

## EXCLUSION OF NATIVES: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF *THE SHADOW OF THE CRESCENT MOON*

**Waheed Ahmad Khan\***

Assistant Professor/Head of Department (Linguistics)  
University of Haripur, Haripur Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.  
[khankaemail@gmail.com](mailto:khankaemail@gmail.com)/ [waheed.ahmad@uoh.edu.pk](mailto:waheed.ahmad@uoh.edu.pk)

**Muhammad Zeeshan**

Lecturer, Department of Linguistics,  
University of Haripur, Haripur Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan  
[zeeshaneng556@gmail.com](mailto:zeeshaneng556@gmail.com)

**Khizar Ali**

Lecturer, Department of English,  
Bacha Khan University Charsada Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan  
[khizark.chd@gmail.com](mailto:khizark.chd@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The present article explores ambiguous status of Pashtun characters in Fatima Bhutto's novel *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. It highlights pitfalls of nationalism which due to racial composition divides the nation into upper and lower classes. Difference between the elite and dominated classes is sustained with the help of economic and political inequalities. Sectarian violence is also a factor which adds to the miseries of the lower class. It results in exteriorization of the interiors which means that cultural identity of the dominated ethnic group is questioned and shown as deviant. Their status becomes ambiguous as they are natives of the state but are not treated as respectable citizens. Views of Etienne Balibar (1991) about exclusion of the natives are relevant to the issue under study. The study is qualitative which is based on interpretive analysis of selected passages from the novel. The article is significant in highlighting issues of sectarian violence and impact of racism on nationalism which leads to division of the same community into elite and dominated groups. The dominated group is pushed into an ambiguous status and suffers due to cultural identity and sectarianism.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Pashtuns, Racism, Exclusion, Sectarianism.

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of nationalism has remained a debatable topic since various theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Homi K Bhabha, Etienne Balibar and Benedict Anderson have discussed it critically in their works. Fanon (2004) has unveiled dubious nature of nationalism as a new form of exploitation after decolonization which leads to wretchedness of the natives due to rising influence of bourgeoisie who consider nationalization "the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period" (p. 100). For Bhabha (1990), "Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions" (p. 294). He is of the view that nation is based on ambivalence due to "unequal interests and identities within the population" (p. 297). Balibar (1991) links nationalism with racism "the discourses of race and nation are never very far apart" (p. 37). According to him, nationalism results into racism which manifests itself in the form of internal racism and external racism. Anderson (1983) also highlights the central problem of nationalism which is based on imagined community. He is of the view that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (p. 6).

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\* Corresponding Author

The pitfalls of nationalism can be related to the status of Pashtuns in Pakistan. Pashtuns live in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They constitute a major ethnic group (42 percent) in Afghanistan (Wahab & Barry, 2007, p. 14). In Pakistan, they live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). FATA has been merged with the neighboring province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018. After partition of the United India in 1947, these parts have been included in Pakistan. However, Pashtuns pass through a miserable situation especially after the war against the USSR and 9/11.

It is a fact that Pashtuns are inspired more with their cultural law known as *Pashtunwali*. Defining elements of *Pashtunwali* are “badal (بدل) (reciprocity), melmastia (ملمستیه) (hospitality), and nanawati (ننواتی) (refuge)” (Khan, 2016, p. 27). These elements are penetrated deeply into their culture. Pashtun culture has some similarities, such as purdah (پردہ), with Islam. Purdah maintains separation between men and women who are not relatives. Islam also has the institution of purdah. However, the identity of Pashtun is in the process of re-construction both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistani narrative attempts to redefine Pashtun in terms of “Middle Eastern Islamic culture” (p. 37). This is the reason that “the Taliban have deemed *Pashtunwali* and Pashtun cultural institutions such as Jirga as practices against Islam” (p. 37).

Pashtuns have been divided through Taliban who consider *Pashtunwali* against Islam. It is said that all Pashtuns are linked with Taliban, “Taliban are Pukhtuns and they have family ties with each other, they are all interconnected” (Daur, 2014, p. 355). The generalization about Pashtuns in the name of Taliban and conflict between *Pashtunwali* and Taliban have led to violence in Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, the movement of Talibanization also pushes Pashtuns into the dark abyss of primitivism and savagery since they impose “their own ways, a culture alien to us [Pashtuns] in the name of religion” (p. 345).

The emergence of Taliban can be understood by having a look at the history of the Cold War which resulted in disintegration of the USSR. The Cold War was between capitalism and communism which resulted in hegemonic power of the United States. Mujahideen (Holy warriors) were recruited and trained in various camps in Pakistan and the United States:

Whereas the main training for the Afghan jihad took place in the string of traditional Koranic schools or madrassahs opened up under General Zia in Pakistan, the training of trainers—and of some high-level mujahideen recruits—also took place at a number of camps in the United States. (Mamdani, 2004, p. 85)

With the disintegration of the USSR, Afghanistan was left without deciding its future. Consequently, the Mujahideen continued its control through bloodshed and the country finally slipped into the hands of the people now known as Taliban, “A talib was a student in a religious school, and the movement of students, Taliban, was born of warfare” (p. 99). These people have unfortunately brutalized Pashtun societies.

The present article analyzes *The Shadow of The Crescent Moon* in the light of the ambiguous status of Pashtuns in Pakistan. Being citizens of Pakistan, they deserve a status of equality. However, they are excluded from the status of equality through Taliban who challenge their cultural values. They are considered suspects and deviant. Their language is also ridiculed through mock Pashtu which is “a fictional and stereotypical way of Pashtun attempting to speak Urdu that depicts Pashtun as incompetent and dysfluent speakers of Urdu language” (Khan, 2016, p. 107). However, they are included into the state and are expected to give up cultural values of *Pashtunwali*.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article follows qualitative research which is “viewed as an organic development dictated by the research in progress and not by a predetermined focus or hypothesis” (Seliger & Shohamy, 1995, p. 116). It uses content analysis which “is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body [novel in this case] of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (Leedy et al., 2021, p. 265). The analysis is based on interpretation of selected passages from the novel in the light of Etienne Balibar’s views about nationalism and racism.

The issue of racism can be linked with the discourse of nation. Etienne Balibar (1991) comments on the relationship of the discourses of nation and racism, “racism...develops within the field of nationalism” (p. 37). The colonial practices are perpetuated by the new masters who are natives and consider themselves representatives of their native people. They follow the footprints of the colonial masters.

Decolonization leads to a situation of uncertainty for the native people since their relationship with the native elites is more ambiguous. The reason is that certain ethnic groups are included into the discourse of nationalism but at the same time they are also excluded. Balibar (1991) calls it “exteriorization of the interior” (p. 43). The exclusion of the natives creates an ambiguous situation for them. It supports view of Anderson (1983) that nations are invented or imagined and thus they have no real existence. Balibar (1991) also talks about good and bad nationalism. He unveils difference between the two:

the one which tolerates other nationalisms and which may even argue in their defence and include them within a single historical perspective (the great dream of the 'Springtime of the Peoples') and the one which radically excludes them in an imperialist and racist perspective. (p. 47)

Certain ethnic groups are marginalized like the colonial masters. Sometimes they are forced to adopt an identity which does not exist in their cultural values. So, an identity is developed and propagated through media and other institutions which validate it. Their culture is mocked and people move away from it slowly and gradually. There is an elite ethnic group and a dominated group; their relationship is based not on equality in the nation:

Moreover, it is often the case that the criteria invested with a 'racial' (and a fortiori cultural) significance in this way are, largely, criteria of social class or that ultimately, they symbolically 'select' an elite which has already been selected by economic and political class inequalities, or that the dominated classes are those whose 'racial composition' and 'cultural identity' are the most questionable. (Balibar, 1991, p. 60)

Nation is developed on the basis of an imagined community which accommodates elite and dominated classes. Their co-existence leads to ethnic politics since the elite class exploits the dominated one. It also reveals a drawback of nationalist discourse which strengthens one class at the cost of the other. The elite class enjoys the privileges while the dominated class suffers a miserable life.

#### **AMBIVALENT STATUS OF DOMINATED ETHNICITY**

*The Shadow of The Crescent Moon* portrays wretched situation of people living in Waziristan. People especially Pashtuns face violence due to sectarian differences such as differences between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. The novel also depicts miserable life of the two sects. The faith-based identity was promoted during the movement of partition, “Since the country’s inception, Pakistan’s leaders have played upon religious sentiment as an instrument of strengthening Pakistan’s identity” (Haqqani, 2005, p. 15). All India Muslim League was considered as the sole representative political party of the Muslims. However, after the partition the Islamic vision was not materialized. The faith-based identity has resulted in intensifying rivalry between India and Pakistan. It has also strengthened position of the religious leaders, “The emphasis on Islam as an element of national policy empowered the new country’s religious leaders” (p. 27). Thus, religious sentiment has been exploited in Pakistan which consequently witnesses sectarian violence. Pashtuns especially after the Cold War have been affected due to rise in sectarian violence and militancy in the form of Mujahideen (during the Cold War) and now Taliban.

The novel of Fatima Bhutto is about wretchedness of people living in Mir Ali which is a town in District North Waziristan. The story is about three brothers named Aman Erum, Sikandar and Hayat. Aman Erum loves Samarra but she gets closer to Hayat after Aman Erum’s visit to the US. Samarra and Hayat fight for freedom of their people. Mina, wife of Sikandar, lives a miserable life after death of her son, Zalan, and attends funerals after death of her son in order to console the grievous mothers (Bhutto, 2014, p. 90). Zalan has been killed in a terrorist attack on the hospital. After tragic death of Zalan, Mina lives a miserable life and visits funeral ceremonies. Her life has been transformed and does not “carry any resemblance of the woman she had always been” (p. 115).

Aman Erum, Sikandar and Hayat belong to Shia sect which is one of the factors responsible for their miserable life in Pakistan. But it is also due to their ethnicity (Pashtun) which makes them wretched beings in the country. Aman Erum does not want to live in Mir Ali due to issues of insecurity. Mir Ali has been represented as a sanctuary for terrorists, “Most Pakistanis thought of Mir Ali with the same hostility they reserved for India or Bangladesh; insiders-traitors” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 19). Mir Ali is a town in district North Waziristan which has now been merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, sufferings of its people have not ended after partition of the United India. North Waziristan and other regions of FATA have been kept underprivileged which has resulted in emergence of insurgent elements in these regions (Farooq & Ahmad, 2021, p. 287). Aman Erum wants to leave his native town due to the war which he cannot avoid,

“He wanted a stamped passport out of his strangled home” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 19). Mir Ali is like a torture cell for him as he is not allowed to avail privileges of a Pakistani citizen:

He wanted to be free, to move without notice, to study, to learn, to expand his life that had so far been restricted to a border town. He had been quarantined in Mir Ali too long. Everything-success, comfort, respect-felt out of reach in Mir Ali. He wanted to be a free man. (Bhutto, 2014, pp. 103-104)

Aman Erum does not show any emotional attachment with his native place, Mir Ali. Too many restrictions on his life lead to traumatic experiences, “He is suffering from both public trauma and private trauma. The public trauma of living in a society under the claws of uncertain death, and the private trauma of having a poor and low lifestyle” (Nawaz et. al., 2023, p. 167). He had also attempted for recruitment in the army but people from FATA are not considered for recruitment, “The army did not want men from these parts; they did not even have a recruitment office in Mir Ali then” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 15). The people of Waziristan are excluded from the status of respectable citizens. Balibar (1991) calls it “exteriorization of the interior”.

Terrorism has affected people of FATA which has become a hub of terrorism. People of FATA have suffered due to the terrorist elements which have destabilized these regions (Farooq & Ahmad, 2021, p. 286). People of FATA fight for freedom even after merging it with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because they still live a wretched life due to lack of real autonomy. In Mir Ali, the state of insecurity prevails to such an extent that people avoid offering prayer or travelling in groups; Isolation has been imposed on them (Bhutto, 2014, p. 21). A taxi driver shares his disappointment with Aman Erum and says, “The state lies while promising autonomy-more than autonomy! - and decentralization so that each province can regulate its own affairs” (p. 21). Aman Erum struggles to secure a scholarship of the US for higher education and is successful in it. He travels to the US because he feels utter insecurity in Mir Ali. He has to face interrogation of Colonel Tarik who asks him questions about his family members and friends and isolates him from his own community, “They want to isolate you from your natural protectors, your allies” (p. 84).

Sikandar is the middle of the three brothers and is a medical doctor. Mina is his wife whose son, Zalan, has been killed in a terrorist attack of Taliban. She has become depressed due to the war trauma and loss of her loving son. She now attends funeral ceremony of every child, “Mina is washing the dead boy’s body. She has taken over the duty of preparing the dead stranger for burial” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 76). While washing dead body of the boy, Mina recites poetry of Rahman Baba, and says that she tries to awaken the people of her country from a slumber but they do not wake up (p. 77). She laments ineffectiveness of the state which remains indifferent to the plight and miseries of its people. Mir Ali is one such region which has been marginalized and alienated but at the same time is included in the state; people of Mir Ali are deprived of the constitutional rights (Farooq & Ahmad, 2021, p. 287).

One day Sikandar takes his wife to attend a delivery case. They are attacked by men wearing turbans (Taliban). They ask Sikandar various questions such as about his religion and the sect to which he belongs. Sikandar and his family belong to Shia sect which is targeted in various parts of Pakistan such as Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta:

People coming from Peshawar spoke of drive-by shootings, of men in parrot-green turbans who rode ...next to the cars of well-known Shia businessmen at red traffic lights and opened fire. They gunned down unknown businessmen too- the shopkeepers, the small-time spice traders and glass merchants- in the smoggy city’s bazaars. (Bhutto, 2014, p. 187)

The natives feel insecurity and have to hide their real sect. Sikandar also tries to do the same when a Talib asks him to take off his kameez to confirm whether he is Shia or Sunni, “The Talib wants to see his back, wants to check if he has the marks of Ashura on his flesh” (p. 189). Sikandar is helpless and cannot do anything except sobbing, “Sikander sobs only for himself” (p. 190). Taliban exclude Sikander and his sect from the community of Pakistani nation.

Aman Erum, Sikandar and Hayat on the first day of Eid talk about various mosques in which they have to offer prayer since “it is too dangerous, too risky, to place all the family together in one mosque that could easily be hit” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 3). They feel insecurity due to their Shia sect which is targeted. Their sense of insecurity makes them exterminated from the native status in their country. They claim to be the rightful citizens of Pakistan but their citizenship is questioned by Taliban as mentioned in the context of Sikandar.

Samarra is daughter of Ghazan Afridi. She is a brave and confident girl and supports Hayat, brother of Aman Erum, in the cause of Mir Ali. She is kidnapped by soldiers who address her in Pashto, “They spoke her language so she would understand them. They were not locals. But they pretended they were. They thought they could make her believe that everyone was a collaborator, that everyone around her was theirs” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 163). Samarra wants peace and security in Mir Ali. However, she like her comrades faces problems and has to continue her struggle for freedom secretly. When she is arrested, an impression is developed that all around her are against her and that she cannot do anything secretly, “There were eyes everywhere in Mir Ali; people watched you even as you slept, as you dreamed” (p. 182). A sense of isolation is developed in order to frustrate Samarra and her companions who fight for freedom (Azadi). She is made to believe that she does not belong to Pakistan, “It is not your country, you are right. You are not fit for it” (p. 164). She is treated like a rebel, “What do you think happens to *baghi* like you?” (p. 165). She does not consider herself a rebel. She is not afraid of the man and unveils their treacherous position:

I know that you are the ones who have sold everything in this country you defend so urgently. You sold its gold, its oil, its coal, its harbours. I know you are the first in these sixty-six years of your great country’s history to have sold its skies. (Bhutto, 2014, p. 166)

Samarra expresses her point of view very confidently. She is of the view that her country is insecure due to the elites who have grabbed its resources. The relationship of Samarra, her people and the elites is based on power. The elites consider themselves real masters of the country wherein they have the right to do anything. They exclude the natives in the name of traitor (*baghi*) especially those natives who resist the injustices and atrocities inflicted on them.

The three brothers suffer in Mir Ali. Aman Erum travels to the US for higher education but he is bound to give information about his friends and relatives to Colonel Tarik. He is a kind of informant. Hayat along with Samarra fights for freedom of Mir Ali which has witnessed bloodshed. Hayat is supported by other natives of Mir Ali, “Hayat remembers comrades, men who had devoted their lives to the cause of Mir Ali, abandoning their careers, money and families” (Bhutto, 2014, p. 71). The sense of marginalization prevails in Mir Ali for two reasons. The first reason is the sectarian violence in Pakistan and especially in FATA in which Shias are targeted, “It is too dangerous, too risky, to place all the family together in one mosque that could easily be hit” (p. 3). The second reason is exteriorization of Pashtuns by the elite class in a racist manner, “But Mir Ali never did transcend its enemies. Its leaders had broken it down, they had become fanatics” (p. 132). People of Mir Ali fight for their freedom since “It [Mir Ali] was a battle that had claimed multitudes, one in which whole generations of men had been sacrificed” (p. 132). The cultural identity of Pashtuns is questioned through Taliban who consider their culture as un-Islamic. The Pashtuns are perceived as deviant and suspects in the state of Pakistan and this kind of ambivalent situation is called “exteriorization of the interior”.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that Pashtuns in Pakistan suffer mainly due to their ethnicity and sectarian violence. Though FATA has been merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but issue of their sufferings has not yet been resolved. They are citizens of Pakistan but their identity is challenged by Taliban who consider their cultural law, *Pashtunwali*, as un-Islamic. They are victims of marginalization and violence. This is the reason that they still fight for their freedom since they are not given real autonomy and are deprived of their rights and privileges such as health, education, security and recruitment. Sectarian violence is another factor which adds to their wretchedness since they are not secure and are targeted in different parts of Pakistan. In the novel, Aman Erum, Sikandar, Hayat and Samarra are victimized due to their ethnicity (Pashtuns) and sectarianism (Shia Muslims).

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