

Project Title: Soldiering the Seas: Baloch mercenaries and state building in Bahrain and Pakistan

Abstract:

Summary: This research will investigate discourses and practices around recruitment of military-laborers from the Pakistani province of Balochistan, for deployment in the Bahraini National Guards. The project asks; how do non-national military-laborers configure the state and society relationship? It hypothesizes that foreign military-labor employment entangles the processes of state building in both the sending and receiving states. It thus suggests the need to study state making in the Persian Gulf and South Asia as a connected history. Baloch military laborers have been integral to state militias in the Persian Gulf since at least the 18th century. The project combines archival and ethnographic resources to argue how state building in Pakistan and Bahrain is influenced by not only the present day recruitment but also the historical circulation of Baloch military-laborers. AIPS funding will help me undertake a portion of the research: ethnographic interviews in Manama (Bahrain) and archival research in Mumbai (India) and Zanzibar. My background in Indian Ocean history, native fluency in Urdu and advanced skills in Arabic, and research background, ideally situates me for this multi-sited project. Being a US citizen with ABD status, I fulfill the AIPS requirements for research on Pakistan but outside of Pakistan.