

War on Terror, Securitisation: A Critical Analysis of Pashtun Representation in Post-2001 Pakistani Cinema

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ABSTRACT: This study will critically analyze the representation of Pashtun identity in Pakistani films that were made since 2001 when Pashtun dominated areas of Pakistan became the focus of the national security debates by the presence of Pakistan in the War on Terror. Based on the theory of securitisation, Hall's theory of representation, and the concept of Othering by Said, the study focuses on three films purposively selected because they clearly address the issues of terrorism, militancy and national security namely *Khuda Kay Liye*, 2007, *Waar*, 2013, and *Yalghaar*, 2017. The study employs a qualitative design, repeated viewing of the film and reflexive thematic analysis of the results; codes: characterisation, dialogue, language and accent, costume, setting, visual symbolism and narrative structure. Five themes were elaborated, namely: the construction of Pashtun identity as indicated by cultural and geographic markers; securitisation of Pashtun space as opposed to Pashtun ethnicity; visual coding of the frontier as a space of threat; Othering through selective visibility; and emerging counter-narratives which place Pashtun as officers, victims and citizens. The results make clear that the films do not label Pashtuns as terrorists per se, but indirect but spatial rounds of profiling are produced as they repeatedly locate terror in Pashtun mountains, villages and dress. Meanwhile, Pashtun characters in service to the state, and Pashtun civilians who are victims of militancy, add to the dominant narrative. The study finds that Pakistani cinema creates and negotiates War on Terror securitisation and concludes that inclusive storytelling and Pashtun involvement in film production and media literacy are the solutions to combat ethnic profiling.

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Introduction

The World Trade Centre attacks on 11th September 2001 shook the world of international politics and shifted Pakistan to the centre of the War on Terror launched by the United States. As a front-line ally, Pakistan has launched several military operations in the past in the "FATA" and in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, where most of the

Pashtun population of the country resides. This conflict had disproportionately affected Pashtun people, leaving their homes destroyed and livelihoods lost, curfews imposed and checkpoints erected (Akhtar, 2021). In addition to these costs, there was a symbolic aspect: Pashtun identity was increasingly being interpreted by the language of militancy, extremism, and threat (Yousaf, 2019, 2021).

This engagement is central to the understanding of the period, and its proportions are important. Since the early 2000s, the army had conducted a series of operations in the tribal belt, followed by Operation Swat in 2005 and then South and North Waziristan in 2007 and 2008 respectively, and finally Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014. Those campaigns were promoted as a national struggle for survival, and the media largely echoed the military's interpretation of these as both necessary and heroic (Gul et al., 2020). The same activities, however, led to the mass removal of people, extended curfews, the closure of markets and homes, and for the residents, to being searched and questioned at checkpoints, on a regular basis (Akhtar, 2021). The grievances that arose from these experiences manifested later politically in the nonviolent Pashtun Tahafuz Movement that was launched in 2018, calling for an end to extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and ethnic profiling (Mahsud, 2024). Instead, the War on Terror was not just a military operation but also a long journey in which the Pashtun periphery was stigmatized and given a new identity as a security threat in the national imagination.

Media and popular culture had a significant role in this. Representations do not merely reflect reality; they also create meaning around what is considered to be "in" the nation or "out" of the nation and the threat that is perceived from the other (Hall et al., 2025). Since 2001, Pakistani cinema has gone through a commercial renaissance, with several commercially successful movies directly addressing the issues of terrorism, militancy, and national security (Hull, 2020; Rizwan, 2023). Cinema is a medium that contains the elements of story, image, sound and feeling, which makes it a very natural medium for political ideas and makes these ideas stick in collective memory. Even if they never explicitly identify a people as the enemy, when the same visual codes of beards, turbans, pakol caps, rugged mountains and Pashto-accented speech continuously appear alongside tales of terror, films can help to profile an entire ethnic group (Amin, 2023; Ayub et al., 2024).

It was during this time of war that the film industry in Pakistan experienced its revival. It attracted audiences again in the late 2000s with a new generation of filmmakers, multiplex cinemas, and better production values, and some of its groundbreaking successes addressed extremism and counterterrorism (Hull, 2020). This new cinema was in close relationship with the state. The media wing of the armed forces, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), has started to make serials, songs, and films that depict the military as a protective family and as a moral pivot of the country (Haider, 2023). In Pakistan, popular culture has now emerged as an important field where the national identity is being told and re-negotiated. For this reason, the question of who is the enemy and where the enemy is has real political weight.

Previously, scholarship has been done linking the 'violent Pathan' stereotype to colonial history (Shah et al., 2022; Yousaf, 2021), the securitisation of the tribal areas, and the emergence of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (Akhtar, 2021; Jan & Khan, 2024; Mahsud, 2024), and the derogatory representation of Pashtun characters in contemporary Lollywood (Rizwan, 2023). However, there are few studies that have been made specifically on the securitisation of Pakistani feature films and even fewer to compare the representation of the Pashtun characters and spaces with that of national security in the films that are made after 2001. This study comes to fill this gap by analysing three films that intentionally work with the War on Terror: *Khuda Kay Liye* (2007), *Waar* (2013) and *Yalghaar* (2017).

There are three reasons this gap is important. First, in contrast to popular fiction, which typically engages readership with less critical eyes, securitisation theory has been predominantly studied in the context of political speeches, policy documents and news coverage (Taylor, 2017; Vultee, 2022). Second, most of the literature on

Pashtun representation is either on colonial writing and novels (Shah et al., 2022) or on Pakistani films without looking at how they portray the same themes of security from different genres. Third, the post-2001 era is unique – for the first time, Pakistani cinema has been featuring the Pakistani counterterrorism campaigns in mainstream entertainment. The study of these movies can thus provide an understanding of the way a warring society narrates its story about its enemies, its protectors, as well as the people who are caught in the crossfire.

The study questions are about the way the chosen movies represent Pashtun identity through visual, linguistic, cultural, and narrative strategies; how the chosen movies represent or reproduce, or contest, the security discourse of the War on Terror; and how the chosen movies affect the profiling of Pashtuns in Pakistan. It is in doing this that it expands the securitisation theory from political speech to cinematic representation.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The literature review of the securitisation of Pashtun identity, colonial and contemporary depiction of Pashtuns, representation of Pashtuns in Pakistani film and television, post-2001 Pakistani film, and the selected films is presented in the next section. In the methodology section, it is explained that the sampling was conducted and the use of reflexive thematic analysis. Each film is then analysed in turn, and the causes and consequences of securitised representation are discussed, followed by recommendations and conclusions.

Literature Review

The War on Terror and the Securitisation of Pashtun Identity

Securitisation theory suggests that security threats do not just 'exist' but are 'made'. In the process of securitisation, an actor "frames" an issue as an existential threat to them and a relevant audience "buys into" this frame (Skidmore, 1999). The concept of speech has been further developed in later work to images, which can be seen as threatened or threatening (Taylor, 2017). Media, accordingly, are involved in the politics of security as a means of visual securitisation and framing (Taylor, 2017; Vultee, 2022).

The War on Terror in Pakistan not only securitised the militants but the area and people that were linked to them. In the "war of terror" in the tribal areas, checkpoints, curfews and military operations became the norm of exceptional governance in Pashtun territories (Akhtar, 2021). The securitisation policies in the erstwhile FATA reinforced discrimination, which manifested in the nonviolent Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) (Mahsud, 2024). This is the state's answer to that movement, which was also expressed in a security manner. Jan and Khan (2024) shows how, through the discourse of the military, the PTM is defined as an 'enemy Other', and the repression of it becomes normal. Amin (2023) argues that contemporary Pashtun nationalism is pluralistic and dynamic as compared to primordial.

Copenhagen School also differentiates between the various sectors of security. The societal sector is where collective identity is a threat as well as where ethnic and religious groups can be the referent objects or the targets of securitisation (Skidmore, 1999). In Pakistan, Pashtuns held both roles; the areas they lived in were said to be "areas to be secured," and their identity was slowly becoming a sign of potential danger. Furthermore, securitisation is not a one-shot affair. Research on framing demonstrates that repeated images in the media can eventually normalise a security perspective on an issue (Vultee, 2022), while visual studies highlight the importance of the images' intertextuality and the accumulation of meaning over time (Taylor, 2017). It is these crucial insights that are relevant to cinema, where meaning is constructed by the repetition of characters, settings, and visual codes, rather than by explicit argument.

Colonial Archives and the Persistence of the "Violent Pathan"

The idea of Pashtun association with violence has existed prior to 2001. The frontier tribes were stereotyped as martial, wild, and fanatical, which found justification for punitive expeditions and special legal regimes (Shah et al., 2022). Yousaf (2019) suggests that this generalization continued even after 1947 and was revived during the War on Terror, given the apparent desire for peace amongst the tribes in their jirgas as well as during the PTM. In a following study, Yousaf (2021) talks about a "post-colonial burden", in which the colonial terms of the "savage" Pathan remain pertinent to the thinking of security.

These colonial images are not simply of symbolic importance but have real-world implications. They demonstrate that the concepts developed in colonial ethnography are still in use today, in the analysis of Pashtun society, without being critically examined, using archival research and interviews with Pashtun intellectuals in Peshawar and in Charsadda (Shah et al., 2022). As Yousaf (2021) posits, the same racialised terminology is present in current counterterrorism rhetoric, in which the colonial "savage" reincarnates as the "militant". This continuity is important in the backdrop of the present study as it helps in recognizing the characters in the film with reference to the images that are familiar to them. Filmmakers can use visual shorthand to show danger in the frontier, even when they are trying to be accurate about current events, and can end up reproducing colonial stereotypes.

Pashtuns in Pakistani Film and Television

The most direct analysis of Pashtun subjects of the present day in Pakistani cinema is presented by Rizwan (2023). She claims that Lollywood creates a binary between Pashtun/Punjabi in which Punjabi identity represents the nation, and Pashtun represents the "noble savage", "violent Islamist", "vengeful patriarch" or "buffoon". One of the three films analyzed in the present study, *Khuda Kay Liye*, interprets the frontier as militant Islam. Research on *Waar* also reveals that the movie links Pashtun characterization with terrorism and intelligence agencies' operations (Ayub et al., 2024), while *Yalghaar* has attracted limited research so far. To contrast with this, Pakistani television presents a useful point of comparison: TV dramas at prime time, which are broadcast in Urdu, tend to pay more attention to the dress of Pashtuns and their rural lifestyle (Shah et al., 2022).

Given its religious and diaspora-based focus, the scholarship of *Khuda Kay Liye* has overlooked ethnicity (Habiba & Rauf, 2025; Sibtain et al., 2021), and neither of these accounts considers the frontier nature of the construction of Pashtun identity.

Post-2001 Pakistani Cinema, the Military and the National Narrative

In the mid-2000s, with the revival of Pakistani cinema, there has been a renewed focus on terrorism, national identity and gendered violence (Hull, 2020). A few of the most popular movies of this era were made in conjunction with or in close coordination with Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media component. Haider (2023) demonstrates that in the context of ISPR-sponsored television, military and domestic worlds are intertwined, and the army becomes a family and a moral guardian. Similarly, Press coverage did not fail to promote the national security image of the military in Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Gul et al., 2020). However, popular culture can also challenge the official narratives and sometimes defy them, as in Pakistani cinema (Sulehria, 2022).

At the same time, security themes took centre stage in Pakistani screen media. Military dramas, patriotic songs and films made and/or sponsored by ISPR portrayed soldiers as the defenders of the country, while militants, depicted as enemies, were frequently set against the backdrop of the mountains of the north-western province (Haider, 2023). In the eyes of scholars of cinema and security, films don't just reflect events; they are also a part of what makes it a threat and who is a legitimate defender (Taylor, 2017). During this period, the films' commercial

success also suggests that their stories were convincing, a fact that securitisation theory also points to, regarding audience acceptance (Skidmore, 1999).

The Selected Films in Context

For the purposes of this study, three films were selected to meet each of the following criteria: They were all high-profile films that directly addressed the War on Terror and together cover the decade in which it was at its most intense. Shoaib Mansoor's film *Khuda Kay Liye* 2007 is considered a landmark in the renaissance of Pakistani cinema, both in terms of writing and directing. The movie was a commercial success and was made available at various international film festivals and was the first Pakistani film to be released in India in several decades. It has been the subject of scholarly studies for its treatment of religion, music, gender and suspicion following 9/11, but most of this has concerned religious and diasporic identity and not ethnicity (Habiba & Rauf, 2025; Sibtain et al., 2021). Rizwan (2023) is a partial exception in that he sees the film as linking the Pashtun frontier to militant Islam, while portraying a cosmopolitanized Punjabi Muslim as the national norm.

Waar (2013) was the feature debut of director Bilal Lashari and was written by Hassan Rana. It came out in 2013 and was one of the top-grossing Pakistani films of the time, and received acclaim for its technical aims but was called patriotic or propagandistic by critics for its portrayal of India and the security services. At the time, the film was connected with ISPR in the media reports, but denied by the director. It has, however, been little systematically studied academically in the representation of Pashtun characters.

Yalghaar (2017) is a film directed and written by Hassan Rana, which was released in 2017 and portrays a military operation by the Pakistan Army against militants in the Swat valley. Whereas *Waar* has an explicit association with the military since it was backed by ISPR and even an ISPR officer has been credited among its producers. This is indeed a prime example of military-sponsored entertainment as mentioned by (Haider, 2023). *Yalghaar* enjoys a high public profile, but has been little studied in the academic literature. The study compares a social drama with an urban counterterrorism thriller and a military operation film (in combination with *Khuda Kay Liye* and *Waar*) and tracks the representation of Pashtuns over 10 years of conflict.

Research Gap

The literature examined above reveals three points: firstly, the War on Terror securitised Pashtun identity (Akhtar, 2021; Jan & Khan, 2024; Mahsud, 2024), and secondly, that the image of the 'violent Pathan' persisted throughout the colonial era (Shah et al., 2022; Yousaf, 2019, 2021). The third point is that Pashtuns are often the subject of negative and derogatory portrayals in contemporary Pakistani cinema (Ayub et al., 2024; Rizwan, 2023). What is lacking is a study that synthesises all these strands together, uses securitisation theory for the analysis of Pakistani feature films, and compares films of different genres and periods of the conflict. Previous film studies have concentrated on one or two films; they have tended to deal with religion and not ethnicity; and they have tended to treat stereotyping as a negative issue of only negative characters. In the present study, the focus will be on the three films that not only give the Pashtun characters security meanings, but also Pashtun spaces, dress and language, while also uncovering the counter-narratives that complicate this pattern.

Theoretical Framework

This research is an interdisciplinary approach with three complementary perspectives. Securitisation theory elucidates the process of defining issues, identities and spaces as existential threats that warrant extraordinary measures (Skidmore, 1999), and its visual counterpart unravels the mechanism through which images can accomplish this framing (Taylor, 2017). Representation theory is used to account for the creation of meaning, in terms of signs,

images and narratives, and the manner in which stereotyping de-signifies an entire group by representing it with a few simplified characteristics (Hall, 1997). According to Postcolonial theory, especially (Said, 1978) concept of Othering, the dominant group is responsible for the creation of subordinate group as different, backward or threatening. While Said wrote on the Western image of the East, the concept has been used to talk about the internal Other in postcolonial states (Shah et al., 2022; Yousaf, 2021). In combination, these lenses pose the question of how the cinematic shape secures security meanings to Pashtun identity and space.

From a practical point of view, each point of view contributes to a different phase of the analysis. Representation theory encourages viewers to consider the sign(s) by which Pashtun identity is made visible and audible on screen, including costume, accent, architecture and landscape (Hall et al., 2025). Securitisation theory focuses the interest on the narrative of these signs, whether they are linked to existential threat or to extreme measures or to the legitimacy of the security state (Skidmore, 1999). Othering is about "what's included and what's not" (Said, 1978) and the boundaries of the film between the self and the Other in the nation. The three viewpoints allow the formulation of concepts of indirect and spatial profiling which otherwise would not be apparent if only an analysis of positive or negative portrayals of individual Pashtun characters was conducted.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative, interpretive design is used in the study. It employs a reflexive thematic analysis as it is not a process of emerging themes but involves the development of shared meanings through sustained study of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The theoretical framework outlined above was also used to guide the analysis, as it sensitised for security, representation and Othering, but was also open to meanings that had not been predicted by the theories.

Sample

Three Pakistani feature films were chosen using a purposive sampling technique: *Khuda Kay Liye* (2007), *Waar* (2013) and *Yalghaar* (2017). The criteria for selecting films were that they were released after 2001, featured a direct treatment of terrorism, militancy, or national security, had Pashtun characters or were set in Pashtun-majority areas, and had wide release and public attention. Combined, the movies cover 10 years of the War on Terror and span three genres: a social drama on religion and extremism; an urban counterterrorism thriller; and a military operation film set during the Swat events.

Data Collection and Analysis

All films were screened in their entirety multiple times, and descriptions of the film scenes, dialogue, analytic memos for characterisation, costume, setting, accent, cinematography, and narrative position were all recorded. The unit of analysis was any scene of Pashtun characters, Pashtun-dominated space, militancy, or state security institutions. The analysis was conducted through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) comprising six stages: familiarization with the films, generation of initial codes, construction of candidate themes, reviewing themes against coded data and whole films, definition and naming themes, and writing the analytic narrative. Early codes were: Tribal dress, Borderland imagery, Pashto accent, Militant leader, Pashtun officer, Captive woman, Civilian victim, Foreign enemy, Military heroism, and religious authority. These codes were grouped into five themes, presented below film by film and then synthesized across the sample.

Analysis of the Selected Films

Khuda Kay Liye (2007)

Directed by Shoaib Mansoor, *Khuda Kay Liye* is about two Lahori brothers. Mansoor goes to the U.S. to study music, and following 9/11, is arrested and tortured by U.S. authorities for being a Muslim. His brother Sarmad becomes influenced by a radical cleric, Maulana Tahiri, and forgets about music and participates in the forced marriage of his British-Pakistani cousin Mary, who is taken away to a remote village across the Afghan border. Eventually, Mary is rescued and takes her case to a Pakistani court, where the moderate scholar Maulana Wali presents a case that Islam is being misapplied to justify violence and coercion.

The primary argument of the film is religious and not ethnic, but the geography has ethnic significance. The situation of radicalisation is set up in the cities of Lahore, while the consequences are played out in the frontier, where mountains, mud-walled compounds, turbans, guns, and secluded women represent a space outside the law and modernity. The tribal village is thus the ground of extremism, where Mary's freedom is removed. The frontier in (Hall et al., 2025) is the sign of coercion and backwardness.

The film's spatial coding confirms Rizwan's (Rizwan, 2023) view that the film places a modern-day and cosmopolitan Punjabi Muslim at odds with a space of militant Islam. The film's conclusion also gives rise to an alternative story, however. Mary decides to go back to the village to teach the girls there, viewing the frontier not as a place of opportunity, but as a place of potential and the people there as people who deserve rights and education and not suspicions. The film thus represents and plays with the securitised frontier: it situates extremism in the Pashtun space but does not equate Pashtun people with terror.

Waar (2013)

One of the highest-grossing Pakistani films of its era, the Bilal Lashari-directed film *Waar* is the most blatant example of securitisation in the sample. It is about Major Mujtaba Rizvi, a retired army officer who is recalled to put down a significant terrorist attack being orchestrated by a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) operative named Ramal, in partnership with a Taliban commander Mulla Siraj, who runs an operation centre in the tribal region from a fort. Based on true incidents such as the attack on a police training centre in Lahore in 2009.

Securitisation in *Waar* is both oral and visual. The speech act described by (Skidmore, 1999) is found in the notion of a threat to the state from terrorism and its ability to be only overcome through extraordinary intelligence and military action. The tribal belt doesn't look like a social place; it looks like an operational theatre for aerial shots of rugged mountains, convoys, surveillance rooms, and armed raids. The visual vocabulary of terror, in the frontier, is shared with the everyday dress of Pashtun men, by the fact that the militants are marked with *beards, turbans, shalwar kameez and weapons*. This is the type of Pashtun characterization as described by Ayub et al. (2024) that is intermingled with the work of intelligence agencies.

Meanwhile, *Waar* complicates an easy reading of an ethnic identity. Its main antagonist is a foreign agent and not a threat to Pashtun society, but to India. Most importantly, one of its heroes is a Pashtun named SP Ehtesham Khattak, a counterterrorism officer, who is killed in the line of duty while driving a bombed-out vehicle away from the innocent. His sister Javeria Khattak is an intelligence officer. These characters put Pashtuns in the security state as defenders and martyrs. The film thus creates a split image – the Pashtun who serves the state is a hero, while the Pashtun who is not part of the state institutions is a threat. This is comparable to the military rhetoric that views Pashtuns as part of the nation or as a nation's adversary (Jan & Khan, 2024).

Yalghaar (2017)

Dramatised by Hassan Rana and facilitated by ISPR, *Yalghaar* is a movie about Pakistan Army operation in Piochar village of Swat. The movie is about a team of officers that are led by Colonel Asad in a 76-hour attack against militants led by Torjan, while secondary stories are about the officers' families and relationships. Zarmina is a local woman, captured by the militants, and Baran is a young militant who is conflicted and disinclined to senselessly brutal acts.

All three films are direct representations of a Pashtun region as a battleground, but *Yalghaar* is the film which has the most intimate portrayal of such a battle space. Almost all of the Swat valley is represented by combat, and the protagonist of the militant leader is a stock bad guy with unmotivated motivations. The film doesn't even explain how militancy came about in Swat, making its Pashtun enemies seem like pure menace, and the army seems to be the only entity willing to sacrifice for order. It aligns with the concept of ISPR defined by (Haider, 2023) that involves blending of military and familial logic so that the army emerges as the moral hub of the nation.

Nonetheless, out of the three, *Yalghaar* has the best civilian point of view. While the captured Zarmina personifies the local Pashtun population as being victims of militancy, Baran's hesitation implies that militants are more a product of circumstances than of birth. These aspects align with what (Mahsud, 2024; Yousaf, 2019) argue that the Pashtuns in the tribal areas are themselves opposed to militancy. They are still, however, subjected to a story of military heroism, with the Pashtun civilians being primarily portrayed as objects of rescue by the State.

The most crucial pattern is the fact that space is securitized not ethnicity. None of the films explicitly say Pashtun are terrorists, but each is a film about terror in Pashtun mountains and villages, what could be called a "spatial profiling" production. Othering is achieved by selective visibility, where urban, educated, professional and artistic Pashtun life is almost completely erased, thus simplifying a diverse community to the contexts of conflict (Hall et al., 2025; Said, 1978).

Discussion

Causes of Securitised Representation

This securitisation can be understood from three aspects. The first one is political context: the films were produced during or shortly after military operations in the tribal areas and Swat, and if the military did facilitate production (as it did with *Yalghaar*), the narrative was based on the army's view (Haider, 2023). The second is the business side of the action genre, where it is essential to have clear enemies and spectacular settings, the Frontier Mountains can supply. A common genre element for the enemy is anonymity, meaning that they are generalized and abstracted (Flood & Martin, 2019; Kennedy, 2017). The third is the low involvement of Pashtun writers and consultants in the mainstream production, which means that the third frontier is likely to be represented from Lahore and Karachi, rather than represented from within (Kanwal et al., 2024; Rizwan, 2023).

Consequences for Pashtun Communities

This study focuses on texts, not audiences; and securitisation works only if it is accepted by an audience (Skidmore, 1999). However, the representations outlined here exist in a larger discursive context where Pashtuns have been subjected to ethnic profiling at the checkpoints, in cities and in public discourse (Akhtar, 2021). Cinema that continually equates to danger Pashtun dress and landscape gives it such familiarity of profiling. Rather than being seen as a security issue, the frontier and its people are viewed largely as a problem of the national community (Rizwan, 2023; Yousaf, 2021).

The counter-narratives are important because the Pashtun officer, the captive villager and the educated returnee represent Pashtuns as citizens, defenders and victims of the war, in such a way that Lollywood can produce and

challenge official narratives simultaneously (Sulehria, 2022). There are ambivalences in the picture: the films move away from the crude caricature but they go on securitising Pashtun space.

Recommendations

Films should be made from Pashtun narratives that go beyond conflict; Pashtun writers, consultants and actors to be engaged in film production. There needs to be a clear distinction between civilian experience and the militant organisations, in counterterrorism films. Media literacy programs should be designed to sensitize the audience about visual securitisation and stereotyping (Taylor, 2017), and funding bodies and censor boards should promote productions to depict Pakistan's ethnic diversity. Further studies are needed which will integrate textual analysis and audience reception studies and interviews with filmmakers.

Conclusion

In this study, three post-2001 Pakistani films which engage in the War on Terror in their context have been studied to look at how the Pashtun identity is represented. It identified the markers of Pashtun culture and geography as the primary ways in which Pashtun identities are constructed in these films while, by using securitisation theory, representation theory, and the concept of Othering, it determined that the films securitise Pashtun space more concretely than Pashtun ethnicity. *Waar* is the most securitized, but it also has a Pashtun officer as a hero; *Khuda Kay Liye* situates extremism on the frontier but separates it from Pashtun people; and *Yalghaar* reserves the strongest space for the Pashtun civilians, but in the context of military rescue. The findings support (Rizwan, 2023) argument by demonstrating that profiling is no longer synonymous with caricature but rather is more subtle and indirect, taking place through setting and visual coding.

Based on 3 films and interpretation of the texts and not considering the audience, the findings are neither generalisable to all Pakistani cinema nor indicate the audience's response to Pakistani cinema. In spite of this, the study proves that cinema is an important site in which the security discourse of the War on Terror is reproduced and contested. The representation of Pashtuns as equal citizens of the country is yet to be completed by Pakistani film makers.

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