Catching a Passing Moment:  
The Redeployment of Tradition

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This report describes a hitherto-isolated culture in northern Pakistan that has recently undergone rapid exposure to the outside world. Rapid change in Karimabad, a town of 4,600 people in the Hunza Valley, has caused conflicts between cultural inertia and the forces of progress and modernization to surface and produced visible instances of cultural persistence and adaptation. For example, the resilience that house forms have displayed in Karimabad has been considerable. In particular, the continued use of the traditional house core as an element in newer plan types that incorporate alien values indicates the continued power of local values. A contrast to this persistence can be found in the free exercise of choice between old and new construction techniques as new technologies have been introduced to the town. The resilience of local values provides the basis for the continued relevance of traditional forms in architectural and planning practice, as residents and outside experts work to create a sustainable future for the mountain community. This situation has forced professionals in the field to reflect on current debates in academia about the nature of tradition.

It has been fifty years since the question was first raised in the English-speaking world of how civilizations other than that of the post-Enlightenment West ought to be dealt with in epistemological terms. Today this question is far from resolved, especially given the fact it imputes an inherent anteriority to whatever context to which it may be applied.

More recently there has risen in academia a tendency to denounce "binary oppositions" and dichotomies that relegate other cultures to the pejorative status of "tradition." A world without dichotomies would certainly be a happier place — one where modern reason could benefit everyone equally. But such a line of thought reveals little more than belief in the singularity of corporate forces.
One repercussion of the discourse described above has been the facile tendency to explain tradition either in terms of ideological “invention” or as an erroneous or romantic facet of modern thought. But just as living cultures other than that of the post-Enlightenment West are not figments of the imagination, so too tradition is not always simply invented. The most proper sense of the term is rather to describe patterns of behavior handed down in a society from prior times.

Given the above analysis, it would be fair to say the “problem” of tradition arises in contexts of change. One might think especially of the kind of change where one way of trying to access the truth about things is aligned against another — a context in which an epistemological choice must be made. By contrast, the “invention of tradition” has more to do with the setting up of rituals and modes of behavior in pursuance of arbitrary social, political or economic agendas. Although there have no doubt been many occasions and circumstances when “tradition” has been invented, it is not appropriate to apply the analysis of political economy, and its relationships with rituals created for expedient ends, in sweeping and general terms to a culture — or to the relevance of a culture’s past to its present state. In other words, the power of the past to manifest itself in living cultural behavior should not always be imputed to purely ideological causes. Without a recognition of the effect of the past on the present, the modern world can only be traumatic in its impact. But with recognition of the proper role of tradition, it is possible to entertain modes of thinking and practice that mitigate the impact of modernism and channel change in ways that are more conducive to culturally and environmentally wholesome growth and development.

This paper describes a process of cultural transformation taking place in the remote and isolated mountain regions of northern Pakistan. While this area has been isolated for centuries, it is now increasingly being exposed to the outside world. As a result, its tradition of architecture and settlement form is experiencing considerable change. The paper examines a particular locus of that tradition, the town of Karimabad in the Hunza Valley. Here, present social transformations have been rapid and profound and have led to choices representing conflicting desires and priorities. The very suddenness of change has produced extremely interesting overlays of visible cultural persistence and adaptation.

As someone involved in professional work in the context of Karimabad, I have been surprised both by the momentum of change and by the inertia of cultural persistence. Not only is this conflict perceptible in qualitative terms, but it also appears in terms of material things fundamental to the culture. While architectural entities not known before are currently being imported, accepted, and allowed to flourish, the presence of prior tradition in both its social and physical dimensions still looms large and colors most issues. This situation is
unlike most every other situation I have experienced as a practicing architect and planner. In most other post-colonial contexts change has been ongoing for at least a century, and there is little ability remaining to bring living traditions into open dialogue with modernization.

HUNZA AND KARIMABAD: PAST AND PRESENT

Situated in the northern-most part of the South Asian subcontinent, the Northern Areas of Pakistan constitute an entirely mountainous region of some 72,500 square miles (FIG. 1). The main body of the region consists of the Karakorum mountain range, and is characterized as a high mountain desert, with the major portion of local precipitation falling as snow at altitudes in excess of 15,000 feet. The snow endows a powerful presence to the twenty-odd peaks in the region that exceed 25,000 feet. And between these peaks there is considerable glaciation, including some of the largest and fastest-moving glaciers in the world. At about 15,000 feet are also to be found high mountain pastures, and just below these, sparse and dwindling coniferous forests.

In this environment human settlements have historically depended on subsistence agriculture, and exist at elevations as high as 11,000 feet. For such settlement patterns to occur, water from snow and glacial melt must be brought to settlement areas by irrigation channels. These are built sometimes in extremely difficult mountain terrain, and since the water often originates in tributaries of the Indus River which hug the valley floors at the bottom of inhospitable gorges, they involve the use of well-developed hydraulic skills. Water from traditional irrigation channels has created a sharp contrast between the uninhabited mountains that loom up to 28,000 feet or more and the vivid green of the area below where human beings have interacted with their environment. Because of the scarcity of irrigation water, arable land is jealously possessed and protected.

Along one tributary of the Indus River lies the area of the now defunct principality of Hunza (FIG. 2). Hunza was once geopolitically important because it offered direct access to western China along an age-old trade route from eastern Afghanistan. The ancient capital of Hunza was the town of Baltit. Until the British took over the area at the end of 1891, this town presented a clear physical expression: a tightly clustered settlement with fortified walls, at the summit of whose hill was the ancient power center, Baltit Fort (FIG. 3). This settlement still commands a bowl-like slope high on the southern face of a system of mountains, behind which Mt. Ultar rises to 24,238 feet. But, together with a agglomeration of fourteen rural settlements, some of them very small, Baltit is now referred to as Karimabad. Its altitude above sea level lies between about 7,500 feet and 8,500 feet, and it covers an area of about 1.5 square miles. In 1990 its population was 4,600 people, who lived in 616 households (FIG. 4).

Most accounts of the history of Hunza with any authenticity pertain to the succession of rulers and their political struggles in the region. But the people of Karimabad are not related to the ruling family, and they have traditionally comprised four distinct tribal or clan communities. These communities claim ancient lineage, and there exist folk accounts of their history. In addition, there is a fifth community in the valley, the Beiricho, who once provided servants, handymen, smiths and musicians, and who were considered a service class. All the above communities inhabit and cultivate distinct parts of the Baltit Valley. The Fort at Baltit was built in the first half of the sixteenth century by Baltistani builders during the rule of the sham Ayasho II, but parts of it date from an earlier time.

Baltit’s walls came down during and after the British conquest. And with the cessation of hostilities with the state of Nagar, the traditional adversary across the river, the people of Baltit began building settlements in the agricultural valley below. In 1960 the President of Pakistan as well as the Aga Khan paid visits to Hunza and to its largely Isma’ili population. On the instructions of the Aga Khan, a number of people from the area became soldiers and were stationed in
different parts of Pakistan. When they returned, they brought new ideas, skills, consumer goods, and cash — thus laying the foundations for trade, commerce, and a cash economy. Such commercial forces led to closer links with the plains of Pakistan. Then, in the late sixties, a major new road was begun in the area as the result of a collaboration between Pakistan and China. Commissioned in 1974 and opened to foreign tourists in 1979, the Karakorum Highway opened the Northern Areas to Pakistan and to the rest of the world. It brought exposure and economic well-being. And it brought tourists.

In terms of politics, the people of the area acquired a modicum of basic rights in 1973 and 1974 when the government of Pakistan abolished the local principalities and extended Pakistan's legislative, administrative, and local-government framework to the region. This marked the beginning of considerable development activity in the region. Employment increased, new skills were introduced, and the institutional and bureaucratic culture of Pakistan became a part of everyday life.

The establishment of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in 1982 was a further watershed in the development of the region. The program relies on community initiative supported by nongovernmental financial incentives and technical help, and has become a paradigm for rural development. AKRSP operates primarily through the vehicle of the “village organization” — a representative and voluntary rural association which identifies development goals, provides physical labor, and helps villagers manage their projects and project finances with the aid of outside financial and technical support and training.

Since the inception of AKRSP, per-capita real income in the Northern Areas has doubled. Over 70 percent of the population are now members of AKRSP village organizations or women's organizations, and the level of group savings has equaled about 10 percent of the economic productivity of the area. Organized training has been given in animal husbandry, and basic preventative health and hygiene has been carried out extensively. Starting with rural roads, bridges, and water channels, “productive physical infrastructure” projects have increased in scope to include small hydropower stations, owned and operated by the communities. Educational levels have also risen. In Karimabad, school enrollment is nearly 100 percent of school-age children. In effect, the old subsistence economy of the region has been transformed within the space of just over a decade into a vibrant cash economy. Although this economy is still based predominantly on agriculture, it now owes much of its dynamism to international tourism.
CULTURE AND CONFLICT

The effect of all this change in less than a decade and a half has been disorienting for many people. In particular, with the increase in the tourist trade (and changes in cropping patterns as the consequence of access to markets in the plains), fairly large-scale occupational transformations have occurred. For example, some people have given up their ancestral vocation in agriculture, taking up new occupations related to tourism, in such areas as hotel ownership and management, trade, and transportation. A further significant segment of the population has left to seek employment in the larger Pakistani cities, or overseas.

Among major physical changes in the town today is a thriving bazaar, which has developed on the old path between the village of Baltit and the Mir's new (1925) palace. And, from a beginning of just eight rooms in 1974, local hotel accommodations increased to about 200 beds by 1993, located in a dozen-odd hotels, all built through local initiative. Most revenues generated by the hotels come from international tourism. Visitors include high-altitude mountaineers and trekkers (both individuals and groups) and an increasing amount of group tourism from the West and Japan. The exposure to the outside world brought by tourism has been heightened by recent access to satellite communication. This has been made possible by dish receivers and the availability of cheap hydroelectricity. The result has been sensory bombardment from Indian, Pakistani, European and American films, sports, news on the BBC and CNN, and the attendant loud television advertisements.

Finally, the introduction of value systems of extraneous origin — some of which are themselves the product of a century of colonial rule — has created new patterns of normative behavior in the collective psyche. Thus, the average Karimabadi now has his mind's eye set on owning a bungalow-villa such as those built by ruling segments of Pakistani society and the emerging middle classes in Karachi and Islamabad. The phenomenon no doubt owes much to the space-segregated emblem of power that the bungalow became before independence. That families are moving away from the space-segregated emblem of power that the bungalow became before independence. That families are moving away from the
digressions from down-country Pakistan — themselves typologically complex and packed with colonial antecedents. New technologies and new architectural paradigms (the desire to build in concrete blocks as opposed to stone and earth, to have large expanses of glazed windows, to use synthetic, weather-resistant paint, etc.) jostle with the need to feel at one with the family in a traditional surrounding and the need to conform to the form of things as tradition would have them be. This conflict is at the heart of the challenge to manage Karimabad's environmental assets.

To understand this process of cultural transformation further, it is important to examine the nature of the built environment — and, in particular, the Hunza house form and the interaction of its cognitive existence with acquired ways of life.
Evidence of what the past was like in Karimabad comes both in the form of visible material realities and behavioral manifestations in the living culture. From the mid-nineteenth century on, there also exist accounts of the region and its culture both from local people and from European travelers, politicians, colonial administrators, soldiers and scholars. These accounts differ in purpose, method and content. Fortunately or not, the more recent happen to be the most useful, being heuristically better, although they are somewhat more opaque in terms of cultural bias. Finally, by careful study of the present form of villages and their relationship with the fort and historical accounts, a reconstruction can be attempted.

Most of the agricultural terraces in Karimabad are centuries old. The retaining structures in the open fields imbue the countryside with a sense of meticulous order, signifying the great reverence held for arable, productive land (FIG.5). The range of agricultural skills practiced in Karimabad include the skills of building these retaining structures. These walls have been described by modern engineers as just stone heaped against the hillside. But, in reality, they involve an almost instinctive awareness on the part of their builders of the combined role of gravity, the shape of stones, and the qualities of local soil. The goal of the builders is both to keep the walls stable and functional, and to ensure they can be modified instantly. These farming terraces provide a large window into the past, comparable to English heaths and hedgerows in their antiquity.

Over the years, settlement morphology has been closely related to the form the land has been shaped into for agriculture. The reason is that terraced fields often lend themselves to be built upon when settlements grow and expand. This, combined with the traditional paths of movement of people and animals, ultimately determined the logic of settlement location, form, size, and manner of growth (FIG.6). The ancestral settlements in Karimabad, Khurukshal and Diramishal, conse-
quently, are located in the highest, least arable area of this landscape of terraces and orchards. A certain amount of “de-densification” appears to have occurred over the one hundred years since the walls in this area were demolished, chiefly as a result of the migration of households to open fields below. This appears to have been accompanied by a rebuilding and modification of the original house form, including the addition of verandahs. But the settlement morphology has largely been resistant to great change as a consequence of strong tenure relations and a remarkable persistence of the essentials of house form (FIG.7).

At the heart of this architectural persistence is a certain spatial and typological unit, a kind of basic space that forms the core of every traditional house. It is important that this house-space be considered in some detail. As a mnemonic tie to the past, as a representation of current social identity, and as a continued agent of influence on the configuration of today’s domestic architecture, it stands as a counterpoint to modernizing trends. In Burushaski, this central nuclear space is called a ha. It consists of a square room whose architectural and tectonic features appear simple (FIGS.8A, B). In reality, the room is a complex space used for the entire range of activities that take place in the life of parents, children, and often elderly members of the family. It caters to all the rhythms of domestic life, whether daily, seasonal, or over entire lifetimes.

In most cases the space measures about 18 feet on a side. The dimensions are based on a human module that is three times the span of the outstretched arms. The walls are made of massed rubble-stone masonry (or stone with mud-rubble infill in a caging of timber beams), and are on average a little over a foot thick. They are coated on the inside with a thick, porous mud and straw plaster. The principal spanning elements of the roof are a pair of wooden beams which, running down the length of the room, divide the room into three more or less equal parts. The beams are supported over this length at least twice on wooden columns. This means that the columns supporting the beams form a sort of irregular four-poster arrangement in the middle of the space. The two beams in turn support rafters about a foot and a half apart, except within the central square.

In this central space defined by the four columns the roof/ceiling construction comprises a remarkable architectural feature, a veritable leitmotif of the domestic architecture of the entire region of the Hindukush-Karakorum ranges. Known as the akhutu, it is formed of five or six layers of thick timber planks, with each successive layer farther off the floor and containing a square opening. Each opening is circumscribed by the previous one and turned at 45 degrees along its inner perimeter. The last of these squares is, in fact, the roof opening, the sagham, usually about 60 cm. on a side. In traditional houses not affected by recent trends, this central opening is the only source of light and the only exit for smoke. The thickness of the planks and the rotation of the squares (or rhombuses) impart a characteristic lantern-like quality to this section of the ceiling (FIG.9). The akhutu brings the vertical axis into dramatic contrast with the horizontal direction of movement within the house, and imbues the central space with a monumental quality that recalls mythic elements of the belief system of the people — mythic systems that could go back to a time
long before the advent of Islam.

Just to one side of an imaginary vertical line through the roof opening, and on the far side of the room along its longitudinal axis, is the fireplace. In the winter a slow fire smolders here continuously, and is used for cooking as well as heating. The cooking hearth is part of an oblong part of the floor, the nikarth, aligned along the central longitudinal axis of the room. The part of the nikarth closest to the door, the yorchi, is where shoes are taken off. The hearth is flanked by two platforms, gently raised above the floor by about eight inches. This step up is made possible by floor beams corresponding to the main beams above. The platforms that parallel the longitudinal axis on either side of the hearth are intended for living activities such as repose, sleep, sitting and working. But the platforms are differentiated. The one on the left as one enters the room is the oyum mun, or the greater mun. It is related to the conjugal function, and is the more important of the two in ritual and ceremonial respects. The platform on the right, in the direction of the slope of the hill, is the jot mun, used by the children and the rest of the family.17

In addition to their ceremonial functions, the platforms are also used for general activities. The oyum mun is used for honoring guests, for ceremonial meals, and for rites of passage. The word mun pertains to a platform in a more universal sense, and is an important conceptual category. It can refer to all kinds of small platforms, including rest platforms built into the hillside along steep mountain paths. But most of all it coincides with the notion of comfort in domestic space. Its primary association is with sitting down comfortably and warmly and in familial surroundings on rugs of goat and yak hair and soft cotton quilts, with legs and feet tucked under. The use of rugs and carpet furnishings and the mud plasters on the walls and the floor endow the dwelling space with a psychological warmth that is appropriate to a space to which people retreat from the harsh natural forces they face in this mountain environment.18

Not all the sections of the room surrounding the hearth are taken up by the platforms. The khunijigah is an area near the door, defined as an entrance vestibule by a storage element.19 The storage element acts as a partition, rising up three-quarters of the way to the ceiling between the door and the oyum mun. It is important because it changes the direction of entry by 90 degrees. As one leaves the vestibule to enter the room, one turns back 90 degrees to enter the room on alignment with the central axis. At the near end of this central axis, there is a recess in the wall, which usually has a built-in storage element on which people can sit. This space is reserved for people of lower caste — servants, certain kinds of craftsmen, musicians, etc. — who are mostly of the Domaki-speaking Beyricho people. Hence, this particular feature of the room/house is called the beyricho mun. It is the zone associated with the unclean, in opposition to the zone across the room that is associated with purity, cooking and value (where grain and household valuables are stored).

There are further special places in the ha. A space is assigned on either side of the cooking stove where the eldest and most honored male (left) and female (right) members of the family, or the community, are seated for rituals, or during ritual hospitality. The corners of the room, in particular those near the cooking area, contain built-in wooden storage chests in which grain, flour, and other provisions are kept. And beyond the wall at the far end of the room a storeroom is almost always located, called the chkish. Here are kept grain and other foods and metal trunks and other containers for the family's possessions. It is important that the door to the chkish be aligned on the central axis. This storage room, and the door to it, have mythic significance. They are associated with the blessings of good spirits and the stability with which a blessed family is endowed. The chkish in a house destroyed by natural calamities, or in a household torn by the death in succession of several family members, may be said to be infested with a demonic being.20 Thus, the progression along the central axis of the house is one from the world of mortals to the world of powerful beings, from the defiled to the pure, and from insecurity to security. The central axis also serves as a dividing line, differentiating the functions on the main platforms and storage areas on either side of the room.

In addition to the ha, a house in the traditional style may contain other rooms, such as more open summer-related spaces, storerooms, and rooms in the rear of the house for animals. Of all these ancillary spaces the most important for human use is the agon, the upper room. This space sits more or less directly above the ha, and it has a large central void, about 1.5 to 1.8 meters on a side (5 to 6 feet square), again defined by the four wooden posts. The size of this opening makes this space very airy, almost as if a series of verandahs had been wrapped around an open space. Indeed, this is more than an analogy, for the space is used for much the same purposes as a verandah, such as sunning in winter or getting outside on rainy days in the summer. In essence, these activities are related to the experience of coming out of the house and looking out over the slopes. In the tight house clusters of old...
Baltit, fortified against enemy attack, this activity was made internal to the house (although an open look-out verandah might also exist as the baldi, with access from the agon, or as a half-completed agon). It is noteworthy that as soon as houses in the area were built on gentler slopes on converted areas of agricultural terracing where there was space for larger building lots, the agon descended to ground level and was constructed as a more loosely configured verandah around a walled-in space.

In terms of settlement form, it is interesting how movement within the house forms a linear extension of movement in the overall settlement. Houses in the settlement are strung along their longitudinal axes, parallel to the contours of the hillside. They traditionally huddled together, built in rows on the narrowest terraces the steep slopes could be shaped into (FIG.10). The rear, or northern, sides of the houses were cut into the hill so as to protect interior spaces from the bitter winds that blow down the slopes in winter. The two ancient villages of Baltit — Khurukshal and Diramishal — provide excellent examples of such communal settlement form. They constitute a settlement form that is extremely compact, its edges clearly demarcated by walls, pathways, and cultivated fields (FIG.11). This form drapes over the slope and enhances the landscape with a unified layer of texture. The village clusters are further tied to one another by a monochromatic earthen color — the color of the local mud plaster, stones, and earthen roofs. The single color of architectural forms is effectively set off by the contrast created with green fields and deeper green apricot orchards, integrating the village visually with its natural setting.

In the “building, dwelling, thinking” process which perpetuates this distinctive habitat, architectural space and the many named things that constitute it are related to diurnal and seasonal cycles of life, and to patterns of language and social behavior. Memory, signification and connotation appear to be steeped in the distant past from which these spatial rules origi-
nated. The configuration of each house appears to be a recall of symbolic relationships found in the internal arrangement of the pre-Islamic cult architecture of the region (as exemplified by the architecture of the Kalash areas). One example of this relation is the location of the storeroom door at the exact axial end of the ha. This feature is consistent in all the houses of central Hunza. Such relationships extend to expressions of ritual power, as illustrated by the assemblage of has that constitute a typical floor plan in the Baltit Fort (FIG. 12).

The people of Hunza live with multiple cosmological frameworks. One involves shamanism, with strong beliefs in the existence of supernatural beings associated with the ethereal cold of the glaciers. Another is composed of the former order of life under the Mir (who traditionally exercised supernatural abilities) and the festivals and rites that made possible a functioning feudal society. A third involves Isma'ili Islam, with its beliefs, rituals, and mystic transcendentalism. Finally, there are the newer but less wondrous things of the modern world. The multiple frameworks make it possible to explore the ritual aspects of architecture at many levels.

One such ritual aspect is to be found in accounts of the Gini festival. This important harvest rite has not been held for several years. But it was one in which the entire community took part and the ruler or his heir-apparent played a prominent role. The rite was traditionally reenacted in each house, as old butter (a scarce and valuable commodity) was smeared on one particular pillar in the ha at the same time that barley ears were attached to the beams and rafters.

A better-examined ritual is the shamanistic bittan seance. It is still practiced extensively by the Shina- and Burushaski-speaking people of the Northern Areas. In fact, this ritual has become an important part of the standard tourist itinerary, an interesting point of overlap between local belief systems and modern life. The ritual also provides an opportunity to relate deeply embedded cosmological concepts with the archetype of the ha. The ritual involves seances conducted by specially endowed people (bittani) who communicate in trance-like states "with the supernatural world in order to bring the human world important information or render malevolent forces harmless through [their] intercession." Interesting comparisons have been made between the dynamics of this ritual — which involves the burning of juniper branches and the slaughter of a mountain goat of a particular ostensible color (the color blue) — and the cosmological symbolism vested in two geographical symbols: niril and kul. Niril refers to the pure and sacred realm of white snow that is surrounded by a belt of dark green conifers and other evergreens. Kul refers to "the demonic world of the valley floor and below." Niril is embodied in the blue/green color and its changing hues and intensities in the landscape and the sky. It occupies an intermediate position between white and the yellow/orange/red colors associated with kul. These colors are associated with the earth, the colors of autumn, and the blood of the slaughtered goat. In local belief, a hierarchical ordering of benevolent spir-

ritual beings, such as fairies and their supernatural male consorts, are to be found in the domain of niril. Their attire is blue, and their skins are white. Meanwhile, demonic and malevolent beings of the lower altitudes have yellow skins and red lips. Overall, the triad of colors (white, blue-green, and yellow-red) links the world of sky, mountain tops, and earth below. This movement from the pure to the defiled and impure, this relationship between the abode of spirits and of human beings, between good and evil, exists in a cosmology set up along a vertical axis.

One can also examine the interior of the ha in terms of this cosmological framework. As suggested above, there appears to be a correspondence between beliefs in the supernatural world of mountain fairies and malevolent spirits and the relationship between the ha and the chkish. One can speculate on the power this vast outer world exerts on the intimate spatial experience of the ha. The sagham, the sole celestial opening into the ha, marked by the monumental akhnu, appears to be of particular significance in this respect. Inside the ha the vertical cosmology can also be said to create a curious double effect. On the one hand, the space inside the house is comprised of polarities strung in a horizontal relationship along the main path of movement (front versus rear; entrance versus end-wall and storeroom; defiled versus clean). On the other, a vertical relationship also exists, activated by the polarity between hearth, fire and akhnu, and the sagham. This involves several symbolic contrasts: sky versus earth; blue (sky) versus red (fire); and cool and pure (mountain and snow) versus hot and evil (fire, childbirth, humanity and sin).

These linkages between architectural form, domestic life, and belief systems provide considerable insight into the comfort provided by customary behavior in traditional architectural space. Such relationships appear to be embedded in the daily life of the people of Karimabad and form part of an unconscious enactment of traditional values. House plans from two different kinds of site in Karimabad illustrate these relationships (FIGS. 13A, B). Figure 13A contains house plans from the

![Figure 12: Layout of joined has, typical of the organization of interior space in the Baltit Fort.](image-url)
two ancestral villages, where houses are either many generations old or have provided the footprints for the construction of new ones. Figure 13B illustrates houses as they have been built in newer villages, some of them very recently. The continuity of house form from old settlements to new ones is evident in the essential consistency of the location and “syntactic depth” of the house in relation to the formal arrangement of the house.

Such unconscious enactment of tradition is only brought into the open in the form of opposition to an array of new values associated with the desiderata of modern life: the desire to form unitary families, the pressures of new occupations, and the needs of new life-styles in new forms of habitat. In response to the choices presented by these new values, there has been a conscious attempt to retain the ha, whose value persists chiefly on the basis of its culturally determined physical use.

There exists a range of transformations in customary behavior brought on by affluence and the introduction of electricity, household gadgets, appliances, and televisions. These require further study. But the main point concerns the continuity through these transformations of customary behavior, and the relationship of these behaviors with artifacts like the muri or the role of fire. (now nearly housed in a steel stoves with a pipe leading through the roof and augmented by electric heaters). The akhutu and the sasham, by their very presence, still play a signifying role, even though the opening may be covered with a pyramidal glass skylight. And life is still led with tenacity on carpeted floors within the ha, even though Western furniture has been accommodated in other spaces of the house that have been adapted for this purpose, or that have been created specially for the purpose of maintaining a “modern” life-style in conformity with social mobility in middle-class Pakistan.

**TECTONICS AS CULTURAL CHOICE**

In contrast to the persistence of certain traditional plan forms, the conflict between tradition and modernization in Karimabad is felt acutely in choices that must be made between traditional building techniques and the new, “modern” techniques that are coming to prevail. The building resources available to the region from time immemorial — stone, wood and earth — have conditioned traditional architecture in interesting ways. In their combined organic role, these materials have dealt effectively with a number of technical requirements: resistance to earthquake-induced stresses; structural adequacy to deal with foundation requirements and underlying soils; adequate protection from the bitter cold of the winter; and cheap, easily maintainable surfaces that are not cold to touch or sit on in the interior, and which provide a barrier to water on the exterior.

Traditionally, the seismic hazard was dealt with through reliance on wood. The traditional technique is very simple: each wall was constructed as a wooden cage using fairly heavy timber sections. Horizontal members in this system were notched and doweled into place, providing a rigid yet flexible skeleton. This cage was then filled with massed stone rubble, which barely justifies being called masonry, laid dry or in mud mortar. The resulting wall was finished in a plaster up to three inches thick on the interior and with mud daub on the exterior.

In this system, the walls were tied to each other using the same notch-dowel technique as in construction of the wall cages. Beams and rafters were doweled into perimeter wall plates, and the large roof was supported on the walls and on the wooden columns within. The house, thus, had walls that, weighed down by the thick earth insulation of the roof, had considerable shear strength. Thanks to the structural rigidity given to it by the plate-like quality of the roof construction, the house offered considerable resistance to lateral destabilizing forces. The shock waves of an earthquake were dissipated by the rattle-and-shake effect of the loose joinery of the timber caging, while any tensile stresses created in the walls by the lifting effect of an earthquake were counteracted by the weight of the thick earth insulation, never less than a foot thick, on the roof (FIG.14).

The efficiency of this house type in withstanding the bitter cold of the Northern Areas was another result of the triad of materials used: timber, earth and stone. In this instance, a fourth element might be added to the building system — the
warm hillside against which and into which most traditional houses are constructed on steeper slopes. Together with the hillside, the heavy stone/timber walls, with their thick coats of plaster, provided a considerable amount of thermal mass—a heat sink that operated on a diurnal and seasonal basis. The effect was augmented by the house's lack of windows. Any further need for warmth in winter was customarily provided for by keeping animals in anterior rooms and in the spaces which, together with the soro (the vestibule immediately outside the entrance door to the ha and the khunjigah), constituted the elaborate entrance system.

For most of the twentieth century, the progressive depletion of timber has forced people in the region to build with less and less wood. Without any compensatory improvement in masonry techniques, the result has been a number of major earthquake disasters in the seismically more active areas of the region near the Hindukush. In Hunza the increasing difficulty of obtaining wood appears to have led to changes in the appearances of houses, particularly with regard to those parts of the house that do not have the spatial discipline of the ha and the agon. Since such ancillary rooms are often at the perimeter of the house, this has led to the new, more rounded forms of settlement architecture characteristic today. The older, more rectilinear character of older houses, however, is betrayed by the few surviving houses of richer families.

Another significant impact on construction techniques in the region has been provided by structures built according to the formal-sector institutional framework of the public works department, or by the experienced contractors who have built the larger hotels and have introduced proper bonded-stone and brick-masonry techniques to the region. This process actually began with the construction of the Mir’s palace in 1925 and with the building known as Nazuk Mahal in the thirties. Also during the early part of this century, the then Aga Khan (the Aga Khan III) enjoined upon the people to establish communal prayer/meeting halls (jama’at khanas). These new buildings also became transmitters of new stylistic paradigms, introducing bay windows, dressed ashlar masonry, and wooden joinery patterned after British colonial standards. These trends were the harbingers of today’s wildly adventurous choices.

Yet, while these first incidental buildings offered the first examples of alternative methods of construction, in recent years a more self-conscious approach has appeared to replacing traditional practices. This process of deliberate example-setting has been shown to be fallible elsewhere, particularly since the 1960s, in buildings designed as self-confident attempts at “technology transfer” in rapidly developing countries. This same tendency has been demonstrated to a certain extent in Hunza through the activities of government agencies, formal-sector building contractors who have constructed the one or two large hotels in Gilgit, and aid and development agencies which have assisted in the construction of self-help schools in the region. Through these channels, reinforced concrete, pre-fabricated reinforced concrete, hollow concrete block, and other modern materials and methods (and the rationale for their use) have been introduced to the Hunza area.

A major impetus to this process of technological change came with the construction of the Aga Khan Academy for Girls, designed by the French architect Didier Lefort, and inaugurated in 1986 (FIG.15). This building, whose construction was undertaken by the Aga Khan Housing Board for Pakistan, made a self-conscious effort to bring a contemporary architectural program into accord with traditional architectural motifs. Perhaps as the very result of responding to an architectural program unprecedented in the region, the effort produced only the semblance of the region’s traditional style. The building is, in fact, a studied effort at “making modern” the visual semantics of the local traditions. One can see this in the use of heavy concrete frames for the windows instead of the usual heavy timber frames, the presence of skylights, and an expression in the exterior massing that is vaguely reminiscent of the clustering of buildings in traditional settlement form. This building gave the language of concrete block and reinforced concrete a major endorsement. Yet, in attempting a visual reinterpretation of certain characteristics of traditional...
settlement form, it has failed to provide the thermal comfort of traditional architecture. And, overall, its sensitivity to the economics of climatic design is questionable. Its unnecessarily long building perimeter results in unwarranted heat loss through the exposed concrete block walls. And the unplastered interiors, the cold concrete and stone floors, and the building's many skylights contribute further to heat loss and psychological discomfort. In fact, the building is at times almost uninhabitable during the "Great Cold" of Hunza.

On a larger scale, the shortcomings of formal-sector institutions such as the public works department have also contributed to the inadequate siting and design of buildings, such as the boys' school at the Polo Ground in Karimabad. The cultural, climatic and technological inappropriateness of many other buildings in the region (conceived by such outsiders as the architects and engineers of the local self-help and government-sponsored schools, the regional colleges, dispensaries and hospitals, etc.) are also symptomatic of the mismatch between external perceptions of need and the local culture, with all its complexities. For example, local assent and cooperation in executing these ill-conceived designs is too often mistaken for a congruity of aims and results. Often, this mismatch is selective, and is eclipsed by a putative claim of a project to be a solution to a particular set of problems. Thus, an overt concern for seismic resistance in a building's structure hides an adulation for reinforced concrete as the ultimate architectural material — whether in the form of masonry block, poured-in-place forms, or prefabricated elements. Merely to work in concrete, the principal metaphor in modern architecture's ideological spectrum, becomes the overriding concern (FIG.16).

And there are other ramifications to this inability on the part of outside professionals to comprehend in any meaningful depth the intricacies of architecture-as-culture in such a dynamic social and economic environment. By the sheer power of their origins, new buildings designed by foreign experts become powerful icons of "progress." And they represent an ever-greater level of outside control over local affairs, which is bewildering to the local people and embodies a force against which they are increasingly powerless. Yet, such architectural examples are far removed from the economic, cultural and logistical realities of local small-scale processes, and locally, there is little recourse to the formal-sector prerogatives that buildings such as the Girls' Academy represent. As a consequence, the informal sector — that consisting of petty contractors and masons of dubious training — is called upon to fill the vacuum in an environment unregulated by professional or technical standards. Thus, buildings being constructed by ordinary people today in the Northern Areas (i.e., in the private, small-scale sector) in general embody neither the validity of historically evolved solutions, nor the security of a modern process of architectural and structural design. They are structurally inadequate and almost completely uninsulated — products of insufficient technical knowledge and social inadequacies such as poverty, lack of formal training, and a construction sector devoid of institutional oversight.

FIGURE 16. Use of concrete construction in an otherwise traditional setting.

BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE: THE PROFESSIONAL AS AN EXTERNAL AGENT OF CHANGE

At the level of the physical environment, then, the present scenario in Karimabad is one of disorder, dishevelment, and cultural fragmentation. There is both an absence of a well-regulated building trade and a paucity of technologies and architectural solutions that might reconcile traditional continuities with powerful modernizing forces. Most responses to this situation arise at the individual level, where the technical and aesthetic choices of the owner meet those of employed masons and workmen. The result is a debasement of taste that stands in sharp contrast to the traditional practices which — even if folk and vernacular — carried the stamp of validity of the traditional skills provided by the homeowner/builder. The pre-
sent vulgarization of taste is expressed on the exterior of houses in such forms as glass fronts for shops, crudely fabricated roll-down shutters made of thin sheet-steel slats, crude "pop" versions of the windows of down-country houses, and loud synthetic paint. The inner structure of the houses is equally inadequate: walls are made of concrete blocks that offer little resistance to heat transfer; thin, external, cement-based renderings and interior plasters have replaced thick traditional plasters; and heavily pitted and honeycombed reinforced concrete slabs push walls down on unstable and sliding foundations.

Add the problem of land-use control, created when individualistic owners insist on building new houses all over the countryside, and the result is a potentially ominous threat to the environment as a resource base for tourism.

On the other hand, what makes Hunza different and rather special is the presence of traditional cultural behavior and traditional ways of thinking about buildings, which have long been given up in most other Third World contexts. Behind the *kitsch* described above, one finds that recourse to traditional spatial and functional schemes is debated just as vociferously as the decision to place large or small windows in a building. This continuing engagement with tradition has made its way into house plans that are often drawn up on the scene by architectural technicians after a process of negotiation with an owner (FIG.17). Although these early attempts at technical assistance were carried out with no great depth of understanding of traditional architecture, they reflected the new social mobility in Karimabad fairly accurately. They were also emblematic of the precarious balance that tradition must maintain in its new juxtaposition with alien spatial and social schemas.

A further aspect of the problem is that the spatial and functional configuration of domestic architecture is embedded in a larger scenario, which encompasses the management of the overall built environment in Hunza. Some such planning issues include the effects of unplanned government investments, the absence of basic civic and public health amenities, and the lack of an institutional framework for ensuring land-use control. In addition, a major issue, and one that impinges heavily on questions of traditional continuities in creating designs for modern life, is the location of housing. In terms of spatial spread and visibility, housing is today the key element affecting the future orderliness and appearance of Karimabad. The growth of housing has so far progressed on an ad hoc basis, with individual owners of farming terraces choosing to build on their land sporadically, in both space and time — and in the process producing an environmental threat. Such a trend in housing production has been driven by factors of social and economic mobility, the breakdown of the traditional extended family, and the locational choices presented by the absence of any land use control mechanism. The local housing market is also being driven by emigrants from Hunza, who return to the area after years of employment in large Pakistani cities, and other people who wish to build second or vacation homes in the area.

The question of the uncontrolled spread of houses over the landscape underlies one of the main aims of the planning process in Karimabad — to make more explicit and to rationalize the economic relationship between tourism and the conservation of environmental and cultural assets. As an integral part of the overall scenic quality of the region, the agricultural landscape attracts tourism. Yet the conservation of agricultural land now conflicts with local perceptions of progress, which involve the devaluation of agriculture as an occupation, and which open the use of agricultural land to nonagricultural purposes. Adequate land-use control mechanisms impinge heavily on the question of land rights — itself undergoing change and transformation. Therefore, the planning process necessitates the assent of all concerned through consensus, representation, and voluntary participation. Appropriate planning responses in the region can only be created when planners achieve a sensitivity to the small-scale, informal processes which engender needs, and through which felt needs are answered by the community. Institutions that must be created, even at the technical level, therefore, must be scaled down to match the levels at which these needs are felt.

So far the conceptual response to these problems has been to set up a community-based planning process in Karimabad that relies on a local-level technical support institution, the Karimabad Planning Support Service (KPSS). This service is working in parallel with a representative institution, the Karimabad Town Management Society, which may form the beginning of urban self-governance. It is encouraging that these institutions have adapted to the changing needs of the community. For example, technical support has changed from the mundane level of providing house plans to home builders, to supporting planning efforts involving conceptualizations of the future structure of the entire town. Such conceptualizations include frameworks for determining future land use and locating new roads and infrastructure. They are based on iden-
tifying what the community should hold valuable in environmental and cultural terms. Some of the conceptualizations have been quickly realized as practical projects: a new road network that has helped resolve the traffic pressures in the old settlements; the first phase of a water supply and sanitation infrastructure project involving the more dynamic, tourist-oriented half of the town; pilot infrastructure and rehabilitation projects meant to demonstrate the livability of the old historic settlements; and pilot conservation projects of individual buildings of historic value or architectural merit. Finally, something that is acquiring a major profile among all these activities is the idea of planned, collectively developed, and well-serviced settlements — either new ones, or extensions of old ones — to alleviate housing pressures.7

Once the matter of the location of new housing developments is dealt with in concordance with larger land-use requirements, the major concern of KPSS and the Town Management Society will be the issue of a settlement form that will satisfy criteria of environmental, social, cultural, technical, and architectural appropriateness. The urgency of this issue becomes more acute each day. For almost a hundred years the people of Karimabad adapted to change in a quiet and sensitive way. As recently as five years ago houses continued a gradual and barely perceptible adaptation of the archetypal formal/spatial configuration that supported the continuation of the living tradition (refer to Figs. 13A, B). Yet in the last three or four years this state of affairs has changed radically, and new houses are now so much further evolved toward modern types that one is hesitant to claim they still incorporate the former processes of continuity.

Several indicators of this acceleration of disjuncture are evident. The first is the siting of new houses with open space all around them. This is not really a phenomenon completely alien to the Northern Areas; traditional houses were also built independently of settlement clusters in certain locations. However, today in Karimabad this trend has become equated with the spatial setting of the colonial bungalow and what this form became in the hands of the dominant classes in Pakistan during the post-independence period (Fig. 18). The second indicator of accelerating disjuncture has been the introduction of functionally differentiated spaces in the house. Where many functions were once performed together in the ha, these are now meted out to kitchens, bedrooms, guest reception rooms, etc. Such spatial differentiation is deployed in imported typological variations that allow an increased degree of gender separation in domestic space — a requirement necessitated by norms now prevailing in most parts of Pakistan (Fig. 19). But the ha is still there, nestled among the other spaces as a major element. Here it continues to act as the family’s inner sanctuary, the place to which the family may retire in the middle of the winter, where most serious family gatherings are still held, and where activities such as television watching are performed. And some typological elements of the traditional ha have also been adamantly persistent in their use, elements such as the akhun and the mun, the sleeping platform. Finally, as has been discussed previously, a third indicator of disjuncture is the proliferation of technological alternatives that are now available, with their own connections to the milieu from which they originate — the technological level of the informal sector of Pakistani cities.

The above situation, combining disjuncture with continuity, persistence with change, presents particular challenges when dealing with settlement form. Conflicts must be resolved between value perceptions (such as that surrounding progress and modernity), decisions based on short-term economic considerations, and longer-term concern for the sustainable development of those resources on which tourism might feed (old villages, historic buildings, vegetation, and landscape). But, while there is a consensus in Karimabad about the economic advantages of tourism, sensitivity is increasing to the presence of outside visitors to settlements that have no place for them. Therefore, when cultural, aesthetic and landscape elements must be preserved and looked after (necessitating the introduction of values which are of no great vintage even in the West), this need not necessarily be justified as a way of promoting tourism. Consensus can also be forged around the need to maintain psycho-social stability and preserve a sense of identity and pride.

In the case of housing, the collective consensus is apt to be more problematic, since each homeowner or would-be builder now has highly individualistic aspirations. However, a rather painstaking process of suggesting, demonstrating, raising awareness, and arguing may result in the community being persuaded as to the appropriateness of locating new housing where it will be compatible with land-use objectives — and with the objective of conserving the most valuable features of the landscape. Although this impinges on hallowed ownership and user rights pertaining to farming land and its potential as a future building site, planning consensus can take a step
backward to the concept of residential clusters (FIGS. 20A, B).

The local people understand this concept well, since it is part of a not-yet-forgotten tradition. And the typological transformation of the community can be better understood if each component of the traditional typology is discussed, analyzed, and externalized in relation to current aspirations. In this effort, the concern must be as much for progress as the mere preservation of traditional form. The yearning for modernity can be made to coexist with appropriate technology, and with respect for traditional architectural world views. And the concepts generated by these discussions can create anticipation that neighborhood coherence and cohesion will be maintained in newer settlements, that tourists will not invade the privacy of neighborhoods, and that everyone will be provided with acceptable architectural forms and basic urban amenities at prices they can afford.

Underlying this effort must be a living relationship between traditional continuities, the imperative of change, and the role of the outside agent of guided change. This role is fundamentally different from that of the researcher, the social scientist, or the anthropologist. It is the role of the fieldworker extending a range of solutions, conceived while working in the field, to resolve the complex knot of historical disjunction and cultural continuity. The aim should not be the transference of interpreted information from a non-Western culture to Western laboratories, classrooms, and bookshelves. Rather, it is the active interpretation and reapplication of what has been interpreted together by the fieldworker and the subject community, the identification and resolution of conflict between sustainability and progress, between continuity and what only appears to disrupt it.

But no matter how small-scale, how local, and how much at one with the community a technical professional gets, there is no escape from the subject/object duality. The task is then to achieve the highest state of what Clifford Geertz calls "experience near." This involves diluting the subject/object dichoto-
my, moving closer to an “inter-subjective” state of affairs, and operating in a manner that permits the transfer of changing orders of values to the professional side of the relationship. This must additionally encompass the passing along of experience from the engaged professional to other colleagues, architects and designers who might be called upon to contribute further normative inputs. Various methods may be used to gain this intimate insight to the cultural dimensions of a problem. Although typological classification is useful, particularly if prepared by the designers themselves (as a sort of practical lesson in the anatomy of a culture), the actual physical experience of living in a culture is indispensable. This must include first-hand apprehension of the life processes that are the non-material and collective holders of typological information, as much as it must include first-hand experience with the typological processes themselves. The process of establishing a dialogue with a community, identifying community leaders and “activists,” and engaging in serious discussions on community issues is another method of achieving some degree of “experience near.” Yet another way to achieve this empathic link is to undertake demonstration projects that provide the community with stark exposure to the “realness” of the professional undertaking (FIG. 21).

SUBJECTIVITIES IN CONFLICT

As it happens, most debates in regard to this issue of tradition and change are held in a relativistic academic alienation outside the conditions of change. Here, they are far removed from the actual economic, political, territorial and psychological conditions of social behavior, in which small-scale cultural conflicts occur, and out of which the fine-grain negotiations (including small-scale inventions) take place that over time add up to the altered cultural faces of entire peoples and nations. As long as this arena of conflict is not understood by means of participation in the small-scale circumstance of change, it is perhaps unrealistic to talk about having an epistemological grasp of the changing nature of a cultural context. This may be particularly true in regard to non-Western societies under foreign domination — a reality always most manifest to those who belong to those societies in conditions of critical change.

When change is rampant and most intense, the condition of loss of semantic content from a culture is most visible — and painful. However, tradition, as it was known before the change, is considered a forgettable condition only when the tide of change has already occurred, when the more important choices between the culture of one’s forefathers and the new norms have been (consciously or unconsciously) made, and when the trauma has healed and the resulting cultural debris has settled down into new, commonly accepted forms. The conscious choices that are made are the dialectic result of two opposite ways of observing change: the one as a participating agent of change, usually on behalf of the dominant forces in the relationship; the other adopted when someone in the affected society is reacting to change.1 It is the latter kind of perceptions about change that are rarely recorded. But when they are written down, on one level they act as a record of change, while on another, plaintive, level they serve as the defiant vehicles for the persistence of cultural forms and cultural memories.

What is happening in Karimabad is an anticipatory stage of the above phenomenon — a stage at which local society is being enabled to seize the moment of cultural loss. The internal apprehension of change is fundamentally different from the anteriority that is inherent in current scholarly discourse. It raises again the basic issue in anthropology and sociology — whether the inquirer is able to leap across an epistemological gap and become able to think, act and make, if not like the “native,” then at least “from the native’s point of view.” However, in Clifford Geertz’s essay of the above title, the major issue really comes down to the sensitivity with which field researchers wield their knowledge-gathering skills. The impossibility of being able to leap totally across the epistemological divide is taken for granted.14

The issue described above really arises prior to consideration of the nature of these sciences, for it has to do with the fundamental fact of who the inquirer is. For, if an inquirer belongs to the dominating side, observing and learning about something that is looked upon and gazed at, the subjectivity of the inquirer is defined in its own right, excluded from the matter under study. If the matter under study happens to be a society, then the possibility of that society as an independent subject is rendered irrelevant. This problem becomes all the more acute if the inquirer also happens to wield the wand of the designer or planner. Not being part of the world of “local knowledge,” an interventionist point of view and approach to the task at hand is taken all too readily. The recognition of tradition as a continuous, if transforming, process can lessen this readiness to act, and it can allow tradition to be engaged as an active subjectivity. This recognition represents the approach being followed in Karimabad. It recognizes dichotomies, but

FIGURE 21. Public design session in Karimabad.
eschews otherness.

It is not only the global, North-South, set of relationships that I speak of when I suggest the existence of dichotomies. Almost every society has circles within circles of dominance and dependence. There is a continuum of dominance and dependence starting from the most powerful in this world and extending to the least powerful—a phenomenon that is obvious despite the complexities of such relationships. And so in this sense it is pointless to talk of crude global dichotomies and polarities. But the ability of those (no matter where they are placed in that continuum) who posit knowledge about another culture to affect that culture in ways coming from their subjectivity is always at odds with where that culture in its own subjectivity might want to go.

The above point comes across powerfully when you catch a tradition in that crisis situation, when it is in the throes of violent change, and when field conditions prevail that make it feasible for a professional worker to bring his or her own subjectivity into a more sensitive, if not an equal, relationship with the subjectivity of the people with whom he or she is working.

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4. The Western Himalayan range, on the southeast of the Karakorums, and parts of the Hindukush mountains on their west, defining the Afghan border, receive more rains. Their climate might be characterized as sub-Alpine temperate, with a higher incidence of evergreen forests and rain-fed verdure.
5. A recent account is to be found in A.H. Dani, History of Northern Areas of Pakistan (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1989), and is acknowledged accordingly at the relevant places in the text. Dani has recounted the founding story of the present family of rulers or Mirs. The term tham (variously also spelled tham or thoomb) also refers to the local ruler. Dani bases his history on the several known accounts of the history of Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar. These are as follows: Shah Rais Khan, Taurarikhi-riasat hai-i Nagar-o-Hunza, riasat-i-khandaan-i-maghlot, riasat-i-nagar, aur hukmaraan-i-khandaan-i-aiush, riasat-i-Hunza (ms.); Mir Nazim Khan, Tarikh-i-Hunza (ms., translated into Persian and published by Qudratullah Beg as Tarikh-i-abad-i-Aiq Riasat-i-Hunza, Rawalpindi, 1962); and J. Frembgen, “Ethnographical Field Research on the history and culture of Nager: some Preliminary remarks on the process of Settlement,” Journal of Central Asia, Vol. VIII No.2. According to Dani, some time in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Trakhan raja Malik Shah II (1422-1449) of Gilgit decided to name his two warring grandsons, Maghlot and Girik, rulers of Nagar and Hunza, dividing these two territories among them and thus creating the independent states of Hunza and Nagar. There began immediately a condition of enmity between the two states that has continued up to the present. It resulted in political conspiracy and the murders and kidnapping of rulers, who sought refuge from time to time in the neighboring principalties. In the centuries after Maghlot and Girik, both states embraced Islam, but the deep gorge of the Hunza River continued to reinforce age-old oppositions: Nagar converting to the Shi’ism that had found strongholds in neighboring Baltistan, and Hunza embracing the Isma’ili faith at the hands of preachers from Badakhshan.
6. Namely, the Diramiting, the Khurukuz, the Baratling, and the Btong.
7. A recurring theme in the origin myths of the tribes (or sub-tribes) of the region, also found in the folklore associated with the Diramiting tribe in Balit, is the slaying of all members of a
“proto-tribe” and the survival, or rebirth, of the tribe through the happenstance of a male born later to a surviving pregnant woman.

8. Ayasho, which means “from the heavens,” is the name associated with the early rulers of Hunza after Girkis. Girkis was succeeded by his daughter Nur Bibi, and there exists more than one account of the birth of a son — of the first Ayasho — to her. The fort was built by builders and craftsmen sent by the ruler of Baltistan whose daughter the shaw had married. The troubled early years of the Ayasho ruling family of Hunza make it difficult to give a date other than that inscribed on a door lintel in the watchtower in the Altit Fort, which is said to have been built at about the same time. The inscription is considerably weathered and, according to Professor A.H. Dani, can be read either as 599 AH/1593 AD or 589 AH/1581 AD.

9. As it appears from investigations associated with the conservation work being carried out in the Baltit Fort.


12. Ibid.


15. In certain cases these terraces may have been converted to orchards. This is visible in orchards where old, untended retaining walls still remain. The time elapsed since the conversion from terraced fields to orchards can be told by the age of the apricot trees, which in some cases bear fruit for well over a hundred years.


17. Although what follows is the description of a ha in Hunza, comparison of our study in Hunza with ethnographic work done by others in Nuristan, Kalash and Tadjikistan, etc., reveals the striking similarity of the basic and essential constituent elements of this house-space with the architecture of the larger cultural region. This spatial unit is known as the amā in Nuristan and the kho-khātan in Northern Chitral. See P. Bucherer-Dietschi, ed., Bauern und Wäimen am Hindukusch (Liezal, 1988); L. Edelberg, Nuristani Buildings (Aarhus: Jysk arkologisk selskab, 1984); and D.W. Illi, Das Hindukusch-Haus: Zum Symbolischen Prinzip der Sonderstellung von Raumnütze und Raumhintergrund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991). Nuristan and Kalash are sub-regions occupied by the Kalash culture, which straddles over the Afghanistan/Pakistan border in the eastern Hindukush.


19. These platforms have often been explained in terms of gender differences, i.e., the opumun as a male-specific domain and the jutum as a female-specific domain. This is not borne out by the names of the platforms: or (senior persons, adults) and mun (a raised place), and similarly jut, the Burushaski word for children. Since this is a single space we are talking about, gender separation would have to be at most in terms of the activities carried out by women (such as cooking) as opposed to men. In any case in the domestic space the intergender roles are mutually complementary and are defined by a power relationship of considerable equilibrium.

20. Lorimer, Language Hunting in the Karakoram.

21. Edelberg and others have reported that in some Nuristani houses there are no doors to enter the lower rooms of the house. Instead, these are accessed by means of trap doors in the floor and ladders made by cutting notches in logs of wood. In Hunza, most houses are entered through doors, with the use of ladders restricted for gaining access to upper or lower floors once the house has been entered.

22. This was revealed in preliminary interviews held by the family of the late Ghulam Rasul, whose house was selected as a pilot project to demonstrate renewal, rehabilitation and adaptation to modern amenities in the summer of 1993.

23. In the Gipal, the Northern part of Hunza, and in western valleys like Ishkoman, the door moves to either side of the axis. In the Kalasha cult houses/temples there are evidently also strong relationships between the inner cult sanctuary and the space outside of it — either a roof terrace or a verandah. In houses in the Kalash areas, as well as in houses in valleys from Ishkoman to Hunza, the wall in front of the entrance (or on the other side of the main axis that runs through the room) is the wall behind which food and most valuable things are stored. Similarly, in the Kalasha djektash han, or the cult house of the deity djektash, there is a front-rear axial relationship between the wall associated with the cult figure (which happens to be the wall opposite the entrance) and the entrance, with the hearth and the four columns surrounding it on the axis connecting the two.

24. Schomberg, Between the Oxus and the Indus.


27. K. Jettmar, Die Religionen des Hindukusch (Stuttgart: 1975), as cited by Nayyar, who refers to Jettmar’s earlier work establishing this vertical cosmology in the neighboring Shina regions.


29. Owing to the greater frequency of earthquakes, the use of timber in the Hindukush zone is far more intense than in the Karakorum area. There is nevertheless a consistency in the essential timber techniques that all architecture in the Northern Areas employ.
30. These institutions were set up in 1992 and 1993, respectively, after the recommendations of Reza H. Ali and Arif Hasan, consultants to the Aga Khan Culture Service, Pakistan.


32. The sustainable use of glass in passive heating, the insulation of walls built with modern materials replacing now-scarce timber, waterproofing leeward walls, etc.

33. Thus, in mid-nineteenth-century Lucknow, Abdul Halim Sharar recorded, as of some import to concerns of civilized life, the ways in which the elite were changing their life-styles.


All photos are by the author.