
Identity Formation under Conditions of Violence: Theoretical Frameworks and Empirical Evidence

Mehmood Faisal Malik

PhD Scholar, National Defense University Islamabad, Pakistan.

strikingfalcon027@gmail.com

Dr. Asif Dawar

Assistant Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Faculty of Contemporary Studies National Defense University Islamabad, Doctorate degree in Development Studies from Lisbon School of Economics and Management, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal.

dawar@ndu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examines the evolution of Baloch ethnic identity in the context of violent conflict by exploring its historical, political, cultural and tribal dimensions. The nature of the paper is qualitative, and many facts of history are evaluated to investigate historical events and situations that had impact on the emergence of Baloch ethnic identity in Baluchistan. This paper uses a combination of two theories: Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory”, and “Social Identity Theory” to address how a cultural identity has been mobilized into collective action and eventually led to ethno nationalist movements. The topic is diverse in nature and dedicated efforts have been made to explain rise of nationalism in Balochistan and effects and causes that ends up in ethno nationalist movements. The empirical analysis demonstrates that both the state and Baloch tribal groups experience forms of ontological insecurity, suggesting that the Balochistan–state conflict cannot be understood solely in terms of economic grievances or relative deprivation; rather, it is fundamentally rooted in a broader social conflict involving identity, belonging, and competing perceptions of security.

Keywords: Baloch, ethnic identity, tribe, culture, violent, formation, ethno nationalist movements, ontologically insecure, Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory, Social Identity Theory

Introduction The territorial distribution of Baluchistan makes it significant as it is the largest province of Pakistan and is significantly rich in mineral resources and natural beauty. The vastness of Balochistan can be visualised by considering its area with respect to country and its importance can be understood by understanding its geopolitical location and borders, Iran on the West, Afghanistan on the North and the Indian Ocean on the South. Hence, the area is replete with unique customary laws having significant impact on the formation of ethnic identity of Baloch. (Khan, 2020). This study has been conducted in such a

fashion that it explores the social, cultural, historical and political dynamics to highlight on the issues of Baloch ethnic identification. The diverse province of Baluchistan is located at the junction of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East where most of oil rich countries are located. The area is also abundant in its traditional and historical civilizations and geographical migrations (Majeed, 2015).

Baloch ethnic identity formation study is unique in its nature, and it is based on various historical narratives of colonial rulers and emperors (Titus & Swidler, 2000). Colonial rulers and outsider immigrants have had an impact on the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. They have significantly affected the Baloch ethnic identity in the past in terms of their language, culture and religions. Moreover, Baluchistan has been used as a trade route in past which also influenced the Baloch identity formation process (Majeed 2015). Obviously, Baluchistan is an interesting land, it is a border with oil and natural resource countries of the world (Javaid & Jahangir, 2020). These geographical factors have had an impact on the history of Baloch culture. Hence the importance and significance of this research is to understand the cause and impact of Baloch ethnic identification especially with a view to understand how it led to ethno nationalist movements. During the research process, study examines the historical cultural boundaries and other dimensions of the Baloch ethnic cultural identity formation. The study further shows that the Balochi language has been the key factor in developing Baloch ethnic identity formation that has been a means of communication from one nation to another.

Historical Perspective of the Study

Baloch identity formation has been influenced by its history which started in the pre-Islamic period. Through the evaluation with respect to time, Baluchistan has had different eras of Persian, Turkic and Arab culture. During the initial period of history Baluchistan had seen resistance, occupation and colonial rule. Baloch culture was blended with various other cultures that migrated here for trading and occupation by different intruders (Jahani, 2014). There are many instances in history that show how the Baloch cultures, lifestyle and traditions helped in maintaining and growing Baloch ethnic identity formation (Khan et al., 2020).

The process of identity formation of Baloch people had also been affected and shaped by the British rule in Baluchistan. Irregular borders were drawn and different administrative arrangements were created during the colonial period in Baluchistan, most of which sought to split Baloch and, in this regard, some of the efforts split Baloch ethnic identity. There was a further division in Baloch based on the diverse language, cultural affliction and social norms (Mushtaq & Mirza, 2021). But all the plans for the division of Baloch failed as Baloch were strongly linked via tribal culture, linguistic foundation and resistance movements and eventually ends up in ethno national movements. Almost all the authors who contributed through their research on Balochistan are convinced that Baluchistan has been a trade route for regional powers because of this, the process of the Baloch ethnic identity has been infected, and this infection always creates ethno national movements (Noraiee, 2020).

Baluchistan had related to the Middle East in Past where it had the impact of Mesopotamian civilization effects. Baloch had a unique formation of ethnic process; they resisted so much and so many invasions by British colonial powers. They stayed on the land, for cultural preservation. The distinctive tribalisation of the Baloch society becomes apparent. This analysis will critically examine the role of tribal structure, the internal dynamics of tribal structure and the influence of outside pressures to the process of ethnic identity formation. In today's world, Baluchistan is at a turning point, facing the challenges of modern-day geopolitics, economic interests and the ongoing insurgency for quite some time. Hence, the historical source of Baloch identity is of utmost importance to understand the challenges and aspirations of the present time and envision the future of the formation of Baloch ethnic identity in Baluchistan. Furthermore, it is a historical analysis which is intended to dissemble the layers of time that envelop the ethnic identity formation in Baluchistan and shed light on the interplay of historical forces that have influenced a people and a region. In this quest through the pages of history to explore the current literature about the Baloch ethnic identity, it is crucial to understand not just what has transpired, but the spirit and resilience of a people whose identity has been as varied as the land they inhabit. The study of the history of ethnic identity in Baluchistan has also been overlooked so far, which would have an impact in unravelling the historical layers of ethnic identity formation in Baluchistan.

Problem Statement. Historical communication and cultural preservation have resulted in the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. Surely, it had geographical pressures, but it didn't change. It has been studied that very little knowledge has been found in existing literature about the Baloch ethnic identity formation especially with respect to formation of identity under historical lens. The study is acknowledged as filling the gap in the literature that identity formation is directly linked with ontological securities. Essential social, cultural, political and geographical issues are also discussed which safeguard the process of ethnic identity formation of the Baloch.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess different historical events which helped the preservation of Baloch ethnic Identity formation?
2. To investigate the causes how Baloch identity led to ethno nationalist movements through Anthony Giddens theory of ontological insecurity.

Aim The aim of this research is to see how the international political norms and the local political norms aided Baloch ethnic identity formation which eventually led to ethno nationalist movements and how it contributes towards ontological insecurity.

Theoretical Framework Since the Baloch ethnic identity enhanced sociocultural integrity unity among Baloch ethnic groups, a theoretical foundation has been essential for the study to understand the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. The theoretical framework gives an insight into the study via which different social, cultural, political and

geographical events and incidents are looked upon with the following relevant theoretical framework. This paper conceptualised through the combination of two theories theory of “*Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory*”, and “*Social Identity Theory*.” The theory of *Ethnicity and Identity Construction* has been introduced by Anthony D. Smith and Stuart Hall. This theory is based on the importance of ethnicity as a social formation that is created by historical incidents events and experiences. It further explains that language, culture, history and tradition and social conditions influence the formation of ethnic identity formation. No doubt that the historical events during the colonial era, and the social contributions formed the Baloch ethnic identity.

This *Social Identity Theory* explains that the dynamics of groups and social categorization form the individual identity. This theory also takes into consideration the impact of the identified relationship and differences with other ethnic groups on the Baloch identity in the context of the Baloch people. The theory deals with the elements that shaped the Baloch ethnic identity formation, such as historical events, cultural norms, social and political circumstances, under a constructivist perspective. With the help of the above theories, the process of the awareness of Baloch ethnic groups with their ethnic identity and the influence of external factors on Baloch culture were identified. Adopting the idea of these two theories, internal factors regarding Baloch ethnic factor have been taken into consideration for further study how identity leads to ethno national movements.

Bridging Knowledge Gap This paper will aim at understanding the mechanics of identity formation of Baloch tribes under various regimes and how it led to ethno nationalist movements. Paper aims at identifying the identity formation through lens of *Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory*”, and “*Social Identity Theory*. Moreover, this will also help scholars to gain a deep insight into the past practices, socio-political tendencies, and the underlying elements that propel the formation of ethnic identities in Baluchistan. The composite nature of ethnicity, state power, resource politics and external participation in the construction of the identity is also conceptualised through theoretical framework and how this creation moved from simple identity creation to ethno nationalist movements.

Research Design The research design has been laid down to find out how the Baluchistan ethnic identity has formed under tough historical environments. The study is qualitative where different situations have been examined such as personal experiences, events and facts to find out the impacts of the Baloch ethnic identity formation process. Different facts and events were enquired with the target population. The selection of the participants was based on different tribal setup, geographical locations and social and economic background who have proper understandings of the Baloch ethnic identity formation. To obtain proper ideas from the informed persons regarding the process of formation of Baloch ethnic identity, informal and unstructured interviews were conducted for the very purpose of the study. Since the area under consideration is conflict zone hence no

respondent was agreed to show the identity. Most of the data was collected through informal discussion and telephonic conversations.

Data Analysis Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data of the study to add validity and authenticity to the study. The theme of primary and secondary data was compressed so as to bring the originality of the study to the surface. Themes were created on various historical facts and incidents to introduce validated information on the process of preserving the Baloch ethnic formation process.

Results and Discussion Balochistan has undoubtedly a rich and wide-spread Balochi dialect and sociocultural background. Therefore, its ethnic identity has been based on its dialects and sociocultural background. The Balochi language, which is spoken throughout Baluchistan, basically originated from the Iranian language. But it was its regional dynamics which altered its dialects (Spooner, 2012). The Balochi language and culture have highly forged a sense of unity and integrity among the Baloch people. The sense of oneness is further boosted by the practice of culture by Baloch people (Khan et al., 2020). History of the information gathered through this review set the ground of the long-term effects of Baluchistani split and British imperialism on ethnic identity (Zeb, 2015). Some of the knowledge gathered and which frames the Baloch identity is shaped by historical legacies (Ahmed, 2020). Struggle stories are important components to identity because they involve some sort of conflict and maintaining cultural diversity.

The Role of Tribalism in Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation Traditionally, tribalism has been crucial to the change of Baloch identity (Ahmed, 2020). In many instances, over the past, tribal setup had evolved with its own socio-cultural structure and customs. The tribal system has played a tremendous role in the Baloch identity formation where they had been engaged in settlement of different problem and issues, providing a feeling of integrity and oneness among the Baloch community. The tribe's decades old had played a crucial role in the formation of Baloch identity introducing the sociocultural and traditional norms within the borders. On the other end, Baloch originate from different tribes who are currently inhabited in different parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Fortunately, all Baloch have identified themselves as one and have a common sociocultural norm across Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. There is no doubt, that the Baloch identity is based on tribalism, but it is divided into different families. Social communication and the cultural affiliation are present in all Baloch, and they have strong classified relationship. It needs to be pointed out that each tribe has a Sardar or Khan who enjoys enormous power within his tribe, and they have their own system of law and order. (Bashir et al., 2023). They invited the jirgas and Baloch Mead to address issues or take a decision that is hard to be challenged by the tribe men. Such jirgas are recognized by the Baloch community.

All these have set the stage for the preservation of Baloch society and formation of Baloch ethnic identity. Except for tribal setup there have been some customs that have been greatly influenced by Baloch social fabric. People from those tribes preserved their identity

by practicing different cultural events. They wore jewellery and participated in various symbolic activities. Tribalism undoubtedly had some cruel history, but they also established a sense of integrity and unity in the Baloch population. Tribalism also posed issues as there was tension and conflict within the Baloch society (Mushtaq & Mirza, 2021). Along with it, Baloch also have contributed to the modification and enlightenment of their culture to cope with the modernity and to sustain their cultural values. It is then logical to admit that tribalism has influenced social formation, executive system, and cultural movements in the past, functioning as a key module to decode Baloch identity. Tribalism has a peculiar significance, in the light of which one can easily understand the effects and causes of Baloch ethnic identity formation in the current era. No doubt, Baloch have a rich history of culture and tradition but still faces so many difficulties in preserving its cultural values due to its tribal and geographical setup.

Importance of Social fabric in Baloch Ethnicity Formation Social fabric has been unique and significant, compared to the Baloch ethnic identity formation. However, scholars such as Gazdar et al. (2007) discovered that the social fabric plays a significant role in creating the identity of Baloch ethnic group. Families and tribal networks are part of the social fabric. Baloch has been integrated and united under the banner of the social fabric which has given the sense of unity and oneness. Baloch history, therefore, abounds with examples of people being united and integrated through the social fabric, which has shaped the process of ethnic identity formation in Baloch. The reliability and sense of association that cultural organizations increased the bonds of Baloch identity. The social fabric, as discussed, has investigated the formation of Baloch identity. It is important to mention that invasion, colonial approach and migrations of various ethnic groups in Baluchistan have helped and shaped the formation of ethno nationalist movements in Balochistan (Siddiqi, 2012). It is unique in the way that the Baloch have adopted the modern change and have also maintained their social and cultural values. Myriad Balochi language, lifestyle and sociocultural norms were influential in the formation of Baloch ethnic identity (Khan et al., 2019). Also, other regional entities such as multidimensional entities have influenced the formation of Baloch ethnic identity. Classification of Baloch tribe has also contributed to shape ethnic formation of Baloch. Similarly, the new changes in the world no doubt had an impact on the Baloch dynamic forces (Shafqat & Shahid, 2017). It is important to note that, Baloch identity has been rising and is directly supported by multiple terrorist organizations like Baloch Liberation Army which question the state autonomy hence creates sense of ontologically insecure environment for both community and state.

Economic Factor in the Baloch Ethnic Identity Formation There are several factors that affect the building of Baloch ethnic identity; however, one major and yet often overlooked factor is economic consequences. Such an important note refocuses the impact of economic undercurrents on the Baloch and unearths the footprints of how the economy influences Baloch identity. Modern sectors such as mining, energy extraction and trade sectors are found in Baluchistan with traditional sectors of agriculture, fishing and

pastoralism (Asif et al., 2017). Economic activities are intertwined with the local ecosystem, topography and past patterns of resource sharing. Economic prospects and constraints are used to model Baloch incomes, as well as immigration, resolution, and career preferences. For example, if there are social unrest and economic elimination in the Baloch communities, this could lead to the collapse of traditional enterprises due to ecological reasons or due to the resistance of existing enterprises. As a result, a major segment of Baloch population is nomadic with agriculture and seasonal crops as a way of life (Shaheen, 2011), this is the main reason behind all the ethno nationalist's movements which surfaced in Baluchistan time to time. Another pivotal point in this study is the economic changes that are leading to a degeneration of social imbalance in Baloch society, facilitating class-based clashes and splits. A critical study of economic developments is essential to confront the economic inequities in the interest of promoting social consistency and balanced development in Baluchistan.

Baloch Linguistic and Ethnic Identity as Driver of ethno nationalist movements The Baloch ethnic identity is characterised by spans of ancient nature, cultural and geographic impacts, which have produced a rich interior diversity and linguistic modifications. This fundamental study explores the various impacts these fundamental elements have on the intricate process of Baloch identity construction and what effects linguistic diversity has on the social fabric of Baluchistan. Many ethnic groups, tribes, and smaller groups can be found in Baluchistan; each has its own exclusive cultural norms, social organizations, and historical descriptions (Khan, 2023). This is an inside-outside view of the compound construction of Baloch society and is confronted with generalised representations of Baloch identity. Linguistic diversity is an important module of Baloch identity as several languages/dialects are spoken by the Baloch people. In Baluchistan, three languages are mainly spoken, namely Brahui, Pashto, and Balochi, all with their own linguistic traditions and historical inspirations. The Baloch cultural inheritance is enhanced by these language variances, but they also create problems for intergroup influences and communication (Khubchandani, 2003). Baluchistan has experienced different phases of contact with other counties and cultures which has brought its linguistic and cultural diversity and has constituted an interesting cultural norm. The adoption of languages from Persian, Arabic and Indian languages and sharing of cultures with neighbouring communities shows the flexibility and adaptability of Baloch identity. Linguistic and internal diversity enrich the vitality of Baloch identity but also pose challenges for political and social cohesion. The breakout of tribal conflict, language conflicts and various narratives can further divide Baloch social fabric and impede economic and social development and group action. In this way, it may be stated that both linguistic and internal diversity of the Baloch ethnic identity are essential elements which represent the complex interplay of social, cultural and historical forces in Baluchistan and eventually leads to ethno nationalist movements. These ethnonationalist movements are developing a sense of dissatisfactions, frustration and aggression and are crucial for the social cohesion and sustainable development in Balochistan.

Recommendations for Future Research The study has accounted regional changes within Balochistan. Further analyses can be more detailed to understand the variations between Baloch identities in different geographical settings. The emphasis of the work is on general identity formation. A more in-depth study of the Baloch community and its experience and definition of identity may be able to shed light on gender trends. Furthermore, understanding the creation of Baloch identity over a period of time through research may provide a better knowledge of the ongoing development of ethno nationalist movements within the community. The study adds to academic research and the creation of well-informed policies that recognize and respect the complications of Baluchistan's ethnic identity scene by offering an understanding of the historical, social, and political elements shaping Baloch identity.

Conclusion. The study of the formation of ethnic identities in Baluchistan reveals a complex and entangled phenomenon, where social, political, historical, linguistic and geopolitical factors are intertwined. Overall, this critical analysis provides valuable insights into the complex processes through which the Baloch people negotiate their identity in a region with rich historical roots and contemporary challenges. Moreover, the study underlines the significance of historical legacy such as the impact of colonial period of Britain on Baloch ethnic group. In addition, it visualises through lens of *Ethnicity and Identity Construction theory*, and "*Social Identity Theory*" about the identity creation and its route towards ethno nationalist movement and proves that both state and Balochistan feels ontologically insecure hence prove the Anthony Giddens work of "*Ontological Insecurities.*" To sum up, this study on the formation of ethnic identities in Baluchistan offers a window for scholars and policy makers to look at how the social, political and historical factors interact to influence the Baloch identity. This process was critically analysed, and it revealed insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by the Baloch people, as well as insights into the formation of ethnic identities in diverse complex geopolitical contexts which eventually surfaced as ethno nationalist movements and create ontologically insecure environment among the Baloch tribes and state.

References

- Ahmed, M. (2020). The dynamics of (ethno)nationalism and federalism in postcolonial Baluchistan, Pakistan. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 55(7), 979–1006.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620906751>
- Ashraf, U. (2026). Dissent or desire for more development? Win-win discourse and power dynamics in the narratives of the Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 67(4–5), 591–613.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2025.2597825>
- Asif, M., Baloch, D., Zafar, H., & Bashir, S. (2017). Poverty alleviation through agricultural development: A case study of date palm and vegetable farmers in Panjgoor District of Baluchistan. *Al-Burz*, 9(1), 1–15.
- Bashir, S., Khan, J., Danish, M., & Bashir, W. (2023). Governance and development challenges in Balochistan: A comparative study with other provinces and way forward. *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences*, 2(4), 620–649. <https://ijciss.org/index.php/ijciss/article/view/179/>
- Gazdar, H., Budhani, S. J., Mallah, H. B., & Khan, N. M. I. (2007). *Baluchistan economic report: Background paper on social structures and migration* (Report No. TA4757-PAK). Collective for Social Science Research.
- Hassan, M., & Jan, A. (2022). Economic basis of Baloch grievances in Baluchistan. *Journal of Historical Studies*, 8(2), 124–138.
- Jahani, C. (2014). The Baloch as an ethnic group in the Persian Gulf region. In L. G. Potter (Ed.), *The Persian Gulf in modern times* (pp. 267–297). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137485779_11
- Javaid, P. D. U., & Jahangir, J. (2020). Baluchistan: A key factor in global politics. *South Asian Studies*, 30(2), 93–105.
- Khan, F. R., Malghani, M., & Ayaz, S. (2020). Construction of Baloch ethnic identity through ethnolinguistic awareness and cultural dynamics. *Global Regional Review*, 5(1), 84–91. [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020\(V-I\).11](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020(V-I).11)
- Khan, S. (2023). *Baluchistan and the mélange of violence: Regional context and external factors*. Routledge.
- Khan, Z. A. (2020). Baluchistan factor in Pak-Iran relations: Opportunities and constraints. *South Asian Studies*, 27(1), 121–138.
- Khubchandani, L. M. (2003). Language policy and education in the Indian subcontinent. In P. Trudgill, J. Cheshire, & D. Britto (Eds.), *When languages collide: Perspectives on*

language conflict, language competition, and language coexistence (pp. 289–302).
Ohio State University Press.

- Majeed, G. (2015). Land of Baluchistan: A historical perspective. *Journal of Political Studies*, 22(1), 153–169.
- Malik, I. H. (2014). [Review of the book *The politics of ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir ethnic movements*, by F. H. Siddiqi]. *Contemporary South Asia*, 22(2), 217–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2014.902667>
- Mushtaq, M., & Mirza, Z. (2021). Understanding the nexus between horizontal inequalities, ethno-political conflict and political participation: A case study of Baluchistan. *Ethnopolitics*, 21(3), 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2021.1963836>
- Noraiee, H. (2020). The Baloch nationalism in Pakistan: Articulation of the ethnic separatism after the end of the Cold War. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 11(1), 72–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366520930728>
- Padilla, A. M. (1999). Psychology. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 110–121). Oxford University Press.
- Phinney, J. S., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K., & Vedder, P. (2001). Ethnic identity, immigration, and well-being: An international perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 493–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00225>
- Shafqat, S., & Shahid, S. (2017). *Migration, urbanization and security: Challenges of governance and development in Baluchistan* (Working Paper No. 12). Centre for Public Policy and Governance.
- Shaheen, A. (2011). Living on the margins: A socio-historical profile of the nomads in Pakistan. *Pakistan Perspectives*, 16(1), 41–58.
- Siddiqi, F. H. (2012). *The politics of ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir ethnic movements*. Routledge.
- Spooner, B. (2012). Balochi: Towards a biography of the language. In A. Korn & C. Jahani (Eds.), *The Baloch and their neighbours: Ethnic and linguistic contact in Baluchistan in historical perspective* (pp. 319–336). Reichert Verlag.
- Titus, P., & Swidler, N. (2000). Knights, not pawns: Ethno-nationalism and regional dynamics in post-colonial Baluchistan. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32(1), 47–69.
- Zeb, R. (2015). *Pakistan's other problem: Narratives, enduring injustice and ethnopolitical conflict in Baluchistan* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Australia]. UWA Research Repository.