International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Between Nation and State: The Baloch Question in an Unfinished Modernity

Abhishek Dadhich

PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Vadodara

Abstract

This essay places Balochistan's nationalist aspirations within the wider debate on postcolonial belonging and state formation. It seeks not to rehearse the familiar frames of insurgency, underdevelopment, or counterterrorism — but to listen more closely to what the Baloch themselves have been saying for decades: that the idea of Pakistan, as it evolved, never included them in spirit, even if it claimed them in law. Here, the state is not a neutral custodian of order but a deeply contested symbol one that, in the Baloch experience, stands for occupation rather than representation. The main argument of this paper is that because ethnic identity trumps religious identity, Muslim Pakistan is therefore not a nation in the classical Modern sense.

Introduction

"If I am a tree, set me on fire; but a mountain cannot be destroyed by a mere flash of lightning." – **'Ata Shad**

"I never took oath of loyalty with Pakistan. I said I'll be loyal to my country—and my country is Balochistan." – **Nawab Akbar Bugti**

These are not just words; they are the residue of a long and weary defiance. In them lives a people's grief, pride, and their stubborn refusal to be forgotten. The story of the people of Balochistan is often told through the vocabulary of insurgency, militancy, and separatism. Yet, when one listens closely—beyond the noise of official narratives—what emerges is something far more intimate: the quiet insistence of a people who have not been allowed to belong. The history of Baloch nationalism is not simply about rebellion; it is about a deep wound inflicted by promises made and broken, of autonomy offered and taken away. In this neglected borderland, the Pakistani state has sought to implement a vision of development and national unity that feels alien—top-down, extractive, and inattentive to the rhythms of life on the ground. For many Baloch, what is presented as progress has come to resemble occupation?

Yet, if the words of Ata Shad were an elegy and Bugti's resolve as quoted above were an emotional prophecy, then the present state of Balochistan offers their most visceral afterlife. In the wake of the recent surge in violence in the Baloch areas, the issue of independence has received much interest. Come March 2025, the region witnessed one of its most dramatic insurgent escalations in recent history—the hijacking of the Jaffar Express by militants of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in the rugged tunnels of the Bolan Pass. The attackers seized over 380 passengers, among them security personnel, and demanded the release of Baloch political prisoners. What followed was a forty-hour standoff marked by violence, a high-casualty rescue operation, and a heavy-handed state response. The military reclaimed the train, killing all 33 hijackers, yet 25 lives—both civilian and military—were lost, and the episode left a lasting scar on the national conscience. (Farzana, 2025)

This was not an isolated expression of rage but a chapter in a broader reawakening. The insurgency—once reduced to sporadic attacks—has become methodical, coordinated, and ideologically sharpened. In the months preceding and following the train hijacking, hundreds of attacks were carried out across Balochistan: sniper ambushes, IEDs, and targeted assaults on settler communities and military convoys. Militant groups have re-emerged not only with tactical precision but also with a new symbolic grammar, positioning themselves as custodians of a wounded nation rather than as peripheral rebels. These acts—however polarizing—are animated by the same political hunger that framed Bugti's stand and Shad's lament: a desire for recognition, dignity, and the right to self-articulate.

This paper is an attempt to listen more carefully to these voices of rage and revolt. It explores Balochistan not as a failed part of a nation-building project, but as a space where a different aspiration endures unfulfilled—what might be called an alternative modernity. Here, 'Modernity' is not the seamless extension of a colonial logic dressed up in postcolonial attire. It is instead an incomplete, fractured, and contested vision of how a people seek to live with dignity, memory, and self-respect—on their own terms. It also tries to pose a question central to the Baloch struggle: Can nationalism emerge where the state remains illegible, externally imposed, and morally ungrounded?

Divided in four parts, this paper firstly evaluates the historical underpinnings of the separatist movement in Balochistan though not its entirety, Secondly it looks deep into the nature of Modernity that Balochistan has witnessed or inherited arguing that its' people and region are lying outside the dominant modernity thesis, thirdly while trying to question the development narrative of the Pakistani State it establishes that "de-tribalisation" of the conflict has strengthened the Nationalist idiom across the region, and finally the paper concludes with some humble and yet far reaching observations.

1. Between the Mountain and the State: The Baloch Struggle Through Time

The curse of Balochistan is as old as the idea of sovereignty perhaps. More tellingly, the average Baloch is a person incapable of being ruled organically by another. Among the ancient inhabitants of the Central Caspian Sea the Balochs, were an independent tribal union until the nineteenth century. In 1893, the British drew the Durand line which divided British India and Afghanistan as well as the Pashtun and the Baloch tribes on the North sides of the border. The Indian Independence in 1947 offered the tribes to join one of the two dominions. The Baloch leaders instead agitated for a third way: independence. And this self-governing strain in the DNA of the Baloch is palpably reflected in the various tribulations the region has been through in its quest for independence. However, for the sake of more clarity, I will try to trace the history of the separatist movement treating the accession of Kalat as a point of origin.

1.1. The Accession Crisis (1947–1948): A Sovereignty Forsaken

Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India believed that Balochistan would not be able to survive on its own and forced it to join Pakistan. One of the Baloch leaders of that time, Suleiman Khan later said: "we had no desire to be part of Pakistan but we were ignored and the agreement was eventually forced down our throats" The agreement being referred to here is the Instrument of Accession of the State of Kalat to Pakistan, which was signed under coercive conditions in March 1948. (Alamgir, 2012)

Since it was on the periphery of the subcontinent it did not hold the same importance as Kashmir or Hyderabad or Junagadh. Also it did not have the complexity of a leader from minority ruling over the majority. Jinnah on his part however promised Kalat and other princely states independence if they seceded to Pakistan. (Priyanjali, 2025) By October 1947 had a change of heart on the recognition of Kalat as an "independent and sovereign state" and wanted the Khan to sign the same instrument of accession as

other rules that joined Pakistan. (Gaffney Smith, 1947) Unlike many other princely states, Kalat had a documented history of quasi-independence, including a treaty with the British in 1876 that gave it significant autonomy. In the aftermath of British withdrawal, the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, declared independence on August 15, 1947, hoping to negotiate a sovereign position with Pakistan. On the night of 27 March 1948, All India Radio aired a broadcast stating that the Khan had formally approached the Government of India seeking accession—a claim India promptly denied. The broadcast sparked confusion and crisis. Feeling cornered, the Khan issued an immediate public statement disowning the alleged request and instead declared Kalat's accession to Pakistan. He also announced that any residual disputes would be submitted to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose decision would be binding. The very next day, Pakistani military forces moved into Kalat to secure its formal annexation. (Dushka, 2006) Thus it can be said that the Baloch conflict with the Pakistani state has its genealogical roots in a fractured promise—the contested accession of the princely state of Kalat in 1948. The event left a scar in the Baloch nationalist memory—a betrayal not just of political autonomy but of a cultural and historical identity. This foundational rupture would return, cyclically, as both grievance and ideology for the next seven decades. (Dushka, Ibid)

1.2 The Insurgent Republics (1948–1977): Resistance against the Centre

On the night of Independence, the Khan of Kalat in a speech said, “I thank God that one aspiration that is independence is achieved but the other two that is enforcement of Shariah-i-Mohammadi and unification of Baloch people remain to be fulfilled. (Jinnah Papers Vol. VIII) though one Following accession, Balochistan became a site of episodic but determined insurgencies. The first armed resistance erupted soon after annexation in 1948, led by Prince Abdul Karim, the Khan’s younger brother. Though it was quickly quashed, it signalled the deep disconnect between the Baloch and the centralising Pakistani state. The decades that followed saw three more major uprisings—in 1958–59, 1962–63, and most notably, 1973–77. Each of these was a response to perceived violations of Baloch political rights and attempts to impose federal authority without regard for provincial aspirations.

The 1973 insurgency was especially significant. After the elected National Awami Party (NAP) government in Balochistan was dismissed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on allegations of anti-state conspiracies, military operations ensued. Thousands were displaced, and armed conflict continued for years. This phase institutionalised the trope of the Baloch as ‘seditious’, deepening the militarisation of the region. (Wani, 2016) More than anything, it exemplified the limits of Pakistan's postcolonial democracy, where federalism was often sacrificed at the altar of national unity—a sacrifice the Baloch refused to make. (Sajjad, 2007)

1.3 The Quiet Years: Strategic Silencing and the Military-Bureaucratic State (1980-1999)

The period from the 1980s to the late 1990s is often perceived as a lull in the Baloch resistance. But this calm was more imposed than organic. Under General Zia-ul-Haq’s authoritarian rule, dissent was heavily policed and co-opted through a mix of patronage and military repression. The reintroduction of parliamentary democracy in the 1990s did little to change the power dynamic. While Baloch leaders were selectively absorbed into national politics, the larger structures of marginalisation remained intact.

This phase also saw an expansion of the military-industrial complex in Balochistan, often justified in the name of development or security. The Baloch population, however, remained under-represented in the bureaucracy, armed forces, and resource management sectors. It was during these years that the narrative of Balochistan being Pakistan’s 'colony within' began to take deeper root in nationalist discourse. (Akhtar, 2013)

The Pakistani state has long wielded the rhetoric of development as a tool of pacification in Balochistan, promising roads, ports, and economic corridors in lieu of political recognition. Yet, as Aasim Sajjad Akhtar notes, these projects have rarely translated into material benefits for the Baloch people, who remain structurally excluded from decision-making and resource-sharing. From the early postcolonial years to the recent Chinese-backed ventures like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the state's development narrative has largely been extractive, designed to integrate Balochistan's land, not its people. (Kaiser, 2012) Towns like Gwadar and Ormara have been transformed into symbols of geo-economic ambition, while local communities face dispossession, surveillance, and militarisation. The promise of progress has become, paradoxically, a mode of erasure—offering infrastructure without inclusion, and modernity without justice. (World Bank Report, 2008) As Wani argues, such state-centric development has only deepened the alienation of Baloch youth, radicalising a generation that sees prosperity being built on the ruins of its agency. (Wani, 2016)

1.4 The Reawakening: Militarised Nationalism and the Bugti Moment (2000–2018)

The national movement started gaining strength in the early twenty-first century against the backdrop of vociferous demands by Balochs for a hike in gas royalties. Tensions between Baloch nationalists and the Pakistani state became palpable when gold was discovered and licenses for extraction of gold and copper at the Duddar lead-zinc project in Lasbela District and the Reko Deq copper-gold projects in Chagai District were issued to French and Australian firms by the government of Pakistan. The Saindak mines in Chagai District, containing abundant reserves of gold and copper, were leased to a Chinese company, Metallurgical Corporation of China, in 2002 for 10 years. Balochs protested their exclusion from decision-making and alleged that the contracts had been awarded at giveaway prices. Prosperity. Gwadar became what Robert Kaplan calls the ''lightning rod for Baluch [i.e. Baloch] hatred of Punjabi-ruled Pakistan.''(Kaplan, 2009) The 21st century witnessed a dramatic reconfiguration of Baloch resistance.

The killing of veteran Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006 by the Pakistani military also became a symbolic rupture. Bugti, once a part of the national mainstream, had turned against the state, accusing it of looting Baloch resources and denying dignity. His assassination sparked widespread protests and reignited militant insurgencies across the province. The Pakistani State under Musharraf was however defiant in its repression of the rebels. ''It isn't the 1970s, when you can hit and run and hide in the mountains. This time you won't even know what hit you,'' Musharraf was quoted as saying after Bugti's murder. The sheer scale of repression unleashed in this period by Musharraf on the Balochs was characterized by Selig Harrison as ''slow-motion genocide.''(Harrison, 2006)

The spate of violence brought Balochistan into the reckoning of global powers. And, in a rare but telling moment of international attention, a group of U.S. congressmen in early 2012 proposed a radical reimagining of South Asian geopolitics. While critiquing the Obama administration's Af-Pak strategy, Representatives Dana Rohrabacher, Louie Gohmert, and Steve King went so far as to introduce a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives advocating for the recognition of Balochistan as an independent nation-state. Their resolution asserted that the "Baloch nation" had a historic right to self-determination, explicitly criticizing Pakistan's governance of the region as corrupt and militaristic. (Al Jazeera, 2025)

This era saw the emergence of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and other armed groups, many of whom adopted more militant tactics than their predecessors. A parallel shift occurred at the ideological level: the demand for autonomy increasingly gave way to calls for complete independence. Human rights violations, enforced disappearances, and the expansion of mega-projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port without local consent exacerbated alienation. Development

became a spectacle for the state, and a trigger for the Baloch—evidence of how modernisation without justice can breed insurrection. (Aslam, 2011) Just like Africa, Balochistan offers a glaring example of the 'resource curse' becoming victim of its profuse natural resources. The vast resources that could have transformed this ramshackle desert province into an island of prosperity are counterintuitively turning it into a perennial source of penury. It is not simply the awareness of the resource wealth but the entrenched perception of exploitation that fuels the Baloch nationalism.

1.5 Contemporary Radicalisation: A Struggle for Narrative and Nationhood (2018–Present)

The most recent phase of the Baloch resistance has grown both in scale and symbolism. No longer confined to guerrilla ambushes in the mountains, Baloch insurgency has entered global headlines. In March 2025, the hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Jaffarabad by the BLA's Majeed Brigade marked a new chapter—coordinated, ideological, and broadcast for international consumption. While such acts invite condemnation, they also reflect a deeper malaise: the consistent failure of the state to address the political roots of Baloch alienation.

The language of resistance has also evolved. Today's Baloch militants frame their struggle in terms of historical justice, cultural reclamation, and a radical refusal of state-sponsored development that bypasses indigenous life. It is in this crucible of grief and rebellion that the idea of an alternative modernity emerges—one that is not tethered to extractive capitalism or national security logics, but to autonomy, memory, and dignity. The struggle, therefore, is not just territorial; it is ontological. (Farzana, 2005)

Not only has nationalist activity spread beyond the traditional strongholds of dominant Baloch tribes, its support base has also grown, both geographically and numerically, with people from other tribes either aligning with the movement or joining it as active members. According to one NGO, a majority of Balochs now support one of the four of the prominent nationalist parties: the Balochistan National Party, the National Party, the Jamhoori Watan Party, and Baloch Haq Talwar. As educated middle-class residents gradually assume the mantle of nationalist leadership, the movement's territorial support base grows, stretching well beyond traditional tribal constituencies. This is nothing but "de-tribalisation of Nationalism". The parochial and tribe centric demands of the Sardars are giving way to 'national politics'. This phenomenon is particularly conspicuous in the cadre base of the Balochistan Liberation Army. (BLA)

2. The Afterlife of Empire: Unfulfilled Promise of Modernity and the Baloch Struggle for Belonging

History alone cannot account for the tenacity of Baloch resistance or the enduring estrangement between Balochistan and the Pakistani state. It becomes necessary, then, to shift from narrative to critique—to understand how the promises of postcolonial nationalism, and the particular vision of modernity it carried, have consistently failed the Baloch people. It must be pointed out that this failure is not accidental but structural, rooted in the very logic of state formation, 'developmentalism', and centralised sovereignty that emerged in post-1947 South Asia. What follows, then, is an attempt to read Balochistan through the lenses of alternative modernities, fractured sovereignties, and postcolonial exclusions—where resistance is not simply political, but epistemic and delusional truth be said.

The story of Balochistan unsettles the foundational myth of postcolonial nationhood in South Asia—a myth that equates political independence with collective liberation. It is not just an outlier to the two-nation theory it is an anti-thesis of it. Far from being integrated through democratic consensus, Balochistan was ushered into the Pakistani state through a mix of confusion, coercion, and silence. Partha Chatterjee's insight that postcolonial nations often mimic colonial forms while inventing a spiritual 'inner domain' for

selfhood (Chatterjee 1993) rings hollow here. In the case of Balochistan, neither domain was ever granted. The nationalist imagination of Pakistan moved forward without the Baloch people, scripting them into a narrative of national unity while excluding their distinct history and aspirations. The result is a nationalism that feels more imposed than inherited—an architecture without anchors, where the modern postcolonial state reproduces the epistemic marginalisation once crafted by imperial rule. (Mohammed, 2002)

Balochistan's long and wounded history with the Pakistani state is not a denial of Modernity—it is an indictment of the particular kind of Modernity that has been offered. Under the guise of development and national integration, the state has demanded compliance but never invited participation. It has been democracy sans democratisation. And yet, as Wani shows, the Baloch resistance has transformed from tribal autonomy movements to urban, youth-led articulations of a democratic and inclusive political imaginary (Wani, 2016). This shift speaks to an alternative vision of modernity: one not anchored in the metro-centric assumptions of Islamabad or Rawalpindi, but rooted in local memory, cultural affirmation, and distributive justice. It is a Modernity that remains "*deferred*", continually postponed by the logic of militarisation and resource extraction, and yet constantly reasserted in every act of resistance and refusal. The Pakistani state has long imagined itself as a postcolonial sovereign, but in places like Balochistan, it has ruled more like a successor empire. This is a place where colonisation was followed by internal colonisation. Themes of colour, language and creed that define the modernist structures of power have altered yet brought no change for its people. What Balochistan reveals is a form of "*unfulfilled sovereignty"*—where the state's claims to nationhood have outpaced its moral and political obligations to its people. S. N. Eisenstadt's theory of "multiple modernities" offers a useful lens here: modernity is not a single, uniform trajectory but a contested field shaped by different civilizational experiences (Eisenstadt, 2000). The Baloch struggle represents one such deviation—a call for self-determined modernity, unmediated by the statist vision of Islamabad. Their desire is not to escape Modernity, but to reshape it on their own terms: a Modernity that speaks in Balochi, remembers Kalat, and demands that dignity precede infrastructure. The BLA has not challenged Modernism like the TPP or Al-Qaeda, it has only sought corrections in it; a more responsive system and a participative democracy. (Chatterjee, 1993)

To conclude, in Balochistan, the borders drawn on paper have often acted as weapons rather than markers of inclusion. This obviously sounds eerily similar to Central and West Africa. The forced annexation of Kalat in 1948 was not just a political act—it was a cartographic denial of identity, one that echoed the hurried partitions and princely betrayals of the colonial era. Dushka Saiyid's account makes clear that the accession lacked procedural legitimacy and moral consensus, unfolding through pressure rather than persuasion (Dushka, 2006). The AIR controversy quoted earlier here was a glorious eyewash, nothing else. What followed was not integration but containment. The postcolonial state, far from dismantling colonial mechanisms of control, repurposed them—deploying censuses, roads, cantonments, and pipelines as instruments of possession rather than emancipation. The Baloch were not invited to build the new nation; they were expected to surrender to it. In that silence, the colonial past continued to govern, wearing the uniform of a republic. The unrequited love shown to China in completion of these grand infrastructure projects mentioned in this paper are testimony to the bankrupt State's disproportionate enthusiasm at the expense of local consent. Beneath the celebratory language of economic transformation lies a deeper political asymmetry: Pakistan's readiness to surrender land, resources, and local governance prerogatives in exchange for Chinese capital. Nowhere is this more starkly felt than in Balochistan, where these mega-projects have arrived without consent, transparency, or distributive justice. As development becomes a Trojan horse for strategic dependence, the state's over-commitment to Beijing serves to further alienate

an already marginalised province leading to subservient sovereignty of sorts. So as far as the debate on Nationalism goes, what you see in Balochistan to use Benedict Anderson's evocative term is an 'imagination without community'.

3. From Secession to Separation: The Sordid Saga of the Baloch Struggle for Sovereignty Amid State-Led Islamisation

To speak of Baloch nationalism, then, is to ask a more unsettling question: what becomes of a people when their sense of nationhood cannot find a name, a place, or a future within the dominant grammar of the state? And more importantly, what alternatives must we imagine — beyond the tired binaries of secession and suppression — to accommodate the plural dreams that the postcolonial state was too brittle to bear? Of course, every state opposes separatist tendencies, and Pakistan is no exception. But a close evaluation of so-called "Baloch nationalism" shows that although real separatist tendencies persisted in the province in the early 2000s, the political groups that actively promoted separatism were a minority. Most, if not all activists had reconciled themselves to the idea that Balochistan's future was within the Pakistani federation. They were struggling for more autonomy within the federal constitutional framework and for the government to respect the socio-economic rights of the Baloch. It was the state's repressive response that radicalized most elements of the "nationalist" movement. Historically, Baloch nationalism relates to the broader national question in Pakistan. Politically, it covers everything from aspirations to full independence from Pakistan to demands for autonomy within the Pakistani federation; the positions of the assorted nationalist parties and organizations vary over time. In that sense, the term "Baloch nationalism" is itself misleading. Sociologically, it is an evolving reality reflecting the evolution of the province as well as that of Pakistan itself. Let us look at the different dimensions of the Baloch struggle for independence voiced by different set of organisations. (Grare, 2006, 2013)

1. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) is a clandestine organization said to be associated with the Marri tribe. The BLA was led by Baloch Marri until he was killed in 2007.
2. The Baloch Republican Army is presumed to be the militant wing of the Baloch Republican Party. It is usually associated with the Bugti tribe and said to be led by Brahamdagh Bugti.
3. The Baloch National Movement calls for the independence of a "greater" Balochistan and refuses to participate in the political process. Its leader, Ghulam Mohammed Baloch, was found dead in 2009 after he helped unite several nationalist groups under a single umbrella.
4. The National Party, led by Abdul Malik Baloch, is a moderate, centre-left Baloch nationalist party that claims to represent the middle class. It has usually participated in the electoral process but boycotted the 2008 elections.
5. The Balochistan National Party, led by Akhtar Mengal, is a major nationalist party that controlled the provincial government before 2002 but boycotted the polls in 2008. Considered a moderate organization, it calls for an increase in Balochistan's share of revenue from provincial resources,
6. The Baloch Student Organization, created in the late 1960s, has trained and produced many nationalist leaders. It is considered the middleclass entry point into the nationalist movement and is composed of several different factions that support the BLA.

The emergence of Baloch nationalism as it is known today is the product of a long and complex process of emancipation of the Baloch middle class, often educated outside Balochistan. This is the 'salariat' class led nationalism. (Akhtar, Ibid) As has been pointed out, Baloch resistance, which crystallized around the objective of protecting the populations and their interests and was inspired by Marxist-Leninist liberation

movements, emerged shortly after the brief encounters of 1962. A few hundred ideologically motivated men assembled under the banner of Sher Mohammed Marri and the militant Baloch People's Liberation Front, setting up what was to become the infrastructure of the 1973 insurgency.

This middle class nationalism emerged in parallel and frequently in dialogue with the growing nationalism of Balochi tribes, until time and military operations eroded tribal identity. Baloch nationalism grew within the tribal structures before gradually spreading to other sectors of society. Federal government marked a new step in the process of "detribalization." While the tribal factor never totally disappeared, it has certainly lose its centrality. (Rehman, 2009) Thus, the middle class is today the main target of the Pakistani military and paramilitary in what seems to be an attempt to eradicate all manifestations of Baloch nationalism and to rule out the very possibility of its renaissance. Military regimes in Pakistan have also sought to eradicate ethnic identities by changing provincial demographics and pursuing Islamization, or the substitution of a common Muslim identity for ethnic ones. Following Zia-ul-Haq's coup, Balochistan also became one of the two focal points of the dictator's Islamization strategy (the other being the North-West Frontier Province, now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). Since then, it has been an integral part of all centralization policies. The most worrisome factor is the changing sociology of the Islamic radicalization in Balochistan. Unlike the Pashtun-populated areas of the province, the Baloch territory was until very recently largely secular. Today, the Tabligh Jamaat conducts its activities outside the Pashtun areas. Lashkar-e-Janghvi is now recruiting in the Baloch population, and five of the most prominent leaders of the organization in Balochistan are said to be Baloch. Sectarian violence continues to thrive in Balochistan, with attacks directed mainly against the Hazara community—a Persian-speaking Shia minority that lives in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Anarchy in Balochistan is not simply another unfortunate situation in an already-fragile region. The power vacuum emerging as a result of the systematic weakening or destruction of all social structures capable of containing the rise of radicalism creates a potentially explosive situation that abuts the most vulnerable provinces of Afghanistan: Helmand and Kandahar. It seems likely that no state power will truly be in a position to control these volatile provinces after conferring additional latitude to the groups whose re-emergence the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was supposed to prevent. (Riaz, 1998

The Balochistan issue cannot be resolved, or at least mitigated, by addressing the socioeconomic grievances of its people—that time is long gone.

Identity is both an elusive and a fluid concept, constantly changing. As a social construct it tends to be dynamic and malleable, forged and reforged in response to certain forces in the economic, political, and social realms. Owing to the intangibility and fluidity of identities, it becomes extremely difficult to accurately determine the degree of nationalist attitudes present among the populace in a particular time and place. The case of Balochistan, with its sparsely located communities and unfavourable mountainous terrain, as well as the minimal presence of modern communication systems, only exacerbate the problem. However, the idea and meaning of self-determination is interpreted differently by different Baloch nationalist groups depending on their ideology and objectives. Self-determination, in common parlance, is often conflated with secession, and as such gets imbued with overt connotations of territorial dismemberment. Since the present political order sanctifies territorial integrity, proponents of self-determination attract the ire of host states. As the first country to disintegrate after World War-II, Pakistan's notion of self-determination is anathema to its ruling establishment, whether civilian or military. Demands for secession generally arise when demands for autonomy or devolution of power are spurned or met with force by the ruling elites. Many autonomist and minority-rights movements

metamorphose into separatist movements following violent treatment by unaccommodating states. As the Pakistani state represses dissenting voices across the spectrum of self-determination, many Balochs are making a transition from internal to external self-determination. (Gall, 2009) An indication of the deepening of Baloch nationalism is that women, traditionally secluded in conservative tribal society, are becoming active participants in the movement. They are, as Rehman puts it, ‘‘adept in taking the floor’’ and passionate in their articulation of independence sentiments.80 In the schools, ‘‘children still refuse to sing the national anthem at assemblies, instead breaking into a nationalist Baluch song championing the armed struggle for independence. Graffiti daubed on walls call for independence and guerrilla war.’’ The continuation of dictatorial policies wearing the garb of ‘‘democracy’’ renders democracy ineffectual in assuaging the grievances of Balochistan. It is in this context that Wirsing contends that democracy is not a panacea for redressing decades-old wrongs. Balochistan needs more than the current formal democracy which finds expression in intermittent but flawed electoral processes. (Wirsing, 2008)

4. Conclusion

Some geographies exist not merely as coordinates on a map, but as stubborn questions that history has left unanswered. Balochistan is one such place — vast, mineral-rich, and fiercely proud, yet consigned for decades to the margins of Pakistan’s political imagination. It is a land claimed by the state but never quite embraced by the nation; administered, surveillanced, and spoken for, but rarely listened to. In this uneasy half-presence — neither fully integrated nor sovereign — Balochistan embodies the ghost of an unrecognised nation, a people in search of a political home they have long been denied.

The story of Balochistan’s thwarted nationalism is not unique, nor is it entirely local. It echoes across South Asia’s postcolonial landscape — in the hills of Myanamar, in the sorrow of Bangladesh’s birth, and in the scattered dreams of peoples folded into borders they did not draw. These are not the familiar triumphs of nationhood, but its silent failures. In many ways, the crisis of Balochistan is the crisis of South Asian modernity itself: a modernity born not of organic political evolution, but hastily imposed by the departing British — a modernity dressed in the garments of electoral democracy, but hollow in its moral and historical foundations.

When the British left in 1947, they left behind more than railway lines and parliamentary blueprints. They left behind an unfinished experiment — one in which diverse, colonised communities were expected to perform the rituals of democracy without having healed the deeper fractures of colonial rule. Popular sovereignty was promised, but the sovereignty of the popular was never allowed to emerge. What followed was a race among newly independent states to appear modern, stable, and unified — even if that meant silencing dissenting histories within their borders. Balochistan, with its proud tribal identity and history of autonomous rule under the Khanate of Kalat, stood in quiet resistance to this fast-tracked modernity. And for this resistance, it has paid the price. (Tariq, 1970)

At the heart of this study lies a broader concern: the shape of South Asian modernity itself. Drawing upon the framework of “multiple modernities,” as articulated by S. N. Eisenstadt and further expanded by thinkers like Dipesh Chakrabarty, this paper examines the peculiar evolution of the Pakistani state, a state that performs democratic rituals while retaining colonial reflexes. In this context, Balochistan becomes more than a troubled province. It is a window into a phantom modernity: a system that mimics the external features of a liberal nation-state but fails to create the inner conditions of belonging — justice, dignity, and memory.(Eqbal, 1974)

This paper is thus a modest attempt to trace those dreams, not as relics of the past, but as claims upon the present; claims that call for a rethinking of how we understand sovereignty, allegiance, and the right to self-articulation in a region still haunted by the hurried cartographies of empire.

Works Cited:

1. Ahmad, Eqbal. "Signposts to a Police State." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 12, 1974.
2. Ahmed Riaz, Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan. *Oxford OUP, 1998.*
3. Akhtar, Aasim Sajjad. "Balochistan versus Pakistan." Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 42, no. 45/46, 2007, pp. 73–79.
4. Alamgir, Aurangzaib. "Pakistan's Balochistan Problem: An Insurgency's Rebirth." World Affairs, vol. 175, no. 4, Nov.–Dec. 2012, pp. 33–38. SAGE Publications, Inc.
5. Ali, Tariq. *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power*. Jonathan Cape, 1970.
6. Bengali, Kaiser. "Budgetary Allocations and Resource Distribution in Balochistan." *SDPI Policy Paper*, 2012.
7. Carlotta Gall, ''Another Insurgency Gains in Pakistan,'' New York Times, July 11 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/world/asia/12baluchistan.html , accessed May 24, 2025
8. Chatterjee, Partha. The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. Princeton University Press, 1993
9. Eisenstadt, S. N. "Multiple Modernities." Daedalus, vol. 129, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1–29. The MIT Press
10. Grare, Frederic ''Balochistan: The State versus the Nation,'' Carnegie Papers, April 2013(Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), p. 19
11. Gaffney-Smith, Sir Laurence. Memorandum to the Commonwealth Relations Office, 24 September 1947. Cited in Harrison, Selig S. In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981, pp. 13–14.
12. Grare, Frederic. *Pakistan: The Resurgence of Baluch Nationalism*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.
13. Harrison, Selig S. *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981.
14. Narayan, Priyanjali. "How Jinnah's Betrayal Sparked Baloch Freedom Movement." India Today, 12 Mar. 2025, https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pakistan-train-hijack-how-jinnahs-betrayal-sparked-baloch-movement-pakistan-bangladesh-1971-kalat-2692320-2025-03-12.
15. Rabia Aslam, ''Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil Conflicts: A Case Study of Balochistan,'' Contemporary South Asia 19:2 (June 30, 2011), p. 195
16. Rehman, Zia Ur. "Why the Baloch Insurgency Is Heating Up Again." *The Diplomat*, Aug. 2016.
17. Robert D. Kaplan, ''Pakistan's Fatal Shore,'' The Atlantic, May 2009, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/05/pakistans-fatal-shore/307385 accessed July 14, 2025.
18. Saiyid, Dushka H. "The Accession of Kalat: Myth and Reality." *Strategic Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2006, pp. 26–45.
19. Selig Harrison, ''Pakistan's Baluch Insurgency,'' Le Monde Diplomatique, October 2006, < http://mondediplo.com/2006/10/05baluchistan (accessed July 20, 2025)

20. Shaikh, Farzana. "The Hijacking of a Train Marks a Watershed in the Balochistan Insurgency." Chatham House International Affairs, 21 Mar. 2025, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/hijacking-train-marks-watershed-balochistan-insurgency.
21. Speech by the Ruler of Kalat, Jinnah papers Col VIII, p 156
22. Wani, Shakoor Ahmad. "The Changing Dynamics of the Baloch Nationalist Movement in Pakistan." Asian Survey, vol. 56, no. 5, 2016, pp. 807–832.
23. Waseem, Mohammad. "Dialectic between Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy." *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation*, edited by Hafeez Malik, Zed Books, 2002.
24. Wirsing, Robert G. *Baloch Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Energy Resources: The Changing Context of Separatism in Pakistan*. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2008.
25. World Bank. *Balochistan Economic Report*, 2008.