

LAND ALIENATION

THE STRUGGLE OF THE BALUCHI PEOPLE

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CTRIBAL PEOPLES ARE TOO OFTEN LINKED WITH THE WORD ‘alienation’. Frequently these groups are alienated from their land, their resources, their homes, access to knowledge, and overall, deprived of their freedom to basic equal and civil rights. Focusing on the Baluchi tribe, it is evident that the linguistically and culturally united peoples, which are geographically split into three countries – Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan – continuously face alienation from the central governments of the country they reside in. For example, in Iranian Baluchistan, the Baluchis are a religious minority being Sunni Muslims in a Shia Muslim country where additionally their cultural, social, economic, and political rights are denied<sup>1</sup>. In Pakistani Baluchistan, the history of struggle between the central government and the Baluchi tribe dates back to 1948, one year after the Baluchi tribe officially became part of Pakistan when the British Raj annexed their land. When focusing on the history of struggle and alienation of the majority of Baluchis that reside in Pakistan, it is clear as to why the Baluchi region remains one of the poorest areas of the world.

The Baluchi tribe dates back to the time shortly before Christ, migrating northward from Aleppo into what is now Syria<sup>2</sup>. They eventually moved through Iran and are now settled in a large region covering 44 percent of Pakistan with a population of about 4.4 million, a population of 1 million in Southeastern Iran, and a very small population covering the southern strip of Afghanistan<sup>3</sup>. The Baluchi tribe depends heavily on agriculture, with about 77 percent of the population living in rural areas<sup>4</sup>. Ironically, as the Baluchi were in search of fresh lands and water sources, they now reside in an arid to semi-arid climate, with low rainfall, dry winds, cold winters, and hot summers<sup>5</sup>.

Baluchistan while lying on the outskirts of the monsoon zone is affected by the currently erratic nature of monsoon rains and therefore cannot solely depend on them for farming needs<sup>6</sup>. Baluchis depend heavily on natural water sources such as springs, streams, and rivers with irrigation being essential to farming, yet in most of the province water resources are limited and uncertain<sup>7</sup>. To

make matters worse, due to groundwater mining, a lack of an integrated approach by the Pakistani government, the drilling of tube wells, and the overall lack of rainfall, the Baluchis are in desperate for safe drinking water<sup>8</sup>. Before cyclone Yemyin and the subsequent floods that

occurred in June of 2007, Baluchistan witnessed an 11-year drought causing crop failure, loss of livestock, and a rapid deterioration of health and sanitary conditions<sup>9</sup>.

Focusing on the district of Chagai, one of the most affected areas of the drought, it is important to note that due to the lack of precipitation and its dry climate, “famine conditions have caused the deaths of about seven million head of livestock and affected 1.3 million people”<sup>10</sup>. Overall, as Chagai, and most of Baluchistan witness, the scarcity of water they are constantly confronted with the inability to survive on their own land<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, they are forced to migrate to urban areas, where they face further discrimination by the Punjab majority<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, this forced migration only threatens the traditions and unity of the Baluchi people.

Historically, the only measure taken by the Pakistani government to help the Baluchi with their shortage of water was on March 22, 1978 when the Baluchistan Ground Water Rights Administration Ordinance was created in order to manage and regulate the use of groundwater<sup>13</sup>. However, this measure failed due to “political interference, the tribal system and a failure of government agencies to enforce the measures”<sup>14</sup>. The Pakistani central government has proven itself to be a detriment to the Baluchi water crisis. In May of 1998 Pakistan carried out a series of nuclear tests in the eastern Chagai district of Baluchistan<sup>15</sup>. Not only has this caused high degrees of radiation, leading to diseases such as leukemia and tuberculosis, but also worsening the already severe shortage of drinkable water. Therefore, Baluchis are now dealing with a lack of uncontaminated natural water since the water sources have been overexploited and polluted.

Currently, the Baluchis are still faced with the shortage of water, a search for a new home, and many other basic survival needs. As Cyclone Yemyin was a huge disaster, it finally brought about international attention to the plight of the

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“Human life is limited, but knowledge is limitless. To drive the limited in pursuit of the limitless is fatal; and to presume that one really knows is fatal indeed!”

CHUANG-TZU

Baluchis. When Cyclone Yemyin hit in 2007 1.5 million people were affected, with 250,000 people made homeless and a further 300,000 displaced<sup>16</sup>. As a result, organizations such as Concern-US, UNICEF, Red Cross, the World Health Organization and many other NGO's have been active over the past year in Baluchistan to aid them in their plight. As the effects of climate change intensify, so do the extremes of the monsoon cycle, making the Baluchi people in greater need of relief. The vast land of Baluchistan is home to a culturally rich tribal people making it crucial that organizations and governments unite in order to help the endangered Baluchi population and environment. ■

<sup>15</sup> CONTENTA, SANDRA, 5 May 2006, "Pakistan's Dirty Nuclear Secret." Accessible at: <http://www.balochwarrior.com/modules/articles/article.php?id=111>  
<sup>16</sup> International Federation of the Red Cross. 25 March 2008. "Pakistan: Cyclone Yemyin/Floods," Accessible at: [www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals-008/mdrpk001intfinal.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals-008/mdrpk001intfinal.pdf).



<sup>1</sup> MEGALOMMATIS, MUHAMMAD SHAMSADDIN, 13 June 2008, "Liberate Baluchistan" in *American Chronicle*. Accessible at: [www.americanchronicle.com/articles/64973](http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/64973) .  
<sup>2</sup> HARRISON, SELIG S., 1981, "Baluchi Nationalism and Superpower Rivalry," *International Security*, 5(3), p. 152 -163.  
<sup>3</sup> NICOLINI, BEATRICE, 2007, "The Baluchi Role in the Persian Gulf during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27(2), p. 384-396.  
<sup>4</sup> FAO, 11 July 2001, "Special Report FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Pakistan." Accessible at: [www.fao.org/docrep/004/y1260e/y1260e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/y1260e/y1260e00.htm)  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>9</sup> UN, 3 June 2002, "Drought? Pakistan" in *Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System's Operational Activities for Development in Pakistan*, Update no. 14. Accessible at: [www.un.org.pk/drought/rcreport14.htm](http://www.un.org.pk/drought/rcreport14.htm)  
<sup>10</sup> FAO, *op. cit.*  
<sup>11</sup> UN, *op. cit.*  
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>13</sup> FAO, *op. cit.*  
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*