parcel of one data stream, and the differences among streams are visible enough to produce grounds for comparison and critical analysis. These data streams, therefore, exhibit internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. In the following subsections I discuss the peculiarities of each platform, identify the logic behind the timeline for each stream’s sampling period, and enumerate the total number of pictures sampled. I also highlight some key narratives produced in each stream, and provide
textual and visual snapshots of data from my sampling set to familiarize readers with the content in each sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Virtual space</th>
<th>Self-Identifier</th>
<th>Source of content</th>
<th>Caption language</th>
<th>Based out of</th>
<th>Sampling period</th>
<th>Total # of photos</th>
<th># of Attabad photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunza</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Travel agency</td>
<td>Shared by the administrator, not original.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Hyderabad Hunza</td>
<td>1st January – 10th May 2018</td>
<td>1304</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunza on Foot</td>
<td>Instagram and linked website</td>
<td>Adventure travel consultant Travel photographer WWF Goodwill ambassador</td>
<td>Shared by the administrator, predominantly original and credits given where due.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
<td>23rd May 2016 – 13th May 2018</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hunzai Lad</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Baig of mountains and valleys</td>
<td>Shared by the owner/administrator, original content.</td>
<td>English and Urdu</td>
<td>Not disclosed in description but Hunza according to captions</td>
<td>21st January 2016 – 26th May 2018</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Data Collected from Virtual spaces

*The Karakoram Club*

*The Karakoram Club* is a Facebook community group with a total membership of 158,000. It is modeled on a community space concept in which people with a shared interest come together for ideas, inspiration, and the exchange of information. The group has 11 administrators and moderators. All but one self-identifies as a down-country Pakistani. The one non-Pakistani moderator identifies as an Australian citizen from Brisbane who currently lives in Sydney. The
‘About’ section of The Karakoram Club details the objectives of this community group, and outlines its rules and procedures:

This group is for those photographers & travelers who want to share their work and experience in all mountain ranges of Pakistan, whilst showcasing the culture, flora & fauna of the region. This is a platform where one can learn by viewing and discussing various mountain ranges the country is blessed with. Authentic content related to the Karakorams, Himalaya, Hindu Kush, other mountain ranges in Pakistan and Himalaya & Pamirs from outside Pakistan may also be shared.

Rules also limit the amount of content that can be shared in any one day, police the kind of content posted, and establish procedures for engagement among fellow members. Members are only allowed to post content from personal or non-commercial accounts, and those who try to sell products and services on the site are banned (including tour operators). The only exceptions are ‘cleaning campaigns’ that members conduct to raise funds and volunteers for trash cleaning, an increasingly common group concern. Users are also barred from sharing pictures of ‘sensitive military posts’ and ‘border areas’, and administrators reserve the right to remove content they deem as inappropriate.

During the April 9-29, 2018 sampling period, 108 pictures of Attabad Lake were shared in the community group, out of a total of 3,216 posted pictures. These include colour corrected images that were uploaded several days after having been taken, as well as pictures captured through cellphones and uploaded immediately. Some pictures showcase individual journeys of predominantly down-country Pakistanis for whom Attabad Lake appears to be one destination on a travel continuum. Others are stand-alone images of the lake (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 3: Attabad Lake in the Summer – A Wooden Boat can be Seen at the Edge of the Lake (Picture from The Karakoram Club; https://www.facebook.com/groups/thekarakoramclub/photos/)
Taking a closer look at depictions of Attabad Lake on the *Karakoram Club* site, only two of the 108 photos show the lake during the winter season. The first one is a wide angle shot of the frozen lake; the second shows a wooden boat locked within ice and snow, sitting empty in one corner of the water body (see Figure 4). Both of these pictures were uploaded by the same group member. The other 106 pictures portray the lake during spring and summer season when travel across the lake is possible by boat.

*Figure 4 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.*

During the winter sampling period (December 25, 2017 – January 15, 2018), 13 pictures of Attabad Lake were shared in the community group, out of total of 1,684. None of these photos depict a boat ride across the lake, and most showcase a sheet of ice, with the photographer either standing on the frozen lake or on the road beside it. Most of these winter pictures are not accompanied by captions; the two that are simply name the lake and note that it was frozen during this time of year.

*The Karakoram Club* stream showcases the lake, its adjoining landscape, wooden boats, and down-country tourists navigating other locations in Gilgit-Baltistan. No photographs were posted that included portraits of locals. Similarly, pictures of local foods and festivals rarely make an appearance. This virtual space focuses almost exclusively on the landscape and environments of Gilgit-Baltistan, and overlooks the languages, culture, and people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Despite strict site rules against self-portraits and group shots, several travelers depict
their own journeys alongside the lake on the KKH, across the lake in wooden and speed boats, and next to the Attabad tunnels. Looking primarily at the depictions of Attabad, 17 out of 108 pictures have Urdu captions, whereas the rest either have short captions in English or no caption at all. Most of the Urdu captions appear to be doing a form of self-interested identity work by associating tourists sitting next to Attabad Lake with couplets of famous Urdu poetry about beautiful landscapes (Table 2, Caption 1), love and longing (Table 2, Caption 2), and the might of God (Table 2, Caption 3). The captions do not describe the pictures; in fact, in some cases they don’t even make a passing reference to the lake. However, this combination of photographs and captions evokes a touristic experience of Attabad Lake, and the feelings that the body of water, the landscape, and the boat ride induces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caption in Urdu</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-</td>
<td>جل تو سکتا تھا مین بھی پانی کا دریا نہ میں پر احترام.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-</td>
<td>رنگی ہے کسی کوئی کوئی سمنانہ حسن اور عشق کی آج موعاد ہے.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-</td>
<td>جوہتے رازی بھاک خدا چہہ بھی نوزدًا سے انام اس کو انسان نتوہے چاہتا.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Selected captions from The Karakoram Club in Urdu (original) and my English translations.
*Hunza*

*Hunza* is a Facebook page established in 2015 that is linked to a series of personal and professional accounts on Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and BlogSpot. The page is introduced as a ‘travel agency’ operating out of Hyderabad (a village in Hunza several kilometers downstream from Attabad), and appears to be administered and moderated by a local resident. The ‘About’ section gives a brief history of Hunza, and highlights its former administrative setup as a princely state. Its ‘mission’ is to promote sustainable tourism. Apart from pre-planned tours, car rentals, and hotel reservation services, the moderator also sells and rents trekking equipment.

Content on the *Hunza* site is a combination of original pictures taken by the moderator and photos he has shared from other virtual spaces, usually with credit to the original photographer. During the January 1 – May 10, 2018 sampling period, 1,304 pictures were shared, 73 of which depict Attabad Lake, the surrounding landscape, and/or the recently built Attabad tunnel (see Figure 5). Most of these pictures were taken by photographers and travel bloggers, and have been shared by the moderator with very short captions in English.

*Figure 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.*

Figure 5: The Most Prominent Depiction of Attabad Lake: Boat Ride, Body of Water, and Surrounding Landscape (Source: *Hunza*; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)

Several characteristics distinguish *Hunza* from other social media platforms. First, there is a significant presence of local and non-local portraits, local foods, and cultural and religious events on *Hunza’s* timeline. While *The Karakoram Club* focuses primarily on landscape photography, *Hunza* strikes a fine balance between people, places, food items, and culture to depict a bustling and brimming region (see Figure 6). During the sampling period from January 1 – May 10, 2018...
(in which 1,304 pictures were sampled), I identified 65 single shot portraits of people (see Figure 7), of which 54 were portraits of local children, women, and elderly people. Additionally, there were three portraits of foreign tourists, and eight of down-country Pakistani travelers. Nine shots of local delicacies made an appearance on the group’s timeline during this time, with *chapshuru’n*\(^9\) and *chalpindu’k*\(^10\) featuring heavily. The platform also displayed a stream of photos of three cultural events from different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan that represent how each event unfolds. The moderator identifies one of the events as the ‘Ginani festival’, a religio-cultural festival exclusive to Ismaili majority areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, including Hunza.

[Figure 6 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 6: School Going Girls Studying on a Rooftop, Overlooking the Hunza Valley (Source: Hunza; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)

[Figure 7 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 7: Girl in School Uniform with a Backpack (Source: Hunza; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)

Second, *Hunza* incorporates social activism, which involves advocating for the rights of Gilgit-Baltistan’s citizens, highlighting injustices they face at home and down-country, and sharing stories of local ‘heroes’ who have accomplished something remarkable for the nation. For example, the moderator shared a photo of Dilawar Abbas, a young man studying down-country who was killed by a group of students while playing cricket. He used the platform to highlight the issues of violence, discrimination, and marginalization faced by minority community members in Pakistani cities. In terms of praising local heroes, a *Hunza* photo stream

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\(^9\) Traditional flat bread filled with meat.

\(^10\) Traditional bread, butter, and milk-based delicacy.
covered the story of Qudrat Ali Shah, a mountaineer who walked barefoot from Gilgit city to Shimshal village, covering a distance of 300 kilometers. Additionally, Havaldaar Lalak Jan Shaheed, an army sepoy from Ghizer and recipient of Pakistan’s highest military honor, was recognized for his service to the nation-state on his death anniversary.

Of the 73 depictions of Attabad during this time period, only one represents it as a natural disaster that claimed lives, resulted in the loss of property, produced food security concerns, and created a significant mobility barrier. This post was shared on January 4, 2018 to mark the 8th anniversary of the Attabad disaster, and provided details of the disaster. The vast majority of these depictions present Attabad in a positive light. Interestingly, the moderator does not acknowledge shifts in the meanings attached to the lake, or of the tunnels that dissipated the disaster connotations initially attributed to the lake. Nevertheless, a single post marking the lake’s anniversary plays an instrumental role in ensuring that the disaster aspect of its existence is not completely invisibilized.

Hunza On Foot

*Hunza On Foot* is an Instagram blog that is linked to a website. The Instagram page had a total of 984 posts as of May 13, 2018, which marks the end of my sampling period. The page has 11,700 followers, and the owner of the page, Naveed Khan, self-identifies as an adventure travel consultant, travel photographer, WWF Goodwill ambassador, affiliate of a *National Geographic* project, and former employee of BBC World News (see Figure 8). The website linked with this Instagram page formalizes the travel consultancy, provides in-depth details about the motivations behind Naveed Khan’s initiative, outlines his core consultancy ideals, and shares details of different travel packages. In the website’s ‘About’ section, Khan says that, “In 2014, I quit my
job as a high-risk advisor at the BBC World News and launched *Hunza On Foot* with the belief that other travelers would share my desire to experience authentic adventures in a responsible and sustainable manner”. The page states that one person’s vision was turned into an adventure consultancy that spans all of Pakistan.

[Figure 8 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 8: Owner of *Hunza on Foot* On his way to Start a “Four-Month Epic Journey” through the Wakhan Corridor (Source: *Hunza on Foot* https://www.instagram.com/p/BfVCOy9DIVg/)

The website affiliated with *Hunza On Foot* also highlights the core values that define the consultancy. It claims to connect “curious travelers with indigenous communities”, and expresses a commitment to “representing the rights, history, and culture of indigenous communities while ensuring that tourism supports their well-being”. *Hunza on Foot’s* mission is to offer an “authentic and unforgettable travel experience”, and the website offers custom itineraries to fulfil this aim. The captions that accompany the website’s photographs represent the region as *timeless, free, and wild* (Table 3, Caption 1). Similarly, pictures show people engaging in activities that constitute *an escape* from their mundane city lives (Table 3, Caption 2), and there is a strong emphasis on *exploration* and stepping out of one’s comfort-zone (Table 3, Captions 3 & 4). All travel expenses are quoted in American dollars, which implies that the consultancy caters to both domestic and international tourists.

During the sampling period, Attabad Lake features 34 times out of a total of 605 images. None show the lake during winter. And none of the captions highlight its disaster aspects. The boat ride across the lake is represented as a major attraction, and portraits of domestic and international tourists captured by digital cameras feature prominently alongside captions that
construct remoteness, idealize Attabad’s landscape, and project it as wild and free (Figure 9, Table 3).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Let go of everything that holds you back. Let yourself be free and wild. It is how you were made and meant to be. Attabad Lake in Gojal. Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Throwback to the yoga-on-the-boat in the Attabad Lake. @zarminaf teaches our little French yogi a few different poses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You never really travel alone. The world is full of friends, waiting to get to know you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>All smiles on deck. Boat ride across Attabad Lake in Gojal. Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Captions in English from *Hunza on Foot*.

[Figure 9 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 9: Tourists Wearing Life Jackets and Taking a Boat Ride Across the Attabad lake (Source: *Hunza on Foot*; https://www.instagram.com/p/BiUAyXSjq-K/)

Dominant on this platform are mountain landscape shots with Passu Peaks (distinctive mountains near Passu village) in the background, in which the stillness of the blue water is captured from a distance (see Figure 10). These images have been colour corrected and digitally transformed. In some cases, the moderator provides information about the make and model of the camera used, the lens and lens settings, the season during which the picture was clicked, and time of the day, producing an adventure travel photography self-identify. The page owner clearly states that he is not involved in commercial activity in urban centers, so his photographs consolidate his travel photographer/travel enthusiast self-identification.
Hunza On Foot is noteworthy for its representations of heritage sites from other parts of Pakistan. Seventy-three of 605 pictures depict destinations in down-country Pakistan. Most often, the Old Fort and Wazir Khan mosque in Lahore are represented in a series of photo streams, giving audiences the impression of a holistic experience of heritage sites (see Figure 11). These pictures also demonstrate that the page owner is familiar with the entire country, not just the northern areas of Pakistan. He places pictures of heritage sights among streams of pictures from Gilgit-Baltistan, achieving the representational work of reducing perceived distances, turning a region traditionally understood to be a ‘frontier’ into a region that is accessible to down-country Pakistanis with the help of Hunza On Foot. Moreover, these picture streams from different parts of Pakistan contribute to the Beautiful Pakistan nationalistic narrative; both urban centers and remote frontiers showcase different and positive aspects of Pakistan.

Hunza on Foot also offers event-planning services in northern Pakistan, particularly related to ‘destination weddings’. This is unsurprising considering the site is described as having emerged as a vehicle for self-discovery in the face of disillusionment with a transnational urban
life. The ‘About us’ section develops this narrative by tracking a move away from a traditional job toward a sustainable travel consultancy that helps indigenous cultures, and introduces potential customers to authentic adventure travel destinations across Pakistan. The marketing and publicity strategy of Hunza On Foot is centered on depicting its uniqueness from other tourism operators, which sets the stage for destination weddings in Gilgit-Baltistan. To market this business idea, Khan conducted a photoshoot in Gojal to illustrate the potential of Attabad and its adjoining landscape as an authentic and wild setting for destination weddings (see Figure 12).

[Figure 12 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 12: Photoshoot for Destination Wedding in Gojal (Picture and original caption in textbox) Source: Hunza on Foot; https://www.instagram.com/p/BUKBrzDhsQU/

The Hunzai Lad

The Hunzai Lad is an Instagram page that is also linked to a Facebook page by the same name. These platforms share content and captions. During the sampling period from January 21, 2016 – May 26, 2018, a total of 213 pictures were shared on the Instagram feed. The owner and moderator of this virtual space identifies as the “Baig of mountains and valleys” (‘Baig’ is a common family name in Hunza). With a total following of 2,449 and 248 posts by the end of the sampling period, The Hunzai Lad is much smaller than the other streams I sampled.

A description of the site is partly written in Urdu:

شیدی جنگلی خواب اور نمکین جانی
“Extremely wild dreams and Salted Tea”

Salted tea is a popular beverage in Gilgit-Baltistan. For young people from the region who study or work in down-country Pakistani urban centers, salted tea acts as a marker of their ‘northern’
distinctiveness. Tea is popular throughout Pakistan, but in almost all other parts of the country it is consumed with sugar instead of salt. Lowland Pakistanis consider the salt and tea combination amusing, even absurd, and the reference is a clear identity marker of people from the Gilgit-Baltistan.

The moderator of the page has ‘pinned’ three stories (i.e., stories that appear at the top of the Instagram page that draw audience attention) that showcase the trans-Pakistan reach of The Hunzai Lad. The first story is titled ‘Mountains’, the second one ‘Karachi’, and the third one ‘Sunsets’. Although there are no details about the location of the moderator’s residence in the ‘about section’ of the virtual spaces, it becomes evident by looking at the posts that Baig lives in Karachi. It is certain that The Hunzai Lad does not reside in Hunza, because the caption accompanying a picture of the Hunza Valley early in the sampling period reads: “I am coming home. Haven’t been there for winters in 4 years. It’s time to escape”. Despite not being there for four consecutive winters, Baig considers Hunza his home.

During the sampling period, a total of 213 pictures were shared on the Instagram feed; 14 of these pictures depict Attabad Lake. Pictures were clicked and shared during both winter and summer seasons in patterns similar to the other platforms (i.e., more pictures of summer and fewer of winter). What differs markedly between some of these photos and those on other sampled platforms are how meanings attached to Attabad Lake are constructed using captions. For instance, in a couple of instances Baig foregrounds the disaster aspects of Attabad in new ways. In Table 4, I’ve compiled the captions accompanying pictures of the lake. Captions 1 to 5 perpetuate dominant down-country understandings of Attabad Lake as a disaster turn-around, a blessing in disguise, or something beautiful that emerged out of a disaster. However, Caption 6 provides a detailed overview of the disaster, and characterizes it not only as a disaster that
resulted in loss of life and property, but also as a mobility disaster that affected local communities significantly for years after the landslide. This caption was uploaded as a post marking Attabad’s 8th anniversary. Marking the date of the disaster, and sharing a detailed post about it demonstrates the effect the lake has had on local residents.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“A blessing in disguise”. Serene Attabad Lake and jaw dropping Passu Cathedrals in the background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I'm a disaster, misery and beauty all at the same time. Attabad Lake, Hunza valley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am a beautiful disaster.  ATTABAD LAKE HUNZA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“The tale of disaster, misery and beauty”. 1/3 On 4 January 2010, a massive landslide blocked the flow of River Hunza, creating a natural lake and burying 20 people beneath it. The rising water displaced thousands of residents and submerged countless villages, fields, orchards a well as a 19-kilometre stretch of the Karakoram Highway (KKH).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“When disaster turns into to beauty”. 3/3 Aerial view of Attabad Lake and spillway from Baldiyat meadow, Ahmedabad Hunza. 22/01/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exactly 8 years ago today ATTABAD LAKE was formed due to a massive landslide at Attabad village, Hunza. It blocked the flow of River Hunza, creating a natural lake and burying 20 people beneath it. The rising water displaced thousands of residents of Gojal valley and submerged its countless villages, fields, orchards a well as a 19-kilometre stretch of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). In 2012, a spillway was made to release a steady flow of water and as the water level reduced, it revealed some land that had been buried but most of it is still underneath. The KKH is now rebuilt by Chinese engineers. A new connection is being carved into the mountains making long tunnels around the lake known as Pak-China Friendship tunnels. Before the connection is restored, the only way to reach the villages of Shishkat, Gulmit, Passu and places onward to the Chinese border was to cross the beautiful, blue lake by boats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Captions compiled from The Hunzai Lad highlighting the disaster aspect of Attabad Lake

[Figure 13 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]
The picture marking Attabad’s 8th anniversary (see Figure 13) was taken during the winter, from an angle rarely used by other sample moderators. Unlike Attabad’s popular depiction, as a site for tourists to take pleasurable boat rides across the lake, this picture showcases a body of water surrounded by snow covered mountains, from a distance where it fails to depict the boat ride or tourists having positive experience as they venture across the lake. A picture from a distance also showcases the emptiness of the landscape in a cold and harsh winter; the ‘ways of seeing’ Attabad are undoubtedly very different in this local platform compared to other down-country and commercial platforms.

Baig’s Instagram page differs in three significant ways from my other sampled social media streams. First, much like Hunza On Foot, he has added pictures of down-country cities, although they are more personal and intimate. Baig takes viewers along with him as he wanders relatively unknown roads and streets that hold personal meanings, watches balconies of private living spaces, and showcases his favorite cultural landmarks such as Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and Mazar-e-Quaid in Karachi. Baig allows viewers to peek into his life as a student from Gilgit-Baltistan who resides in different cities in down-country Pakistan (see Figure 14).

Second, portraits of local children, women, and the elderly feature heavily: a total of 18 images out of the total 213 sampled (see Figure 15). Unlike Hunza, the travel agency based out of Hyderabad, not a single down-country or foreign tourist was featured on The Hunzai Lad; all the portraits are of residents of Gilgit-Baltistan. We therefore get a much stronger sense of the
Third, Baig appears to be a pencil sketch artist, as well as an avid reader (see Figure 16). During the sampling period he shared pictures of two of his pencil sketches, one of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan – the late famous South-Asian musician – and another one of a whirling dervish. He also shared pictures of three books he had read or was reading during that time. Pictures of the books are placed against a background of an empty valley floor, constructing Gilgit-Baltistan’s remoteness and his own escapism into books in that context. Unlike the entrepreneurial work of the moderator of Hunza On Foot, and the social justice activism of Hunza’s moderator, Baig focuses more on self-interested identity work by sharing his sketches and his books, constructing an image of himself for his audiences. Baig isn’t offering commercial services. Rather, The Hunzai Lad is a platform through which he shares his life as a ‘Lad of the North’, thereby constructing a distinct northern identity that is free from commercial tourism promotion interests. Against the backdrop of scenic locations, Baig projects his own interests, rendering his work more than a representational project for Gilgit-Baltistan; it becomes a self-representational project that constructs a distinct northern identity within the Pakistani national imagination.
Constituting Social Reality through Picturing Practices

While travel literature data is primarily textual in nature, my description of the social media sites I’ve sampled demonstrates that these data streams comprise both visual (photographs) and textual (photograph captions) elements. Drawing connections among discourses exercised in travel literature text and photograph captions is relatively straightforward. Analyzing visual data for animating discourses is a more challenging task. These visual representations are discursively productive just as the cannon of colonial and postcolonial travel literature, institutions and bodies of knowledge is, creating a domination effect. In what follows I develop a framework for analyzing the discursive constitution of visual data.

Murray (2009: 473) argues that visual images should be understood as ways of “preserving, storing, and representing information”, and that picturing practices play an instrumental role in place-making by rendering landscapes socially intelligible. In order to understand pictures as discursively organized, we need to understand how visualized geographies constitute meaning production and social reality. Rose (1997) and Crang and Cook (2011) argue there are three interconnected ‘actors’ that need to be considered when interpreting photographs. Producers are the people and equipment involved in making the images; text is the resultant images; and audiences are those who view the images. An understanding of picturing practices involved in shaping photographs is as important to interpreting the social environment in which the photograph was produced, as is the ‘material reality’ they depict. Therefore, my analysis
includes a discussion of the processes of selection used in composing pictures, which are significant factors in discourse production.

To think critically about photographs as text, I draw on Rose’s (1996: 287) series of analytic questions:

• What is being shown? What are the components of the image? How are they arranged?
• Is it one of a series?
• What is the vantage point of the image?
• What use is made of colour?
• How has its technology affected the text?

By addressing these questions, we can understand a photograph’s embeddedness in social reality, the picturing practices used to create it, and its discursive elements.

In the Attabad Lake case, picturing practices involve the manner in which the lake is discursively represented, which shapes understandings of it and renders it socially intelligible for a range of audiences. These representational practices differ slightly in each of the four virtual space platforms I sampled, producing different ways of ‘seeing’ and engaging Gilgit-Baltistan. Despite these differences, particular understandings gain prominence in all of these virtual spaces. They articulate with colonial and post-colonial representations, and are influenced by the materiality of the landscape and connectivity infrastructure, working in conjunction with a whole web of nation-building platforms, institutions, and networks I highlighted in the second chapter, and creating socio-cultural grounds for continuing domination, control and marginality.

**Conclusion**

I devoted the third chapter to methodological considerations, which involved providing an overview of data collection strategies and sampling justifications and brief introductions to data streams and their dominant narratives. In this chapter I did not directly address any research
question I set out for this thesis. However, this preliminary analysis of data streams is instrumental in setting up the discourse analysis I conduct in subsequent chapters. I concluded the chapter by highlighting the ways in which social-reality is constituted through picturing practices.
Chapter 4: Orientalizing Gilgit-Baltistan’s People and Landscapes

In the first and second chapters, I demonstrated that Gilgit-Baltistan’s history has been representationally constituted throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods in an asymmetrical field of discursive power by a range of actors with particular interests. This discursive process constitutes a form of socio-cultural domination that works in tandem with constitutional, legal, militaristic, and political forms of domination and control to orientalize the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in ways that enable outside interests and agendas in relation to them. In this chapter I link this colonial and post-colonial representational history of Gilgit-Baltistan with new institutional platforms that have emerged recently in the virtual sphere, as a direct consequence of cellular, digital, and virtual connectivity in the region. I investigate the emerging role of virtual spaces, new actors in these virtual spaces, and altered representational practices to understand how they reproduce, rework, subvert, or accentuate the complex web of discursive processes that constitute Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-cultural domination.

In particular, I analyze the sampled data streams outlined in the third chapter to answer the following research questions:

(3) How do contemporary lowland Pakistanis/domestic tourists and bloggers discursively construct Attabad in virtual spaces, drawing on colonial tropes, nationalistic narratives and new ways of understanding the region, and to what effects?

(4) How does the physical landscape and connectivity infrastructure in and around Attabad Lake act as a representational resource for the production of discourse?

(5) How has the Attabad landslide event been represented by the people of Gilgit-Baltistan who have been affected by it, and to what effects?
To address these research questions, my analysis has three components. I discuss the dominant representations of Attabad Lake in virtual spaces, focusing on both down-country and local platforms, to understand the numerous understandings of Attabad Lake that have developed over time, and to highlight the understandings that gain dominance and contribute most significantly to discourse. Furthermore, I look at the construction and subsequent romanticization of Attabad Lake in virtual spaces by framing its online representations within colonial and post-colonial tropes about ‘Remoteness’, ‘Authenticity’, and ‘Rural romance’ that have orientalized Gilgit-Baltistan throughout different representational periods. I also look at Attabad’s emerging understanding as a site for the projection of Pakistani nationalism by framing it within understandings that gain dominance in post-colonial travel literature, and by looking at the ways in which both the natural and built environment have been used as a resource to project and justify nationalistic pride. My goal in this chapter is to identify how virtual representations build on cultural tropes and material affordances to constitute socio-cultural forms of domination and control that perpetuate Gilgit-Baltistan’s well-established and multi-faceted marginality. I end this chapter by tracing the wide range of interests that are served in Gilgit-Baltistan’s contemporary representational period through virtual space representational activity. This helps set up an analysis of the domination effects that these socio-cultural representations engender, which I focus on in the fifth and final chapter.

**Reviewing Attabad’s Transition from Disaster Site to Tourism Destination**

As detailed in the third chapter, Attabad Lake is the result of a landslide disaster that took place in early 2010 in Gojal district of Gilgit-Baltistan, which led to the loss of life and property and the displacement of long-time residents of seven villages in lower Gojal: Sarat, Attabad,
Ainabad, Shishket, Gulmit, Ghulkin, and Husseini. Sökefeld (2012) views the disaster through a political ecology lens, and frames it within discourses of Gilgit-Baltistan’s marginality vis-à-vis the Pakistani nation state. Cook and Butz (2015) frame the Attabad landslide through a mobilities lens, highlighting the issues faced by people living upstream whose only vehicular link to the rest of Pakistan – the KKH – was broken and replaced only by expensive, infrequent, inconvenient, and unsafe boat travel across the landslide barrier lake. Attabad Lake, therefore, can be understood simultaneously as a ‘geophysical disaster’, a ‘political ecology disaster’, and a ‘mobility disaster’, which is experienced differently by different groups of people depending on their physical placement in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan and their discursive positionality in its asymmetrical field of discursive/representational power.

As I will show in the analysis that follows, in the aftermath of the disaster Attabad’s touristification was partly achieved as positive recreational connotations replaced negative associations with disaster. In 2012 and 2013, virtual spaces showcased a ‘disaster tourism’ leaning, depicting the vastness of the lake, along with jeeps, trucks, and motorbikes being hauled across it on wooden boats to overcome a disrupted road link. After the Attabad tunnels opened in 2015 and the body of water ceased to be a mobility impediment, boat rides across the lake became primarily a tourist attraction. More recently, virtual spaces showcase tourists waterskiing on the lake, an uncommon scene in northern Pakistan. Attabad is a site of struggle over meaning, but it is increasingly becoming understood as a prime touristic location in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Several independent digital news sources that are popular in down-country Pakistan and abroad herald Attabad as one of the ‘must see’ places in Pakistan, and in this chapter I argue that it has become a bucket list destination for down-country tourists. In many ways, Attabad has become a symbol of national pride, and has come to represent everything that Gilgit-Baltistan has to offer.
Altogether, representations of the lake that gain dominance have reworked and sidelined the disaster meanings attached to the lake.

**Dominant Representations of Attabad Lake in Virtual Spaces**

1) *Attabad as a Site of Disaster*

Attabad Lake is depicted as a site of disaster in different ways in each of the four virtual spaces. *The Hunzai Lad* and *Hunza* platforms, which are operated by people who self-identify as residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, showcase Attabad Lake during the winter when tourism traffic is low, and provide details of the landslide disaster and the destruction that it caused. Contrarily, platforms operated by outsiders portray Attabad predominantly during the summer, gesturing toward its history as a site of disaster, but focusing more fully on its emerging position as a tourism hotspot. As Table 5 shows, whenever Attabad is framed as a disaster, the representational emphasis is on what the disaster has turned into (Table 5, Caption 1), the beautiful aspects of the disaster, (Table 5 Caption 2), or the beautiful outcomes of disaster (Table 5, Caption 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual space</th>
<th>Captions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The Hunzai Lad</td>
<td>“A blessing in disguise” Serene Attabad lake, and jaw dropping Passu cathedrals in the background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Karakoram Club</td>
<td>جہاں تھا جھوپسورت سی ہے کاسب دنیا جہاں ہے انہاں اس کیس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Hunzai Lad</td>
<td>“I’m a disaster, misery, and beauty all at the same time” Attabad lake, Hunza valley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Captions with dominant depictions of Attabad Lake.

The common representation in all data streams, irrespective of their moderators’ positionalities, is that ‘blessings’ such as Attabad emerge out of disasters. Notwithstanding the
number of pictures that acknowledge the disaster, the dominant discourse is that the lake as
disaster has become something beautiful today – a ‘blessing in disguise’– thereby linking beauty
and tragedy.

[Figure 17 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 17: Boat Ride Across the Attabad Lake which is being Referred as a
‘Beautiful’ Disaster. (Source: The Karakoram Club;
https://www.facebook.com/groups/thekarakoramclub/photos/)

Figure 17 is a case in point. This photograph was shared on The Karakoram Club, and it
showcases a wooden boat on the lake against a wall of black mountains. The caption asserts that
Attabad is “the most beautiful tragedy this world has seen” (Table 5 caption 2). Following
Murray’s (2009) argument, picturing practices play a pivotal role in place-making by making
landscapes socially intelligible. Figure 17 depicts Attabad Lake as a disaster, but as a disaster
whose ‘beauty’ cannot be overlooked. It is helpful to analyze this picture by framing it within
some questions posed by Rose (1996):

- What is being shown? What are the components? And how are they arranged?
- What is the vantage point of the image?

It is worth noting that the composition of this picture is quite similar to the pictures I shared in
the third chapter, which construct a positive and touristic image of Attabad Lake. The vantage
point in Figure 17 troubles the romanticism dominant in such representations of Attabad Lake by
framing the boat against a background of unremarkable and unappealing mountains rather than
the Passu Peaks. Similarly, instead of foregrounding up-close tourists traveling across the lake in
a colorful wooden boot, this photograph depicts two faraway figures who look like a driver and
perhaps his assistant.
Figure 18: Attabad Lake as a Site of Disaster (Source: Hunza;
https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)

Figure 18, posted on Hunza, represents Attabad Lake as a site of disaster. However, in this particular case the composition differs considerably. Roofs of a flooded Jamaat Khana (an Ismaili religious meeting house) can be seen, and trees which previously lined the valley are visible protruding from the waterbody, whereas the base of the dry and barren mountains in the background highlight the disaster aspect of Attabad Lake.

Figure 19: Half-Frozen Attabad Lake (Source: The Hunzai Lad;
https://www.instagram.com/p/BCcgSWxARFh/).

“She stood in the storm and when the wind didn’t blow her away, she adjusted her sail”. Location: Frozen Attabad Lake, Hunza. (Caption from The Hunzai Lad accompanying Figure 19)

The caption that accompanies Figure 19 highlights resilience and grace, a representation that is somewhat tangential to typical touristic depictions of Attabad Lake, but nevertheless romanticizes the lake and its surrounding landscape, and in that way orientalizes it for the consumption of down-country Pakistani audiences. Its caption highlights both the ‘misery’ and ‘beauty’ of the Attabad disaster by employing a quotation from a western outsider who has no relationship to the lake, but whose words resonate with down-country and outsider audiences, inspiring feelings of awe and wonder. It is worth noting that this picture has been shared by Baig, the moderator of The Hunzai Lad, who identifies as a local, but for the most part lives in the
down-country Pakistani urban centers of Karachi and Islamabad. This picture shared on The Hunzai Lad is an example of autoethnographic expression (Pratt 1992), and highlights the co-constitution of knowledge in transcultural discourse, whereby the local is using captions by western outsiders to make his point. The dominant understanding of Attabad as something ‘beautiful’ is perpetuated through this autoethnographic expression. However, by using language and jargon that tourists are likely to understand, Baig is also able to assert that there is ‘misery’ associated with this beautiful lake.

*Hunza* and *The Hunzai Lad* are both virtual spaces moderated by residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, and I argued earlier that these virtual spaces contribute to the dominant discourse whereby Attabad is hailed as a ‘beautiful disaster’. However, they also make a point to highlight the destruction caused by the disaster (see Figures 18 & 19). For instance, *The Hunzai Lad* dedicated a post to mark the anniversary of Attabad disaster (see Figure 20):

Exactly 8 years ago today ATTABAD LAKE was formed due to a massive landslide at Attabad village, Hunza. It blocked the flow of River Hunza, creating a natural lake and burying 20 people beneath it. The rising water displaced thousands of residents of Gojal valley and submerged its countless villages, fields, orchards a well as a 19-kilometre stretch of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). In 2012, a spillway was made to release a steady flow of water and as the water level reduced, it revealed some land that had been buried but most of it is still underneath.

The KKH is now rebuilt by Chinese engineers. A new connection is being carved into the mountains making long tunnels around the lake known as Pak-China Friendship tunnels. Before the connection is restored, the only way to reach the villages of Shishkat, Gulmit, Passu and places onward to the Chinese border was to cross the beautiful, blue lake by boats.

It is clear in this caption that Baig understands the lake as a consequence first and foremost of a geo-physical disaster because it was “due to a massive landslide at Attabad Village”. This caption subtly points out that the site of present day Attabad Lake, a tourism hotspot, was once a village. Further, the anniversary post shares details about how the disaster unfolded. In this
sense, it is projected as a political ecology disaster. Lastly, this caption highlights the disruption of the KKH, asserting that in addition to everything else the Attabad landslide also resulted in a mobility disaster.

[Figure 20 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 20: Picture Shared on Attabad Disaster’s 8th Anniversary (Source: The Hunzai Lad; https://www.instagram.com/p/BdhaGM8FVN_/)

Here (Figure 20), Attabad is depicted from a distance, against the backdrop of snow-covered mountains. Not a single vehicle, human settlement, or human being can be seen in the picture, which contributes to the discourse of *emptiness* and *desolation*. The caption alongside this picture highlights Attabad as the site of a geo-physical, political ecology, and mobility disaster, making it socially intelligible as a reminder of Attabad’s disastrous past, which significantly impacted local lives and livelihoods.

2) *Remoteness and Rural Romance: Revisionist Romanticism*

The virtual sites I examine also construct and idealize Gilgit-Baltistan as a remote and authentic space. This discourse has been dominant throughout most periods in the region’s history, and it continues to organize understandings of Attabad in contemporary virtual spaces. The discursive othering of the region as remote and romantically authentic begins by representing its people and places as fundamentally different from western outsiders, as Said (1978) describes. Tracing representations of Hunza during the colonial period through the work of several travel writers, Dolphin (2000) argues that ‘othering’ of the region’s ‘remote’ and ‘dangerous’ landscapes was a critical strategy that constructed the ‘civilized us’ versus ‘primitive them’ binary. During this
historical period, western outsiders such as Biddulph (1880) and Durand (1900) represented the local people and landscapes in a negative light, and these negative depictions constructed Gilgit-Baltistan as inherently different from the spaces inhabited by western audiences. These negative representations created the discursive grounds for colonial expansion into ‘remote’ and ‘uninhabited’ regions, enabling the conquest of Hunza by British troops in 1891.

After the Hunza conquest, British imperial designs for Gilgit-Baltistan began to change. In the second chapter, I trace this shift in representational practices between the early and the later colonial period. Representations that emerged during the early to mid 20th century cast the people of Gilgit-Baltistan in a positive, yet still orientalist light, as healthy, happy, and good humored. New western outsiders come to the fore during this period, who were not directly linked to the colonial empire but were undoubtedly facilitated by its existence (e.g., Visser-Hooft 1926). Their depictions of Gilgit-Baltistan were neo-orientalist in nature, which Butz (1993: 137) characterizes as a “gentler” and “more romantic” form of orientalism. While previously remoteness was cast in a negative light and projected as ‘dangerous’ and ‘difficult’, in the later colonial period it was projected through the lenses of authenticity and untaintedness. This genre of representations continued well into the post-colonial period. Tobe (1960) and Jamie (1992), for example, describe Hunza as a mythical place, tucked far away from the reaches of the modern world. Both Hussain (2015) and Dolphin (2000) argue that the region was popularly depicted in such western travel literature as the Himalayan Shangri-La, a mythical place that offered happiness, health, prosperity, and simplicity. This representation was popularized through Hilton’s (1933) Lost Horizon, a film that exercises the same representational tropes as the ‘Happy Healthy Hunza’ texts.
Contemporary representations in virtual spaces dovetail with this discourse of romantic remoteness, primarily by depicting Attabad Lake and its immediate surroundings as spaces that offer a spatial escape from normal busy city life and mundane urban routines (see Table 6, Captions 1 and 3). Remoteness is constructed through pictures (and picturing practices) accompanied by textual captions. Once the spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan have been constructed as ‘remote’, a degree of romantic attractiveness is discursively attached to this remoteness (see Table 6, Caption 2). For example, the leisurely journey across the lake, its clear blue water, and the Passu cathedrals at the back are foregrounded to construct Attabad as an experience of a simpler, more relaxed, and more enjoyable time that is associated with a lost past for city dwellers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual space</th>
<th>Captions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The Hunzai Lad</td>
<td>That feeling is here again. To escape from the hustle and bustle of the city life and run off to the nature. To be on top of the mountain surrounded by the lush green meadows and to watch the river flow in the distance. Attabad Lake Hunza and Baldiyat meadow in the backdrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Hunza on Foot</td>
<td>Let go of everything that holds you back. Let yourself be free and wild. It is how you were made and meant to be … Attabad Lake in Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Hunza on Foot</td>
<td>Therapy for the soul, Attabad Lake, Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Captions romanticizing remoteness and projecting rural romance

In the introductory chapter I review Foucault’s claim that discourses establish ‘normal’ and ‘true’ ways to talk, write, and behave. Cresswell (2009: 211), therefore, characterizes discourse as performative; discourse is not simply ‘about’ something (politics, illness, sexuality, etc.), but rather actually brings these things into being: “Discourse does not simply describe something that pre-exists, rather it brings it into being. In this sense it is more than a reflection of ‘reality’ that can be true or false but is in fact performing ‘reality’ and producing ‘truth effects’”.
Discourses of remoteness related to Attabad, then, are not about its actual spatial remoteness and distance from down-country urban centers. Rather, they discursively bring remoteness into being by sanctioning ‘true’ assertions about it, and constructing ‘normal’ behaviors around it.

   Rural romance is a particular aspect of the discursive constitution of Attabad as remote. It is constructed by representing the distinctiveness of the region’s cultural practices, its spatial distance from down-country urban centers, and its landscape features. Figure 21 from *Hunza on Foot* demonstrates how the idealization of remoteness is constructed in contemporary virtual spaces in which a certain representational combination of landscape, people, and connectivity infrastructure helps in “place making” using visual and textual tools (Murray 2009).

   **[Figure 21 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]**

Figure 21: Woman Seated on a Wooden Boat Traveling Across Attabad Lake
(Source: *Hunza on Foot*; https://www.instagram.com/p/BglCLFbnh7N/)

Figure 21 depicts the lake and the landscape by incorporating a wooden boat, the wild blue lake water and sky, rugged surrounding mountains, and most prominently a down-country woman tourist (conspicuous from local women by her clothing), hair blowing free in the wind, journeying across the lake. The accompanying caption by Khan, the owner and moderator of *Hunza on Foot*, provides insight into the social context within which the picture was produced, helping to forge its social intelligibility:

   Let go of everything that holds you back. Let yourself be free and wild. It is how you were made and meant to be … Attabad Lake in Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan.
The lake, particularly the boat ride across the lake, brings the traveler a step closer to ‘wilderness’ and ‘freedom’. Figure 21 also highlights the ways in which Ismaili majority areas of Gilgit-Baltistan are constructed as spaces that offer down-country Pakistani women an escape from certain social and moral constraints. Being ‘free and wild’ represents a break away from the drudgery of everyday life in down-country urban centers, but it also highlights the aspect being unconstrained from the social restrictions of appropriate attire and mobility patterns that women in down-country Pakistani spaces face under conservative Islam (see Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987). In this way, Attabad Lake is othered and romanticized; it offers the freedom to be unconstrained, and becomes a symbol for everything that Gilgit-Baltistan, as a liminal, marginal, and peripheral space, has to offer for down-country Pakistanis.

It is worth noting that the only person captured in this frame is a young woman, sitting cross-legged and looking across the lake. She is the only person in the boat, which usually transports between 20-40 tourists across the lake. Even the driver’s seat is empty, indicating that the picture has been carefully composed to deliberately erase the presence of locals. These picturing practices invisibilize everyone other than the tourist, and in so doing discursively construct Attabad’s remoteness and wilderness, turning these ideals into metaphors for freedom: an escape from metropolitan lifestyle and ideas. Ali (2014:118) argues that it is this “Tourist-Adventurist gaze” that defines the importance of Gilgit-Baltistan to the Pakistani nation-state, and plays an integral part in producing the region as the “Eco-body of the nation-state” (122).

Earlier, I elaborated on representations exercised in colonial and postcolonial travel texts that constituted and idealized Hunza’s remoteness. By reviewing these data streams, it becomes evident that these orientalist depictions are being reproduced in contemporary virtual spaces.
These age-old cultural tropes are not disrupted here; rather, they are perpetuated and reworked through new institutional platforms, virtual spaces, and types of interlocutor.

I have highlighted how discourses of remoteness come into being through outsider depictions of Attabad’s landscape. However, just as Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape is constructed for the consumption of down-country audiences in contemporary virtual spaces, its people are also constructed and idealized as particular kinds of oriental subjects. Hussain (2015: 89) identifies the characteristics associated with remote spaces: “health, simplicity, holism, sense of community and self-reliance”. These characteristics are associated with the Hunza region in the works of Tobe (1960), Kathleen Jamie (1992), and the down-country travel writer Tarrar (1991 & 1994). Post-colonial travel literature, especially Tarrar’s work in Safar Shumaal ke – Journeys of the North (1991), highlights the region’s distinct cultural practices to create a point of difference between Gilgit-Baltistan and down-country urban Pakistan, in an effort to construct the region as remote and distinctive, and its people as simple and untainted. These representations are not only perpetuated in down-country Pakistani virtual spaces, but are also reproduced in the virtual spaces moderated by residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, where they draw on autoethnographic (Pratt 1992) expression by using outsider’s terms to describe themselves in the service of their own interests. Figure 22 from Hunza on Foot and its accompanying caption subtly hint at Hunza’s cultural difference from urban Pakistan, including its simplicity, hospitality, and holism, by representing its ‘remote’ and distinctive cultural practices.

[Figure 22 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 22: A Hospitable Stranger, a Pot of Tea, and Stories (Source: Hunza on Foot; https://www.instagram.com/p/Bhn23H5D4Lw/)
In Figure 2, a man wearing simple local attire and Hunza cap is playing the Rabab – a traditional musical instrument of South and Central Asia. The picture is black and white, a picturing practice that evokes feelings of timelessness. The photographer is seated across from this man, in a personal and homely indoor setting where the music plays as warm tea is being prepared in a traditional pot that can be seen in the foreground. The setting depicted in this picture is a marker of hospitality, and a conversation starter. The caption accompanying this picture extends its socially intelligible:

Invitation to a hot cup of tea that lead us to a home with this 78-year old gentleman; telling us stories of the past with musical theater … Gulmit in Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan. Shot with Nikon D5.

Following Butz (1993: 137), a more romantic orientalism is perpetuated in this photograph and its accompanying caption, where “primitiveness” is represented through “simplicity” and “remoteness” through “untaintedness”. This discursive construction of ‘remote’ Hunza and its ‘simple’ cultural practices is a continuation of representations circulated in the later colonial and post-colonial period, which romanticizes remoteness and the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan through an orientalizing discourse of rural romance.

3) Attabad as a Site of the Nation

Nationalistic discourses that draw Gilgit-Baltistan and Attabad Lake into the heart of the Pakistani state also organize the photos and captions included in the social media sites I examine. Gilgit-Baltistan is constructed as an integral part of the Pakistani state using Attabad Lake as a core site. As I will show, it is depicted as a pride of Pakistan, a testament to its natural beauty, a resource for economic and infrastructural development, and a landscape that overwrites negative stereotypes about the country with positive connotations of beauty and peacefulness. In the third
chapter I highlighted changes in tourism trends in Gilgit-Baltistan, because of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. In addition to representing Gilgit-Baltistan as a place of natural beauty, the Facebook and Instagram sites I’ve selected are implicated in state efforts to depict the ‘positive side’ of Pakistan, thereby countering the dominant international media discourse that represents Pakistan as a state that harbours and sponsors terrorists. For example, the tourism company Hunza claims that photographers and bloggers who represent Gilgit-Baltistan positively online are ‘ambassadors of peace’, fulfilling their moral and nationalistic duty to break problematic stereotypes about their country. Site moderators understand the power they exercise in constructing narratives that depict the country in a positive light and promote tourism in their own interests, to intervene in mainstream media discourses.

In the second chapter, I discuss policies and practices used by the Pakistani state to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan more fully into the nation-state, which led to its subjugation, the invalidation of its ethno-linguistic diversity, and the invisibilization of its culture. Travel literature by down-country Pakistanis like Tarrar (1991, 1994, 2004) and Rashid (2003, 2011) establishes nature as the primary modality through which Gilgit-Baltistan is understood. At the same time, these depictions of its mountains, valleys, and lakes are meant to invoke a sense of Pakistan’s ownership of and pride in the region. Ali (2014) argues that even though most down-country Pakistanis are unfamiliar with Gilgit-Baltistan’s historical struggles with the state, they nevertheless take pride in its natural beauty, and situate the landscapes and environments of Gilgit-Baltistan within the larger nation-state. A similar process is at work through contemporary social media. We see Attabad represented as a site of the nation in two main ways: through the positioning of national flags and connectivity infrastructure in photographs.
Many photographs posted on the social media sites under study include Pakistani flags, which are often hoisted on wooden boats that ply the lake and take center stage in evoking ‘the Attabad experience’ for down-country tourists. Figure 23 from *Hunza on Foot* and Figure 24 from *Hunza* are representative of a range of images that depict Pakistan’s flag on wooden boats, which have become a tourism resource at the lake over the years. These pictures are both from commercial platforms. However, *Hunza* is both owned and operated by a resident of Gilgit-Baltistan, whereas *Hunza on Foot* is operated by a down-country Pakistani. Boat rides across Attabad Lake are a prime touristic activity, and projecting nationalism using the lake and connectivity infrastructure (i.e., the boat) serves the interests of both local and non-local moderators of different virtual spaces.

[Figure 23 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 23: Two Boats Lined Next to the Attabad Lake (Source: *Hunza on Foot*; https://www.instagram.com/p/BjW9Qdnvrj/)

Figure 23 depicts two boats moored at the edge of the clear blue Attabad Lake. The primary focus of this photograph seems to be the Pakistani flags, which can be clearly seen on each boat. The caption accompanying this picture also plays an integral part in reinforcing nationalism by constructing ‘true’ ways of respecting the flag:

Feels good to see country’s flag displayed all over to celebrate our Independence Day which one? tomorrow! While you are placing your flag on your car, at your house or at your workplace, please remember that while at the end of the day most consider it nothing more than a piece of cloth, it is your identity! Here’s a few quick things to know about how to about how to care for your flag this Independence Day, and more importantly, how to store them after: www.a-to-z-of-manners-and-ettiquete.com/flag-etiquette.html. It breaks our heart to see Pakistani flags torn, dirtied, and written over, and mostly to see them laying on the ground (especially the small paper versions aka jhandees?) Share on your wall and help spread the message.
The moderator of *Hunza on Foot* argues that the flag is “your identity” and not just “a piece of cloth”. It is interesting to note that Gilgit-Baltistan has been in a state of constitutional and legal liminality, still not fully integrated into the Pakistani nation-state, yet its landscape is being used as a resource to project Pakistani nationalism.

[Figure 24 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 24: Pakistani Flag Projecting Nationalism on the Attabad Lake (Source: *Hunza*; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)

When Pakistani flags are situated in a landscape that is beautiful and highly romanticized, a more favorable image of the state is represented, in sharp contrast to its depiction in global media discourse. Attabad is also claimed as a part of the nation, with nationalistic pride. Captions reinforce these representations. Figure 24, uploaded by a locally owned and run tourism company, once again showcases the inclination of locals to use Attabad Lake as a resource to project Pakistani nationalism, thereby serving the region’s commercial interest in attracting more down-country tourists and, in the process, incorporating it more fully into the national imagination. Photographic representations of the lake, and especially of the boat ride across it, can easily omit the flag or give it a central position, based on the narrative the photographer/travel blogger is constructing. Boat rides are the most prominent tourist activities at Attabad Lake, and prime opportunities for photographic intervention. Interestingly, these social media sites include many photographs of boats with flags, which together discursively assert the state’s influence over its frontier, and incorporate the region more fully into the Pakistani national imagination. During my own visits to Attabad Lake, I noticed many Ismaili (orange and green) flags on boats. However, photographs of these flags do not feature in virtual
spaces. Media owners and moderators erase this aspect of local social identity in their framing of photographs. Down-country Pakistani bloggers have an active interest in depicting the region as an integral part of Pakistan; an unfamiliar local flag disrupts this metropolitan construction of Gilgit-Baltistan. Local virtual spaces also de-emphasize the Ismaili flag, possibly to align the region with its construction as a remote playground for down-country tourists and travelers.

Apart from using the Pakistani flag as a resource to nationalize the region, virtual spaces also represent connectivity infrastructure to produce Gilgit-Baltistan as an integral part of the nation-state. The KKH and its tunnels around Attabad Lake have been represented extensively in virtual spaces, to evoke a developing state strengthening itself economically, a national frontier that serves as an integral site for beneficial social change and development for the state, and a region that positively showcases the state’s productive activities. Keeping Attabad’s disaster connotations in mind, Attabad tunnels serve as a resource for material connectivity, removing mobility barriers for locals and reviving the vehicular link vital to Pakistan-China trade.

Although these tunnels are a physical infrastructural resource, they are much more than that. Tunnels are also representational resources for locals and non-locals alike. For down-country travelers, Attabad tunnels reinforce the state’s writ over its frontier, exhibit its technical capabilities, and highlight its strong economic linkages with China. For locals, they showcase the increasing ease of access to Gilgit-Baltistan, and highlight the region’s significance and centrality vis-à-vis the Pakistani nation-state as a node that connects the country to its neighbor and emerging super power, China.

[Figure 25 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 25: A Truck Hauling Cargo from China (Source: Hunza; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)
Figure 25 was posted on *Hunza*, a travel agency operating out of Haiderabad, Hunza. The picture foregrounds a concrete tunnel, and a truck with Chinese lettering can be seen emerging from it, which doesn’t at first sight seem like a good strategy for stimulating tourism development. However, this image contributes significantly to a nationalistic discourse that incorporates Attabad into the nation, particularly through its caption: “Chinese truck passing through the tunnel after crossing Khunjerab National Park”.

This representation of the Attabad tunnels, which were constructed with Chinese expertise and financial assistance, reinforces the discursive association of Pakistan with its Chinese neighbor, and contributes to the ‘developing Gilgit-Baltistan’ narrative. Just as Attabad Lake and its adjoining landscape inspire awe and wonder in down-country travelers, Attabad tunnels achieve much the same emotional reaction. On the *Karakoram Club*, a community group that comprises predominantly down-country Pakistanis, there are numerous time-lapse videos that depict vehicular mobility through the tunnel. Captions accompanying these pictures and time-lapse videos are most often fairly descriptive in nature, highlighting the length of the tunnels and the speed with which Attabad Lake can be crossed. Some captions explicitly “Thank China”, whereas others depict the tunnels with a sense of joyful celebration and awe. However, the most common representation of the tunnels in both commercial and down-country virtual spaces is infrastructural development infused with national pride.

[Figure 26 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 26: A Pakistani Truck Hauling Cargo Along the Karakorum Highway
(Source: *Hunza*; https://www.facebook.com/pg/Hunzaavalley/photos/?ref=page_internal)
Figure 26 showcases the KKH in all its might, whereas the truck hauling cargo is a metaphor of economic strength and connectivity between China and mainland Pakistan. It is interesting to note that I sourced this image from *The Karakoram Club*. The same image was shared earlier on *Hunza*, a locally owned tourism company, which presents a case of the citationality of discourse. Once again, it becomes evident that the KKH is being used as a resource to project the Pakistani state’s growing affinity with China, and the resurgence in its economy. Down-country Pakistani travel literature that I review in the second chapter is replete with references to the KKH using a lens of nationalistic pride. For instance, in Tarrar’s (1991) most celebrated Pakistani travelogue, *Safar Shumaal Ke (Journeys of the North)*, the KKH is represented as the guiding road on which a humbling bumbling down-country traveler begins his journey. The highway enables him to ‘discover’ one hidden valley after another, providing him with the opportunity to showcase Pakistan’s beauty to his predominantly down-country audiences. In the national imaginary, the KKH is an integral part of Gilgit-Baltistan’s identity: an arterial highway that connects the region to the Pakistani heartland, a marvel of engineering that provides connectivity to and through a ‘harsh’ landscape, and a symbol of China’s ‘friendship’ with Pakistan. In Urdu travel literature, these representations are dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, and they are reproduced in contemporary virtual spaces in much the same way.

[Figure 27 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 27: The KKH Represented as the 8th Wonder of the World (Source: The Karakoram Club; https://www.facebook.com/groups/thekarakoramclub/photos/)

Photographs in all four virtual spaces sampled also attach mythical qualities and attributes to the KKH. In Table 7, I reproduce the captions that accompany photographs of the
KKH. A photo on the *Karakoram Club* site highlights the road as the “Highway to Heaven” (Caption 2), and another represents it as the “Eighth Wonder of the World”, the highest paved road in existence (Caption 1). Accompanying a picture of the KKH winding through the valley floor (see Figure 27), another caption on *Hunza* pays tribute to Chinese and Pakistani workers who lost their lives constructing the KKH, hailing them as martyrs (Caption 5). A picture on the *Hunzai Lad* calls the KKH the “The killer road”, which contributes to the myriad mythical qualities attributed to this highway in various discursive venues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Virtual space</th>
<th>Caption</th>
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| 1 | *The Karakoram Club*          | The Karakoram Highway Gilgit-Baltistan  
At a height of 15,397 ft above sea level, the Karakoram Highway (KKH) is the highest paved international road. It is also considered as the 8th wonder of the world. The highway connects Pakistan’s Gilgit-Baltistan to China’s Xingiang region. Regards: Team All Baltistan Movement. |
| 3 | *The Karakoram Club*          | 1982. Beautiful waterfall and rainbow. Somewhere at Silk Highway. Karakoram (Old picture shared by a member)                                 |
| 4 | *The Hunzai Lad*              | With so many curves, no doubt it is the killer road. Karakoram Highway.                                                                  |
| 5 | *Hunza*                       | Karakoram Highway, (Beauty and the Beast) almost 810 Pakistanis and nearly 200 Chinese workers lost their lives in its construction in the 1960s |

Table 7: Captions accompanying pictures of the KKH

Representations of the KKH are increasingly common in these virtual spaces, and several comments and captions link it with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – a recent multi-billion-dollar infrastructure development project between the two countries – that many down-country people believe will be an economic game changer for Pakistan (Dawn 2016; Sidaway and Woon 2017). In early colonial accounts, Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape was represented as difficult and treacherous. Construction of the KKH was a material project that provided connectivity; it was also an ideological project that supposedly tamed the frontier. Hussain (2015) provides a historical overview of the construction of the ‘Friendship Highway’,

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which began as a joint venture between Pakistan and China. Although the road begins in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the greatest length of the KKH runs through the Gilgit-Baltistan administrative region. Due to rapid socio-economic changes experienced in the region in the wake of its construction (Kreutzmann 1991), the KKH is a representational resource for both residents of Gilgit-Baltistan (especially tour operators) and down-country Pakistanis. Contemporary representations of the KKH are disrupting colonial tropes that depicted Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscape as harsh and difficult to access. They also subvert global discourses about Pakistan by representing the highway as a sophisticated material resource that produces national economic prosperity, pride and overall state positivity. At the local level, it is a symbol of nationalistic pride and a marker of Gilgit-Baltistan’s identity, whereas at the national level it serves as a material example of Pakistan-China friendship and the state’s control over its frontier.

Analysis of the Various Interests Being Served Through Gilgit-Baltistan’s Orientalization

In the introductory chapter I argued that colonialism serves as the discursive foundation on which the amalgam of contemporary representations is built. I also argued that post-colonial representations reinforced some preexisting understandings, but also forged new ways of looking at the region. In each representational period a range of interests have been served, which has led to Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-cultural domination by outsiders, and contributed to its intersectional marginality. Edward Said (1978) argues that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power, domination, and varying degrees of complex hegemony. Therefore, it is essential to understand representations of Attabad Lake in virtual spaces by framing them within discourses of Gilgit-Baltistan’s historic relationship of domination and control with a series of outsiders.
Said (1978: 6) argues that “Orientalism therefore isn’t an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment”. Said further asserts that orientalism serves “a whole series of interests”, creating and maintaining a relationship of domination and control between the Orient and the Occident. In this chapter, I have connected colonial and post-colonial representational histories of Gilgit-Baltistan with understandings that have gained dominance in selected virtual spaces. It has become clear that virtual spaces act as institutions in a Foucauldian sense, reproducing and reworking cultural tropes about Gilgit-Baltistan, and discursively constructing it as a particular kind of oriental space in the contemporary representational period. Our understanding of these orientalizing discourses is likely to remain limited until we appreciate their implications for the relationship of domination and control between Gilgit-Baltistan and lowland Pakistan. To understand the power and domination effects engendered by Gilgit-Baltistan’s discursive orientalization in virtual spaces, it is important to delineate the various interests that are being served as a range of actors participate in these representational processes. In this subsection I trace these interests, and I do so by dividing my analysis into three categories of interest groups: down-country, local, and commercial (both local and non-local) virtual spaces.

**Dominant Discourses in Down-country Virtual Spaces and the Interests They Serve**

For this thesis I looked at two down-country virtual spaces. *The Karakoram Club* is a community group of predominantly down-country Pakistani travel enthusiasts. Membership in this group is not restricted. However, judging by the posts and locational patterns of moderators it is evident that the page focuses largely on northern Pakistan: Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Kashmir, and Chitral
Valley. *Hunza on Foot* is a travel and tourism consultancy that facilitates ‘curious travelers’ who wish to have an ‘authentic and unforgettable’ experience by connecting them to ‘indigenous communities’ of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is owned and operated by Naveed Khan, a down-country Pakistani who is, or has been, a part of several international networks: World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), National Geographic, and BBC World News. The consultancy focuses on sustainable tourism, and promises an experience that is ‘off the beaten track’. Despite the obvious difference between these two media spaces – a community group loosely moderated by a large number of predominantly down-country Pakistanis and an unconventional travel consultancy owned and moderated by one person – there are numerous similarities worth exploring.

Both of these virtual spaces are replete with positive depictions of Attabad Lake, and its history as a site of disaster is either presented with a positive spin or simply ignored. Attabad’s landscape and connectivity infrastructure is presented in a continuum of other tourist hotspots in the Gilgit-Baltistan region, and the entire region is constructed as ‘remote’ and subsequently romanticized for this remoteness. Moreover, visual and textual content about the Attabad tunnels, Pakistani flags on boats, and the KKH is used to project Gilgit-Baltistan as a symbol of national pride. There are strong linkages between the ways Attabad Lake in particular and Gilgit-Baltistan in general is depicted in down-country virtual spaces and the interests that are being served through these depictions.

In virtual spaces operated and moderated by down-country Pakistanis, Attabad Lake is seen with a tourist-adventurist gaze (Ali 2014). Constructing the region as remote, and reinforcing this remoteness by romanticising it, achieves the material and representational constitution of Gilgit-Baltistan as inherently ‘different’ from other Pakistani spaces. In this way
down-country virtual spaces, by building on colonial and post-colonial tropes of remoteness, rurality, and authenticity, are able to project Gilgit-Baltistan as the 21st century Shangri-La of Pakistan. The region is othered in a rurally romantic way such that it becomes too different, and too distant, from down-country urban centers, pure and unadulterated, almost unreal. Down-country Pakistanis have an interest in constructing Gilgit-Baltistan as a Shangri-La, because this image contributes to their own self-interested identity work of ‘finding their true selves’ in ‘wilderness’ and ‘freedom’. At the same time, associating pride with the landscape and people, and celebrating the landscape as ‘their own’ asserts the state interest of maintaining ownership and control of this ‘remote’ region. Attabad’s discursive construction, therefore, also achieves the aim of cementing down-country Pakistanis’ understandings of themselves. Said (1978: 21) argues that,

Orientalism is premised upon the exteriority, that is, on the fact that the orientalist, poet or scholar makes the orient speak, describes the orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact.

Constructing quintessentially northern values such as “simplicity, hospitality, and holism” (Hussain 2015) and associating them with the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan (see Figure 22) invokes in down-country Pakistanis a simultaneous sense of awe and wonder, which subsequently feeds into a desire to protect and conserve these values and the landscapes within which they take root. Critiquing the works of Schaller (1983) and Jamie (1992), Dolphin (2000) argues that the desire to save and protect the people of Gilgit-Baltistan is associated with the ‘vanishing primitive’ trope, which projects the people of Gilgit-Baltistan as incapable of determining their own affairs, and justifies the role of outsiders in deciding what is best for the
residents of the region. The socio-cultural ‘othering’ and ‘romanticization’ of Gilgit-Baltistan serves the interests of down-country Pakistanis, who come to understand their spaces as core and the spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as peripheral, where the latter is always negatively defined in relation to the former.

The moderator of *Hunza on Foot* depicts his travel companions doing yoga on boats as they travel across Attabad Lake, and shares his favourite reading spots in Balidiyat meadows overlooking the lake (see Figure 16). A journey to and across Attabad Lake is depicted as a contemplative experience that prompts one to pause and reflect. The drive to look inward by taking up activities such as yoga (see Figure 21) and pleasure reading, coupled with the deployment of Attabad and its adjoining landscape as a positive resource, reminds audiences of their authentic selves, free from the fast-paced, robotic lifestyles that the moderator himself seems to have escaped. This construction of authenticity is aligned with Naveed Khan’s own narrative of leaving a well-established career in ‘the west’ to embark on a journey of self-discovery in Gilgit-Baltistan. Khan prompts his audiences to engage in a process of self-interested identity work, by showcasing this hyper-romantic and supposedly remote lake in northern Pakistan, and constructing it as a site that offers an escape from the drudgery of everyday life in down-country Pakistani cities. Many interests are served by representing Gilgit-Baltistan as the 21st century Shangri-La: it offers an ‘escape’ from a down-country urban lifestyle; it is an empty and natural space where visitors re-establish a connection with their ‘true selves’; and it is a timeless space that invokes simplicity, holism, and a sense of community, and promises hospitality to its down-country visitors.

*The Karakoram Club* is a community that comprises predominantly down-country travellers with an interest in the mountain ranges of northern Pakistan. Members of this
community draw heavily on down-country popular culture and representations of Attabad Lake as resources to conduct self-interested identity work. Urdu poetry is commonly posted on this platform, and often accompanies pictures of the lake, highlighting the aspect of being ‘free’ and in one’s ‘true element’. In down-country Pakistan, these pieces of poetry have been used in novels and drama serials. They have also been reworked and presented in the form of Ghazal music, and more recently in the East-West fusion music genre (see Coke Studio, Seasons 1-10). Sharing them alongside pictures of Attabad Lake forges representational pathways for the lake, where all the meanings associated with the poetry in its mainstream usage are also attached to the lake, in effect orientalizing it and making it socially intelligible for a new set of outsiders.

Dominant Discourses in Local Virtual Spaces and the Interests They Serve
Two of the four platforms sampled for this thesis are owned and operated by people who self-identify as locals belonging to Gilgit-Baltistan. The local self-identifier should not be confused with the place of current residence. Rather, it appears after a review of the data that owners and moderators of both The Hunzai Lad and Hunza spend a considerable amount of time outside of Gilgit-Baltistan, usually in one of the down-country urban centers (Islamabad, Lahore, or Karachi). The local self-identifier is simply that, an identification of one’s own sense of belonging and home, irrespective of the place of residence. Here, I share the discourses that gain prominence primarily in local virtual spaces, and the interests being served through these discourses.

It is worth noting that The Hunzai Lad is a non-commercial travel blog, whereas Hunza is a tourism company that was established primarily for commercial purposes. Therefore, ways of ‘seeing’ differ considerably between the two. Having said that, there are some representations of
Attabad Lake in particular, and Gilgit-Baltistan more generally, that gain prominence in both these virtual spaces. Local virtual spaces draw on age-old cultural tropes that have been used and popularized by western and non-western outsiders. However, they use these tropes in the service of their own interests, albeit still situated in the asymmetrical field of discursive power in which they have been historically orientalized.

*Hunza* and *The Hunzai Lad* have a particular way of depicting and re-visiting the Attabad disaster. All data streams sampled for this thesis acknowledge Attabad’s history as a site of disaster. At the beginning of this chapter I argued that a positive spin is given to the disaster, whereas its destructive aspects are invisibilized and reworked to focus more on the ‘beautiful’ lake that emerged as a ‘blessing’ (see Table 6). However, virtual spaces owned and operated by locals provide consistent reminders of the destruction caused by the Attabad landslide. For instance, both *Hunza* and *The Hunzai Lad* have dedicated posts marking the anniversary of the disaster on the 4th of January. The details of the landslide, the loss of life and property, and mobility and food security concerns that emerged soon after the disaster have been shared in some detail (see Figure 21). Highlighting the destruction caused by the Attabad landslide is a strategy used by the locals to honour lives that were lost and livelihoods that were disrupted because of the disaster. Simultaneously, these anniversary posts serve as reminders that the biggest stakeholders of this emerging tourism destination are the locals who have suffered innumerable losses over the years. An anniversary dedication, therefore, is a strategy of taking ownership of the space by highlighting the lived experiences of those who faced the disaster. This ownership claim reasserts local decision-making authority with regards to present and future configurations of Attabad, as home and/or tourism destination.
*Hunza* and *The Hunzai Lad*, in different ways, attempt to carve a distinct space for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistani national imagination. For example, in the third chapter I elaborated on the ‘Salted Tea’ reference by Baig, the owner and moderator of *The Hunzai Lad*, who describes his blog as ‘Salted Tea and extremely wild dreams’. Tea is a popular beverage across Pakistan. However, salted tea is associated primarily with Gilgit-Baltistan. By focussing on this incarnation of tea in this local virtual space, the moderator is carving a distinct northern identity within Pakistani national imagination.

Similarly, the owner and moderator of *Hunza* highlights the ‘sacrifices’ that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have made, and marks the death anniversaries of military men from the region in an effort to project the role residents have played in guarding and protecting their nation. Ali (2009) looks at militarism as a state formative process, emphasizing the ways in which discourses of *Shahadat* (martyrdom) give the people of Gilgit-Baltistan validation as loyal citizens of Pakistan, a frame of mind that can sway popular opinion and lead to Gilgit-Baltistan’s full integration into the Pakistani nation-state\(^{11}\). Moreover, local virtual spaces also emphasize local foods and cultural activities, providing evidence that the region is much more than the “eco-body of the nation-state” (Ali 2014).

Local virtual spaces highlight the destruction caused by Attabad landslide, and forge nationalistic representations that make a space for the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistani national imaginary. These representations don’t disrupt dominant discourses, but rework them in order to serve local interests. For instance, the vast majority of Attabad Lake representations on both *The Hunzai Lad* and *Hunza* are positive, focusing on the blue lake, adjoining Passu cones, and wooden boats that are used to transfer tourists from one end of the

\(^{11}\) See Rizvi (2000), especially chapter 4 and 5, for a historical analysis of the military’s formative role in influencing Pakistan’s politics.
lake to the other. At the same time, a disaster anniversary post serves as a reminder that no matter how many new, positive meanings are attached to the lake, locals will not forget its history as a site of disaster that caused considerable loss, pain, and agony. Similarly, sharing posts about local heroes (military men such as Havaldar Lalak Jan Shaheed) asserts the ‘sacrifices’ residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have made for the nation-state. In this sense, local virtual spaces have used militarism as a state-formative process in the service of their own interests, vying for equal rights and integration into the Pakistani nation-state based on their efforts to guard and protect its frontiers. Local virtual spaces, therefore, attempt to carve a distinct identity for Gilgit-Baltistan within the Pakistani national imagination, and to overcome decades of socio-cultural invisibilization by exercising discourses to their own advantage.

**Dominant Discourses in Commercial Virtual Spaces and the Interests They Serve**

Two of the four virtual spaces I sampled can be understood as commercial (i.e., their core function as a virtual space is to offer products and services related to tourism). *Hunza* operates as a travel agency based in Gilgit-Baltistan, whereas *Hunza on Foot* is a travel consultancy owned and operated by a down-country Pakistani. A cursory glance at these virtual spaces reveals their core interests: to generate profits by offering tourism services in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, they contribute to popular discourses by engaging in processes that commodify the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan, making it an attractive location for an exponentially increasing number of domestic down-country tourists. Both commercial virtual spaces showcase Attabad Lake as a destination that is an integral part of the Gilgit-Baltistan experience.

*Hunza On Foot* showcases down-country as well as international tourists on a boat ride across the lake, performing yoga in an attempt to connect with their ‘free’ and ‘wild’ selves.
Khan projects his travel consultancy as a platform that offers a transformative experience. He uses Attabad Lake, and gives references to its history as a site of disaster, to offer his audiences a chance to break free from down-country metropolitan ideas and heal in Gilgit-Baltistan’s wilderness.

[Figure 28 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 28: A Wooden Boat Inside the Attabad Lake (Source: Hunza on Foot; https://www.instagram.com/p/BenbcfOD-Lx/)  

Figure 28, for example, is accompanied by a caption Khan uses to make Attabad Lake socially intelligible as a site of disaster that offers both a lesson and a transformative experience to travelers:

She had a wild, wandering soul but when she loved, she loved with chaos and that made all the difference.” – Ariana Dancu

Attabad Lake, one of the most stunning bodies of water ever created after a terrible landslide. Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan.

Using a western author’s quote to say something about wilderness and chaos, and tying it to Attabad’s history as a site of disaster, projects the lake as a mystical place that encapsulates both ‘beauty’ and ‘chaos’. In that sense Hunza on Foot draws on colonial and post-colonial tropes about wilderness, remoteness, harshness, and emptiness through a combination of text and images to project Attabad Lake and Gilgit-Baltistan as sites that offer transformative experiences. The interests being served in this virtual space are commercial in nature, but a point of difference is created. Attabad Lake, because of its baggage as a site of disaster, is represented as offering a unique experience that other travel destinations across Pakistan do not: the evocative feelings of ‘chaos’ and ‘beauty’ at the same time.
Hunza offers a number of tourist packages for travel across Gilgit-Baltistan, and Attabad Lake is included as a core site in most that cover Hunza and Gojal districts. Staying true to its cultural tourism vision, Hunza also markets cultural products such as the Hunza cap that can be shipped anywhere across Pakistan for Rs. 200, making inroads into Pakistan’s e-commerce business. Additionally, appealing to adventure travel enthusiasts, ‘mountain survival workshops’ by western outsiders have also been publicized on this virtual space, which couples the wisdom and cultural capital of local porters and guides with experience and affirmation of western outsiders, in order to offer training to predominantly down-country Pakistanis in ‘survival skills’ through a series of workshops. The owner and moderator of Hunza leverages his local networks to offer a range of options to tourists, and markets the region as an adventure and cultural tourism destination. Nationalistic leanings are also evident in this virtual space. For instance, photographers and bloggers who showcase the positive side of Pakistan by representing Gilgit-Baltistan are hailed as ‘Ambassadors of peace’, whereas pictures of Attabad tunnels and the Karakoram cargo showcase how ‘developed’ Gilgit-Baltistan has become over the years, and also signal to down-country Pakistanis the ease of connectivity through paved roads and several kilometer-long tunnels. Commercial virtual spaces use Attabad Lake as a resource to draw in tourists from down-country Pakistan, and use a number of strategies to achieve this aim: constructing the region as a ‘remote paradise’, ‘an adventure travel destination’ and ‘the nation’s pride’. This serves their commercial interests, but also orientalizes the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan.
Revisiting Research Questions and Concluding Remarks.

In this chapter I address the core research questions that I set out for this thesis by conducting a discourse analysis of data sourced from virtual spaces in light of Gilgit-Baltistan’s representational history during the colonial and post-colonial period. The questions that I set out were:

(3) How do contemporary lowland Pakistanis/domestic tourists and bloggers discursively construct Attabad in virtual spaces, drawing on colonial tropes, nationalistic narratives and new ways of understanding the region, and to what effects?

(4) How does the physical landscape and connectivity infrastructure in and around the Attabad Lake act as a representational resource for the production of discourse?

(5) How has the Attabad landslide event been represented by the people of Gilgit-Baltistan who have been affected by it, and to what effects?

I reiterated my claim that virtual spaces act as institutional platforms where discourses are reproduced and reworked to accommodate changing outsider interests in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan. To support this claim, I provided an overview of the Attabad disaster and traced its changing perceptions over the last few years. To understand the representational landscape in the virtual sphere I looked at the various ways in which photographers, moderators, and content generators highlight the disaster aspects of the Attabad Lake. I then focused more fully on the popular depictions of Attabad Lake and framed them within colonial and post-colonial tropes that have historically orientalized Gilgit-Baltistan.

Two themes gain dominance in virtual spaces by building on established cultural tropes: Remoteness and Rurality and Projection of Nationalism. I developed these themes by analyzing selected pictures and captions from different virtual spaces in light of colonial and post-colonial
discourses. For example, virtual spaces perpetuate discourses of Gilgit-Baltistan’s remoteness by depicting it as a space of wildness and freedom, which was the dominant modality through which the region was understood in the late colonial and post-colonial periods. Similarly, the lake and its adjoining landscape and connectivity infrastructure have been incorporated into nationalistic narratives that claim this liminal space with nationalistic pride. This social construction of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as particular kinds of oriental subjects has material repercussions, and the full force of these discourses that I delineated in the first half of the fourth chapter can only be fully understood once we understand the interests they serve. I ended the chapter by tracing down country, local, and commercial interests that are being served, which helped develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which Gilgit-Baltistan’s intersectional marginality is re-enforced and its relationship of domination and control with the Pakistani nation-state in this new representational period.
Chapter 5: Domination Effects and the Power of Discourse

Virtual spaces are becoming increasingly significant institutional sites for the (re)production of discourse. As we enter what has been popularly termed the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (Kim and Kuljis 2010) – the era of virtual, digital, and cellular disruptions – we can expect that the discursive impact of this technological shift will be as significant in the social sphere as changes made in the economic and political spheres of life around the globe have been.

My goal in this thesis has been to sample streams of data from four virtual spaces for a particular period of time in order to analyze how virtual data in the form of photographs and their captions impact ‘ways of seeing’ Attabad Lake and its adjoining landscape and connectivity infrastructure. I also highlight the ways in which these understandings are connected to earlier discourses about the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan that were constituted in the colonial and postcolonial periods of Pakistan’s history. The amount of virtual content related to Gilgit-Baltistan and produced by Pakistani nationals is copious, diverse in style, and distributed through various forms of popular culture and news to engender and perpetuate regimes of truth about Gilgit-Baltistan’s landscapes and people, according to particular institutional interests and power agendas. I have been able to analyze only a small fraction of this discursive activity.

The production of discourse about Attabad in virtual space occurs in an asymmetrical field of power in which a range of actors produce new and draw on established cultural tropes to orientalize Gilgit-Baltistan, in the process reinforcing its complex marginality and domination and control by the Pakistani state. My objective in this final chapter is to more clearly analyze these domination effects of the dominant discourses and specific interests that I identified in the previous chapter. But first I want to revisit my goals for the thesis, some of the core concepts
used in my analysis and my findings, to set the stage for that analysis. I conclude with suggestions for further research.

**Tracing Domination Effects through an Analysis of Dominant Discourses**

Domination and control in Gilgit-Baltistan have been achieved through a range of institutions, including the military, politics, economics, and the law. These institutions work in tandem to produce Gilgit-Baltistan’s intersectional marginality vis-à-vis the Pakistani state. I argued earlier that constitutional, political, and militaristic forms of domination in Gilgit-Baltistan have already been documented (Butz 1998; Butz and Cook 2016; Hong 2013; Sökefeld 2005). However, the role of socio-cultural domination in engendering other forms of marginalization is often left unexplored. Although Butz (1993) and Dolphin (2000) have discussed Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-cultural othering through an analysis of colonial travel literature, our understandings of the link between Gilgit-Baltistan’s orientalization in the current representational period and its intersectional marginality – political dependence, economic subservience, and constitutional liminality – continues to be fairly limited.

An analysis of a range of nation-building platforms such as school textbooks, media outlets, and government reports by Ali (2014) and Hussain (2015) reveals that Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-cultural othering leads to its construction as a particular kind of space: a remote, empty, rurally romantic eco-body of the nation-state. These representations serve different local and non-local interests, and have strong implications on Gilgit-Baltistan’s relationship of domination and control with Pakistan. Virtual spaces have recently become both a nation-building platform and a site for the construction and dissemination of contemporary travel experiences. So far, I have established that the discourses that gain dominance in virtual spaces draw heavily on
cultural tropes about Gilgit-Baltistan that developed during the colonial and postcolonial period. Despite this, our understanding of the forms of domination that these representations in the virtual spaces engender is limited. In this sub-section I look at the ways in which these discourses create domination effects that reinforce Gilgit-Baltistan’s intersectional marginality. I do this by analyzing the larger interests at play for different actors who engage in this process of Attabad’s discursive construction as a particular kind of oriental space.

By drawing on examples from the colonial and postcolonial period, I highlight how socio-cultural othering through discursive representational practices can engender domination effects. Looking at representations of locals that came to the forefront during early colonial period (19th and early 20th century), it becomes evident that activities such as caravan raiding, slave dealings, and tribute exchanges are highlighted in order to project the local people as backward (Butz 1993), creating and cementing the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide. Dolphin (2000) demonstrates the strong link between orientalist representations of the region and its people, and the political goal of colonial expansion and exploitation. In Said’s (1978) terms, western outsiders were able to develop these representations of locals because of their flexible positional superiority, which “puts the westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7). The conquest of Hunza in 1891 aligns very well with the late 19th century orientalist representations in travel literature. This conquest enabled empire by contributing to the British imperial designs whereby they were able to counter Russia’s interests in South-Asia and forge a possible pathway into Central Asia. Western outsiders such as Biddulph (1880) and Durand (1899) provided justification for the Hunza conquest and subsequent British rule through representational projects that orientalized the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. Local chiefs were represented as ‘barbaric’ and ‘despotic’,
which justified colonial intervention and provided western-outsiders with a sense of purpose as they assumed control of the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan. Said (1978: 3) aptly encapsulates the relationship between socio-cultural representations, outsider interests, and domination effects:

No matter how authoritative a position orientalism had, it was no one writing, thinking or acting on the orient which resulted in this construction and subsequent domination, Orientalism is a whole ‘network’ of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when the peculiar entity “the orient” is in question.

Similarly in the later colonial period, western outsiders engaged in representational practices that served the broader interests of the Pakistani nation-state. Schaller (1983) leveraged his academic training and professional experience to document the status and spatial distribution of wildlife in Gilgit-Baltistan. Drawing on colonial tropes, Schaller (1983) characterizes the locals as ‘unpredictable’ and ‘suspicious of others’, which serves as an othering strategy whereby western outsiders purely by implication end up becoming ‘predictable’ and ‘trustworthy’. After documenting the population and spatial distribution of Marco polo sheep, bighorn sheep, and musk ox, Schaller proposes the idea of a national park or a wilderness reserve and embarks on a mission to search for areas that would serve this purpose.

Dolphin (2000) provides an analysis of Schaller’s work, claiming that the authority with which he spoke about the region and its people stripped locals of the ability to speak for themselves. Interestingly, the Pakistani nation-state was quick to act on Schaller’s recommendation, and used his work to justify its decision of converting Khunjerab, a traditional Wakhi grazing ground, into a ‘gazetted’ national park (Knudsen 1999). Once again, seemingly harmless observations by a western-outsider during the postcolonial period led to the construction of locals as ‘unpredictable’, ‘suspicious of others’, and ‘incapable of managing their own affairs’, giving both the Pakistani nation-state and Schaller the legitimacy to orientalize the
residents of Gilgit-Baltistan and enabling interests of the empire (in this case it is the Pakistani state) in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan. This sanctioning of true statements by outsiders led to the state’s domination and control of large swathes of land as these understandings developed here were codified into law and administrative procedures.

Virtual spaces present a representational landscape where a range of actors construct the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan as particular kinds of oriental subjects in tandem with their own interests. Locals are also implicated in this process of their own discursive production, which leads to co-constitution of knowledge and understandings that gain dominance within the asymmetrical field of discursive power I highlighted earlier. Given the emergence of virtual spaces as a new institutional platform for the production of discourse, new representational practices in the form of visual media, and new actors in the form of content producers and moderators in the virtual sphere, it is evident that both the socio-cultural representations and the interests they serve are changing. Modalities of domination and control are also changing as the interests associated with them undergo processes of transformation, whereby new rules of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are determined, enabling outsider interests in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan. Following Sharp et al. (2000), dominating power attempts to discipline, silence, prohibit, and/or repress difference and dissent. Discourses that gain dominance through virtual spaces are the ones that further the interests of dominating powers, and continue to forge new regimes of control for the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan.

In the fourth chapter I highlighted down-country, local, and commercial interests at play by conducting a discourse analysis of a series of virtual spaces. First, focusing on down-country spaces I argued that both *The Karakoram Club* and *Hunza On Foot* contribute to discourses that romanticize remoteness and rurality by focusing on self-interested identity work which offers an
escape from the drudgery of everyday down-country urban life. By looking at the people and spaces of Gilgit-Baltistan through a tourist-adventurist lens, down-country virtual spaces establish Gilgit-Baltistan as a summer playground where people go to find their ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ selves. In the fourth chapter I present captions from these virtual spaces which prompt visitors to ‘let go of everything that holds them back’ and be ‘wild and free’ as they ‘were made and meant to be’ (see Table 7). Wilderness and freedom, therefore, are associated with Gilgit-Baltistan, creating a point of difference from down-country urban spaces, in effect orientalizing Gilgit-Baltistan and its people by casting it as a region that can be understood as a 21st century Shangri-La – a mythical space that gives down-country Pakistanis an opportunity to find their ‘true and ‘authentic’ selves.

In addition to the discourses of remoteness and wilderness that serve down-country interests of projecting Gilgit-Baltistan as a ‘playground’ and as an ‘escape’ for Pakistanis, there are strong nationalistic leanings that focus on projecting the region as an eco-body of the nation-state. These narratives consider Gilgit-Baltistan as an integral part of the country that is valued for its natural beauty. Positive depictions of Gilgit-Baltistan are meant to counter international media discourse, projecting it as a beautiful, peaceful, picturesque and serene part of Pakistan, in stark contrast to the violent image that the country has in international media discourse. In the fourth chapter, I dedicated a sub-section to highlighting the symbolism of the Pakistani flag on wooden boats that provide visitors with the quintessential Attabad experience. Numerous pictures shared on down-country virtual spaces focus on the flag and a caption by Hunza on Foot (see Figure 23 and 24 and accompanying captions) even offers advice on respecting the flag as it is ‘your identity’. Similarly, The Karakoram Club is filled with down-country Pakistani poetry, literature, and music with strong nationalistic leanings, along with pictures of Attabad Lake and
its adjoining natural and built environment. The meanings that all of this down-country poetry, literature, and music carries within it are also attached to Attabad Lake, forging new representational pathways for the region and making Gilgit-Baltistan a 21st century Shangri-La, but one that is a part of Pakistan, under its control, and open to its citizens as a remote and mythical space that they take pride in by calling ‘their own’. Representations that gain dominance in virtual spaces are heavily influenced by colonial and postcolonial travel literature. In fact, tropes about remoteness and rurality, authenticity and vanishing primitives, and eco-body of the nation have all been a major part of colonial and postcolonial travel literature, as well as a range of nation-building networks, institutions and bodies of knowledge. It is clear that major cultural tropes have been reworked over the decades to enable outsider and down-country interests in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan, and in this thesis I have established that the new representational period, defined by visual representations in the virtual sphere, is no exception. Projecting the region as ‘the 21st century Shangri-La of Pakistan’ is a core interest that comes to the forefront in down-country virtual spaces, irrespective of their commercial or non-commercial nature.

The domination effect of this orientalization is that Gilgit-Baltistan is not only understood to be inherently different from down-country Pakistan, but also distant, a peripheral region that is so magical that it is almost unreal. In dominant discourses, Gilgit-Baltistan is the ‘pride’ of Pakistan, and it is also a ‘remote’ frontier, and the state, therefore, has an active interest in guarding and protecting it. The constitutional and legal liminality that the region and its people continue to battle is a form of state domination with lasting power effects. Even today, residents of Gilgit-Baltistan do not enjoy the same democratic rights and privileges as other Pakistani citizens, the region is virtually invisible in Pakistan’s constitution, and residents have no
representation in the federal legislature or access to the supreme court of Pakistan. There is considerable literature on this form of domination, where Gilgit-Baltistan is understood to be in a state of “legal and constitutional liminality” (Butz and Cook 2016: 200-201; Hong 2013: 74-82), an overt form of state-domination hinged in the region’s ambiguous status as a zone of contestation.

At the surface, however, Gilgit-Baltistan is a highly romanticized remote space and a source of Pakistan’s ecological pride. Domestic tourism is on the rise and this becomes evident by looking at government issued reports. According to the Tourism Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, 86% of the tourists over a three-year period (2008-2011) were down-country Pakistanis. In the third chapter I elaborated on the changing tourism landscape in Gilgit-Baltistan and highlighted a steep fall in international tourism after the initiation of the US global war on terror. Similarly, stricter travel and visa requirements for Pakistan have also become deterrents for Pakistanis to establish summer playgrounds abroad. However, when these socio-cultural depictions of Gilgit-Baltistan are framed within the larger regimes of power that orientalize Gilgit-Baltistan, it becomes abundantly clear that another motivation for down-country tourists to travel to Gilgit-Baltistan is the ease with which they can navigate Gilgit-Baltistan’s spaces. On my 2016 visit to Karimabad, a small town in the Hunza Valley, I was surprised to see the penetrative power of down-country Pakistani food throughout the main bazar. This extensive down-country influence driven by market forces and justified by orientalizing discourses is telling of the administrative and political forms of domination that the region experiences under the Pakistani nation-state.

In local virtual spaces a set of representations come to the forefront that are aligned with down-country interests. However, locals also use the virtual sphere to push back against
dominant discourses that do not align with their interests. In the fourth chapter I argued that there is a strong effort on locals’ part to carve a distinctly ‘northern’ identity within the Pakistani national imaginary. Local virtual spaces serve these interests in numerous ways: by highlighting the ‘sacrifices’ residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have made for the nation-state, representing the Attabad Lake as a site of disaster which caused considerable damage, and focusing on local people, food, and culture. The moderator of Hunza, for instance, has dedicated posts to military men hailing from Gilgit-Baltistan, who laid down their lives guarding the nation-state, and highlighted the efforts of numerous mountaineers who have set different regional and national records. This shows an effort not only to carve a distinct identity, but also to argue for Gilgit-Baltistan’s inclusion in the Pakistani national imaginary. The Hunzai Lad has dedicated a post to mark the anniversary of Attabad disaster, asserting local rights to define Attabad as they deem fit.

This push-back in the current representational period serves the local interest of inclusion into the nation-state while maintaining a distinct identity. The domination effects of these representations are complex, because in most cases local representations speak back to down-country interests, and are overpowered by them, only to be silenced and ignored. Even though some local interests may be aligned with the discourses that gain dominance, locals are still unsuccessful in engendering a domination effect that changes their own circumstances significantly. Asserting ownership of their spaces by highlighting the disaster aspect of Attabad, celebrating the sacrifices and achievements of local heroes, and sharing local foods, festivals, and people, aligns very well with the political and constitutional demands of inclusion into the nation-state. However, even when the state is prompted to bring change, that change rarely has significant material outcomes for locals, who continue to remain under reworked and refurbished
regimes of domination and control vis-à-vis the Pakistani nation-state. For instance, a wave of reforms was initiated with the Gilgit-Baltistan reforms package introduced by President Musharraf in 2007, which turned the legislative ‘council’ into legislative ‘assembly’ and made Kashmir’s minister the legislative assembly’s ‘chairman’. However, this reforms package was widely termed as a hollow move that switched titles around without providing any real economic autonomy or political/administrative power (Kreutzmann 2015). These reforms undoubtedly mimic ideals set by western liberal democracies, but underneath all this wordplay little has changed for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Hong (2013) calls this ‘liminality in disguise’.

Karrar and Mostowlansky (2018) argue that since January 2016, the government has been under pressure to grant provincial status partly because of growing Chinese interest and investments in the region, and partly because of renewed calls for reforms from Gilgit-based civil society members. As Gilgit-Baltistan gains center stage in national politics due to its spatial connection with China, these demands are likely to grow. Karrar and Mostowlansky (2018) quote a former Judge of Gilgit-Baltistan, who advocated for equal citizenry for the people of the region and a legally mandated provincial status to settle grievances. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor – a multibillion dollar project that is part of China’s One Belt One Road initiative with Gilgit-Baltistan as the first point of contact – has recently gained center stage in national discourse. Karrar and Mostowlansky (2018) argue that residents of Gilgit-Baltistan are being left out while the state enjoys benefits of the partnership, using the frontier primarily as a transit route. Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan could previously import small quantities of goods from Xingiang duty-free, but the imposition of a new border regime has paved the way for stricter controls. As trade volumes between the two countries become more and more formalized,
there will be little room for an alternative local economy, making Gilgit-Baltistan completely dependent on the center, in terms of finances as well as political, and administrative control.

**Final Thoughts and Concluding Remarks**

Photographic and textual representations of Attabad in down-country and international social media sites and travel vlogs have seen a sharp increase over the last few years. For example, Eva Zubek, a polish traveler, and Umer Khan, a down-country Pakistani, both showcase Attabad Lake and Gilgit-Baltistan, gaining between 100,000 and 200,000 views and countless shares of their content in the virtual sphere. Television commercials created by numerous international consumer brands also depict Attabad Lake as a symbol for Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan itself. And Telenor, one of Pakistan’s largest cellular network providers, has produced a four-minute-long promotional tourism video that showcases landmarks of each and every part of Pakistan. In this video Attabad Lake is used to represent Gilgit-Baltistan, just the way ancient Mughal forts and *Dhamal* music is used to represent Punjab, and shrines and *Sufi* music are used to represent Sindh. In Gilgit-Baltistan’s depiction, its landscape takes center stage: The Khunjerab Pass, Attabad Lake, and the KKH. The region is depicted through a lens of remoteness and rurality, cementing its position in Pakistani national imagination as a particular kind of oriental space. The emerging understanding of Attabad Lake as a positive resource for tourism and its projection as representative of Gilgit-Baltistan with commensurate attachments of nationalistic pride is worth critically analyzing.

For a region that has experienced such complex regimes of domination, control and orientalization by both western outsiders and down-country Pakistanis, this new representational period marked by virtual connectivity presents an interesting case to study the workings of
orientalizing discourses in virtual spaces. Keeping in view the geo-political shifts that are informed by China’s growing influence on its westward neighbors, renewed calls for equal citizenship within Gilgit-Baltistan, and exponential rise in domestic tourism, new regimes of domination and control are being forged in Gilgit-Baltistan. This thesis has just initiated an analytic track to understanding how photographic and textual representations of Attabad reproduce, rework, and disrupt colonial and postcolonial cultural tropes that have conflicted outcomes for the people of the region. There are numerous areas that need further probing and critical analysis if we intend to address these challenges with any potency and precision.

In the research questions that I set out for this thesis, I aimed to revisit dominant understandings of Gilgit-Baltistan and its people through different representational periods during the colonial and postcolonial period. I also aimed to understand ways in which the material environment is used as a representational resource to justify certain representations. Finally, I looked at Attabad’s representations by local and non-local actors in the virtual spaces to see if there are links between the age-old cultural tropes about the region and emerging regimes of socio-cultural othering. Through my analysis, it has become clear that there are strong links not only between socio-cultural othering and political, economic and militaristic domination, but also between historic orientalization and contemporary socio-cultural othering. The advent of new platforms for virtual self-representations and neo-orientalist outsider representations has shown a remarkable dovetailing with historic forms of othering and domination. However, the link between material forms of domination and control in Gilgit-Baltistan and orientalizing discourses that bring this domination to fruition is not particularly strong.
A much more effective discourse analysis can be conducted in order to address the shortcomings of my thesis, which are primarily limitations of scale. By analyzing a much larger data set, increasing sampling period to at least 3-4 years, looking at sites in Gilgit-Baltistan other than Attabad Lake (i.e. Shandur, Skardu, Chilas), and by analyzing tags and geo-locations, a more well-developed discourse analysis could be conducted. Discourses that gain prominence in such a wide range of social media spaces can then be framed within local and non-local digital news discourse from sources such as Pamir times, Dawn, and Express Tribune. All in all, increasing the breadth of sample will give a much better understanding of the asymmetrical field of power that constitutes virtual spaces and makes them a site for struggle over meanings. This in turn will help in clearly laying out the interests behind dominant discourses and their power effects.

Once we have a fair idea of the virtual landscape we can start asking a series of difficult questions. In this thesis I simply explored the link between colonial and post-colonial representations and discourses that gain dominance in virtual spaces. Once we understand the full force of the domination effects of these orientalizing discourses we can probe into reasons for: (1) the romanticization of local ‘northern’ values and the simultaneous invalidation of their rights as full citizens; (2) the ways in which natural and built landscapes came to project nationalism in the first place; and (3) the drive to construct a ‘remote’ space just so it can offer the possibility of self-interested identity work. Gilgit-Baltistan today remains a militarily administered frontier in practice, but it is also discursively constructed through social media platforms as a ‘remote’ corner of Pakistan that offers unforgettable experiences. Such heterogeneity in meanings attached to a physical space in virtual spaces has serious material
implications for the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, making it a region defined by geographies of domination.
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