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## THE BALUCH PRESENCE IN THE PERSIAN GULF

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Contrary to popular perception, the Persian Gulf—including the Arab littoral—exhibits a variegated *mélange* of sectarian, ethnic, and communal groups. Some are of recent addition to the mix, while many others can boast of an ancient presence and contribution to society. The Baluch form one of the communities most integral to society in the Gulf, with representation in all six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and a presence that, in at least some of these countries, dates back innumerable centuries. As long-time residents and as Sunnis, the Baluch tend not to stand out or to be noticed in any obvious way. Nevertheless, they maintain a clear identity shaped by linguistic and cultural factors that makes them distinct on closer inspection. Consequently, an examination of their role provides an important insight into one aspect of the multicultural mosaic of the Persian Gulf. This chapter furnishes as extensive a look at the Baluch of the Arab littoral as is possible given the extent of available information.

The term Baluch refers to a major ethnic group primarily located in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan (Balochistan) and across

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the border in neighboring Iran.<sup>1</sup> The Pakistani province extends from the Makran Coast along the Gulf of Oman to the northern frontier of Pakistan with Afghanistan; there are consequently some Baluch across the border in Afghanistan as well. Baluchi tradition claims that the Baluch and the Kurds share a common ancestry originating in Aleppo. It is more certain that the Baluch lived along the Caspian Sea before migrating into present-day Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan in the early centuries of Islam. A political identity was forged in the eighteenth century when the rulers of Kalat in northern Baluchistan created an independent state that lasted until the arrival of the British. The Baluch resisted incorporation into both Reza Shah's Iran in 1928 and into Pakistan in 1947, and sometimes violent Baluchi opposition has persisted in both countries.<sup>2</sup>

It is estimated that between 70 percent and 80 percent of the Baluch live in Pakistan, with most of the remainder in the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan and in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> There are also Baluch in the

<sup>1</sup> These introductory paragraphs draw from Selig S. Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations*, New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981; Selig S. Harrison, "Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: The Baluch, the Pashtuns, and Sindhis," in Joseph V. Montville (ed.), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990, pp. 301–25; Selig S. Harrison, "Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan: The Baluch Case," in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 294–301; Peter R. Blood, *Pakistan: A Country Study*, 6th edn, Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1995; Carina Jahani, Agnes Korn, and Paul Titus (eds), *The Baluch and Others: Linguistic, Historical and Socio-Political Perspectives on Pluralism in Balochistan*, Wiesbaden: Reichart Verlag, 2008; Muhammad Sardar Khan Baluch, *History of Baluch Race and Baluchistan*, Quetta, privately printed, ca. 1958; M. Paul Lewis (ed.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edn, Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2009, www.ethnologue.com

<sup>2</sup> There have been periodic attempts by some Baluch, particularly those living in Arab countries, to claim that the Baluch actually are of Arab descent. Therefore, they should be treated as other Arabs and some would even argue that the Arab world should support the movement for the independence of Baluchistan. This contention seems to be rejected by most Baluchis, however. (Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, pp. 120–6; interviews in Oman, various years.) Valeri also mentions this point in this book, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> The Pakistani province of Baluchistan was created in 1970 by merging Kalat and Quetta districts. Robert G. Wirsing, "South Asia: The Baluch Frontier Tribes of Pakistan," in Robert G. Wirsing (ed.), *Protection of Ethnic Minorities: Comparative*

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Sind and Punjab provinces in Pakistan. Population figures are vague, with Baluchi nationalists claiming more than 16 million while the government of Pakistan put the total at 3.2 million in the late 1980s. One seasoned observer estimates a total of about 5 million with 4 million in Pakistan and 1 million in Iran; the same observer put the literacy rate at 6 percent to 9 percent.<sup>4</sup> The 1996–7 census in Iran counted 1.7 million inhabitants of Sistan and Baluchistan province, although this includes many Persian speakers.<sup>5</sup>

The Baluch are mostly Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school (although some are Zikri, a sect that believes in a prophet superseding Muhammad) and speak their own language (subdivided into distinct dialects or, as is sometimes contended, languages). Their language is from the Iranian group of Indo-European languages. The Baluchi language was unwritten until the nineteenth century and is now written in Arabic script. The dialect that is most relevant vis-à-vis the Gulf is Southern Baluch. The Baluch are divided into a number of tribes, some of which are replicated, at least in name, in Oman and perhaps elsewhere. The picture is complicated by the existence of many Jadgal living among the Baluch in both Pakistan and Iran. Although close to the Baluch in many ways, their origins are a matter of dispute and they speak the distinctive language of Jadgali.

It can be conjectured that the migration of Baluch to the Arab countries of the Gulf was prompted by three motivations. The first, and perhaps the most primal, factor seems to have been the general tendency for ethnic or sectarian communities to spread into neighboring lands. This has been particularly true up and down the Gulf with Arab groups settled on the Iranian coast and inland from it for many centuries, and with Persian groups, first as merchants and then as laborers, settling in Arab littoral towns from Kuwait to Dubai. Over the longer term this type of migration exhibits a pattern of movement from areas along the Iranian littoral to the nearest points on the Arab littoral. Thus Behbeha-

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*Perspectives*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, p. 281. There also exists a pocket of Baluch in Soviet Turkmenistan. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, "Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan," p. 304. Lewis, *Ethnologue*, gives a total Baluch population of 3,405,000 with 2,770,000 in Pakistan and 405,000 in Iran.

<sup>5</sup> Abdolhossein Yadegari, "Pluralism and Change in Iranian Balochistan," in Jahani et al., *Baloch and Others*, p. 247.

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nis are predominant in Kuwait, Bushehris in Bahrain, and Bastakis in Dubai. Under this reasoning, it is not surprising that a sizeable proportion of the population of Oman's Batinah Coast on the Gulf of Oman should be Baluch.

The second factor in the settlement of Baluch in the Gulf is related to the Baluchi martial reputation. Baluch mercenaries have served as soldiers and armed retainers in the service of more than one Gulf ruler, but especially the rulers of Oman, where their presence has been recorded with the Ya'rubis imams in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Recruitment directly from Baluchistan continued well into the twentieth century in Oman and Bahrain. A factor in this process unique to Oman was the sultanate's ownership for more than a century and a half of the enclave of Gwadar on the coast of Baluchistan.

The third factor is part of a general migration of labor to the Persian Gulf during the oil era. While the Baluch have not been as numerous in this respect as other Pakistanis, not to mention Indians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and other Asian nationalities, Baluchi workers can be found in all the Gulf states. "Here the Baluch found work as unskilled laborers, policemen, or fishermen. Other Baluch joined the military. Still others labored in the oil fields and on the farms of the wealthy Gulf states. Although the Baluch work extremely hard, they are much better off than they were in Baluchistan, one of the poorest areas of the world."<sup>7</sup>

### *Oman*

Oman is the one country in the Gulf where Baluch live in profusion and have done so for a long but indeterminate period of time. This is undoubtedly due to the proximity of Makran to the Batinah. Early European travelers to Oman in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mentioned the Baluch, and it can reasonably be assumed that Baluch have resided in the country for centuries before that.

<sup>6</sup> S.B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, London: Harrison and Sons, 1919, 2nd edn, reprinted in one vol., London: Frank Cass, 1966, pp. 201–64; Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: A Political and Economic History of Five Port Cities, 1500–1730*, Washington, DC: Mage, 2006, pp. 347–51.

<sup>7</sup> Beatrice Nicolini, "The Baluch Role in the Persian Gulf during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27, 2 (2007), p. 385.

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Omani Baluch form a large proportion of the population in all the towns of al-Batinah Coast (stretching from Muscat to the UAE border in the west), as well as in the Muscat capital region. As the Sultanate of Oman census does not break down the population by ethnicity or religion, there can be no accurate figure of the Baluch population but a reasonable estimate would reckon between 205,000 and 245,000, or around 10–13 percent of the total Omani population.<sup>8</sup>

There are smaller communities of Baluch elsewhere in Oman, notably in al-Dhahirah region (on the inland side of the Hajar Mountains opposite al-Batinah and close to Abu Dhabi). At some forgotten point in time, a group of Baluch settled in this area where they adopted the organization of an Arab tribe as well as the Arabic language. By their own explanation, the enclave was created when earlier rulers of Oman sent Baluch to the region as soldiers and guards for officials.<sup>9</sup> Although they dressed as Arabs and spoke Arabic, they were regarded as being on poor terms with all the neighboring Arab tribes. Because they were threatened by the Ibadi imam in the early 1950s, they allied themselves

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," *Middle East Journal*, 58, 1 (Winter 2004), p. 36; Sultanate of Oman, Supreme Council for Planning, National Center for Statistics and Information, *Statistical Yearbook 2011*, Muscat, 2011, <http://www.ncsi.gov.om/book/SYB2011/contents.htm>. These very rough estimates were calculated on the basis that one-third of the Omani population of al-Batinah is Baluch. The 2010 Omani census enumerates 773,000 residents of al-Batinah, of whom about 80 percent were Omani, with 1,957,000 Omanis in total. It is possible that the Baluch form a lesser proportion of al-Batinah's population but, on the other hand, the numerous Baluch of the capital region were not included in this estimate. The Joshua Project, an online website proclaiming to be "a research initiative seeking to highlight the ethnic people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ," puts the total of Baluch in Oman at 434,000, <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php>. However, there is no indication of date, sources of information, or methodology. Earlier estimates of the Baluch population of Oman were much lower. A compendium of information on Omani tribes and groups in the early 1950s put the total at between 15,000 and 16,000. Of these, it was estimated that 5,000–6,000 were settled in Muscat and the remainder along the Batinah. Only about 500 were in al-Dhahirah and the numbers that J.G. Lorimer had found in the Ja'lan of the east and the Western and Eastern Hajar Mountains were considered insignificant. United Kingdom, National Archives, Kew Gardens, Foreign Office (later Foreign and Commonwealth Office), FO/1016/3 (1949–51), "Notes on Certain of the Tribes of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman."

<sup>9</sup> Interviews in Oman, various years.

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with the Saudis.<sup>10</sup> Local tradition in Manah, a town of the central, interior, Omani heartland, holds that Baluch have been among the earliest inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

The *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omân, and Central Arabia*, compiled by J.G. Lorimer for the Government of India at the beginning of the twentieth century and in some respects still the most exhaustive source of information today, noted that the Baluch in Muscat and Matrah constituted half or more of the population and served as soldiers, sailors, porters, servants, and petty traders.<sup>12</sup> Both towns possess a Harat al-Balush, or Baluch Quarter, although most of Muscat's population outside the walls seemed to be Baluch.<sup>13</sup> The Baluch may still predominate in Muscat and Matrah today, in part because they tend to fall within lower income groups and because many other Muscat and Matrah families have abandoned the towns for newer residences in the suburbs. While many Omani Baluch preserve tribal names, such as Ra'isi or Sangur, there does not seem to be any interaction with tribes in Makran.

The second factor in Baluch immigration to the Arab side of the Gulf, that of mercenary or soldier, applies squarely to Oman. Ahmad bin Sa'id Al Bu Sa'idi, who had unified Oman to drive out the invading forces of Nadir Shah of Persia and subsequently served as imam, died in 1783 and was succeeded by his son Sa'id. Sa'id abdicated after a year in favor of his son Hamad, but other sons of Ahmad bin Sa'id contested his leadership. When one of them, Sultan bin Ahmad, was forced to flee Oman, he was given refuge in the Makrani coastal fishing village of Gwadar by the khan of Kalat, who had assumed power in the Makran when Nadir Shah's forces retreated. Sultan bin Ahmad continued to contest the leadership of Oman and he never surrendered his claim to

<sup>10</sup> FO/1016/3 (1949–51), "Notes on Certain of the Tribes of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman"; FO/371/156820, BC1821/1, "Tribes of Oman"; compendium updated and maintained by GSO 2 Int., HQ LFPG, Bahrain (n.d. but 1961).

<sup>11</sup> Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, "Manh: the Architecture, Archaeology and Social History of a Deserted Omani Settlement," PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, School of Architecture and Building Engineering, n.d., Chapter 3 (unpaginated).

<sup>12</sup> J.G. Lorimer, comp., *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omân, and Central Arabia*, Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, vol. I (1915); vol. II (1908); reprinted by various publishers in 1970, 1989, and 1998. Here see vol. II, pp. 1185 and 1200.

<sup>13</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Historical Muscat: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer*, Leiden: Brill, 2007; interview in Oman, 1989.

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Gwadar, apparently using the small port to launch attacks on the Omani coast. After his nephew Hamad's death in 1792, Sultan succeeded in besting the other members of his family and took control of Muscat. He then sent a governor to administer Gwadar and build a fort there.<sup>14</sup>

A visit by the British political resident in the Persian Gulf and the consul-general in Muscat to Gwadar in 1952 revealed that the economic situation was satisfactory and that the opposition Baluch Reform Association—which had agitated for the return of Gwadar to Pakistan—had become defunct. A new school was planned—in addition to the existing school for Agha Khanis—and a dispensary received considerable use. The sultan's administrator was British, and Britain maintained an agent of Indian origin who apparently looked after the British subjects who were Hindus.<sup>15</sup> The population of Gwadar was estimated to be around 20,000 in the early 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Gwadar remained a dependency of Oman until 1958 when Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur was pressured to sell it to Pakistan for £3 million. Omani sovereignty over Gwadar undoubtedly facilitated Baluchi movement to Oman in search of work and settlement. This continued after the enclave's return to Pakistan, as a 1962 report noted the interception of a number of boatloads of Baluch seeking to enter the sultanate illegally, possibly seeking to travel overland to the oilfields of Abu Dhabi.<sup>17</sup>

More importantly, however, Baluch have long served as soldiers throughout the Gulf and the western Indian Ocean, including Oman. The use of Baluch as *'askaris*, armed retainers and guards, began long before Omani acquisition of Gwadar and dates at least to the early eighteenth century under the last Ya'rubi imam. They were employed alongside Najdis, Yemenis, and black Africans, as well as men from Arab tribes allied to the ruler. Imam Ahmad bin Sa'id Al Bu Sa'idi was reported to have relied occasionally on Baluch mercenaries, in addition to a garrison of African slaves used for the defense of his capital at al-Rustaq and a mounted force of Arabs for mobile use around the country. A bit later, it was said that Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad employed

<sup>14</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, vol. I, pp. 418–22 and 601–3.

<sup>15</sup> FO/371/98329, EA1018/3, W.R. Hay, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, to Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 19 May 1952.

<sup>16</sup> FO/1016/3 (1949–51), "Notes on Certain of the Tribes of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman."

<sup>17</sup> FO/371/162842, BC1013/6, Muscat Monthly Diary, 1–31 May 1962.

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about 300 armed slaves and 1,700 Sindi, Baluchi, and Arab mercenaries. The garrisons of the two forts commanding Muscat's heights were described in the early twentieth century as being manned by some 200 Baluch and Arabs. Baluch *'askaris* also assisted Indian Army troops during their 1915 battle defending Muscat from Omani tribes.<sup>18</sup>

The first modern organized army unit in Oman was entirely Baluch in composition. The Muscat Levy Corps was formed when the British brought the redundant Sistan Levy Corps from Iran to Muscat in April 1921.<sup>19</sup> Never more than several hundred in strength, the force, later named the Muscat Infantry, provided the nucleus of the subsequently created Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). However, the 250 Sistani soldiers were badly affected by malaria and many were discharged in the initial year. They were replaced mostly by Makrani Baluch recruited from Gwadar. A few Omani Baluch and a handful of Arabs and Africans previously in the sultan's service also joined, as did one member of the ruling family.<sup>20</sup> The Muscat Infantry also served as a model and source of recruits for the Bahrain Levy Corps (which later transitioned into the Bahrain Police Force—more details below).<sup>21</sup>

By 1939, the barely effective force of about 150 men consisted of half Makrani Baluch from Gwadar and the other half Omani Baluch, with a few Arabs.<sup>22</sup> Because of the preponderance of Baluch, the language of command was Urdu and remained so until the unit was absorbed into the SAF in 1958. Baluch soldiers figured heavily in the Jabal al-Akhdar War of the mid- to late 1950s. In 1964, the SAF consisted of 779 Arabs, 170 Omani Baluch, and 1,081 Gwadar Baluch.<sup>23</sup> The heavy reliance on

<sup>18</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy*, London: Saqi, 2007, pp. 38, 40, and 43.

<sup>19</sup> For an account of the force's activities in 1916, see the *London Gazette*, Supplement, Issue 30360 (31 Oct. 1917), p. 112170. The Sistan Force was formed by order of the Indian Army at the onset of World War I as the East Persia Cordon to protect British interests in Persia from German activities and it was last utilized in 1920. "Seistan Force," Wikipedia <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Seistan\\_Force&oldid=457722286](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Seistan_Force&oldid=457722286)>

<sup>20</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, London: Croom Helm, 1978, p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. Recruitment for the Sultan's Armed Forces over the years was regulated to prevent reliance on any one region or social stratum of Baluchistan.



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Makrani Baluch could be explained partly by the age-old reliance of rulers in the region on foreign mercenaries (who could be supposed to be more loyal and trustworthy) and a marked reluctance of local Arab tribesmen to join the British-officered armed forces—indeed, Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur (r.1932–70) forbade recruitment in most areas of Oman. Nevertheless, the Baluch soldiers did not get along well with the local population.

At the same time, Sultan Sa‘id bin Taymur’s eagerness to create a unit in Dhufar entirely separate from the SAF led to the creation of Dhufar Force, composed entirely of Baluch at the beginning, although it later included *jabbalis* (mountain tribesmen) and palace slaves.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent outbreak of full-scale insurgency in Dhufar required a rapid build-up of SAF capabilities and forced Oman to recruit even more heavily from Gwadar. Some of the Baluch received full training and status as members of the SAF, while others served as *‘askaris* (irregulars) to hold small forts and picket posts.<sup>25</sup> After 1970 the old Dhufar Force was incorporated into the SAF as a separate unit and transformed into an all-Baluch unit, while Arab recruiting was stepped up as the size of the SAF mushroomed. This led to some easily contained animosity between the Arabs and the Baluch. By the end of the war in the mid-1970s, the Baluch in the SAF were largely grouped into three all-Baluch battalions.

After the fighting stopped, the heavily Makrani Baluch majority of SAF personnel was reversed in favor of Omanis and the recruitment of Makrani Baluch ceased in the 1980s. A number of the soldiers chose to settle in Oman rather than return home. Omani Baluch remain well represented in the SAF and the first Omani officers in the armed forces

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“The greater number of recruits are from the Kech area, but many come from the coast, especially from Gwadar, and from Panjgur. Soldiers of other areas are sometimes recruited; a few Iranian Baluch are found, some from Karachi and some Brahuis from the east of the province. Even the odd Pathan manages to be recruited. The majority of recruits are from the middle-ranking social strata, but some are from more wealthy and influential hakim families and a good many from the lower hizmatkar classes of fishermen, artisans and ex-slaves.” N.A. Collett, “Baluch Service in the Forces of Oman: A Reflection of Makrani Society and an Impetus for Change,” *Newsletter of Baluchistan Studies*, 2 (1985), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Peterson, *Oman’s Insurgencies*, pp. 187–8.

<sup>25</sup> A position to which only a small detachment of men is posted.

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were Omani Baluch from Matrah. By 1968, there were thirty-one Omani officers in the SAF, all of them Baluch.<sup>26</sup>

Most Omanis of Baluchi background are Omani nationals by birth, although some of the soldiers recruited from Gwadar who chose to remain in Oman were naturalized. There is no official distinction between various ethnic communities in the sultanate. However, Omani Baluch are often regarded with some disdain by Omani Arabs, and their socio-economic status tends to be lower. Some Baluch are less proficient in Arabic, although the extension of universal education in Oman over the past few decades has had considerable effect in ameliorating this.

Because of perceptions of discrimination, some younger Baluch exhibit signs of alienation and, interestingly, sometimes identify with “black power” expressions similar to African Americans and the Caribbean populations of the United Kingdom. This was evident in the numbers of young Baluch who some years ago frequented a CD shop in Muscat in search of a particular song by Bob Marley and the Wailers that seemed to encapsulate the self-perception of their identity.<sup>27</sup>

Discrimination against the Baluch, for the most part, appears to be relatively subtle and has no legal basis. Indeed, there have been several Baluchi ministers in government, such as Muhammad Zubayr (Baluchi father), Ahmad Suwaydan al-Balushi (the former minister of Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephones), and Ali Muhammad al-Musa (former minister of health). Some of the most prominent merchants are Baluchi, including Yahya Muhammad Nasib and Musa Abd al-Rahman Hasan. Baluchis have also risen in the ranks of security forces, including a former commander of the air force, Talib Miran Ra'isi. In mid-2012, it was reported that Oman had appointed its first ambassador to Pakistan of Baluchi origin.<sup>28</sup>

Although most Omanis of Baluchi background trace their origins to what is now Pakistani Baluchistan and identify, even if weakly, with Makrani Baluch tribes, there is an element of Iranian Baluch in Oman

<sup>26</sup> FCO/8/589, D.C. Carden, Consul-General, Muscat, to Sir Stewart Crawford, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 27 June 1968, “Report for 2nd Quarter of 1968.”

<sup>27</sup> Personal observation in Oman, 1990s. See also the brief discussion of the Baluchi role in Omani society in Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State*, London: Hurst, 2009, pp. 232–4.

<sup>28</sup> *The News* (Karachi), 23 Aug. 2012.

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as well. The dates of their arrival in Oman appear to be later, a result at least in part of the shah of Iran's attempts to extend his authority to the Iranian Makran in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of these immigrants were used by the present sultan's father as a sort of paramilitary force, in similar fashion to his use of the Bani Umar and al-Hawasinah Arab tribes. These Iranian Baluch settled in both Kalbah in Sharjah and Shinas in Oman. For many years until the mid-1990s, Oman paid salaries to them but the practice was stopped when a new minister responsible for defense affairs took over.<sup>29</sup> Notice should also be made of the existence in Oman of the closely related community of Zadjalis, the local variation of the name Jadgal employed in Pakistan and Iran. Some live in the UAE where they may also be known as Ziyalis.<sup>30</sup>

### *Bahrain*

The Baluch community in Bahrain seems to be of far more recent arrival than the Baluch community in Oman. However, one young Baluch (who spoke Arabic and no Baluchi), interviewed in Bahrain in 1980, claimed to be head of a Baluchi tribe of "Hoots" with 28,000 members in Bahrain. These he claimed had come to Bahrain in 1782 with the Al Khalifah. He also claimed an aunt was married to Shaykh Isa bin Salman, the ruler of Bahrain.<sup>31</sup> Traditionally, Baluch were among the *fidawis* (armed retainers) in the estates of the ruling Al Khalifah family up to 1920 and were regarded as part of the *bani khudayr*, the "green stock" who had no clear tribal origin, along with "Omanis, 'stray' Arabs who had lost tribal affiliation, and people of African origin."<sup>32</sup> In addition, Baluch were said to serve in the pearling industry as divers and pullers, along with south Persians and people of African origin, although this has been disputed.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Interviews in Oman, 1990 and 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, "Oman's Diverse Society: Northern Oman," p. 37; Behrooz Barjasteh Delforooz, "A Sociolinguistic Survey Amongst the Jadgal in Iranian Balochistan," in Jahani et al., *Baloch and Others*, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow*, pp. 121–2. The Baluch speaker also claimed that there were 350,000 Baluch living in the Arab Gulf states. Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 47 and 51.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 59–66; interview in Bahrain, 2012.

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As in Oman, the second factor in Baluch immigration was prompted by the community's reputation for martial service. As part of the nascent efforts to modernize the government in Bahrain, recruitment began in Muscat in February 1924 of 150 men, many of them Baluch, for service in Bahrain. Most of them were recruited from the Muscat Infantry, who were originally from the Sistan Levy Corps. In July 1924, 107 of these soldiers arrived in Bahrain as the nucleus of the new Bahrain Levy Corps (BLC). While nearly all of the force's composition in 1925 was Baluch, they were broken down into forty-six British subjects, twenty-three Persian, thirty-nine Muscat (from Gwadar), plus one Yemeni.

The BLC was not a success, however, particularly after several non-commissioned Indian officers were shot by their men. In addition, an attempt was made to murder the head of the existing police force (apparently this was the municipal police of al-Manamah founded in 1920 and composed mainly of Persians) and the British political agent was wounded. As a consequence, the BLC was disbanded and 186 Baluch of the BLC and the old police were deported that same year. A new Bahrain Police Force recruited from the Punjab was hastily created that year to provide defense against al-Dawasir attackers from al-Dammam that the BLC was unable to do.<sup>34</sup>

The Punjabis proved to be unsuitable, and so the government began to bring in local recruits. However, many Bahrainis were unwilling to join because of the association of paramilitary activities with socially inferior minorities, so the force was comprised mainly of African stock with some Baluch, Yemenis, Omanis, Pakistanis, and Iraqis. It was not until after Bahrain's independence in 1971 that Bahrainis, mainly Sunni Arabs from urban lower-income groups, came to predominate. In contrast, the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF), created in 1968, found its personnel among Sunni tribal groupings.<sup>35</sup> In later years, the Bahrain Police came increasingly to rely upon non-Bahraini personnel, including Jordanians, Pakistanis, and Yemenis. Many of these, all Sunnis, were said to have been given Bahraini citizenship in a deliberate attempt, according

<sup>34</sup> United Kingdom, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Government of India, Political (External) Files & Collections, L/P&S/12/3719, "Administration Report of the Persian Gulf for the Year 1926"; Political Residency in the Persian Gulf Records, R/15/1/437, "Bahrain Levy Corps," various correspondence.

<sup>35</sup> Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, pp. 114–15.

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to the Bahraini political opposition, to redress the sectarian imbalance. Certainly, many of these have been Baluch. Recent reports have spoken of the government's efforts to hire "hundreds" of retired Pakistani Baluch soldiers and police to join the Bahrain National Guard and the BDF.<sup>36</sup>

The Baluch community in Bahrain remains small. In Manamah, it is centered on a mosque on Palace Road, originally built by a wealthy merchant in the 1920s and later taken over by the Baluch. The Baluch Welfare Society was founded in 1973, although it was banned shortly afterwards due to fears that it would become involved in politics. It was followed by the Baluch Club, established later in 1973 as a cultural and sports club.<sup>37</sup> As of 2013, one member of the Bahraini Council of Ministers carried the name of al-Balushi.

### *The Other GCC States*

There is considerably less information available on the Baluch in the other Gulf states, although small communities exist in each of the GCC countries. The Joshua Project lists a population of 14,000 Baluch in Saudi Arabia, 37,000 in Qatar, and 565,000 in the UAE, but these numbers are unverifiable.<sup>38</sup>

It cannot be determined how old the Baluch community in the UAE is, but it is logical to assume that it predates the oil era that spurred the massive immigration of expatriates. At least two distinct older communities of Baluch can be discerned. One resides in al-ʿAyn, the inland second city of Abu Dhabi, and presumably is related to the al-Balush tribe of Oman's al-Dhahirah region.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Riedel in the *National Interest*, 2 Aug. 2011.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.balochclub.org>; interview with Ali Akbar Bushehri in Bahrain, 2012. Bushehri believes that the Baluch in Bahrain are of recent arrival and the earliest document he has found referring to them dates only from 1930. He also contends that they were not known to be involved in pearling. Furthermore, the British agency and the government of Bahrain in the early twentieth century relied upon Minawis (Persians from Minab, near Bandar Abbas) for security duties and not Baluch. Lorimer's *Gazetteer* (vol. II, p. 258) makes note of "an appreciable part of the population" from Minab district. Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Gulf: Manama Since 1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 93, asserts that Baluch, along with fellow "dispossessed" Persians and former slaves, provided casual labor for the harbor and pearling industries.

<sup>38</sup> See comment on The Joshua Project in note 8.

<sup>39</sup> Interview in the UAE, 2012.

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The other community in Kalbah, on Sharjah's Gulf of Oman coast, is comprised of Iranian Baluch who left Iran to escape claimed oppression by Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was apparently seeking to "modernize" the Baluch by abolishing old customs such as the veiling of women. Some of this group settled in Shinas in Oman and both settlements served the Sultanate of Oman as paramilitary groups, as explained earlier. Presumably in this connection, British intelligence reported in the late 1960s that a cell of the Free Baluch Movement, allegedly supported by Iraq in order to embarrass the Iranians, was in operation in Dubai, as well as Abu Dhabi and Muscat.<sup>40</sup> Other communities of more recently arrived Baluch presumably came as menial and semi-skilled laborers during the oil boom years.

One effect of the emergence of Dubai as a transnational, cosmopolitan metropolis has been its attraction as a place of exile or second home for politicians from various parts of the Middle East and Asia. For example, Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto spent most of her time in Dubai during her years in exile and her children were also educated there. Pakistani politics in Baluchistan has produced another connection. One observer contends that "The State [of Baluchistan] is being increasingly administered not from Quetta, but from Karachi or Dubai. The members of the Baloch State Government are being increasingly seen by the people as quislings of Islamabad and are afraid of staying in Quetta. They spend more time in Karachi or Dubai than in Quetta. Government files go to them for orders there."<sup>41</sup>

The size of the Baluch community in Kuwait is unknown. There is a feeling that Baluch have been there for a long time, as they have in Oman, but there is no available evidence one way or the other. Because they are Sunni, they assimilate rather easily—contrary to the Shi'i for

<sup>40</sup> FCO/8/1256, Abu Dhabi Intelligence Reports, Record of Abu Dhabi Local Intelligence Committee Meeting of 12 Nov. 1969.

<sup>41</sup> B. Raman, "Weakening Pakistani hold in Balochistan," South Asian Analysis Group, paper no. 3958, 30 July 2010, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers40%5Cpaper3958.html>. Raman quotes the *The News* (Karachi) of 25 July 2010 as charging that "While half of the province [of Balochistan] is inundated because of floods, killing scores of people, Chief Minister Aslam Raisani is languishing in Dubai. His staff said he was in Dubai for many days and they could not confirm when he would return. In any case, he is known to be a part-time CM as he lives in Dubai or Islamabad nearly 15 days a month and is never available, intelligibly that is ..."

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example. Many are indistinguishable from other Kuwaitis, even in name (except for those few who call themselves al-Balushi). Interestingly, however, there has been a small revival of social or ethnic *diwaniyahs* (a casual social or political gathering of family, friends, or constituents), among them al-Awadi and Baluch. Yet these *diwaniyahs* have been established more for political than ethnic reasons. The meetings allow them to host candidates for parliament and to promise votes. In return, a successful candidate does not hesitate to listen to their grievances. The utility of this approach does not depend on the concentration of Baluch in specific constituencies but rather represents a countrywide voice.<sup>42</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has introduced and analyzed the limited amount of detail available about the presence and roles of the Baluch residents of the Arab side of the Gulf. Certainly the biggest contribution to Gulf society has been in Oman where the Baluch are not only numerous but exceedingly long settled.

It is widely held that Baluch have been well represented in the creation of modern armies and police forces in various states of the Arabian littoral, not just Oman and Bahrain, although details are unavailable. In addition, Baluch from Pakistani Baluchistan and presumably the Baluch areas of Iran as well have been attracted to jobs in the Gulf over the last several decades. Again, detailed information is lacking, although it can be surmised that in general the poverty and low levels of education in Baluchistan means that most of these Baluch are employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Similar to other expatriate communities, these workers play no role in local politics and, because of their extreme vulnerability to arrest and deportation, tend to eschew political activities related to their homelands. Still, this has not prevented all political activities. Baluch opposition groups in Pakistan opposed the emigration of better-educated Baluch to service in Oman in the 1970s and 1980s and prominent figures called for an end to it.<sup>43</sup>

The Baluch residents on the Arab side of the Gulf, and particularly those who hold citizenship in the GCC states, are among the least

<sup>42</sup> Interview in Kuwait, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Collett, "Baluch Service in the Forces of Oman," p. 9.

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noticeable and least contentious minorities. Those of long residence have fit well into local society and have contributed significantly to their countries' military forces, civilian governments, and large and small businesses. Their presence adds to the richness of Gulf society and politics without creating significant challenges.

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