

A Critique of Pashtuns' Racial Profiling and Generalized Identity through Fatima Bhutto's *Shadow of The Crescent Moon*

Inam Ullah¹, Dr. Waheed Ahmad Khan², Dr. Terri Tomsky³

¹ PhD scholar, Department of Linguistics and Literature, The University of Haripur Pakistan, Lecturer, Department of English, Govt Degree College Thana Malakand.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics and Literature, The University of Haripur Pakistan.

³ Associate Professor, Department of English and Film Studies, University of Alberta Canada.

Abstract

The identity of Pashtuns is generally associated with the stereotypes of violence, social and cultural inferiority and terrorism, especially in the wake of 9/11. This pattern of identity has been in vogue in media discourses as well as literary works. The present study, based on a critical analysis of Bhutto's *Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013) analyses the link between terrorism and the identity of Pashtuns. The study shows that Bhutto's depiction of Pashtuns runs counter to that of other writers especially Khaled Husseni's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* (2014), and thereby offers a counter narrative to the stereotypical identity of Pashtuns. The study contends that Pashtuns are not violent and terror oriented rather its worst. The analysis is conducted under the theoretical framework of Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) and supported by Pashtuns' history and Pashto folklore. The study concludes that Pashtuns are not the perpetrators of war and violence rather its worst victims.

Key Words: Pashtuns, Identity, Orientalism, Generalization, Profiling, Pashtunwali.

Background and Introduction

The Pashtun ethnic group, often known as Afghans or Pakhtuns, resides mainly in the western regions of Pakistan and the southeast of Afghanistan. Pashtunwali, a customary rule and code of conduct that governs nearly every aspect of their lives, is a distinct cultural code that they respect and have a long history of adhering to it. (Khan, 2011). The basic features of Pashtunwali include hospitality, traditional dance, music, poetry, and storytelling. Pashtuns love peace, and one of the outstanding features of Pashtunwali is the Jirga, which is an institution that represents their desire to uphold law and order and ensure peace. In Pashtun tradition, the jirga, or council of elders, is an ages long means of resolving disputes. However, at various points in their history, foreign countries have paid close attention to Pashtuns due to the geostrategic significance of their localities. Pashtuns have suffered from these interactions in a variety of ways, especially on social, cultural, and economic fronts. The imperial powers used a variety of narratives and discourses to portray Pashtuns as an uncivilised, barbaric, and violent nation with a view in end to justify their expeditions and realize their imperial ambitions. With the resources of academics, the media, and propaganda tools at their disposal, they fostered the stereotypical portrayal of Pashtuns, placing them in their own version of a fixed identity based on exaggerated generalisations.

The British, according to (Scott, 1995), propagated their own interpretation of Pashtun identity in order to further their own vested interests during the British Raj era in the Indian subcontinent and

their expeditions in Pashtun territories Justifying their conquest and establishing their own administrative system is always the ultimate goal of these discourses (Bhaba, 1994, p. 71). A similar set of identification patterns about the Pashtuns were promoted by Russia throughout the Cold War and the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. During this time, the Pashtun identity was in a state of flux. Ironically, the United States and its allies were highlighting the positive aspects of Pashtun culture, namely their hospitality and bravery. The Mujahideen and other resistance movements were well publicised.

An important turning point in US foreign policy was marked by 9/11. The Pashtun identity experienced significant transformations in tandem with the shifts in the agendas and interests of the major powers over the region. The Pashtuns were associated during this time with stereotypes of violence, terrorism, social and political regression, and averse to women rights. Because of the widespread popularity of this image in the media and other propaganda channels on a national and international scale, this era turned out to be more perilous for Pashtuns, even their traditional dress was represented as a symbol of violence and terror. These symbols have been used indiscriminately by the media, particularly the film and drama industries, to depict their generalized image.

This trend of stereotyped portrayal and essentialized identity also found its way into fiction. Pashtuns have been depicted in similar fashion by Kamila Shamsie's *A God in Every Stone* (2014) and Khalid Husseni's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The study uses *The Shadows of the Crescent Moon* (2013) by Fatima Bhutto to build a counter narrative to the racial profiling of Pashtuns and their generalized identity. Bhutto's novel is set in the Pashtun region of Mir Ali and portrays the Pashtun people as being peace-loving, progress-oriented, and eager to learn and advance but the scourge of war obstructs their progress and make them suffer badly.

Methodology

The study is data-driven and qualitative in nature. It employs the close reading approach and Catherine Belsey's model *Textual Analysis as a Research Method* (2005). The data are collected from chosen novels. Only the main characters from the novel have been chosen for the analysis. Focus has been kept on the relevant passages and recurring patterns emerging in the novel. The study's foundation will be textual analysis, with a focus on the pertinent sections' critical description, interpretation, and analysis. The text's structure, content, and intended meaning will be examined during analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study is carried out under the theoretical frameworks of Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). According to Nkrumah (1965) neo-colonialism not only influences the economy and the domain of politics of the developing nations but exerts its interference on the religious system, ideological basis and cultural structure as well (p. 235). The countries under the clutches of the neo-colonialism show the semblance of sovereignty but in reality their politics and policies are dictated from outside. Countries and nations under the spill of neo-colonialism are always used as battlegrounds by the imperial powers for settling their issues, "neo-colonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries". (p.12). Such approaches and strategies show a turning point in the designs of the imperialists because the old techniques of the explicit colonization can be no more applied in the present international political structure. Nkrumah adds, "neo-colonialism is not a sign of imperialism's strength but rather of its last hideous gasp. It testifies to its inability to rule any longer by old methods." (p. 253)

Stereotypical Representation and Racial Profiling: A Key Component of Expansionist Strategy

The colonial and imperial endeavours not only employed armed force but also laid out the basis for indoctrination via non-lethal means. A tactic like this entails disparaging others and building one's own sense of superiority. According to John Macleod, "While the use of force and physical coercion was undoubtedly necessary for colonialism, it could not have happened without the existence of a set of beliefs that are held to justify the possession and ongoing occupation of other people's land" (Macleod, 2010, p. 37). The powers of colonialism and imperialism create their own framework for representing the people they seek to conquer. Despite being extremely prejudiced and controversial, this kind of representation is given popularity in order to protect interests. Lawson & Tiffin (1994) hold in this regard, "Colonialism (like its counterpart racism), then, is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation" (p. 3). Such ideologies are so much widely circulated that even the subjects themselves acknowledge and tacitly support their position.

The goal of such representation is to reflect themselves as superior and the other people as inferior; it is never objective and is instead predicated on a negative portrayal of the individuals in question. By portraying others as inferior and ignorant, they draw attention to their own superiority. "The representation of other cultures always involves the presentation of self-portraits, in that those who are observed are overshadowed or eclipsed by the observer," (David Richard, 1994, p. 289). The invading troops intentionally used this kind of portrayal to indoctrinate people in order to gain their objectives. According to Rana Kabbani, "the ideology of Empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason and recruited science and history to serve its end" (Kabbani, 2008, p. 6), they create a whole institutional system for the purpose. The goal of such fabrication is to provide the impression that the portrayal of others is entirely accurate.

War and Terror and Pashtuns' Quest for Survival

Bhutto (2013) shows the life of three brothers in the Pashtun village of Mir Ali, "The house on Sher Hakimullah Road is often chaotic on Fridays, and this morning, tough decisions had to be made. After a few days of consideration, the brothers ultimately determine that they cannot and will not pray together on Eid" (p. 2). Following the events of 9/11, Pashtuns have been severely impacted by the War on Terror. During the conflict, they suffered the most. Suicides and other acts of violence have targeted public gatherings and mass worship activities such as congregational prayers on Fridays, Eid days, and funeral prayers. People are uncertain about their safe return from their places of worship because their lives are in such peril. "It is too dangerous, too risky, to place all the family together in one mosque that could easily be hit," one person said. They are no longer aware of who. (p. 3). Pashtuns are unable to lead safe, independent lives in both public and private domains. Ironically, it is unknown who hit them, but their lives are in jeopardy and uncertainty. The following circumstances are mentioned by the Centre for Research and Security Studies Islamabad in their 2014 paper, *The Cost of Conflict in Pakistan*:

Innocent civilians have also become the target of brazen attacks, with Peshawar having endured the brunt of attacks in 2009, with 20 of the 87 suicide attacks taking place in the city. One of the deadliest took place in late March at a mosque in the tribal Khyber agency when a suicide attack took place at the start of Friday prayers, killing as many as 85 people. (p. 5)

The three brothers decide to attend separate mosques in order to protect themselves from any potential explosion or suicide attack at the mosque and to avoid dying on the same day. Erum takes a cab to get to a far-off mosque. When the cab driver questions Erum about why he and his family aren't heading to the local mosque, he responds, "one of my brother is going there. I am going to Hussain Kamala Jumat". (p. 20). Because it is "too dangerous... in case something happens" (p.

21). People in the Pashtun region of Mir Ali are unable to live in freedom due to the perilous circumstances around them. Their movements put their lives in danger, and they are always under threat of life and limbs. Particularly in the aftermath of the global war on terror, Pashtuns have been the worst victims of violence and terror that has put their lives in danger:

No one prays together, travels in pairs, or eats out in groups. It is how they live now, alone... I don't go for Friday *munz* anymore. It's better not to. Allah will exempt us. He has already exempted us. He has exempted and misplaced and forgotten everything that came to Him from Mir Ali, from the frontiers of this country within a country. (p. 21)

Pashtunwali requires Pashtuns to maintain social and cultural events in their localities. Their active participation is always required by the Jirga and Hujra institutions. Every Pashtun town has a Hujra (Community Centre), which acts as a venue for resolving conflicts and a place of accommodation and refreshment for strangers and guests. Traditional musical instruments are also found in the Hujra, and they are played especially at night. In order to participate in the Hujra and the events therein, town residents must have a freedom of movement. Instruments of traditional music are kept in the Hujra which are played in the late evening. But that way of life was severely disrupted by the bloodshed and war. Pashtuns cannot risk their lives to attend such events and gatherings, "we do not come out of our villages because it's very dangerous to go out anywhere... we used to participate in... wedding gatherings... Jirga, and funerals. . . go to different houses for condolences" (Living under Drones, 2012, p. 96).

Their lives are now threatened by the idea of communal life. They are forced to lead a life of seclusion. It is risky even to give obligatory religious worship. The Pashtun communities' sufferings differ from those of the rest of Pakistan. For the Pashtun people, the effects of the violence and war are extremely devastating. Notwithstanding their extreme suffering, Pashtuns are stereotyped as violent people who happen to be victims, , "Khair, the taxi driver continues, at least the media tires not to treat the people of Mir Ali like total barbarians" (p. 22). There is little personal freedom and opportunities left in Mir Ali, life is very constrained there:

As long as he could remember he had felt constrained in the Mir Ali. He wanted to get out, to be free, to make money, to move without checkpoints and military police poking their red berets into your car and asking for your papers. The other boys of Aman Erum's age didn't seem to feel constrained by the country's wild borders; they didn't feel restricted the way he did. (p. 12)

The violence and war that followed 9/11 have had a significant negative influence on Pashtun culture and daily life. In addition to losing money and men, they have been forced to live a limited lifestyle. The Pashtun belt appears to be a battle zone as a result of military activities. There are military checkpoints dotted throughout these regions, and each individual must regularly provide identification and go through the security clearance procedure. The procedure limits the freedom and existence of Pashtuns while also causing cultural norms to be violated because the women must also obtain security clearance (Khan et al., 2019, p. 81). The way they are treated illustrates how severely the scourge of violence and war has affected Pashtuns themselves:

Fourteen killed as US Predator drones strike North West Frontier Province village North of Bannu... his heart quickening, he breathed slowly, waiting to see if any news of Mir Ali would follow... he thought of Samara and tried to calculate how long they would be apart... President Obama says his country will strike terror wherever its tentacles appear.

Pak President approves operation, confirm alliance to remain strong. (p. 36)

Aman Erum worries about his home town because of the horrors and scourge of war and violence that haunt it. Erum asks for for a visa to the US in an attempt to flee the repercussions of war and terror. He reads about drone strikes in his area on the day of his interview at the US consulate. The president of the nation he is attempting to flee as well as the president of his own nation both approve of the drone strikes. The role US as an actor of neo-colonialism is obvious, "the essence

of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 9). Erum is stuck mentally, and his worries about everyone's safety, especially his beloved Samara, in his community grows. The majority of the victims of these three distinct types of violence and conflict are Pashtuns. Drone strikes causing destruction were the deadliest and indiscriminate of them. Among the forms of violence Pashtuns were subjected, drone strikes were the deadliest and indiscriminate of them. According to *The Cost of Conflict in Pakistan* (2014), “US drone flights to hit targets in almost all the tribal agencies is another cause of fear among the tribal people in FATA. Until mid of October 2009, eighty-two air strikes were carried out by US drones, killing 750-1000 people” (p. 19). They have to live in a perilous situation where there is constant risk of losing their lives or limbs. The report further adds, “As they hear the sound, their hearts begin to throb as they worry about the possible target of the attack” (pp. 18-19).

Militants using a gunfire stop Erum's brother Sikandar and his wife Mina as they are heading to the hospital to attend to a serious case of delivery. The extremists surround their vehicle and question the them about their identity and the purpose of travelling in their own hometown. During discussion, the commander asks the following questions:

Are you a Muslim? ... yes of course I am a Muslim. You are a man of faith? Yes, yes, of course. I am driving the doctor to the village where she is needed and then I will be returning for my prayer. Brother, ror, I am a Muslim. I pray each week. I was first taken for munz by my father as a young boy. I learned how to speak to God before I could write. I taught my own son, my own boy, how to give thanks. I pray today for the blessing of Eid. (pp. 172-3)

As a result of the ongoing war and terror in their land for decades, the people of Mir Ali Town are unable to live their lives freely and in accordance with their needs and desires. When they leave their homes, they must produce their identity documents and have them registered at military checkpoints. They also have to prove their faith and belief system to the militants and prepare for the possibility of a drone strike at any time. Their victimised status and sorry state of affairs are reflected by people's public scrutiny of their religious affiliations and belief system. Although no individual, religious organisation, or governmental system has the right to interfere in such affairs, but in the case of the Pashtuns, even this affiliation is under public scrutiny following the conflict and unrest in their homeland. The worst happens if their views conflicts with that of the militants or their interpretation of it:

Brother, I am just a Muslim. Please let me go. If you're not a Shia declare it. Who are you hiding your pride form? Sikandar bows his head deeper.it is heavy with sweat and blood. Mina begins to mumble under her breath. He lets the blood rush to his ears... she rocks back and forth gently in the seat... I am not, brother. Please. I am not. I am a Muslim... (p. 188)

The militants' rigid, limited viewpoints have a negative impact on Pashtuns' way of life in the area and are wholly foreign to them. They encourage people to openly declare their pride in their faith and criticize other people's beliefs because they cherish their own version of religion, which they regard as paramount and binding on all. Sikandar is subjected to public torture because he chooses not to disclose his religious affiliation. He receives the severe and crazy treatment while his wife Mina is present. According to Pashtunwali, women should be treated with respect and dignity, and acting inappropriately in front of them is unacceptable. Sikandar begs again to be released, but the torment goes on, “: “take off your kameez, he orders... Sikandar can't understand his secret language... of what makes you part of them and what makes you their enemy” (p.189). Only the people who share the militants' worldview and support their type of governance are considered to

be fit for living. Sikandar finds it difficult to understand their way of thinking, because before the arrival of the militants' ideology, there were no such intimidation tactics or limits based on faith. He is embarrassed in front of his wife since he won't remove his kameez in public. "The Talib wants to see his back, wants to check if he has the marks of Ashura on his flesh" (p.189). According to the militants, Sikandar is a member of the Shia sect, and conforming to this faith, he must be put to death. When it comes to dealing with the extremists, there is no room for discussion or debate. They immediately announce and carry out the punishment. Sikandar is meant to be executed as a punishment for his belief system. Mina becomes hysterical as she witnesses her husband's treatment and steps out of the car. Because of her extreme frenzy, the militants believe she is mentally unfit, giving them an opportunity to avoid being killed by them. Pashtun belt residents have suffered greatly as a result of the conflict and violence.

Pashtun belt has suffered greatly as a result of the conflict and violence. There are certain limitations that apply. They have restricted freedom of movement, regular checkpoints, security clearance, curfews, and are monitored by government security organisations. Explosions and terrorist acts pose a threat to their lives. Public punishment and lynching may follow in case of violations of the militants' beliefs ideologies.

Psychological Trauma and Deterioration of Pashtuns' Sociocultural Fabric

Pashtuns are inherently romantic. They adore adventures, hunting, and music. Their Hujras are incomplete without musical instruments. They play the instruments with songs when they get together in their Hujras, particularly in the late evening. Rich information about Pashtun history and culture can be found in Pashto folklore, which is passed down to the next generation through genres like Tappa, Matal, Charbeta, Nemaikai, Badala, and so forth. Dawar (2019) opines in this regard, "Hujra served as a social club in a tribal society where musical programs used to be arranged once a week where male members of all ages participated. The essentials of the Hujras include charpai (bed), pillows, musical instruments and chillum (hookah)" (p. 280). But as militancy and radical ideology gained traction, many aspect of Pashtun culture suffered greatly. In addition to destroying the cultural objects, militant vandalism also completely ruined the Pashtun people's history and way of life. Active interaction between people in their culture form the foundation of Pashtunwali. Men and women must actively participate in almost all traits of Pashtunwali. Loss to Pashtun culture can be seen in Bhutto (2013):

"No one goes to the vegetable market with their mother, she goes alone and carries the thin bags..." (p. 21). Similar to Hujra for males, Gudar is a significant hub for women's gatherings in Pashtun society. Although Gudar is essentially a freshwater stream or reservoir that women retrieve for household use, it holds significant cultural value for the Pashtun people (Baloch, 2016). Every Gudar featured an improvised stone seating arrangement where women, particularly the younger girls, would gather and engage in gossip. However, "With the rise of militancy in FATA, going to *Gudar* was banned and strict rules of Purdah for women were applied which restricted them to remain at homes". (Khan et al., 2019, p. 79).

The Pashtun region of Mir Ali reflects a desolate picture replete with terror, lawlessness and insecurity: "No one goes works at the mechanic stall... no one prays together, travels in pairs, or etas out in groups. It is how they live now, alone." (p.21). The conditions brought about by the militancy in the Pashtun belt, which restricted the Pashtun people's movement and social gatherings and obstructed their life cycle, negatively impacted Pashtun culture in many ways, particularly its three main characteristics: Melastiya, Ashar, Panah, and Hujra culture. The Pashtun culture is distinguished and remarkable by its Melmasita, or hospitality. The term "melmastia" describes feeding visitors and strangers as well as providing them with shelter. By nature, Pashtuns are hospitable and view having guests as an honour. They provide them with food, recreation, and

lodging (Rzehak, 2011). They put aside their animosity and extend hospitality to their worst enemy, even when he comes to their house. The idea of Panah (Asylum) also a related one. The host provides appropriate protection for an individual seeking asylum in case of danger or enemy chasing him. He is even capable of breaking the sanctity of a Pashtun's home by going inside without permission, which is not permitted under normal circumstances. At the risk of his own life, a Pashtun will provide food, housing, and defence to the individual, not even a king can force a Pashtun to give up the individual who has found refuge in their home. (Yousafzai, 2022). This aspect of Pashtun culture was initially destroyed by the Pashtun belt's restrictions on travel, frequent checkpoints, curfews, and gathering prohibitions. Second, those with an interest in the conflict and violence abused it and used Pashtuns as an instrument of exploitation. The United States and its allies extolled this quality of Pashtunwali and exhorted the people of Pashtuns to welcome foreigners as guests from around the globe who would battle the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Paradoxically, the United States and its allies were enhancing the favourable perception of Pashtuns, emphasising their bravery and hospitality in particular. (Malik, 2016, p. 29). This feature of Pashtun culture allowed non-natives like Arabs, Uzbeks, and Chechens to remain in the region; subsequently, these individuals misappropriated this aspect of Pashtun culture. (Kakar, 2014).

An essential component of Pashtun culture is *ashar*. Instead of using paid labour for activities like building, farming, and harvesting crops, or cutting wood for fuel, Pashtuns assist one another in doing these jobs. The inhabitants of the town assemble at the location upon the prior request of the individual in question, and they complete the task as a group. In Pashtun culture, this has been a centuries-old custom. (Ullah & Ahmad, 2019, p. 198). However, this aspect of Pashtun culture was impacted by the war and terror, and the idea of *Ashar* vanished from Pashtun society. People separated from one another and the security conditions split society into pieces. Individualism has taken the role of collectivism.

“Some of our elders were able to escape across the borders to Afghanistan; some of their sons joined them and were eventually hunted down – killed and left to bleed on far away soil and buried in no man’s land.” (p. 18). The Pashtun tribes' elders are referred to as *Malik(s)*. They are typically well-respected senior citizens in the community. They are extremely important to the region's socio-political structure, particularly in terms of resolving conflicts. They convene *Jirga*, examine and debate the nature of the disagreement, and look for a peaceful resolution through negotiation. Their main areas of focus are local political and security issues. The militants began attacking every *Maliks* in the region because the militants, as Rashid (2009) holds, were worried that the elders would use their considerable power to incite the populace against them and give them hard times by organising the *Lashkar* (local militia). To buy their coffin and shroud, as well as a needle to sew it beforehand, the militants would send them sixteen dollars. Whenever the *Maliks*' bodies were discovered, letters with a warning to others would invariably be discovered with them. In Mohmad Agency, a suicide attack claimed the lives of around 100 *Maliks*. . (Ali, 2010). As their assassination proceeded, dozens of local *Maliks* were killed in Mohmad Agency when an explosives-laden truck struck a *Jirga*. (Taj, 2011). In just ten years, the Pashtuns' strife and brutality had taken the lives of over 2,000 *Maliks* and other elderly personages. (Dawar, 2019, p. 281). The tribal *Maliks* moved permanently to distant locations to avoid their impending demise.

Conclusion

Racial profiling of Pashtuns and the propagation of their stereotypical identity by interested sections has been in vogue since centuries and has gained further popularity after the incident of 9/11 and the following War on Terror. The identity of Pashtuns is widely linked with the stereotypes of violence, terrorism, warmongering and uncivility. Analysis of Bhutto’s (2013)

counters such essentialized identity of Pashtuns and shows that Pashtuns themselves are the victims of war and violence on their land and not its perpetrators. In addition to the loss of human lives, Pashtuns have suffered psychologically, socially, culturally and economically. Linking Pashtuns with the stereotypes war and violence has been the brainchild of imperial powers and oriental mind set.

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