

The Dance of Transculturation

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The essay is an autoethnographic account of my relationship with Abdul Qayum, a long-time friend from Gilgit, northern Pakistan. The story conveys some of the many ways Qayum constitutes himself as a transcultural subject, as well as my own intimate involvement in his process of self-constitution. I present the narrative as a way to refute notions of “civilization identity” and the so-called “clash of civilizations,” which in the present context continue to nourish one-dimensional geographical imaginations and offer stereotyped portrayals of Islamic subjects and cultural forms.

These are tense times, but it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance, and universal principles of justice and injustice, than to wander off in search of vast abstractions that may give momentary satisfaction but little self-knowledge or informed analysis. “The Clash of Civilizations” thesis is a gimmick like “The War of the Worlds,” better for reinforcing defensive self-pride than for critical understanding of the bewildering interdependence of our time (Said, 1991, 13).

As I sit down to write this essay, I’m thinking of this morning’s phone conversation with our friend Abdul Qayum. He called to say that some money Nancy and I sent him the other day had arrived. This was the first time we used Western Union to wire money to Qayum, so I was relieved to hear he had received it without difficulty. Our usual method has been to wire funds bank-to-bank, but Canadian banks’ increasing suspicion of transfers to Pakistan makes the process slower and more irritating each time; happily, we found Western Union to be cheaper, faster and less aggravating at both ends of the transaction. More options would be available if Qayum lived down-country, but Gilgit, his hometown and capital city of Pakistan’s peripheral Gilgit-Baltistan province, is poorly-equipped with transnational banking and telecommunications infrastructure; even Western Union is a novel resource, and I wasn’t sure of its reliability.

We have been sending small sums to Qayum now and then for about 20 years, initially to help him purchase a plot of land on the outskirts of Gilgit where he has since built a small guesthouse, more recently to help with household expenses or support some of the social and spiritual care work he does. As is often the case, it was the latter that animated Qayum’s conversation this morning. He filled me in on recent repairs to a small, ancient, non-sectarian

shrine he revived and maintains in the Gilgit bazaar, updated me on his ongoing efforts to care for some of Gilgit's stray animals and homeless "deaf and dumb" people, and outlined a new scheme to distribute free used clothing in front of his moribund handicraft shop in the city centre. Together with tending his garden and shrine, and collecting scraps of meat and bread to feed feral animals, Qayum's efforts to succor people abandoned by society but "touched by God" occupy most of his time, especially now that international tourism has all but disappeared from Gilgit and neither his shop nor guesthouse have many paying customers. Many such outcasts subsist in Gilgit's bazaar: elderly, widowed, physically or mentally infirm, driven to town from the surrounding villages by poverty, dispossession, family circumstance, disaster, and Development's relentless effort to "free" individuals from the constraints and protections of non-capitalist social relations. Although his current income is miniscule, Qayum does his best to feed, clothe and bathe some of the worst-off of these people, to keep them company and acknowledge their subjecthood.

Today he told me about an elderly man who arrived at his doorstep a day ago, having found his way to Gilgit from a rural district some 150 kilometres away. He was homeless, friendless, and suffering untended from a badly broken leg. Qayum managed to admit him to hospital, and convinced medical staff to share with Qayum the cost of medicine and food for the duration of his stay. For the next couple of weeks, Qayum's daily routine will involve a stop at the hospital to feed and bathe the patient. He related this story in detail, I think to stress that the money we sent would allow him to aid this man and others like him (as well as to meet his own household expenses), thereby enfolded me as an enabler of his own "service," and from his perspective gaining us both God's blessings. I know from previous conversations that Qayum wants me to understand our remittances as part of an ongoing spiritual partnership: simultaneously a source of personal income and a collaborative form of worship. I don't share his interpretation's specifically spiritual calculus, but I'm reassured by its assertion of reciprocity: in this way as in others we are *each other's* projects.

We are each other's projects – Qayum in Gilgit, Pakistan, and me in St. Catharines, Canada. I claim this as simultaneously an interpersonal accomplishment, a theoretical assertion about the relational constitution of subjectivity, and a euphemism for the asymmetrically-constituted global circuits of knowledge and power that shape our connections. Some of the latter are evident in my vignette: for instance, in my characterization of Gilgit as a place of poverty and need, in the shadow cast by the War on Terror over international tourism and transnational remittances, in the Orientalist figure of the spiritual Asiatic, in the steady trickle of Development's agrarian cast-offs into Gilgit, and in the philanthropic Westerners at the centre of the narrative, whose Canadian dollars are ridiculously and unjustly potent when converted to rupees and circulated through Gilgit's informal economy. So don't get me

wrong; Qayum and I have not *transcended* any of the discourses or facts on the ground that reproduce the “flexible positional superiority” of an Orientalist West (Said, 1978, 7); in fact our relationship is constituted by them. Rather, our modest interpersonal accomplishment has been to shape a space of care, commitment and unstable reciprocity within those global currents. It is in this space – and similar spaces of mutual projecthood that other Pakistani friends have generously forged with me – that I find affective nourishment for my theoretical rejection of the “clash of civilizations” thesis and its avatars (Huntington, 1997).

What follows is a multi-layered *autoethnography*, by which I mean it is the contingent product of a self-conscious effort on Qayum’s part to represent himself to me, and on my part to represent my relationship with him to you (see Pratt, 1992; Butz & Besio, 2009). Both links in this representational chain involve situated, self-interested identity work: effort on both our parts narratively to constitute ourselves for ourselves and for an audience of one-another. In the process, we are each engaged in the transcultural production of transcultural identity – across selves, ethnicities, linguistic traditions, continents, and positionings in modernity’s globalized flows. In our intimate autoethnographic dance we use each other as positive identity resources, and as we do so, we give the lie to geographical imaginations that map the world in terms of unnatural, unbreachable divisions, including those between Occident and Orient, Christendom and Islam. There is nothing unique in this. We are all familiar with theorisations of hybridity, syncretism, mestizo logic, transculturation, Orientalism, cultural imperialism, and so on, which from various angles demonstrate the empirical falsity and theoretical impossibility of such natural and immutable divisions, and show in particular how the so-called “liberal West” and “Islamic world” are discursively and materially co-constituted in a field of asymmetrical relations. But as I hinted above, there can be a difference between theoretical and affective appreciation. My relationship with Qayum has given me the latter, and in the process has made me a more thoughtful researcher and a more appreciative student of Pakistan. That is why I’m telling his story.¹

Neither Qayum nor I recall what year we met. It was either 1986 or 1988, at his shop on Airport Road, in mid-August, when I was passing through Gilgit on my way back to Canada from a research season in a village farther north. At that time Qayum rented a small three-sided shop with a roll-down metal door, from which he sold carpets, handicrafts, jewellery, and cold drinks. I remember stopping at the shop for a Fanta with another graduate student, and being welcomed by its cheerful proprietor, who spoke English, had a stock of well-rehearsed tales, and was eager for conversation. The three of us spent most of our afternoon telling stories, exchanging biographies, laughing, and drinking sweet, golden, cardamom-flavoured tea.

At that first meeting I learned that Qayum was born in Gilgit around 1950, and was raised there, but spent nine years in Europe, mainly Spain, in the 1970s and early 1980s, selling silver jewelry on the street and living what he called “the hippy life.” This is where he had learned his quirky, expressive English, and gained fluency in Spanish. He showed us an album of pictures, many of which portrayed him on Ibiza’s beaches or Barcelona’s streets, sometimes behind a table selling his wares, often with an arm around a European girlfriend. These were interspersed with group shots of young adults living it up at house parties or discos. He had a story for every picture, and he told these gleefully, giggling at the photos as if he could hardly believe they portrayed his own past. My predictable Orientalist fear of being conned by Pakistani shopkeepers made me wary that Qayum’s enthusiastic conversation was inveigling me into an expensive purchase – after all we were sitting in a handicraft shop catering to Western travelers – but the sales pitch never came. I got my first sense, since amply substantiated, that for Qayum a sale is secondary to the pleasure of recounting his European memories and connecting with foreigners.

I visited the shop again the following days and whenever I passed through Gilgit on subsequent graduate research trips. It became my refuge in the noise, dust and commerce of the bazaar: a place where I could drop purchases, rest my legs, have a cup of tea, and pass the time in pleasant conversation. I introduced Qayum to my partner Nancy in 1989, and together we heard more detailed European stories, but learned little about his childhood, present life in Gilgit, or the circumstances that led him to Europe in the first place. I remember probing him for these details, but he quickly refocused conversation on his experiences *in* the West. Although I was delighted with Qayum’s European tales, their lack of context unsettled me. I experienced them as disturbingly incongruous, both in the material social space of Gilgit and in my own imaginative geographies. I was just getting used to the guilty privilege of my (newfound) global mobility relative to the people whose lives I studied, and to encounter a Gilgiti shopkeeper who had traversed Europe so thoroughly and flamboyantly was simultaneously fascinating, disconcerting, and deflating to my own self-image. Part of the reason for this mix of emotions, I now realize, was that Qayum’s self-narrative unsettled the lazy epistemology of “native authenticity” that had shaped my research methodology and framed my encounters with northern Pakistan to that point (and which, by the way, underpins the fantasies of immutable otherness that sustain ontologies of civilizational clash; see Spivak, 1999; Butz & MacDonald, 2001)

In 1995 Nancy and I returned to Pakistan for the first time since 1989, and established ourselves in Gilgit for a six-month stay, during which our friendship with Qayum intensified (see Figure 1). Our three-year-old daughter Nina immediately adored him, and he had three small children of

his own by this time, so the activity space of our relationship expanded from the bazaar to include his home and Gilgit's residential spaces more broadly. We also began to learn more about the longer trajectory of Qayum's life. He was born and raised in Kashrote, a densely populated Sunni neighbourhood in the heart of Gilgit's old town. Kashrote was settled by Kashmiris involved in the Kashmiri Dogra occupation and administration of the region between 1846 and 1947, and urban Gilgit developed around it, incorporating nearby Shia villages and agricultural lands as it grew. Qayum's mother's family is descended from these Kashmiri settlers and the house he was raised in and now owns was built for his parents by his maternal grandfather. Qayum's father was a Pathan – also Sunni – who migrated to Gilgit from Dir (in present-day Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province) with his mother and brother when he was young. He earned his living as a peddler, traveling by foot to sell inexpensive household items in outlying villages. Qayum attended school intermittently as a child, but he was an indifferent student, and whatever literacy he gained was forgotten during his time in Europe. Although he doesn't read or write, he speaks four languages fluently and gets by in several others. In Qayum's telling, he was a student of the streets, picking up odd jobs in Gilgit's fledgling bazaar, and sometimes peddling with his father.

By his mid-teens he had learned to drive a jeep, and for several years in the late 1960s and early 1970s earned his living as one of Gilgit's first generation of professional local drivers, working variously for private operators, government agencies, and the newly established Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC). Around 1972 he drove members of a Pakistani trade delegation from Gilgit to Kashgar, in western China, negotiating the rough mountain track that later became the Karakoram Highway. At some point in the early 1970s Qayum was arrested for involvement in a movement to protest the government's practice of hiring lowland Pakistanis for Gilgit's senior bureaucratic and administrative posts, and he spent several months in jail with other leaders of the protest, many of whom subsequently became influential local politicians or bureaucrats. After his release, Qayum returned to driving for the PTDC, but he maintained close friendships with some of his former cellmates, thereby enjoying until recently an unusual measure of influence and protection in Gilgit's volatile social and political landscape; most of these people are now deceased or retired, and he no longer has reliable connections to Gilgit's administrative elite.

Qayum's final assignment for the PTDC was to arrange a sightseeing tour of Gilgit's mountain countryside for an American tourist on holiday from his duties as international director of a Spanish bank. This man, whom Qayum always refers to as "my boss," offered to hire him as his manservant and take him back to Europe. Qayum jumped at this unlikely opportunity, the necessary papers were arranged, and he moved to England. He spent two years with his boss, living first in the UK and then in Spain. Eventually he quit his job and

set out to experience Europe on his own terms. His boss helped him to arrange visas and other legal documents, and wrote him a letter of recommendation. For the next seven years Qayum lived in Europe, travelling widely, but basing himself in Spain, where the cost of living was low and he could survive in the informal economy. He was especially fond of Barcelona and Ibiza, where he associated with other peripatetic hippies from around the world, and found a ready market for the silver jewelry he was taught by another traveler to fashion and sell. He established a yearly cycle of summering in Barcelona, wintering on Ibiza, and attending as many regional Spanish festivals as he could; the latter were great places to sell his jewelry as well as to enjoy the conviviality of sharing food, drink, conversation and rough accommodation with other youthful travelers. Judging from his stories, the carefree, live-for-the-moment atmosphere of these hippy gatherings encapsulates much of what he remembers most fondly of his years in Spain.

In Qayum's telling, he was constantly searching for a comfortable balance between the temptations of respectability, stable employment and accumulation on the one hand, and on the other, the poverty, dissipation and persecution that threatened to accompany a more casual approach to survival. Various European girlfriends set him up with jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities, but these stressed him out – “destroyed his peace” – and he returned to the hand-to-mouth existence of itinerant vending. Qayum's youth in Gilgit prepared him well for the rough-and-tumble of making do in Spain's informal economy, but it still couldn't have been easy; many of his most poignant stories involve sleeping in parks or alleys, scrounging for meals, skipping town, or running afoul of police for an endless array of vagrancy offences or transgressions of vending bylaws. It didn't help Qayum's relations with the law that many of his acquaintances were involved in much shadier activities than him, including using and dealing narcotics. His own relatively mild vices were alcohol and hashish, the latter accounting for numerous run-ins with police.

Brief rehearsals of two of Qayum's favorite stories provide a glimpse of his life in Spain, and of his narrative style, which focuses heavily on the humorous aspects of getting in and out of scrapes. The first story takes place on the Spanish island of Ibiza during tourist season, when Qayum and a friend were, as usual, short of money. On another friend's advice they bought some uncooked macaroni, which they painted brightly and strung in patterns to make necklaces and anklets, for sale at the beach. The female sun-bathers loved them, so the two friends sold out quickly, turning a tidy profit and enjoying tying chains of macaroni around the necks and ankles of bikini-clad women [giggle and hand-slap]. Then they bought a bottle of wine, and spent the afternoon relaxing at the beach; life was good. Suddenly a woman marched up to them, pointing to a bare string around her ankle and irately demanding her money back [more giggles]. She was followed by others. Ooh-

la-la! Many of their customers had gone swimming with their new jewelry, and the macaroni had disintegrated. What did they expect? It was macaroni. Still, Qayum had to refund their money, ending the day richer in experience but materially poorer than he had begun it.

On another occasion Qayum's girlfriend invited him to visit her family home in another town. Some weeks later he took a train to the town. It was evening when he got there, and he couldn't locate her home. He eventually hired a taxi, spending most of his money on the fare, but he was dropped off at the wrong location. He continued to search until well after dark, but without luck. There he was, in a residential suburb of an unfamiliar town, broke, hungry, and with no place to stay. What to do? He was preparing to sleep rough outdoors when a police car came along. Ooh-la-la! The officer examined his papers, accused him of vagrancy, and bundled him into the police car. On the drive to the station, Qayum remembered he had a small piece of hashish in his pocket. Sure that his belongings would be searched, and worried that the hash could land him in worse trouble, he managed to extract it from his pocket and slide it between the cushions of the car seat. Whew! At the station he was searched, questioned, and his documents were examined again, this time by a friendlier senior officer who eventually accepted Qayum's story, berated the first officer, and instructed him to drive Qayum back to where he found him. Luckily, they returned in the same car, so Qayum was able to retrieve his hash undetected [giggle, giggle]. The police officer dropped him off in the same suburb, still with no supper, place to spend the night, or way to contact his girlfriend. Goddammit! But at least he could enjoy a quiet hash cigarette [final giggle].

These stories exemplify what I mean by autoethnographic expression. They are among the resources Qayum uses to construct his sense of self. Indeed, these self-consciously scripted tales – with their tidy narrative arc, humorous punch line, and sanguine wrap-up – may be more important in this regard than the “actual” events they purport to describe. Moreover, they have been fashioned in the epistemological space *between* Qayum and his intended audience of Western interlocutors, so they are transcultural achievements, which produce an identity in dialogue with others. I have heard these and many of Qayum's other stories dozens of time, told to me and to others, so I know they are responsive to Qayum's reading of his audience. They become more risqué, more philosophical, more slapstick or more nostalgic, depending on the company. Their contents and the social contexts of their telling are assertions of transcultural identity, efforts to construct Gilgit as a transcultural space, and repudiations of a growing conservatism in Gilgit, which trades in essentialised differences between Islam and the West. They are interventions in an increasingly dominant discourse.

From what I gather, Qayum's day-to-day life in Spain grew trickier after Franco's overthrow in 1978, as the cost of living increased, visa eligibility was

regularized, and democratic liberal governance reshaped the country's institutional landscape. The informal economy was under duress, and the mix of international travelers changed.

Qayum felt less at home in this new Spain, but he adapted by moving into the formal economy, establishing a wholesale jewelry and clothing import/export business between Pakistan and Spain. He returned to Pakistan in 1982 to organize aspects of this business, and through some contingencies that are unclear to me, ended up spending a year at a Sufi shrine in Punjab, serving a *baba* and gestating the idiosyncratic form of mystical, unorthodox and non-dogmatic Islamic practice that has subsequently oriented his identity (Figure 2). I think it was during this period that he decided to return permanently to Pakistan, so after his time there he made one final visit to Spain, wrapped up his business, and moved home to Gilgit, where he struggled to re-adapt. His family was surprised and disgraced that he hadn't returned wealthy, he wasn't sure how to make a living that would suit him, he missed Spain terribly, and he was being urged to marry a cousin whose Sunni conservatism was at odds with his own more flexible approach to religious devotion.

Qayum's is a syncretic, transcultural version of Islam, combining the Sufi teachings of his *baba* with heterodox hippy spirituality, the folk Islamic practices of his childhood, and bits and pieces of Spanish cultural Catholicism. It treats the kindness to strangers he felt he received in Europe (his rueful stories notwithstanding) as a model of Godly conduct, which dons a more overtly religious aspect in the forms of organized service to the wretched he learned from his Sufi master. Celebration, laughter and ecstatic experience (e.g., alcohol and hashish) are valued expressions of devotion. Two points are worth stressing here. First, in my experience, Qayum's open-hearted, non-dogmatic, and service-oriented approach to Islam is common in Pakistan, if not wholly respectable; Nancy and I are its constant beneficiaries. Second, Qayum's experiences in Europe inform almost all aspects of his spirituality; at the same time, everything he says about his European sojourn is filtered – often explicitly – through this subsequently-adopted spiritual lens. These inseparable aspects of Qayum's identity shape his constitution as a transcultural subject.

By the time I met Qayum in the late 1980s, he had married his cousin, fathered two sons, opened the shop, and bought a jeep. He was fully but not contentedly established in Gilgit, largely because he and his conservative wife were continuously at odds. She and her family found him disreputable, and he chafed at the narrow conventions of respectable Gilgiti domesticity that he felt she personified and was forcing on him. They had settled into the ungenerous chill that still characterizes their relationship. Without a companionable marital partnership, Qayum searched for male friends like he had in Europe (female friends were out of the question), but found them

impossible to cultivate in a social environment structured mainly by household, lineage, neighbourhood and sect. He felt out of place in Gilgit, was homesick for Spain, and desperately lonely. In this context, the handicraft shop where I met him was more than a business; it was as importantly a place to meet Western travellers of the type he associated with in Spain. Foreign visitors like me were his main source of companionship.

Qayum had established a happier social life by the time we reconnected with him in 1995. The 1990s was Gilgit's heyday for international backpackers, mountaineering excursions and group tours, which Qayum exploited by developing connections with Western tourism operators who hired him to organize transport and other services, including Spanish and English translation. He was making decent money as a shopkeeper and "fixer," and had frequent encounters with "*angrez*" tourists as well as with longer-term expatriate residents associated with Gilgit's expanding assortment of development NGOs. He had become a peripheral member of the expat crowd, often attending their parties and helping arrange their outings. He had also made two close Gilgiti friends: a well-off idler named Saleem; and Iqbal, a medical laboratory technologist, whose devout Shia family had migrated from Hazara in Afghanistan a generation earlier. Their friendship developed after Iqbal returned from a medical training program at Temple University in the USA.

Nancy, Nina and I spent lots of time with Qayum in 1995. My research on tourism labour often led me past his new larger shop, where I invariably stopped to say hello, and we frequently dined together at his family home in Kashrote or at our own rented accommodations. Qayum's four kids were Nina's favorite playmates, so we would all bundle into his jeep for picnics or excursions (Figure 3). These almost daily interactions pulled me into three of Qayum's emerging preoccupations. First, for years he had aspired to revive a small shrine that sat neglected in an eddy of Gilgit's bazaar. It was built on the grave of an early Shia missionary to the region, but in Qayum's childhood Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis prayed there. He thought resurrecting the shrine could help heal some of Gilgit's deep sectarian tensions, so he tried, without success, to attract Gilgit's religious authorities to his vision of restoring it. In 1995 he opted to proceed on his own, and with my assistance removed decades of debris from the site, made some rough repairs to the structure itself, and undertook to keep it tidy. Nancy and I have subsequently funded small improvements to the modest facility, which attracts some of Gilgit's impoverished and marginalized, a few of whom sleep there; Qayum supplies food when he can (Figure 4).

Second, it was in 1995 that Qayum introduced me to some of the homeless "deaf and dumb" people he cared for, and began to involve me in his schemes to rescue stray puppies, starving kittens and people in various forms of material crisis. I gained peculiar familiarity with the lives of some of Gilgit's most marginalized underclass – impoverished widows, homeless

children, crippled or mentally disabled men abandoned by their families, disoriented victims of psychological disorders and post-traumatic stress, drug-addicted Western hippies languishing in jail, abused and neglected animals – as well as with the small network of openhearted individuals who try to help them. As I accompanied Qayum on his rounds, he challenged me to overcome my nervousness and frequent feelings of abjection, so that I could help him serve these unfortunates corporeally: bathing, feeding, and comforting them, tending their wounds and lighting their cigarettes.

These forms of service have subsequently become an increasingly important part of Qayum's life, which, together with his stewardship of the shrine, inspires some Gilgitis to understand him as a *baba* in his own right (although he prefers the term *malang*). On the other hand, his indifference to propriety and constant interaction with unclean (*haram*) creatures and social outcasts – not to mention his appetite for alcohol and hashish – embarrasses his family, and exposes him and them to ridicule and danger. This has been difficult for his six children, and helps to account for the disintegration of his formerly-loving relationship with all but the youngest as they became adolescents. In this context of alienation from his family and much of the larger community, my appreciation and support for Qayum's Sufi-styled service has become a more important source of sustenance for him. During lean times, our small financial contributions help him to sustain this service without neglecting the material needs of his family, and when I am in Gilgit he often uses my undeserved authority as an "*angrezi*" to leverage cooperation from officials. As importantly, my appreciation for his projects motivates and reassures Qayum. He often says that he feels weak, uncertain and despondent when he is alone; I am one of three or four foreigners who have wandered into his orbit, whom he claims give him confidence and vitality through our approbation.

The third of Qayum's projects I became involved with in 1995 was the improvement of a plot of barren land he owned on the outskirts of Gilgit. He had already built a boundary wall, and was slowly grading the land. He hoped to build a hybrid Spanish-Pakistani villa with Gilgit's first swimming pool, which he would run either as a hostel for orphans or a guesthouse for travelers, or perhaps rent as long term accommodation for foreign NGO workers. Nancy and I gave him some of the money he needed to buy an adjacent property, and served as sounding boards for his seemingly unrealistic plans. I observed progressive phases of construction during trips to the region in 1997 and 1998; by the time Nancy, Nina and I returned to Gilgit for extended stays in 1999 and 2000, the villa was complete, and the property was rented to two young NGO employees, a Briton and a Canadian. Qayum, who enjoyed friendly relations with his tenants, had constructed a rudimentary dwelling for himself at the bottom of the garden, and enjoyed the run of the property. We visited often to swim, help weed the garden, or for

expat-oriented swimming and drinking parties (Figure 5). At that time Nancy was studying the lives of Western women living and working in Gilgit, so she and Qayum helped each other expand their circles of expat acquaintances.

Qayum had finally managed to create a rewarding, transcultural life for himself in Gilgit. His shop was thriving, he had a stable income from the villa, he could afford to devote time and resources to service work, and he had recreated fondly-remembered aspects of his social life in Spain. But geopolitical circumstances had already begun to threaten these achievements. Pakistan tested a nuclear weapon in May 1998, the Kargil conflict erupted on the India-Pakistan border in summer 1999, and in 2001 New York's twin towers were attacked. Together these incidents decimated international tourism to Gilgit, and spurred the withdrawal of most foreign NGO personnel.

When I was finally able to return to Gilgit in 2005, Qayum was operating his villa as a guesthouse for the few low budget travelers who continued to pass through Gilgit. Guests were frequent for a few months in summer, which allowed him to sustain seasonal transcontinental sociability, but he charged very little, and the income was unreliable. Neither was he selling much in his shop, although he opened it every day (Figure 6). Times were tough. In Fall 2005 he was hired by the Spanish army to translate for their earthquake relief efforts in Azad Kashmir. In the process he was able to sell much of his stock to Spanish army officers, and provide his service to earthquake victims.

Tourism has rebounded a bit since the mid-2000s, but its character has changed. Nowadays weeks go by without clients at the guesthouse, and few foreigners venture to the bazaar, much less enter his shop. To make ends meet, Qayum has rented his house in Kashrote and moved his family to a rudimentary dwelling he built on the property adjacent to the villa. His adult sons, one of whom lives in Thailand, help with household expenses. These days he spends most of his time tending the guesthouse garden, maintaining the shrine, sitting in his empty shop, and aiding Gilgit's most wretched human and animal creatures (Figure 7). Twice in the past decade young hippy backpackers – Spanish and Austrian – stayed with him for several months, keeping him company and helping him with his service work, but he hasn't seen either of them for several years.

Now in his mid-60s and beginning to feel the health effects of a lifetime of smoking, drinking and rough living, Qayum describes himself as bored, weak and morose much of the time. I think that apart from his tender relationship with stray animals and the “deaf and dumb” people he aids, our phone calls and infrequent visits are the highlight of his life. This realization helps to pull Nancy and I back to northern Pakistan, and when we are there, leaves us torn between getting on with our field research in villages north of Gilgit or spending a few extra days in town with Qayum. We almost always succumb to the latter temptation, because it invigorates Qayum, nourishes our own sense of connectedness to him and to Gilgit, and *always* exposes us

to new and edifying experiences.

These brief hiatuses are opportunities for jeep excursions to valleys off the beaten track, where we invariably encounter one of Qayum's jeep-driving comrades from the 1970s, or ancient villagers who remember his father from the 1950s. They are chances to reconnect with Qayum's wife and children, who treat us as members of their household despite family tensions. In these snatched days with Qayum I have visited the wards of Gilgit's hospitals, delivered food to underserviced orphanages, been interrogated by Interservice Intelligence officials, toured the stables of the army polo team, drunk scotch in the homes of former district commissioners (who once shared a cell with Qayum), sung ghazals with stoned mechanics in greasy godowns off the bazaar, watched bootleggers distil araq from apricots, and crossed paths with Canadian hippy travelers I would never meet at home. In the bazaar, mute and naked homeless people hug me, impoverished elderly women pay me respect, taxi drivers pull me aside to smoke a "black cigarette," and vicious-looking dogs wag their tails at me (Figure 8). In other words, Qayum continues generously to guide me safely through more of Gilgit's bewildering complexity than I could otherwise dream existed. In this context of shared experiences and preoccupations, we also continue to reproduce and reshape our mutual constitution as transcultural subjects, thereby refuting the super-organic notion of civilization identity that underpins clash of civilizations thinking.

Notes

Although I have been conducting ethnographic research in northern Pakistan since 1985, I have never done research with or "on" Qayum. I have surprisingly few photos of him (none before 1995), and he is seldom mentioned in my field notes or journals. This is the first time I've written about his life or our relationship, and I've done so mainly from memory.

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FIGURE 1

My first photo of Abdul Qayum, taken in 1995 at a plot of land he had purchased and had begun to improve on the outskirts of Gilgit



FIGURE 2

Qayum's *baba*, depicted on a wall near the swimming pool at his guesthouse. It was painted by a European backpacker who stayed at the guesthouse, and is based on a photo Qayum keeps at his bedside

FIGURE 3

Picnicking in the Bagrote Valley with Qayum, his helper, and his children in 1995



FIGURE 4

Qayum in 2012, praying at the shrine he restored and maintains in Gilgit bazaar



FIGURE 5

Twisting by the pool at Qayum's villa in 1999. Pictured are Qayum, his children, my daughter Nina, and the NGO workers who rented the villa



FIGURE 6

Xama Store. Qayum's handicraft shop in 2005. By this time international tourism to Gilgit had diminished substantially and the shop was yielding few sales



FIGURE 7

Qayum and his youngest daughter, Saba, working in the garden in 2010



FIGURE 8

A “selfie” in Qayum’s shop with one of the “deaf and dumb” people he has befriended

