

Musa, Jennifer ('Mummy'; Jennifer Jehanzeba Qazi Musa)

by Turlough O'Riordan

Musa, Jennifer ('Mummy'; Jennifer Jehanzeba Qazi Musa) (1917–2008), politician, tribal elder and nurse, was born Bridget Wren on 11 November 1917 in Tarmons, Tarbert, Co. Kerry, one of five daughters and two sons of John Wren, a small-holding farmer, and his wife Johanna (née McGrath). She moved to England in the late 1930s where she trained as a nurse, changing her name to Jennifer around this time. At the 1939 May ball at Exeter College, Oxford University, she met Qazi Mohammad Musa, a philosophy student there. Eldest son of a Pushtun (Pashtun) noble family, his father, Qazi Jalaluddin, hereditary Qazi of Kandahar, was exiled after the battle of Maiwand (27 July 1880) in the second Anglo–Afghan war (1878–80). Settling in Pishin, Balochistan (Baluchistan), Jalaluddin served as prime minister to the khan of Kalat (one of four independent states within Balochistan). The Qazi family were sardars (tribal elders), exercising considerable autonomy under British suzerainty, providing strategic security and stability in return for payment.

When Musa and Jennifer married in London (1940), she took the name Jehan Zeba (Jehanzeba). They had a son, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, and left for Pishin in January 1948, six months after the birth of the dominion of Pakistan. The khan of Kalat, reluctant to join Pakistan, declared an independent greater Balochistan in late 1947. The Pakistani military subdued this brief rebellion in early 1948.

Pishin is forty miles north of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, a mountainous and arid province ranging over 130,000 square miles, and constituting over forty per cent of the land mass of post-1971 Pakistan. Straddling the Bolan Pass, the historic gateway to south Asia, the region – having been the most militarised in British India – remained of huge geopolitical importance post-independence. Iran lies to the west, Afghanistan to the north, and 400 miles of southern coastline abutting the Arabian Sea extends westward toward the Gulf of Oman and Straits of Hormuz.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, championed the cause of Balochistan and other tribal areas, seeking to rebalance under-represented Muslim regional rights as the end of the British Raj approached. Musa's younger brother Qazi Isa (d. 1976) had been appointed (1938) by Jinnah as a political organiser for the Balochistan Muslim League, and became president of the Balochistan Muslim Students Federation (1945). Upon his return to Pishin, Qazi Musa joined and then replaced his brother (who, owing to Karachi's displeasure, was relegated to the ambassadorship to Brazil (1951–3)) at the forefront of the Balochistan Muslim League. The brothers promoted the league (funded by the khan of Kalat) within the province's weak civil society (illiteracy was almost universal), media and political institutions.

The family home – built in 1893 and decorated with lavish furnishings and mementoes of the family's role in tribal politics – hosted Jinnah on his various visits to Balochistan in the 1940s. Qazi Musa was a spokesman for the Muslim League in Balochistan in the early 1950s, active in the region's volatile politics. He welcomed the Karachi-led unification in April 1952 of the four Baloch states into the Balochistan States Union under a shared executive, legislature and judiciary. The underlying semi-feudal governance of the tribal sardar system was retained at local level.

Pishin is within fifty miles of the Afghan border and 125 miles of Kandahar; the porous border allowed the Qazi and Jennifer to avail of European society in Kabul under the shah. Qazi Musa died in a road accident in 1956 (reluctantly at the apex of the sardar system resurgent in post-independence Pakistan, the family then owned the only motor vehicle in the village), and Jennifer considered returning home to Ireland. In deference to their 14-year-old son's reciprocated wishes to remain with his extended family (which included Musa's four sons and a daughter from his first marriage), she decided to stay in Pishin.

The powerful Musa clan welcomed their male heir's remaining *in situ*; Jennifer stayed on her own terms. Donning the *shalwar kameez* (tribal dress) but refusing to wear a headscarf or *burqa*, she despised the widespread practice of purdah in the region. The Qazi family had always been progressive Sunni Muslims. She 'converted' to Islam on her own terms at the time of her marriage, later recalling: 'I think I became Islamic at the time ... there is no difference in any of these religions except some people believe in one god, some in another and some in lots of gods' ('Queen of Baluchistan', Things Asian, 21 January 2007). Musa accepted certain social and cultural practices while supporting women's rights and education. She regularly corrected local lore that Queen Elizabeth had awarded her, an English princess, to her husband in recognition of his shooting a Bengal tiger. White-skinned, unveiled and conspicuous without the *burqa*, her distinctive appearance accentuated her prominence across the region.

Musa assumed her husband's role in tribal politics, mediating tribal disputes between families and clans. Violent blood feuds were common in Baloch society still mired in the semi-feudal sardar system. Her stepdaughter married Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, a prominent Baloch nationalist leader and violent irredentist, further augmenting her tribal prestige. In the December 1970 Pakistani national elections – the first to be held, conducted on an adult franchise, and widely regarded as fair – she stood unopposed for Pishin. Gaining one of the six Balochi seats in the National Assembly (1970–77), Musa allied herself to the National Awami Party (NAP) led by Wali Khan. Musa later recalled: 'I joined thinking I could do something for Balochistan and something for women. But you can't liberate women until you liberate men' (*NY Times*, 17 August 1992).

The National Assembly then convened to formulate a new constitution. There followed the secession of East Pakistan as the independent state of Bangladesh

(26 March 1971), the ensuing war, Indian intervention, and truncation of the state of Pakistan. Allied for a time to Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the NAP, although secularist in outlook, became a conduit for Baloch (linguistically divided between Pushtun, Baloch and Brahui speakers) aspirations for increased provincial autonomy and concomitant representation at national level. Musa vocally represented this chronically underdeveloped region; limited subsistence agriculture and smuggling provided little communal wealth, as Balochi mineral resources and irrigation schemes were exploited by elites from the Punjab and the Pakistani military. She championed Baloch interests as integral to any reasonable balancing settlement between the centre and the periphery as constitutional negotiations commenced in early 1972. The autocratic, US-supported regimes in Afghanistan and Iran greatly feared nascent Baloch irredentism, despite its being riven by tribal and ethnic factionalism. Iran pressurised Pakistan, especially after the secession of Bangladesh, to counter growing demands for increased Baloch provincial autonomy.

The new constitution was devised by Bhutto's PPP-led coalition with the NAP, other small parties (who held majorities in the provincial assemblies) and independents. Musa was appointed to the assembly's constitutional committee in late 1972 (as 'Mrs Jennifer Jehenzeba Qazi Musa'), agitating for maximum provincial autonomy in the face of PPP demands for a strong federal central government. As she was at the forefront of opposition to Bhutto's centralising instincts, Bhutto pressurised her son, then a rising diplomat stationed in Cairo, to return home and convince his mother to support the new constitution. Pressure was also brought to bear on her brother-in-law Qazi Isa. Her son's career under threat, Musa held fast, extracting maximum concessions to regional autonomy; Bhutto (possibly apocryphally) quipped that 'she just wants to be queen of Balochistan'. Musa supported the ensuing bill's progress to the National Assembly on 31 December, assured that her dissent would go into the parliamentary record. The new constitution unanimously passed the National Assembly on 19 April 1973. Musa proudly voted for the constitution, while voicing her objections to the weak protections offered to provincial autonomy. She unsuccessfully stood as deputy speaker of the assembly in August 1973, as the opposition candidate.

Bhutto imposed central rule upon Balochistan in late 1973; the ensuing insurrection saw 70,000 government troops flood the region. Musa acted as an intermediary between the insurgents and the federal government; around 12,000 Balochs died in the ensuing violence (1973–7). Disillusioned by the increasingly corrupt and decrepit practice of politics through the 1970s, she lost her seat in the 1977 election (widely held to be rigged, precipitating Bhutto's ouster by General Zia-ul-haq, who imposed martial law) and returned to Pishin. After the Daud regime assumed power in Afghanistan (July 1973), tens of thousands of Afghan refugees spilled over the border into Balochistan.

Musa turned to social work, promoting women's rights. She founded a type of girl guides and also the Pishin Women's Association to promote female literacy and

education, teaching English to anyone she could. Increasing ferment emanating from the revolutions in Afghanistan and Iran worsened the region's intermittent electricity supply, already blighted by weak infrastructure. Musa established an ice factory in Pishin in the early 1980s, providing employment and producing huge ice blocks, a source of refrigeration. Selling ice blocks into Afghanistan, the business closed in the early 2000s due to growing regional instability.

Assisting refugees fleeing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, hundreds of thousands of whom settled in Balochistan, Musa promoted female rights, literacy and education wherever she could. An astute tribal administrator, Musa wisely dispensed favour, seeking to aid the poor, destitute and blighted. Her stature allowed her to speak truth to the powerful, deeply conservative tribesmen: 'I speak a mixture of Pashtun and Urdu, but when I get angry I go down to English and they understand me' (*NY Times*, 17 August 1992).

Pakistan's existential concern for its survival (that Iran would subsume Balochistan, Afghanistan would gain Pushtun areas, and the Punjab and Sindh would revert to India) meant Balochistan, although little heard of in the West, remained of critical geopolitical strategic importance. A volatile crucible integral to regional affairs, Balochistan endured decades of violent instability. The Soviet–Afghan war (1979–89), the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan from the mid 1990s, and the US/NATO-led war in Afghanistan from 2001, took their toll. As Pakistan remained a crucial American ally, Balochistan – its borders more porous than stable – was a safe haven, hunting ground and supply line for competing forces. As ties of tribe, family and ethnicity pulled in various directions, Musa sought to protect her extended family, clan and people throughout.

Planting a rose garden at her home, a marvel to visitors in this arid region, she greatly enjoyed gardening. Known as 'Mummy' to her family, friends and locals, she was an enormously popular figure, and was often visited by western travellers and journalists intrigued by her astonishing experiences; the latter's ensuing copy was invariably headlined 'the queen of Balochistan'. The troupe of visiting journalists grew in numbers as the regional volatility increased, especially with the international response to the rise of the Taliban. She especially disdained the rise of Wahabi-influenced Islamicism in the 1980s and 1990s, propounded and spread by Sunni Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula drawn by the Pushtun resistance to Soviet aggression. A life-long campaigner for women's rights, she detested the growing Wahabi influence on Pakistani Sunni Islam – negating gains in women's rights and education – marked by a widespread resurgence of the practice of purdah. In an October 2001 interview (months before her son was appointed Pakistani ambassador to the USA) she astutely noted: 'Pakistan created this situation by supporting the Taliban. Now it's even more intractable than the Irish situation. What can the Americans do? Osama bin Laden won't come out – even if they obliterate the country. He'll hide. Even if they destroy bin Laden and the Taliban, a new Taliban will come along' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 2001).

Musa last visited her family in Ireland in the 1960s, calling Pishin home for the rest of her life, apart from occasional visits to her son and his family on overseas postings. She died at home 12 January 2008. Her funeral drew thousands of voluminously bearded, Kalashnikov-wielding Pushtun tribesmen, many politically and tribally allied to the Taliban. They cheered 'Mummy Jennifer' as the procession moved through Pishin, shuttered out of respect. She was buried in the Qazi's ancestral graveyard near the tomb of family Sufi saint Baba Sheikh Farid. Unveiled and uncompromising, Musa was a widely known public figure, fearless in her denunciation of venality and corruption at all levels. A strong sense of civic duty imbued her promotion of women's rights in a remote region where illiteracy and the practice of purdah are almost universal.

The diplomatic career of her son, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, blossomed after his posting in Egypt: ambassador to Syria (1986–8), East Germany (1990–91), Russia (1991–4), China (1994–7), high commissioner to India (1997–2002), and ambassador to the USA (2002–04). He served as the UN secretary general's special envoy to Iraq (2004–07), and to Sudan (2007–14), supervising the UN's peacekeeping force in the southern region as South Sudan seceded from the north.

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