

## **A Successful Model of Acculturation: Historic Overview of Baloch Migration from West and South Asia to East Africa**

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**Abstract.** By examining the historic settlement of the Balochi people from West Asia to East Africa, this article seeks to study and examine their past immigration patterns, presence and current socio-political situation as a minority Muslim population. The Balochi people are an Indo-European ethnic Sunni Muslim minority population located in a region currently shared and divided by modern Islamic republics of Iran in West Asia and Pakistan in South Asia. The Balochis have formed a significant part of the non-indigenous Muslim population in East Africa since the late 17th century. Yet, there is not much written on them as a distinct Sunni Muslim minority group originating from historic Iran (including parts of South Asia) to Africa. Being part of a larger project, this study will explore the chief reasons behind the immigration of the Balochis to the regions of East Africa and how did their presence affect the local population and vice versa. The hypothesis is that the Balochis were formerly welcomed by the indigenous and non-indigenous population of East Africa and established amicable relationships with them. Using the method of qualitative content analysis combined with historical analysis, this article highlights the reciprocal impacts of the Balochi immigrants and indigenous people of East Africa.

**Keywords and phrases:** Asian-Muslim diaspora, Balochis, East African history, cultural assimilation, Indian Ocean migration

## Introduction

In international politics and in global affairs nations often go as far as in declaring war on each other for inexplicable and bizarre reasons. Such conducts by nations are not something restricted to historic times, peoples or specific regions and areas but a popular global occurrence. Events in historic and contemporary Africa are of course not an exception. In fact, war almost broke out between the newly formed United Republic of Tanzania (formed in 1964) in East Africa and the West Asian (Middle Eastern) nation of Iran in 1970 (see numerous reports throughout the *Ettelaat Daily Newspaper*, in Farsi, for 1970 or AH 1349; Arabahmadi 2016). Circumstances behind this call for war, particularly by Iran in case diplomacy fails, have in fact not been studied previously. Iran held that the intention by the newly appointed government of Tanzania to allow the forcible marriage of women with Iranian ancestry or citizenship in the Zanzibar region to indigenous men of African origin violated international law. Having come out of a brutal British colonial history, the government of Tanzania argued that these Iranian women and their families (especially from the Baloch region of Iran) have been present on the island for generations, particularly to when the Omani sultans controlled the islands in the 18th century and thus are by then Tanzanian citizens<sup>1</sup> (*Ettelaat Daily Newspaper* 1970). Although war never broke out between these two nations and saw Tanzania being pressured to back out, especially by Muslim countries, yet there was an exodus of several hundred people claiming such ancestry out of Zanzibar into Iran, Oman, Britain and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran and their recruitment by the Omani sultans since the 17th century has yet to attract the attention of many scholars or researchers, particularly from a multidisciplinary perspective.<sup>2</sup> This migration pattern is important geopolitically as it includes a great portion of the former Iranian periphery and frontier with the Indian Subcontinent; spreading from a region to the east of the Persian Gulf to the Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean to the coasts and islands of East and South-east Africa (as shown in Figure 1). It is also significant as it includes the migration of a predominantly Sunni Muslim group during and after the 17th century Safavid dynasty that represents the beginning of a period in which the majority of the Persian-Iranian population is seen to adhere to Shi'i Islam. This dismisses the common perception and notion that the Iranian diaspora at the time was necessarily of the Shi'i faith (Cole 1989; Haneda 1997; Marcinkowski 2000; 2010). In addition, the recruitment and employment of Sunni Balochis by the Omani sultans who themselves belonged to the Ibadi strand of Islam is also noteworthy and deserves attention (Ashtiani 1949; Lodhi 2013; Arabahmadi 2017).



**Figure 1.** The main routes used by Balochis to travel to East Africa

Source: *Perry Castaneda Map Collection* (as retrieved from <https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps> on 10 December 2022)

Initially recruited and brought in to act as soldiers in the 17th century by the Omani rulers of Zanzibar, directly from Balochistan province of eastern Iran, the Balochis soon relocated permanently there with their family members (Lodhi 2013; Arabahmadi 2017). By the early 20th century and during the British colonial rule in the region much of the new generation had shifted their profession away to become entrepreneurs and shopkeepers in most cities of East and South-east Africa. Numbering an overall population of about 25,000 the Balochis currently enjoy a relatively high-income level compared to the indigenous community in East and South-east Africa (Nicolini 2007; Arabahmadi 2017).

The presence and resettlement of Balochis in East Africa is multilaterally significant. They have contributed positively to not only Omani historic presence, success and expansion in East Africa but also to the socio-economic and political infrastructure that has traditionally appreciated the multi-ethnic identity of East Africa as a region and economic hub (Nicolini 2007). As a case study, the historic migration of the Balochis as an Iranian Sunni (Hanafi school) Muslim migrant group into the region is noteworthy and an understudied topic (Lodhi 2013, 130; Jahani, Korn and Titus 2008). In fact, most post-Iranian revolution studies of the

Iranian diasporas in Africa concentrate on the Shirazis of East Africa. Conversely most recent scholarly studies on Balochi diasporas focus on contemporary issues or their historic migration into Oman and other parts of West Asia.

This article seeks to identify the reasons for the historic immigration of the Balochis in historic Iran to the regions of East Africa where most of them currently reside. This research makes foremost use of the theory of interactive acculturation model by Richard Bourhis, a Canadian social-psychologist, as its main conceptual framework. According to Bourhis's theory, the strategy of integrity is an adaptive approach by which the citizens of the host society believe that immigrants have the right to simultaneously maintain their cultural heritage and adopt aspects of the national culture of the target community (Bourhis et al. 1997, 369–386).

Several research questions arise. In particular, was this migration part of a larger, regular or systematic migratory pattern from the region to Africa or were these Balochi migrants' remnant of an independent travel or a single one-off transplantation by the Omani sultans to the region? Indeed, reasons behind migration away from Balochistan, such as employment or persecution, are also important factors as will be discussed below with regard to Balochi migratory patterns. The socio-political and economic success, challenges and outcomes of Balochi settlement into various locations in East Africa (particularly Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) as independent variables will also be elaborated on. This is important in proving the hypothesis that the Balochis upon settling in the region established friendly relationships with the indigenous populations of the East African countries, were trusted by the Omani overlords of the area and were gradually welcomed as part of the general community and local population.

The methodology of this research is qualitative content analysis combined with historical analysis of both existing material and new primary sources and information gained through observations, field works and visits to the region (2006 to 2020), research and personal interviews in the afore-mentioned East African countries. The findings of this study are presented in four parts: the first part traces the history of Balochi migration from its early days to the early 21st century to East Africa in general, the second and third parts illustrate the status of the Balochi immigrants at the present time, as well as the socio-cultural and mutual impacts of their migration in the selected countries. The final part surveys the challenges they are faced with.

Regarding the existing literature on the subject, it is worth noting that despite the historic links of the Balochis to the East African region during the Omani and British colonial rule, there exists only a small scattering of information (particularly

personal or oral stories) about them in Arabic, Farsi or Persian, Balochi, native African languages or in the English language sources (pre-late 19th and early 20th century sources written in British India). To remedy this scarcity of sources and information on the Balochi presence in the region, the authors have thus gathered data via field trips to Iranian Balochistan, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. The time frame of our study for the historic Balochi migration to East Africa is set from the late 17th century to the late 19th century, which coincides with the annexation and political division of Balochistan by British India. There will also be references to smaller migration waves from Iran afterwards into the late 21st century.

Being specific in time frame and historic Iran (the greater Iran) the authors do not claim that all the information in this article is novel and admit that more is needed in terms of further study and broader research. However, this study hopefully sheds some new light about Balochi migration to East Africa. In the conclusion, the relationship between Balochis and the indigenous people of East Africa, with reference in particular to the former group's general acceptance in the community, is foregrounded. It is noteworthy that during the course of this study and through interviews held, it was found that the Sunni Muslim Balochis in East Africa predominantly viewed themselves as citizen of the nations that they resided in, but concurrently viewed Iran as their historic and ancestral homeland (rather than simply Balochistan or having any connections to modern day Pakistan). This finding and view of Balochis residing in East Africa is particularly important and corresponds to that of an earlier finding by Lodhi in 2013.

### **The Main Reasons for Immigration to East Africa**

Historically, the Balochi people are noted to have a tradition to migrate to a number of other regions and countries (like India, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, East Africa and Oman) during different periods in history for environmental (including natural disasters) and economic reasons (Sepahi 2005, 232). One reason the Balochis had to immigrate to other countries is the perennially dry and barren land for much of the Sistan and Balochistan provinces where the bulk of the population has traditionally resided (Delmi 1982; Taheri 2012, 78). The harsh climate of the area has meant shortage of water or drought, loss of livestock and limited opportunities to develop agricultural activity.

Nonetheless, the Balochis tried to take advantage of their adaptability to nature and rugged environments, as well as expertise in using guns and other weaponry, to set off to Oman from the early 18th century. In Oman, they were hired as soldiers, navy officers and guards. The sultans of Oman, YaArubi and Al Busaidi dynasties took advantage of the Balochis' expertise in warfare and gradually sent them to

East Africa in order to fulfill their own expansionist goals (Nicolini 2015, 3). The fall of the Safavid dynasty to the Afghans in the early 18th century followed by the harsh behaviour of the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925) in Iran that employed extreme cruelty to collect taxes, repression, intimidation and pressure (Moradi, Afzal and Sahebkar 2013, 247), also encouraged Balochi immigration to East Africa. Such intolerance and socio-political insensitivity continued during the Pahlavi dynasty by suppressing and ignoring Balochi culture and economic investment; often under the pretext of Cold War politics and foreign influences (such as “Communism”).

During the early years of the Islamic revolution in Iran, security in the Sistan and Balochistan provinces became largely compromised by the proliferation of drug dealers, criminal gangs, weakening of Pakistani security in its own Balochistan region, complex situation of Afghan politics and security, import of foreign religions and extremism and terrorist groups who often extort Baloch tribes and disrupted local dynamics. The widespread presence of ancestors of modern Balochis in East Africa and their economic success, after many generations of continuous immigration, became by the 1980s and 1990s another pull factor drawing increasing numbers of Balochis to the African region (Lodhi 2013, 127–134; Nicolini 2014; Arabahmadi 2017, 109–128).

### **Gradual Settlement in East Africa**

The early presence of Balochis in East Africa dates back to the era when the Omani sultans ruled over parts of East Africa and its coasts from the late 17th century. These Balochi mercenaries and their families were recruited directly from historic Balochistan region in the east of Iran (Ashtiani 1949; Qassem 1974a; Arabahmadi 2017). Arguably the Balochi mercenaries and tribal, or several clans, leaders were the power behind the Omani sultans and their East African allies’ success in liberating, securing, defeating and banishing the Portuguese in the region.

In 1664, during the time of Portuguese ruled over some parts of the East African coasts and islands (Coupland 1936, 39), a group of Balochi and Omani soldiers led by a Balochi commander, Amir Shahdad Kuta Baloch, acting under the command of Sultan Saif bin Malik, entered the East African coasts, mainly Mombasa, to liberate these areas from Portuguese colonial rule (Salvadori 1989, 187). The Balochis were noted not only by the Omani rulers and their allies for their ingenious war tactics and familiarity with modern firearms; but also, for their bravery as valiant soldiers in expelling the Portuguese from East Africa (Qassem 1974b, 85; Jafarian 1992, 49).

On the other hand, the Omani rulers had full trust in the Balochis who had acted as special guards of the Omanis for a long time. Gradually, many of these Baloch soldiers—recognised for their loyalty to the Omani kings of Zanzibar and some parts of the coastal areas—settled in Zanzibar Island and in the southern coasts of Kenya, mainly in Mombasa. Balochi guards were also responsible for protecting other key locations controlled by the Omani rulers, such as Fort Jesus in Mombasa and the Saatini garrison in the Zanzibar suburbs. During this period, Balochis were also instrumental in putting down the tribal insurgency of the Mazrui against the Omani rulers.

When the headquarters of the Omani kingdom moved officially to Zanzibar in 1840, as per the order of Sultan Sayyid Sa'id, the third sultan and imam of Āl Bū Saīd dynasty (Ashtiani 1949; Romero 2012, 374), other groups of Balochis were strategically transferred to Zanzibar, some of whom became personal guards, advisers and part of the administration of the sultan.

After beginning his rule over Zanzibar, Sultan Sa'id recruited another group of Balochis in order to maintain discipline and law and to stem the continuous attacks of the Arab warrior tribes gathered together in the northern colonies of Zanzibar, Lamu, Pate and many other islands in the region (Gregory 1971, 33).

Concurrently, a number of other Balochi tribes were also recruited and brought in to protect travelling caravans inland on the road to Tanganyika's inner sanctuary and safeguard garrisons (Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990, 212) until 1895 when Zanzibar became a British protectorate (Salvadori 1989, 187). During the Omani period the Balochis gradually immigrated to the shores and islands of East Africa, including Mafia Island in today's Tanzania (Byrne 2004, 13–14) and the Malindi coastal city located in Southern Kenya.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the Balochis held various missions and played an important role in developing the political and commercial relations of the Omanis with the Tanganyika. In this regard, many Balochis, with the aim of expanding the commercial relations between the Omani Arabs ruling Zanzibar and the indigenous people of the Tanganyika regions, traveled to the Tanganyika's inner territories including Tabora at the centre of the then Tanganyika, and Kigoma, beside Lake Tanganyika.

In 1873, hundreds of Balochis fought in support of Unyanyembe, a native ally of the Omani rulers against Chief Mirambo, the head of the Nyamwezi tribe, in the Tanganyika area. There is also evidence that during this period Balochis continued their gradual immigration from Iran to the shores and islands of East Africa, including

Zanzibar, as well as Pemba, Mafia Island (in today's Tanzania) and the Malindi coastal city located in southern Kenya (Byrne 2004, 13–14). What is significant in this period is that the availability as well as the effectiveness of Balochis as loyal mercenaries was acknowledged not only by the Omani sultans but also separately by prominent East African merchants that traded further inland in Africa. Tippu Tip (Hamad bin Muhammad bin Juma bin Rajab el Murjebi), a prominent ivory and slave trader, is one such trader that is believed to have recruited Balochis directly from Balochistan and Iran to act as guardians of caravans travelling to the lands which today lie in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Other Balochis that left Zanzibar were also able to easily find jobs with other local East African rulers. An example includes the case of Isa ibn Hussein Baloch as reported by the British explorer, Richard F. Burton, who had fled Zanzibar for financial reasons (pursued by his moneylender) in the early part of the 19th century but soon became one of the guardians of the king of Uganda (Burton 1859, 294).

It is noteworthy that during much of the 19th century Balochi mercenaries, either as a source of income or through the commands of the Sultans of Zanzibar, accompanied and joined with a few prominent European explorers or played an indirect role in the discovery of some unknown places in the present East Africa. One of these journeys took place in 1857 at the time of Sultan Majid bin Sa'id Al-Bu Said's reign, when some of the Baloch soldiers accompanied two explorers, Richard F. Burton (Burton 1860, 193) and John Hanning Speke (Johnston 2011, 134), inside Tanganyika (Tanzania) in search of the source of the Nile River. It was continued by Speke in 1860 and he was assisted again by some Balochi guards (Stanley 1875, 346). In 1871, during the reign of Sultan Sayyid Barghash bin Sa'id Al-Busaid, some Baloch soldiers served as bodyguards of explorer Henry Morton Stanley in Tanganyika in search of the famous European explorer Dr David Livingstone (Stanley 1872, 42).

By the time of the arrival of the British in East Africa in the late 18th century and the shift of the political infrastructure of the Omani rulers of Zanzibar as part of the 1895 British protectorate, which reduced dramatically the power of the Omani kings to just a ceremonial role, the Balochis whose main task until that time had been to protect the Omani sultans and their interests, were attracted to other jobs, and some became traders and shopkeepers. A group of Balochis from Zanzibar travelled through Tanganyika and Uganda to access the markets of these regions, and gradually settled in parts of Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and further west into the Democratic Republic of the Congo and married indigenous women. Others became shopkeepers in Zanzibar and Mombasa. A number of Balochis were also recruited as Zanzibar's local police during the British period (Mohamed Bakari 1995; Arabahmadi 2012, 79–85; Lodhi 2013, 127–134).

For the duration of the World War I, many Balochis in East Africa joined the British Indian Army and contingents (in particular “The 129th Duke of Connaught” which later shifted back from Europe to East Africa in the middle of World War I) (Dolbey 2004, 10). Then there were other Balochis that after 1890 joined the German Tanganyika army up till the end of World War I. They were respected greatly by Germans due to their trustworthiness and the German colonial administration used a number of Balochis as district officials and heads of important stations such as Tabora, Bagamoyo, Mikindani and the Mafia.

After World War II, there was a further influx of new Balochi migrants directly from Iran (particularly the cities of Nikshahr, Kaserkand, Sarbaz, Dhabkar and Chabahar). Alas the number of these new arrivals is not known but they were mostly relatives of previous Balochi settlers in East Africa and were encouraged to go to this area by them—settling in areas such as the Iringa and Mbeya in Tanzania, Mombasa in Kenya and Soroti in Uganda—and like the first generation of the Balochis, were attracted to various commercial businesses and expanding job opportunities there (Arabahmadi 2017). The process of successive Balochi groups settling in East Africa continued up until the early 1960s and the start of political unrest in East Africa, which led to the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. However, in the course of political developments of the Zanzibar revolution, and the efforts of Zanzibar revolutionaries to seize the assets of thousands of Asian immigrants whose ancestors came from the Indian Ocean, a large number of resident Balochis in Zanzibar along with the Indians, left the island for Europe, North America, Pakistan, Iran, India and other West Asian countries (Alfahmi 1978; Lodhi 2013).

### **Balochi Communities in East Africa**

Currently, as already mentioned, it is estimated that there are about 25,000 Balochis still living in East African countries including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In each of these countries, the Balochis established independent yet interrelated settlements. The largest Balochi congregation in East Africa is resident in Kenya, and although there are no formal statistics as to their number, the Balochi population is estimated to number from six to eight thousand (Arabahmadi 2014; Lodhi 2013). Balochis residing in Kenya can be categorized into two broad groups: the Balochis from the generation of the Omani mercenary soldiers and the Nangarani Balochis who later came to the East African region as trusted servicemen of the British colonisers (Mohamed Bakari 1995, 67). Another group of Balochi settlers in Kenya migrated over the last few decades from the Iranian cities of Zahedan, Chabahar and Saravan (Alfahmi 1978; Arabahmadi 2014; 2017). Most of the Balochis residing in Kenya currently live in Old Mombasa, where the Makadara area is dedicated to a Baloch enclave, though

there are some small Baloch communities in Nairobi and Malindi as well. Balochis living in Mombasa, have a mosque according to the Hanafi Sunni rite and a large auditorium in this city, in which their ceremonies are usually held (Cohen 1995; Arabahmadi 2017; Hassani 2019). They chiefly trace their roots to the Iranian cities of Zahedan, Chabahar, Saravan, Nikshahr and Kaserkand.

Tanzania is the second centre of Balochis in East Africa. Most of the Balochis living in Tanzania are either descended from the older generations of settlers or from migrants who arrived after World War I and are mostly located in the cities of Dar es Salaam, Iringa and Mbeya or the outlying suburbs of these two cities. Balochis residing in Rujewa and Usangu comprise the most vibrant Baloch community living in the Mbeya region. Accordingly, in the early years of their stay in the area in the 1920s and 1930s, they cultivated crops—mainly rice fields—and built the first canals and water supply system in the villages of Rujewa and Usangu, diverting the water of the surrounding rivers to the rice plantations as an advanced irrigation system of its own kind (Franks, Lankford and Mdemu 2004, 280). During Tanzania's then-president Julius Nyerere's visit to Mbeya in 1964, he visited the Rujewa canals irrigation initiative and impressed by the Balochi's initiative on how to easily supply water to their farms, invited locals to emulate these irrigation canals (Qassem 1974b; Nicolini 2006–2009; Arabahmadi 2017). Further, a small number of Balochis live in Kaole in the Bagamoyo suburb. These Balochis, who have been living in the city for nearly 200 years, comprise one of the oldest Balochi settlements in Tanzania (Nimtz 1980, 148). Following World War II (especially between the years 1950 to 1970), there was a new arrival of Iranian Balochis migrating to Tanzania from the cities of Zahedan, Sarbaz, Nikshahr and Kaserkand. Like the first generation of Balochis and arrivals, they too first settled in the cities of Iringa and Mbeya.

Uganda also has a substantial number of Balochi residents. While the history of the arrival of the Balochis goes back about 350 years, the first immigrant Balochis travelled to Uganda in the 19th century from Zanzibar. The first Baloch who appeared at the court of Shah Sauna (King Ssuuna II of the Buganda kingdom) in Uganda in the early 1850s (during the reign of Sultan Sa'id in Zanzibar), was Isa ibn Hussein Baloch who later became one of the guardians of the king (Burton 1859, 294). After the death of Shah Sauna, Isa bin Hussein came to the conclusion that he should live somewhere safer and left Uganda.

Later, in the late 19th and early 20th century other groups of Balochis gradually travelled from Zanzibar to Uganda and settled in different parts of the country. Currently, Ugandan Balochis live mostly in Soroti and Arua, while others live in the cities of Kampala and Masaka. Ugandan Balochis, who are mostly active in the

businesses of trade and agriculture, have a number of committees that oversee their activities (Lodhi 2013; Nicolini 2014, Arabahmadi 2017).

Apart from East Africa, a few Baloch people live in small communities in Djugu and Bunia further west in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Alfahmi 1978; Arabahmadi 2017). Their numbers are much lower than that of the Baloch in Tanzania, Kenya or Uganda. There are also very small minorities of Balochis living in Somalia and Comoros but are assimilated chiefly with the natives and have little links to the larger Balochi community elsewhere in East Africa or Balochistan (Arabahmadi 2012; Mohamed Bakari 1995).

## Integration

The Balochis in Swahili language and amongst the natives of East Africa are called *Wabulushi* (singular: *Mbulushi*), *Waburushi* (singular: *Mburushi*), *Washumi* and *Bulushi* (plural: *Mabulushi*) (Lodhi 2000, 72) or *Balushi* (plural: *Mabalushi*). Like Balochis living in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Balochis of East Africa belong to various ethnic clans and tribes such as Barahoi, Shahnvazi, Shirani and Rigi; as well as Neushirvani, Ridz, Rind and Hot. Nevertheless, based on the common tradition among the Baloch people of East Africa, they are divided into two main groups, Omani and Nangarani. Omani-Balochs (Omani-Balushs) or simply “Omanis” are considered as the first and oldest group of Balochis in East Africa (Mohamed Bakari 1995, 97). As previously discussed, they trace themselves to the Omani dominance of East Africa from the second half of the 17th to the late 19th century. Although there is no doubt that Omani-Baloch have travelled from Iran to Oman and after a while left Oman to East African coasts accompanied by Omani kings, very little information is available about the ethnic group and clans that they had belonged to (Breseeg 2017, 50). These Baloch settlers were mostly soldiers, who until the formal establishment of the Oman sultanate along the East African coasts in 1840, maintained army posts in the major centres of Mombasa, Dar-es-Salaam, Zanzibar and Pemba.

The second major tribe to which East African Balochis belong is the Nangarani tribe. *Nangarani* in the Balochi language means “to possess tools for plowing agricultural lands”. It is attributed to the Baloch people for their farming skills and profession in Balochistan from ancient times (Delmi 1982; Alfahmi 1978; Nicolini 2007; Hassani 2019). Most of the Nangarani Balochis gradually entered the East African region from the mid-19th century and many of them joined the British administrative service from 1890 onwards as trustworthy soldiers (Dolbey 2004, 10). Some other Nangarani Balochis migrated mainly from Iran after the end of World War II up till the 1960s and 1970s, and due to their agricultural experience, they were absorbed into farming activities in some areas in Tanzania and Uganda (Nicolini 2006–2009, 2014; Arabahmadi 2012; Lodhi 2013).

One of the most prominent features of the Baloch tribes is their deep ethnic, clan and tribal affiliation. In fact, all Baloch tribes have found their national identity in the framework of the tribe's entity which they have grown up with and have a deep respect for their tribal structure. In other words, the Balochis in the course of history have stabilised their position through the tribes which they belong to and see their unity as dependent on keeping their ethnic tribal affiliations strong. This situation has long prevailed among Balochis and the roots of Baloch dependence on their own tribes—in addition to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan—is quite visible, especially in the countries where Balochis have formed cohesive minorities.

### **Mutual Cultural Effects**

One of the most important aspects of Balochis' life in the region has been their cordial relations with the East African natives and the mutual transfer of some socio-cultural components between the East African Baloch minority and the majority of the region's natives. In fact, despite their very small population, and although Balochis had no political influence over the indigenous peoples of East Africa, as a result of daily and continuous communication with Africans, they had impacted to some extent indigenous communities' lives and mutually received some socio-cultural practices, mainly after permanent settlement.

### **African Influences**

Although the Balochis have always been loyal to the Baloch socio-religious identity, lifestyles and traditions due to their ethnic camaraderie and tribal affiliations, after appearing in East Africa and interacting with the Africans they have gradually been impressed by some African cultural characteristics. The most important of these effects are Swahili language, lifestyle, cuisine, and some superstitions that gradually found their way into Baloch communities:

1. One of the greatest African cultural impacts on the Balochis of East Africa is the gradual adaptation of the Swahili language and its popularity among them. Apart from Swahili, almost all of Balochis acquire proficiency in English and some local languages in the area they are living (Lodhi 2013; Nicolini 2014).
2. Inter-marriages with Arab tribes living on the coasts and islands of East Africa, as well as with Waswahili peoples, were another factor that partially led to the Balochis' acculturation among indigenous peoples especially during the 19th century. After the subsequent arrival of other Baloch groups from Iran, the number of intermarriages greatly reduced. However, the effects of such inter-marriages on the Baloch communities

living in East Africa are still palpable to this day, when we might easily stratify Balochis living in East African countries to two main categories, namely “pure Balochis” and “mixed-Balochis”. Pure Balochis are the progeny of the Baloch’s inner marriages, whereas mixed-Balochis are descendants their fathers’ or grandfathers’ marriages to African or Arab natives (Alfahmi 1978; Arabahmadi 2014).

3. The Balochis were also influenced by the social life of the Africans. Such simplicity inevitably crept into the Balochis’ social life, creating a hybrid culture that bore marks of healthy and equitable interaction with the natives, who were in turn also influenced by the Balochis (Alfahmi 1978; Nicolini 2014).
4. Some typical East African foods including *ugali* (porridge), *samaki* (fish), *mchuzi wa samaki*,<sup>3</sup> *ndizi-nyama* (cooking bananas), *irio* (mashed peas and potato mix), *githeri* (beans and corn), *wali wa nazi* (coconut rice), *sukuma wiki* (collard greens/kale), Kenyan stew,<sup>4</sup> *matoke* (plantain banana stew), *kachumbari* (tomatoes and onions), *matoke* (cooking bananas) and cassava accompanied with some vegetables including *bamia* (*okra*), *mchicha* (a kind of spinach), *njegere* (green peas), *maharage* (beans), *kisamvu* (cassava leaves), as well as different types of traditional bean soup have found their way into the cuisine of Balochis living in East Africa.
5. The Balochis have also been somewhat influenced by some African superstitions and traditional beliefs, to the extent of incorporating these beliefs into their lifestyle. For example, like Africans, many Balochis consult traditional healers to cure illnesses and use African traditional medicines. Despite being committed Muslims, they still sometimes consult witch doctors for good-luck charms especially when confronted by mysterious mental illnesses and calamities. Some of these “indigenised” Balochis interpret incurable illnesses as a bad omen and perform a semi-trance dance, like the *Zar* trance dance, in order to exorcise the devil or *jinn* from the body of the sick person, in a manner similar to the Africans (During 1997; Nicolini 2007; Arabahmadi 2012: 80; Hassani 2019).

### Reciprocal Impacts on Locals

Though Balochis never planned to have a cultural impact on the indigenous peoples in the coastal areas from the beginning of their presence in East Africa, their indirect influence on the natives who were in constant contact with them was impressive, especially in the field of Swahili language and literature, and to a lesser extent in native society and culture. Balochi traits welcomed and well-received by East African traditional communities include:

1. Swahili language: Balochi and Persian-Farsi words entered the Swahili language vocabulary, with slight traces on Swahili literature. Familiarity with the Persian-Farsi language, poetry and literature was popularised by Balochi adults arriving at East Africa early on as confirmed by most informants interviewed in this study. Although only one direct Balochi loanword in East Africa has been identified: *braza* (brother) – a term used by Balochi soldiers to address one another, the Balochi soldiers indirectly introduced Persian words popular with them into Swahili. These words are mostly military terms, which are used all over East Africa today. The Balochis also consolidated the use of relatively uncommon Persian items already found in the Swahili language and used in East Africa.
2. Balochis played a minor role in fostering the Swahili language. Yet, several Baloch scholars had an impact on Swahili grammar and wrote some articles and books on the Swahili language (Nicolini 2009; 2014; Arabahmadi 2014; 2017). Shihabuddin Chiraghadin of Mombasa and Maalim “Mohamed Kamal Khan” of Dar es Salaam produced Swahili essays and books. Their colleague, Nurjahan H. Zaidi, was the first Swahili poetess to be honored with the Kenya Presidential Award for Literature in 1974 (Lodhi 2013, 134). Sheikh Abdulrahim Pirmohamed Kamalkhan Pordelan also published a resourceful book entitled *Kiswahili-Balochi Phrasebook*. Dr Sara M. Mirza (a Los Angeles-based Baloch of Mombasa) along with Dr Thomas Hinnebusch of University of California co-authored the scientific book *Kiswahili Msingi wa Kusema Kusoma na Kuadika* in Swahili (A Foundation for Speaking, Reading and Writing) which is used by Swahili speakers (Arabahmadi 2012, 11).
3. Balochis’ contributions to the locals encompassed religious matters as well. Since Balochis are faithful people, from the beginning of their arrivals in East Africa, they were always particular when it comes to religious matters, rituals and responsibilities (Mohamed Bakari 1995; Nicolini 2009; 2014; Lodhi 2013; Arabahmadi 2017). Along with missionary activity, Balochis constructed a number of mosques in several regions including Mombasa, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Bagamoyo, Kaole, Tabora (Bokena), Mbeya (Chimala, Madibira, Rujewa), Dodoma (Chipigoro), Mtwara (Masasi), Kabramaido, Arua, Soroti, Kampala and Masaka.
4. One of the Balochis’ major agricultural initiatives was digging some canals in parts of Tanzania from the 1930s onwards, mostly in Rujewa and Usangu in the Mbeya region. This was accomplished by new groups of Baloch immigrants from Iran from the 1920s to 1970s. These canals used to divert the water of the surrounding rivers to the rice plantations

and were an advanced irrigation system of its own kind (Ominde 1971, 246). These irrigation canals are still used by present-day Balochis. Natives have modelled their farms on these canals and their irrigation systems. Newly arrived Balochis to the Mbeya region in the 1920s and 1930s started the plantation of rice for the first time in the region, bringing about a fundamental change in the economic infrastructure of areas such as Rujewa and Usangu (Masija n.d., 76). The special method of paddy farming of the Balochis was widely welcomed by the natives, who gradually learned the ropes of high-yielding rice production from the Balochis (Kangalawe, Mwamfupe and Mbonile 2007, 21). The Balochis still successfully operate several large family-owned rice farms (Kissawike 2008, 14) with their own furrows in Usangu and Rujewa (Patel, Vedeld and Tarimo 2014, 3).

5. The other Balochi characteristic that was charming to indigenous peoples was Balochis' warfare ability that had given Balochi soldiers the reputation of being unbeatable. Balochi warriors at the time of Omani sultans of Zanzibar looked fierce, through the combination of weapons they used. In other words, Balochi soldiers who joined the Oman army proved they were qualified fighters, who can carry and use Iranian *shamshir* (i.e., swords), Indian tulwar,<sup>5</sup> Omani daggers, Indian gunpowder and later on, matchlocks, professionally and put *tupak*<sup>6</sup> on their strong shoulders. During those years, many natives learned well how to use various types of weapons from the Balochis, and always praised the Baloch soldiers for their combat skills. Balochis' bravery and skill in warfare has often been praised by explorers such as Burton, who had been on exploratory trips with the Balochis (Burton 1872, 163).
6. The loyalty and devotion Balochis had to their masters (Omani sultans of Zanzibar) and later on to the chief of commercial caravans and German and British armies, left a positive impression among locals, who gave heartfelt respect for Balochis as an extremely trustworthy group. Burton, Speke and Livingstone have repeatedly praised the loyalty and sincerity of the Baloch during their exploratory voyages in the interior lands of East Africa and indirectly mentioned that Balochis' devotion had been an influential element on locals too.
7. Balochis demonstrated great physical endurance and resistance against natural hardships and local diseases, especially from the 1840s to 1880s. In fact, the Baloch's physical resistance to a variety of tropical diseases, especially forest fever and malaria, and their ability to withstand harsh natural conditions, including heat and torrential rains, was one of the keys

to their success in East Africa. Explorers including Burton, Speke and Livingstone repeatedly mentioned the stubbornness of the Balochis and their high physical resistance to unknown indigenous diseases in the heart of the forests of Tanzania, Kenya, and Congo. To the natives, this was awe-inspiring (Burton 1872, 163; Stanley 1872).

8. The Balochis have left their imprint on the oral tradition of the natives of East Africa. The relations of Balochis with local Africans have always been based on sincere friendship, mutual respect and understanding, to the extent that while Balochis retain a very clear sense of cultural distinction, at the same time they always display enthusiasm for social interactions with indigenous peoples. That is why although they are a proud community in East Africa which has tried to maintain their identity, culture, and traditions, they never attempted to seclude themselves from Africans, let alone to practice segregation based on skin colour and racial differences.

## Challenges

Despite the successes, Baloch communities in East African countries have faced some challenges over the past few decades, some of which can become obstacles to their further progress. These are related to, among other things, political instability in the region such as occasional coups d'état and ethnic clashes, gradual migration of increasing numbers of Baloch youths to Western countries within the last few decades, the gradual distance of the new generation from old Baloch traditions, the emergence of some differences between new and old Balochi generations, and unpleasant memories among locals of Balochis' indirect involvement in the 19th century slave trade. As a result, over the past two decades, in order to ease pressure on their lives, many Baloch families have opted to move inland to small towns in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Although generally welcomed in East Africa, the Balochis cannot escape the cultural and social challenges that appear now and then in lands so remote from their ancestral homeland but which they have learned through hard work and perseverance to call their home.

## Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, this article has used the index of integrity in the acculturation model of Bourhis on the cultural expectations of the host community and the orientation of the culture of immigrants – i.e., simultaneous preservation of their cultural heritage and the acquisition of aspects of the national culture of the target community. According to this theory, as the Balochi immigrants communicated sincerely with the indigenous people, they could establish themselves

as part of the elevated community. During the many years of Balochi settlement in East African societies, aspects of their ethnic and Iranian culture were adopted by the indigenous people of East Africa, while the Balochis simultaneously assumed parts of the local indigenous cultures as well. In addition, the Baloch immigrants gradually increased their scientific and cultural achievements during their long period of residence in the countries of East Africa and played influential roles as societal builders in their host societies.

Indeed, the Balochi immigrants in East Africa, in accordance with the acculturation model of Bourhis, managed to successfully preserve their cultural heritage and simultaneously accept parts of the national culture of the destination communities. They did so in such a way that they could popularise some of the characteristics of Iranian culture as well as the Baloch subculture among the Swahili speakers of East Africa while also assuming some of the indigenous cultural practices of these areas. At the same time, proving the hypothesis of the present article, the Balochis have always prioritised the strengthening of their friendly relations with the indigenous people, and throughout centuries of residence in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, they rarely had tense relations or disputes with their hosts with respect to the culture and customs of the destination countries, which reflects their effective bilateral engagement with the peoples of East Africa.

Although the first Baloch immigrants to East Africa may have lacked knowledge and literacy and were considered only as professional warlords, nowadays the Iranian Balochis are among the well-educated minorities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and quite a number of them enjoy significant economic status. Some Balochis have even come to the forefront of political engagement in Kenya and Tanzania, including tycoon Rostam Aziz, an influential businessman and a former member of the parliament in Tanzania; tycoon Haroon Mulla Pirmohamed, a current member of the parliament in Tanzania; Sheikh Muhamad Dory Muhamad Yakub, current ambassador of Kenya in Oman; and Bur'i Mohamed Hamza, former state minister of the Premier's Office for Environment of the Federal Republic of Somalia (Alfahmi 1978; Arabahmadi 2014; Hassani 2019).

Due to the origins and close ties to Iranian culture and customs, the Baloch communities in eastern Africa have continued to use the Persian language as a signifier of their national identity, while also using Swahili and Baloch languages in their everyday lives. Perhaps reflecting their historic migration (including parts of Balochistan now in Pakistan-South Asia) in this study it was found that most Baloch in Africa connect their origin, roots, culture, religion and traditional links to Iran. Many of the Baloch families in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya—despite their long residence in these territories—have also retained their relative fluency

in Persian and Balochi languages and transferred it to their children. Separately, Baloch cultural figures in East African countries have also been working in the past two decades to introduce the Persian and Baloch languages to the younger generations and to keep the Iranian traditions and customs alive by establishing The Baloch Iranian Cultural Association (Mohamed Bakari 1995; Hassani 2019). The Iranian Baloch settlers in East Africa in particular have their own mosques and associations, and in order to maintain their roots with Iran, the elders of these communities in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya regularly travel to Iran to consolidate their long-standing ties with Balochistan.

The Baloch minorities in East Africa are among the wealthiest non-indigenous communities with the lowest crime rates in the region; a fact that is appreciated by the heads of governments of these countries. Baloch communities are also known for their respect for moral norms and values in their interactions with other communities. As such, the Baloch migration to East Africa can be considered a successful migration that has been beneficial for the immigrants themselves as well as their indigenous host communities. Being outside the scope of this study and for future research, British era documents and archival sources in modern day East African nations, as well as Pakistan and India too, can also further shed light into Baloch migration from the port of Gwadar and Makran regions in the 20th century. In particular these sources can give further insight and elaborate further on the progress and historic linkages that have traditionally persisted in the region.

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## Notes

1. Based on the authors' series of interviews with the locals and field trips to Zanzibar, Kampala, Dar al Salam and Pemba between 2015 to 2020.
2. Few exceptions include works by Alfahmi (1978), Nicolini (2007), Lodhi (2013) and Arabahmadi (2017).
3. Fish cooked in a combination of onions, oil, garlic, curry powder, tomatoes, water and lemon juice.
4. Including different meats—beef stew, goat stew, chicken stew or any other animal stew—as well as a few other base vegetable ingredients such as carrots, peppers, peas or potatoes.
5. Matchlocks began to appear in the hands of Omani troops including Balochi soldiers during the first half of the 19th century.
6. *Tupak* was the muzzle-loading musket used by the Baloch soldiers of the Omani Sultans of Zanzibar.

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