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THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOVERNANCE: BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM VERSUS PRE-COLONIAL STRUCTURES IN BALOCHISTAN (1876-1947)

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ABSTRACT

This Study examines the remarkable evolution of governance in Balochistan during the colonial period from 1876-1947. It has contrasted the imperial administrative approach with the pre-colonial governance, political-legal, and tribal structures. Based on archival material, imperial gazetteers, political correspondence, and recent postcolonial studies, the British dismantled the decentralized system of tribal self-governance, replacing it with a system of bureaucratic, militarized, and extractive governance built to serve imperial interests. This analysis positions Balochistan in the geopolitical context of the British "Great Game" and colonial era frontier policy and governance to demonstrate how the shifting colonial order altered the sovereignty, territory, and social order laid out in the hierarchies of colonial Balochistan. Using a comparative approach, the article details the changes from political authority based on kinship and customary law and negotiated sovereignty to one of administrative centralization, formal legal codes, and governance through surveillance. The imposition of British rule created new local power relations and new enduring postcolonial legacies, including tribal marginalization and centralization in the state of modern Pakistan. The study engages with the critical postcolonial texts of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Mahmood Mamdani to contend that the governance of Balochistan was, in fact, the imposition of colonial state administrative substitution, grasping in violence to re-organize society fundamentally. In relation to the subject of the article, Balochistan's colonial experience is illustrative of the twin, simultaneous forms of logic instrumental in imperial rule across the borders of South Asia. The article thereby advances more general discussions on empire, governance, and the politics of the frontier.

Keywords: *Transformation of Governance, Administrative System, Colonial and Pre-colonial Administrative structure, Great Game, Decentralized and Centralized government, Manipulated and exploited Administration in Balochistan*

INTRODUCTION

The shift of power within Balochistan from 1876 to 1947 CE marks one of the most significant, albeit, underrated phases in the history of British imperial rule in South Asia. Being at the intersection of Central Asia, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent, the inclusion of Balochistan in the British Empire went beyond territorial acquisition to a more complex geopolitical calculus intertwined with colonial frontier crafting state strategies. The region, having been historically structured around tribal confederacies, decentralized authority, and negotiated sovereignty, underwent systematic transformations into a

territory ruled by bureaucratic hierarchies, codified laws, and surveillance-driven governance. The changes being made show that there has been a change in power from local customary governance to imperial administrative governance. This change has a highly profound effect on the postcolonial state structures of present-day Pakistan.

The geopolitical contest referred to as the "Great Game" provides the context for the British encounter with Balochistan. This term describes the contest for influence over Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent that was predominantly between the British and Russian Empires during the nineteenth century. Being positioned at the crossroads of Afghanistan, Persia, and the Arabian Sea, Balochistan was of pivotal value in the defence strategy of the empire, resulting in an enhanced colonial interest in the region. However, the British also understood that the domination of the region required more than forts and treaties, and involved the reconstruction of governance itself. Lord Curzon's remark illustrates this point that it is not enough to hold the frontier with rifles; one must hold it with institutions.

Balochistan had a distinctive arrangement that consisted of political tribal autonomy, tribal politics, and negotiated alliances before the start of British intervention. The Khanate of Kalat was established in the 17th century under the rule of the Ahmadzai dynasty. It did not function as a cohesive state; rather, it was a confederation of tribal political units. Rulers and tribal chiefs, through a system of mutual obligations, exercised power via the tribal councils (Jirgas) and traditional laws (Riwaj). Political power was also exercised through a system of mutual obligations, with the chiefs (Sardars) of the tribes. Despite its fragmented and contested nature, this form of governance maintained cohesiveness throughout the social order and the shared historical consciousness of the region. It was resilient to the historical and social challenges posed by the loose and fluid systems of contested order that emerged, and the local political cultures that influenced the complex social interweaving of the region.

British colonial interference disrupted this balance. Starting with the Treaty of Kalat in 1876, negotiated by Sir Robert Sandeman, the colonial administration increasingly subordinated indigenous authority systems to imperial structures. Sandeman's implementation of a hybrid form of indirect rule involving tribal intermediaries and direct supervision of political agents signalled a turning point in the transition from the political order of the pre-colonial era to the colonial state system. In Balochistan, a new type of institutional framework came into being as a consequence of the amalgamation of military, civilian, and experimental governance functions. The British consolidated their authority through the use treaties, payments, the appointment of local feudal lords, and the creation of districts, all of which facilitated the transition of political control from a negotiated participatory model to a model characterized by explicit centralization and pejorative governance structures.

Security, surveillance, and control merged as instruments of colonial logic. The British sought not only political allegiance but also a fundamental restructuring of the modalities of governance. Customary law was codified and subordinated to the imperial legal system. Tribal chiefs were turned into state functionaries and made to depend on colonial patronage. Revenue collection, the exercise of judicial power, and the adjudication of inter-tribal disputes were all centralized and made the exclusive domain of British political agents. Consequently, the colonial state expanded its penetration into regions that were previously administered under indigenous custom, diminishing the self-governance of tribal structures, and altering the dynamics of power within Baloch society.

This paper professes that the evolution of governance in Balochistan cannot be seen only as a process of administrative reforms. It was primarily a calculated work of imperialism, with simultaneous attempts of knowledge creation. Leveraging Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, one may argue that colonial governance worked not only through physical force but also through the creation of what one may term as an epistemic sovereign, that defined the tribal subject, systematized the law, and produced a discourse of 'backwardness' that rationalized intervention. Frantz Fanon noted that colonial power attempts to reorganize the colonized world from within, a

sentiment that clearly appeared in British policies regarding Balochistan. Additionally, the change in systems of governance in Balochistan is an example of Mahmood Mamdani's concept of the "bifurcated state," in which colonial power simultaneously built a central, bureaucratic control system, while also sustaining an indirect form of control through local customary governance. This conjunction of direct control in Quetta and the strategically important regions alongside the indirect control of the frontier districts (tribal areas) allowed the British to sustain their grip over the region and simultaneously reduce governance expenditure. However, this also deepened the divisions and created a legacy of political fragmentation and marginalization that lasted well beyond the colonial period.

This research explores the transformation of governance within Balochistan through both comparative and critical lenses. It targets, for example, the contrast between the pre-colonial period of tribal governance, when customs, power relations, and governance structures were adaptive, fluid, and negotiable, and the colonial era of British rule, during which governance became inflexible, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and subordinated to surveillance. In taking such an approach, it seeks to illustrate the ideological and structural magnitude of transformation colonial rule brought to the region. The article further contextualizes these developments within wider theoretical discussions on empire, governance, and the postcolonial state construction. It shows how the colonial history of Balochistan mirrors the colonial experience of other frontier regions of the British Raj.

Ultimately. This study aims to explore the motivations behind the narratives of modernization that see British rule as an 'evolution' that is, in some ways, just, or at least necessary. While most of the scholarship still emphasizes the 'transformations' that governance 'progress' provided, this study aims to shift the focus to the 'transformations' that governance 'progress' provided to Balochistan. In addition, the study attempts to expose colonial frameworks in their extractive, coercive, and epistemic functions, arguing that the shifting governance of the empire was a primary form of control that not only extremely distorted Balochistan's polity but also instituted the state-society relations that continue to sustain the political tensions in the region.

2. Methodology of the Research

This study utilizes historical-comparative analysis and postcolonial criticism to study the change in the governance of Balochistan from 1876 to 1947CE. Given the complexity of the formation of the colonial state in an extensive border region like Balochistan, the study required an integration of multi-layered approaches archival research, discourse analysis of texts, and comparative studies of institutions. The goal, however, is not to build a linear chronological account, but to explore the interstices of power, knowledge, and administrative governance that characterize the colonial, postcolonial, and intercolonial periods.

2.1 Historical-Comparative Approach

The historical-comparative method is pivotal for this study. It aims to examine Balochistan's governance history chronologically from pre-colonial tribal confederacies and customary law systems to the centralized administrative governance frameworks during the British colonial period. This requires the comparison of two different but interrelated paradigms:

- Pre-colonial governance involved self-rule of the tribes, collective decision making through the Jirga system, the Riwaj customary law, and sovereignty negotiation between and within the Khanates and the Sardar.
- Colonial governance entailed the imposition of a bureaucratic ladder, codification of law, establishment of surveillance and political agents, and the restructuring of power relations between the state, tribes, and leadership.

Through a comparative analysis of these paradigms, the research sheds light on both continuity and rupture, demonstrating how British policies seized, altered, and removed prevailing governance standards. This comparative aspect is essential in comprehending the complexity of the colonial administrative state construction: it was a phenomenon of adaptation, translation, and domination, rather than the straightforward imposition of alien systems.

2.2 Archival and Documentary Sources

This article empirically builds on a variety of archival and colonial administrative documents. The most important of these include:

- British administrative correspondence and political reports from the India Office Records and the National Archives of the UK. These documents explain the motivations behind the colonial governance policies in Balochistan and British officials' attitudes.
- The text of treaties, particularly the treaties of Kalat (1876) and the subsequent ones. These treaties formalized and documented bureaucratic shifts in the relations of the British Government of India and the Khanate of Kalat.
- Gazetteers and political memoirs, such as legal and political memoirs and gazetteers of the territories adjacent to India by Edward Thornton and Robert Sandeman's Report on the Administration of the Baloch Frontier, as these served to provide colonial documented accounts of the administrative configuration and structures, tribal and inter-communal relations and the prevailing imperial ideologies.

Alongside colonial documents, the research includes Balochi oral histories, tribal genealogies, and regional chronicles to reconstruct Baloch pre-colonial political history and counter the colonial narrative of Baloch society being "lawless" and "ungoverned." Engaging with these two sources is important for not reproducing the epistemological biases contained in colonial documents.

2.3. Postcolonial Discourse Analysis

While archival sources provide empirical depth, this article also employs discourse analysis to interrogate the language, categories, and assumptions through which colonial power operated. Building on the works of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Partha Chatterjee, discourse analysis here focuses on how colonial texts, treaties, reports, gazetteers, and ethnographies constructed the Baloch political order as primitive, fragmented, or in need of "civilizing" intervention.

These depictions served a dual function. Not only did they describe the situation, but they also served as performative actions which asserted and legitimized the construction of new forms of governance. For instance, the cycle of colonial discourse referring to the "turbulent tribal frontier" not only undermined the legitimacy of the then-existing local governance frameworks, but also represented British incursion as a 'civilizing' moral and administrative intervention. Through discourse analytical techniques, the article uncovers the ideological foundations which colonial administrators operated within, and how these ideologies were woven into a broader imperial framework of governance through the production of knowledge and the exercise of control.

2.4. Comparative Institutional Analysis

The study deepens the understanding of structural change by using comparative institutional analysis and systematically comparing pre-colonial and colonial administrative structures along the legal, political, and social dimensions. The text integrates comparative tables that outline fundamental differences across sovereignty, dispute settlement, taxation, land tenure, and the selection of leaders. Through this, the study captures how British rule affected a transformation in the form, function, and legitimacy of governance.

This approach is rooted in historical institutionalism, especially the idea of path dependency, which holds that the first institutional configurations set the sequence of future political developments. This study demonstrates how British interventions, including restructuring tribal leadership, codifying customary law, and creating new dependencies, were a form of colonial governance that political legacies endured and, after 1947, continued to shape state-tribe relations.

2.5. Critical Reflexivity and Positionality

Considering the primary sources are largely colonial, this research takes a reflexive approach to its materials. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that colonial archives are not neutral fact repositories, but tools of control and knowledge imperialism. They convey the perspective of colonial bureaucrats and silence, distort, or suppress the voices of the colonized. This research acknowledges this bias by

juxtaposing sources of colonial domination with indigenous perspectives, oral traditions, and modern research to create a more equitable history.

Moreover, the text considers the colonial governance as a structure of domination, extending beyond the administrative, including the economic, administrative, and cultural subjugation along with epistemic violence. Such a viewpoint facilitates a more profound examination of the ways in which governance as a whole was a technology of colonial domination as power was exercised through the governance system.

The combination of archival research, discourse analysis, a comparative study of institutions, and a postcolonial critique provides a comprehensive view of the changes in the governance of Balochistan. It reconstructs the changes in the governance of Balochistan while asking the right questions about the ideological and structural realities, and the interplay of power. The documentation of institutional change becomes secondary as the more important task is to reveal the power, knowledge, and colonial governance, and the constituent-changed relations which are still present.

3. Historical Background: Pre-Colonial Governance in Balochistan (c. 1666CE-1876)

Prior to the British intrusion into Balochistan in the late 19th century, the region had a unique and strong political arrangement based on the tribal, custom law, and negotiated sovereignties. Balochistan was far from a "stateless" frontier, as it was referred to in British colonial literature. There were, and still are, dynamic systems of governance in Balochistan that were, and still are, influenced and shaped by dominant geography, ecology, and the social and political structures of the people. These pre-colonial systems provided legitimacy and stability without centralized coercion, and their transformation, and ultimate demise, under colonial rule, was a political rupture of considerable depth and breadth.

3.1. Tribal Polities and Segmentary Sovereignty

Balochistan in the pre-colonial period was predominantly tribal, and was particularly marked by the presence of the confederacies and the Khanate of Kalat along with the Marri, Bugti, Mengal, and others. The tribal confederacies maintained several complex systems of authority based on kinship and customary law (Riwaj), as well as and systems of reciprocity. The Khanate of Kalat, particularly, established in the mid-seventeenth century by Mir Ahmad Khan I, became the most dominant polity and exercised a form of suzerainty over a considerable part of Balochistan. He also extended considerable political autonomy to the subsidiary sardars (tribal chiefs). This governance arrangement encapsulates what anthropologists refer to as a segmentary lineage system, where authority was decentralized and radiated in concentric circles of loyalty as opposed to a clipped, bureaucratic hierarchy. The Khan's legitimacy was anchored not in monopolizing force but in mediating disputes, maintaining tribal balance, and upholding the *haraf* (honour) and Riwaj of the tribes. Sardars, in turn, derived authority from their ability to mobilize tribal councils (Jirgas), enforce customary decisions, and negotiate alliances. Such councils, composed of tribal elders, served as deliberative bodies resolving conflicts, distributing land and water rights, and even arbitrating cases of blood-feud.

3.2. Governance as Negotiation: Khanate and Sardari Dynamics

Negotiated sovereignty marked the Khanate's political order. The dispersion of power within the Khanate meant that the Khan received tribute and gained military assistance. Still, he was largely bound by customary constraints and the need for consensus. This political interdependence was substantially different from the bureaucratic rationalities of British colonialism.

The Khanate's power was unequal and fluctuated as a result of personal magnetism, inter-tribal relations, and alliances. An example is Mir Nasir Khan I (c. 1749-1794 CE), who, by way of Treaty of 1758 with the Afghan Durrani Empire, arranged marriages, and forged patronage networks, built Kalat's power and

influence as a regional nexus. At the height of power, the Khanate was still unable to abolish tribal autonomy, but incorporated tribal sovereignty within a larger, confederative framework.

3.3. Mechanisms of Justice and Social Order

Restitution, rather than retribution, was central to the autonomous justice of the pre-colonial Balochistan system. Local tribal assemblies, called jirgas, exercised both legislative and executive functions. The *mashwara* system of consultation, where decisive comments were made for or against a proposal regarding taxes, military expeditions, or alliances, was incorporated alongside jirgas. Many decisions were made in public tribal assemblies. Coercion was infrequent and usually handled by social-order implications, such as indirect honour (izzat) and social contracts of kin-based vengeance, and compensatory social contracts (badal) were made, as was prior negotiated compensation. Though decentralized, these institutions provided control within the region and created an adaptive social order in relation to the region's and socio-economic pastoral-nomadic economy and dispersed settlement patterns.

3.4. External Relations and the Geopolitical Context

Although Balochistan's rulers had a significant degree of internal self-governance, they were never completely detached from the governing realities of the region. The Khanate was able to manage and maintain self-autonomy while balancing external pressure, due to it tributary relations with the Safavids, the Mughals, and later the Durranis. Such tributary relations were evidence of the Baloch Khanate's non-territorial and flexible political culture.

The mid to late nineteenth century was the beginning of significant geopolitical changes with the rise of the British Empire and later the British Raj over Colonised India, due to the changes in the political order that took place in Balochistan. The first Anglo-Afghan war was the first signal of direct British involvement and the subsequent Kalat treaty's that were intended to limit Balochistan's autonomy. The 1854 treaty is a clear illustration of this whereby Balochistan was declared to still have political sovereignty, while Britain had indirect rule over it.

3.5. Conceptualizing Pre-Colonial Governance: Beyond the Colonial Gaze

British accounts of Balochistan before 1876 often used descriptors like 'disorderly', 'lawless', and 'without government', giving the impression that it needed an intervention and reordering. Yet the narratives used by the likes of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said remind us that such descriptions serve the ideological purpose of constructing the colonial state as a civilizing force and masking the political sophistication of the 'native' communities.

Balochistan governance systems before the advent of British rule were neither chaotic nor primitive. It was rather a polycentric arrangement that valued the principles of negotiation over the coercive and imposition of consensus rather than a commanded governance. The principles of fluidity and fixity governance arrangement were contrary to the systemic imperial state order that sought to control, map, and bureaucratically surveil an area. The imperial state's rational bureaucratic order of discipline was a marked contrast to the customary and negotiated principles of governance.

Table 1. Comparative Features of Pre-Colonial Baloch Governance

Feature	Pre-Colonial System (1666-1876 CE)	British Colonial System (Post-1876)
Sovereignty	Distributed, negotiated among tribes and Khanate	Centralized, monopolized by colonial state
Authority Basis	Custom (*Riwaj*), kinship, consensus	Law, bureaucracy, imperial decree
Governance Mechanism	Tribal jirgas, councils, alliances	District administration, codified law
Justice	Restitution, mediation, compensation	Punitive, codified, court-based

Feature	Pre-Colonial System (1666-1876 CE)	British Colonial System (Post-1876)
External Relations	Tributary-diplomatic, flexible	Imperial treaties, formal protectorates

This pre-colonial tapestry of governance, adaptive, participatory, and embedded in social relations would be fundamentally reconfigured under British rule. The next section examines how colonial administrators dismantled and reconstituted this order in pursuit of strategic control, revenue extraction, and imperial ideology.

4. The Colonial Intervention and the Logic of Transformation (1876-1947)

The British colonial encounter in Balochistan was, in part, the expansion of imperial frontiers. More significantly, it involved the first systematic restructuring of governance in the region. Beginning with the Treaty of Kalat in 1876, the British engineered the dismantling of the flexible, negotiated, and kin-based political order that characterized pre-colonial Balochistan, and set in its place a rational, centralized, and bureaucratized governance architecture aimed at meeting the imperial strategic and economic needs of the British Empire. It was not just a matter of 'administration'; it was, as Edward Said put it, an epistemic project: reconstituting geography, power, and subjectivity to make the region governable through colonial knowledge and power.

4.1. Strategic Imperatives and the "Forward Policy"

Geopolitical concerns defined the evolution of the British colonial project in Balochistan, particularly the so-called "Great Game" rivalry with Tsarist Russia. The province's location bordered Afghanistan, Persia, and the Indian Ocean, making it a significant buffer zone in the imperial defense strategy. As early as 1876 CE, Sir Robert Sandeman, the architect of the British system in Balochistan, explicitly linked the administrative intervention to frontier security. Sir Robert Sandeman said, "The pacification of the frontier depends not upon conquest but upon the substitution of our system of order for the tribal chaos which has long prevailed". This settler colonial framework underpinned the Forward Policy, which focused on the active advance of British control into the tribal regions of the frontier. The Forward Policy was underpinned by a myriad of treaties, garrisons, political agents, and co-opted local elites. The Treaty of Kalat (1876) was a watershed moment in this regard, which subordinated the Khan of Kalat to British "advice" in relation to his foreign affairs and ensured the stationing of British officials in Quetta. Quetta would go on to become the linchpin of frontier administration and a major military cantonment.

4.2. Institutional Engineering: From Indirect to Direct Rule

Sandeman's administrative model, which for a time received praise as a system of indirect rule, was fundamentally a system of deep intervention. It consisted of modifying indigenous institutions to serve colonial purposes while maintaining a veneer of local autonomy. Sardars were transformed into intermediaries of a tiered colonial bureaucracy, and their incorporation into the system came with subsidies and titles. The Khanate of Kalat was nominally kept sovereign but was definitively stripped of any meaningful power, fully integrated into a political constellation with a British Agent to the Governor-General. Importantly, the British came up with new territorial and administrative divisions, transforming Balochistan into districts, agencies, and tribal areas. The spatial reordering, described by the establishment of the Balochistan Agency in 1877 CE and the Chief Commissioner's Province in 1887 CE, fundamentally reconfigured the nature of sovereignty from fluid and overlapping pre-colonial jurisdictions to a modern, bounded, and cartographically fixed domain.

4.3. The Legal-Cultural Encounter and the Epistemic Shift

Colonial control was exercised not only through military and administrative force but also through the introduction of new legal and epistemic frameworks. British colonizers revised customary law and wrote statutes while

distorting and selectively capturing Riwaj to tighten state control. Jirgas were kept but repurposed under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR, 1872/1901), transforming them from self-governing tribal institutions to tools of colonial control.

This legal change was also part of a larger colonial ethnographic knowledge project involving extensive mapping, surveying and "rendering" Baloch society in order to make it governable. As noted by Bernard Cohn, this knowledge was not neutral; it constituted power by creating a "colonial archive" that re-organized tribal identities, fractal boundaries and hierarchies.

4.4. Economic Reorganization and Resource Extraction

New British colonial governance in Balochistan also brought new economic logics that, in turn, reshaped social relations. Infrastructure (roads, telegraphs and, later, the North-Western Railway) was built primarily to facilitate the movement of troops and the extraction of resources. Quetta was transformed from a small village into a strategic military city, the economic and administrative centre of colonial Balochistan. In addition, even though it was within the context of the region's arid geography, the settlements and revenue systems of the land imposed new and incomplete systems of settlements and land revenue which altered the communal landholding patterns. The colonial state's focus on land documentation and fixed taxation represented a transformative change of subsistence, customary economies toward a monetized economy aimed primarily at imperial desires.

4.5. Resistance, Adaptation, and Colonial Counter-Strategies

Imposing colonial governance certainly faced some opposition, and some governance was dispersed and contested. Tribal uprisings, including the Marri resistance of 1915 and Bugti revolts, were testaments to opposition to British encroachment. These insurgencies were harshly dealt with, revealing, however, the limits of colonial dominion and the resilience of an uncaptured political culture.

Many sardars, however, adapted to the new order and consolidated local power due to colonial patronage. The political landscape was thus the result of simultaneous resistance and passive collaboration, revealing a deeper tension in the subaltern's constructed order: the complex interplay of domination and autonomy, and coercion and negotiation relative to the construct's influence.

4.6. Colonial Governance as a Civilizing Mission

An underlying logic to all colonial rule discourse and governance was a civilizing narrative. Colonial administrators perceived Baloch society as "backward", "violent", and incapable of self-rule as a justification for enduring imperial oversight. However, as Fanon noted, the civilizing narrative of colonial discourse hidden a more brutal reality of restructuring and exploit a society rather than civilizing it. As of 1947, Balochistan's governance system had undergone an 'un-line' transformation. The still negotiable sovereignties and tribal confederacies of the period before 1876 had been transformed to a centralized, militarized, and bureaucratized colonial order, which fundamentally transformed the postcolonial history of the region.

Table 2. Transformation of Governance: Pre-Colonial vs. Colonial Structures

Dimension	Pre-Colonial Balochistan	British Colonial Balochistan (1876-1947)
Sovereignty	Shared, negotiated among Khan and tribes	Centralized under colonial authority
Political Structure	Confederative, polycentric	Bureaucratic, hierarchical
Law and Justice	Customary (*Riwaj*), Jirga-based	Codified law, FCR, controlled jirgas
Land and Economy	Communal landholding, subsistence-based	Surveyed land, taxation, strategic infrastructure

Dimension	Pre-Colonial Balochistan	British Colonial Balochistan (1876-1947)
External Relations	Tributary diplomacy, fluid alliances	Protectorate treaties, imperial command
Knowledge and Mapping	Oral traditions, flexible boundaries	Surveys, censuses, ethnographic classification

The colonial state's administrative project was thus far more than a technical exercise in governance; it was a civilizational reconfiguration a deliberate attempt to overwrite indigenous political rationalities with a new order aligned to imperial power. This structural transformation would have lasting consequences, shaping patterns of state-society relations, tribal politics, and resistance in the post-1947 era.

5. Comparative Analysis: Colonial Governance vs. Pre-Colonial Systems Structural, Ideological, and Material Dimensions

The interaction of British colonial governance with pre-colonial administrative structures in Balochistan was not simply an administrative showdown; it was a deep conflict of two sets of political orders, two power ontologies, and two philosophies of social order. This bloc performs a comparative analysis on the structural, ideological, and material dimensions in order to expose the depth and ramifications of such a shift. The intent is to go beyond a mere comparative institutional analysis and to engage the power logic that drove reconfigurations of sovereignty and subjecthood, and the politics of governance in Balochistan.

5.1. Structural Dimension: From Polycentric Authority to Centralized Bureaucracy

Before 1876 CE, governance in Balochistan spanned a polycentric order with negotiated authority and shared sovereignty. The Khan of Kalat, the paramount ruler, held power through a web of tribal alliances and responsibilities. Power was shared with the sardars (tribal leaders), who held enough influence to manage the internal conflicts of their domain and to call the jirgas assemblies. These gatherings were rooted in law (Riwaj), and decision-making was collective. The order was complex, with a flexible structure designed to embrace the geography and sociopolitical tribal mobility of the area, political power and legitimacy emerging from kinship, and tribal identity political mobility.

The core governance structure changed with British intrusion and the 1876 CE Treaty of Kalat. The British constructed sovereignty along the lines of a stable, centralized, bureaucratic, and militarized territorial order. Sovereignty cloaked in military power central to the Treaty resulted in administrative authority concentrating in the hands of British political agents, and subsequently, precedents were set for chief commissioners to usurp local governance. The British divided this area into districts, sub-agencies, and tribal areas, each organized in a specific structure of government officials. Jirgas were kept but placed under colonial supervision, and sardars were incorporated into the state system as paid middlemen rather than as free agents. This transformation was a momentous change from the governance of negotiation to governance of command. As Hugh Beattie mentioned that tribal consent once legitimated power, now the imprimatur of the colonial state defined authority.

5.2. Ideological Dimension: Discursive Domination and the "Civilizing Mission"

The political culture in pre-colonial Balochistan was rooted in political autonomy, communal recognition of honour, and social mutuality. Authority was within the social relations of the Baloch, and the political legitimacy was situated in lineages and martial ability to settle disputes Governance was an extension of the moral and communal obligations of the tribe rather than an impersonal apparatus of the abstract state. By contrast, the ideology animating the British project was deeply different. Colonial officials presented their interventions in Balochistan as a "civilizing mission" by depicting tribal society as anarchic, violent, and incapable of self-rule. This description was a caricature of tribal society, driven primarily by the exotification of

the 'Other.' It provided the moral authority to impose foreign rule.

As Edward Said pointed out, colonial knowledge was, to all intents and purposes, a descriptive discourse of domination, not a neutral account: the British constructed the "tribal" society as primitive and the "state" as civil, thereby legitimizing their presence as necessary and progressive. In the same vein, Fanon noted that to exert control, colonial power had to create a subject who internalized inferiority. In reality, this ideological endeavour changed the conception and practice of power. Sovereignty, law, and order, to the extent they could be claimed, were redefined to serve Eurocentric ends. Indigenous knowledges were pushed to the periphery, deemed pre-modern. It was through colonial dossiers, gazetteers, and ethnographic surveys, those tribal identities, which were fluid, were rigidly ensconced within the colonial administrative edifice.

5.3. Material Dimension: Economic, Spatial, and Legal Reconfigurations

In Balochistan, pre-colonial material order involved subsistence pastoralism, seasonal trade, and low monetized exchange. Communal land tenure systems and the collection of tributes with no formal taxation systems indicated weak state consolidation and minimal state subsistence taxes. Therefore, control of people and not the land was the primary political spatial order.

The British fundamentally changed Balochistan through land and people integrated economic infrastructure such as garrison town Quetta, strategic road development, and North-Western Railway expansion. The state changed land from a non-taxable, communal holding to a taxable commodity, and, through land surveys, state extraction facilitated land communal holding disintegration and the communal land holding system state transformation.

Legal transformations were equally significant. Codified custom law, and, FCR 1872/1901 sanction of collective punishment, state surveillance, and control of movement consolidation coercively restructured justice systems from negotiated order to justice coercive systems. Control order system state transformation rationalized the control and coercion of land, people, and spatial systems.

5.4. Comparative Synthesis: Governance as Domination

These variations produced a remarkable shift in the character of governance. Unlike the pre-colonial system, which was relational, negotiated and socially embedded, the colonial system was hierarchical, bureaucratic and command-driven governed. The change cannot be explained purely as a "modernization" shift, but also as an alien colonizing project of domination that merged material restructuring with ideological ascendance.

Postcolonial theory, in particular, helps shed light on the changes. Said's Orientalism focuses on the discourse of colonial power and the justification of that power, while Fanon's analysis of the colonial condition centres the power that penetrates the soul of the colonized. As Partha Chatterjee articulates, colonial governance was not simply state-building but also a process of reconstituting society's new subjectivities, new hierarchies, and new attachments. The following table summarizes the core contrasts:

Table 3. Comparative Dimensions of Governance in Balochistan

Dimension	Pre-Colonial Balochistan	British Colonial Balochistan
Political Authority	Negotiated among Khan, *Sardars*, and Jirgas	Centralized under colonial officials
Sovereignty	Relational, shared, and fluid	Absolute, territorial, and bureaucratic
Law & Justice	Customary (*Riwaj*), consensus-based	Codified, coercive (FCR, 1872/1901)
Legitimacy	Tribal consent, lineage, mediation	"Civilizing mission," imperial mandate
Economy	Subsistence-based, communal land	Monetized, taxable, infrastructural
Knowledge	Oral, fluid, relational	Censuses, surveys, Orientalist

Dimension	Pre-Colonial Balochistan	British Colonial Balochistan
		ethnography

In addition to the political imposition, governance in Balochistan, in the broader scope, was a totalizing project meant to transcend the grammar of authority. It aimed to not only rule the people but to also reconstitute the very legacy of what governance meant in the historical state of Pakistan, whose traces continue to dictate the political culture and state-tribe relations of modern Pakistan.

6. Conclusion

The governance history of Balochistan from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries represented more than the simple substitution of one form of administrative order for another. It signified a radical reconfiguration of political space, social authority, and the epistemic order, restructuring the intricate bonds of power and society, which prevails long after the Union Jack was lowered in 1947. This shift in modern Balochistan governance is embedded in the state architecture of Pakistan and the deeply entrenched relations of power, legitimacy, and resistance that continue to define Balochistan.

Central to the colonial enterprise there were two factors: the need to protect the Empire's frontier from potential assaults by Russia, Persia, and Afghanistan, and the need to 'civilize' what the administrators portrayed as colonial savage, tribal, and anarchic frontier. The changed socio-political landscape of Balochistan was the result of the post-1876 Forward Policy with its permanent garrisons, direct intervention, and codified civil laws and infrastructure building. The surveillance and control governance systems introduced by the colonial state replaced the pre-industrial political order of consensus, kinship, and customary law.

Nevertheless, the transformation was never complete and, at times, was even resisted. Tribal sardars were co-opted as intermediaries, but they still exercised considerable influence over their clients. Tribal representatives and state collaborators, as they were, dealt with the less visible and more resilient customary order that colonialism sought to over. Hybrid and contested, the political order was, therefore, neither fully indigenous nor entirely colonial, as state sovereignty and tribal order coexisted, and at times clashed.

Mimicking the colonial state-building pattern, the postcolonial state in Pakistan during its early years was, to a large extent, still reliant on the same bureaucratic rationality as the colonizers. The patterns constructed around the agencies of the administrative Balochistan, the colonial placement of Political Agents, and the enforcement of the Frontier Crimes Regulation well into the twentieth century all exemplified the persistence of colonial control mechanisms. Today, Balochistan and its regions still function under the control of Sandeman's indirect rule, whereby state control operates through tribal intermediaries. This, as Mahmood Mamdani would argue, characterizes the "bifurcated state." Colonial control differentials, as citizen and subject, settled and tribal, continue to order the landscape of governance and identity.

Similarly, the colonial epistemologies that depicted Balochistan as a "frontier" marginal, unruly, and in need of pacification continue to inform the state's discourse. Development frameworks and policies, security narratives, and even national historiography restate these Orientalist tropes, reflexively and routinely depicting Baloch society as an object of reform. These and other discursive legacies not only inform policy but also delineate the frameworks within which political contestation remains structured. For example, nationalist movements, in part, define themselves in contestation to the colonial legacies that labelled them "tribal" and "backward".

However colonial domination, as Fanon reminds us, also constructs its own forms of resistance. In Balochistan, resistance to centralized authority from the Marri and Bugti uprisings during the British Raj to the multiple insurgencies in postcolonial Pakistan cannot be understood only as a response to a specific policy. These are rooted in a historic consciousness of autonomy, a precolonial political tradition that regarded negotiated sovereignty and local self-determination as a form of self-rule. This long history of resistance

illustrates that colonial transformations, no matter how extensive, could not fully destroy the political cultures they sought to control.

In closing, the British colonial experience in Balochistan did not merely shift the administrative borders or change the governance structures; it fundamentally Altered the grammar of Politics. It Installed the patronage Politics of centralization, sovereignty, power, legislation, and bureaucracy in the very political topology of the region. It simultaneously and, in fact, in some ways Installed enduring Precolonial Autonomy, traditions, and resistance. The legacy is then a postcolonial state built on colonial structures and operating with colonial logics and facing resistance that is also colonial in origin. The state, then, becomes a postcolonial enigma: built structurally and operationally as a consolidated imposition.

Such a legacy matters for policymakers and political theorists as well, and perhaps explains why state-building in Balochistan remains unfinished, why tribal formations still exert influence, and why sovereignty in the province is still partial and contested. It also illustrates the transformative, albeit negative, influence of colonial state power on social formations, not as a thing of the past, but as a contemporary reality.

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