

Competing Narratives of Pashtun Nationalism: *The Kabul Times*, *The Pakistan Observer* and *The Guardian* During the Pashtunistan Crisis (1960–1962)

Yuri Alan Maciel Tesch, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Brazil

The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The Pashtunistan question constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of colonial boundary-making in South Asia. Originating from the imposition of the Durand Line in 1893, which divided Pashtun communities between Afghanistan and British India, the issue intensified following the creation of Pakistan in 1947. This article examines how Afghan, Pakistani, and British newspapers represented the Pashtunistan dispute during the period of heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan from 1960 to 1962. Drawing upon discourse analysis and the theoretical contributions of Anthony D. Smith, Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, Reinhart Koselleck, Patrick Charaudeau, and Michel Pêcheux, the study compares reports published in *The Kabul Times*, *The Pakistan Observer*, *The Dawn*, and *The Guardian*. The findings demonstrate that each newspaper constructed distinct narratives concerning identity, sovereignty, territorial legitimacy, and self-determination. While *The Kabul Times* portrayed Pashtun nationalism as a legitimate anti-colonial struggle, Pakistani newspapers emphasized territorial integrity and national unity. *The Guardian*, meanwhile, reproduced elements of colonial and orientalist discourse in its representations of Afghanistan and the Pashtuns. By comparing these competing narratives, the article contributes to broader debates on nationalism, colonial legacies, media discourse, and identity formation in South Asia during the Cold War.

Keywords: Pashtunistan, Pashtun nationalism, Afghanistan, Pakistan, discourse analysis

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

The partition of British India in 1947 generated a series of territorial, political, and identity-related disputes whose consequences continue to shape South Asian geopolitics. Among these disputes, the Pashtunistan question occupies a distinctive position due to its connection with colonial border-making, ethnic nationalism, and competing projects of state formation. The issue emerged from the legacy of the Durand Line, established in 1893 between Afghanistan and British India, which divided territories historically inhabited by Pashtun populations (Shah, 2000).

When Pakistan emerged as an independent state in 1947, it inherited the Durand Line as its western frontier. Afghanistan, however, refused to recognize the legitimacy of the border in its existing form and became the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the United Nations. Afghan governments argued that Pashtun communities residing west of the Indus River should be granted the right of self-determination. Pakistani authorities, by contrast, viewed such claims as direct threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The dispute intensified during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Diplomatic relations between Kabul and Karachi deteriorated significantly, culminating in military incidents, border tensions, economic restrictions, and competing propaganda campaigns. Newspapers became important arenas through which these political conflicts were articulated and communicated to domestic and international audiences.

Rather than functioning merely as vehicles of information, newspapers actively participated in the production of political meanings. As argued by Neves (2003), periodicals publicized debates, influenced readers, formulated and interpreted ideas, contested and defended positions, proposed solutions, and represented a wide range of interests. Listening to these voices is essential for understanding the diverse political concepts and languages that were being structured and restructured over time.

This article examines how Afghan, Pakistani, and British newspapers represented the Pashtunistan question between 1960 and 1962. It focuses specifically on *The Kabul Times*, *The Pakistan Observer*, *The Dawn*, and *The Guardian*. The central argument advanced here is that these newspapers constructed competing discourses concerning nationalism, sovereignty, and historical legitimacy. *The Kabul Times* framed Pashtun nationalism as a continuation of anti-colonial resistance and national self-determination. Pakistani newspapers defended territorial integrity and state sovereignty, portraying Pashtunistan as a separatist project encouraged by external actors. *The Guardian*, while presenting itself as an independent observer, frequently reproduced colonial and orientalist assumptions in its representations of Afghanistan and the Pashtuns.

By examining these competing narratives, this article seeks to contribute to discussions concerning ethnonationalism, colonial legacies, and the role of the press in shaping political identities. More broadly, it highlights how media representations become instruments through which historical disputes are interpreted, legitimized, and contested.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily informed by Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist approach to nationalism. Smith (1991, 1999, 2009) argues that modern nations do not emerge from a

historical vacuum. Rather, they are frequently rooted in pre-existing ethnic communities, or ethnies, characterized by shared myths, historical memories, symbols, values, traditions, and attachments to specific territories.

According to Smith (1991), nationalism can be defined as an ideological movement seeking autonomy, unity, and identity for a population perceived as constituting a nation. Ethnonationalism emerges when these aspirations are grounded primarily in ethnic identity and collective memory. Such movements commonly invoke narratives of common ancestry, historical continuity, territorial belonging, and cultural uniqueness.

The Pashtun case illustrates many of these characteristics. Narratives concerning the Durand Line, anti-colonial resistance, tribal traditions, and linguistic unity frequently appear within nationalist discourse. References to a lost territorial homeland and to historical injustices inflicted by colonial powers serve as important symbolic resources in the construction of collective identity.

Complementing Smith's framework, Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah (2000) emphasizes the distinctiveness of Pashtun political identity. His concept of ethnoparticularism highlights how Pashtun political consciousness developed independently from both Pakistani nationalism and broader Islamic political movements. According to Shah, Pashtun identity rests upon a combination of language, tribal traditions, historical experience, and cultural practices that cannot be fully reduced to religious or state-centered identities.

This article also draws upon Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) theory of historical temporality. Koselleck distinguishes between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation." The former refers to interpretations of the past that influence present political action, while the latter concerns future aspirations projected from the present. These concepts are particularly useful in analyzing Pashtun nationalist discourse, which frequently invokes historical memories of territorial division while simultaneously envisioning future political autonomy.

Finally, the article incorporates perspectives from discourse analysis. Charaudeau (2013) argues that political communication often relies not only upon explicit statements but also upon implicit meanings, omissions, and presuppositions. Similarly, Pêcheux (1982) emphasizes how ideological structures shape the production and circulation of discourse. Together, these approaches enable an examination of newspapers not simply as repositories of information but as sites where political meanings are actively produced and contested.

By combining ethnonationalist theory with discourse analysis, this study seeks to understand both the symbolic foundations of Pashtun nationalism and the mechanisms through which competing representations were disseminated through the press during the Pashtunistan crisis.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis to examine representations of the Pashtunistan question in Afghan, Pakistani, and British newspapers between 1960 and 1962. The methodological approach is informed by the understanding that newspapers do not merely report political events but actively participate in the construction of social and political realities. Consequently, newspaper texts are treated not as neutral descriptions of events but as discursive artifacts embedded within broader ideological, political, and historical contexts.

The corpus consists of newspaper articles selected from four publications: *The Kabul Times*, *The Pakistan Observer*, *The Dawn*, and *The Guardian*. These newspapers were chosen because they represent distinct political, national, and ideological perspectives regarding the Pashtunistan issue. *The Kabul Times* served as the principal English-language newspaper of the Afghan government and functioned as an important instrument of public diplomacy. *The Pakistan Observer* and *The Dawn* represented influential Pakistani perspectives, while *The Guardian* provided insight into British interpretations of the conflict and its colonial legacies.

The articles selected directly addressed Afghan-Pakistani relations, Pashtun nationalism, border disputes, military incidents, or diplomatic controversies associated with the Pashtunistan question. Particular attention was devoted to reports published during periods of heightened tension, including Afghan incursions into Pakistani territory and the subsequent deterioration of diplomatic relations.

Three analytical dimensions guide the investigation. First, the study examines how each newspaper defined the origins and causes of the Pashtunistan question. Second, it analyzes representations of key political actors, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Pashtun nationalists, British colonial authorities, and international actors. Third, it investigates the ideological assumptions embedded in discussions of nationalism, sovereignty, self-determination, and territorial legitimacy.

The analysis draws upon concepts developed by Charaudeau (2013) and Pêcheux (1982), particularly regarding implicit meanings, ideological positioning, and discursive formations. These perspectives enable an examination of both explicit statements and underlying assumptions embedded within journalistic narratives. Particular attention is devoted to recurring themes, metaphors, historical references, and evaluative language employed by each publication.

Rather than assessing the factual accuracy of individual reports, the study focuses on how newspapers constructed competing interpretations of the same historical events. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how media discourse contributed to the political contestation surrounding Pashtun identity, state sovereignty, and historical memory during the Cold War era.

***The Guardian* and the Persistence of Colonial Discourse**

The Guardian's coverage of the Pashtunistan question reflected broader British concerns regarding regional stability, Cold War geopolitics, and the preservation of territorial arrangements inherited from the colonial era. Although the newspaper frequently presented itself as an objective observer of international affairs, its reporting often reproduced assumptions deeply rooted in imperial modes of representation.

One recurring theme was the characterization of Pashtunistan as an unrealistic or impractical political project. Reports frequently questioned the viability of an independent Pashtun state and emphasized the absence of clearly defined territorial boundaries. Through this framing, the newspaper implicitly legitimized the post-colonial territorial order established following the partition of British India.

Particularly significant was *The Guardian's* treatment of the Durand Line. Rather than portraying the frontier as a contested colonial imposition, the newspaper generally accepted it

as a legitimate international boundary inherited by Pakistan. Afghan challenges to the border were therefore interpreted less as expressions of anti-colonial nationalism and more as sources of instability within a strategically sensitive region.

This perspective was reinforced by Cold War concerns. Throughout the period examined, Afghanistan maintained increasingly close economic and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. *The Guardian* frequently associated Afghan support for Pashtun self-determination with broader Soviet strategic interests. Consequently, the Pashtunistan question was often transformed from an ethnic and historical dispute into a geopolitical issue connected to the global rivalry between East and West.

James Morris and Orientalist Representations of Afghanistan

The clearest examples of colonial discourse appeared in the travel reports and political commentaries of journalist James Morris. His writings offer valuable insight into how Afghanistan continued to be represented through orientalist frameworks long after the formal end of British imperial rule in South Asia.

Morris frequently described Afghanistan as a land suspended between civilization and barbarism. Tribal societies were portrayed as remnants of an earlier historical stage, while political institutions were depicted as fragile, authoritarian, or underdeveloped. Such descriptions closely resemble what Edward Said (2003) identified as Orientalism: a system of knowledge that constructs the East as exotic, irrational, and fundamentally different from the modern West.

Afghanistan emerged in Morris's writings as both fascinating and backward. The country was represented as a geographical frontier populated by fierce tribes, ancient customs, and political instability. Development and modernization were portrayed as external processes introduced through foreign assistance, whether Soviet or Western. Afghans themselves appeared less as historical agents than as passive recipients of modernization projects.

These representations carried important political implications. By emphasizing Afghan backwardness and political immaturity, Morris indirectly reinforced arguments supporting existing geopolitical arrangements. If Afghanistan was perceived as politically fragile and socially underdeveloped, then Afghan claims concerning Pashtun self-determination could be dismissed more easily as unrealistic or irresponsible.

The language employed by Morris frequently reflected paternalistic assumptions characteristic of colonial discourse. Afghan society was often evaluated according to Western standards of political development and social progress. Tribal institutions were depicted as obstacles to modernization rather than as historically rooted forms of social organization. Such representations contributed to a broader narrative in which Western models of governance and development appeared naturally superior.

Abdul Huq Waleh and the Contestation of Colonial Narratives

The orientalist representations advanced by Morris did not go unchallenged. One of the most significant responses came from Abdul Huq Waleh, a member of the Royal Afghan Embassy in London. Through a public letter addressed to *The Guardian*, Waleh directly criticized Morris's portrayal of Afghanistan.

Waleh accused Morris of relying upon outdated stereotypes inherited from nineteenth-century colonial literature. According to Waleh, the journalist ignored significant social, economic, and political transformations occurring within Afghanistan. Educational reforms, infrastructure projects, industrial development, and urban modernization received little attention in Morris's account, despite their importance in contemporary Afghan society.

More importantly, Waleh challenged the underlying assumptions embedded within Morris's narrative. He argued that Afghanistan should not be judged according to colonial standards that portrayed non-Western societies as perpetually deficient or incomplete. Instead, Afghanistan should be understood on its own historical and cultural terms.

The exchange between Morris and Waleh illustrates that representations of Afghanistan were themselves sites of political struggle. Competing narratives emerged not only regarding the Pashtunistan question but also concerning the meaning of modernity, development, and national identity. Whereas Morris reproduced elements of an orientalist worldview, Waleh sought to challenge and deconstruct those representations.

This contestation reveals the persistence of colonial epistemologies within post-colonial media discourse. Even after the formal end of empire, struggles over representation continued to shape how Afghanistan and its people were understood internationally. The Pashtunistan question cannot therefore be separated from broader debates concerning knowledge, power, and the legacy of colonialism in South Asia.

The Kabul Times and the Anti-colonial Narrative

In contrast to *The Guardian*, *The Kabul Times* consistently interpreted the Pashtunistan question through the lens of anti-colonialism and national self-determination. As the first English-language newspaper published by the Afghan government, it functioned not merely as a source of information but as an instrument of public diplomacy designed to communicate Afghan perspectives to international audiences.

The newspaper's treatment of the Pashtunistan issue was deeply influenced by the official position of the Afghan state. Throughout the articles examined, the Durand Line was portrayed as an illegitimate colonial imposition forced upon Afghanistan by the British Empire. Rather than recognizing the border as a legitimate international frontier, *The Kabul Times* consistently represented it as an artificial division that fragmented a historically unified people.

This interpretation transformed the Pashtunistan question from a bilateral dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan into a broader issue of decolonization. The struggle for Pashtun self-determination was presented as part of a wider historical process through which colonized peoples sought to recover rights denied by imperial powers.

Such a perspective reflected broader political developments occurring throughout Asia and Africa during the mid-twentieth century. As former colonies gained independence and challenged inherited colonial boundaries, concepts such as self-determination, sovereignty, and national liberation acquired increasing importance within international political discourse. *The Kabul Times* situated the Pashtun cause within this broader global movement.

Abdul Rahman Pazhwak and the Historical Foundations of Pashtun Nationalism

A central figure in the newspaper's treatment of the Pashtunistan question was Abdul Rahman Pazhwak. Diplomat, poet, journalist, and former representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Pazhwak authored a series of articles dedicated to explaining the historical origins and political legitimacy of the Pashtunistan movement.

Pazhwak's writings reveal a sophisticated effort to construct a historical narrative capable of legitimizing contemporary political claims. Rather than focusing exclusively upon recent political events, he situated the Pashtun question within a much longer historical framework extending back to antiquity.

References to classical authors, particularly Herodotus, were employed to emphasize the antiquity of Pashtun presence in the region. Similarly, frequent references to Ariana and other historical territorial designations sought to demonstrate continuity between ancient populations and contemporary Pashtun communities. Through these historical connections, Pazhwak attempted to establish that Pashtun identity predated both British colonialism and the creation of Pakistan.

This strategy closely corresponds to Anthony Smith's (1999) observation that nationalist movements frequently mobilize myths of origin, collective memories, and symbolic attachments to territory.

For Pazhwak, the significance of history extended beyond the mere reconstruction of the past. Historical memory functioned as a tool through which contemporary political claims could be legitimized. The Durand Line was not simply represented as a diplomatic agreement imposed in 1893; it was portrayed as a historical injustice that interrupted the natural development of a national community.

Historical Memory and Ethnonationalist Discourse

One of the most distinctive features of *The Kabul Times* was its systematic use of historical memory as a mechanism of political persuasion. The newspaper repeatedly invoked episodes of anti-colonial resistance, tribal autonomy, and cultural continuity in order to strengthen the legitimacy of Pashtun nationalist aspirations.

This approach aligns closely with Smith's (2009) ethno-symbolist framework. According to Smith, nationalism frequently draws its strength from pre-existing cultural resources, including myths, memories, traditions, heroes, and sacred territories. These symbolic elements provide emotional and historical depth to political projects seeking autonomy or independence.

Within *The Kabul Times*, Pashtun nationalism was consistently represented as the continuation of a historical struggle rather than as a recent political invention. British military campaigns in frontier regions were recalled as evidence of long-standing resistance against foreign domination. Tribal leaders and anti-colonial activists were transformed into symbols of collective perseverance and national dignity.

The repeated invocation of historical suffering served an important political purpose. By emphasizing colonial oppression and territorial division, the newspaper constructed a narrative

in which the demand for self-determination appeared not only legitimate but morally necessary. Contemporary political aspirations were therefore linked directly to historical grievances.

This process illustrates how collective memory can function as a powerful instrument of political mobilization. Rather than providing a neutral account of the past, *The Kabul Times* selectively interpreted historical events in ways that reinforced contemporary nationalist objectives.

Koselleck, Historical Time, and the Pashtunistan Question

Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) concepts of “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” provide a particularly useful framework for understanding the temporal structure of Pashtun nationalist discourse.

The “space of experience” refers to how historical experiences are remembered and interpreted in the present. In the case of *The Kabul Times*, this space was populated by memories of colonial intervention, territorial fragmentation, anti-colonial resistance, and cultural continuity. These historical experiences formed the foundation upon which contemporary political arguments were constructed.

The “horizon of expectation,” by contrast, refers to future possibilities imagined from the standpoint of the present. Throughout the newspaper's coverage, the future was imagined as a moment in which Pashtun communities would recover political autonomy and overcome the injustices associated with colonial rule.

The relationship between these two temporal dimensions is particularly significant. The newspaper's political project depended upon transforming historical memories into future aspirations. The past was not merely remembered; it was mobilized to justify expectations concerning the future.

This temporal structure helps explain the persistence of the Pashtunistan question. Even though the Durand Line had existed for decades, its meaning continued to be reinterpreted through nationalist discourse. Historical grievances remained politically relevant because they were continuously connected to future hopes of self-determination.

Pakistan as the Successor to Colonial Rule

Perhaps the most important discursive strategy employed by *The Kabul Times* involved portraying Pakistan as the successor to British colonial authority in the region.

This argument rested upon several interconnected claims. First, Pakistan inherited and maintained the Durand Line, thereby preserving what the newspaper regarded as an illegitimate colonial boundary. Second, Pakistani authorities were accused of continuing administrative and security practices originally established under British rule. Third, Pakistan was portrayed as systematically denying Pashtun communities the right to determine their own political future.

By constructing Pakistan as a continuation of colonial authority, *The Kabul Times* transformed a contemporary interstate dispute into a broader struggle between colonialism and national liberation. The Afghan state appeared as the defender of anti-colonial principles, while Pakistan emerged as the guardian of an inherited colonial order.

This narrative simplified complex political realities, yet it proved highly effective as a form of political communication. By linking the Pashtunistan issue to global anti-colonial movements, the newspaper situated the Pashtun cause within a moral framework that resonated strongly during the era of decolonization.

The result was a powerful nationalist discourse in which history, memory, identity, and political aspiration converged. Through its coverage of the Pashtunistan question, *The Kabul Times* did not merely report political events; it actively participated in the construction of a collective narrative designed to legitimize claims for self-determination and challenge the territorial order inherited from colonial rule.

The Pakistan Observer, The Dawn, and the Defense of Territorial Integrity

In contrast to the anti-colonial discourse promoted by *The Kabul Times*, Pakistani newspapers approached the Pashtunistan question primarily through the framework of state sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity. Both *The Pakistan Observer* and *The Dawn* consistently rejected Afghan claims regarding Pashtun self-determination and portrayed the issue as a challenge to the legitimacy of the Pakistani state.

For Pakistani commentators, the creation of Pakistan in 1947 represented the culmination of Muslim political aspirations in South Asia. The incorporation of the former North-West Frontier Province into Pakistan was therefore considered a settled political and constitutional matter. Consequently, Afghan support for Pashtun nationalism was interpreted not as a legitimate concern for self-determination but as interference in Pakistan's internal affairs.

This position was reinforced by references to political participation and economic development within Pashtun-majority regions. Pakistani newspapers emphasized infrastructure projects, educational expansion, administrative reforms, and increasing political representation as evidence that Pashtun communities were fully integrated into the Pakistani state. Such arguments sought to undermine claims that Pashtuns remained politically marginalized or colonized.

From this perspective, Pashtunistan was represented as an artificial political project promoted by Kabul rather than a genuine expression of popular sentiment among Pakistani Pashtuns. The movement was frequently described as a source of instability that threatened national cohesion and regional security.

The emphasis on territorial integrity reflected broader concerns regarding state-building in post-colonial Pakistan. Given the country's ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity, separatist movements posed significant challenges to political consolidation. Consequently, official narratives frequently portrayed demands for autonomy as threats to national unity.

Comparative Analysis of Competing Discourses

The comparison of Afghan, Pakistani, and British newspapers reveals substantial differences in how the Pashtunistan question was understood and represented.

Each newspaper assigned responsibility for the conflict differently. *The Kabul Times* identified British colonialism and the Durand Line as the primary causes of the dispute, while simultaneously portraying Pakistan as the inheritor of colonial structures. Pakistani newspapers

attributed responsibility to Afghan interference and nationalist agitation. *The Guardian* generally framed the issue as the result of Afghan political ambitions and regional instability.

Differences also emerged regarding the representation of Pashtun nationalism itself. *The Kabul Times* portrayed the movement as a legitimate expression of historical identity and anti-colonial resistance. Pakistani newspapers depicted it as a separatist project that threatened national sovereignty. British reporting frequently represented it as an impractical political aspiration lacking clear territorial and institutional foundations.

Historical narratives varied considerably across the three media environments. Afghan newspapers relied heavily upon collective memory, historical continuity, and anti-colonial symbolism. Pakistani newspapers emphasized constitutional legality, state formation, and territorial legitimacy. British reporting frequently drew upon imperial perspectives and Cold War geopolitical concerns.

Perhaps most significantly, each newspaper constructed a different understanding of political legitimacy. For *The Kabul Times*, legitimacy derived from historical identity and the principle of self-determination. For Pakistani newspapers, legitimacy emerged from state sovereignty and constitutional authority. For *The Guardian*, legitimacy was generally associated with international stability and the preservation of existing territorial arrangements.

The Politics of Representation

The comparison demonstrates that newspapers functioned as active participants in political struggles rather than neutral observers of events. Through framing, selection, omission, and interpretation, they shaped competing understandings of history, identity, and legitimacy.

The Kabul Times mobilized historical memory and anti-colonial rhetoric to internationalize the Pashtun cause. Pakistani newspapers employed the language of sovereignty and statehood to defend the territorial status quo. *The Guardian* reproduced elements of colonial and orientalist discourse while simultaneously interpreting the conflict through Cold War strategic concerns.

These competing narratives illustrate how media institutions contribute to the construction of political realities. Newspapers not only inform audiences but also shape collective understandings of the past, define the boundaries of legitimate political action, and influence perceptions of national identity.

The Pashtunistan question therefore existed not only as a territorial and political dispute but also as a discursive struggle over meaning. Competing actors sought to define who possessed legitimate claims to territory, identity, and sovereignty. The press became one of the principal arenas through which these struggles were articulated and contested.

Conclusion

This article examined the representations of the Pashtunistan question in *The Kabul Times*, *The Pakistan Observer*, *The Dawn*, and *The Guardian* during the period of heightened Afghan-Pakistani tensions between 1960 and 1962. Through a comparative analysis of media discourse, the study demonstrated that newspapers functioned not merely as sources of information but as active participants in the construction of political meanings, historical narratives, and national identities.

The findings reveal that the newspapers analyzed produced markedly different interpretations of the same historical events. *The Kabul Times* consistently framed Pashtun nationalism as a legitimate anti-colonial movement rooted in historical continuity, ethnic identity, and the right to self-determination. Through the mobilization of historical memory, references to colonial injustice, and appeals to collective identity, the newspaper sought to legitimize Afghan support for the Pashtun cause and challenge the territorial order established by the Durand Line.

Pakistani newspapers adopted an opposing perspective. *The Pakistan Observer* and *The Dawn* emphasized territorial integrity, constitutional legitimacy, and state sovereignty. Afghan support for Pashtun nationalism was interpreted as interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs and as a threat to national unity. The resulting discourse reinforced the legitimacy of the Pakistani state while delegitimizing separatist aspirations.

The Guardian occupied a distinct position. Although formally detached from the dispute, its reporting frequently reflected assumptions inherited from Britain's colonial experience in South Asia. The newspaper often portrayed Pashtunistan as an unrealistic political project and represented Afghanistan through orientalist frameworks that emphasized backwardness, instability, and political immaturity. Such representations reveal the persistence of colonial modes of understanding long after the formal dissolution of empire.

The study further demonstrates the usefulness of ethnonationalist theory for understanding the Pashtun question. Smith's concepts of ethnic identity, collective memory, myths of origin, and territorial attachment provide valuable tools for interpreting the symbolic foundations of Pashtun nationalism. Similarly, Koselleck's concepts of the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" help explain how historical grievances concerning the Durand Line continued to shape political aspirations decades after the establishment of the border.

More broadly, the article contributes to scholarship on nationalism, media discourse, and post-colonial state formation by illustrating how competing narratives shape understandings of legitimacy and sovereignty. The Pashtunistan question existed not only as a geopolitical dispute but also as a struggle over historical interpretation, identity construction, and political meaning.

Although the geopolitical environment of South Asia has changed considerably since the early 1960s, many of the issues examined in this study remain relevant. Debates concerning the Durand Line, Pashtun identity, and self-determination continue to influence Afghan-Pakistani relations. The historical narratives analyzed here continue to resonate within contemporary political discourse, demonstrating the enduring significance of colonial boundaries and ethnonationalist claims in the region.

This study is limited by its focus on a selected corpus of English-language newspapers. While these publications provide valuable insight into official and elite perspectives, they do not fully capture the diversity of opinions present among Pashtun communities themselves. Future research may benefit from incorporating Pashto-language newspapers, oral histories, memoirs, and archival materials from both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Additionally, the study focuses on a relatively short period between 1960 and 1962. Expanding the chronological scope to include earlier and later phases of the Pashtunistan movement would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of nationalist discourse in the region.

Future studies may explore comparative studies involving other ethnonationalist movements in South Asia and the Middle East may also provide valuable insights into the relationship between historical memory, media discourse, and political mobilization.

Furthermore, digital archives and computational methods offer new opportunities for examining large collections of newspapers and tracing discursive patterns across longer periods of time. Such approaches may deepen our understanding of how nationalist narratives are constructed, transformed, and disseminated.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the support of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES). This article derives from broader doctoral research concerning Pashtun ethnonationalism, colonial legacies, and political discourse in South Asia. The author also expresses gratitude to colleagues and reviewers whose comments contributed to the improvement of this manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Generative AI technology was used during the translation and language revision, and formatting of this manuscript in accordance with the IAFOR Conference Proceedings Guidelines. The author reviewed, edited, verified, and assumes full responsibility for all arguments, interpretations, and conclusions presented in the final manuscript.

References

- Charaudeau, P. (2013). *Language and discourse*. Routledge.
- Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures past: On the semantics of historical time*. Columbia University Press.
- Neves, L. M. B. P. (2003). *Corcundas e constitucionais: A cultura política da independência (1820–1822)* [Hunchbacks and Constitutionals: The Political Culture of Brazilian Independence (1820–1822)]. Revan.
- Pêcheux, M. (1982). *Language, semantics and ideology*. St. Martin's Press.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books.
- Shah, S. W. A. (2000). *Ethnicity, Islam and nationalism among the Pashtuns of North-West Frontier Province*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. Penguin Books.
- Smith, A. D. (1999). *Myths and memories of the nation*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. Routledge.

Contact email: yuri.tesch@hotmail.com