

**POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION THROUGH THE LENSES OF AL-
JAZEERA (THE CASE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM ‘BALUCHISTAN:
PAKISTAN’S OTHER WAR’)**

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Abstract

Media has the potential to represent individuals or groups on behalf of large populations which has the potential to affect perceptions, cognition, attitudes and behaviors. In the process of representations, media actively participates and constructs meanings that affect and are affected by politics. Particularly, film operates as a model “for” as well as a model “of” reality because of its audio-visual competence. This research analyzes documentary film “Baluchistan: Pakistan’s other war” telecasted on Al-Jazeera television channel for the portrayal of Baluchistan. Selection of issues, portrayal of problems, and treatment of different discourses highlighted in the documentary film are analyzed along with the historical background for better conceptualization of Baluchistan issue. Through the triangulation method the study explores whether the documentary contributes in conflict escalation or resolution or management. The findings suggest that the secession movement, ethnicity and Bloch nationalism are predominantly highlighted in a way that affects upon development projects like Gwadar port and extraction of natural resources. The frames applied to the portrayal of Baluchistan and the treatment of different issues contributes to conflict escalation rather than resolution or management.

Key words: Bloch ethnicity; secession movement; conflict escalation; Baluchistan Liberation Army; conflict management

Introduction

Pakistan since its birth has faced many separatist movements like Pakhtunistan, Bangladesh, Greater Baluchistan and Sindhudesh. Issue of Baluchistan has been ignored in the past at both national and international levels, however, it has become a hot issue these days. It is said that when J. F. Kennedy was the President of US, Henry Kissinger, the US diplomat, visited Pakistan in 1962. A journalist asked him to comment on Bloch insurgency and he answered, “I wouldn’t recognize the Baluchistan problem, (even) if it

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hit me in the face.” But now it has gained attention of the international community. Baluchistan is geo-strategically a sensitive area that is why it is becoming a matter of concern for the regional and global players like China, the U.S. Iran, Afghanistan, and India. Rising insurgency in Baluchistan is a serious threat for Pakistani federation as well. Since independence, deprivations among Bloch have caused a number of uprisings against governments who, in turn have carried out military operations to crush these insurgent movements.

However, 21st century is characterized by much advanced communication technology which has contributed to the multiplicity of media channels and wide range of access and resulted in borderless information flows. According to Attali (1991). We live in a world that is simultaneously shrinking and expanding, growing closer and farther apart. National borders are becoming increasingly irrelevant and globalism is by no means triumphant Journalism has always gone hand in hand with new technology. As a result the international agencies emerge as the major agenda-setters because they make the decisions on how and whether international stories will be covered. They choose where to allocate their resources and hence which stories will be covered and what angle will be given. They decide on which stories to send to their clients, how much visual element they will provide, what kind of audio and accompanying background text they will send. Therefore, media have turned into weapons of psychological warfare working at global level, which can continue the war of minds described as low-intensity warfare anywhere in the world without a formal declaration of war prior to and even after the actual war. Moreover, the new technology has converted news and information into commodity that means a product for sale and purchase. No doubt it has always been meant to sell but now the growing competition has accelerated the commercialization of information. As a result more and more news organizations are swallowed up by the multinationals that have economic and political interests.

In the case of Baluchistan, information accessed and depicted by foreign media is not neutral. On 4th January 2012, Al-Jazeera telecasted a video documentary on what they called 'Bloch freedom struggle'. The documentary, named "Baluchistan: Pakistan's other war" was shot in 2011 in some remote areas of Baluchistan. It included interviews of many Bloch separatist leaders and presented a very negative view of the situation by giving eschewed and twisted facts. The documentary is totally based on Bloch separatist interviews and a small scale representation of Pakistan government's viewpoint on the issue. Al Jazeera's Ahmad Zaidan travelled to Baluchistan to meet with key Bloch politicians who explained the history and current circumstances of the region. He was able to get an exclusive interview with one of the leaders of Baluchistan secession movement. However, without a closer understanding of the history of Baluchistan audience cannot fully grasp the issue, which is not fully covered in the documentary.

Historical Background

When Pakistan came into being in 1947, Baluchistan was divided into two parts; the British Baluchistan, comprising Quetta, Pishin, Zhob, Loralai and Lasbela and the native Baluchistan, constituting Kalat, Kharan and Makran. Makran became a district within the province of Baluchistan, minus an area of 800 km around Gwadar, which was then still part of the Sultanate of Oman.

In 1783, the Khan of Kalat had granted suzerainty over Gawadar to Taimur Sultan, the defeated ruler of Muscat. When the sultan subsequently retook Muscat, he continued his rule in Gwadar by appointing a 'Wali' (governor). The Wali was then ordered to subjugate the nearby coastal town of Chah Bahar (in modern day Iran). Until 1958, Gawadar was part of Oman. Pakistan purchased it in September 1958. The money for the purchase was generated by way of taxation and donations. It was made part of the Baluchistan province in 1977. Baluchistan province itself, as we know it today, came into being on July 1, 1970, with the abolition of One Unit in West Pakistan. The administrative divisions of Quetta and Kalat were merged to form this province. Baluchistan is the abode of different people mainly populated by Blochis, Barohi and Pathans. A great number of settlers from around Pakistan, particularly Punjab, and northern India have also been settled in the province for generations. They are ironically still known as 'Settler Blochis'.

Territory wise Baluchistan is the largest province with rich natural resources but demographically it is the least populated and the most under-developed province of Pakistan.

Large reservoirs of natural gas were discovered in Sui, Baluchistan in 1950s however, Baluchistan remained deprived of natural gas until 1980s and the rest of Pakistan was enjoying this facility. In spite of all the natural resources, per capita income in Baluchistan is very low. These deprivations gave way to resentment and unrest in the province. For the last 60 years, such deprivations have been contributing to the increased uprisings and governments have carried out military operations to crush these insurgent movements.

Baluchistan's geostrategic significance, natural resources, and Gwadar port make it important not only for Pakistan but also for the region. Baluchistan shares geographical and cultural proximities with Afghanistan and Iran. Any riots in Baluchistan can affect these countries and may lead to regional instability. For the last two decades, stop-go war of separatist nature has become a feature in Baluchistan. Governments and the separatists are engaged in violent acts for more political and economic concerns which has transformed into ethno-nationalist conflict. Insurgents have been using a variety of violent tactics to destabilize the system. If the problem sustains, it may appear as a threat and a challenge to the integrity of Pakistan. The killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti during the regime of President General Pervaiz Musharraf by the security forces also led to increased unrest and protests in the province. Killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti made him a hero and a martyr among nationalists. Unlike earlier, Bugti gained more sympathies from the masses of Baluchistan which exacerbated the deteriorating law and order condition in Baluchistan.

The crisis in Baluchistan became even worse with the formation of Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) which is a militant organization. The main target of BLA is armed forces of Pakistan and other militant groups. Though BLA is not very large in its set up, however, it has the capability to disturb law and order situation in the province. Many times it has been involved in blowing up the major gas pipeline from Sui to other parts of Pakistan because of gas royalty issue.

Another serious issue of Baluchistan is missing persons who have not yet been recovered or traced. Relatives, community people and human rights activists have been protesting against agencies and federal government. Though under the 18th Amendment, constitution of Pakistan guarantees the rights of Bloch but the execution of laws is usually in abeyance.

Therefore, rising insurgency in Baluchistan can be a serious threat for the federation of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Bloch nationalism has its genesis in a culture, which has never been analyzed in its true historical perspective and in the context of prevailing socio-political conditions. Even to this extent that the existence of Baluchistan issue has been denied. Akhtar (2012) stated that Baluchistan issue is not new, in fact, as old as state of Pakistan itself. Since last two decades, stop-go war has become a feature in south east Baluchistan which is mostly a tribal area. It has emerged as an abode of terrorists' threats which are of the separatist nature. Javaid (2000) in her study titled 'Concerns of Baluchistan: Effects and Implications on Federation of Pakistan' concludes that the insurgency in Baluchistan is one of most serious threats to the integrity of Pakistan. Exclusion of Bloch from mainstream politics has invited the influence of neighboring countries like Iran and Afghanistan which propelled Bloch nationalism. While evaluating American policy of South Asia, Akbar (2011) suggests that Baluchistan has acquired importance due to extraordinary geostrategic circumstances. Baluchistan is a hub of South, Central, and West Asia and the role of China is very crucial in deep sea Gawadar port. White House wants to delineate Chinese influence in the region by controlling the geostrategic location of Baluchistan to access Central Asian states. Therefore, America is more concerned on Baluchistan issue. Pipes (2010) explains Baluchistan problem through two theories; one is Islamabad theory and the other is Bloch theory. Bloch theory holds certain validities especially Sardari System integration. However, final analyses show that Islamabad theory best explains the interaction between Bloch insurgency and government policies. Fair (2012), mentions Baluchistan as the most resource rich area in gold, copper, coal, gas, and silver, yet it is the most underdeveloped province of Pakistan. Government has not deployed extractive and distributive system capabilities in Baluchistan which has led to worsening the issue. Andley (2006) argued that Bloch grievances are rooted in their denial to political rights. Utilization of natural resources by federal governments seems to Bloch as being plundered. Therefore, the nationalist and the separatist element are at increase. The present day crisis in Baluchistan is also vitiated by the issue of missing persons. A large number of missing persons from Baluchistan have not yet been recovered.

Report of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) (2009) suggests that the family members of missing persons have lost their trust in judiciary. Ali and Ansari (2012) in their study about Bloch resentment summarized the roots of conflict in the environment of terrorism, violations of human rights, exclusion of stakeholders, and disappearances of Bloch. They conclude that the response of federal government to the regional conflict has been inadequate that contributed to exacerbation of the situation. Constitutional reforms need to be considered in this regard. Khan (1996) in his thesis about the impact of political culture on political development in Baluchistan sums up

political developments as a mixture of political culture with pluralistic value system, urban-rural area distinction, mass elite diversification, actual decision making by the traditional hereditary tribal Sardars and a thin crust of a shade of bureaucracy. He concludes that all-inclusive and thoughtful planning considering intricacies of the contemporary situation, through a unified communication system, extending respect to local norms and traditions, can help to develop the province politically and economically. Bloch (2007) adds another factor that contributed in worsening Baluchistan issue. He mentions media contribution to create awareness among Bloch youth regarding exploitation of their rights by the federal government. He finds foreign involvement as one of the other reasons of conflict and concludes that the problem is more of economic nature than political. Therefore, he suggests that opinion leaders need to sit together and ponder as to whether Baluchistan conflict is a national problem or not. For the resolution of Baluchistan conflict, Qaddus (1990) also suggests bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach in his book 'The Tribal Baluchistan'.

Iqbal (2008) explains how ongoing counter insurgency has badly damaged the development projects, security, infrastructure and economy of the province. The apathy of Pakistan government towards the development of Baluchistan and its interest in handling natural resources has resulted in a big clash between Bloch youth and federal government. Bloch nationalist parties do not want to negotiate with government because of the indifferent attitude. To combat insurgency, he suggests that a comprehensive strategy by police and intelligence may be evolved to eradicate the terrorist groups. Mahmad (1985) proposes that economic and structural reforms in Baluchistan can facilitate to blur and blend Bloch ethnicity with mainstream national identity.

In the light of literature review it is hypothesized that Al-Jazeera TV will give favorable treatment to secession movement in Baluchistan through documentary film "Baluchistan: Pakistan's other war".

It is also hypothesized that the film will highlight secession movement at the cost of other core issues like drone attacks, missing persons and will contribute in conflict escalation rather conflict management.

Theoretical Framework

Media has the ability of highlighting certain issues and events and then developing associations of these issues and events with a field of meaning. Theory of framing deals with the concept of how media content writers and producers frame a story or issue. In the case of films, a filmmaker decides what to include within the view, or frame of a story and what to leave out, which facts to highlight and which context to develop, much as painter chooses what to put in the frame of painting (Straubhaar & LaRose, 2002; p.54). Thus framing essentially involves selection and salience. Entman (1993) explains framing as a process of selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Therefore, it can be concluded that through framing problems are defined, contributing factors are diagnosed, remedies and solutions are suggested, moral judgments are initiated for public discourses and future consequences are suggested.

In the case of documentary film 'Baluchistan Pakistan's Other War' researchers have applied framing theory to analyze which issues are raised, what aspects are highlighted, what reasons are suggested for the emergence of Baluchistan issue, what contributing factors are diagnosed and what remedies are suggested for the resolution.

Research Questions and Methodology

- 1) What are the issues telecasted by Al-Jazeera TV regarding Baluchistan and whether core issues are discussed?
- 2) In which direction issues are predominantly discussed in the documentary film?

The documentary film 'Baluchistan: Pakistan's Other War' has been studied through content analysis for the selection and treatment of issues. Quantitative analysis begins with the collection of data, followed by the application of various descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Scene is selected as a unit of analysis and there are 49 scenes in total which are separately analyzed for the depiction and treatment of issue. It is also explored whether documentary strives to simply report various issues or contributes in the conflict resolution/management or conflict escalation. Categories are formulated for the depiction of issues and time duration. The data is further tabulated to make valid inferences.

Data Tabulation

Data is collected for time given to different issues depicted in the documentary and treatment in terms of documentary's contribution for conflict escalation or conflict resolution/management. The following table shows that what issues are highlighted in the documentary and for how long different issues have been depicted.

Table 1: Depiction of issues, Juxtaposing and duration of treatment in the documentary

Issues Depicted	Juxtaposing (Scene wise)	Escalation	Resolution	Neutral	Total minutes
Baluchistan Strategic Importance	5,6,14,35,36	3 min	0	2 min	5 min
Gawadar Project	27,28,29,32,33	1.4	16 sec	4.6	5.26 min
Military Operations, Pakistan Government	13,18,23,40,41,42	4 min	0	0	4 min
Foreign Involvement	43,44,45,46	2 min	29 sec	0	2.29 min
Bloch Ethnicity	1,2,3,4,7,8,11,12,15,20,24,25,26,31,39,49	16 min	0	3 min	19 min
Missing Person	47,48	19 sec	0	1.41	2 min
Akbar Bugti Case	9,10,11	3 min	1.6	3 min	7.6 min
Issue of Natural Resources	16,21,22,30	1 min	0	2.5 min	3.5 min

Human Rights Violations	37,38	3.20 min	32 sec	0	3.54 min
Bloch Sardars Controversy	17,19,34	2.45 min	0	3.2 min	5.47 min

The table shows that the most prominent issue in the documentary is Bloch ethnicity as it has gained nineteen minutes maximum coverage time than other issues. Sixteen minutes are consumed for the depiction of conflict escalation through dialogues, voice over, images, and text on the screen whereas, there is no attempt for conflict management and only three minutes have been given in a neutral manner. The least prominent issues in the documentary is the issue of missing persons that is covered for two minutes only. Then comes the issue of foreign involvement in Baluchistan that is covered for 2 minutes and 29 seconds only. The results of the content analysis of documentary also reveal that the documentary film “Baluchistan: Pakistan’s other war” is based on conflict escalation rather than conflict management or conflict resolution. In terms of juxtapositioning (putting side by side), Bloch ethnicity most frequently appears as the issue is highlighted in sixteen scenes and all the scenes contribute to conflict escalation.

The documentary is further analyzed for the factors portrayed as responsible for Baluchistan conflict.

Table 2: Factors portrayed as responsible for Baluchistan conflict

Factors responsible for Baluchistan conflict		
1.	Category	Time duration
2.	Pakistan Army	7 min
3.	Establishment	10 min
4.	Bloch Sardars	13 sec
5.	Bloch rebellious groups	2.3 min
6.	Foreign involvement	3 min

This table shows that the root cause portrayed for Baluchistan conflict are Pakistan army, establishment, Bloch Sardars, rebellious groups and the involvement of foreign countries are the most responsible factors for Baluchistan current situation. Pakistan government has been blamed through different issues for ten good minutes in the documentary as compared to Pakistan army that has been blamed for seven minutes, and Bloch Sardars are blamed for the current situation only for thirteen seconds. Bloch rebellious groups are blamed for two and a half minutes and foreign involvement is made responsible for three minutes. The main culprit in this category is the government of Pakistan. The association of Baluchistan conflict with the Pakistan government and establishment has softened the image of Bloch rebellious groups whereas Bloch rebellious groups and Bloch Sardars are not depicted as main perpetrators responsible for the conflict.

Discussion and Analysis

Films in the realist tradition claim to reproduce reality with a minimum distortion. The techniques of distorting reality are applied through thematic as well as schematic structures of the film. Thematic structures include idea or topic of the documentary, selection of particular aspects and content, script and voice over, selection of a particular mode of documentary, text on the screen, titles of chapters of the DVD version etc. Schematic structures include technical treatment, light, camera angles, types of shots, sequencing of the content, juxtaposing, sound, music etc. Results of the quantitative data reveal that secession movement is highlighted at the cost of other core issues that include drone attacks, missing persons, natural resources, (gold in Reko Diq, natural gas, minerals) etc. Bloch ethnicity is also the most recurrent theme and appears with the strategic importance of Baluchistan, murder of Akbar Bugti, military operations, issue of the equitable distribution of natural resources. Therefore it seems as if all the issues are linked with the issue of Bloch ethnicity. Demand of separate homeland by ethnic Bloch appears to be justified. It can be concluded that this film promotes the idea of secession movement and justifies Bloch for this demand.

Al-Jazeera is an international channel and due to the accessibility of YouTube, this documentary gained worldwide attention. Therefore it seems important to look into the things highlighted in the film. Heavy ammunition like SA-7, missiles, AK-47s, and RPG-7 are shown in the first scene owned by BLA and other militant groups. Provision of such heavy ammunition to these groups poses a serious threat to Pakistan armed forces and other law and order maintenance authorities. However, these weapons are depicted to portray the intensity of secession movement that appears as a serious threat to the federation of Pakistan. Documentary does not suggest any resolution in this regard.

Thematic structures are supporting the idea of Bloch nationalism as the very first scene of the documentary introduces the name of the documentary with a wall chalking in the background with the words "Aazad Baluchistan". The selection of the text on wall for the first scene, along with Bloch insurgents establishes the idea of Bloch separatist movement. That is how filmmaker has set the stage in favor of secession movement in the very first scene. Bloch insurgent commander is depicted in the second scene and he is chanting slogans, "We want to end Punjabi Rule," "Our goal is to gain independence for Baluchistan". Punjabi's are shown as tyrant and oppressors. Third scene again depicts Bloch ethnicity as the Bloch insurgent commander tells in talking head mode, "We don't want to have a command centre. The experience of Tamil tigers is a vital lesson". In the same scene he further explains, "Perhaps later we may unify our command since we are one ethnic group. We fight to free our people." In terms of content, Bloch ethnicity that is 38% of the whole documentary.

There are forty nine scenes in total and nineteen scenes are projecting to Bloch nationalists. The other scenes are directly or indirectly supportive to the idea of Bloch nationalism. Interestingly foreign involvement is strikingly marginalized in the documentary as only two minutes and twenty nine seconds are given to this idea. This documentary also establishes the idea that films can be effectively used as a tool of foreign diplomacy and to influence international relation.

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