A Constructed Memoir: The History and Heritage of the Baloch Community in Qatar

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a constructed memoir: the history and heritage of the Baloch community in Qatar
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Abstract

In the 1960s, when my father was only thirteen years old, he took a perilous journey on a boat alone from Sistan va Baluchestan, Iran, to Qatar, in the hopes of a better life. Like many long-term residents from Balochistan, my father has lived in Qatar for decades, predating the establishment of the modern state of Qatar itself in 1971. His legal position in the country today remains subject to the Kafala system, and his residency is subject to his employment status, which must be renewed each year. In other words, permanency is never guaranteed, nor is future planning.

In 1984, my father was mandated to move to Al Baluche Camp, then a hidden place on the outskirts of Doha, emphasizing this permanent-temporariness. When moving to the camp, the government issued contracts for all the residents of the camp that stipulated that only three materials (plywood, construction-grade lumber, and corrugated metal sheet) were to be used to build their houses, which were officially designated as “temporary.”

Thirty-eight years later, some 15,000 residents of the Al Baluche Camp are now facing permanent displacement from their camp—their only home—due to a new official mandate. This thesis highlights the plight of this misunderstood and marginalized community in Qatar, exploring the permanent-temporariness and hiddenness of this ethnic community in Qatar, by constructing a series of symbol-laden cabinets using the same three basic materials.
Introduction

Migration from one place to another is an integral part of human life. There are many reasons why people choose to migrate; some are escaping conflict, others are escaping from human rights violations or overpopulation. Still others migrate for educational purposes or for economic prosperity. What all these motivations have in common is that people are looking for a better life when leaving their homeland.

In the case of the Baloch, an ethnic group originating in Balochistan, a province in southeast Iran, the reasons are social and religious; since most Baloch are Sunni Muslims, they are generally not considered Iranian enough by the majority of Shia Muslims. But as Baloch migrate, those from low-income communities usually cannot bring their family members, valuable items, or much else. This was the case with my father in the late 1960s when he traveled alone and empty-handed on a boat journey from Balochistan to Qatar.

This thesis is inspired by my father’s journey to Qatar and his settlement in the Al Baluche Camp in 1984, a large residential area in Abu Hamour (Figure 01) that draws its name from the Baloch, who constitute the majority of the residents. In the early years, the camp consisted of 200 houses, whereas today, due to population growth, it exceeds more than 450 homes. Other ethnic communities live with the Baloch in the camp: other Baloch people from the Balochi area of Pakistan, as well as Jaskis and Josaris, two other ethnic groups from Iran.

The Baloch people and these other, smaller ethnic groups in the camp have been living in this permanent-temporary state, as stipulated in the residency contract, for longer than anyone ever expected. With this in mind, I have used the notion of “permanent-temporariness” to frame the Baloch people’s experiences in Qatar.

With the recent construction of hoarding around the camp’s borders, the residential area is entirely hidden from the outside world. Therefore, “hiddenness” is another theme that my thesis explores. Hiddenness has also been a survival mechanism for some Baloch people due to negative stereotyping from other Iranians and non-Iranians who know little about them. For those reasons, many do not disclose that they are Baloch when asked about their origins.

My father’s story is significant because it speaks to the 10,000-15,000 people who continue to reside in a permanent-temporary state and are now on the verge of becoming even more hidden, as they are being displaced. Through design, this thesis seeks to explore and illuminate the collective narratives of the Baloch community in the camp.
Figure 01: The Al Baluche Camp in Qatar.
Problem Statement

Balochistan spans three countries: Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This thesis focused on the Baloch from Iran who are currently residing in Al Baluche Camp, located in Abu Hamour, Qatar. Most Baloch people did not migrate to Qatar in groups; many migrated separately. The camp is an important social space for the Baloch, providing a sense of belonging to both Baloch residents and visitors. Baloch residents of the camp have maintained many aspects of their culture and way of life. They feel a sense of belonging to Qatar and to one another, given that they have lived in the country for generations.

To date, many Baloch people from Iran continue to migrate to Qatar, seeking employment opportunities with the help of Baloch people residing here. As the community continues to grow, research about their lives is important since there are few written sources about this ethnic Iranian group and its migration history to Qatar or other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. To address the lack of research and general awareness about this marginalized group, this project uses design to spotlight the Baloch community’s history, heritage, and presence in Qatar.

Delimitations

While there are Baloch people who live in different areas in Qatar and other GCC countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Oman, this thesis focuses exclusively on the Baloch of the Al Baluche Camp, of which I am a member. Although there are studies that provide a general overview of the lives of the Baloch, there is little to no literature about the Baloch in Qatar. Along with focusing on the history and heritage of the Baloch, I am also looking at the current state of the camp, which is being removed entirely, leaving its residents displaced and uncertain of the forthcoming changes (Figure 02).
Literature Review

Baloch Movement and Settlement in Qatar

Before the establishment of clear-cut national borders, Baloch moved across the Gulf region with few restrictions (Figure 03). While there is evidence of the long existence of the Baloch in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, scholarly literature and detailed information are limited. J. E. Peterson wrote an article called *The Baluch Presence in the Persian Gulf*, that speaks about the Baloch presence in the GCC countries. However, does not mention the Baloch specifically in Qatar, which makes his research broad. Carina Jahani’s article on the *The Baloch as an Ethnic Group in the Persian Gulf Region* also mentions the Baloch as a whole in the GCC countries, but does not focus only on the Baloch in Qatar, which makes her research broad as well. The majority of the literature focuses on the Baloch in Oman and not the rest of the Baloch in other GCC countries. Moreover, in this research, only vague motivations behind Baloch migration are given, which do not provide the clear, context-specific details needed to make sense of unique cases like the residents of the Al Baluche camp.

In 1970, my father was issued his first passport due to the strict implementation of national borders and travel restrictions by Qatar’s Ministry of Interior’s Immigration Department. Over time, migration from Balochistan to Qatar became more difficult for many. However, that did not mean that people did not migrate. In fact, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report 2020, provides data regarding migration issues around the globe. “[a]s of June 2019, the number of international migrants was estimated to be almost 272 million globally, 51 million more than 2010.” This statement shows that migration is one of the integral phenomena of modern life.

Baloch people of Iran, as Sunni Muslims, have been marginalized or disenfranchised. To some degree, this has impacted their access to quality education and employment. Hence, the Baloch community’s migration to Qatar is mainly the result of having fewer economic opportunities in Iran. But here in Qatar, due to a lack of financial resources, the majority of Baloch people have not finished secondary school, and very few have pursued a university education. This has resulted in fewer employment opportunities in Qatar. Many Baloch people in Qatar work in the service sector, as police officers, school maids, public relations officers, and in a range of other low-income occupations. The job market in Qatar has also become increasingly competitive, making it even more difficult for many to find employment given their lack of qualifications.

Figure 03: The map of Balochistan in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
The Kafala System

Baloch people live in a constant permanent-temporary state not just in the camp but in Qatar as a whole due to the Kafala (sponsorship) system. Residents' stay in these countries depends on the kafeel, i.e., the sponsor, either a GCC citizen or employer. In most GCC countries, the kafeel, is someone with authority and power, and controls the movement and legality of the sponsored individual. While the Kafala system has been discussed in relation to the low-income migrant workers and the exploitation they have been subjected to, other skilled workers also are impacted as they need the employer's permission to change jobs or leave the country (Zahra Babar, 2019).

The sponsorship system treats all workers as temporary, regardless of when they entered the country. Like other long-term residents, the Baloch people have lived in the country for generations, yet they do not possess Qatari citizenship and must renew their residency every year. This has left Baloch people in a state of permanent-temporariness, living in a precarious situation for a prolonged period of time without access to long-term residency. This legal arrangement has prevented the Baloch people from establishing roots in the country, leaving them with a tenuous sense of belonging to Qatar.

Acculturation vs. Assimilation: Al Baloch Camp and Little Italy

Baloch people, like many other communities, have acculturated into their surroundings. The majority of the Baloch people in the camp speak and dress like Qatari nationals when in public out of a desire to belong. However, they have maintained their cultural traditions and values within the camp. Many ethnic and cultural groups have migrated to other countries and set down semi-permanent roots. For instance, “between 1880 and 1920, over four million Italians arrived in America, with tens of thousands settling in New York City alone.”

Italian immigrants to the United States also settled in large numbers in San Diego, California to work in the tuna industry. Unlike the Italians and other communities that migrated and enjoyed the benefits of being able to fully assimilate into their host country, the Baloch people have no real path to citizenship in their adopted homeland of Qatar. Baloch people were mandated by contract to live in a specific area in Qatar only temporarily. Thus, their legal status as temporary residents with no access to Qatari citizenship has prevented them from assimilating into the Qatari community. However, the Baloch community migrated to Qatar as an ethnic community to benefit from living in another country where social cohesion and culture could be maintained, which was not the case in Iran.
Precendent Studies

A Refugee Nation

This piece by Mohamad Hafez, a Syrian American artist and architect, represents the reality of conflict where he invites the audience on a nostalgic trip to Syria’s glory before the war (Figure 04). His work sheds light on one of the distressing humanitarian crises in modern-day history that many chose not to acknowledge. Given that Mohamad Hafez’s work specifically highlights the displacement of Syrians, his work extends, and speaks to the reality of, many displaced and isolated communities.

Hafez’s work shows the fragility and reality of life along with the resilience of the refugees in their ability to adapt, which is also the case of the Baloch living in Qatar. Baloch people are facing imminent displacement from the camp and uncertainty about where they will settle next, with no assurances of permanence in their future homes.

The framing of Hafez’s work in a briefcase further reinforces the notion of displacement, being unsettled and on the move. This is also true for the Baloch, who are currently repeating this act of packing their memories and belongings in order to relocate, as they did when they first migrated to Qatar.
Sandi Hilal, an architect and researcher, and Alessandro Petti, an architect as well, work on research projects that speak to the struggle for justice and equality. One project in particular, called Permanent Temporariness, depicts the story of a Syrian refugee couple and the importance of their living room in the refugee camp (Figure 05). Similar to Syrian culture, living rooms are where we Baloch sit with our guests, and where important conversations occur. Hilal and Petti’s aim in creating this piece was also to spark conversation between people who visit the cement tent.

When thinking of the term “refugee” or “refugee camps,” one can imagine the houses and tents constructed out of fragile, temporary materials that disintegrate over time. Hilal and Petti’s choice to use a solid material such as concrete in the construction of the tents suggests that the camp shelters are permanent, altering our perception of what it means to live in a refugee camp. This shift also happened among the Baloch people living in the camp, as they chose, over time, to move away from the three municipality-specific, temporary and flimsy building materials to more durable materials such as brick and cement. The shift in material choice echoes their desire and need for belonging, stability, and permanence.
Law of the Journey

Ai Weiwei is a Chinese artist whose work often draws attention to the injustices that happen in the world. Many of his works also speak about refugees’ human rights and people who have been displaced from their homes. Law of the Journey by Weiwei is a 60-meter-long boat crowded with many refugee figures (Figure 06). The inflatable boat, along with the figures, is fabricated using black rubber. The sheer scale of the work does not allow people to walk by it without engaging and facing the injustices of displaced peoples throughout the world. The inflatable work exhibits a harrowing scene of what happens on-board these overcrowded boats, with some figures getting lost along the way and others drowning (Figures 07, 08). Weiwei states,

“There’s no refugee crisis, only a human crisis… In dealing with refugees we’ve lost our very basic values. In this time of uncertainty, we need more tolerance, compassion, and trust for each other, since we are all one, otherwise, humanity will face an even bigger crisis.”

This quote by Weiwei shows how we act toward refugees and encourages us to unite. Weiwei’s quote reminds me how Baloch people in the camp have chosen to live as a united community. Living together has enabled them also to maintain many important aspects of their culture.
Weiwei’s work speaks for not only the refugees but also people similar to my father, given that the figures do not have facial expressions. The anonymity of the figures suggests that this can be anyone’s situation. This project is relevant to my topic because my father was also in the same situation as many refugees who traveled on a boat journey to another country. When my father would explain his boat journey as a thirteen-year-old boy, he would mention that the path was terrifying because the boat was unsafe, and the chance of survival was very low, as they would also lose people on the way.

Another important aspect of this project is its materiality. Weiwei used one single material, black rubber, to comment on the human crisis and show the boat journey. Rubber is usually not seen as a valuable or permanent material and having this piece made entirely out of rubber suggests that these people are not important in our society either.
Fool’s Gold for The Alchemists

Francesca Lanzavecchia and Hunn Wai collaborate on creations that question the value of materials at their Design studio, L + W. They show one method to change the perceived value of corrugated metal sheets (Figure 09). This has been done using chrome car wrap vinyl to transform the corrugated metal sheet’s materiality. In addition to the car wrap vinyl, they used shiny color finishes, such as gold, which is often perceived as precious or valuable.

Lanzavecchia and Wai explore the idea of the corrugated metal sheet in an unusual way, as they transform the industrial material into a non-industrial material by using it in home cabinetry. In my project, I intend to use the three materials that were given to the Baloch community in Qatar to build their original homes in 1984, in an attempt to elevate inexpensive materials and echo permanent-temporariness. Given that this project explored adding value to an inexpensive material, my intention with my project is not to change the value of the materials; instead, to use the materials as a medium for storytelling.

Permanent-temporariness and hiddenness are the main themes explored in this thesis project. My investigations included interviews with camp residents, images and videos that I have taken from the Al Baluche camp, and exhibitions that explore different facets of the Baloch community, artifacts, and material experimentations.
Investigations

Interviews: Permanent-Temporariness

Many interviews were conducted among the Iranian Baloch people, aged from 19 to 60 years old, and currently residing in the Al Baluche Camp. I started by interviewing my father, who was the primary source of data for this thesis. The interview questions were geared toward understanding individuals’ reasons for migrating, the process of assimilation, and their experiences in the Al Baluche Camp. Conducting multiple interviews led to a rich set of data for me to draw upon to inform my design work (See Appendices A and B).

During my interview with my father, I wanted to learn more about his voyage from Balochistan to Qatar. Although I have lived with my parents my whole life, I had never heard the full story of my father’s journey to Qatar, other than a few snippets. Therefore, it was vital to understand and hear his story in full. As my father was telling his story, he also mentioned other Baloch people in the camp who were in the same situation as him, coming to Qatar on a boat journey, being given the same contract in 1984, bound by the same Kafala system, and sharing many other experiences. Therefore, interviews with other Baloch members in the camp were important in order to corroborate both my father’s individual experiences and the shared lived experiences of the community.

Regarding the experience of migrating to Qatar by sea, many Baloch people stated, “I came to Qatar when I was forty days old with my mother and two siblings on a boat,” “My father came to Qatar on a boat, and years later when he settled, he also brought us from Iran to live in Qatar.” These quotes confirm that many Baloch migrated to Qatar via the sea. Baloch people were also asked about their opinions on living in the camp stated, “I like the fact that we are living together, similar to Balochistan.” Another interviewee stated: “We were always uncertain, and now our uncertainty has become a reality.” Their statements highlight their concerns about living in a temporary state and having to possibly start over again. They have made their camp into a community that resembles the environment they were living in Balochistan, Iran. It has taken a long time for them to establish a sense of belonging, even if only partial.

Many Baloch people moved to Qatar because, as Sunni Muslims in Iran, they have fewer opportunities compared with other ethnic groups in Iran; as non-Shias, they are not considered Iranian enough. When asking the Baloch people about returning to Iran, they shared, “I do not see myself living there when seeing the conditions of the other Baloch in Balochistan,” which shows how living in dire conditions in Iran has made them not want to return. For this reason, many Baloch people I interviewed felt they could not pursue an education, find jobs, or feel safe in their homeland.
In finding objects that represented the Baloch community, many artifacts that were dear to the Baloch in the camp were gathered (see Figure 10). These homemade objects, made out of date palms, were essential for the Baloch community, and include items such as rice strainers, sugar cube holders, food rugs, and various containers. Usually, women in the camp have to keep making these objects again year after year because they wear out due to extensive use. Other objects included a hookah used by married women only, a heavily embroidered dress, and an image of the map of the Al Baluche Camp. Coincidentally, the typical pocket on the Baloch women’s apparel was the same shape as the physical walled enclosure of the camp on Google Maps.

Exhibitions

1) Survey of Traditional Baloch Artifacts

In finding objects that represented the Baloch community, many artifacts that were dear to the Baloch in the camp were gathered (see Figure 10). These homemade objects, made out of date palms, were essential for the Baloch community, and include items such as rice strainers, sugar cube holders, food rugs, and various containers. Usually, women in the camp have to keep making these objects again year after year because they wear out due to extensive use. Other objects included a hookah used by married women only, a heavily embroidered dress, and an image of the map of the Al Baluche Camp. Coincidentally, the typical pocket on the Baloch women’s apparel was the same shape as the physical walled enclosure of the camp on Google Maps.

This shape is valuable for the Baloch people because it is not only the shape of their traditional pockets but is also embedded as a pattern on their embroidered dresses. The patterns on the Baloch women’s dresses symbolize their values. This shape is called Bakalok, a hair accessory that they use to hold their earrings because they are cumbersome. The Bakalok to them means holding each other’s hands, which is what the Baloch people have been doing in the camp to survive the journey together.

The shape is repeated in the embroidery design, symbolizing that they are holding hands and are going through life together.
Figure 10: Traditional Baloch artifacts.
2) Exploring Materiality

My second exhibition explored more deeply the materiality of the objects from the first exhibition, the date palm objects, the hooka, and Baloch women’s dresses. Yet, of all of these objects that symbolized, in some way, the story of the Baloch people whom I interviewed, the object that intrigued me the most was the housing contract my father received from the Qatari government. After migrating to Qatar, all Baloch people received this contract which stipulated the three materials they could use to build their homes. Therefore, the materials in the documents were explored more deeply in order to inform the development of a meaningful design outcome (Figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16).
3) Exploring Cabinetry

After choosing to explore plywood, construction-grade lumber, and corrugated metal sheet as the materials for the outcome, another interview was conducted with my parents to learn more about the objects that were personally important to them. My parents explained their move to the camp and how they had one item that contained all that was important to them, a metal chest. Some of the most valuable items that they had in their metal chest were spices, documents, cassette tapes that had music, and voice recordings of people dear to them and who were far away from them, such as my grandmother.

Inspired by the metal chest, I investigated its usability to learn more about the function of the metal chest in my parents’ lives. My parents stated, "We used the metal chest only to store our valuable objects, and it did not have another function, as we sit and eat on the ground." Their comments indicated to me that the chest functioned as a sort of cabinet or wardrobe of their most important belongings. This led me to choose cabinets as the ideal vehicle to express Baloch narratives of migration and permanent impermanence.

Once cabinets had been chosen, the next step was to explore making cabinets with three specific materials. Not having any carpentry background, I decided to first explore the three materials I would be using for construction i.e., plywood, construction-grade lumber, and corrugated metal sheet by creating cabinet prototypes with opening doors (see Figures 17 and 18). I produced six examples to help me decide which door-opening style could benefit the project most. This exercise contributed not only to the ideation of the final product but also to the development of my own skills as a maker, giving me hands-on experience working with construction-grade lumber and corrugated metal sheet, two materials that I have never used before. In addition, the practice helped me decide on the thickness of the materials that would be most suitable to the cabinets, to the finishings, and their final use.
Figure 18: Exhibition III. Close up image of the six door opening experiments.
Along with finding objects and materials, photographs and videos of the Al Baloch Camp were taken. During this period of time, the camp was also beginning to experience significant changes. Site hoarding was being laid around the perimeter of the Baloch Camp (Figure 19). The height of the hoarding was very imposing. One could not see the outside world from inside the camp and vice versa. (Figure 20). As a member of the Baloch community living in the camp, this further reinforced the notion of hiddenness and led many people in the camp to be uneasy about what could come next.

Feelings of being hidden gave way to new feelings of being isolated. Many Baloch people also began to question their sense of belonging, and uncertainty became a reality for them, given that it has always been in the back of their minds.

These changes in the Al Baluche Camp solidified my decision to make cabinets. Usually, the inside of the cabinets is not seen from the outside just by looking at them; this represents the Baloch camp community itself, which like the treasures in a real cabinet, is enclosed and hidden behind huge fences around the camp’s borders.
Outcomes

The outcome of this thesis was based on my father’s story and the stories of other Baloch people who reside in the Baloch Camp. The two themes that were the main pillars of the outcomes are permanent-temporariness and hiddenness.

The outcome resulted in four cabinets inspired by my parents’ and many other Baloch people’s metal chests, designed by myself and fabrication was outsourced, that speak about the reality of the Baloch in the camp through my father’s story. The cabinets are also designed for specific items and functions. They are made of three materials (Plywood, construction-grade lumber, and corrugated metal sheet).

In my outcome, the chest is referred to as a ‘Treasury’ because it holds the values of not only my father but the Baloch people in the camp as well. ‘Awaken’ is about the spices, their sizes, and the amounts used when cooking in my family.

‘Archive’ holds the documents of my family members, such as legal documents, images, and other vital documents, including the 1984 contract of the camp.

Lastly, the ‘Matriarch’ cabinet holds a cassette tape recorder and cassette tapes, including a voice recording of my grandmother telling my father to come home. The cassette record player and the tapes are significant to my father, given that he had not seen his mother since he was thirteen.
The shape of the cabinets is inspired by the outline of Al Baluche Camp, the Baloch women's pocket on their dresses, and an embroidery pattern from Baloch women's dresses. The pattern of the embroidery is taken from a hair accessory called 'Bakalok', which means togetherness, one of the survival mechanisms that the Baloch people use when in new environments. The shape also showcases their unity (Figure 21).

Along with the pattern, the shape also resembles the pocket on the Baloch women’s dresses and the aerial view of the camp on Google Maps as mentioned previously (Figures 22, 23).
Figure 21: The map of Al Baluche Camp on Google Map.

Figure 22: Close detail of the pocket of the Baloch women’s dress.

Figure 23: The map of Al Baluche Camp on Google Map.
Cabinet Hinges and Handles

To further emphasize the theme of hiddenness in my project (Figures 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28), I decided to make the hinges and the handles hidden. The fact that the hinges and other door-opening mechanisms were hidden, I used the features of the materials and different techniques to open the doors of the cabinets. This decision aligns with the fact that materiality and form are both highly symbolic in my project, highlighting the history and the lived experiences of the Baloch community in Qatar. For example, in the Treasury cabinet, the locks were used to open the door. The corrugated metal sheet pattern was used to open the door for Awaken cabinet, and the other two doors for this cabinet are push-to-open drawers. The corrugated metal sheet pattern was also used for the Archive cabinet. Lastly, I decided to cut the plywood in an angled way for the Matriarch cabinet with a grip for the user.

The three cabinets inside the Treasury cabinet do not have handles on their sides to take them out. Therefore, the rod inside the Treasury cabinet is used to hang clothes, and it is also used to take out the three smaller cabinets. Each of these three cabinets has two holes on top of them for the rod to go inside to take them out easily.

All these decisions were made in response to the fact that the Baloch people are hidden, not just by the new fences around their camp, but also because when they are out in society, they wear Qatari dress and speak the local Arabic dialect in order to blend in and hide their identity. The reason why Baloch people do this is because of the negative stereotypes that are attached to them.
Figure 25: Hinges.

Figure 26: Handles.

Figure 27: Locks.

Figure 28: Hinges, handles, locks, and runners used in all the cabinets.
The items inside each of the four cabinets and the sizes of the cabinets are decided based on many surveys. The dimensions of the three cabinets influence the portable treasury cabinet’s size, as it will contain them. The portable treasury functions as a closet for hanging and folding clothes, another way my parents used their treasury.

To further reinforce the design of the treasury cabinet, it was necessary for the project to explore another aspect of the Baloch traditions to further allow the cabinet to represent them. Embroidery is a huge part of the Baloch identity. Therefore, merging embroidery with the treasury cabinet benefited the outcome. Given that the Baloch people use embroidery only on fabric, the outcome needed to explore embroidery in its unusual state on different materials. Hence, I practiced using embroidery on different materials such as wood, acrylic, rubber, brass, paper, and different types of leather. In teaching myself this technique, I found it an important way of telling stories through symbolism, which is why it was also decided to use this technique for the treasury cabinet (Figures 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37).

The parametric design was used to tell the story of the Baloch in the camp because the design shows the camp’s transformation from permanent to temporary. This technique was used to further emphasize the mark and trace that the Baloch are leaving behind in the camp.
Figure 29: Embroidery on steel.

Figure 30: Embroidery on brass.

Figure 31: Embroidery on cotton fabric.

Figure 32: Embroidery on vegan leather.

Figure 33: Embroidery on cotton fabric using leather thread.

Figure 34: Embroidery on carbon fiber.

Figure 35: Embroidery on MDF wood.

Figure 36: Embroidery on tin sheet.
Figure 37: Embroidery on plywood.
'Ganjineh' means treasury, which refers to the fact that the cabinet holds all the treasures that are important and valuable to my family and many other Baloch people in the camp. The treasury cabinet is made to hold the other three cabinets inside of it (Figure 38). It is made out of film-face plywood to reflect the current changes happening to the camp. The camp is fenced in film-face plywood to obscure the public’s view, which will soon be dismantled as it is removed. Film-face plywood is also a good choice for the treasury cabinet, as it is portable and the cabinet will also be water-resistant. This fact also responds to my father’s sea voyage to Qatar and that he was “portable and water-resistant” as well.

The cabinet further emphasizes the shape of the other three cabinets, showing that it is not to sit on because of the pointy structure. The exterior of the Treasury cabinet, where the shape is engraved using a parametric design, shows the movement of the Baloch in the camp and how the residential area is morphing into a new place. The piece also showcases the memories and traces the Baloch left in the camp.

The Treasury cabinet functions as a wardrobe for hanging and folding clothes and placing shoes on its doors as well. When designing all these cabinets, it was vital to use the materials on the cabinets purposefully. For example, the rod inside the treasury is used to take out the smaller cabinets inside the Treasury cabinet. The first shelf inside the treasury cabinet acts as legs for the Awaken cabinet.
The legs are made using two-ply corrugated metal sheets on top of the film-faced plywood shelf. There are also magnets under the shelf, where the Awaken cabinet will go on top. The magnets underneath the cabinet and on the shelf help the user not to struggle when putting the cabinet on top of the shelf. In addition, it also helps with stability if the cabinet and the cabinet are not moving.

Given that it was important for the project to show the permanent-temporariness nature of the camp and the Baloch people, the idea of portability for the treasury cabinet was explored (Figure 35). Portability would also help the user pack all their belongings and easily move from one place to another.

To explore this theme, casters were used for the treasury cabinet to allow for easy movement, but they are also discreetly hidden to suggest the cabinet’s permanence.

Moreover, the theme of permanent-temporariness has been further emphasized through the six embroidered panels on the Treasury cabinet. Using Grasshopper helped design the parametric design on the chest to showcase how the camp is fading away slowly. The parametric design on Grasshopper is based on algorithmic processes rather than direct manipulation, which helps change the design without taking much time.
Figure 40: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
Figure 41: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
Figure 42: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
Figure 43: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
Figure 44: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
Figure 45: Details of the Treasury cabinet.
For the ‘Awaken’ cabinet, the cabinet was measured based on my house cabinets to determine the size (Figure 46). Another survey was done for the spices to see the number and sizes of the jars we use that contain spices (Figure 46). This survey helped decide on the sections in the Awaken cabinet and their orientation.
The Awaken, also called ‘Rang beh Rang’ cabinet stores my family’s spices (Figure 47). Rang beh Rang means color to color, which represents the fact that I have a large family with colorful personalities. The cabinet responds to the spices being important to my family, as they awaken flavors and bring vitality to the food. The spacing amongst the drawers is driven by the size of my family’s jars. Some of the most important spices for my family are turmeric, red chili, saffron, and mixed spices that they grind and make themselves. Some of the spices in these jars are spices for fish, chicken, meat, biryani, and other dishes that my family cooks.

The top tier is for the larger spice jars that my family owns. The second drawer in the middle is for the spices that are in small containers, which are used for important dishes. The third drawer is for the second most important spices that my family uses; they are medium size jars that range between fourteen to fifteen centimeters in height.

Figure 47: Awaken cabinet.
Figure 48: Details of the Awaken cabinet.
Figure 49: Details of the Awaken cabinet.
Given that my family also used the Treasury for documents, it was vital to see the type and size of the documents my family owned for the Archive cabinet. All of their documents were A4 size, so the document holder inside the cabinet was also A4 (Figure 50).
The Archive cabinet contains the legal documents that my parents put in their chest (Figure 51). The word یادداشت ‘Yaddasht’ means having written or collected personal memories and notes that speak about a certain period or date in one’s life. These documents were passports, birth certificates, contracts, letters, pictures, and many other documents that were important to them. Another function of this cabinet is that it will also have hooks on the door to hold keys. My father owns many keys to all the doors in my house and our chest. Therefore, it was also essential to have a place for his keys.

The documents that my family owns are very dear to them because they hold their identity and journey. The cabinet has an intimate component where it does not open its doors fully; instead, its doors open to ninety degrees protecting the documents from everyone accessing them easily. This is because these documents are valuable to them, and losing them would mean losing their identity.
Figure 52: Details of the Archive cabinet.
Figure 53: Details of the Archive cabinet.
For the ‘Matriarch’ cabinet, the number of cassette tapes my father owns in my house was used to determine the placeholders of the cassettes (see Figures 54, 55, 56, 57, and 58). The survey helped determine the number of cassette tapes, which were forty-two cassettes. Some cassettes were traditional Baloch music and some were Arabic music. There was also a voice recording of my grandmother telling my father to return to Balochistan.
My father owns forty-two cassette tapes. The cassette tapes are important to him because they contain his mother’s and other family members’ music and voice recordings. Listening to these tape recordings is part of my father’s daily rituals. The cabinet is called مادر بزرگ (Madar Bozorg), which translates to grandmother to commemorate my grandmother. The cabinet also holds a picture of my grandmother, as she is important to my father, who did not see his mother since he was thirteen years old.

On each of the doors of this cabinet, there are fourteen cassette tape holders, and the last fourteen cassettes are inside the drawer (Figure 59). Given that there are three places within the cabinet to hold the cassette tapes, one can put the most used cassettes on the corrugated metal sheet, and the least used or the most precious could go inside the drawer. All the cassette tapes that my father owns do not have a case, so it is important to store the cassette tapes safely. Due to the tapes’ film sensitivity, they are oriented to the back where the light cannot reach them.

I come from a family of twelve siblings, and until today my mother cooks for all of us. My mother cooks large portions requiring huge amounts of spices when making the dishes. Therefore, the sizes and the number of spices my mother uses differ, often dictated by the number of my family members.
Figure 60: Details of the Matriarch cabinet.
Figure 61: Details of the Matriarch cabinet.
In 1984, my father and many other residents of the Al Baluche Camp were issued contracts that contained materials to build their houses with and rules and guidelines on living in the camp.

This video showcases the current state of the camp after standing for thirty-eight years. The video also shows the permanent-temporariness and hiddeness of the camp through some elements in the camp such as the house structures and the materials used to build their houses with.
A Constructed Memoir: The History and Heritage of the Baloch Community in Qatar

This video showcases the outcomes of this thesis project and demonstrates their usability and functionality. The cabinets also present the way that my family and Baloch people in general use their cabinets to store their treasures.
A Constructed Memoir resulted in a series of four cabinets that were on the treasures of my family, their history, and their heritage in Qatar. My family’s story is also the reality of 10,000 to 15,000 other Baloch people who reside in the Al Baluche camp.

These cabinets respond to the permanent-temporariness and hiddenness of this community in Qatar. This project came to life through immense research and investigations noted in this thesis document.
Figure 64: Final Exhibition.

Semael Dorzadeh

A perspective drawing of the exhibition space and a detail view of one of the models.
Somaia Dorzadeh

A Constructed Memoir:
The History and Heritage of the Baloch Community in Qatar

In the 1960s, when my father was only thirteen years old, he undertook a perilous journey on a boat alone from Sistan via Bushehr, Iran to Qatar, in the hopes of a better life. My father, like many long-term residents from Balochistan, has lived in the country for decades, preparing the establishment of the modern state of Qatar itself. In 1971, his legal position in the country today is still subject to the feudal system, his residency subject to his employment status, having to be renewed each year. Permanency is never guaranteed, nor is future planning.

In 1984, my father was mandated to move to Al Baluchie Camp, a hidden place on the outskirts of Doha. Reinforcing this permanent temporariness, the contract stated that residents of the camp were required to use only three materials: plywood, construction-grade lumber, and corrugated metal sheet, to build their houses, which were officially designated as "temporary."

Thirty-eight years later, some 15,000 residents of the camp are now living permanent displacement from their camp—their only home—according to a new official mandate. My work highlights the plight of the modernized and marginalized community in the country, uncovering the permanent temporariness and hiddenness of the Baluchis in Qatar, through the construction of symbolic wooden cabinets, relying on the same three basic materials used to build our "temporary" homes.
Figure 67: Details of the parametric design on the Treasury cabinet.
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Conclusion

The outcomes of this thesis are a series of cabinets inspired by a metal chest, the first item that my parents and many other Baloch people brought into their houses when first moving to Al Baluche Camp in 1984. Each of the cabinets was inspired by my father’s experiences and stories to highlight and elevate those family possessions that traditionally have been stored in our family chest. These items symbolize what my family values and treasures, including traditional clothes, spices, and important documents, as well as a cassette recorder and cassette tape that are particularly dear to my father.

The cabinets also respond to the Baloch people’s state of permanent-temporariness and hiddenness, given that they have lived in Qatar for generations. The Baloch people have always been hidden within Qatari society. With the new fencing surrounding the Baloch Camp, the community fears being further isolated and displaced once again.

Future Directions

In the process of completing this thesis, I learned many lessons about the design process, carpentry, and materiality. I want to continue using the same medium to tell more stories about the Baloch in Qatar. I have come to understand through my research that cabinets are like blank canvases, their form and function open to interpretation. My perspective on the notion of the shape of the cabinets has changed as well, as I was accustomed to seeing cabinets with only a rectangular shape.

If I had more time, I would have designed additional cabinets that would have articulated the stories of other Baloch people in Qatar. This would have allowed me to expand on the themes uncovered during the interviews, including memory. Given that a cabinet usually hides what is inside it, I would have enjoyed exploring ways to make what is inside the cabinets visible. I believe that there is a huge potential in cabinet design and using cabinetry-making as a means of storytelling. I would have also explored other materials that came to mind or were referenced during interviews. The Baloch culture is rich, and more needs to be shared with the world.

Coming from a BA (Honors) in Art History, I did not have the skills of a carpenter. My project was fully designed by myself, along with the mentorship of my committee members and a carpentry company in Qatar fabricated it. To complete this project, I did numerous experiments that consisted of trials and errors to achieve what I was aiming for. Ultimately, I have gained more knowledge about objects’ materiality and their value in giving voice to the hidden and the permanently temporary wherever they may be.
Bibliography


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Appendix A: Interview Question Set

01. Tell me about your migration to Qatar.
02. Did you live in Dubai?
03. How did you hear about Qatar?
04. What did you take with you when migrating to Qatar?
05. What about official documents like a passport or ID?
06. What was your occupation when you moved to Qatar?
07. Where did you live before the Al Baluche Camp?
08. Where did you live before the Al Baluche Camp?
09. How did you move to the camp?
10. How did you build your home in the camp?
11. How long did it take you to make your house?
12. Who helped you to build your house, given that you do not have the experience yourself?
13. How did you learn to speak Arabic?
14. Why do you wear the Qatari thob but not the Balochi clothes for men?
15. Why were you never given a Qatari passport, given that you have lived in Qatar for generations?
16. Why didn’t you travel back to Iran to see your parents?
Appendix B: My Father’s Interview

**Somaia:** Tell me about your migration to Qatar.

**Father:** I traveled by boat alone from Balochistan to Dubai and, in the end, to Qatar.

**Somaia:** Did you live in Dubai?

**Father:** No, some people in the boat who wanted to go to Dubai went out, and even though I was asked by other Baloch people on the journey to live with them in Dubai, I decided not to. Instead, I came to Qatar.

**Somaia:** How did you hear about Qatar?

**Father:** I never knew what it was, I heard from older Baloch people that there is a place called Qatar. So, I decided to go there for a better living than what we had in Balochistan, Iran.

**Somaia:** What did you take with you when migrating to Qatar?

**Father:** Nothing.

**Somaia:** What about official documents like a passport or ID?

**Father:** We never used documents when traveling, passports happened later.

**Somaia:** What was your occupation when you moved to Qatar?

**Father:** When I came to Qatar, they were using Indian Rupees, and so I worked in the houses of Qatari people for 10 Indian Rupees.

**Somaia:** Where did you live before the Al Baluche Camp?

**Father:** I lived in Mirqab, then Freej Ghanim, Dawar Biju, Freej Nasr, Freej Hitmi, Aslata, Khalifat, Nuaija, and at the end, we lived in the camp.

**Somaia:** How did you move to the camp?

**Father:** From Nuaija, we moved to the camp by the order of the Qatari government.

**Somaia:** How did you build your home in the camp?

**Father:** They gave us our own designated area in the camp along with corrugated metal sheets, plywood, and construction-grad lumber to build our houses. However, we paid for everything else when building our houses.

**Somaia:** How long did it take you to make your house?

**Father:** It took me two months to build our house with the material that was given to us.

**Somaia:** Who helped you to build your house, given that you do not have the experience yourself?

**Father:** I hired people from Afghanistan to build our houses.

**Somaia:** How did you learn to speak Arabic?

**Father:** I lived with Qatari people since a young age, and they taught me how to speak the language.

**Somaia:** Why do you wear the Qatari thob but not the Balochi clothes for men?

**Father:** When living with Qatari people, they also gave me their clothes to wear.

**Somaia:** Why were you never given a Qatari passport, given that you have lived in Qatar for generations?

**Father:** This is not our country, and it is understandable why we don’t have a Qatari passport. We are glad that they gave us a place to live, which is what we needed. A place to belong and live peacefully.

**Somaia:** Why didn’t you travel back to Iran to see your parents?

**Father:** I didn’t go, I didn’t go, I didn’t go. You’re asking a lot of questions.
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Fabrication of the cabinets
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