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**THE DIALECTICS OF STATE NATIONALISM AND ETHNO-
REGIONAL NATIONALISM IN FATIMA BHUTTO'S THE
SHADOW OF THE CRESCENT MOON**

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Abstract

*The present study explores the dialectics between Pakistani state nationalism and ethno-regional nationalism of Mir Ali in Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. The study utilizes the theoretical model of nationalism developed by Anderson through his *Imagined Communities*. Furthermore, Althusser's concepts of *Repressive State Apparatus* and *Ideological State Apparatus* are used to explain the imposition of official nationalism by the state on the people of Mir Ali. Anderson's model is further supported by the concepts of Anthony D Smith on nationalism. The study analyses the conflict between these contrastive narratives of nationalism, Ethno-regional nationalism – anchored on connection with ancestral land, collective history and memories - confronts the state's centralized authority and imagination. This conflict sprawls through generations. Pakistani state imposes its official nationalism through the repressive state machinery of Pakistani Army and law enforcement agencies. In addition, the Pakistani state follows the policy of integration through scholarships, visa lotteries and special recruitment strategies in Pakistan Army and civil bureaucracy. The study is qualitative and interpretative in its nature. Close reading is used as a tool for the textual analysis of the novel. The study suggests that official nationalism triumphs over ethno-regional narratives through the provision of scholarships and jobs to the younger generation of Mir Ali. The strategy of using soft powers by the state diffuses the resistance narrative of Mir Ali in Bhutto's novel.*

Keywords: *Nationalism, Imagined Communities, Sovereignty, Memories, Ethnic Identities, Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus*

Introduction

Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013) was selected for Women's Prize for Fiction in 2014. Written in the backdrop of War on Terror, the novel is set in the tribal area of Mir Ali located near the Pak-Afghan border. Life in Mir Ali moves under the shadow of guns, drones, and whispered loyalties in the novel. It is Eid morning, a day of celebration, but the atmosphere is tense and there is uncertain situation.

The narrative unfolds a web of memories where past flows into present revealing sacrifices, betrayals, childhood bonds and political wakening of each character. The novel focuses not only about politics or militancy. It seems more a narrative of loyalty; loyalty to ideology, family and land. Under the crescent moon symbolizing faith and identity, the characters in the novel pursue different paths. Some choose rebellion, while others choose escape and government services. Thus, the novel portrays the tragic situation of Mir Ali where political struggle and personal destinies are inseparably intertwined.

The conflict between the Pakistani state and the people of Mir Ali is the central thread of the novel. The narrative of the plot seems to represent a clash between state nationalism and ethno-regional nationalism. The people of Mir Ali imagine themselves as a distinct community, united by shared culture, history, language and attachment to the land. Their sense of identity and belonging is rooted in their land, history and collective memory. And this imagined solidarity drives their demand for sovereignty, autonomy and control over their resources. They show resistance to state interference, considering it as an intrusion upon their land and sovereignty, as well as a threat to their

political and cultural existence. In this manner, the novel portrays a community that asserts its right to political autonomy and self-governance. In contrast, the state imagines Mir Ali as an inseparable part of the state territory and administered by central authority. Through integrationist policies, military presence and administrative control, the state claims its authority and writ over the region. The state legitimizes its official nationalism and national unity within the framework of territorial integrity and sovereignty. Consequently, the claims of the people of Mir Ali anchored in ethno-regional nationalism and the state of Pakistan based on official nationalism create conflict in the narrative space of the novel.

This study probes the conflict between Pakistani state and the people of Mir Ali from Benedict Anderson's model of Nationalism. Anderson (1983) sees nation as "an imagined community" (p. 6). He argues that nation or nationalism is "social construction", imagined by the people (P. 4) In Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, both the Pakistani state and the ethnic community of Mir Ali project themselves as opposing imagined communities. Both represent different narratives of legitimacy, belonging and collective identity. The subsequent conflict arises not only from territorial dispute but from imagination, political belonging, and sovereignty. This study probes how the novel represents the clash between these two imagined communities; one rooted in national integration and state-centred nationalism while the other grounded in local identity and ethnic nationalism. Further, the study explores how these two versions of state nationalism and ethno-regional nationalism is linked with the struggle over land, sovereignty and identity in the novel.

Research Question

How does Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* represent the clash between Mir Ali's ethnic-regional imagination and the Pakistani state's official nationalism?

Literature Review

Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* is critiqued by academic scholars from different perspectives. Ajmal, Hussain and Anjum (2025) explore *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* from the perspective of socio-political realities and ecological degradation in Waziristan. Through local dialects, metaphors, Bhutto connects environmental decline with human experiences (p.19). The study highlights social marginalization, state oppression and military control, focusing on socio-political and ecological struggles (p. 23). The study alerts readers to the connection between ecological crisis and military-political upheavals.

Likewise, Ullah et al. (2025) highlights the perpetual insecurities and restricted freedom of the people of Mir Ali, due to war, militancy and drones strikes. The study emphasizes how the geography of war disrupt Pashtuns' traditional practices, such as gathering, Ashar cooperation and Hujra undermining social cohesion and communal identity. The study further examines how rigid ideologies of militants enforce punishment and religious scrutiny enhancing the deterioration and psychological trauma of the Pashtuns' sociocultural fabric (p. 37). Similarly, Ahmed, Mahrosh and Tariq (2024) investigated how political instability, social inequality and conflict force people to migrate from Pakistan's tribal Areas. (p. 435). The study underscores disrupted life, restricted education and fear caused by military presence (p. 435). The study probes how unemployment, poor medical facilities and economic struggles further push migration. Furthermore family disruption, violence against women and psychological trauma aggravate the situation for people of Mir Ali (p. 437).

Correspondingly, Zainab et al. (2020) probes Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* from the lens of the repercussions of War on Terror in tribal areas of Pakistan. The research underscores military oppression, social injustices and political corruption that instill fear and disrupt daily life. The study focuses on the perseverance of female characters, particularly, Mina and Samarra in the midst of loss and violence (p. 2249).

In addition, Khan, Ali and Zeeshan (2023) critique the novel from postcolonial perspective. The study discusses how Mir Ali's natives, particularly, Shias and Pashtuns are marginalized and excluded within Pakistani society due to elite domination, state neglect and sectarian violence. Moreover, the study focuses on trauma and insecurity that compel characters like Samarra and Aman Erum to struggle for survival and autonomy (p.1187). In a similar way, Hussain et al. (2024) states that *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* depicts trauma as both a form of resistance and reflection highlighting the oppression in FATA through the characters of Sikandar and Samarra (p.797). The study suggests that the narrative functions as a counter-archive, resisting state amnesia, and links literary narratives to youth activism (p. 799).

Likewise Aman et al. (2024) investigates the novel from the perspective of War on Terror and post 9/11 surveillance. The study examines how the War on Terror and post-9/11 surveillance generated instability and threat for the residents of Mir Ali. Characters like Sikandar and Aman Erum are subjected to Taliban's attacks, identity checks and constant monitoring, resulting in trauma and displacement. It also examines Fatima Bhutto's portrayal of how state violence disrupts relationship, trust and daily life, making normalcy and freedom impossible (p. 805)). Finally, Zaidi and Farooq (2022) conduct a comparative analysis of *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, *Butterfly Season*, and *Stained* focusing on the subversion of the traditional feminine roles in Pakistani society. In Bhutto's narrative, Mina and Samarra challenges patriarchal norms through public resistance, activism and courage engaging in social activities that are commonly associated with males. Likewise the *Butterfly Season* depicts Rumi as an independent and bold woman while *Stained* presents Selina as symbol of resistance and.

The current study contributes to the existing critical literature on Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* from the lens of the two contrastive narratives of Ethno-regional nationalism of Mir Ali and the official nationalism of the Pakistani state. Further, this study uses Anderson's model of nationalism for probing the dichotomy of these narrative of nationalisms in the novel.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the theoretical framework of nationalism developed by Anderson through *Imagined Communities*. Anderson (1983) writes that nations are social construct, "imagined" by their members through collective symbols, shared memory, and emotional connections (p. 6). Anderson's model is supplemented by Anthony D. Smith, Achankeng and Althusserian concepts.

Anthony D. Smith's work (1986) on "ethnic identity and memory" emphasizes how intergenerational transmission and historical narratives sustain the ethnic imagined community, connecting the ongoing struggles to moral obligation and ancestral legacies. In addition, Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses serve as a lens to understand the Pakistani state's combined strategies: at first seeking ideological integration through media, education and institutional assimilation, and ultimately resorting to violence and coercion to assert authority over Mir Ali's ethnic imagination. Besides, such relevant views from Ozkirimli's *Theories of Nationalism A Critical Introduction* (2017) and Achankeng *Intra-State Conflicts in Postcolonial World* (2015), are incorporated to support the theory and the context of the study. Thus, these concepts collectively, provide a comprehensive interpretative lens to analyze how ethnic nationalism and state nationalism imagine, compete and actualize itself in Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*.

Research Methodology

The current study is qualitative and interpretative in its nature. The primary method employed is textual analysis. The primary source for analysis is the text of *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* by Fatima Bhutto. In addition, relevant books and research articles serve as secondary source of data that provides contextual and theoretical support. Close reading technique is used for probing *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. According to Greenham (2019), close reading technique involves a

detailed examination of a text, focusing on word, sentences, paragraphs, stanzas or chapters, as well as the whole of the text (p.6). Through this reading technique, the study explores the dialectics of the official nationalism of the Pakistani state and the ethno-regional nationalism of the people of the Mir Ali in the novel.

Analysis

The Shadow of the Crescent Moon represents a region, Mir Ali, where opposing visions of sovereignty and belonging collide. Ethno-regional identity in the tribal area of Mir Ali is inseparable from territory, memory and history. The people of Mir Ali, rooted in a distinct culture, language and ancestral narratives, imagine themselves as an independent community, free from the central state. Their belonging transcends sectarian differences; it is instead rooted in shared memory, collective struggles and attachment to the land. Contrarily, the state pursues the creation of a national imagination, where Mir Ali is seen as an integrated part of the state. Through military, administrative and ideological mechanisms, the state tries to assert territorial sovereignty, instill loyalty and reshape identity of Mir Ali. This conflict between state and regional nationalism is visible from the death of Hayat elder brother while “fighting in the insurgencies against the army” (p. 83).

Anderson concept of “the nation as politically imagined community” helps us understand this conflict (p. 6). Anderson writes that “nations exist in the minds of the members of community, as symbolic and shared entities, even among those, who never met or even interacted” (p.6). This symbolic identity is evident from the ethnic and regional imagination of Mir Ali that can be seen in opposition to the Pakistani state trying to impose its official imagination through military presence, media and state institutions on the people of Mir Ali. In the light of Anderson's framework, the analysis seeks to explore how the people of Mir Ali construct identity through sacrifices, history and land, while the state strives to assert sovereignty through ideology, coercion and integrationist strategies.

Anderson defines nation as “an imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign; it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each live the image of their communion” (p. 6). This concept seems visible in the *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* through the community of Mir Ali, where religious differences are overshadowed by shared language, land and political struggle. The novel projects this imagined identity as “Hindu and Christian communities across the border, wore only shalwar kameez. They didn’t stand out as minorities; nothing about them seemed foreign at all. They spoke Pashto perfectly, with no accent, and looked like all the other ladies in the town” (p.16). Religious minorities here can not be separated from the Pashtun Muslim majority. Their language, clothing and physical presence ground them in the same cultural landscape. Anderson writes their belonging does not rely on shared faith or face-to-face interaction, but on shared symbols of community such as speech, dress and attachment to the land, as well as they imagine themselves as part of the same territory (p. 6). Similarly, Geertz (1993) writes that “These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have ineffable and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves (p. 259). This imagined solidarity intensifies in times of political unrest. Bhutto writes that “Shias who had left, feeling threatened by the Sunni movements....sent their sons back to Mir Ali. All in the service of brotherhood” (p.13). The call to defend Mir Ali transforms religious division into secondary importance. Association with land, history and collective memories become part of ethno-regional identity of Mir Ali. Bhutto expression, “The battle for Mir Ali was no longer restricted to panegyrics” suggests that territorial defense and sovereignty unite people and transcend sectarian divisions (p.16). Mir Ali becomes an imaginative geography and collective homeland worthy of collective sacrifice.

This imagined identity and symbolic unity is visible from the death scene of nationalists,

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Balach and Azmary. The imagined unity is displayed by public mourning in Mir Ali as “Men and women gathered on campus, praying together and weeping. The janitorial staff, mainly poor Christians, came too. They all gathered to march for Azmaray who was known, and for Balach, who was not” (p. 4). Those who pray “in a different tongue” gather for the same cause. Even the people who personally did not know Balach participate in his mourning. Ozkirimli in his *Theories of Nationalism* (2017) writes that “one is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the tie itself” (p. 58). Correspondingly, Horowitz (2002), states that “ethnic affiliation is based on community even communion, at a level that can only be justified by myths of common ancestry and analogies of ethnicity to the family” (p. 75).

Anderson writes that the members of a nation do not need direct familiarity to feel a profound horizontal comradeship (p.6). They take action in the name of a collective imagined community. Therefore, Shias, Sunnis, Christians, Hindus and Pashtuns are not primarily defined through religion in Fatima Bhutto’s novel. Instead, they imagine themselves as one people, rooted in a shared struggle and collective land. Their unity in language, dress, public mourning, and defense of territory demonstrates Anderson argument of the nation as an imagined political community, yet sovereign in its shared political and emotional commitment to the homeland. The ethnic imagination of Mir Ali is not limited to shared territory, language and culture; it is rather rooted in the long tradition of history, memory and ancestry. This spontaneous attachment and sense of belonging is described by Ozkirimli as “primordialism”. He asserts that “primordial identities and attachment are given a priori, prior to all attachment and interaction. Primordial attachment are natural, even spiritual, rather than sociological.” He maintains that “some attachment seems to flow more from a sense of natural affinity than social interaction (p. 58).

The imaginative geography of Mir Ali’s ethno-regional nationalism is evident from the mythical link of the present generation with their ancestors. The cultural myths and symbols of Mir Ali serve as a link between the present generation and their ancestors for the integrity of the imagined identity and community. This is demonstrated by Inayat’s transmission of cartographic measurements and rituals to his son “His father had taught him maps of the land, drawn from memory and measured in footsteps, not miles. Inayat thought his son would find belonging in this cartography of the heart. But Inayat was thinking of a different boy, a much younger son”(p. 4). This reflects Anderson argument that ethnic nationalism is deeply rooted in historical memories. Unlike state nationalism, it retains its ties through historical continuity which flows from generation to generation through memory and a sense of belonging to the land. According to Anderson the modern states of Official nationalism draws boundaries physically and scientifically, documenting them through map and other administrative means, whereas ethnic people realize these boundaries through memory, and thereby, orally pass them unto next generations. They measure boundaries through footsteps, a tradition introduced by their forefathers showing allegiance to their ancestral tradition than state’s mechanisms of demarcating boundaries.

This aspect can further be aligned with Anthony D. Smith argument, who In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) asserts that ethnic communities endure through “myth memories, values and symbols” that are transmitted across generations (p. 15). He maintains that it is the continuity of shared historical memory that binds members of an ethnic to their ancestral homeland and sustains their collective identity over time (p. 22). Memory is not only past recollection; it is the mechanism of culture through which ethnic identity is reproduced and preserved. Similarly, Eagleton (2004) explains that “Nationalism is a romantic brand of politics, casting a nostalgic glance back to a noble past” (p.104). He writes about this romantic dimension as “Nationalism is much taken by myths, heroes, and lofty ideals; yet it is also popular in the sense of being anchored in the life of the mass of

the people” (p.103). The romantic vision of Mir Ali’s ethno- regional imagination is reflected in its ancestral narrative of sacrifice and struggle.

Inayat in Bhutto’s novel acts as preserver and transmitter of the collective memories and memorization of the nostalgic romantic nationalism of Mir Ali. Inayat thinks of Mir Ali as a nation, distinctive and ancient. Oskirimli writes that ancient nation "claims some form of collective, bounded, territorial sovereignty in the name of distinctive identity" (p. 72). Inayat is driven to preserve this distinctiveness, sovereignty and ethnic identity of Mir Ali’s history through the collective memory. Bhutto narrates, “Inayat had fought in the first battle for Mir Ali in the 1950s, and had survived. He had fought amongst the bravest, against the nervous young soldiers of Pakistan’s new army. He had raised his young sons on the stories of Mir Ali’s struggles” (p.7). Inayat’s personal experience turns into collective memory. He transforms his personal history into communal heritage through the narrative of his first battle. In Smith’s view, this is the recreation of ethnic memory that ties the younger generation to a shared past of rebellion, emphasizing that the imagined community exists across ages and generations. “Inayat was a sentinel of Mir Ali’s history;... ‘Don’t isolate the boy,’ Zainab begged her husband as she watched him take their youngest into his memory, nightly feeding Hayat the stories” (p.9). Inayat’s narration of history is both strategic and deliberate. As a “sentinel,” he preserves the shared memory through its transmission to Hayat. This can be seen to illustrate Smith’s concept that ethnic identity sustains itself through the conscious preservation and teaching of shared memories and myths. By “nightly feeding Hayat the stories” Inayat converts remembrance into duty, embedding memory within the family structure (p. 86). “Inayat told Hayat fables as they walked in the evenings, preparing to head home for dinner” (p. 86). History becomes moral instruction through fables. Memory is framed as ethical guidance, conditioning Hayat’s sense of moral obligation toward Mir Ali. “Inayat spoke the moral of the story to the one son who knew how precious the summit of Mir Ali was” (p.88).

The land and its romantic history of past rebellions is uplifted into a an imaginative sacred symbol. Its security and Sovereignty is imagined as moral obligation, focusing on emotional attachment to the land. The romantic ethno-regional energy is visible from Inayat’s futuristic yearning for Mir Ali’s freedom as, “Come to my grave and tell me Mir Ali is free. Whisper it to me, even when I’m gone” (p.88). This line seems to depict Smith’s claim that ethnic memory moves beyond individual life span. This reflects Inayat’s dream of the golden age for the people of Mir Ali. Inayat reshapes the struggle for independence into an intergenerational obligation. Even after death, memory persists to administer the future. Thus, the imagined community transcends continuous physical existence. Eventually, the process of transmission is completed via reception, “Hayat did not speak of Mir Ali, he listened for her” (p.12). Listening itself becomes the act of absorption. Hayat silently internalizes the inherited memory, making it part of resistance narrative and action. In this way, ethnic nationalism of Mir Ali survives not solely through resistance, but through the persistent reproduction of collective memory what Smith calls as the essence of enduring ethnic communities.

The ethnic imagination of Mir Ali collides with official nationalism of the Pakistani state due to its intrinsic nature. These imaginative realms of ethnic and official nationalisms function differently from each other. Ethnic nationalism is spontaneous. On the other hand, official nationalism is deliberate. However, Anderson distinguishes between state nationalism bordering on patriotism and ethnic nationalism. According to Anderson, state nationalism is consciously constructed, forged and sustained for the sake of integration despite of its heterogeneous nature. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism is natural, spontaneous, ancient and homogeneous (p. 110). The Mir Ali community imagine themselves through shared language, history, territory and memory that create a clash with national imagination or state nationalism. According to Anderson, official nationalism is exercised for the purpose of integration. He argues that unlike ethnic nationalism,

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"official nationalism depends on national ideology circulated through mass media, the educational system, administrative mechanisms, and military structures in order to produce national integration (p.33). Achankeng, (2015) presents a similar view stating that "Under colonialism, the government developed a highly authoritarian set of institutions, laws and tactics designed to administer the country and repress emerging associations opposed to its rule. It was characterized by centralized administration that was the arm of the executive" (p. 10). He sustains that "many postcolonial states are held together through the use of force because of the many contradictions of the colonial state" (p. 4).

Achankeng considers "nation-state as false and unnatural with imaginary claims to unity, collectivity, and geographic space (p. 19). Inheriting the legacy of British colonialism, the state of Pakistan imposes its official nationalism through repressive and Ideological state apparatus on the people of Mir Ali in Bhutto's novel. Louis Althusser (1971) writes that the state maintains power and ideology through two types of apparatuses; the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The Repressive state apparatus is visible through police, court, army and means of coercion. On the other hand the Ideological State apparatus works through religion, family, education and cultural industry of the state. These strategies are used by the Pakistani state to impose its official ideology on the people of Mir Ali in Fatima Bhutto's novel. The People of Mir Ali struggle for their independence through resistance and separation, while the state adopts various institutional tools such as recruitment, patriotism, and bureaucratic inclusion to incorporate Mir Ali's people into the national imagination for the sake of integration. This integrationist approach is evident as "The Chief Minister of the frontier state is coming all the way from his whitewashed bungalow in the capital to preside over the induction of four hundred of Mir Ali's finest into the national army" (p.96). The Chief Minister is the visible symbol of official nationalism. The minister's physical movement, from the capital to Mir Ali represents symbolically the extension of the central power into ethno-regional peripheries. The performance of presiding over induction into the national army is not only administrative, it is ideological. The army becomes a central tool of national imagination, converting the younger generation into citizens and subjects of the Pakistani state.

The ideological state apparatus used by Pakistani state is evident in the pilot recruitment project. Bhutto writes about the use of soft power as "after a five-week initiation course, Mir Ali's four hundred would be formally inducted into the armed forces" (p.98). The dispersal of Mir Ali's youth "in various parts of the country" seems to embody Anderson's view that official nationalism strives to normalize identity through discipline, mobility and collective institutional experience. The initiation course of five-weeks indicates ideological training, an act of transforming regional loyalties and identity into national affiliation. The state seeks to redirect loyalty from tribe and land to national flag and state symbols.

Beyond military inclusion, the state stretches its strategies into developmental and bureaucratic channels of soft powers. The Pakistani state uses "visa lotteries to study and migrate abroad" for the younger generation (p.97). Further, the state pursues the policy of inclusivity through establishing "small ministries...the Ministry of Health, largely—for junior civil servant positions" (p.97). The Pakistani state seeks integration through administrative inclusion and patronage. By offering civil service positions and visas, it attempts to produce loyalty through opportunity. Anderson writes that official nationalism often functions via "compulsory state-controlled education and state-organized propaganda" (p.101). The state propaganda is visible from the Chief Minister's remarks "The people of Mir Ali wanted nothing more than to be a part of Pakistan's future. They do not want violence, they want reconciliation" (p.98). The statement that the people "wanted nothing more than to be a part of Pakistan's future" uncovers a constructed narrative enforced from above. The Chief Minister has never visited Mir Ali yet he projects their political aspirations. This reveals

the projected and constructed nature of state nationalism.

In spite of these mechanisms such as visa programs, media narratives, bureaucratic inclusion, military recruitment and symbolic reconciliation, the efforts for integration ultimately collapse as the people of Mir Ali do not internalize the constructed official imagination of the state. They persist to imagine themselves as a distinct ethnic community grounded in collective memory, history, land and sacrifice. Macedo writes that people "embrace their identity" because "without a sense of identity there is no need for struggle" (p. 122). They do not identify themselves with the state narrative as Achankeng writes that "The people seeking to liberate themselves usually do not have any feelings of belonging and commitment to the centre" (p. 4). Furthermore, their imagination is affective and organic, whereas the state's imagination is administrative and institutional. Thus, the conflict in the novel is not only political but also epistemological between two modes of imagining community. The state builds bureaucratic incorporation and centralized ideology, while the people of Mir Ali construct identity through territorial belonging and inherited memory. It is also because ethnic imagination exists prior to state nationalism repulsing integrationist and assimilationist narratives and strategies of the state.

The essence of Mir Ali's struggle is freedom and sovereignty for the land and people. Anderson writes that "nation is imagined as sovereign" (p.7). Similarly, Achankeng writes that "Nationalist conflicts arise from the aspirations of a people to assert their right of self-determination" (p.3). The memory of living "amongst saints and sovereigns" projects Mir Ali's lost identity and sovereignty in the novel. The sense of deprivation from historical memory gives a flavor of nostalgic romanticism to the struggle of Mir Ali. Thus sovereignty exists as both memory and aspiration engraved upon the landscape as "They drive past walls covered in red and black graffiti, political slogans written in thick cursive script. They painted what patches of Mir Ali were not guarded by the military. *Azadi*, they scrawled: freedom" (p.4)." The young people across the walls convert territory into a symbolic battleground. "*Azadi*" compresses the collective desire for self-governance. By marking the spaces that are devoid of military presence, they reclaim sovereignty symbolically, even before it is materially recaptured. The land itself is imagined emancipated, and territory and its associative sovereignty are imaginatively claimed through graffiti. The red and black symbols project the energy of the people beyond resistance. They signify Mir Ali's dream of independence.

On the other hand, the Pakistani state asserts its symbolic and territorial sovereignty over Mir Ali. Anderson writes that "state sovereignty is fully, flatly and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory" (p.19). This operative sovereignty of Pakistani state is visible from the omnipresence of army and their operation in Mir Ali for controlling every inch of the land. "The army was both an invisible and an omnipresent force in Mir Ali. They will have put their fingers everywhere, even on the ground on which we stand and the fibers through which we weave our stories" (p.7). This suggests state's control over the physical as well as cultural space of Mir Ali. The state's sovereignty operates both symbolically and territorially, generating tension within the community's sense of memory and place.

The omnipresence of the Repressive State apparatus generates anti-state narrative in Mir Ali. Ghazan Afridi and Inayat emerge as the champions of the resistance narrative of Mir Ali dynamically guiding the movement against state domination. Their resistance goes beyond the boundaries of Pakistani state as they operate their struggle from Afghanistan. This trans-border movement mirrors the geographical contiguity and cultural continuities between Mir Ali and Afghanistan. The people share tribal memory, history, and language and lived experiences preceding the enforced boundaries of the Pakistani state. The links of Mir Ali and Afghanistan are visible from Ghazan Afridi's travel "to Jalalabad one summer, journeying alongside the Kunar, leaving Samarra alone at camp" (p.4). His journey demonstrates more than a mere physical movement. It reflects the fluidity of the border and the continuity of an ethnic imagination transcending state borders. While the state enforces fixed

territorial sovereignty, Ghazan's mobility can be seen to reflect a counter-spatial belonging grounded in the imaginative realm of shared memory and culture. This becomes a conflict between fixed state borders and historically fluid ethnic geography.

Like the collective memories, the anti-state narrative is transmitted to the younger generation of Mir Ali. Samarra Afridi and Hayat are the representatives of the anti-state narrative of the younger generation. They inherit their fathers' commitment to Mir Ali's sovereignty. Samarra's allegiance is guided by her father's final command: "Think of me, Ghazan Afridi said. Think of me. That was all he said. It was all Samarra ever did" (p.5). This reflects how personal memory converts into political commitment, connecting father and fatherland. Her connection to her fatherland is further reinforced by her father's martyrdom: "Samarra never travelled out of Mir Ali any more" (p.13). Her refusal to leave Mir Ali indicates more than grief; it signifies an act of deep belonging. While the state imposes its official narrative through mobility, the immobility of Samarra becomes resistance affirming rootedness to soil rather than to state boundaries. Likewise, Hayat devotes himself to the cause of independence of his fatherland. His dedication is shared rather than personal: "But Hayat was not looking for company. He only wanted news of the rising rebellion...those who lived abroad...had returned home to fight. Women, men and children, there were no timid souls" (p.12). The diasporic return of the people emphasizes the strength of ethno-regional nationalism; they remain umbilically and imaginatively tied to Mir Ali. The resistance and rebellion becomes a collective communal project, uniting men, women and children for the defence of shared identity, memory and land, inspired by a communal sense of belonging and sacrifice.

Anderson argues that "nation inspires love and often profoundly self-sacrificing love" (p.141). He elaborates that "nationness is always something unchosen. In this way, nationness is assimilated to skin colour, gender, parentage and birth era, all those things one can not help" (p.143). This sense of sacrifice is embodied in the actions of Mir Ali's people including men, women and children. Anderson writes that "dying for one's country which one does not choose, assume a moral grandeur (p.144). Bhutto's novel projects this sacrificial energy of Mir Ali as "To have a son die for Mir Ali would secure a family's honour for generations, worth the eternities of harassment and suspicion from the state" (p.95). Sacrifice is not merely politically driven but culturally and socially honored. Dying for Mir Ali is a source of shared identity and honor emphasizing the imagined sovereignty of the land. The burials become the sacrificial rituals for the cause of Mir Ali's independence as "Funerals and burials and prayer evenings became the meeting ground for the resistance. Even the dead were enlisted in the battle against the state" (p.31). The imagined community crosses the boundaries between living and dead and communities enclosed by the states. Anderson writes that "The whole point of the nation is that it is interestless. That is the reason, it can ask for sacrifices" (p.144). The sacrifices of Mir Ali are free of personal interests but are anchored in symbolic and imaginative realm of the people.

Pakistani state uses the Ideological State Apparatus and Repressive State Apparatus for the integration and assimilation of Mir Ali into its Official nationalism. The conflict further escalates when state demands assimilation and ethnic nationalism resists integration into the state's constructed vision of unity. Crenshaw (1989) writes that in such scenario "ethno-nations and people have been subjected to forced assimilation with the intent of changing their identities in fundamental and irreversible ways". The state uses the modern means of communication and cultural industry as tools for suppressing the dissident voices of Mir Ali through "phones, computers, access to the world" (p.127). Furthermore, the state imposes its narrative 'Askari disappearances' on the people of Mir Ali. The use of the Repressive State Apparatus is evident from the fact "the army had, taken men and held them without warrants before, for weeks or even a few months, but they had not really disappeared before. There was a difference" (p. 136).

The colonial legacy of the Pakistani state is evident from the "Askari disappearances" in

Bhutto's novel. Susanne Mueller (2014) writes about this colonial legacy in post-colonial world that "The act of challenging the state continues to invite intimidation and repression. Earlier legacies continue to haunt the present"(p.10). Individuals who persist to imagine Mir Ali as sovereign are punished through intimidation, distension and abduction. Samarra Afridi, whose father was already martyred, is subjected to a brutal rape. "Her rapists never made it to court. Who could have been treacherous enough to name her when they knew, in Mir Ali everybody knew what these men did to women like her?" (p.109). Sexual violence operates as purposeful political strategy for enforcing obedience. The stories of rape and abduction are integral to colonialism. Anderson writes that "official nationalism had cultural, political and military means of successfully asserting itself"(p.58). Similarly, Achenkeng writes that "as sovereign entities states possess ultimate or final authority over delimited territories and their inhabitants" (p. 5).

Bhutto's novel represents the triumph of state nationalism over ethno-regional imagination due to its structural and institutional advantages. Possessing ideological apparatuses, military force and institutional authority, the state imposes its national ideology over the people of Mir Ali. This imbalance of power becomes evident in the final moments when Hayat and Samarra visit to his father grave. "I'm sorry.' He says it to himself. 'Forgive me.' He whispers it to his father. 'None of us can be free' (p.149). Hayat's withdrawal signifies not merely personal defeat but the collapse of a competing imagined sovereignty. Despite long history of resistance, sufferings and sacrifice, the younger generation fails to realize the dream of their forefathers. Thus, the novel demonstrates how state nationalism fortified by repressive and ideological mechanisms finally prevails over ethnic aspirations. While ethnic nationalism preserves itself through sacrifice, memory, and ancestral belonging, the state expands political legitimacy through military power and state institutions. Finally, the structural and institutional authority empowers state nationalism to absorb, dominate and suppress alternative visions of sovereignty.

Conclusion

In short, Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* represents the competing narrative of official nationalism of Pakistani state and ethno-regional nationalism of the people of Mir Ali. The narrative space of the novel projects competing visions of sovereignty, belonging, and identity. The study suggests that ethno-regional nationalism rooted in communal and collective history, memory and ancestral land leads to a protracted struggle with state nationalism. This phenomenon is prevalent in many post-colonial states. The official nationalism enforces integration through ideological, institutional and coercive strategies of the state machinery. The study concludes how the state of Pakistan diffuses the ethno-regional identity of Mir Ali through its integrated repressive and ideological machinery.

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