

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF CALUMNY: REPRESENTING WAZIRISTAN IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper undertakes a comprehensive, critical examination of the Waziristani Pashtun identity as constructed within the historiographical traditions spanning the twentieth century. The core argument rests on the assertion that the indigenous inhabitants of Waziristan, especially the resilient Wazir and Mahsud tribes, have been subject to a pervasive and deliberate process of misrepresentation across both the official colonial record and the subsequent postcolonial literary output. Initial colonial accounts, predominantly authored by military strategists and administrative officials, established a discourse founded on civilizational superiority and the politics of control, consistently affixing pejorative and reductive labels such as 'wild,' 'barbarous,' 'noble savage,' and 'untrustworthy mountaineer' to the tribes. This systemic 'Othering' was intellectually vital, serving as the necessary justification for costly military expeditions and the imposition of special, often draconian, administrative regimes like the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Crucially, the research demonstrates that this flawed representational model exhibited a damaging continuity; the postcolonial literature and subsequent media narratives, particularly following the geopolitical upheaval catalysed by the Afghan Jihad, perpetuated the colonial framework, simply updating the vocabulary. The older terms of 'savage' were replaced by 'militant' and 'terrorist,' thereby cementing a fundamentally distorted, securitized image of the Waziristani people that profoundly obscures their genuine cultural narratives, historical agency, and legitimate political grievances, ensuring their continued marginalization from the national mainstream.

KEYWORDS: Colonial Project, Historiography, Representation, Frontier Regions, Waziristan.

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The North West Frontier of British India, encompassing the formidable terrain of Waziristan, was never intended to be a mere administrative or territorial boundary; rather, it functioned as a contested ideological frontier where imperial concepts of order met indigenous principles of autonomy. Within this theatre, the valleys and rugged peaks inhabited by the Wazir and Mahsud tribes became a singular point of resistance, challenging the political and intellectual foundations of the British Raj unlike almost any other population in the subcontinent. The sustained, unyielding defiance of these tribes—whose actions were governed by the deeply ingrained code of Pashtunwali—demanded that the colonial state construct a powerful and convincing narrative of justification to rationalize its perpetual failure to achieve decisive control (Wylly 1912, 142).

This paper argues that the resulting historiography of the twentieth century, commencing with the intellectual demands of the colonial project, has systematically failed the people of Waziristan by establishing and perpetuating a narrative rooted in reductive generalization and fundamental misrepresentation. The core mechanism of this failure lies in the strategic deployment of a limited, deeply pejorative lexicon that fixed the tribal populations as a monolithic entity characterized by innate lawlessness and moral deficiency. Across decades of official reports, ethnographic studies, and military memoirs, the Waziristani Pashtuns were consistently rendered as the 'Other' through labels like "wild," "uncivilized," "barbarous," and "illiterate mountaineer."

The sustained, consistent application of this stream of negative connotation served a profound dual purpose for the imperial administration. Firstly, it provided the essential intellectual alibi for the so-called

'civilizing mission,' thus justifying the frequent, often brutal, and always costly punitive military expeditions required to maintain a presence in the region. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this discourse artfully obscured the profound administrative failure of the imperial system to integrate or subdue a population fiercely committed to its traditional autonomy, effectively transforming political resistance into evidence of inherent moral and civilizational backwardness (Said 1978, 203).

This study, therefore, aims to systematically deconstruct the pervasive and damaging imagery that has clung to Waziristan. It proceeds through a critical review of the foundational colonial texts, examining the ideological context of their production, and then tracing the continuity of their thematic framework into the postcolonial era. The central assertion guiding this entire investigation is that the stereotypes forged during the intense conflict of the Anglo-Afghan frontier—initially designed to rationalize imperial violence—exhibited an alarming and damaging resilience that survived the formal end of the British Empire (Taj 2012, 12). The successor state and its narratives, especially those following the tumultuous geopolitical shifts of the 1980s Afghan Jihad, merely updated the colonial lexicon, replacing 'savage' with terms like 'militant' and 'terrorist,' thereby establishing a striking and persistent continuity in the systematic misrepresentation of the Waziristani people in contemporary academic and media discourse (Hanifi 2016, 390).

The literature on the Pashtuns, and specifically the Waziristan region, is marked by a distinctive and problematic bias, primarily because the initial and most voluminous works originated directly from

the colonial encounter. The foundational texts were largely authored by British officials—military officers, political agents, and administrators—such as Mountstuart Elphinstone, Colonel Harold Carmichael Wyllly, and Sir Olaf Caroe. These works, while invaluable as primary sources documenting the imperial perspective, are fundamentally characterized by their lack of academic objectivity and their role as instruments of the colonial state, designed specifically to rationalize and legitimize the projection of British power into a turbulent frontier (Lindholm 1980, 355).

Texts like C.M. Enriquez's *The Pathan Borderland* (1921) and H.C. Wyllly's *From the Black Mountain to Waziristan* (1912) are prime examples of this early ethnographic impulse. They employ the powerful "Noble Savage" trope, which was instrumental in constructing a morally ambivalent image of the tribes: they were simultaneously praised for their "bravery" and "honour" while condemned as "treacherous and scoundrels." This contradiction was politically necessary, allowing the European author to assert his own cultural superiority by demonstrating an ability to discern, and thus govern, such a morally and politically complex people. These initial, politically driven ethnographic and historical accounts, rooted deeply in the necessity of imperial expediency, set the damaging intellectual precedent that would dominate the discourse for decades (Ahmad 1978, 320).

Following the geopolitical shifts of the mid-twentieth century, a powerful postcolonial critique emerged, driven by seminal thinkers such as Edward Said and Ranajit Guha, who meticulously challenged the monolithic supremacy and Euro-centric bias of the colonial narrative (Guha 1997, 5). Said's *Orientalism* (1978) established the

crucial theoretical framework, demonstrating how the West systematically fabricated a distorted, essentialized 'Orient' not out of malicious intent alone, but out of a need to maintain intellectual and cultural domination over its subjects. Applying this theoretical apparatus to the Pashtun context, later scholars like Akbar S. Ahmad attempted to introduce necessary nuance, engaging deeply with social models such as *Pashtunwali* to explain tribal organization and decision-making processes.

However, even in the work of these postcolonial scholars, the pervasive influence of the established colonial categories often persisted. Contemporary academics, including Farhat Taj and Shah Muhammad Hanifi, directly address this crippling continuity, arguing that postcolonial state actors, media outlets, and even some academics have inherited and repurposed the colonial lexicon, demonstrating that the intellectual decolonization of the Waziristani image remains profoundly incomplete (Hanifi 2016, 390). The common thread uniting this entire body of literature—from the 19th-century military memoir to the 21st-century policy paper—is the near-total absence of the authentic Waziristani voice. This silencing of the subject renders the historiography largely a prolonged monologue by the powerful, focused obsessively on control, rather than a genuine dialogue with the people's cultural, political, and historical reality (Said 1978, 203).

This study employs a rigorous qualitative and analytical methodology, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the central theoretical tool to deconstruct the textual production surrounding Waziristan. This approach is essential because the primary research goal is not to produce new factual knowledge of historical events, but rather to

critically analyze the mechanisms of knowledge production itself—specifically, how the Waziristani image was strategically created, mobilized, and sustained across distinct political periods. The methodology involves a meticulous inspection of a wide corpus of historical and contemporary documents, including official British reports, military memoirs, administrative tracts, and postcolonial scholarly and media narratives, all examined for embedded ideological assumptions and underlying power structures.

The theoretical lens is heavily derived from Michel Foucault's fundamental assertion regarding the inseparability of knowledge and power, which posits that the effective exercise of power necessarily produces a corresponding form of knowledge that serves to rationalize that power (Foucault 1980, 52). This principle, adapted by Edward Said in his critique of Orientalism, reveals how British imperial power proactively *manufactured* the image of the 'wild Pashtun' explicitly to legitimize and justify its administrative and military presence. CDA allows the analysis to penetrate beyond superficial content and focus acutely on the narrative strategies: the pervasive use of generalization, the enforcement of racial or civilizational stereotyping (the 'savage/civilized' dichotomy), and the systematic omission of indigenous political rationale, cultural context, or counter-narratives (Spivak 1988, 78).

The study rigorously isolates instances where military or administrative failure on the frontier was linguistically reframed as direct proof of the Waziristanis' innate moral deficiency. This reframing ensured that the resulting historical text functioned primarily as an intellectual justification for imperial

control rather than an accurate historical account. This analytical methodology inherently recognizes that the concept of representation is non-neutral, as the cultural, political, and institutional positioning of the author profoundly shapes the ultimate narrative (Loomba 2008, 115). By inspecting the provenance of the sources—whether it's an account written by a retaliating military officer or a later analysis produced far from the tribal areas—the study uncovers how the author's interest-based relationship with the subject dictated the ultimate depiction of the Waziristani people, thereby perpetuating a historical narrative strategically divorced from local reality.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE

The establishment and subsequent expansion of the British Raj required more than mere military superiority; it necessitated a robust intellectual framework to rationalize the governance of a foreign population, a foundation that became known as colonial historiography. This intellectual project commenced with the systematic distortion and erasure of indigenous history and cultural organizations, most notably through the profoundly influential writings of James Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay. Mill's foundational text, *The History of British India* (1817), which became the official guide for training colonial administrators, famously dismissed the entirety of pre-colonial Indian history, asserting that any meaningful historical heritage only began with the introduction of Western imperialist forces (Mill 1817, 34). This hegemonic text served as the ideological blueprint, immediately categorizing Indian society as inherently rude, savage, and barbaric, which provided the essential political pretext for external,

supposedly '**civilized**' European rule, thereby establishing a doctrine that indigenous histories must be either suppressed or rewritten through a Euro-centric lens (Majeed 1992, 120).

Macaulay significantly reinforced this intellectual hierarchy through his notorious "Minute on Education" (1835), articulating an explicit contempt for Oriental languages and learning. He argued with powerful rhetoric that the entire historical and literary knowledge base contained within Indian texts was intellectually inferior to the content found in the most rudimentary preparatory schools of England (Macaulay 1835, 1). This rhetorical demolition was strategically vital: by devaluing indigenous knowledge systems, the British created a necessary ideological vacuum that could then be filled by the purportedly 'superior' Western educational and administrative models. This process ultimately established the doctrine of the "Divine Duty," which posited that the colonizer, armed with the Enlightenment's concepts of science and reason, was morally compelled to "civilize" the allegedly superstitious and irrational natives. This framework was particularly applicable on the North West Frontier, as it enabled administrators to interpret the Waziristani Pashtuns' fierce resistance not as a rational political act of defense, but simply as an expected, chaotic manifestation of their innate, inferior state, thereby demanding intervention (Metcalf 1995, 22).

The application of racial 'science' further solidified the colonial discourse, with administrators and ethnographers like Sir Herbert Risley attempting to categorize the subcontinent's diverse peoples into fixed, often racially charged, typologies for administrative control. His comprehensive work, *The People of India* (1915), exemplifies

this method, deliberately transforming cultural differences into a rigid racial hierarchy suitable for state management. For the Pathans, this involved the compilation and dissemination of generalized, highly pejorative folk proverbs and statements, effectively reducing entire tribes to simplistic, negative archetypes. Risley infamously recorded the saying that 'Afridi parents teach their children to be a thief,' utilizing popular, yet often unverified, idiom not as an anthropological observation but as an official judgment on the tribes' inherent moral and ethical character (Risley 1915, 138). This pervasive system of ethnographic categorization, underpinned by the concept of social evolutionism—which placed European society at the pinnacle of 'civilization'—provided the moral and intellectual ammunition necessary to manage the perpetual security threat posed by the unyielding Pashtun tribes on the frontier.

THE FRONTIER AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL LOGIC

The British policy towards the North West Frontier was fundamentally dictated by geopolitical necessity, serving as a critical buffer zone against the perceived military threat of Tsarist Russia in a phenomenon known as 'The Great Game.' Following the formal annexation of the Sikh Empire in 1849, the British found themselves in control of a chronically volatile boundary, which they immediately labeled 'Yaghistan,' or the 'land of the rebels' (Wylly 1912, 145). The unwavering commitment of the Pathan tribes to their traditional autonomy meant that the region was trapped in a perpetual state of flux, necessitating a costly and ultimately contradictory dual policy on the part of the imperial power. On one hand, the British attempted conciliation through promoting

trade and offering employment to secure the buffer zone; on the other, the persistent and costly tribal raids demanded severe and frequent punitive military actions, establishing an ruinous cycle of aggression and retaliation that defined the border for nearly a century (Moreman 1998, 45).

This administrative and military dilemma directly facilitated the contradictory literary representation of the Pathan, leading to the creation of the enduring 'Noble Savage' archetype. The sheer impossibility of achieving decisive control over the tribes ironically forced an acknowledgment of their impressive martial prowess, which formed the 'noble' component of the trope. Early diplomatic accounts, such as those documented by Mountstuart Elphinstone during his mission to Kabul in 1808, initially offered a measured, albeit paternalistic, appreciation of Pashtun society, recognizing their profound love of liberty and traditions of hospitality, though he often framed this within a patronizing 'Highland analogy' (Elphinstone 1815, 235). However, this limited positive narrative quickly deteriorated into the dominance of the 'savage' component following major British defeats and humiliating retreats, most notably those experienced during the Anglo-Afghan Wars. The Pathan was subsequently fixed as an inherently unreliable and volatile entity—a people who could be praised for their bravery one day, yet condemned as "treacherous" and "scoundrels" the next, ensuring that the British narrative remained morally unassailable regardless of the military outcome (Lindholm 1980, 355).

The deliberate maintenance of this moral inconsistency was the key rhetorical strategy employed by the colonial state to rationalize its perpetual use of force. It allowed British figures, when confronted by effective tribal

resistance, to dismiss the actions of the Pashtuns not as legitimate defense against occupation, but simply as unpredictable, animal-like behavior stemming from their inferior nature. This viewpoint was most infamously articulated by high-ranking political figures, including Winston Churchill, who described the tribes as "animal-like," and Lord George Curzon, who compared them to a "child-like species of cat" (Tahir 2017, 10). The persistent and pervasive use of terms like "bloodthirsty," "vindictive," and "bigoted" successfully transformed what was fundamentally a political and territorial conflict into a civilizational struggle, casting the Pathan as perpetually sub-human and incapable of rational political engagement, thereby demanding intervention and control by the superior European power (Johansen 1997, 60). This narrative ensured that the official history, produced largely by the retaliating military forces, functioned primarily as a strategic instrument to justify continued violence, the expansion of imperial administration, and the necessity of the highly repressive Frontier Crimes Regulation (Wylly 1912, 142).

WAZIRISTAN'S UNYIELDING DEFIANCE

Waziristan, standing out even within the tumultuous North West Frontier, represented the ultimate, unyielding challenge to the British Raj, consistently earning the description of "the hardest nut to crack" among seasoned administrators (Caroe 1957, 400). The sustained resistance of the Wazir and Mahsud tribes consistently foiled attempts at full annexation, repeatedly pushing back British brigades and maintaining a fierce, generations-old commitment to their independent status. This sustained defiance, culminating in two extensive wars (1919–20 and 1936–37),

eventually forced the British to adopt unique and contradictory policies. The sheer cost in men and materiel ultimately necessitated a policy of withdrawal from advanced posts and the granting of a high degree of autonomy, a tacit admission of the limits of imperial power in the mountainous terrain. This military failure, however, was promptly translated into a literary victory for the colonial pen, where the tribes' successful defense of their land was reframed as definitive evidence of their inherent, irredeemable barbarity and chronic lawlessness.

The depiction of Waziristan's unforgiving geography was instrumental in this literary reframing, as the land itself was transformed into an active antagonist in the imperial narrative. Writers struggled to capture the region's complexity, often resorting to paradoxical and evocative language that suggested chaos and unpredictability. C.M. Enriquez, reflecting on his 1917 expedition, described Waziristan as a place where the people and the land were subject to sudden, violent "spates," characterizing the environment as inherently unmodern and untamable—a place where people were stuck in the "tenth century" (Enriquez 1921, 55). Yet, other accounts, when attempting to describe the region's scenic beauty for a metropolitan audience, could suddenly compare it favorably to the "Switzerland" of the East, demonstrating the complete subjectivity and interest-based nature of the colonial gaze, which shifted its descriptive framework to suit its narrative needs (Wylly 1912, 180). This unstable cartography of calumny ensured that Waziristan was perpetually represented as a zone of primordial wildness, an uncontrollable backdrop against which the narrative of

British civilizing effort was constantly being tested and justified.

The Mahsud tribe, geographically situated at critical ingress points, faced the most intense and sustained discursive assault, being routinely branded as the "most notorious robbers" and "thieves" from the mid-nineteenth century onward (Young 1882, 540). While the Mahsud certainly conducted raids, critical analysis suggests these actions were often politically and territorially motivated—a crucial means of self-defense and resistance against the rapidly encroaching colonial state—rather than being driven purely by financial or material gain (William 2005, 20). The British, however, utilized every available cultural tool to reinforce the negative stereotype. E. Howell, a long-serving administrator, used Waziri proverbs in his monograph to subtly belittle the tribes, quoting a saying that translated to: "you (British) are like a cemented and strong wall, we are like a loose-stone wall of the field" (Howell 1979, 115). This comparison was profoundly disingenuous, as it juxtaposed a small tribal society against the full military and technological might of the global empire, serving only to exaggerate the tribal community's perceived inferiority and cement their image as fundamentally backward and unreliable.

The persistent failure to secure Waziristan led to the administrative policy of indirect rule, relying heavily on the traditional Jirga system (tribal council) to maintain a semblance of control. This reliance was not born of respect, but of necessity, yet the literature often framed it as a benevolent accommodation of primitive custom. The reframing of armed resistance as innate barbarity was crucial for justifying the perpetuation of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), a highly punitive and non-

judicial legal regime that allowed for collective punishment and administrative fiat, ensuring that the logic of colonial control persisted even where military control failed (Rand and Condos 2018, 705). By continuously presenting Waziristan's unique legal and political structure as a chaotic anomaly—a land trapped outside the rational history of the modern state—colonial historiography ensured that the Waziristani people remained conceptually isolated, deserving of exceptional and often harsh treatment.

THE POSTCOLONIAL LEGACY OF THE FCR

The partition of British India in 1947 marked the political culmination of the anti-colonial struggle, yet for the Waziristani Pashtuns, the transition brought not liberation but a distressing continuity of colonial governance and entrenched prejudice. The newly formed state of Pakistan chose not to fully integrate the tribal agencies into its constitutional framework, opting instead to inherit and reinforce the colonial administrative template. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), encompassing Waziristan, were maintained as a geopolitical buffer zone, governed outside the national legal and administrative mainstream solely under the archaic, repressive Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) (Leake 2015, 140). This retention of a colonial legal relic—a law designed for summary justice and collective punishment—immediately signaled that the postcolonial elite was willing to treat the Waziristani people as a distinct, ungovernable 'Other,' perpetuating the very logic of securitization and control established by the British Raj (Taj 2011, 40).

This policy of systematic political and developmental neglect proved catastrophic when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan

in 1979. The tribal belt, already structurally isolated by the FCR, rapidly transformed into the epicenter of the Afghan Jihad. The Pakistani state, with significant international backing, actively used Waziristan as a forward operating base, flooding the region with foreign fighters, sophisticated weaponry, and a radicalized ideology of Islamic jihad. The resultant vacuum of governance, created by decades of FCR-enforced isolation, was quickly filled by radicalized elements, profoundly altering the social and political fabric of the tribes. Following the Soviet withdrawal, the subsequent abandonment of the region by its former allies left the local population dangerously destabilized and vulnerable to the security fallout and the rise of militancy. It is within this chaotic context that the postcolonial media and certain academics readily updated the colonial stereotype: the 'savage' mountain warrior was expediently recast as the 'militant,' 'dihshatgar,' and 'intehapasand' (terrorist/extremist) (Khalid 2014, 15).

The persistence of the colonial discourse is most clearly visible in this linguistic transformation, where the fundamental function of 'Othering' remains identical. Just as the British needed to label the Pashtun a 'barbarous robber' to justify military control and the FCR, the Pakistani state later found it politically necessary to label the Waziristani a 'terrorist' to rationalize large-scale military operations and the continued administrative exclusion of the region from mainstream national development (Hanifi 2016, 390). This pervasive reliance on the colonial template is further highlighted by the enduring, almost obsessive scholarly fascination with the 'warlike' Pashtun personality, a theme that has dominated literature and policy making since the 1960s (Spain 1961, 166). The overwhelming focus on conflict and militancy

ensures that the only image presented of Waziristan is one defined by violence, which strategically excuses the state's historical underdevelopment of the region, thereby maintaining the established power dynamic and intellectual marginalization.

The tragic consequence of this deep-seated historical and literary continuity is the profound, entrenched feeling of 'otherness' and betrayal experienced by the Waziristani people. They correctly perceive a state apparatus that has repeatedly manipulated and abandoned them, utilizing them first as a geopolitical bulwark against external threats and later as a convenient scapegoat for the resulting internal security crisis (Ahmad 2013, 110). The complex, nuanced reality of the Waziristani Pashtun identity—an identity deeply rooted in the communal justice of the Jirga, the sacred code of Pashtunwali, and an unwavering commitment to nang (honor)—is entirely suppressed and overwritten by a reductive, militarized stereotype. This perpetual misrepresentation, continuously reinforced across successive generations of literature and media, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, ensuring that the Waziristanis remain fundamentally misunderstood, structurally voiceless, and perpetually relegated to the violent periphery of the national consciousness, trapped within the enduring and unjust cartography of calumny.

CONCLUSION

The historiography of Waziristan in the twentieth century serves as a profound and necessary case study, illuminating the detrimental endurance of imperial discourse and demonstrating that the construction of identity is intrinsically tied to the mechanisms of power. The evidence consistently demonstrates that the representation of the Waziristani Pashtuns was never an objective

exercise in historical documentation, but a calculated, political, and military necessity. From the systematic erasure of native history by early foundational writers to the administrative dismissals of high-ranking officials, the colonial project consciously and consistently manufactured an image of the Waziristani as the 'uncivilized Other.' This intellectual framework was indispensable for the colonial power, providing the justification for two centuries of military interventions, the use of extraordinary laws like the FCR, and masking the ultimate failure to integrate a people whose sole political crime was their unwavering commitment to autonomy and their traditional code of honor. The 'Noble Savage' trope provided the rhetorical flexibility needed to manage this failure, acknowledging their bravery only to amplify the magnitude of their supposed moral and civilizational deficiency.

Tragically, the advent of the postcolonial state did not dismantle this essentialized narrative but rather repurposed it for modern political utility. The inheritance of colonial laws and the subsequent geopolitical manipulation during the Afghan Jihad created the perfect conditions for the successor state to seamlessly transition from the colonial lexicon of 'savage' and 'barbarous' to the modern, universally understood term 'terrorist.' This profound continuity in misrepresentation has had disastrous real-world repercussions, silencing the authentic Waziristani voice and cementing a national and international perception rooted in pervasive fear and militant stereotypes rather than in their deep cultural heritage or legitimate historical grievances. Moving forward, the decolonization of Waziristan's history must be viewed as an urgent scholarly and political priority, demanding a fundamental paradigm shift that places

indigenous narratives, traditional institutions like the Jirga, and the cultural code of Pashtunwali at the center of scholarship, finally allowing the full, nuanced history of the people to eclipse the one-sided, violent narrative imposed by the powerful.

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