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Ethnic nationalism and the state in Pakistan

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Ethnic Nationalism and the State in Pakistan

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Adeel Khan

Sociology Program, Faculty of Arts

February 2001
Declaration

I, Adeel Khan, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Sociology Program of Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Adeel Khan

26 February 2001
Aknowledgements

I would like to thank the Sociology Program and the School of Critical Enquiry at the University of Wollongong for helping me to travel to Pakistan twice to do my fieldwork. In Pakistan there are too many people who have helped me in many different ways. I am grateful to all those academics, journalists, politicians, lawyers and activists who spared their time to speak to me. I would like to especially thank Mazhar Abbas who not only provided me with very useful information and contacts but also arranged meetings with the MQM leaders. I am indebted to Ahmed Shah and Ayub Shiekh for organising one of the most entertaining as well as productive trips to Hyderabad where they arranged meetings with Ibrahim Joyo and Rasul Bux Palejo and other Sindhi nationalists. In Lahore I had the pleasure of Khawar Malik and Imtiaz Alam’s company in one of the most dramatic months in Pakistan’s history when the chief justice and the prime minister were caught in a bizarre battle of ego that had created a serious political crisis. In Quetta, Abdul Sami Kakar, a former Pukhtun Student Federation activist, who was introduced to me by Tahir Mohammad Khan, was a wonderful company and great help in organising interviews with Baloch and Pukhtun nationalists. In Islamabad I shall always miss late Eqbal Ahmed with whom I had some of the most stimulating discussions.

My supervisor, Stephen Castles, has been an unrelenting source of encouragement and inspiration. He not only encouraged me to think as deeply and as critically as possible but also, at times, forced me to explore different aspects of the argument whenever he felt I could do better. I have particularly benefited from Stephen’s knowledge of European history. What impressed me the most about Stephen, however, is that he is one of those people who are so comfortable with themselves that they hardly care what others think of them, and therefore they are unassuming and full of humility. I wish I could learn that from him, too.

My wife, Rafat, deserves more than a few words of gratitude for she is the one who had to put up with my anxiety, self-doubt, writer’s block, mood swings, and all the other ‘hazards’ that come with a person who agrees with Adorno that “(o)nly those thoughts are true which fail to understand themselves.” I stand obliged to her for bearing with me.

As is customary, and in legal terms, too, I must admit that only I am responsible for the mistakes and weaknesses in my work, but as I have made it obvious that I would not have been able to produce this work without the help of all those mentioned above, and therefore, morally at least, they cannot escape the responsibility. The only consolation I can offer to them is that I apologise for the mistakes and weaknesses and promise to try harder, next time, to fail better.
Abstract

Nationalism is a way of dealing with a world where 'everything melts into thin air'. It is a form of self-love in which individuals celebrate their collective identity. And like all forms of self-love it gets its strength more from the hatred of others than its love for the self. Here lies the secret behind some of the most intractable conflicts in the world.

Nationalism is, probably, the only form of self-love that gets its life-blood from an institution, the modern state. Had the state not been behind the self-love of the Germans, they would not have been able to torture and murder so many Jews in such a short period of time. Likewise, had the west not helped the Jews to establish their own state in Palestine, the Jews would never have been able to displace and kill so many Palestinians.

Nationalism is not the 'pathology' of the modern world, but is, as a sentiment and as a doctrine, only a pathetic way to deal with a pathetic world. But nationalism as a game of power, as a politics, is lethal and destructive. As a sentiment and as a doctrine nationalism may be the child of an unstable and fast changing world but as a politics it is the child of the nation state.

This thesis explores the relationship between the nation-state and the nationalisms of four ethnic groups, namely, Pukhtun, Sindhi, Baloch and Mohajir, who have, at various points in time, contested the legitimacy of the administrative structure of the Pakistani state. It starts with identifying the issue of ethnic conflicts, goes on to review the available literature and then outlines a framework for studying ethnic
nationalism. As the emphasis here is on the role of the modern state in provoking ethnic
discontent and resistance the second chapter discusses the interventionist role of the state
and tries to highlight its relationship with nationalism. The second section of the chapter
looks at various approaches to nationalism and explains as to which approach is more
suitable and why for dealing with ethnic nationalism.

The third chapter endeavours to explicate the difference between pre-colonial
and colonial state in India as well as the way the colonial state despite being modern was
different from the modern state system in the west. The fourth chapter discusses the
state system in Pakistan and argues that the postcolonial state is a replica of the colonial
state. The next four chapters examine the emergence of four ethnic movements and their
varying strategies for dealing with the centralising and homogenising policies of the
state. Throughout, the focus remains on the ethnic groups' distance from and proximity
to the state system as the major factor in determining their relationships.
## Table of Contents

Declaration .............................. ii  
Acknowledgments ....................... iii  
Abstract ................................. iv  

Chapter 1  Introduction ................ 1  
Chapter 2  Nationalism and the State ... 24  
Chapter 3  Colonisation of the State in India .... 45  
Chapter 4  Nationalisation of the Colonial State in Pakistan .... 67  
Chapter 5  Pukhtun Ethnic Nationalism: From Separatism to Integrationism .... 99  
Chapter 6  Baloch Ethnic Nationalism: From Guerilla War to Nowhere? .... 133  
Chapter 7  Sindhi Ethnic Nationalism: Migration, Marginalisation, and the Threat of 'Indianisation' .... 158  
Chapter 8  Mohajir Ethnic Nationalism: El Dorado gone Sour! .... 201  
Chapter 9  At a Crossroads as Ever Before! .... 238  

References ......................... 244  

Appendix A  
Interviews .............................. 259
The whole is the false

Adorno

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1 Inversion of Hegel's famous dictum, the whole is the true (1978:50)