

Exploration of the foundations of ethnic conflicts in Balochistan: a theoretical perspective

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Abstract:

The objective of this study is to understand the foundations of the violent ethnic conflicts of Balochistan, a federating unit of Pakistan so that the primary causes of the conflict are to be addressed. The mainstream theories of ethnic conflicts, i.e., primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, are reviewed and applied in the context of Balochistan. This research attempt has been made because, in the past, the state responded to ethnic conflicts without understanding the actual causes. The qualitative research methodology with descriptive and interpretive approaches has been adopted to address the objectives. The article is principally based on a critical review of the literature. The arguments have been developed by juxtaposing the primary and secondary information collected through books, journals, periodicals, and electronic sources. It is argued that primordialism has limited explanatory power while constructivism has explanatory power, but its appeal is limited in Balochistan's context. Instrumentalism explains the foundations sufficiently, while primordialism and constructivism provide the bases for instrumentalism. It is suggested that reconciliations should be adopted as the policy for ethnic conflicts so that the political and economic causes that play an instrumental role in addressing the ethnic conflicts can be resolved.

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1. Introduction

Ethnic conflicts have become a fundamental challenge to the world's societies. The basic fabric of the societies is under threat because of these conflicts. States cannot stop the occurrence of conflicts because they are inevitable. These conflicts are unavoidable because the needs, aspirations and resources are unevenly distributed in society. Still, if nations analyze the conditions in which these conflicts prevail, the ability to respond and management can be devised. The phenomenon of ethnic politics has existed throughout the recorded history (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1990). The ethnic groups have sometimes contended interests and inspirations, which lead to social and political conflicts. Cordell and Wolff (2011) explained ethnic conflicts as a situation where two or more than two actors compete for incompatible goals. The goals of at least one particular party are defined extensively on ethnic lines and the principal fault line of contention is one of the ethnic distinctions. The causes and perspectives may be too many but tangible issues on which the conflicts break out explain the discontent on ethnic term. Furthermore, leadership and public feel that their distinct identity is the reason that they are unable to realize goals. Kaufman (2011) explained that ethnic conflicts have the potential to generate low intensity and non-violent conflicts and also to give rise to extremely violent conflicts like "civil wars." The challenges that ethnic conflicts generate for society demand in-depth study because effective dealing with conflicts is difficult without an understanding of the occurrence. Therefore, Cordell and Wolff (2011) said that "we have to clarify the relevant concepts and theories which provide the foundation of ethnic conflict and allow us to situate this subject within and across disciplinary boundaries, engage with key methodological issues, and identify the main underlying assumptions" (p. 03).

Balochistan is the largest province and has been in the grip of ethnic tensions since the inception of Pakistan. Bansal (2006) mentioned that conflicts had posed serious threats to social cohesion and existence. Still, as elaborated by Wirsing (2008), Bloch ethnic movement is not a unitary force and its leadership, and their tactics have diverse voices. Some intend (nationalists) to have larger provincial autonomy and want a federation under the 1973 Constitution. Some (insurgents) ask for an independent state and have chosen anti-state violence as tactic. The causes and inspiration of ethnic conflicts, dynamics and separation have been the interest of national and international scholars (Bansal, 2006; Siddiqi, 2012; Grare, 2013). However, they did not elucidate the explanations with sufficient theoretical lanes and were unable to discuss the real nature of the Baloch ethnicity. This research is an attempt to bridge this scholarly gap. The objective of this research is not to give a new theory or perspective. Still, the actual intent is to understand the nature and character of Baloch ethnicity and to judge the relation of this character with the generation of conflicts. Likewise, along with understanding the foundations of ethnic conflicts, it is an attempt to explore how they can effectively be responded.

This paper proceeds as follows. The first part is related to the methodology that is set to deal with the objectives. The second part deals with the theoretical perspective of ethnic conflicts

and three mainstream theories i.e., primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism are reviewed. Third section deals with the analysis and application of these theories in the context of Balochistan. Last section is the concluding reflections that describe the review's main theme, findings and limitations of research.

2. Theoretical perspectives

Ethnicity is a new term in the academic literature which appeared for the first time in Oxford English Dictionary in 1953 (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). It is, therefore, a contested term (Joireman, 2007). Hutchinson and Smith (1996) properly explained this term. To them, this term is connected to other terms like ethnic, identity, ethnocentrism and ethnicism. The term ethnic has an ancient origin which falls under the dichotomy of "us and them." Identity refers to the individuals' ancestral heritage. Ethnocentrism is the belief that my ancestry is superior, and it results in hate for others. Ethnicism is the movement of resistance or protests against exploitation. Hutchinson and Smith (1996) explained the six features that constitute ethnicity. Ethnicity contains a proper name, a myth of ancestry, shared historical memories and heroes, common culture based on religion and language, common geography, and a sense of solidarity among the members (p.07). Horowitz (1985) considered it an umbrella term that differentiates groups on the bases of religion, language, race, and nationalities (p. 53). As Brass (1991) noted that it is quite difficult to determine ethnic boundaries as they may take many shapes (p. 18). Joireman (2007) argued that it is a subjective thing that is a construct of culture, memories and a sense of solidarity. Furthermore, it is the sense of belonging and emotional bonds that lead to the politicization of ethnicity, and they take arms against each other and sometimes the state.

According to Wan and Vanderwerf (2009), there are four central theoretical approaches that underprop the study of ethnicity. These are primordialism, materialism, instrumentalism and constructionism. However, the mainstream theorists of ethnicity like Joireman (2007) have mentioned only the three main approaches i.e., primordialism, instrumentalism and constructionism. They did not mention or gave weightage to materialism. The evolution of all these theories is meticulously linked to the development of approaches and thoughts in the social sciences, such as, cultural evolutionism, structural functionalism and postmodernism. The general theory of conflict and violence has also influenced these theories (Wan & Vanderwerf, 2009). The number of imperative debates runs through these three areas of literature. The debates mainly comprise of the integration of psychological and social dimensions of ethnicity. This literature also includes the significance of the cultural content of identities and the relationship between ethnicity and state (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016). These three mainstream perspectives explain the nature of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. However, Gurr (1994) argued that still, no theory has ample explanatory and perspective power. It makes it essential to review all three perspectives for understanding the foundations of the ethnic conflict in Balochistan.

The Primordialism was the only approach to ethnic conflicts before the 1970s and still, it has

currency in some cases. Classical theorists viewed ethnic identity as fixed, innate and permanent. They termed it as a culturally defined unit and claimed that each person is born into a specific ethnic group, tribe and geography (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016). According to this approach, ethnic identities are derived from nature. It means that identity is biologically determined or it is sociologically constructed by the people in past. This biological or sociological construction passed through the current generations from their ancestors (Chandra, 2001). Thus, ethnic identity is an inborn identity, passes genealogically from generations and remains inherent in human nature (Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 1986; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). Moreover, members of the ethnic group have a group consciousness that develops from language, culture, history and traditions. This consciousness is reinforced over time through myths and symbols (Jesse & Williams, 2011). The groups often work hard to keep their identities intact and to make it unchangeable (Cordell & Wolff, 2011).

The approach also indicates that ethnic conflicts are a natural phenomenon. It is not the product of modernity rather, it is the result of ancient hatred of divergent values and cultural differences among the ethnic group (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016; Jesse & Williams, 2011). Primordialists put emphasis on ethnic identity as the direct cause of ethnic conflicts. To them, ethnic violence is an age-old natural phenomenon that is essentially rooted in deep and irreconcilable differences in ethnic identities. Primordialist rationale builds on the concept of ethnocentrism that makes in-group-out-group peculiarities to describe discriminatory behaviour (Esteban *et al.*, 2012). The myth of common ancestry makes the ethnic groups cooperative and hospitable to in-group while fearful for the out-group. The conflict is natural because of ethnocentric attitudes and incompatible goals among the ethnic groups (Horowitz, 1985; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Vanhanen, 1999; Jesse & Williams, 2011). Additionally, Primordialists claimed that ethnic conflicts are triggered because of the horrible memories of past atrocities that create an environment where violence is difficult to avoid (Vanhanen, 1999; Sambanis, 2001).

Instrumentalists, particularly Abner Cohen of Manchester School challenged the primordial assumptions (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016). Though instrumentalist traditions are often associated with Bates (1974), instrumentalists view the effects of identity as subsidiary and indirect. Instrumentalist does not take the ethnic conflicts as natural; rather regard them as deliberate human action subject to geographical and temporal actions. To add more for them, they are not reducible to ethnic loyalties, there are other issues which hit more strongly than identity. Cohen (1969) argued that political leaders in specific cases utilize and exploit primordial symbols like language to get the support of followers. In this sense ethnicity is a tool that is used to mobilize people of the same ancestry to influence public policies. It is easy to mobilize the people, who feel that their goal is common for seizing and protecting authority (Chandra, 2004; Kaufmann, 2005). Horowitz (1985) explained further that the main tensions appear from the measurement of the people of their situations and abilities with the other identities. Comaroff and Stern (1995) argued that members of the same group feel strong cohesion, therefore, political leadership ask them that they are under threat, and mobilize them for committing violence.

Ellingsen (2000) argued that conflicts are commonly inspired by the frustration and grievances which are mainly socio-economic. These socio-economic issues are economic discrimination and marginalization, disparity in education and health and lack of equality of opportunity (Williamset *al.*, 2016; World Bank, 2019). Gurr (1994) also gave weightage to economic inequality and competition. Posen (1993) gave importance to political and security concerns. To him domestic security dilemma thesis is not irrefutable and ethnic groups seldom exist as sovereign entities. Normally, they exist as constituent elements of larger political units. As integral members of the state, their security is essentially the state's exclusive responsibility. Consequently, ethnic groups are less likely to embark on self-securitization except possibly in resistance to internal colonialism. Even when ethnic groups in states resort to militarization, there tends to be a sharp discrepancy in state and ethnic competencies (Posen, 1993). The deprived economic, political and security situations do not lead to the conflicts in itself. Rather, as mentioned by Joireman (2007) such situations would become instrumental in manipulation of the ethnic leaders' deliberate actions.

The constructivism theory can be traced back to historical arguments of the French and English philosophers who stated that ethnic identities are constructed, reconstructed, and mobilized in accordance with political and social factors. Ethnic groups are fabricated and refabricated according to social norms. Constructivists consider it incorrect to consider the group's attributes as natural features which emerge from psychological predispositions. (Fearon & Laitin, 1996; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Chandra, 2001; Brass, 2003; Posner, 2004; Wimmer, 2008). This theory perceives ethnic identity as a fluid entity that can be formed through various means including colonization, conquest and immigration (Wimmer, 2008). Ethnic groups are recognized as social constructions with identifiable ancestries and histories of expansion, contraction, amalgamation and division (Posner, 2004). They originate within a set of social, political and economic processes (Chandra, 2001). Constructivists maintain that every society has a historically constructed dominant cleavage and narrative that political entrepreneurs can manipulate (Brass, 2003). Constructivists take identity as social category eminent by rules of membership, characteristics or behaviour expected in certain circumstances (Fearon & Laitin, 1996).

The constructivist approach shifted the focus from "what ethnicity is to how it is constructed." Unlike primordialism, constructivists recognize the ethnic identity as unification of inborn traits and social input, and unlike instrumentalists, they consider the ethnic expressions are not always opportunistic (Joireman, 2007). They consider it wrong to assume that in ethnic group every member has singular social experience. Additionally, most of individuals have mixed ancestries and they choose the identity that fit them (Cerulo, 1997). Constructivists also argue that ethnicities are not conflictive inherently; some of them pursue goals through peaceful channels (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). There are two types of approaches within constructivism. The first argued that individuals in addition to elites are the agents of social construction. The marginalized members contest the current identity and construct the new one. It creates retaliatory violence from the members who benefit from the existing one. The marginal groups

also alternatively go for violence against the established members (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). The dominant view is leaders, social, economic and political forces normally called as elites construct the ethnicity. Modernity causes conflicts because modernization creates “converging aspiration” which leads to ethnic violence (Eriksen, 2002).

3. Research methodology

Research methodology is referred to the approach that a researcher chooses to study a specific phenomenon. It is the main logic behind the selection of this approach and the justification for the choice of particular method and data collection technique. Likewise, methodology is the clear roadmap that how the research will be conducted (Kumar, 2010). Methodology is critical in academic inquiries to produce quality knowledge (Kothari, 2004). This research aims to bridge the theoretical gaps therefore, qualitative methodology with descriptive and interpretive approaches has been adopted. Primarily, the argument of the research is developed with the review of the literature and the personal reflections. Primary data in the shape of Government’s reports and pamphlets have been collected but largely it is based on the secondary resources extracted from books, research papers, interviews, websites and periodicals. As it is the case in desk research, the internal and external validity of the data has been checked before utilization. The thematic analysis method with “six step model” of Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted for logical analyses of data.

Table-1: The six-stage thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006)

Steps	Phase	Description of the Process
1	Familiarization with data	Transcribing (reading, re-reading, taking notes)
2	Generation of initial codes	Coding interesting feature across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each code
3	Searching for themes	Collecting codes into potential themes
4	Reviewing themes	Generate a thematic “map” of the analysis and check the themes relevance in relation to coded extracts
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis: Analysis of selected extracts, relation back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis

4. The case of Balochistan: analysis and discussion

Balochistan is in the grip of violent ethnic conflicts. Scholars have provided different reasons for conflicts. Muzaffar *et al.* (2018) attributed them to authoritarian rule, Noraiee (2020) to foreign involvement, Samad (2014) to military operations, Noormal (2016) to human rights violations and Bansal (2008) to political and economic marginalization. Their interpretations are empirical and thought provoking, but none has explained the ethnic foundations and role of

ethnicity in conflict. In this section, the three theories would be tested against the situation of Balochistan and then it would be concluded which theory looks factual in the case of Balochistan.

4.1. Primordial view

According to this argument, Baloch believe on puritan nationalism and consider them as free natured, historical and lover of land. The majority of the Baloch consider that their identity is ordained by their language, group homogeneity, geography, history and cultural values. They value identity on other social constructs and feel pride and valour over this identity. This identity corresponds to their idea of nationalism (Raisani, 2018). The militants in Balochistan consider Balochistan as the “land of Baloch” and emphasis on the linguistic purity. Moreover, some insurgents claimed that Baloch are a nation, and they have the right to have free state with Baloch authority. By this logic, the exclusion of other groups is legitimate and alienation of Pashtuns, Hazaris, Punjabis and so on is justified (Noraiee, 2020). Baloch are against the mega-projects because they had realized that mega projects would culminate their language and identity. They fear that influx of Pashtuns and Punjabis with mega-projects would change the historical demography of the region. Baloch have resisted consistently, the attempts for balancing their history, status and character (Bansal, 2006). Puritan nationalism has ethnocentric bases, considers the multi-ethnicity in Balochistan as an issue. The residents in Balochistan are divided as “settler” and “natives” and bigotry and discrimination is vindicated against settlers. The conflict is the result of state’s repression for assimilation of Baloch lingual and cultural identity to larger national identity. Baloch have made impressive efforts to preserve it and it resulted in harsh operations and conflicts (Breseeg, 2009).

4.2. Instrumentalism

This argument attributes the ethnic conflicts to the post-colonial political and economic control of powerful Punjabi ethnic group. Punjabi-Muhajir fidelity in 1950s and 1960s and Punjabi-Pashtun association in post 1970s environment was not favourable for Baloch. Because of political, economic and geo-strategic interests, elites tried to incorporate them into a single modern sense of national identity. The Baloch nationalist leaders created the narratives of backwardness and denial of share in natural resources and economic development. Baloch leaders pointed out that they had always been dominated by a Punjabi-controlled central government. They further stated that the provincial governments were not allowed by elites to complete their terms (Gattani, 2021). Baloch leader Attullah Mengal remarked that, “we stand nowhere, under military we are ruled with iron heel, and during democracy, it is more of same” (Jetly, 2009, p. 213). Baloch are under-represented in the organ of state and jobs (Akhtar, 2017). According to Baloch leader, all positions in Balochistan from officer to *sepoy* were filled with outsiders. In 2002 out of fourteen provincial secretaries only four were Baloch, moreover, key position holders like Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police were non-Baloch

(Jetly, 2009). The national political policies for emancipation are regarded as cosmetic and inadequate (Akhtar, 2017).

Balochistan has remained the poorest among all provinces and its share in national GDP is only 3.5%. It has 50% poor population as compared to 22% national poor population. The human development index is lowest in South Asia. Socio-economic education, health, infrastructure, civil amenities are extremely backward (Siddiqi, 2015). The resentment is also on the exploitation of natural resources. It is resourceful area but discriminatory policies and lack of royalties of major sources like Natural Gas brought the province to preset backward stage. Balochistan's consumption of its resources is 17% while 80% are sent to the rest of the country (Grare, 2013; Gattani, 2021). The mega-projects for infrastructure and communication have not the desired effects. Government has allocated the funds but money did not attend the required targets (Grare, 2013). Additionally, they look at projects as tool of colonization, since they do not serve the people; rather fulfil the strategic requirements of state (Gattani, 2021). Baloch nationalists treated it discriminatory and exclusionary policy, thus this policy politicized the ethnicity (Jetly, 2009). The elite in Balochistan exploited the situation, mobilized the people and it give rise to ethnic nationalism (Siddiqi, 2015). The competitive material interests between Baloch nationalists and state on one side, and other ethnicities on the other, created the conflicts.

4.3. Constructivist view

This thesis expresses that some political and social developments and changes were tempting in the creation and reinforcement of Baloch ethnicity (Grare, 2013). The quest of state for single nationalism, based on Islam and Urdu; federation with colonial patterns of central tendencies and negative diffusion by empowering and patronizing the Islamists, Pashtuns and Punjabis were the temptations. The migrations from outside are considered as policy of ethnic cleansing. Ethnic groups in Balochistan, when, showed their resentments, state instead of compromise launched the military operations and dubbed them as traitors (Rahman, 1996; Foreign Policy Centre, 2006; Breseeg, 2009; Jetly, 2009; Grare, 2013; Noormal, 2016; Noraiee, 2020). These events created fear among Baloch. This impels united them on ethnic lines, in order to stay united and protected and against state's policy of alienations (Levesque, 2013; Siddiqi, 2015). The social, economic and political constructs were created as the situation demanded, such as rhetoric of disregarding, colonial rule and discrimination (Jetly, 2009; Grare, 2013). It created certain symbols and opposed others on the bases of same symbols of rhetoric. State did not retreat from its fabricated identity, so is the case of Baloch. It created tensions and conflicts of Baloch ethnicity with state and patrons of its identity in the province i.e., Islamists, Pashtuns, and Punjabis. It is to be noted that all the Baloch do not have agreement with ethnic politics, certain are with state's nationalism. Additionally, not all the nationalists are in conflict with state. The Baloch nationalism is not a unitary voice, some demand complete independence and some greater autonomy within the federation (Wirsing, 2008). Many non-racial and non-Baloch groups, such as Brahui and Sindhi, considered different from Baloch are now called

Baloch. It is not opposed by mainstream Baloch ethnicity (Breseeg, 2009). This perspective explained the conflicts better as compared to the primordialism because ethnicity, ethnic politics and ethnic conflicts emerged after the Baloch reacted to the problem created by government action.

5. Conclusion

Ethnicity has the potential for low intensity as well as extremely violent conflicts (Kaufman, 2011). Effective dealing with ethnic conflicts demands the in-depth study of theories, perspectives and dynamics of conflicts (Cordell & Wolff, 2011). This study was conducted with the objective of understanding the Baloch ethnicity with three dominant perspectives, in order to know which theory explains the conflicts unerringly. It is perceived that primordialism is a cause, somehow, but it is not the dominant factor in conflicts. Baloch nationalists did not effectively utilize history and culture for identity construction. Baloch and other groups have long periods of tolerance and stability, so the argument of “primeval hatred” is not valid. Many non-Baloch speaking groups like Brahui and Sindhi call themselves Baloch and this belief is not contested by Baloch-speaking people (Breseeg, 2009). They also live in harmony, whenever state adopted the policy of accommodation. The issue of killings of out-groups is more an economic issue than the primordial (Foreign Policy Centre, 2006). As for as constructivist arguments is concerned, it is found that, it explained the rise of nationalist politics and conflicts better, as compared to the primordialism. The ethnicity, ethnic politics and conflicts in Balochistan emerged as a response to the problem created by federal government. It is observed further that this perspective presented the plural picture because all the Baloch are not involved in ethnic politics, same as all the Baloch are not in conflict with state. However, the research found that the better explanation of Balochistan is instrumentalism. The opposition to marginalization of Baloch Language policy has economic concerns, as recognition of provincial language produces many jobs.

The reaction to One Unit Plan (1955), and Martial Laws (1958 and 1969) was political because authoritarian regimes restricted the political spaces in the province. The opposition to military operations in 1970s was also political because it was an attempt to take the administrative control of the Baloch. Baloch leaders, thus, got the opportunity to highlight the issue for their political claims. The cultural and cultural difference is utilized for political mobilization (Levesque, 2013; Siddiqi, 2015). This argument gets the further strength when one looks at the parties in conflict. It is not the ethnic group that is in conflict with the state; rather ethnic organizations speak on the name of nation and are in conflict with the state (Levesque, 2013; Siddiqi, 2015). The narrative of leaders, as explored in this study, about conflict is also support of this thesis. The voices for ethnic cleansing are very few. The main rhetoric of leaders is of political and economic marginalization. The rhetoric of denial of share in natural resources and economic development, deliberate backwardness, control of central government, lack of provincial autonomy and under-representation in jobs are common and ostentatious (Akhtar, 2017; Jetly, 2009; Gattani, 2021). The opposition to mega projects, such as Gawader Port is

also purely political, because they feel the other ethnicities would get the jobs and benefit out of these projects (Hasan, 2016). Furthermore, their relations with other ethnicities also support the instrumental nature. Baloch have tense relations with Pashtuns because of political competitiveness but are living in harmony with Sindhis (Breseeg, 2009). Such as, they do not have strains with Pashtuns in KPK, Punjabis in Punjab and Muhajirs in Sindh, because they do not have competition in these provinces. The Baloch leaders, when co-opted by the state, change the standpoint of their respective political organizations. The economic and political concessions also make them responsible and pacific (Levesque, 2013; Siddiqi, 2015; Ejaz & Hussain, 2018).

Thus, it is apparent that primordial and constructivist perspectives are not pertinent explanations of the conflict. As found in the study, instrumentalism is an accurate explanation. The real reasons of the conflicts, that are instrumental, are political and economic. It is suggested that the state should make the compromise and adopt the policy of reconciliation with Baloch. The general policy of amnesty should be adopted for past crimes. The political and economic concerns, instrumental in the politicization of the Baloch ethnic groups, should be addressed. Liberal political and economic concessions should be given. It is anticipated that it would minimize the insurgency in Balochistan.

This study has limited scope, as it deals only with the examination of the foundation of the ethnic conflicts in Balochistan. Therefore, its findings have some applications in the Pakistani context, but it has limited applications outside of the Pakistani context. There are many areas that need to be explored, such as the role of religious identities in conflicts, the impact of religious upsurge on the ethnopolitical uprising, and the impact of foreign involvement in the politicization of Baloch ethnicity.

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