

Julie Flowerday

AAA Panel. Public and Public Interest Anthropology. New Orleans, 2002.

[photo] Three days following the terrorist events that shook the United States on September 11, 2001, I opened a photography exhibition in Pakistan **[photo]** for the host community of Hunza **[photo]** about whom it was constructed. The event had a dual purpose: first, to endow the community with a resource about themselves and second, to document, as best I could, a public reaction to the exhibit, which was *a public view of themselves*.

In respect to this panel, which directs us to redress social inequity and moral disparity, I offer some observations from my Hunza experience and I challenge the implied unity of a contemporary and cultural collectivity underlying the notion of a public. First, I will briefly reveal the idea behind the exhibit; second, I will offer examples of local reactions to it; and third, I will raise some theoretical concerns with regard to the composition of a *public*.

I used forty representative photographs from a catalog carefully constructed by a British researcher who documented local life over fifteen months in 1934-35. I designated these photos SINGLE VISION and used them as a template of the older community. **[photo]** In the 1930s, for example, political rule was vested in a hereditary ruler, here shown on the roof of his 650 year old Fort. Working in the same community more than 60 years later, I matched each photo with a parallel version I photographed in the 1990s, which I called DOUBLE VISION. **[photo]** In the 1990s, there was no hereditary ruler and the Fort was a famed international museum.

I used the disjunction of time to explore the effects of a deeper political transformation, one that addressed the significance of the altering constitution of a small population in transition from a semi-autonomous locality to a marginal and UNofficial sub-division in the -state of Pakistan. The 60 year period encompassed many landmark events. Nineteen forty-seven, for example, was the end of British Colonial rule, the beginning of Partition and Independence of Pakistan and India, as well as **[photo]** the secession of Hunza among other Muslim polities from the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Non-government organization (NGO) development schemes officially began in the 1960s under the Aga Khan,, then broadened and escalated rapidly after 1980. The expansion of NGOs was linked to the opening in 1978 of the international Karakoram Highway through Hunza to connect the capitals of Pakistan and China, which, in turn, ushered in tourism as a major industry. In this same period, the government of Pakistan mandated dismantling Hunza's hereditary political rule in 1974 and introduced public elections in 1976. The disjunction of sixty years, moreover, signified peaceful but radical discontinuity in reconstituting an earlier local scheme of rule in a political subdivision of the UNofficial province of the Northern Areas. My interest was to learn how these changes were manifested in the population.

Accordingly, I added a third photo to the ensemble of SINGLE and DOUBLE VISION that I called TREBLE VISION. TREBLE VISION conformed thematically and addressed the time gap. [photo] Hence, in the 1990s there was no longer a hereditary ruler, [photo]; but there were public democratic elections [photo] that coincided with Pakistan's national elections.

I used the construct of SINGLE, DOUBLE, TREBLE VISION to look at a range of ordinary practices and daily activities. Formerly, [photo] religion in Hunza was secularized, Islam co-existed with other sacred sites, [photo] such as this boulder that symbolized community beliefs. In the 1990s under Pakistan, Hunza was part of an Islamic State and religious sectarian differences increasingly reflected political dispositions, here represented by a [photo] Sunni mosque and an [photo] Ismaili Jamat Khana. Blown out of the ground, [photo] the boulder was no longer visible to younger generations.

From a semi indentured land-based economy, which involved men, women, and children in a scheme to produce all their food and goods and was underwritten by a socialist philosophy, people had shifted to a cash system. In the 1990s, [photo] potatoes were among a growing list of cash crops. People worked in government sectors. Tourism, civil service, and new private enterprises, [photo] such a carpet factory, provided wages and cash income. Children no longer worked for their parents, but their parents worked for them, earning money to pay for their school fees, uniforms, books, and related expenses.

[photo] In the 1930s, exchange was local and a single official bazaar met people's need for acquiring things from outside the community. Households relied on their land-tied resources for the production of foods. Sixty years later, bazaars were in every village and imitated a global pattern. Children nipped to the store [photo] to buy milk, salt, sugar, meat, and vegetables. [photo] People bought shoes from China and [photo] cars from Japan. Shops sold Pakistani manufactured goods to the local population, while [photo] antiques, and [photo] imported regional crafts were targeted for tourists. Walking through the bazaars, children ate popcorn and ice cream on their way home from school [photo].

Children above all were bearing the new cultural production. [photo] They imitated shop-keepers, [photo] caricatured political rallies, [photo] attended health clinics and [photo] schools, and [photo] learned not to be like those [photo] farmers who had too many children and, as a result, could not afford a quality life.

Cultural events were selectively altered to national events. Polo from a festival during the 1930s [photo] was reintroduced after a lapse of more than twenty years [photo] at a State sponsored tourism conference in 1999; and, again, events like tug of war [photo] and men dancing [photo], which were part of great festivals in the 1930s, were incorporated in contemporary civil [photo] and Islamic celebrations [photo]. The latter events were progressively interchangeable with State occasions.

By the 1990s, Hunza's population comprised diminishing numbers who had lived all or part of the landmark transitions over the last 60 or so years. The ever increasing majority, in contrast, knew only Pakistan. Accordingly, memories of social inequalities and moral disparities varied significantly in this synthetically unitary and ever altering population portrayed as contemporary.

Old and young argued about the meaning of democracy. A conversation between an elder statesman, who served under local rule and then the State of Pakistan, and a young college educated man, who knew only Pakistan, burst into a heated exchange when the elder claimed that the political system under local rule was a democracy ... only without money. The younger protested, saying the earlier scheme was a contemptible autocracy to which the elder then rebuked him saying, that unlike the current system, justice under the earlier local form of democracy was immediate, and no one suffered from want.

At the exhibition there were other reactions. Many young students looked at the photographs in disbelief wondering whose history they depicted. Elders found credibility of their past and laughed with peers in remembering the shared meaning of their lives. Local scholars and leaders of the community appropriated the exhibition and explained it to all who listened. There were also notable absences. Many people stayed away from the celebratory occasion as a sign of respect and in sympathy for the American people. Some others, I suspected, debunked the presentation as trite and just another Western self-serving display.

Results from this exhibition, moreover, demonstrated that though a public was contemporary, it was not a collective. It was not a mean, medium, mode of a culture. In the Hunza study, differences were highly visible through people's age. Divergent social memories and constructions of self reflected altering political and socio-economic conditions. They were outstanding. People were not all the same. I, therefore, submit to this panel and the audience that writing of a *public*—even at a gross level—must clearly deal with the altering conditions reflected in a particular public as well as the dynamic and inconstant composition of its membership.