THE STRUGGLE IN QUETTA, PAKISTAN: THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES[1]

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Abstract:

In Quetta, the capital of Balochistan Province in Pakistan, numerous conflicts persist, driven by ethnic-religious tensions and the dissatisfaction of Baloch Muslims over perceived injustices. To address these issues, we employ a library research method in the form of autoethnography, drawing on personal experience to describe and interpret texts, events, beliefs, and cultural practices. In this way, we incorporate our years of apostolic work in Quetta. We apply Anthony Giddens' theoretical framework of the Duality of Structure, which explores how social structures are formed through interactions among various social groups that extend beyond physical and temporal boundaries. Our findings reveal that the conflict in Quetta is highly complex, involving political, social, economic, and cultural issues, and not merely a matter of religion. At this stage, politics related to ethnic identity has resulted in specific theological consequences. We believe that a viable response involves initiating dialogue between conflicting groups through political negotiations

aimed at reaching mutual agreement, supported by humanitarian efforts for the common good. This praxis can be implemented through the field of education. Drawing inspiration from Lian Gogali, who fostered reconciliation during the ethnic-religious conflict in Poso by establishing a public library, the Vicariate of Quetta Apostolic could consider promoting character-building initiatives for children, emphasising local wisdom rooted in cultural folktales.

Introduction

This article is based on our experience of living and working as a Parish Priest in Quetta and its surroundings for two years, from mid-2005 to mid-2006, and from early 2010 to early 2011. Between mid-2006 and early 2010, we worked as Parish Priests and lived in Karachi, the capital of Sindh Province, while visiting Quetta several times. While in Quetta, we frequently encountered tense situations related to the conflict in Quetta and the wider Balochistan Province.

Based on this concern, we were inspired to examine the root causes of the problem. Initially, the main focus of the research for this article was the relationship between Islam and Christianity/Catholicism in Quetta; however, this issue is only a small part of a larger, more complex problem. This focus was chosen to narrow the scope of the topic and enable the author to contribute insights for addressing pastoral needs within the Church in Pakistan, where we worked. The fundamental question, or *status quaestionis*, in this article is: What are the underlying causes of conflicts or problems in relationships, and are there opportunities to improve and maintain harmonious relations?

Our hypothesis is that fostering meaningful dialogue between the Sunni Muslim majority and Christians can lead to the development of

a positive and cooperative dynamic between the two religious groups. Furthermore, this improved interaction could create opportunities for peaceful coexistence between the Sunni Muslim majority and other minority communities, such as Hindus and Shia Muslims. Additionally, this constructive dialogue will promote greater unity among minority groups. The benefits of this improved connection will extend beyond religious matters, contributing to mutual prosperity in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.

The ultimate goal of this article is to analyse the data in order to identify the main causes of conflict and propose effective solutions to address them, thereby creating harmonious relations between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority in Quetta specifically, and in Balochistan more broadly. These harmonious relations encompass everyday life, where individuals can interact without suspicion, collaborate in social, political, and economic fields, and maintain positive connections despite the spread of false news or rumours. To support this analysis, it is essential to first provide an introduction to the city of Quetta. This will help readers unfamiliar with the city gain a better understanding of its community life, thereby facilitating comprehension of the issues and challenges discussed throughout the article.

An Overview of Quetta[4]

The name Quetta (/ˈkwɛtə/; Urdu: کوئٹہ; [ˈkweːʈə]; Pashto: کوټه; Balochi: کوئٹہ) is a variation of the Pashto word *Kwatkōṭ* or *kōta*, meaning 'fortress'. Previously known as Shalkot (Pashto: شالکوت;

Balochi: لاش کوٹ), Quetta is now the capital of Balochistan, one of Pakistan's four provinces, alongside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh, with Peshawar, Lahore, and Karachi as their respective capitals. The names of the four provinces reflect the dominant ethnic groups in each region. The word 'dominate' refers to either the numerical majority or the significant influence of the ethnic group in daily social life. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is predominantly inhabited by the Pashto ethnic group, while Punjab Province is largely Punjabi, Sindh Province is mainly Sindhi, and Balochistan Province is primarily Baloch. However, some experts argue that the majority in Balochistan, particularly in the capital city of Quetta, are Pashto. The Baloch people predominantly reside in rural areas or villages within Balochistan Province. At the local level, the city is governed by a City Council composed of 66 councillors, who elect the mayor and deputy mayor. Additionally, the Quetta Development Authority is responsible for providing municipal services for the city.

The Geographical Location of Quetta

The city is located in the southwest, nestled in a valley surrounded by mountains on all sides. Quetta's elevation, averaging 1,680 metres (5,510 feet) above sea level, makes it the only major city in Pakistan located at a high altitude. Quetta's location in northern Balochistan, near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and along the road to Kandahar, Afghanistan, positions it as a key centre for trade and communication between the two countries. Quetta is currently home to 50,000 undocumented Afghan refugees. The city is located near the Bolan Pass, a key gateway connecting Central Asia to South Asia. Quetta plays a significant military role for the Pakistan Armed Forces in the ongoing conflict with Afghanistan.

Climate in Quetta

Quetta experiences four distinct seasons: summer, fall, winter, and spring. The city's climate is classified as cool semi-arid, with significant temperature variations between summer and winter. The surrounding area is characterised by grasslands and mountains, rich in diverse plant and animal life, in contrast to the arid plains to the west. Summer spans from late May to early September, with average temperatures ranging from 24-

26°C (75-79°F). The highest recorded temperature in Quetta was 42°C (108°F) on July 10, 1998. Fall begins in mid-September and lasts until mid-November, with average temperatures between 12-18°C (54-64°F). Winter starts in late November and ends in late February, with average temperatures around 4-5°C (39-41°F). The lowest recorded temperature in Quetta was -18.3°C (-0.9°F) on January 8, 1970. Spring runs from early March to mid-May, with average temperatures near 15°C (59°F).

Unlike much of eastern Pakistan, Quetta does not experience a monsoon season with heavy rainfall. The highest 24-hour rainfall recorded in Quetta was 113 millimetres (4.4 inches) on December 17, 2000. The highest monthly rainfall, 232.4 millimetres (9.15 inches), occurred in March 1982, which was also the year with the highest annual rainfall, totaling 949.8 millimetres (37.39 inches). During winter, snowfall can be erratic, typically occurring in December, January, and February. This climate contributes to Quetta's reputation for producing a variety of fruits, leading to its designation as the "Orchard of Pakistan." The area is well known for its numerous orchards, which produce a wide variety of fresh fruits and nuts. Quetta is one of the largest exporters of these products, including almonds, with much of the distribution taking place within Pakistan. The region is also renowned for its high-quality dried fruit products.

Religious and Ethnic Groups in Quetta

According to statistics, the city's population is approximately one million. In 2016, it was estimated at 1,140,000, but the 2017 census recorded a population of 1,001,205. This makes Quetta the largest city in Balochistan Province and one of the major cities in Pakistan. Experts disagree on the city's demographics. Some suggest that Pashto tribes form the largest group, followed by Baloch tribes, with Hazaras and settlers from other parts of Pakistan also residing in the city. Others believe the majority of the population is Pashto, followed by Balochi, Hazara, Brahui, Punjabi, and Muhajir communities. Urdu, the national language, is spoken and understood by the entire population, serving as the lingua franca. According to Reuters and the BBC, approximately 50,000 to 60,000 Hazaras live in Quetta and the surrounding areas.

Religious Groups in Quetta City (1941 & 2017)				
Religious group	**1941**:13–14		**2017**	
	Pop.	**%**	**Pop.**	**%**
Islam	27,935	43.33%	975,815	97.64%
Hinduism	24,010	37.24%	6,112	0.61%
Sikhism	7,364	11.42%	—	—
Christianity	5,024	7.79%	16,842	1.69%
Zoroastrianism	73	0.11%	—	—
Buddhism	42	0.07%	—	—
Judaism	11	0.02%	—	—
Jainism	6	0.01%	—	—
Ahmadiyya	—	—	363	0.04%
Others	11	0.02%	253	0.03%
Total population	**64,476**	**100%**	**999,385**	**100%**

Culture in Quetta

Quetta has a rich historical background, which has given the city strong cultural traditions. Quetta is home to many ethnic groups, but their cultural values are closely interconnected. This is likely due to the fact that they share the same religion, Islam. These shared traditions are also reflected in the region's traditional dresses, where similarities in dress highlight the cultural unity among the different ethnic groups.

The traditional attire of the Baloch, Pashto, and Brahvi tribes is quite similar, with only minor differences. Turbans are a common head covering worn by men, while loose-fitting *shalwar* and knee-length shirts are worn by both men and women. Women's dress typically includes a traditional shirt with a large front pocket, often adorned with intricate embroidery and small round mirror pieces embedded in the fabric. In addition, they also wear a large *dupatta* or *chaddar*, a long rectangular piece of cloth draped over the shoulders and used to cover the head.

Traditional Pashto music primarily consists of classical *ghazals*, often performed with instruments such as the rubab or sitar, tabla, portable harmonium, flute, and several other instruments. Two famous Pashtun dances are the *attan* and *khattak*, which were originally performed during wartime for leisure but later became integral parts of Pashtun culture.

Today, these dances are renowned worldwide. Wherever Pakistan is represented, they are performed not only as a symbol of Quetta's heritage but also as an integral part of Pakistani culture.

As Quetta is part of a Muslim-majority state, the two Eid festivals, Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of fasting, and Eid al-Adha, marking the end of Hajj, are significant celebrations. During these festivals, the majority Muslim community holds musical performances and distributes sweets and gifts among relatives and the poor. Buzkashi is a traditional festival and sport celebrated by the Pashtuns, in which two teams on horseback compete to snatch a goat from each other. The people of Quetta tend to prefer soccer over cricket or hockey, despite the latter two being the national sports of Pakistan.

Visitors to Quetta are often drawn to its vibrant markets, where traditional craftsmanship is proudly displayed. The Quetta bazaar is renowned for its colourful handicrafts, including Balochi mirror work and Pashto embroidery. Afghan carpets, fur coats, embroidered jackets, vests, slippers, and other traditional Pashtun items are also well-known and are frequently exported to Western countries.

Traditional Pashtun dishes like *khadi* kabab, lamb roast, and Balochi *sajji*, along with other local delicacies, can be found throughout the city, especially in areas such as Prince Road, Jinnah Road, and Serena Hotels. The Pashtun tribal dish roast, locally referred to as '*namkin*', is widely available in the city's restaurants as well as in the surrounding areas. Quetta is known for producing some of the finest mutton in the country, a staple of the local cuisine. The Pashtun dish '*landhi*' consists of a whole lamb that is dried and preserved for the winter. Other popular dishes include "*khadi* kabab", a grilled lamb dish, and local favourites like '*sajji*' and '*pulao*'.

Transportation in Quetta

Quetta is situated in western Pakistan and is connected to the rest of the country through a network of highways, railways, and an international airport located near the city centre. At an elevation of 1,605 metres (5,266 feet) above sea level, Quetta International Airport is the second highest in Pakistan. Pakistan International Airlines operates regular flights to and

from major cities, including Islamabad, Gwadar, Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar.

Quetta Railway Station is one of the highest in Pakistan, situated at an elevation of 1,676 metres (5,499 feet) above sea level. The railway line was constructed in the 1890s during the British era to link Quetta with the rest of the country. Pakistan Railways' extensive network connects Quetta to major cities, including Karachi to the south (via 863 km or 536 miles of track), Lahore to the northeast (1,170 km or 727 miles), and Peshawar further northeast (1,587 km or 986 miles). An iron highway runs parallel to the railway, connecting Quetta to Karachi via the nearby town of Sibi and continuing through Jacobabad and Rohri on the Indus River plain.

An Overview of the Ongoing Conflict

The city of Quetta, despite its unique and interesting character, faces serious challenges. A prolonged conflict has persisted in the city. This once calm city would occasionally erupt into turmoil due to riots or bomb explosions, as experienced by the authors who lived in Quetta for two years. The people of Quetta, contrary to their portrayal, are fundamentally loving, caring, and very friendly. It is only in the past decade or two that their behaviour has changed. This shift may be driven by a need to protect themselves and their families from external threats that have entered the city and contributed to the rising violence.

In everyday life, relations between people in Quetta remain positive. Residents frequently interact in markets, schools, government institutions, public service facilities such as hospitals, and workplaces. Tensions arise primarily during incidents related to blasphemy against Islam, such as the burning of the Quran or insults directed at the Prophet Muhammad, often involving individuals from the Christian community. Even before the veracity of the news could be confirmed, riots would break out, forcing us to remain indoors for three days to a week. As a result, we always kept a stockpile of staple foods at home in anticipation of such events.[5]

The conflict was not solely between Muslims and Christians/Catholics but involved a range of complex issues. Political issues, perceived unfair or discriminatory government policies towards certain ethnic groups, inter-

ethnic tensions, power struggles, and the independence movement of the Baloch tribe, who claim the ownership of Balochistan's territory, all contribute to the broader conflict in Quetta and Balochistan. Throughout 2013, there were numerous bombings and killings targeting the Hazara community in Quetta and other parts of Balochistan. There were at least two major bombings targeting the Hazara community. The first attack claimed the lives of 90 Hazaras, while the second resulted in 76 fatalities.[6]

According to Sister Magdalene's testimony, discriminatory practices against Christians, particularly women, persist in Quetta. Women are not permitted to participate in various activities. Their movements are highly restricted, and Christians are frequently subjected to unfair treatment. Christian teacher placed a calendar in the classroom that featured a picture of a car brand perceived to be associated with Christianity. As a result, the teacher was threatened and forced to leave Quetta.[7]

This situation persists to this day, as evidenced by news reports from Pakistan and the testimonies of priests, monks, and nuns working in the country. Driven by this concern, we are inspired to explore the root of the problem. While the primary focus is on the relationship between Islam and Christianity/Catholicism, this issue represents only a small part of a much larger conflict. This focus was chosen to narrow the scope of the topic, as we wish to contribute ideas to address pastoral needs within the Church in Pakistan, where we worked.

Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structural Duality

To explore these issues, we employ a library research method[8] in the form of autoethnography, which involves using personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, events, beliefs, and practices. Here, we draw upon our personal experience of working there for several years. In terms of social analysis, the theoretical framework of Anthony Giddens' "duality of structure" will also be employed, which explains the formation of social structures through the interactions of various parties across time and space.

Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist born on January 18, 1938, is renowned for his structuration theory and his comprehensive analysis

of modern society. He is widely regarded as one of the key contributors to contemporary sociology.[9] According to Giddens, the duality of social structure refers to the idea that social structures are both created by agents and simultaneously serve as the medium that shapes their actions. Thus, social structure is both the outcome of repeated and patterned interactions and, at the same time, the means that conditions and influences those actions.
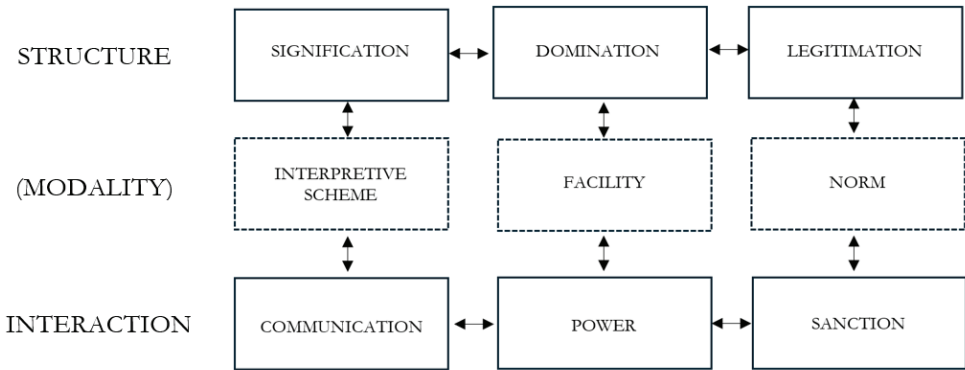
The relationship between actors (actions) and structures is one of duality, not dualism. This duality manifests in social practices that are repeated and patterned across time and space. During a pandemic, the habits of wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining distance are repeated over a specific period of time (the pandemic) and in certain places (crowded areas).

The question arises as to where the actor-structure duality manifests in social practice. The duality in social practice lies in the presence of schemata that function like 'rules', serving as guiding principles across time and place. These schemata (or structure) are both the outcome of the repetition of action and the medium through which social practice takes place.

Structure transcends time and space. Therefore, it can be applied to a variety of situations, making them enabling as well. This means that it enables a social practice to take place. That is why structure is seen as a means. Its objectivity is not external, but rather inseparable from the actions and social practices being performed; and furthermore, it is not objects or entities, but schemata that emerge within social practices. This social structure is inseparable from the activities it governs. It is not separate from the actors' understanding of their activities and has a relative duration due to its duality with the actors.

In structuration theory, there are three structural clusters: the structure of signification, the structure of domination, and the structure of legitimation. The structure of signification, derived from the word 'signify', involves symbolic schemata, meanings, and discourse. The structure of domination encompasses the schemata of control over people (politics) and control over goods or resources (economics). The structure of legitimacy pertains to the schemata of normative rules, which are reflected in the legal system.

Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory[10]

STRUCTURE	SIGNIFICATION	↔	DOMINATION	↔	LEGITIMATION
	↕		↕		↕
(MODALITY)	INTERPRETIVE SCHEME		FACILITY		NORM
	↕		↕		↕
INTERACTION	COMMUNICATION	↔	POWER	↔	SANCTION

In social practice, individuals refer to the person who leads the village as the village head. From this example, we can identify the three structural clusters. The structure of signification is evident in the designation of the village head. The structure of domination is reflected in his authority to lead the people in the village. The structure of legitimacy is evident when the village head reminds the people to pay the village fee, as stipulated in the village regulations.[11]

In addition, there are three internal dimensions of agency. The first is the unconscious motive, which stems from unrecognised conditions of action. The second is practical consciousness, which encompasses everything individuals know about the world but are unable to explicitly articulate. The third is discursive consciousness, which includes everything individuals know and can clearly articulate.[12]

The relationship between the 'structural principle' and 'social practice' can be understood through the duality of structure and actor, which functions as follows. In the conception of structure as the 'medium' of social practice, actions and practices, such as 'communication', always presuppose a particular structure of signification, like grammar. Control over goods (economic) and people (political) involves schemes of domination, while the application of sanctions presupposes a schema of

legitimacy. In this way, social structures are both the outcome of social practices, with duality always involving intermediaries.[13]

Structuration modality represents a key dimension of the duality of structure in the formation of interaction. Structuration modalities are employed by actors to perform and create interactions, while simultaneously serving as a means to reproduce various structural components of the interaction system. When focusing on institutional analysis, modalities are viewed as a repertoire of knowledge and resources that actors utilise in interactions, showcasing their proficiency and expertise under the constrained conditions of action rationalisation. Modality refers to the mediation between interaction and structure in the process of social reproduction. The concept in the first row characterises structure, while the third row refers to the properties of interaction.[14]

There are three dominant forms of social interaction in society: communication, power, and sanctions (morality).

a. Communication Interaction

The signification (meaning) of actions and speech is inseparable from the framework of interpretation. This interpretive framework is inherently linked to the system of knowledge that structures the signification or meaning within a community. Conversely, the signification or meaning structure of a community shapes its knowledge order.

b. Power Interaction

It is determined by the resources available. The more resources one possesses, the greater their capacity to influence the behaviour of others or enhance their dominance.

c. Morality Interaction

Finally, all actions, particularly those involving power, require a basis for justification. This framework is included in the interaction of morality. The basis for justifying actions or the exercise of power is derived from referring to norms such as law, tradition, religion, rules, customs, and morality.

It is important to note that the three forms of interaction (communication, power, and morality) and the three structures (meaning, domination, and legitimacy) are inseparable from one another in everyday life.

Causes of Conflicts

Anthony Giddens' theory of structural duality is highly useful for analysing and identifying the root causes of the conflict between Islam and Christianity. Catholics are implicated, as they typically are not categorised as Protestant Christians or Catholics. In Pakistan, all Christians who follow Jesus Christ are referred to as '*Masihi*', derived from the title "Jesus *Masih*". In addition to aiding in the analysis of the conflict's causes, this theory also provides insights into potential solutions for resolving the conflict.

To uncover the causes of the conflict between Islam and Christianity in Quetta, we base our analysis on the perspective of Lian Gogali, Director of the Mosintuwu Institute, who presented on "Religious and Cultural Identities: The Roots of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Asia" during the *Young Ambassadors of Peace in Asia (PPA) 2022* programme held in Chiang Mai, Thailand.[15] The Mosintuwu Institute is a grassroots organisation dedicated to promoting peace and justice during and after conflicts in the Poso District and surrounding areas. Established in 2005 in response to violent incidents carried out in the name of religion, the organisation also addresses the political and economic interests behind such conflicts, which often lead to resource management practices that disadvantage poor and marginalised communities, particularly grassroots women. Today, Mosintuwu comprises members from various ethnic and religious backgrounds within the Poso District. The name 'Mosintuwu' is derived from the Pamona language (one of the local tribes in Poso) and means "working together".[16]

We apply Anthony Giddens' structural duality theory to delve deeper into the causes of inter-religious conflicts as presented by Lian Gogali. Using this framework, we analyse the conflicts in Quetta and the broader Balochistan Province, focusing on the causes of conflict between Islam and Christianity in Quetta. Our findings reveal that the conflict is not solely a religious issue, but rather a complex one involving ethnic, political, social, and economic factors. The causes of inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts are different views on the use of religious narratives, the centralization of identity, and the existence of intra-state conflict.

Different Views on the Use of Religious Narratives

The use of religious narratives as a cause of conflict can arise when religion is regarded as something sacred, prompting individuals to engage in conflict over religious matters. As Anthony Giddens' structural theory suggests, these religious narratives create distinct mental frameworks in the minds of adherents. Consequently, specific interpretations of religion are formed. When certain religious groups use these narratives to 'justify' actions that contradict human values and human rights, such as violence or discrimination against other religious groups, whom they consider 'infidels' or deviating from the path of God as they understand it, conflicts between religious communities may ensue.

The Sunni Muslim group holds the belief that other Muslim groups, particularly the Shia, have deviated from the true teachings of Islam. The division between Sunni and Shia stems from the question of who had the right to lead the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. Most of the Prophet's followers believed that the ummah itself was sacred, and thus any decision made by the community was correct. Others, however, were firm in their belief that the Prophet had been divinely guided to appoint a successor from his closest male relative, his cousin and son-in-law, Ali bin Abi Talib. This disagreement has led to a lasting division between the two major groups in Islam, which continues to this day.[17] Sunnis consider it lawful to commit acts of violence against Shias. Similarly, Shias justify violence against Sunnis, believing that Sunnis do not adhere to the true teachings of Islam as they understand them.

In the Punjab Province of Pakistan, mutual attacks between the Sunni and Shia groups are common. However, in Quetta and Balochistan Province more broadly, the Hazara Shia community is often victimised due to their smaller population compared to the Pashto and Baloch Sunnis. A particularly brutal incident occurred on September 20, 2011, in the Mastung area of Balochistan. Forty Shia pilgrims, travelling from Quetta to Iran for a pilgrimage to a Shia shrine, were stopped by gunmen and killed. Even more distressing was the response of Chief Minister Aslam Raisani, who made light of the tragedy, stating that he was intent on "stemming the tears" of the Shia Hazaras. His statement was: "Of

the millions of people living in Balochistan, 40 killed in Mastung is no big deal. I will send a truckload of tissue paper to the bereaved families. I would send tobacco if I were not a politician."[18]

Religious narratives promoted by a small number of hardline Muslims against Christians often lead to inter-religious conflict. These hardliners portray Christians as '*stilli*' people—infidels who do not conform to Islamic teachings, such as believing in three gods and refusing to recognize Muhammad as the final prophet. As a result, violence against Christians is, in their view, somewhat justified. Similarly, among Christians, there is a growing belief that their religion, as taught by Jesus, is the true faith. This has led to a sense of religious fanaticism, with Christians in Pakistan generally remaining steadfast in their beliefs despite facing violence. They typically do not convert under pressure, taking a defensive stance in the face of attacks from hardliners, likely due to their smaller numbers. This religious tension is prevalent throughout Pakistan, including in Quetta. A major attack by Muslims on Christians occurred in Quetta in December 2017, resulting in 9 deaths and 57 injuries.[19]

The Centralization of Identity

The root cause of ethnic and religious conflict lies in identity centralization. Identity centralization refers to the tendency of individuals to strongly associate themselves with a particular group, such as a tribe, religion, or ethnicity, and prioritise that group identity over their national identity.[20] Especially when a tribal, religious, or ethnic group controls economic, cultural, social, political, ideological, or physical domains, Anthony Giddens suggests that such a group will feel superior to others and tend to dominate all groups in the region. Meanwhile, groups that perceive themselves as minorities in some areas, such as population size, but are strong in others, like economics, resist losing their influence. This dynamic can trigger conflict between different groups, as each feels superior and more significant than the other.

The centralization of identity can also reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudices against other groups, which can exacerbate conflict. The conflict between Christians and Muslims in Quetta is inseparable from issues related to economic, cultural, social, political, and ideological control.

The separatist group from the Baluchi tribe strongly dislikes the Punjabis, believing that they have dominated the central government, which implies control over political, economic, and social affairs. As a result, Punjabis in Quetta and Balochistan Province more broadly are viewed as targets for elimination. Since most Christians (99%) in the region are of Punjabi origin, they became targets of hatred from the Sunni Muslim Baluchi tribe. Therefore, the conflict in Quetta is not purely religious but also involves ethnic, political, social, and economic dimensions.

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) has released an analysis of the causes of conflict in Balochistan Province. According to the analysis, Balochistan is the most underdeveloped of Pakistan's four provinces (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan). The Balochi, who view themselves as the rightful rulers of Balochistan, have been treated as an 'outcast' tribe within their own homeland.

Politically, they feel marginalised. Very few from their community have attained positions in the provincial government, and almost none hold strategic roles. Key decisions are largely controlled by the predominantly Punjabi central government. They are also significantly underrepresented in most federal institutions. None from their ranks heads any of the more than 200 companies in Pakistan, nor do they hold federal secretary positions. The President's House and the 700-strong staff of the Prime Minister's House are entirely devoid of representation from their group. Furthermore, no one from their community has ever been appointed as a Pakistani ambassador or to any of the 10 director positions in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). Out of 342 members in the National Assembly, only 16 MPs represent Balochistan. Although their representation is somewhat higher in the Senate, the upper house holds limited power.[21]

Educationally, the Baloch are significantly disadvantaged. Very few of them have access to education. The literacy rate in Balochistan is 29.81%, compared to the national average of 39.69%. The literacy rate for males is 18.3%, and for females in rural areas of the province, it is less than 10%. In terms of primary school enrollment, Balochistan records the lowest numbers compared to other provinces. Professor Abdul Nabi, Vice Chancellor of Balochistan University, does not foresee a bright future for Balochi youth regarding educational development. He laments that they lack institutions and teachers, and even those who manage to complete

some level of education often face unemployment: "They cannot compete with youth from other provinces."[22]

Balochistan Province is also economically underdeveloped compared to other provinces. Approximately 58% of the population lives below the poverty line. If poverty is viewed as an index of human deprivation, including limited opportunities and social exclusion, a much larger portion of Balochistan's population would fall below the poverty line. In addition to low incomes, households in the province suffer from low levels of education, a lack of potable water, and limited access to health and welfare services. As many as 92% of the districts in Balochistan are classified as 'extremely poor,' compared to 50% in Sindh and 29% in Punjab.[23]

The Existence of Intra-state Conflict

The centralization of identity, as described above, has triggered intra-state conflict. This refers to disputes occurring within a state, involving actors from within its borders. Such disputes can include government forces clashing with insurgency groups, criminal organisations threatening state sovereignty, ideological movements, ethnic tensions, and secession campaigns. Intra-state conflicts can become more destructive, irrational, and uncontrollable in the absence of legitimate authoritative institutions capable of pressuring warring groups to cease their destructive actions. Some internal disputes are driven by a combination of ideological, criminal, political, and ethnic factors, with many being highly volatile.[24]

The conflict in Quetta and Balochistan Province as a whole stems from the Balochi's desire to establish their own state, independent of Pakistan. They believe it would be better to secede, as this would allow them to govern their own country. According to structural duality theory, those who control laws, customs, habits, and religions gain the legitimacy to enforce moral norms or sanctions without external interference. This autonomy would also allow them to control the region's abundant natural resources, including coal, marble, precious stones, and petroleum. As a result, separatist movements have emerged in Balochistan, such as the one led by Nawab Akbar Bugti.[25] This also triggered inter-religious conflict, as each tribe was 'affiliated' with a particular religion. The Baloch (Sunni Muslims), in their pursuit of making their territory an independent state,

found themselves in conflict with other tribes, such as the Pashtuns (Sunni Muslims), Hazaras (Shia Muslims), and Punjabis (Christians).

From the previous descriptions, it becomes clear that the conflict in Quetta is rooted in political, social, and economic injustices. Each group feels entitled to be at the forefront and secure the largest share, leading to competition where some feel disadvantaged or defeated. Minority groups, such as Christians, Hindus, and Shias, perceive themselves as being treated unfairly and strive to defend themselves against further oppression. Meanwhile, majority groups like the Pashtuns and Balochis feel compelled to protect their dominance to avoid losing power. As a result, they seek to control all aspects of life to remain in power. This dynamic has escalated the conflict. According to Anthony Giddens' theory, communication has broken down due to the lack of meaningful dialogue. Each side is determined to maintain its position, with a tendency to dominate the other. Equal communication, which is essential for dialogue, is difficult to achieve in this environment of political, social, and economic injustice.

Blasphemy Laws and Possible Ways for Interfaith Dialogues

As Anthony Giddens' structural duality theory explains, those who control laws, customs, and religion have the legitimacy to establish morality or norms according to their preferences. In practice, the majority often uses this control to oppress the minority. The majority dictates the existing laws and customs, determining sanctions or punishments based on their own interests. For instance, if a minority member insults the religion of the majority, they are subject to punishment. However, when the majority insults the religion of the minority, sanctions or punishments are often overlooked. This imbalance frequently leads to conflict.

To this day, blasphemy laws remain in force throughout Pakistan. These laws impose sanctions or penalties on anyone who commits blasphemy against the teachings or figures of any religion. In 1947, Pakistan inherited its blasphemy laws from British colonial rulers, who made it a criminal offence to commit "willful and malicious acts intended to offend the religious feelings of any class by insulting its religious beliefs". In the following decades, the Islamic military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq

expanded the law between 1977 and 1988, introducing life imprisonment for those who defiled or desecrated the Quran. Later, the death penalty was made mandatory for anyone found guilty of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad.[26]

On January 17, 2023, Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously voted to expand the country's blasphemy law, which mandates the death penalty for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.[27] Human rights activists fear that the expanded blasphemy laws could disproportionately target minorities, particularly Shia Muslims, who have historically been critical of many early Muslim leaders. Other minority groups, such as Christians, are also at risk. The most recent case occurred on August 16, 2023, when an alleged insult to the Quran in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan, led to a large mob setting fire to a Christian neighbourhood. This incident has heightened tensions between Christians and Muslims across Pakistan, including in Quetta.[28]

Pakistan has the second strictest blasphemy laws in the world, after Iran. Over the past three decades, around 1,500 Pakistanis have been charged with blasphemy. In one case that drew international attention, Junaid Hafeez, a university lecturer, was sentenced to death in 2019 for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. His conviction is currently under appeal.[29] Although no executions have been carried out under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, extrajudicial killings related to blasphemy have occurred. Since 1990, more than 70 people have been killed by mobs and vigilantes for allegedly insulting Islam. These blasphemy laws are often misused. Upon study and analysis, it is clear that the conflict in Quetta is highly complex. It is not solely a religious issue but is also politically, socially, economically, and culturally driven. Politics tied to ethnic identity has, in fact, led to certain theological consequences.

In order to establish dialogue with people of other religions, the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta should rely on two key documents to strengthen the dialogue process. The first is Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, signed on October 3, 2020, during his visit to the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi, and published the following day, coinciding with the saint's feast day.[30] The second document is the Abu Dhabi Declaration, also known as the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Coexistence*. This joint statement was signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand

Imam of Al-Azhar, on February 4, 2019, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.[31]

The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* focuses on "fraternity and social friendship". It consists of 8 chapters, 287 paragraphs, and spans 92 pages. In the document, Pope Francis reflects on the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting a failure in international cooperation. The encyclical emphasises the importance of universal brotherhood, inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi, where all beings are regarded as brothers and sisters. Pope Francis hopes the encyclical will inspire a "rebirth of the universal aspiration" towards "fraternity and social friendship". This concept teaches respect, appreciation, and mutual assistance, regardless of differences in race, religion, or social background. Universal fraternity encourages living in harmony and working together to build a better world for all.[32]

It is hoped that the *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical will serve as a strong foundation for fostering dialogue in Quetta. Inter-religious tensions, driven by political, social, economic, and unjust issues involving various tribes, need to be addressed through meaningful communication. Through such dialogue, it is hoped that a sense of brotherhood, as envisioned in *Fratelli Tutti*, will develop among all tribes in Quetta. This could begin with the tribes whose children attend schools run by the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta. Patience and perseverance will be essential in this process.

Fratelli Tutti is a phrase St. Francis of Assisi used to encourage his brothers to live in the spirit of the Gospel. According to Pope Francis, these words emphasise the importance of expressing a love that transcends boundaries of place and distance. This can be achieved when people of faith truly embody the spirit of openness and brotherhood within society. Furthermore, it requires everyone to recognize, respect, and love others, namely God, fellow human beings, and all creation.[33]

St. Francis made brotherhood, simplicity, and joy the cornerstones of his journey through life. Notably, the foundation of St. Francis' life inspired Pope Francis in writing the encyclicals *Laudato si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, as St. Francis was able to build relationships with anyone, anywhere. He even greeted the sun, the sea, and the wind as brothers. For this, St. Francis is remembered as a diligent and faithful sower of peace, always

walking alongside the poor, the abandoned, the outcast, and the least of his brothers and sisters.[34]

As a theological reflection, in addition to using the *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical, the reflection can be complemented by the *Abu Dhabi Document*. This document outlines 12 key points that emphasise the importance of human fraternity and peaceful coexistence. The 12 key points are:

1. The belief that religion is rooted in the values of peace, mutual understanding, human brotherhood, harmony, rebuilding wisdom, justice, and love.
2. Freedom is the right of every person.
3. Justice based on mercy is a necessity to achieve a life of dignity.
4. Widespread dialogue, understanding, and promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others, and peaceful coexistence will go a long way to alleviating the myriad economic, social, political, and environmental problems that weigh heavily on most of humanity.
5. Inter-religious dialogue means coming together in the broad space of shared spiritual, human, and social values and, from this, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. It also means avoiding unproductive debates.
6. Protecting the rights of children and enabling them to grow up in a family, peaceful and harmonious environment.
7. Protecting the rights of women and guaranteeing their rights to education and employment.
8. Protecting the rights of the elderly and enabling them to remain active in society.
9. Protection of the rights of the disabled and enabling them to fully participate in society.
10. Protect the rights of migrant workers and ensure that they are treated fairly and humanely.
11. Protection of the rights of the poor, who are often victims of social and economic injustice.
12. Protection of the rights of the earth and the environment, which is the common heritage of all humanity.

These twelve points are highly relevant to the situation in Quetta, where the conflict involves a complex set of issues and has persisted for a long time. To date, no moral force has been able to unite all parties, as each side remains firmly convinced that their perspective is the most correct. The idea of coexistence in a spirit of brotherhood appears, for now, to be a distant utopia.

Coexistence emphasises the importance of social brotherhood and friendship among all beings in the world. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Standard Indonesian Dictionary), the term coexist means to exist or live together. In society, it is essential for everyone to coexist despite differences. Each individual has a unique mindset and perspective, even within families. As social beings, humans rely on one another to meet their needs. Universal brotherhood encourages us to live in harmony and collaborate to create a better world for all.

Coexistence can be practised in everyday life by respecting, honouring, and helping others, regardless of differences in race, religion, or social background. It can begin with expanding one's circle of friends and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. Learning about other cultures and traditions can also foster greater understanding. Additionally, it is important to avoid discriminatory behaviour and refrain from harming others. By peacefully coexisting, we can create a harmonious and supportive environment for all.

The *Abu Dhabi Document* can serve as an entry point for dialogue in Quetta. Its significance lies in the fact that it was approved and signed not only by Catholic Church authorities but also by Muslim leaders in Abu Dhabi. The document's endorsement has been welcomed by various global communities. The hope is that, if introduced in interfaith and intertribal dialogue in Quetta, it will be broadly accepted by most parties. It offers a framework that aligns with Giddens' emphasis on communication as a tool for fostering equal dialogue, making it a valuable starting point for addressing the religious and cultural tensions in Quetta.

Referring to Anthony Giddens' structural duality theory, communication plays a crucial role in shaping social dynamics. It serves as a bridge that connects various elements within a society, influencing the quality of interactions. Effective communication, characterised by equal

dialogue, ensures both parties have the opportunity to express themselves and listen, fostering understanding. This approach is applicable across different contexts, such as daily life, organisations, and politics. In terms of religious relations, an equal dialogue could potentially help reconcile conflicts between Islam and Christianity. However, in Quetta, fostering such dialogue between Sunni Islam and Christianity faces significant obstacles. These challenges also affect Sunni relations with other minority groups like Shia Muslims and Hindus. Furthermore, the region's generally harsh temperament complicates efforts to establish constructive communication.

To date, there has been no significant interfaith dialogue in Quetta, unlike in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. In Punjab, the Catholic Church is notably active in organising interfaith dialogue, particularly between Muslims and Christians, in cities like Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Multan. Key figures in Punjab's interfaith efforts include Father James Chanan, Mr. Mehboob Sada, and Mr. Rashid Najmi. In Sindh Province, most dialogue takes place in Karachi and Hyderabad. Prominent figures in this dialogue include Father Archie De Souza, Father Mohan Victor, and Sr. Nasreen HF. In Hyderabad, the dialogue extends beyond Christians and Muslims to include Hindus.[35]

Tensions between tribes in Quetta over political, social, and economic power are particularly sharp. In contrast, Punjab Province, where the Punjabi tribe is more homogeneous, experiences fewer such tensions, allowing for interfaith dialogue to be more easily established, though it remains challenging. Sindh Province, with its more complex ethnic diversity, also faces occasional tribal conflicts, but these are not as intense as those in Quetta. Despite the difficulties, efforts to initiate dialogue in Quetta should still be pursued.

Pastoral Praxis

Employing Anthony Giddens' theory of structural duality, an opportunity for dialogue could emerge through education. The Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta operates a substantial network of schools, ranging from nursery to high school (College). These schools are run by various

religious congregations, including the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena (OP), Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS), Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux (HF), and Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry (CSJ). There is also one school unit operated by the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB). The quality of these schools is highly regarded by the people of Quetta, with many children and families of government officials and politicians attending. This presents a valuable opportunity to foster dialogue through the education system. In the SDB school, for example, 90% of the students are children from Pashtun, Baluchi, and Afghan refugee families, providing an excellent platform for dialogue.

This dialogue must be carefully structured so that it is acceptable to all parties. The author suggests that the dialogue should not focus on religious or political issues. Instead, it should be aimed at fostering collaboration in the area of child development, creating a "dialogue of life". For the sake of their children, people can engage in dialogue and work together for their children's success. The Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta, as the school's governing body, could structure this dialogue accordingly. They could take inspiration from Lian Gogali and her team's efforts, who opened a children's library following the religious conflict in Poso in 2003-2004. Through this initiative, children and their mothers came together, setting aside religious differences and building a sense of community. Indeed, Gogali's research found that women play a significant role in fostering peace.[36]

Dialogue can begin within the Protestant Christian denominations, as conflicts often arise between these groups over congregations. In this effort, the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta, representing the Catholic community, can act as a facilitator. Once inter-Christian dialogue is strengthened, efforts to engage in dialogue with other religious communities can be pursued, starting with minority groups such as Shia Muslims and Hindus.

It must be acknowledged that achieving equal dialogue in Quetta is a long journey. The Christian community, in particular, faces significant educational and economic challenges, with many working as sweepers or manual labourers. Under these circumstances, reaching the level of equal dialogue is quite difficult.

Conclusion

The conflicts in Quetta and Balochistan are not solely inter-religious in nature. They are largely driven by political, social, cultural, and economic issues that fuel inter-ethnic tensions. Since each ethnic group is associated with a particular religion, religion becomes entangled in the conflict. If societal welfare and social justice are achieved, conflicts, including inter-religious conflicts, are less likely to occur. Therefore, it is crucial to establish equal dialogue among ethnicities, religions, groups, and political parties. All parties should work towards a common goal: fostering a spirit of brotherhood, love for the country, and cooperation in advancing society and helping one another.

The Catholic Church, as a part of society, should actively participate in this dialogue. Therefore, the Church, along with people of good will, must advocate for such dialogue. Naturally, this dialogue should take place in everyday life. One avenue for fostering dialogue is through the Catholic Church's schools and educational institutions. This is important because Catholic schools in Quetta are still trusted by the community at large and play a significant role in improving education in the region.

At this point, politics related to ethnic identity has led to certain theological consequences. The Catholic Church, present in the Quetta community, should offer an inclusive theological perspective. This means recognizing that the One God is the God of all people, who loves everyone and deserves to be loved by all without exception. It also acknowledges that salvation is granted by God to all individuals, affirming that all people are brothers and sisters to one another. In light of the ethnic and religious differences present in Quetta, the Catholic Church teaches its members to appreciate and respect these differences while rejecting discriminatory attitudes. As taught by the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians are called to love their fellow human beings as they love themselves, without discrimination. Paul in his letter to the Romans says "For there is no difference between Jews and Greeks. For the one God is Lord of all, rich to all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

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