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War, terror and tourism: Impact of violent events on international tourism in Chitral, Pakistan

Abstract

In mountain areas, tourism is one of the most dynamic and controversial elements of development. Terrorism, political instability and violence are among the most important factors controlling tourist flows particularly in the global south. In this paper, we aim to explore the connectivities between international or national events of violence, the role of the media as image-makers as regards travel safety and the impact on regional tourism and local livelihoods in high mountain Pakistan. Against the background of a fragile and vulnerable tourist sector the changes in tourist inflow to Chitral (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, eastern Hindu Kush) have been correlated with violent events that happened from 1970 to 2009. The study shows close correlations between international or national events of violence and the tourist numbers. Most of the events which have affected tourism business are exogenous in origin. The fluctuation in the tourist inflow has caused damage to the livelihood strategies of actors depending heavily on tourism activities as a supplementary income. In this context, the role of the dominant mass media is influential and questionable. It can contribute to produce an imaginative geography of North Pakistan being violent and insecure, and a culture of fear that accompanies it.

Key words:

mountain tourism; violence; media; place image; travel behavior; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing and most sensitive industries, with a recently increasing share of non-western tourists at regional level (cf. Ghimire, 2001; Winter, 2006). The security of tourists is of prominent concern in the wake of a rise in political instabilities and terrorism (Arana & León, 2008; Bhattarai, Conway & Shrestha, 2005; Goodrich, 2002; Poirier, 1997; Rayan, 1993; Richter & Waugh, 1986; Sönmez, 1998; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Williams, 2009). On the one hand, the impact of ter-

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rorism on tourism may be direct. Tourists may attract terrorist attention because of their symbolic meaning of capitalism, and because of ideological and cultural reasons, e.g. their representation of the West. On the other hand, tourists may become incidental victims of activity targeted at others. As a result, particular regions are avoided when perceived as destinations of risk. Drawing on the notion of "imaginative geographies" (e.g. Gregory, 1994, 2004; Orford, 2003), which stresses the crucial connection of space, power and knowledge, we argue here that the peripheral mountain areas of North Pakistan, which have become infamous worldwide as regions of violent conflicts, can be regarded as "imagined risk areas". Representations of these distant (and assumed unsafe) places in the media may be articulated in contexts of individual interests, reflecting underlying grids of power relations.

In mountain areas, tourism is one of the most dynamic and controversial elements of development. Various regions experience both gains and stresses from this sector. In economically marginal places tourism can provide an important source of off-farm income (cf. Butz, 2006; Fang, Qin, Ding & Yang, 2009; Kreutzmann, 1992, 1994; Stevens, 1993; Yang, Hens, Ou & Wulf, 2009). In many instances the tourism industry, which might have grown from small-scale climbing to mass tourism, influences regional growth and sustainability (cf. Joshi & Pant, 1990; Linde & Grab, 2008; Nyaupane, Morais & Dowler, 2006; Zurick, 1992). Apart from the diversification of the rural economy, it can incorporate community participation and positively contribute to development, for instance, by means of ecotourism establishments or multi-scalar sustainability networks. Amongst others, communication infrastructure and tourist facilities shape the structure of the mountain tourism sector (Funnel & Parish, 2001; Kreutzmann, 1995).

However, mountain ranges such as the Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindu Kush fraught with problems concerning political instabilities and violence face additional challenges. This holds true especially in an age of global communication where mass media is not only influencing public opinion and perception, but can play a significant role in informing tourists' images of potential travel destinations (e.g. Bhattarai et al., 2005; Hall, 2002). A place's image as regards travel safety affects the actors' decision making, for example, as for the selection of destinations, routes or modes of transport.

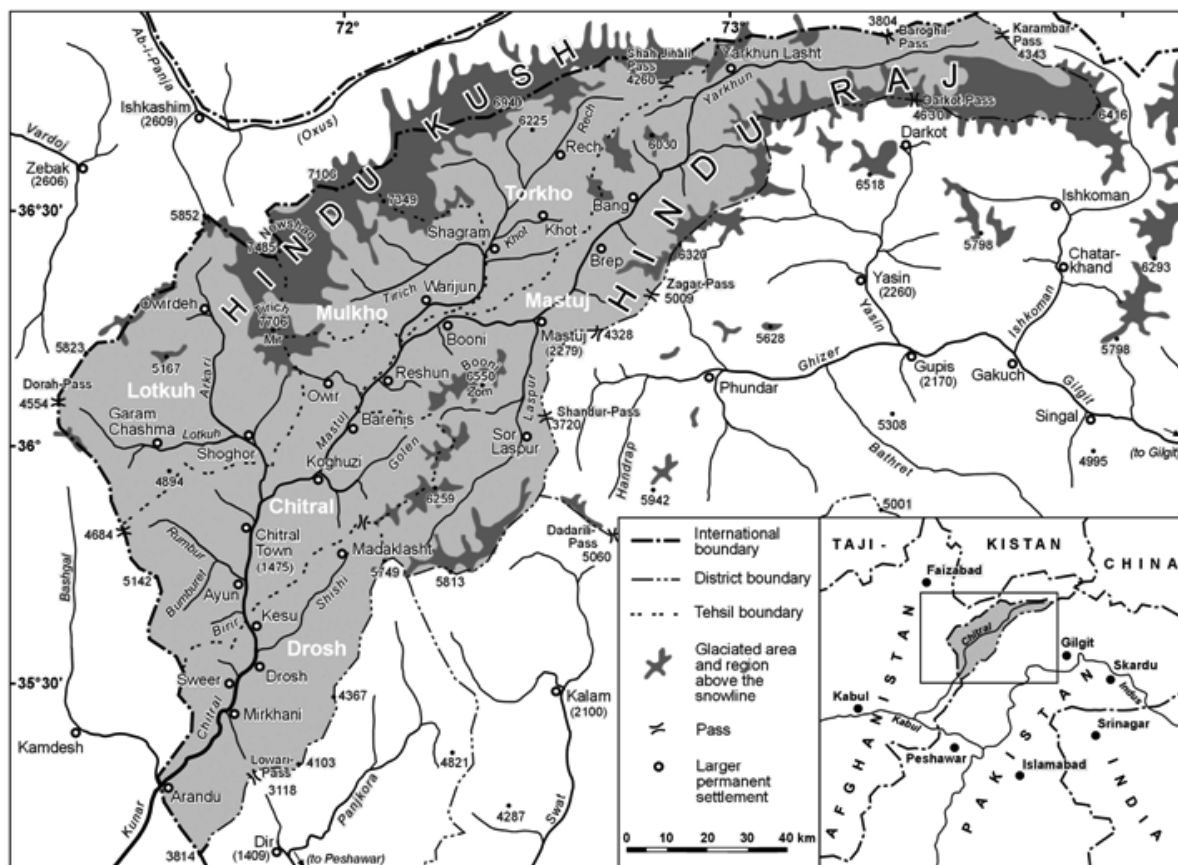
In this paper, we aim to explore the connectivities between international or national events of violence, the role of the media as image-makers and the impact on regional tourism and local livelihoods in high mountain Pakistan. The remote region of Chitral (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in the eastern Hindu Kush may serve as an example. After outlining our conceptual and methodological framework we discuss aspects of travel behavior in the context of war and terrorism in North Pakistan with special reference to Pakistani media reports. The following section analyzes the structure and dynamics of the fragile tourism sector in Chitral. We then correlate violent events with the international tourist inflow to the study area. Finally, we discuss the main findings and try to draw some conclusions on the imaginative geography of the region.

Conceptual and methodological framework

Places and communications are reciprocally interwoven. Place images emerge from mediated and direct experience, they are social and efficacious (Adams, 2009, p. 152). The notion of imaginative geographies puts focus on power and communication in the production of textual and visual place images (cf. Gregory, 1994, 2004). Representations of distant (and reputed backward) areas may reflect and reproduce underlying power relations. Imaginative geographies can be mobilized to separate spheres of stability from those spaces facing security crises (cf. Orford, 2003). For example, terrorism can be located beyond the boundaries of "civilization", thus creating popular prejudices.

Against this background, we analyze the impact of globally or nationally important events of violence reported in the news media on travel behavior, indicated by the foreign tourist inflow into the far-flung mountainous valleys of Chitral (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ca. 35° to 37° N and ca. 71° to 74° E; Figure 1). Firstly, the study is based on time series data collected from Chitral Police Department. Usually, tourists who intend to spend several days in Chitral are registered. These data were available from 1973 onward; however, detailed country-wise data were available for a decade.

Figure 1
CHITRAL DISTRICT



Source: Modified from Haserodt, 1989, p. 47

As a next step in the research process the changes in tourist inflow to Chitral have been correlated with violent events that happened from 1970 to 2009. For this purpose,

inter alia, information has been inferred – secondly – from the available regional literature, official data of the Tourism Department as well as Pakistan Urdu and English newspapers by means of textual analysis.

Moreover, framing and related factors playing a key role in regional mountain tourism such as accessibility, tourist facilities, law and order situation as well as tourism impacts are discussed. These sections, thirdly, are based on the authors' own observations and qualitative interviews conducted during continuous geographical research visits between 1998 and 2010. In this time span, numerous semi-structured interviews on regional development including tourism were conducted with government officials, experts of semi- and non-governmental organizations and academics as well local actors involved in the regional tourism industry. Given that this longitudinal approach was taken by all authors of the paper the interview data are not specifically detailed in the text but rather integrated into the overall empirical discussion.

Terrorism, travel behavior and the media: North Pakistan as an example

The murderous events of 9/11 have decisively changed the pattern of global tourism and completely transformed the associated industries throughout the world (Goodrich, 2002). In an immediate response to this event the number of tourist originating from the so-called developed countries drastically decreased and tourist-associated activities in most of the developing countries came to their minimum level. Consequently, the tourism sector in the developing world suffered relatively more compared to the global north. This is because of the fact that the majority of the developing countries was and still is heavily dependent on the tourists originating from the developed countries. Following the 9/11 event the US State Department issued travel warning to US citizens to avoid traveling to 28 countries including Iran, Iraq and Pakistan (ibid., p. 576). This further deteriorated the situation and tourist arrivals in many countries including Pakistan dropped. However, with the passage of time in many developing countries the conditions improved substantially. Contrary, in Pakistan the situation further deteriorated following the US declaration of global "war on terror" and ensuing invasions on Afghanistan and Iraq. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is the most affected area of the country where military operations, bomb blasts and suicide attacks became very frequent, particularly in the capital city of Peshawar, and deterred the inflow of foreign tourists.

As indicated earlier, the media is pivotal in influencing travel decisions and thus diverting the flow of tourists. It is pertinent to mention that the (news) media can play a negative role in framing and changing the mind of tourists. News related with terrorism are extraordinarily highlighted both in electronic and print media. Quite often false, fabricated and practically impossible media reports that have nothing to do with the reality can cause heavy damage to tourism business in the global south. In this regard the mountainous north of Pakistan (Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan region) is no exception. Off and on American media and secret agency officials were tracing the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden in the Hindu Kush (Faizi, 2009 p. 4; Yusufzai,

2008a) or in the Karakorum (The News, 2008; Yusufzai, 2008a, b). Such news items are printed or telecasted in the beginning of the tourist season in this region. According to Ahmed (2008):

"The residents of Skardu and its adjoining areas, whose livelihood depends mainly on tourism activity, have been taken aback by media reports about Osama Bin Laden's likely presence in the area. The report, which these people term 'ridiculous', has been carried by UAE-based TV channel Al Arabia and picked by many other media outlets at a time when mountaineering and trekking season is about to set in."

Later on this news item was disowned by the TV channel. According to Yusufzai (2008a):

"Journalists working for Al Arabiya later claimed that their channel was misquoted. They said the report quoting the CIA's unnamed officials cited the area around Chitral as the likely hiding place for Bin Laden. The actual report, they argued, was that he was in or near Chitral. And the report added that Chitral was near the area where the K-2 mountain peak was located. It seems K-2 was mentioned in the report to add some context or colour to the story. K-2 surely is widely known and the reference to it glamourised [Sic!] the news story. It is another matter that Chitral is at some distance from K-2 and not near it, as mentioned in the report."

The creation of this place image suggesting reduced travel safety by the more powerful media resulted in the cancellation of visits by many tourist groups and individuals. According to our respondents, the tourism sector in these areas suffered. Thus, it seems useful to have a closer look at these relations on the basis of a local case study. At first, it is appropriate to examine the potentials and constraints of tourism in the study area.

Empirical context: Chitral tourism, its potentials and problems

According to Baig (1994, p. 129) "Chitral has been a visiting resort since 1876 when Major Biddulph and then Sir G.S. Robertson undertook the arduous journey to Chitral and Kalash valleys to 'know about that strange culture which has since fascinated many foreign travellers'. In the succeeding years explorers, tourists, climbers, trekkers etc. have traversed the whole countryside, side valleys, snowfields and glaciers in the Hindu Kush range". Chitral has a vast potential for adventure and cultural tourism (Haserodt, 1989, 1996). In addition to the mountain environment, the Kalasha culture (see critically: Parkes, 2000; Frembgen, 2008), events like the Shandur polo tournament and the hot springs of Garam Chashma (Lotkuh) are the main tourist attractions. However, it is a typical cul-de-sac valley in winter, with limited accessibility by air and by road. Additionally, there were certain governmental restrictions on foreign tourists to visit areas close to the Afghan border (Grötzbach, 2008, p. 201). However, these areas were declassified in 1990 in the aftermath of the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan, and presently, there is no restriction on foreign tourists to visit the remote areas of Lotkuh and Yarkhun Valleys (Faizi, 2009, p. 4).

With the passage of time, both the number of visitors as well as tourist facilities increased. However, compared to other mountainous areas of Pakistan, e.g. Kaghan (Grötzbach, 1989), Gilgit and Hunza (Kreutzmann, 1989, 1996), there are still many drawbacks. Apart from accessibility, the possibilities of accommodation for tourists are very limited and restricted to Chitral Town and the Kalasha valleys. In the side valleys where more tourist attractions are located this facility is almost absent. In the far-flung areas of the district there are rest houses from the British period (1895-1947) which are presently either occupied by government officials as office or reserved for the touring government servants. Moreover, according to our own observations and interviews, the possibility of getting accommodation in these rest houses is rather limited especially because of the official procedure of advance booking.

Recently, the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) has constructed new motels in some of the remote parts of the district. According to GoP (2007a, pp. 80-81) there are five motels with accommodation capacity of 78 rooms. However, these rooms are quite expensive for domestic tourists: daily tariffs range between 15 and 18.75 US \$ (Rs. 1,200-1,500). Similar to Kathmandu and Hunza Valleys (cf. Bhattarai et al., 2005, p. 680; Kreutzmann, 1989, p. 23, 1996, p. 434), in Chitral this business was and still is in the hand of the local ruler. Still the former royal clan has a lion share in the tourism industry of Chitral. Most of the high standard hotels especially designed for the foreign tourists are owned by this group. It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that few local entrepreneurs also entered this business. In recent years, a wider range of actors such as trekking guides, drivers, porters, cooks, renting riding animals and camping ground operators have participated in the sector, too.

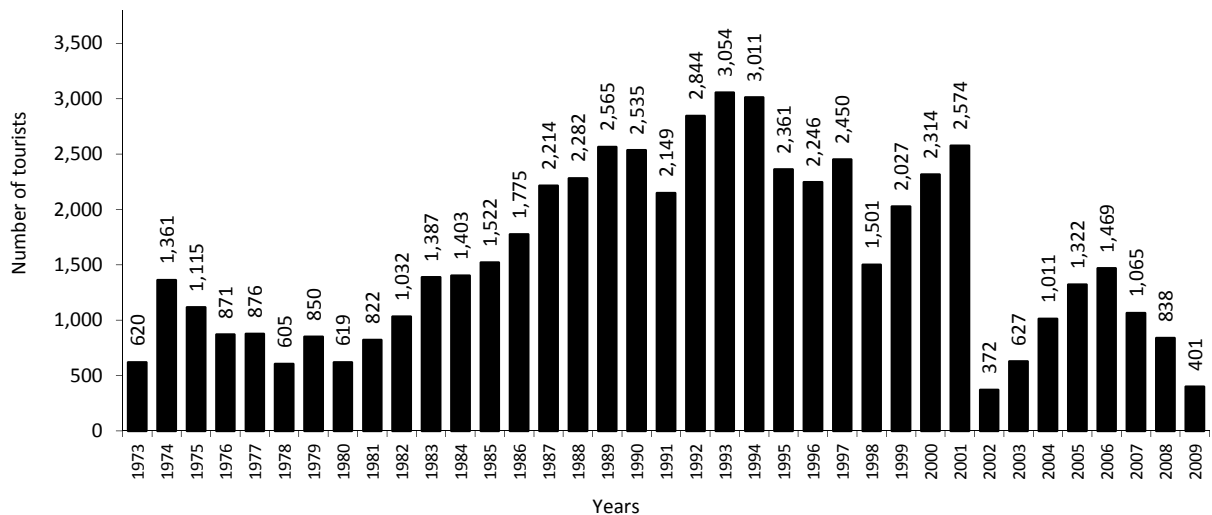
Tourism in Chitral is of very seasonal nature. Usually July and August are the peak months both for domestic and international tourists. Most of the tourists prefer to travel to Chitral by road because it is relatively cheap for groups. The flights operating from Islamabad and Peshawar are expensive and weather dependent. Within Chitral district another important problem is the availability of suitable public transport service. Usually the tourists have to rent a jeep at a rate of ca. 30 US \$ (ca. Rs. 2,400) plus fuel charges. These are high costs both for domestic and foreign tourists. Contrary, both accessibility and availability of public transport is far better in the Gilgit-Baltistan region where the Northern Areas Transport Corporation (NATCO) is operating comfortable buses and luxurious coaches from Rawalpindi and Gilgit to the major administrative centers of the region. The NATCO is also operating a daily mini bus service from Gilgit to Chitral that is currently plying till Mastuj (Figure 1). For onward journey to Chitral Town the tourists must shift to other vehicles.

Yet, it can be summarized that tourism in Chitral has certain significance for livelihood strategies and implies future income potentials. But currently it is still in a fragile and vulnerable initial phase, with many potentials still unexplored (cf. Holdschlag, 2011, pp. 164-166). This forms the economic setting of the following investigation of the interrelations between violent events and tourist flows.

Relations between violent events and tourist flows

The analyses of the time series data from 1973 to 2009 on tourist inflow to Chitral reveal interesting facts. Its variation can easily be correlated with national and international violent events occurring outside the area. During the 1970s a maximum number of tourists visited Chitral in the year 1974. Since then the number of tourists progressively decreased to a minimum in 1980. This development corresponds with the changing political setting in Afghanistan which culminated in the Russian invasion in December 1979. Additionally, the reports on political instability in Pakistan following the 1977 general elections may also have changed tourists' minds. Throughout the 1980s a continuous increase in the flow of tourists took place and a maximum number (2,565) was received in 1989 (Figure 2) – which was still low compared to Gilgit (> 9,000 in 1989, Allan, 1989, p. 137). It is noteworthy that neither the Sunni-Ismaili tension of 1982 in Chitral Town (cf. Dittmann, Fazlur-Rahman & Holdschlag, 2000, p. 267; Holzwarth, 1994, p. 93-107; Marsden, 2005, p. 193-238) nor the deteriorating law and order situation due to Sunni-Shia conflict in Gilgit (Town) from 1988 onward have affected the number of foreign tourists. Contrary to the Hunza region (cf. Kreuzmann, 1996, p. 435), the Russian bombing on southern Chitral (Sweer village, cf. Figure 1) in June 1985 had apparently no impact on the inflow of tourists in 1985 and in the following year(s).

Figure 2
FLOW OF FOREIGN TOURISTS IN CHITRAL (1973 - 2009)



Source: Chitral Police, Foreign Tourists Registration Section (authors' own graphic)

During the 1990s the data show considerable variations in the inflow of foreign tourist to Chitral. In the beginning of the decade the number of foreign tourists declined by 15.2% against the background of the first Gulf War. The attack on Iraq generated anti-US demonstrations all over Pakistan and most foreigners working in different parts of the country shifted to Islamabad for safety reasons. This decrease can be substantiated from other cases as well (e.g. Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Schmidt, 2004, p. 234). Nevertheless, the situation improved rapidly and in 1993 the maximum number of tourists (3,054) during the study period was registered in Chitral. The number of tourists decreased after 1994; a similar trend has been registered at the national level as well,

whereby the number of tourists decreased by 15.6% in 1995 and another 6% in 1996 (GoP, 2007a, p. 27). The minimum number of tourists of that decade was recorded in 1998, the inflow of tourists decreased by more than 38% in Chitral (Table 1). This can be attributed to the political situation in South Asia. India detonated nuclear devices and directly threatened Pakistan. Ultimately, Pakistan followed suit which resulted in US sanctions on both countries. Moreover, the news reports on American missile attack on Osama Bin Laden base in Kandahar in August (cf. Omar, 1998, p. 22) also deterred many tourists. This resulted in an anti-US as well as anti-West mood in the whole country. Anti-US rallies were held in and reported from almost all cities of the country, even in the small town of Chitral (Town). At the same time, various embassies called their citizens to leave the far-flung areas for safety reasons. However, in the course of time the security situation improved and a substantial increase in the inflow of tourists took place. The number of foreign tourists registered at Chitral increased by more than +35% in 1999. Though, the available data show no change in the inflow of tourists at the country level (GoP, 2007a, p. 27).

Table 1.

CHITRAL DISTRICT: CHANGE IN THE INFLOW OF FOREIGN TOURISTS (1973-2009)

Year	Number of foreign tourists	Percent change over the previous year	Year	Number of foreign tourists	Percent change over the previous year
1973	620		1992	2,844	32.34
1974	1,361	119.52	1993	3,054	7.38
1975	1,115	-18.07	1994	3,011	-1.41
1976	871	-21.88	1995	2,361	-21.59
1977	876	0.57	1996	2,246	-4.87
1978	605	-30.94	1997	2,450	9.08
1979	850	40.50	1998	1,501	-38.73
1980	619	-27.18	1999	2,027	35.04
1981	822	32.79	2000	2,314	14.16
1982	1,032	25.55	2001	2,574	11.24
1983	1,387	34.40	2002	372	-85.55
1984	1,403	1.15	2003	627	68.55
1985	1,522	8.48	2004	1,011	61.24
1986	1,775	16.62	2005	1,322	30.76
1987	2,214	24.73	2006	1,469	11.12
1988	2,282	3.07	2007	1,065	-27.50
1989	2,565	12.40	2008	838	-21.31
1990	2,535	-1.17	2009	401	-52.15
1991	2,149	-15.23			

Source: Chitral Police, Foreign Tourists Registration Section

At the beginning of the new millennium the number of foreign tourists considerably increased. But nevertheless, from 2000 to 2009, considerable variation in the inflow has been registered. During this period the highest number of tourists was received in 2001 (2,575). The 9/11 event significantly changed global tourism and, unsurprisingly, Pakistan as well as Chitral in particular serve as typical examples of a decline of tourist numbers. The inflow of tourists to Pakistan decreased by more than 10%, and the situation did not improve in the following years (GoP, 2007a, p. 27). In Chitral the number of tourists declined by 85.6 % to the minimum number of 372 tourists in 2002.

In the following years a steady increase took place in Chitral but again it decreased in 2007. This is despite the fact that the year 2007 was declared as "Destination Pakistan Year" as a government campaign to attract an increasing number of tourists. According to the official figures an increase of 7.7% was registered in Pakistan during the first six months of the year (GoP, 2007b, p. 2). However, the situation did not sustain and at the end of the year 2007 a decrease of 6% was registered. And according to Shah (2009) "The federal tourism ministry witnessed a fall in the number of tourists in 2008 compared to the previous year which, with its theme of Visit Pakistan Year, drew 689,500 tourists. In contrast, 660,993 visited in 2008." Similarly, the data for Chitral reveal a continuous decrease following 2006 (Table 1). It can easily be connected to the reports on the deteriorating law and order situation in the country, mainly due to action taken against mosques in Islamabad and particularly the Lal Masjid episode and the following series of terrorist and suicide events in the country. Moreover, the pro-American policy of the government on the "war on terror" and military operations in different parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province adversely affected tourism in the country.

The recorded data of tourists in Chitral is also available according to the country of origin. More than 40 nationalities were recorded. For our analysis we have selected only the top ten nationalities who visited Chitral from 1996 to 2009. The relative position of these generating countries fluctuated widely. However, during the study period British, French and Japanese remained the main nationalities who visited Chitral. Except few years the British had the lion-share in Chitral tourism and secured the top position for eight years from 1996 to 1999 and 2005 to 2009 except 2007 (Table 2). Moreover, these tourist-generating countries were further divided into three major regions, comprising Europe, North America and Australia/Far East (Japan, Korea). Out of these three regions, Europe has a lion share. During the study period the proportion of European tourists remained more than 45% of the total inflow except in 2002 and 2003. The percentage share of North American tourists remained less than 10% throughout the study period except 2003 and 2009. The percentage share of tourists from Australia/Far East fluctuated throughout the study period. It remained less than 15% during the 1990s. However, from 2000 onwards it has registered a phenomenal increase and its share in the total number of tourists increased to 32.9% in 2004 (Figure 3). This development may reflect the underlying tensions between the Anglo-American sphere

and Pakistan which is often represented, in "axis of evil" rhetoric, as an area of conflict and violence in many parts of the mainstream media.

Table 2

CHITRAL DISTRICT: RELATIVE POSITION OF THE TOP TEN TOURISTS GENERATING COUNTRIES (1996-2009)

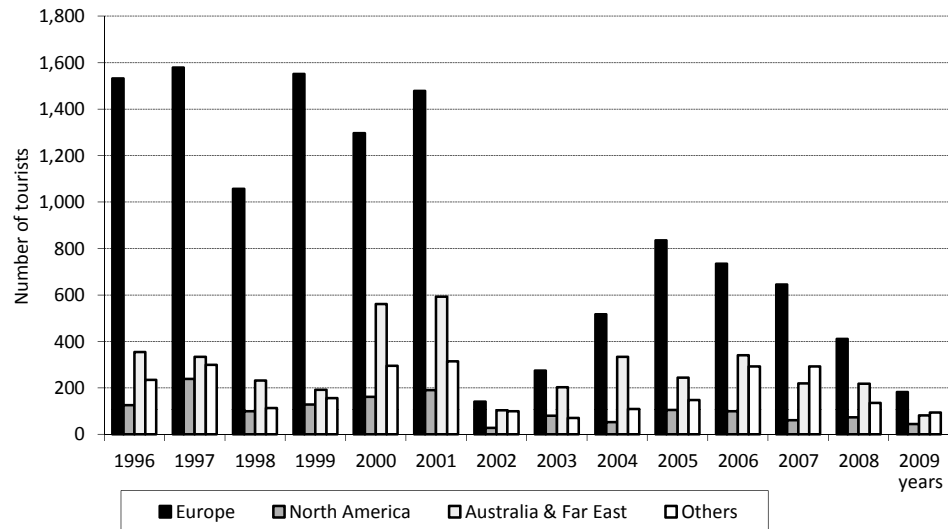
Year	British	French	Japanese	German	Dutch	Italian	Spanish	Australian	Americans	Korean	Others	Total
1996	1 (16.5)	2 (12.2)	5 (9.0)	6 (8.8)	9 (4.1)	4 (9.0)	3 (10.8)	7 (6.3)	8 (4.3)	10 (0.5)	416 (18.5)	2,246 (100)
1997	1 (22.6)	2 (11.1)	4 (7.5)	6 (6.3)	9 (3.7)	5 (7.3)	8 (4.0)	7 (5.6)	3 (7.7)	10 (0.5)	581 (23.7)	2,450 (100)
1998	1 (21.4)	2 (12.5)	3 (9.7)	4 (8.7)	7 (4.6)	6 (4.9)	8 (3.9)	9 (3.5)	5 (5.0)	10 (2.3)	353 (23.5)	1,501 (100)
1999	1 (18.2)	2 (17.1)	5 (4.8)	3 (13.4)	6 (4.5)	4 (11.2)	9 (2.4)	7 (4.3)	8 (3.9)	10 (0.3)	400 (19.7)	2,027 (100)
2000	3 (11.5)	6 (6.1)	1 (17.6)	4 (8.3)	2 (12.4)	8 (2.5)	10 (0.8)	9 (2.3)	5 (7.0)	7 (4.3)	630 (27.2)	2,314 (100)
2001	2 (12.2)	4 (8.0)	1 (16.6)	5 (7.8)	3 (11.8)	8 (2.3)	10 (0.7)	9 (2.2)	6 (7.4)	7 (4.2)	690 (26.8)	2,574 (100)
2002	2 (7)	5 (5.4)	1 (19.6)	4 (5.4)	7 (4.0)	10 (1.1)	9 (3.0)	8 (3.0)	3 (6.2)	6 (5.1)	150 (40.3)	372 (100)
2003	2 (15.3)	5 (5.4)	1 (19.5)	7 (3.2)	9 (1.9)	10 (0.8)	8 (1.9)	3 (8.1)	4 (5.7)	6 (4.8)	209 (33.3)	627 (100)
2004	2 (12.3)	3 (7.3)	1 (20.9)	5 (5.5)	6 (5.4)	10 (0.0)	9 (2.6)	4 (6.8)	8 (3.3)	7 (5.2)	310 (30.7)	1,011 (100)
2005	1 (15.2)	2 (10.1)	3 (9.1)	7 (4.4)	4 (9.0)	9 (3.8)	6 (5.0)	5 (5.3)	10 (2.8)	8 (4.0)	420 (31.5)	1332 (100)
2006	1 (16.6)	3 (9.1)	2 (14.7)	4 (5.7)	10 (2.0)	7 (4.5)	9 (2.9)	5 (5.3)	6 (5.0)	8 (3.2)	456 (31.0)	1469 (100)
2007	1 (24.8)	3 (8.0)	2 (13.7)	4 (5.8)	8 (3.0)	6 (4.1)	10 (0.0)	5 (4.9)	7 (4.0)	9 (2.0)	316 (29.7)	1,965 (100)
2008	2 (20)	3 (6.7)	1 (21.5)	5 (4.1)	6 (3.8)	7 (2.4)	8 (2.4)	9 (2.3)	4 (6)	10 (2.3)	240 (28.6)	838 (100)
2009	1 (16.7)	4 (5.2)	2 (14.5)	6 (4)	7 (2)	9 (1.5)	8 (2)	5 (4.5)	3 (9.7)	10 (1.2)	155 (38.7)	401 (100)

Source: Chitral Police, Foreign Tourists Registration Section

(Figures in the parentheses shows percentages). Authors' own calculation.

Figure 3

CHITRAL DISTRICT: INFLOW OF FOREIGN TOURISTS FROM MAJOR REGIONS (1996-2009)



Source: Chitral Police, Foreign Tourists Registration Section (authors' own graphic)

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the connectivity between political instabilities, the place images created in the news media and the development of tourism shows close correlations between international or national events of violence and the tourist inflow to destinations in the global south. This study conducted on Chitral district in the eastern Hindu Kush further substantiates this relation. Most of the events which have affected tourism business in the study area are exogenous in origin. Apparently, the local events have very little or insignificant impacts on the tourist inflow.

The empirical research reveals that reports on war, terror and turmoil have considerably negative impacts on the regional tourism industry. According to local interview respondents the resulting fluctuation in the tourist inflow to the mountain areas of northern Pakistan has caused damage to the livelihood strategies of actors depending heavily on tourism activities as a supplementary income. This is particularly the case in high altitude villages close to the internationally famous mountain peaks such as Nanga Parbat, K-2 or Tirich Mir. In the small urban centers of the mountainous belt (Gilgit, Skardu, Chitral Town etc.), where numerous tourism establishments are concentrated, investment in the tourism sector is suffering from a setback due to the external violence.

Moreover, the 9/11 event and the "war on terror" have proved to cause harmful effects on the tourism sector of Pakistan, especially in the areas where international tourism has already played a prominent role in regional development. Further evidence can be inferred from local reports on the Kalasha valleys of Chitral (Kalhor, 2008) and on Ziarat in Baluchistan (Tabassum, 2008). The most prominent recent example, however, may be the deteriorating law and order situation in the Swat Valley of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (cf. Akhmad, 2009; Shah, 2009; Siddiqi, 2009; Zehra, 2009).

In this context the role of mass media is influential and questionable, its driving forces and underlying discourses need to be further studied in a differentiated manner. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the coverage of terrorist activities and other violent events and a sensation-seeking spreading of those reports by the more powerful and dominant media on the global scale are negatively affecting tourism. This holds true especially for fake and fabricated news reports, for example on the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden in the past, which originated from US secret sources. These contribute to produce an imaginative geography of North Pakistan being violent and insecure, and a culture of fear that accompanies it.

It is concluded that despite the generally favorable conditions and potentials for international tourism in the region the vulnerability of the livelihood strategies in many mountain communities is increasing due to exogenous large-scale political developments. A negative representation of the entire region by the dominant media as a space of instability and risk can be regarded as an influencing factor that needs further research in a wider framework of power analysis.

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Submitted: 09/10/2010

Accepted: 11/21/2011