Rage as Resistance: Minoritised Political Dissent in Pakistan

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Over the decades, Pakistan has stood at multiple crossroads of ethnopolitical contentions that have challenged its legitimacy and political stability. The primary force driving this extra-institutional opposition to the state is rage at systemic injustice, which has given rise to social movements such as the Pashtun[¶] Tahaffuz Movement (PTM). In response, the state has resorted to suppression and violence, framing any resistance by the oppressed as illegal and uncivil. Drawing on insights from the phenomenology of emotion and postcolonial studies, this essay presents a theoretical study in political sociology, aiming to develop a non-pathologising framework for understanding minoritised rage in contemporary Pakistan. It highlights the contradiction in the statist narrative, which defends the use of state violence for social order but denies the oppressed groups the right to voice grievances from decades of imposed conflict. By making an analytical distinction between anger and rage, the essay contends that although the terms are often used interchangeably, it considers Pashtun resistance, such as that of the PTM, as rooted in rage—a buildup of anger neglected and suppressed by the state. Through personal reflections, interviews, and an examination of theoretical writings, it redefines rage as a potent political force for change rather than merely an emotion to be silenced.

The Pakistani State's Anger Problem: Fractures from Below

On February 2, 2019, Arman Luni was killed following a clash with police at a protest sit-in outside the Lorelai Press Club. The next day, PTM activists led by Manzoor Pashteen, Ali Wazir, and Mohsin Dawar marched toward Killa Saifullah, a city in the Balochistan province, to attend Luni's funeral. A YouTube video shows security forces obstructing the path of marchers at a military checkpoint in Dhana Sar, a town situated on the border between Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan[1]. The checkpoint, which dates back to the British colonial era, is seen manned by armed personnel with guns aimed at the demonstrators. Several defiant marchers challenged the uniformed

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[¶] 'Pashtun' is also spelled as Pakhtun or Pukhtun in the north, leading to variants like Pakhtunkhwa or Pukhtunkhwa. As a Pashtun from Balochistan or Southern Pashtunkhwa, I use 'sh' instead of 'kh', such as in Pashtun and Pashtunkhwa.

gunmen to shoot them as they boldly advanced. A man behind the camera can be heard saying, 'One has been killed, kill more!'[2] Pointing to a bulldozer parked on a bridge in the middle of the road, the man continued, 'First, a PTM member is killed. Then, a ban is imposed on us to attend the funeral prayer. This is how the state behaves. They are not even allowing us to go to the funeral. And then, when we say the uniform is behind terrorism, people question why we say so.'[3] Once they cross the impassable route, the same voice raises the slogan '*yeh jo dehshat gardi hai, iske piche wardi hai* (the uniform is behind terrorism)' and the chant is taken up by others. Then some marchers angrily declare, 'We will die but will not let you stop us.'[4]

Despite the state banning PTM leaders from entering Balochistan, they were able to travel to Killa Saifullah and participate in the funeral prayer. This ban policy echoes the actions of British colonisers in the 1920s, who prevented Ghaffar Khan[¶] from entering British Balochistan.[ℱ] During the burial ceremony, Pashteen said: 'I swear on the Quran that we will not let go, and will avenge his blood. ... [In our province,] they killed our youth, beheaded our elders, destroyed our homes, dishonored our mothers and sisters. They still chase our youth. It has reached a point where they even prevent us from attending our funerals. In such circumstances, when you block all our options and ways for negotiations, we will forcibly find a way. Then we will show you the power of Pashtuns.'[6] A week later, in an opinion piece, Pashteen wrote that on their way back from Killa Saifullah after attending the funeral, security forces fired at the car transporting him, Ali Wazir, and Mohsin Dawar, but luckily, they were unharmed.[7]

On 29 April 2019, the Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Asif Ghafoor, in a wide-ranging press conference at the General Headquarters, said that the Pakistan Army wanted to make every effort to resolve the issues faced by Pashtuns in tribal areas, but that the manner adopted by PTM to voice such grievances would no longer be tolerated. The DG warned the PTM leadership, 'You have enjoyed all the liberty that you wanted to.'[8] Referring to PTM, he said, 'Their time is up. Their time is up.'[9] Earlier that month, former Prime Minister Imran Khan, while addressing a public gathering in Orakzai tribal district of Khyber Pashtunkhwa province, had said that PTM rightly speaks about the hardships faced by the tribal areas and Pashtuns, but the manner in which they make such demands is 'not good for our country.'[10]

The state's intolerance was apparent in former army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa's brazen demand that Ali Wazir apologise to him for criticising the military.[11] Wazir, who has lost 17 family members to violence by the Taliban in the past two decades, including his father and two brothers, responded: 'If the state expects an apology from me, it should remember that my body and flesh will melt and bones will be buried, but I will never apologise.'[¶] In a YouTube video, Wazir claimed he refused to meet Bajwa, let alone apologize to him.[12] Instead, he stressed, they should come and apologize to Pashtuns for the death and destruction they have caused them.[13]

Wazir was detained for over two years in Karachi, another corner of the country away from his home, family, and loved ones, depriving him of support and his constituency of representation in parliament. He has been jailed half a dozen times in about 17 cases since PTM's inception, on charges of sedition and provocation against state institutions.[14] All of this only deepened his rage. In a speech in the capital, Islamabad, Wazir said, 'Comrades, remember this: I am standing firm with you. Jail can't break my resolve. If deaths didn't end my resolve, if the gory corpses and funerals didn't end it, and the lost spaces in the graveyard didn't end it, how can these black doors [referring to jail gates] end my resolve?'[15] Wazir's rage is a response to blatant state-sponsored violence that claimed over 70,000[ℱ] lives in roughly two decades. According to the Pashtun National Jirga in Khyber,[¤] a significant majority of the fatalities were Pashtuns from ex-FATA, Balochistan, and Khyber Pashtunkhwa.

More recently, the incumbent Army Chief General Asim Munir suggested that Pakistan needs to become a 'hard state'[●] to effectively address security threats, implying that its current 'softness'—particularly in peripheral areas—may be a vulnerability. However, as Sara Ahmed

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[¶] Journalist Syed Muzammil Shah's tweet quoted Wazir's speech outside state parliament a year earlier, in 2022. The Twitter post included a photo of Wazir with supporters outside Karachi Central Jail after his release.

[ℱ] The figure of approximately 70,000 lives lost in violence in Pakistan over two decades is consistent with estimates reported by various organisations and media outlets, particularly in reference to the period after 2001 following Pakistan's involvement in the U.S.-led 'War on Terror.' Notable sources such as the South Asian Terrorism Portal report 70,978 fatalities since March 6, 2000, till May 10, 2025, based on compiled news reports and are provisional. The Pashtun National Jirga, a historic gathering for the Pashtuns, took place from 11 to 13 October 2024 to address critical issues affecting Pashtun people and their lands. The event included both public and private sessions, combining data presentations, live testimonies, in-depth discussions, and the formation of a new organising committee to lead future efforts.

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[●] In the wake of the Jaffar Express train attack in Balochistan, the Army Chief Asim Munir in an address said that Pakistan had to become a "hard state" to fight militancy and asked how long countless lives would be sacrificed in a soft state, and how long governance gaps would be filled by the blood of soldiers and martyrs. For a detailed analysis, see, Qazi, "Hard State" and reporting, Syed, "Top-level Huddle Seeks."

[¶] Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also known as Bacha Khan and Frontier Gandhi) was a leading 20th-century Pashtun anti-colonial activist who promoted nonviolent resistance and reform. A close ally of Gandhi, he founded the Khudai Khidmatgar movement in 1929, advancing Pashtun rights through nonviolence, social justice, and self-discipline. After Partition, his calls for Pashtun autonomy led to repeated imprisonments, yet he remains a central figure in Pashtun political memory and nonviolent nationalist thought.

[ℱ] During the colonial period, Balochistan comprised a complex mix of administrative zones: Kalat State, British Balochistan, and leased regions. British Balochistan included Pushtun areas from the 1879 Treaty of Gandamak and the Marri-Bugti zone, all directly administered.[5]

explains, this 'hardness' is actually a deeply emotional reaction, not an absence of emotion.[16] For Asim Munir, the hard state meant leaving no room for empathy towards the wounds of the dehumanised other.

Despite this culture of blatant political violence, the authorities demand poise, urging the oppressed to bear their anguish with grace while denying them the dignity of frustration and public rage. The state-owned and -backed media blacked out PTM for a year after its rise in February 2018, and even when there was coverage, it showed distorted depictions of the movement as a proxy of foreign spy agencies in order to discredit it. It questioned PTM's slogans against the military, asking the movement to soften its *lehja* (tone), shifting attention from the substance to the style of speaking, in the classic fashion of moral policing. One wonders how such an expectation is moral when innocent citizens from particular groups have borne decades of grotesque violence, with drilled and bullet-ridden bodies ending up in mass graves. If rage is not an ideal emotion, how can one expect an ideal emotion from people in a non-ideal society and state, as Myisha Cherry puts it?[17] Why should this oppressive affective regime be regarded as normal and acceptable by those on the fringes of politics and power?

State violence and the persistent refusal to heed the oppressed's cry for justice have transformed the latter's anger into rage and violence. This distinction is crucial for my analysis, as it emphasises the metamorphosis of anger into rage as an instrument of opposition. Failing to address anger at perceived injustice—the primary injury—has allowed a secondary injury to take root. As Peter Lyman contends, 'the second is an injury to an expectation that one's appeal will be listened to by someone else; this is the status injury that provokes rage. The key point is that a dialogical response to anger is essential if the second injury, which provokes rage, is not to occur.'[18]

Amid widespread calls for justice, political rage is visible but largely unexamined. Instead, the focus is often on the tone and expression of rage. To move beyond superficial critiques, we must explore anger as an emotion within the context of phenomenology and affect theory, examining its ethical dimensions, philosophical foundations, and political implications. Key questions include: What is anger, and how does it differ from rage? What is its moral status in philosophy? When is rage justified, and who holds the authority to judge this? Specifically, how should we understand the political rage of PTM in Pakistan? And how can we develop a framework for understanding minoritised rage without pathologising it? This essay aims to address these questions.

Anger vs Rage: A Necessary Analytical Distinction

One key definitional issue concerns the moral status of anger, i.e., whether moral principles regarding anger are objective. The essay contends that anger is objective in a physiological and neurobiological sense: It arises from tangible biological processes within the brain and body when one experiences the emotion. This understanding is frequently used in psychology, neuroscience, and physiology to examine how anger manifests in and through the body. Unlike the physiological and neurobiological objectivity of anger, its morality or legitimate political affectivity is not always clear. However, this moral uncertainty should not lead to its dismissal; anger deserves a non-judgmental space because it could very well be valid.

Usually, anger stems from pain, humiliation, and frustration. These feelings can be real or imagined. In pre-Enlightenment Western thought from varying schools, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Lactantius, Aquinas, and Descartes[19] have long implied that anger is a response to a wrong and that it involves a moral judgment. The Stoics broadly defined it as a desire to redress, punish, or retaliate against a wrong.[20] For instance, Seneca viewed anger as the worst emotion, one that should be eliminated whenever possible. In line with the pre-Enlightenment theorisation, Enlightenment thought emphasised logic, reason, and discipline as defining traits of a cognitively superior human existence.

According to Catherine West-Newman, the antithetical pairing of reason and emotion in Western thought underlines common law doctrine.[21] She adds that according to this logic, 'failure of reason signifies unpredictability; if human subjectivity is permitted to displace the objective, neutral rule of law, then injustice will inevitably follow.'[22] She maintains, 'if this were the whole story, then the only appropriate relationship between law and anger would be for law to control and prevent anger's socially disruptive effects.'[23] Moreover, this overly legalistic approach has marked emotion as 'disruptive and dangerous to law's project and English legal doctrine exported to British colonies takes little account of subjective feelings.'[24]

Contemporary affect theory, including sociological and psychological perspectives, has also emphasised the role of insult, injury, and offence in shaping social experiences of anger.[25] Ahmed's work, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, is regarded as foundational within affect theory: She explores how emotions such as anger influence social and political contexts, personal and group identities, and their link to power structures. West-Newman suggests that although '... justifiable anger in pursuit of justice has a long and respectable history, it is still, often, evaluated negatively within western thought.'[26] Thus, despite the recognition that expressions of anger can

be morally justifiable, scholarly discourses nevertheless deem angry displays as 'undesirable, disruptive, and even socially pathological.'[27] In contrast, Rosalind Hursthouse highlights accounts that recognise the positive potential of anger based on the Aristotelian idea that emotions are neutral and that individual choice, echoing intentionality, influences whether anger is directed toward good or bad outcomes.[28] Aquinas believed that anger is just when the revenge it seeks is just as well, asserting that anger's moral quality is determined by the contexts surrounding provocation, which may render anger virtuous rather than vicious. Thus, this view stresses proportionate punishment seen fit by law, and with a determination to redress a fault and uphold justice.[29]

According to Lyman, 'the critics of anger describe emotions as magical behaviour, self-justifying fantasies that angry people use to free themselves from the obligation to engage the real world in an instrumental manner... Anger in particular is criticised because it manifests itself as a self-righteous world-view that seeks to resolve conflict by assigning blame and exacting revenge.'[30] Lyman counters this view by acknowledging that while there might be merit to it, the critique shifts the blame onto the victim, overlooking the social dynamics and injustices that may have triggered the angry response. He stresses, 'the psychological critique of anger is an ideology that justifies domination by silencing the voices of the oppressed, labeling anger as "loss of control", as "emotionalism", or as "neurotic."'[31]

West-Newman argues that indigenous epistemologies in Australia and New Zealand do not separate reason from emotion, or exorcise either from justice and conflict resolution practices.[32] Such challenges can also be seen in Western thought as postmodern critiques of the dominant paradigm of Enlightenment rationality, opening space for the (re)location of emotions in law.[33] Empirical evidence and conceptual analysis in the works of psychologists, philosophers, and neurophysiologists now suggest that such a separation is arbitrary and that emotion does not undermine rationality. Antonio Damasio argues that emotion is integral to processes of human reasoning and cognition.[34] West-Newman adds that what underlies this apparent separation is 'instrumental rationality' in Western thought that keeps certain feelings from attaining the status of emotions to safeguard the capitalist order. She concludes, 'feelings permitted to retain the description of emotion are defined into a domain of the private and personal, safely segregated from the public practices of governance.'[35]

Moreover, Deborah Lupton argues that the emphasis on emotional expression, or 'emotionality', emerged to resist the dominant focus on rationality and self-control.[36] Lupton contends that in response to this perceived subordination to rational control, Romanticism framed emotions as a form of freedom and resistance. It flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a literary and artistic movement that celebrated intense emotions and passions, regarding them as central, authentic sources of human motivation and action. By valuing emotion as a

fundamental part of human experience, underlining inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual, Romanticism offered an alternative to the rational, restrained approach of the Enlightenment.

While a more accepting view recognises individual anger as normal, this understanding is rarely extended to collective anger, especially among marginalised groups like Pashtuns in Pakistan, who are often seen as aggressive.

Audre Lorde defends the uses of anger for political change, stating that 'anger is an appropriate action to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change.'[37] She uses 'fury' synonymously with rage: 'my response to racism is anger...'[38]; 'I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivialises all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action.'[39] Rejecting guilt as a barrier to progress, Lorde insists that anger must be expressed to challenge systemic injustice.

Cherry defines rage as 'an intense anger in response to incessant injustice' rather than 'unbridled anger,'[40] deploying the term similarly to scholars like bell hooks, Cornel West, Soraya Chemaly, and Brittney Cooper. For Cherry, this rage does not imply irrationality or loss of control but instead mirrors a deep, justified anger, particularly in contexts of continued racial or gendered oppression. Lyman sharpens this distinction by urging us to listen to the meaning of angry words, using two key heuristic practices.[41] First, anger and rage must be distinguished as distinct but related emotional responses in political contexts. Lyman characterises anger as a response to perceived injustice, a feeling that motivates action and can be constructive when it fuels political engagement[42] as it can enable dialogue about fairness and justice within a political order. In contrast, rage is described as a more intense, uncontrolled response often arising when anger is dismissed or left unrecognised. While anger seeks recognition and correction of grievances, rage manifests as an aggressive or violent reaction to the perceived denial of a legitimate platform for those grievances and the frustration of not being heard.

Second, Lyman asserts that a political sociology of anger must genuinely consider the perception of the angry person, not cast judgments towards that perception's validity.[43] This way of understanding emotions frames them as a dynamic interaction between the individual's internal experience (the self) and the external social context (the social world), rather than as internal states. Lyman stresses that it is worth listening to angry speech because it contains a claim about the commission of injustice, which makes anger political, at least in principle. Lyman argues that liberal societies often devalue anger by characterising it as a psychological disorder[44] that disrupts social order. Rooted in a functionalist perspective, such theorisation views society's default condition as order. Alan Sears and James Cairns explain that the social

order model supposes that 'society is the crucial regulator that keeps the people from acting in their narrow self-interest without the slightest regard for others.'[45] The proponents of this model argue that 'the role of the state is to preserve social order within a particular territory by enforcing these norms, whether by punishing wrongdoers or by socializing the population so that they internalise society's values.'[46]

Conversely, theorists of the conflict model critique the fundamental assumptions of shared values and order upheld by the social order model. They argue that 'rather than a genuine consensus, these are seen as ideologies that support the ruling order and perpetuate the disadvantaged status of the subordinate groups.'[47] The conflict model presumes that the state is not a neutral referee but rather a facilitator of the uneven playing field that advances the interests of the powerful every time. According to the latter, 'the representation of the subordinate groups might create the illusion of full participation, but generally does not result in a significant change in the condition of the bulk of the disadvantaged population.'[48]

Consequently, the silencing of marginalised groups undermines their anger and stifles political discourse that could address the very conditions fueling that anger. Paradoxically, as the next section analyses, this suppression of anger may transform into rage with impacts far more threatening to the stability of state and society.

Colonial Continuities and Accumulated Anger:
Why Pashtun Rage is Justified

To understand the enduring legacies of colonialism on identity, power, and resistance in postcolonial state-nations like Pakistan,¶ I draw on the insights of revolutionary thinker, Frantz

¶ The terms 'state-nation' and 'nation-state' may sound similar, but they describe very different political and sociological arrangements. A 'state-nation' usually governs over multiple national, ethnic, or linguistic groups and seeks political unity without requiring cultural uniformity, such as Pakistan or the United States. In contrast, a 'nation-state' refers to a political entity in which the boundaries of the state largely coincide with those of a single nation—defined by shared language, culture, and identity, such as Japan or South Korea—producing a relatively homogenous national community. Pakistan, while conceived as a nation-state—a homeland for Muslims of British India—functions more accurately as a state-nation. Despite its Islamic identity as a unifying force, Pakistan comprises diverse ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Mohajir, Baloch, and others, each with distinct histories, languages, and political aspirations. The state's emphasis on a singular Islamic-national identity has often led to the marginalisation of these groups, the suppression of alternative, pluralistic visions of the nation, and political conflicts.

Fanon.¶ He noted that in some developing countries, hopes were dashed within a few years of independence, leading to questions like, 'What was the point of fighting' if nothing was destined to change?[49] He claims that 95 percent of people in developing countries see independence as unchanging, with 'latent discontent which like glowing embers constantly threatens to flare up again.'[50]

According to Fanon, police and military in the colonies maintained close surveillance through direct, often purely violent means. The government openly used violence to demonstrate and enforce domination, bringing violence into the homes and minds of the colonised subject.[51] After decolonisation, the persistence of this system is what some describe as 'internal colonialism' or 'domestic colonialism.'[52] My argument similarly positions Punjabi dominance over the land and resources of ethnic minorities in Pakistan as a form of internal colonialism.

In this context, a postcolonial framing that centres the politics of resistance among the oppressed—whom Fanon called 'the wretched of the earth'—is necessary. In Fanon's understanding, 'Colonisation or decolonisation: it is simply a power struggle. The exploited realise that their liberation implies using every means available, and force is the first.'[53] In Fanon's view, no Algerian considered these terms overly violent, articulating what they felt deep inside: 'Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence.'[54] Fanon explains that violence becomes the language of the colonised because of the obduracy of the coloniser's lies and their unwillingness or inability to engage in dialogue.

Since Pakistan's inception, colonial policies and practices have continued unabated. Violence and militarisation have been the norm in the periphery and an exception, unless absolutely necessary, at the core.¶ Economic exploitation and marginalisation are maintained through a combination of force and a colonial-style administration of civil bureaucracy loyal to the core. Moreover, through an excessively nationalistic educational apparatus and the collaboration of what Fanon called 'colonised intellectuals,'[55] the state maintains an arrangement of inclusive exclusion or coercive inclusion passed as representation. In Fanon's terms, force is the language the center uses to suppress peripheral dissent. The space for political dialogue is non-existent, at home and abroad.

¶ While there are times the state has used violence against Punjab-based groups, like the 2007 Lal Masjid operation in Islamabad and the 2014 killing of Pakistan Awami Tehreek activists in Lahore, such instances are exceptions. Its approach in Balochistan and Khyber Pashtunkhwa is very different. Violence against Pashtuns and Baloch is systematic, with frequent extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and military actions. This selective force shows the state's actions are driven by strategic interests and ethnic considerations. Its reluctance to aggressively target Punjab threats is linked to maintaining stability in a vital region where the middle classes must be appeased.

In contrast, state violence is the norm in the periphery. Securitisation is selective and primarily concentrated in specific regions, such as Balochistan and the former tribal areas in the north. Over the past twenty years, Balochistan, Khyber Pashtunkhwa, and ex-FATA have borne the brunt of militancy, leading to deaths, destruction, and displacement. The military has publicly referred to these casualties and damages as collateral damage.[¶] While there have been terrorist attacks in other cities, including some in the Punjab, they have not matched the scale of what the periphery has experienced. Pashtun and Baloch nationalists question why they suffer the highest casualties and destruction but get little peace and development. The scale of violence in the periphery is whitewashed through what Stephen Bronner terms 'fabricated relativism'.[56] Statements like 'all Pakistanis have suffered' or 'Punjab has suffered too' tend to avoid responsibility, ignore oppression, or refuse to engage seriously with the other's realities.

Not only has the political rage of the living been considered profane, but mourning for the dead has also been forbidden. Movement, too, is prohibited and unlawful. Gatherings at funerals are a threat to law and order, reflecting a continuity of British colonial tactics of oppression. As a former British colony, Pakistan's dependence on an overly legalistic approach to angry protests is not at all surprising. PTM's slogan *da sanga azadi da* (which translates to 'what kind of freedom is this?') reflects the sentiments of colonised people in a postcolonial context. This idea is a recurring theme in Fanon's work, where he questions the value of independence with phrases like 'What is the point of being independent then... ?'[57] and 'What was the point of fighting?'[58] Little has changed for those on the margins of society, who continue to live under the shadow of colonial legacies.

My interviews with PTM leaders and activists, alongside secondary sources, suggest that their rage is a response to the persistent, anguished pleas that have gone unheard for decades. Their rage originates from their demands for basic rights and liberties and is not a sudden or irrational outburst. Historically, unjust and exclusionary state policies in the region since Pakistan's inception have given rise to radical demands within certain segments of the Pashtun struggle.[‡] Pashtuns opposed the newly established Pakistani state on multiple fronts, for example, a limited secessionist insurgency in tribal areas[¶] and the Red Shirts or Khudai Khitmatgars' civil resistance in North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) with simultaneous institutional opposition from the second half of the 1930s onwards. Aside from occasional armed resistance led by figures such as Faqir Ipi at Pakistan's creation and Pashtun Zalmay[‡] until the early 1970s, the Pashtun struggle remained unarmed despite persistent state oppression. In the wake of the establishment of the Awami National Party[¤] in 1986 and the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party[•] in 1989, Pashtun nationalist politics primarily focused on institutional opposition for greater provincial autonomy, recognition, and control over their land and resources, all within the framework of the constitution. Abubakar Siddique states that since 1947, there has been no major violent Pashtun secessionist movement[63]. Leading Pashtun ethno-nationalists like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abdul Wali Khan, and Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai participated in mainstream Pakistani pro-democracy and anti-dictatorship parties. They have long fought for representative rule, mainly demanding provincial autonomy within Pakistan. Despite facing state oppression, their preference has consistently been ballots over bullets.

[¶] The former DG ISI and DG MI Asad Durrani at a talk show at the Oxford Union said that the deaths of soldiers and civilians are inevitable and acceptable collateral damage for the country's strategic interests.

[‡] In its early decades, Pakistan established a state structure centred around robust, centralised bureaucratic-military institutions. These institutions were predominantly staffed by Punjabis and Mohajirs and supported by an ontology of Islamic nationhood. However, sustaining this structure came at a steep cost, as it incited ethnonationalist opposition in the western border provinces and Eastern Pakistan, where people felt marginalised and disadvantaged in their regions.[59]

[¶] The secessionist insurgency was led by Faqir of Ipi from 1947 to the early 1950s. The Red Shirts initially sided with the Indian National Congress against Pakistan's creation, then shifted toward advocating sovereignty and an independent Pashtun state. The idea of a separate Pashtunistan is contested; some say Ghaffar Khan did not make it his goal, viewing it as a slogan rather than a concrete plan. It may have also served as a bargaining tool for better deals for Pashtuns in Pakistan. Similar movements arose among the Pushtun and Baloch in Balochistan, persisting despite oppression and remaining relevant today.[60]

[‡] Before India's partition, Khyber Pashtunkhwa's Pashtuns formed the Zalmay Pashtun organisation led by Ghani Khan, aiming for independence but did not achieve it, as neither the Indian National Congress nor Khudai Khidmatgar supported armed conflict. In May 1970, the National Awami Party (NAP) established Pashtun Zalmay with Wali Khan as leader. Wali Khan, also NAP president, helped form coalition governments in Balochistan and Khyber Pashtunkhwa in 1972. In 1973, after Bhutto's government dissolved Balochistan's assembly, the Khyber assembly protested and dissolved itself. The Pashtun NAP revived Pashtun Zalmay to start an armed struggle, but lacked experience and guerrilla warfare knowledge, thereby ending the armed struggle.

[¤] The Awami National Party (ANP), originating from Bacha Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars in the 1930s, has shifted from a leftist, secular movement to a more pragmatic party focusing on Pashtun nationalism. Dominated by the Wali Khan and Bilour families, it has evolved to support provincial autonomy and form alliances across the political spectrum, including with right-wing groups. Historically, it has faced violence from militant groups like TTP due to its secular stance and opposition to militancy. Leaders like Asfandyar Wali Khan and Iftikhar Hussain have survived multiple attacks. Today, the ANP advocates for better Pakistan relations with India, Afghanistan, and the US, promotes economic development, and supports dialogue and military actions when necessary.[61]

[•] PKMAP, formed in 1989 from the National Awami Party by Samad Khan Achakzai, promotes Pashtun nationalism, advocating for resource parity and maximum provincial autonomy, including support for the 18th Amendment. It opposes military interference in politics and favors impartial foreign relations, notably with Afghanistan. The party has a history of contesting and boycotting elections, supporting PML-N during crises, and occasionally backing the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, with leaders like Mehmood Khan Achakzai. Critics oppose its stance on FATA's merger and demand for a separate Pashtun province.[62]

The 2010 Eighteenth Amendment addressed the issue of provincial autonomy, promoting democratic federalism and renaming the North-West Frontier Province as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pashtun parties' grievances were partly addressed after the amendment, but their ability to confront problems like terrorism was limited, leading to stagnation and loss of influence due to violence and repression, such as the 2014 Peshawar school massacre. This created a political vacuum, leading some activists and parties to seek new influence, notably with PTM as a third force¶ advocating for Pashtun rights amid ongoing militancy and repression.[64]

Although PTM originated largely from classical Pashtun nationalism, it began to differ in four key aspects. First, it is led by educated, lower-middle-class Pashtuns from the previously marginalised ex-FATA region, unlike the elite leadership often seen in classical movements. Second, PTM focuses on current issues such as displacement, ethnic profiling, violence, and economic challenges, steering clear of glorifying historical or perceived territorial aspirations. Third, it dismisses the Orientalist tropes of Pashtun courage and invincibility, instead highlighting the Pashtun narrative of victimisation over aggression. Lastly, PTM's leadership grounds its demands in Pakistan's constitutional framework, advocating for fair treatment and recognition within the state system, rather than pursuing secessionist or abstract nationalist aims.[65]

As the third force, PTM reframed the Pashtun nationalist narrative in more radical terms⸸, marking a break from the relatively quiescent Pashtun politics of the past, particularly on the issue of militancy and state aggression in Pashtun lands.[67] By employing cultural tools and logic of resistance, like *spina khabara*,[68] which roughly translates to white talk, clear talk, or plain truth, PTM's leadership advocated for honest and constructive confrontation with the state in their speeches. *Spina khabara* refers to a narrative that, as the Pashto expression goes, comes from above the tongue, not from beneath it. In other words, it represents an open and free expression, emphasising the emotional and political strength of speech in Pashtun resistance. *Tar zhāba landi ye na kawal* ('not keeping it under the tongue') signifies the refusal to hold back one's words and to speak what is on one's mind and in the heart. This phrase reflects not only personal frankness but also a broader collective defiance against enforced silence. It resonates

¶ In a Zoom interview with the author on November 29, 2023, Shahbaz Sturyani,a founding PTM activist, said the two main Pashtun ethnonationalist political forces were spent, leading to a vacuum. Since 'politics abhors space,' he claimed, 'there was the need for a third force.'

⸸ PTM surpassed Pashtun nationalism's old guard through signaling and outbidding. Ethnic groups use grievances to signal strength to the state, members, and their broader ethnic community. Signaling and outbidding are radicalisation mechanisms whereby groups competing for support and resources radicalise their goals and strategies. Radicalisation may also result from generational leadership change and political quiescence. Analysts say PTM arose due to ineffective Pashtun politics.[66]

with another powerful expression, *par haq walarh, na pategi* ('one who stands on truth does not hide'), affirming the moral courage to speak out despite fear or repression. Together, these proverbs articulate an ethical and cultural logic of resistance where speech becomes both a weapon and a duty.

PTM named state officials and agencies as well as non-state elements accused of war crimes and called for accountability under the law. Pasheen repeatedly said, '*che zulm kavi, khilaf ye yo*' ('Whoever commits oppression, I am against them'). In a fiery speech he added, 'I oppose every cruel person, whether they are Taliban, whether good or bad Taliban, as well as the "peace" committee, MI [Military Intelligence], ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence], and the Army. It was once impossible to name all these elements, but I do so proudly and honorably. You tried to scare the Pashtun with death, but death cannot scare me, just as your father cannot.'[69] Rooted deeply in Pashtun traditions of tribal honor and moral strength, Pasheen challenged forces which no one had dared to before.

The emergence of PTM in February 2018 marked the culmination of years of growing discontent and anger in response to the death and destruction caused by terrorist violence and military operations targeting the Taliban. Wazir and other PTM figures have voiced deep outrage over the personal and collective suffering their communities have endured. The movement directs its rage toward a system of internal colonialism, seething over the countless lives lost and the mass displacement of Pashtuns, an anguish powerfully captured in the term 'Intentionally Displaced Pashtuns' (IDPs), as acknowledged within Pashtun intellectual circles. In countless rallies and gatherings across the country, PTM leaders said they witnessed and gathered the shattered remains of children killed in suicide blasts and maimed by land mine explosions. As PTM founder Manzoor Pasheen poignantly stated, they have seen the unseeable. The movement's slogan against the military—*yeh jo dehshat gardi hai, iske piche wardi hai* (the uniform is behind terrorism)—was articulated against this backdrop.

The state's response to PTM's pleas has been violent crackdowns, including killing over a dozen protestors in Khar Qamar on May 26, 2019, a response that echoes Fanon's assertion that oppressors only know the language of force. This continued impunity and silencing of dissent have only deepened the sense of injustice, allowing anger to harden into rage. The truth is that suppressed anger does not simply disappear. As Fanon suggests, state anger becomes the anger of the oppressed, which, as James Scott[70] explains, first thrives in clandestine, liberatory enclaves before erupting into rage. According to Scott, subordinates retain the capacity for the anger they have learned to suppress.[71] This silenced anger, rooted in daily experiences of indignity, control, and enforced submission, accumulates over time, informing what Scott terms 'hidden transcripts.'[72] Ultimately, a pivotal moment arises when this suppressed anger is inevitably released. As Flam notes, 'And, would not anybody who lived in a repressive system

support this view, knowing from their own experience that daily humiliation, frustration and anger, sediment into a hard, heavy stone in the pit of one's stomach and cry to be released?'[73]

Pashtun youth were able to get PTM off the ground by deploying rage, after decades of violence and systematic suppression of their rights to free speech. On 26 January 2018, Manzoor Pashteen and twenty friends initiated their march against all odds. As Pashteen later recounted in numerous interviews and speeches, they faced state threats with a resolve captured by a Pashto proverb, *saruna pa las ghrzawal*, literally 'to carry heads in hands', signifying they had nothing to lose. After bidding farewell to their mothers—a gesture noted by activists[74]—they found themselves with nothing to fear. Intimidation and death had lost their power over them. Rather than adopting a dialogical, political approach, the state repeatedly dismissed PTM leaders' speeches as angry and unacceptable for the last seven years. These leaders have faced arrests on false charges, while other activists have been harassed, silenced, and even killed. However, state repression has only exacerbated the crisis of its legitimacy and stability, with the movement finding itself curtailed but with no end in sight.

PTM's choice of civil resistance is instrumental, representing a departure from Bacha Khan's philosophical stance on nonviolence. Perhaps I don't have to remind the reader of the intensity of rage witnessed in the numerous speeches of PTM's leaders over the past seven years. Some leaders, off the record, have also suggested that a violent option may not be entirely off the table if circumstances demand it. This can be a reminder for the state: if it does not adapt and instead continues with the logic and language of violence, then the most probable response, in Fanonian terms, would be within that same framework.

Toward a Decolonial Politics of Emotion

PTM has rightly identified the political pulse of Pashtuns, who seek actual integration rather than independence. Their current 'symbolic integration underlines the Pashtuns' position as a permanent minority—bound by geography, reluctant to pursue armed struggle for statehood, yet propelled by the uncertainty of alternatives and aspirations for a more equitable future within Pakistan.'[75] The ongoing state violence and intransigence could change the terms of engagement, requiring a redefinition of goals and strategies to achieve them. If Pashtuns reach a breaking point, realising they can not attain their rights and live with dignity in the existing state, nationalist violence may not be entirely ruled out.

To conclude, state violence to suppress the anger of the oppressed is offensive, while the rage of the oppressed is almost always defensive. This is the case with the Baloch and Pashtuns in Pakistan, the Palestinian struggle against Israel, the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, and Black people in the U.S. At the very least, critics of the destructive nature of the subordinates' rage must first hold the state accountable. Most crucially, we should recognise that acts of aggression and self-defence are not morally equivalent. This essay has demonstrated that the rage of the oppressed, after persistent neglect of anger, is a non-ideal yet necessary, legitimate, and positive political response, rather than a destabilising emotion, one that has the potential to shift societies away from rigid, violent, and repressive military and technocratic control toward a more inclusive and responsive model of governance. This approach would recognise rage as a necessary element of political life, capable of alleviating social suffering and addressing structural injustices through open, empathetic dialogue.

Notes

1. PTM Voice, "Ali Wazir."
2. Ibid., at 0:04.
3. Ibid., at 4:05.
4. Ibid., at 11:06.
5. Titus and Swidler, "Knights, Not Pawns," 48.
6. Anwar, "Alleged Killing by Police Angers Pashtuns in Pakistan."
7. Pashteen, "The Military Says Pashtuns Are Traitors."
8. "Time is up."
9. Ibid.
10. "PM Imran Endorses Grievances of Pashtuns."
11. Veengas, "Pakistani State Favours Killers."
12. "Ali Wazir MNA Speech" at 04:18
13. Ibid. at 8:40
14. Khanzada, "How Ali Wazir was kept in prison for 26 months?"
15. "Ali Wazir MNA Speech" at 9:30-9:50
16. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 4.
17. Cherry, *The Case for Rage*, 8.
18. Lyman, "The Domestication of Anger," 140.
19. Averill, *Anger and Aggression.*
20. Nussbaum, "Secret Sewers of Vice."
21. West-Newman, "Anger in Legacies of Empire", 193.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 191.
24. Ibid., 193.
25. See, Averill, *Anger and Aggression*; Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*; de Rivera, *A Structural Theory of the Emotions.*
26. West-Newman, 191.
27. Ibid.
28. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics.*
29. Averill, 91.
30. Lyman, 134.
31. Ibid.
32. West-Newman.
33. See, for instance, Bandes, *The Passions of Law*; Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure*; Henderson, "Legality and Empathy."
34. Damasio, *Descartes' Error.*
35. West-Newman, 193–94.
36. Lupton, *The Emotional Self.*
37. Lorde, "The Uses of Anger", 129.
38. Ibid., 124.
39. Ibid., 130.
40. Cherry, 16.
41. Lyman, 139–140.
42. Ibid., 139.
43. Ibid., 140.
44. Ibid., 133-134, 139–140.
45. Sears and Cairns, *A Good Book, In Theory*, 31.
46. Ibid., 33.

47. Ibid., 35.
48. Ibid., 36.
49. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 34–35
50. Ibid., 35.
51. Ibid., 3–4.
52. Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?*; Klug, *The Internal Colony.*
53. Fanon, 23.
54. Ibid.
55. Fanon, 8. Refer to chapter, "On Violence," for a detailed description of the psychology of the 'colonised intellectual.'
56. Bronner, *The Bigot*, 10.
57. Fanon, 10.
58. Ibid., 34–35.
59. Titus and Swidler, 48.
60. Titus and Swidler, 47.
61. Abbasi, "Awami National party".
62. "Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party." Siddique, *The Pashtun Question*, 218.
63. Siddique, The Pashtun Question, 218.
64. For more on PTM's anatomy, refer to Aslam, 291–332.
65. Aslam, "Ethnopolitical Movement Strategy," 292. Also, see Kakar, "Politics."
66. S Vogt et al., "From Claims to Violence," 2021, 1281–1282.
67. Aslam, 307.
68. Ibid., 310.
69. Ibid.
70. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance.*
71. Ibid.
72. For explanations that complement Scott's 'hidden transcripts,' also see Elizabeth Alexander, *The Black Interior* and hooks, *Yearning.* Alexander's 'black interior' challenges us to imagine what's barred from view, dwelling on concerns often censored by society. Similarly, bell hooks' 'homeplace' is a protective space of nurturing and resistance within oppressive systems, especially created by black women under white supremacy and patriarchy, providing refuge and healing.
73. Flam, "Anger in Repressive Regimes," 176.
74. For instance, Sturyani, Shahbaaz. Interview. Conducted by Aslam Kakar, 29 Nov. & 2 Dec. 2023.
75. Aslam, 296.

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