

## Sectarian Violence in Quetta Balochistan using the Theory of Othering

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### Abstract

This paper applies the "theory of Othering" to evaluate sectarian violence in Quetta, Balochistan, with the objective of understanding its impact on community dynamics and identity. This descriptive study employs content analysis of secondary sources, including research articles, books, and journals, along with a desk survey. The methodology involves categorizing and interpreting collected data to derive meaningful insights into sectarian conflicts. The study reveals that sectarianism has inflicted numerous crises upon the people of Balochistan, where Sunni and Shia communities are primarily engaged in continual skirmishes, the practice of violence, the prosecution of each other's fundamental rights to education, freedom, and even life, terrorist attacks, and target killings. Additionally, the analysis highlights the historical context of sectarian tensions, tracing their roots to political, economic, and social factors contributing to violence. The study concluded that Shia Hazaras in Quetta are marginalized due to ongoing sectarian violence, leading to their Othering in society. Recommendations include promoting interfaith dialogue and enhancing law enforcement to ensure equitable access to public services for all communities.

**Keywords:** Sectarian violence, Conflicts, Shia, Sunni, theory of Othering, Hazara

### Introduction

Sectarianism is defined as an extreme attachment to a specific social group, a sect, or a party in religion. It gives adherence to intrinsic characteristics to a person or group of people for them to accumulate socio-political, theological, and religion-specific advantages over their opponents in a society.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in some instances, this excessive attachment of an individual or a group of individuals results in a cultural or political dispute resulting from the contradiction between their lifestyles, opinions, traditions, rituals, and religious practices. Sectarianism can result in hatred, violence, and discrimination, which can ultimately inflict extreme violence and oppression on both sects or the minority sect.<sup>6</sup> It is also defined as a social and religious set of attributes that give its adherents privileges and political and social rights within a specific sect of a religion. Sectarian conflict arises from fierce competition over perceived socioeconomic and political advantages over opposing parties.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Haddad, Fanar. "Sectarianism' and Its Discontents in the Study of the Middle East." *The Middle East Journal* 71, no. 3 (2017): 363–382.

<sup>6</sup> Abbasi, Waqas A., Habib A. Memon, and Sadaf Irum. "Role of the Structural Factors in Construction of Violent Extremist Thoughts." *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 13, no. 2 (2021): 97–117.

<sup>7</sup> Ille, Sebastian. "The Evolution of Sectarianism." *Communications in Nonlinear Science and Numerical Simulation* 97, no. 1 (2021): 105726.

Sectarianism has a deep-rooted history, affecting various regions and religions.<sup>8,9,10</sup> In Quetta, sectarianism is traced back to British colonial times, linked to the ethnic division of employment, including the Hazaras.<sup>11,12</sup> It intensified with the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> Initially, sectarianism involved Sunni, Shia, and Wahabi sects. The Sunni and Wahabi alliance led to the formation of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, targeting the Hazara Shia community. This violence, driven by political and cultural conflicts, has severely impacted the socio-political and economic growth of the affected communities.<sup>14</sup>

Violence escalated in 2003 when a Jihadi group attacked the Hazara community, killing nearly 50 Shias during a religious gathering. Further attacks followed, including a 2010 suicide bombing killing 55 Shias and the massacre of 26 Shia pilgrims in 2011.<sup>15,16</sup> In 2013, a suicide attack killed 79 Hazaras, despite government promises to protect the community.<sup>17</sup> Since the 1990s, nearly 1,500 Hazaras have been killed, 4,000 injured, and 100,000 forced to migrate. Despite these atrocities, the Pakistani government has taken no firm action, leaving the Hazara Shia community still oppressed.<sup>13,12,18</sup> Table 1 presents the number of sectarian casualties, including both fatalities and injuries, in Quetta over the years from 2010 to 2018.

Table 1. Sectarian Casualties over Years in Quetta

Year of Sectarian Violence in Quetta	Killed	Injured
2010	98	250
2011	89	63
2012	159	179
2013	239	400
2014	81	78
2015	34	38
2016	60	101+
2017	43	38
2018	6	2

Source: (South Asian Terrorism Portal)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, Shaye J. D. "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55, no. 4 (1984): 27–53.

<sup>9</sup> Haddad, Fanar. *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Haddad, Fanar. *Understanding 'Sectarianism': Sunni-Shi'a Relations in the Modern Arab World*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Nawaz, Rashid, and Naveed U. Hassan. "Issues of Hazara Community and Sectarianism in Quetta (Pakistan)." *Journal of Political Studies* 28, no. 1 (2021): 77–88.

<sup>12</sup> Majeed, Ghazala. "Issues of Shia Hazara Community of Quetta, Balochistan: An Overview." *Journal of Political Studies* 28, no. 1 (2021): 77–88.

<sup>13</sup> Changezi, Abdul Rahim, and Mohammad Ashraf Tareen. "Civil Society Empowerment: Issues, Perspectives, and Proposals (A Case Study of Balochistan)." *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 65, no. 4 (2017): 93–108.

<sup>14</sup> Kalin, Michael, and Niloufer Siddiqui. *Religious Authority and the Promotion of Sectarian Tolerance in Pakistan*. JSTOR, vol. 21, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Yasmeen, S., and Farzana Umar. "Religious Extremism and Sectarianism in Pakistan: An Appraisal." *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 58, no. 2 (2021): 59–63.

<sup>16</sup> Heinkel, Jason C., and Raymond de Villafranca. "Could Pakistan Lose Balochistan? Balochistan's Insurgency and Its Implications for Pakistan and the Region." *Journal of Strategic Intelligence* 2, no. 6 (2016): 62–72.

<sup>17</sup> Rafiq, Arif. "Sunni Deobandi-Shia Sectarian Violence in Pakistan." *Middle East Institute* (2014).

<sup>18</sup> Tahir, S. N. "Sectarian Clashes and Public Opinion in Balochistan: A Comparative Study of Selected Urdu Newspapers." *Pakistan Perspective* 17, no. 1 (2012): 161–192.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/balochistan/data/sectarianviolencebalochistan2009.htm>

The Shia Hazara community can only travel freely within Mariabad and Hazara Town. Outside these areas, their children face danger in attending school, and people fear going to other districts for healthcare due to pervasive fear.<sup>20</sup> Sectarianism, driven by Taliban insurgencies, ethnic hatred, and political dominion, has disrupted Quetta's socio-political and economic progress, leading to regional instability<sup>21,22</sup> Further, Balochistan has become a battleground for proxy wars involving regional and international powers, including Iran, India, Afghanistan, and the United States. Reports suggest that Allah Nazar, leader of the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), accuses Hyrbyair Marri of supporting Saudi Arabia's moderate Islam, while Marri claims Nazar is an Iranian puppet.<sup>23</sup>

Islamist and right-wing parties in Pakistan, including Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), have long cooperated with sectarian groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP).<sup>17</sup> Lashkar-e-Janghvi (LeJ), a sectarian group, openly threatens Hazara Shias, with growing violence linked to economic disparities and ethnic conflicts.<sup>12,13</sup> LeJ operates locally, backed by Baloch tribal leaders and politicians, targeting Hazara Shias.<sup>13</sup> Historically, Hazaras were significant business owners in Balochistan. Many arrived from Afghanistan with low incomes and no formal education but succeeded in business, politics, and education. The community encouraged higher education, leading to government job opportunities, where Hazaras holds a 5% employment quota in Balochistan.<sup>24</sup>

The Department of Services and General Administration outlines the mandates for provincial governance, condemning violence and granting the Interior Ministry authority to ensure security and religious freedom for all ethnic and religious groups.<sup>25</sup> Due to ongoing sectarian violence and terrorism, the Interior Department mandated the Frontier Corps (FC) to maintain security and law and order across the province. The FC, originally a military unit, now influences urban policing, traditionally handled by municipal police. Equipped with assault rifles, IEDs, rocket launchers, and suicide bombers, the FC's officers, all retired military personnel, make development suggestions and handle criminal investigations within their camp. Politicians often meet with FC wing commanders, sometimes secretly. The armed forces can directly impact local political discourse by shaping security operations and governance. In the case of Karachi, the growing reliance on the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) by the civilian police illustrates this influence, as the military increasingly handles counterterrorism operations. The involvement of armed forces in such duties reflects the government's security approach and alters the political dynamic, especially after police officers have been targeted by extremist violence.

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<sup>20</sup> Kiran, Nosheen, and Muhammad Irfan Chawla. "Sectarianism in Balochistan: Lashkar-E-Jhangvi vs Hazara Community." *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies* 11, no. 4 (2020): 1–11.

<sup>21</sup> Fair, C. Christine. "Explaining Support for Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan: Piety, Maslak and Sharia." *Religions* 6, no. 4 (2015): 1137–1167.

<sup>22</sup> Fair, C. Christine. "Explaining Support for Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan: Piety, Maslak and Sharia." In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Pakistan*, edited by Aparna Pande, 309–335. Routledge, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Noraiee, Hoshang. "The Baloch nationalism in Pakistan: Articulation of the ethnic separatism after the end of the Cold War." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2020): 72-85.

<sup>24</sup> Ali, Sajjad. "The Specter of Hate and Intolerance: Sectarian-Jihadi Nexus and the Persecution of Hazara Shia Community in Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 29, no. 2 (2021): 198–211.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Services and General Administration. *Rules of Business (2012)*. Government of Balochistan, Civil Secretariat, Quetta, 2012.

## Literature Review

Since its inception, Pakistan has been home to regional, linguistic, ethnic, and religious minorities. The Shia Muslim community constitutes around 10–15% of the population, and the overwhelming majority, Sunni Muslims, constituting around 80–85% of the population.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Pakistan becomes the second largest home to Shia Muslims in the world after Iran. Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan had generally peaceful relations historically with relations becoming peaceful historically from the British Indian colonial period. Sunni Shias conflicts were not as common during this time and harmony in the post-independence period was also observed.<sup>26</sup>

However, the political climate in Pakistan began to change in the 1980s, notably during General Zia ul Haq's military regime. His Islamization policies, which favored Sunni interpretations of Islam heavily, sowed the seeds of sectarian tension in the country. This was accompanied by the rise of Sunni extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi whose violent targeting of Shia communities, particularly in the more urban centers like Karachi and Quetta, signaled a worrisome shift in inter-sect relations.<sup>27</sup> The growing political and social exclusion of Shia Muslims compounded their vulnerability to attacks.

In the 1990s, sectarian violence increasingly affected the region of Balochistan, a site of political and economic marginalization for a long time. However, in the province, where a large Shia Hazara population lives, Sunni extremist groups were particularly vulnerable to targeting. According to Samad, sectarian violence in Balochistan was not a local issue, but also something deeply linked to broader national security concerns and geopolitical tensions. The Hazara became a frequent target of violence and displacement in Balochistan. Sectarian hatred was not the only cause of this community's marginalization, for the lack of political representation and social integration played a role, too. Samad shows that this environment has been fertile ground for sectarian violence, made worse by external influences, especially that of surrounding countries with conflicting sectarian interests.<sup>28</sup>

Aside from the geopolitical factors, the internal dynamics of Pakistan's political landscape also had a considerable impact on the rise of sectarian violence. According to Siddiqi, the political exclusion of Shia Muslims, particularly after the Zia ul-Haq regime, made many Shia communities susceptible to extremist ideologies. The increasing politicization of religious identity in Pakistan further fueled the growing divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims. A process of Islamization under Zia ul Haq also entrenched the Sunni interpretations of Islam as the state's official doctrine, leading Shia Muslims to be largely excluded from political discourse and public life.<sup>29</sup>

It is Balochistan's Hazara community that is a case study of how political exclusion and sectarian violence are intertwined. Brown et al. view the Hazara Shia population as particularly at risk of violence because of their political marginalization from mainstream political processes.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the Hazara rarely had any political representation, being both ethnically and religiously distinct, and easy targets for Sunni extremist groups. Such groups as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi targeted

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<sup>26</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni-Shia Divide," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/sunni-shia-divide>.

<sup>27</sup> Qureshi, Jawad. "The Discourses of the Damascene Sunni Ulama during the 2011 Revolution." *Syria Studies* 4, no. 1 (2012): 59-91.

<sup>28</sup> Samad, Yunus. "Understanding the Insurgency in Balochistan." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 52, no. 2 (2014): 293–320.

<sup>29</sup> Siddiqi, F. H. "Security Dynamics in Pakistani Balochistan: Religious Activism and Ethnic Conflict in the War on Terror." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 39, no. 3 (2012): 157–175.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, Michael, Mohammad Dawaod, Ali Iranlatab, and Mustafa Naqi. "Balochistan Case Study." *CIFP Conflict Report* (2012).

the Hazara Shia population in violent attacks, causing the community widespread fear and insecurity.<sup>29</sup>

External geopolitical factors began to play a larger role in the sectarian split in Pakistan at the same time as the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran. How regional powers have encouraged sectarian violence by backing Sunni and Shia groups favoring their interests has been highlighted by Tariq<sup>31</sup> and Ali.<sup>24</sup> They have furthered the divide with ideological and financial backing for local sectarian groups. Nevertheless, while these studies acknowledge the impact of foreign powers, they often overlook the main role local governance and political structures play in perpetuating or fraying sectarian conflict.

While there has been considerable research in uncovering the political and external drivers of sectarian violence in Pakistan, there is a deficiency in understanding the psychological mechanisms, like dehumanization and "Othering" that are responsible for sectarian violence. Iqbal explains the idea of 'Othering' used to describe how Shia Muslims have been socially and culturally discriminated against in Pakistan's mainly Sunni society. Iqbal argues that this psychological mechanism has been of utmost importance in legitimizing sectarian violence against Shia Muslims by allowing the marginalization of Shia Muslims. However, this idea needs additional interrogation of how these psychological processes manifest at a local level, for instance in conflict zones like Balochistan, where sectarian violence is at an alarming stage.<sup>32</sup>

While the literature on the political, social, and external components of sectarian violence in Pakistan is useful, there is a need for further research that integrates both internal and external conflict drivers. An understanding of sectarian violence in Pakistan requires an examination of how political exclusion, geopolitical factors, and psychological mechanisms fuel sectarian violence. Future research could consider a more nuanced approach that addresses the sectarian divide in Pakistan through a political, social, and psychological lens, creating a more comprehensive understanding of sectarianism in Pakistan and its broader implications for regional stability.

### **Methodology**

It is a descriptive study that applies the theory of Othering for sectarian violence in Quetta based on content analysis of available information. It contains data collection through secondary sources of relevant literature. The secondary sources of data include desktop surveys, published research articles, books, pamphlets, a set of selected studies in religious studies, sectarianism, sectarian violence, the theory of Othering, religious books of both sects of Islam, government policy documents, the practices of law enforcement agencies, and the responses of Shia and Sunni clerics in understanding the phenomena about sectarian violence in the context of Quetta. The theory of Othering is sorted out in the content analysis of secondary sources of data to elaborate on its application and show its relevance to the sectarian violence inflicted upon the Shia community of Hazaras in Quetta city.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of "Othering" refers to the process by which one group perceives and defines another group as fundamentally different, often leading to marginalization and dehumanization.<sup>33</sup> In the

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<sup>31</sup> Tariq, M. "Conflict in Balochistan." *Strategic Studies* 33, no. 3/4 (2013): 23–40.

<sup>32</sup> Iqbal, Abid R. "Internal and External Factors in Balochistan Conflict." *ISSRA Papers* 4, no. 2 (2012): 79–102.

<sup>33</sup> Dervin, Fred. "Cultural Identity, Representation and Othering." In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*, edited by Jane Jackson, 195–208. Routledge, 2012.

context of sectarianism, Othering helps to explain how Sunni attitudes toward Shia communities are shaped by notions of identity, belonging, and difference. This theory was chosen over others due to its capacity to illuminate the dynamics of conflict and power imbalances within the sectarian landscape of Quetta. It allows for a nuanced exploration of how religious identity influences perceptions and interactions between these groups, thus providing a critical lens for understanding sectarian violence.

To study Sunni attitudes toward Shia, this research employed a robust methodology that included an extensive literature review and a comprehensive analysis of historical and contemporary sources. Rather than relying on a single study, the research synthesized findings from multiple secondary sources to capture a well-rounded perspective of the sectarian context in Quetta. This approach enhances the validity of the findings, as it draws on diverse perspectives and data points, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing sectarian attitudes.

Considering the hypothetical proposition of sectarianism in Balochistan, it can be evaluated in the theoretical background of several theories based on marginalization, social injustices practiced on minorities, socio-political instability, and a lack of social, economic, and political advancement for marginalized communities. This research underpins the theoretical framework of the "theory of Othering," which incorporates the concept of spiritualism as discrimination against minorities in a variety of contexts, including sectarian violence.

### **The Role of Power and Identity in Othering**

The theory of Othering was proposed by G.W.F. Hegel<sup>34</sup> and asserted that this hypothetical receptacle of Othering was associated with the perspective and behavior of humans. Othering is a perceptual assumption in which a particular group of individuals considers other groups of individuals others, either based on their religion, caste, ethnicity, opinion, thinking, education, sect, or other things.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, that group of people is labeled as different and unfit according to the social norms and principles established by the other people. Therefore, it ultimately leads to the marginalization or degradation of a group of individuals referred to as "others," and it can result in the oppression of their basic rights and acts of violence against them. While evaluating the concept of Othering, Hegel used the phrase "us vs. them" to elaborate on the viewpoint of one social group against the other.

The theory of Othering analyzes the conceptual paradigms of social prejudice, the practice of violence, and the dehumanization of a specific group of individuals.<sup>35</sup> Hence, sectarianism in Balochistan can be explained within the context of the theoretical receptacle of Othering. The Sunni community of Quetta contemplates the Shia community as others do and hence believes that the Shia community is the same, which does not fit in their environment or social circles. Furthermore, the perspective of the Sunni community leads to a perception that the Shia community is regarded as disgusting and untrustworthy. Therefore, they are considered a group of lower individuals than the Sunni community.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the viewpoint of the Sunni community toward Shia Hazaras in Quetta visualizes its impact in the form of violence and prejudice against

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<sup>34</sup> Bullock, Alan, Stephen Trombley, and Alf Lawrie. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. HarperCollins, 2000. <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=KmljQgAACAAJ>.

<sup>35</sup> Jensen, Sune Q. "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency." *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 63–78.

<sup>36</sup> Farooqi, Zia-ur-Rahman. "Tareekhi Dastawaiz." Department of Publication Sipha e Sahaba, vol. 1, 1995. Retrieved from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/441471589/Tareekhi-Dastawaiz-By-Maulana-Zia-Ur-Rahman-Farooqi-pdf>

the Shia community. This prejudice and violence are evident from the multiple and non-terminating killing episodes inflicted on the Shia community of Hazaras.

The theory of Othering can be explained in the theoretical context of the "identity problem," which asserts that individuals define their identities along with two fundamental parameters: The first is the social identity, which is illustrated by an individual's membership in a specific social group that distinguishes him/her from other social groups, and the second is the personal parameter, which is illustrated by an individual's distinguishing characteristics that distinguish him/her from other individuals. Sectarianism arises from the first parameter, in which individuals are separated from other individuals based on their social groups. Some of the social groups in every society consider themselves superior and are constantly competing with other social groups to gain social dominance and political leverage, which leads to economic supremacy and personal parameters of identity.<sup>37</sup> For example, the Shia Hazaras are perceived as separate groups other than the Baloch and Pashtuns in Quetta city. Consequently, the personal traits of Hazaras are also treated as inferior by the dominant social groups of both Baloch and Pashtuns in Balochistan.

Dominant groups, particularly Sunni communities, often suppress minorities like the Shia Hazaras, fostering hatred that escalates into violence and infringes on basic rights. This has led to violent incidents, with over 1,000 Hazara Shia fatalities due to targeted attacks since 2003.<sup>38</sup> The theory of Othering suggests that social divisions based on identity lead to sectarianism.<sup>39</sup> In Balochistan, this manifests as the Sunni sect viewing the Shia as distinct, resulting in animosity and discrimination. Both groups vie for socio-political dominance, resulting in ongoing sectarian violence in Quetta since 1999. While both participate in clashes, the majority often adopts an authoritative stance, inflicting harm on the Shia Hazaras. The framework of Othering highlights how religious and sectarian segregation cultivates pseudo-beliefs, leading to perceptions of superiority and inferiority among social groups, which perpetuates discrimination.<sup>40</sup>

In some cases, spirituality fosters the belief that lower social groups deserve violence or even death, a phenomenon evident in Balochistan. The Sunni and Shia communities, the two major social groups, have developed a deep-seated hatred for each other, leading to spiritual and sectarian extremism. This animosity drives both groups to engage in violent efforts to expel one another from their territories. As a result, sectarianism has escalated into widespread violence, including terrorism, bomb blasts, and human rights violations in Quetta. The Sunni community, as the dominant majority, often perpetrates violence against the Shia, exemplified by the killings of the Hazara community in subsequent incidents (Table 1). Perpetrators of violence against the Shia Hazara minority often justify their actions by claiming they are fulfilling a religious or spiritual obligation. Montemaggi explains that extremists in the Sunni community perceive acts of violence as a defense of their faith, believing Shia practices to be heretical. This distorted view of religious

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<sup>37</sup> Nasr, Vali R. "International Politics, Domestic Imperatives, and Identity Mobilization: Sectarianism in Pakistan, 1979–1998." *Comparative Politics* 32, no. 2 (2000): 171–190.

<sup>38</sup> Ghobadzdeh, Naser, and Shahram Akbarzadeh. "Sectarianism and the Prevalence of 'Othering' in Islamic Thought." *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2015): 691–704.

<sup>39</sup> Jung, Eura, and Michael L. Hecht. "Elaborating the Communication Theory of Identity: Identity Gaps and Communication Outcomes." *Communication Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2004): 265–283.

<sup>40</sup> Guest, Mathew. "In Search of Spiritual Capital: The Spiritual as a Cultural Resource." In *A Sociology of Spirituality*, 181–200. Routledge, 2016.

duty fuels sectarian violence, as attackers see their actions as morally justified, reinforcing hatred and escalating conflict between the groups.<sup>41</sup>

### **Results**

Clerical roles as policy inputs to reduce sectarian violence: Policy interventions should place a greater emphasis on altering attitudes toward other groups and less on altering the norms that regulate the behaviors employed to convey those attitudes. Islamic clerics may be particularly well-suited to developing such norms in general and those governing Sunni-Shia interactions. Due to their important societal responsibilities in establishing what constitutes acceptable behavior, Islamic elites may be uniquely positioned to create such standards. In Pakistan, there is a common belief that Islamic clerics play a critical role in encouraging tolerance and understanding of other religious communities.

Several clerics have spoken at public conferences, while others have aided in developing codes of conduct to regulate their followers' behavior. Numerous policy initiatives are available, and each should be thoroughly explored. Studying how ordinary Muslims pick which religious authorities to follow may help us better comprehend Muslim religiosity and possible influence networks. Caution must be exercised in identifying authorities who wield actual influence. Religious networks are frequently highly personal and regional, occurring outside formal educational institutions.<sup>14</sup> However, it is essential to address the inadequacy of the application of the Othering theory in this context, particularly in understanding the complexities of sectarian violence. The application of this theory often overlooks the deeper root causes of exclusion that manifest in sectarian dynamics. A significant factor is the differences in schools of thought, particularly regarding 'aqidah (doctrine), which can create divisions among sects and lead to perceptions of the "other." The failure to account for these underlying issues limits the effectiveness of strategies aimed at fostering inter-sectarian dialogue and understanding.

The dominancy question of Baloch and sectarian violence in Quetta: The Baloch people in Balochistan always show their dominance in the province and use any means to subjugate its competitors like Hazaras, in academic and provincial government positions and its acquisitions in Quetta city. Due to the low educational capacity of Baloch people and the provincial socio-economic and employment opportunities are based on quota bases defined in 1994.<sup>25</sup> The disgruntled Baloch youth join violent groups and organizations such as LeJ/ASWJ to continue Baloch dominance in the city. According to a prominent Baloch businessman, one of the primary reasons for the Hazara people's deliberate persecution is their social and economic progress. Hazaras have become urban elites due to their tremendous success in business and obtaining positions in the public sector, leaving Baloch and Pashtuns far behind.<sup>42</sup>

Many Baloch and some Pashtun people perceive Hazaras as intruders who took jobs and privileges that belonged to their people and consider Hazaras as migrants from Afghanistan who are not liable to get the highest positions in business and education.<sup>24</sup> This perception reinforces the Othering process, highlighting components such as stereotyping and dehumanization, which serve to justify the sectarian violence and discrimination faced by the Hazara community in Quetta. Understanding the interplay of these factors requires a nuanced application of the Othering theory that considers economic, social, and ideological dimensions, especially the significance of 'aqidah differences.

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<sup>41</sup> Montemaggi, Francesca E. "The Enchanting Dream of 'Spiritual Capital'." *Implicit Religion* 14, no. 1 (2011): 67–86.

<sup>42</sup> Dedalus, Steven. "The Bitter Harvest: Sectarianism in Balochistan." *Middle East Report*, no. 251 (2009): 42–47.



People's perception in Othering Shia Hazaras in Quetta: Perceptions of development vary significantly among different groups. Politicians often highlight visible infrastructure projects, while the Hazaras, who have faced severe brutality, seek peace and safety. Despite their struggles, the Hazara community has maintained public schools and hospitals, often independently from the state, and operates various private institutions, including clinics and vocational schools. Additionally, the civil administration has undertaken anti-encroachment and clean-up initiatives, along with sewage and green space reconstruction projects.<sup>43</sup> The dynamics of in-group versus out-group perceptions play a significant role here, as the Hazara community's progress is often viewed negatively by the Baloch community, contributing to their marginalization and reinforcing the narrative of exclusion. This dynamic illustrates how Othering manifests in daily interactions and societal structures, often intertwined with doctrinal differences that fuel sectarian sentiments.

Peaceful coexistence to reduce sectarianism in Quetta: Sectarian violence is particularly a pressing issue in Pakistan, where a sizable Sunni majority opposes pro-tolerance remarks on sectarianism. While having intolerant attitudes toward another group of people does not always result in acts of violence against them, popular opinion might narrow the range of practicable policy measures. There are genuine activists in Pakistan promoting peaceful coexistence between Sunnis and Shias, but they should be encouraged and provided the opportunity to do so. Further research should focus on these real-world activists' effects to find the most effective forms of communication for altering individual beliefs. Critiques of an excessive focus on Othering should also be considered, as economic inequality and other socio-political factors are significant contributors to sectarian conflict that must not be overlooked. The intersection of economic disparities and Othering dynamics suggests a need for comprehensive policies that address both social attitudes and economic conditions to foster true sectarian harmony. Furthermore, addressing the doctrinal divides that contribute to the perception of "otherness" is crucial for promoting a more inclusive dialogue among different sects.

To effectively reduce sectarian violence in Quetta, a national dialogue is essential to educate Pakistanis, including clerics, about the contributions of minority communities. This dialogue should address the political climate that fosters religious discrimination. Additionally, research into the relationship between educational practices and sectarian tolerance can enhance understanding of religious instruction. However, Islamic clerics in Punjab and Quetta often have limited influence over broader public opinion, as their authority typically extends only to their immediate followers, making it challenging for less-known clergy to sway public attitudes despite their qualifications.

Sectarian violence as social stigma and its linkages with Othering Shia Hazaras in Quetta: Sectarianism significantly undermines regional integrity and national interests, threatening unity and stability.<sup>44</sup> In Balochistan, it fosters the perception of minorities as "others," leading to their marginalization and questioning their societal identity.<sup>45</sup> This mindset contributes to sectarian violence, human rights violations, and persecution of the Shia community. Unfortunately, the Pakistani government has failed to take effective measures to address these issues. The Hazara

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<sup>43</sup> Hashmi, Fatima. "Stigmatisation processes and populations' responses in turbulent environments." PhD diss., Oxford Brookes University, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Haleem, Irm. "Ethnic and Sectarian Violence and the Propensity Towards Praetorianism in Pakistan." *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003): 463–477.

<sup>45</sup> Gilani, Syed Mohammad Shabbir. "Counterinsurgency in Balochistan in the Long View." *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 9, no. 3 (2017): 1–185.

community's suffering is compounded by state incompetence and a lack of political support for their plight.

Allama Hussaini, a prominent Shia leader, emphasized that while Muslims are divided into Shias and Sunnis (with Sunnis further split into Deobandi, Brelvi, and Ahle Hadith), sectarianism poses a greater danger than these divisions. Each sect often rejects the others and tries to impose its beliefs, highlighting the need for coexistence.<sup>46</sup> Historically, Sunni groups in Pakistan united to counter the rising influence of Shias following the 1970s Zakat bill and in response to the Iranian Revolution. This tension led to the formation of militant groups like SSP and LeJ, which have targeted Shia and Hazara communities, contributing to sectarian violence in Balochistan.<sup>13</sup>

Hazaras in Quetta were killed brutally from 2003 until the present in different incidents of bomb blasts, suicide blasts, firings, and target killings. Hazaras have protested by refusing to bury their dead until the massacre is stopped. Various governments have assured the Hazara community that they will be safe and that such incidents will not occur in the future, but promises are never kept<sup>31</sup> Sectarian violence has continued to date, and incidents have happened time and again. People of the Hazara community were forced to migrate to other parts of the country or the world.

There are several causes of sectarian violence in Quetta, including Taliban insurgencies, religious and sectarian hatred, and considering Hazaras as others among the other ethnicities of Balochistan. The mainstream political parties supported and continue to support sectarian militant groups. LeJ has connections with prominent Baloch political leaders in Quetta and is sometimes backed by politicians.<sup>13</sup> Faced with difficulties in Afghanistan, the Hazaras migrated to Balochistan before the formation of Pakistan. They very quickly became economically well off, which also resulted in a lot of sectarian violence against them.<sup>24</sup> The city's security has been given to the FC for a long time, but they have not succeeded in providing the city with the security required of them. In the presence of the FC, many attacks took place in Quetta city.

Table 2. Key Groups in Balochistan Sectarian Dynamics

<b>Group</b>	<b>Background</b>
Islamic Clerics	Play a critical role in shaping attitudes and norms in society, particularly regarding inter-sectarian interactions.
Baloch Community	Dominate Balochistan and often view the Hazara community as competitors for socio-economic resources and opportunities.
Hazara Community	Face persecution due to their socio-economic progress, often perceived as intruders by other ethnic groups.
Pashtun Community	Share territorial and socio-political influence in Balochistan, contributing to the marginalization of Hazaras.
Jihadist Groups	Extremist factions that incite violence and sectarian tensions, notably LeJ and SSP, impacting regional stability.
Government of Pakistan	Lacks effective policies to protect minority rights, exacerbating sectarian violence and discrimination against Hazaras.
International Influences	Geopolitical factors, including support from foreign nations, complicate sectarian dynamics and local conflicts.

<sup>46</sup> Lodhi, Maleeha. "Pakistan's Shia Movement: An Interview with Arif Hussaini." *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988): 806–817.

## Discussion

Sectarian violence is a continuous threat to the lives and property of the Shia Hazara community in Quetta. The Hazara community has paid socio-economic, political, psychological, religious, and familial costs. The literature showed that the majority of ethnicities, Baloch and Pashtun, marginalize the Hazara community in Balochistan, including Baloch and Pashtun. This marginalization is exacerbated by political foundations and policies that favor the dominant groups and perpetuate discrimination against the Hazaras.

The paper has incorporated the theoretical context of sectarian violence in Balochistan. The theory of "Othering" discusses the different dimensions of sectarian violence in Quetta. The theory of Othering assumes that a particular group or ethnicity considers the other group as marginalized or "Other" based on their religion, caste, ethnicity, opinion, thinking, education, sect, and other things.<sup>33</sup> The theory examines how one group's social prejudice leads to violence and dehumanization of another group of people.<sup>35</sup> For example, the Hazara Shia community in Quetta is perceived as "Others" by the Sunni majority of Pashtun and Baloch. This led to the perception of disgust and untrustworthiness in the Hazara community. The main reason why Hazaras are considered lesser beings in Quetta

The perception of others leads to violence against Hazara Shias in Quetta, and from early 2003 to the present, many Hazaras have been violently killed by militant groups claiming to be part of the province's Sunni majority group. The identity problem separates individuals or groups from other individuals or groups within a geographic location. Sectarianism arises in a social structure like Quetta when groups (Sunnis) differentiate themselves from the other groups (Shia). Some of them (Baloch and Pashtun) consider themselves superior, gaining economic and political supremacy through state policies and local governance that favor their interests. The hatred generated by such differences converts into violence, and the dominant groups use violence against the group in minority. The Shia Hazaras are considered others in Balochistan, and this led to social hatred and discrimination against them. The Sunnis use violence against the Shia group and call it a spiritual obligation. This spiritual obligation was created due to the identification of Hazara Shias as Others.

As mentioned earlier, sectarianism in Balochistan is associated with the extremist Jihadist groups that have taken the law into their hands, especially LeJ, SSP, and Sipah-e-Muhammad. Foreign countries facilitate these extremist religious groups. Each of these countries intervened in Pakistan for their specific interests. India engaged in terrorism in Balochistan to gain social leverage and political dominion in South Asia. Iran and Saudi Arabia are engaged in a continuous fight over religious extremism, significantly impacting the Shia-Sunni conflict in Pakistan, with the Sunni group often supported by Saudi Arabia and the Shia group backed by Iran.<sup>47</sup> These geopolitical influences shape local sectarian identities and conflicts, complicating the already fragile socio-political landscape in Balochistan.

But unfortunately, the government of Pakistan has taken no concrete action to tackle the problem until now. Since the inception of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, several development projects have been initiated in Balochistan, which have the potential to lead to socio-economic advancement in the region. However, these developments must be coupled with comprehensive policies that address the underlying political and sectarian tensions. Only then can they contribute meaningfully to ending sectarianism and other social problems, including terrorism.

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<sup>47</sup> Ahmad Wani, Shakoor. "Political Indifference and State Complicity: The Travails of Hazaras in Balochistan." *Strategic Analysis* 43, no. 4 (2019): 328–334.

### **Conclusion**

The following conclusions can be drawn from this study: sectarianism and sectarian violence in Balochistan are primarily caused by socio-political and socio-economic underdevelopment, foreign intervention, religious extremism, Jihadist groups, and militant insurgency. The consequent effects of sectarianism in Balochistan are social, political, and economic underdevelopment; terrorism, a constant threat to the people; and other social problems. Sectarianism in Balochistan can be dealt with through social advancement, economic growth, and political development.

Moreover, the military operation against Jihadists and extremist groups can be of fundamental importance. The provision of equal rights and the empowerment of minorities can also improve the situation. The dismay of the Hazara community in Balochistan is not only inflicted by the incompetency of the state but also because of the lack of sympathy and solicitude for the Shia community on the part of political figures. Therefore, the government must take certain strategic measures to protect the Hazara community and other minorities.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

This study will be a significant contribution to the literature related to sectarianism in the Hazara community in Balochistan. Furthermore, this study serves as the foundation for policy recommendations for dealing with sectarianism by eradicating the causes and reducing the effects of it on the people of Quetta. This study was limited to qualitative secondary sources. Future studies can be conducted using a mixed method. Further studies can be conducted on how to resolve the sectarianism in Balochistan.

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