CHAPTER 7

Music and violence: The complexity and complicity of Pashto "Songs of Terror"

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Abstract

This chapter discusses how Pashto songs eulogize and romanticize militarization, especially its twin technologies of systemic violence — Drone strikes and suicide bombing. Using Achille Mbembe's necropolitics as a theoretical lens, the authors discuss how music, politics, and destruction reinforce one another in a war zone where life is subjected to the rule of death. The authors argue that militarization in the Pashtun belt—a border region straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan and inhabited by the ethnic Pashtuns—led to the emergence of a local genre of songs, which they call "songs of terror" in this chapter. The poignant lyrics in these songs hide the power structure that imperceptibly regulates the troubled space of their cultural production. This politicization of music and musicalization of death, they argue, create a necrospace in which the cultural imagery appears in an undifferentiated role with the technologies of war. This imagery of the necrosovereigns — Drones and suicide bombing—does not only reflect the complexity of the ties between culture and politics, but also becomes complicit in reproducing and proliferating organized violence in its enunciations.

Keywords: Pashto songs, songs of terror, necrospace, necrosovereigns, drone, suicide bombing, Pak-Afghan border, terrorism

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Introduction

The famous Pashto singer, Sitara Younis, sang: "I am an illusion, a suicide bomb" (*Khud kasha dhamaka yum, dhoka yuma, dhoka*), with the stage performance of Sonu Lal, to hundreds of Pashtuns of all ages who did not just listen to the song,

but also danced to the tune and lip-sang the lyrics in unison with the singer (Zeb, 2012).

Given the popularity of this song, a couple of years later, the same singer sang another song, "My gaze is as fatal as a Drone attack" (*Za kaom pa stargu stargu drone hamla*) that also received a similar response (Zainali, 2014). This popular appearance of the imagery of suicide bombs and drone strikes, the two offshoots of the "war on terror" in contemporary Pakistan, signify the prevailing wave of militarization as a discourse in the daily life of the Pashtuns. This raises a vital question: does this form of music dilute, negotiate, and/or resist the horrible effects of the war in Pakistan? Since music is traditionally associated with resistance, therefore its celebration of militarized violence complicates its role and deserves an investigation. These responses require seeing how music, especially the lyrics, has been influenced by the persistent militarization in Pakistan. In this chapter, therefore, the authors examine a complex relationship of Pashto music with the troubled site of its emergence — the border region comprising the northwest Pakistan and southeast Afghanistan, commonly known as the Pashtun belt.

With the beginning of the "war on terror" in Pakistan's bordering tribal region in 2001, the daily lives of the local Pashtun population and their cultural space began to shrink (Ahmed, 2013). The heavy presence of Pakistan's military and the Taliban's reemergence as a political force reinforced the militarization that almost resulted in the stifling of alternative voices in the region (Siddique, 2014). In the given militarized space, the emergence of the "songs of terror" problematized the relationship between music, politics, and death. Despite the relative lull in the drone and suicide attacks in recent years, the Pak-Afghan border is still the focus of the global war and its multiple ramifications. Using Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics as a theoretical lens, this chapter focuses on the lyrics of the emergent Pashto songs to understand how music, politics, and destruction reinforce one another in a conflict zone where life is subjected to the rule of death—various sovereign powers (USA, Pakistan, and Al-Qaeda-affiliated Taliban) instrumentalizing death to control the local population. This politicization of music and musicalization of death, as argued in this chapter, create a necrospace in the Pashtun belt where the cultural imagery appears in an undifferentiated role with the necrosovereigns—drones and suicide bombers—drones representing the U.S. military sovereignty in the sky and suicide bombing ruining people's lives on the ground (Ashraf & Shamas, 2020). The textual imagery produced in such a violent troubled space not only reflects the complexity of the ties between culture and politics but also becomes complicit in reproducing systemic violence in its ramifications.

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Often dismissed in Pashtun belt as too mundane[1], and thus unfit for academic inquiry, a relationship between commercial music and militarized violence (read "war on terror") is not a common theme in popular and academic discourses. This undervalued symbiotic relationship between space and violence is either generalized in the context of performing arts as the cultural voice of Pashtun nationalism (Khan & Khattak, 2014) or it is buried deep down under a militarized discourse with a focus on the legal and political dimensions of techno-savvy Drone warfare (Gusterson, 2019; Khan, 2011; Parks, 2014; Peron, 2015). A few academic inquiries have examined the violent (mis)representation of Pashtuns in a bid to dispel such myths of cultural representation (Afridi et al., 2016; Yousaf, 2019), but the approach (of such a discourse) is often apologetic in a sense that it absolves Pashtuns of colonial charges of being unruly and violent. Among the popular responses, the authors of this chapter found reports that have looked into the shrinking of space for Pashto music with focus on murders, censorships, threats, and destruction of the places of cultural production (Buneri et al., 2014).

On the whole, such cultural discourses, while attributing regional imperialist militarization to local insurgency, ignore a relationship between global power and the state's ideology in the construction of the space. It also undermines the mutation and transformation of the marginalized local cultural sphere that reveal mediation between the global forms of local violence and their attendant responses. These representations, however, do not connect the local social milieu with the systemic form of contemporary global violence in the form of "war on terror." As a result, the local agency, as well as the Pashtun belt, either submerges in a passive power of victimhood or reduces to an appendage status in cultural discourses. This dual negligence, academic inattention toward the expansive local cultural terrain in the context of the global war and generalizations around the Pashtun identity, do not only decontextualize systemic violence, but also naturalize the proliferation of the wider militarized discourse.

The main objective in this chapter, therefore, is to reveal a symbiotic relationship between imperialist violence and a local production of commercial cultural artifacts — "songs of terror." By showing how a new genre of songs has developed under the shadow of the decades-long militarization in Pakistan, the authors not only attempt to show the rising popularity of this emerging genre

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[1] For details see *Vulgarity has destroyed Pashto music | Art & Culture | thenews.com.pk.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2021, from https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/56496 5-pashto-music; and *Violence and vulgarity: Pashto pop music reflects region's war fixation.* (2015, July 5). The Express Tribune. http://tribune.com.pk/story/915473/violence-and-vulgarity-pashto-pop-music-reflects-regions-war-fixation.

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on social media but also focus on how the local cultural artifacts connect imperialist violence to everyday life in the Pashtun belt. The discussion in this chapter, however, is not limited to mere temporal conditions (trends, profit, public response) responsible for the production of the cultural artifacts; rather, it emphasizes that the emergence of this commercial text and their poignant lyrics hide the power structure that imperceptibly regulates the space of their production. This study, therefore, aims to establish that these songs do not merely depict violence at the time and place of their origin but also, through their circulation, disseminate it to the broader cultural space of the region, and consequently produce a hitherto unknown necrospace in the process.

The Pashtun Belt: A Site of Imperialist Militarization

The Pashtun Belt is a sparsely populated mountainous strip that connects Pakistan's northwestern (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including former FATA) and southern parts (Karachi and Ten Districts of Baluchistan). It protrudes into Afghanistan's three adjacent eastern (Loy Nangarhar or Greater Nangarhar), southeastern (loya Paktia or Greater Paktia), and southern and southwestern (Loy Kandahar or Greater Kandahar) tribal regions. Divided on both sides, over 20 million ethnic Pashtuns live in Pakistan—over sixteen percent of its total 200.2 million population (*Minority Rights Group*, 2018). This belt had historically connected Central Asian states in the north with the northwestern fringes of the Indian subcontinent (present day Pakistan) via Afghanistan.

Different global powers at different ages fought for the control of this corridor for different purposes. The British regime in India, as part of its Forward Policy, initially imagined its boundary with Russia along Amu Darya (river) in Afghanistan, but their defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan war made them settle for a "closed border" policy that resulted in the Durand Line in 1893.[2] As a colonial outpost, this line separated northwestern and southwestern fringes of British India from Afghanistan, dividing Pashtun tribes, the world's largest tribal society on both sides of the Durand Line (Ahmed, 2011; Anderson, 1975; Bartlotti, 2000; Hart, 1985). In 1901, the local population along the border toward the British Indian side was further divided into North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Culminating in what the British called a "threefold frontier," this division allowed the colonial administration to directly administer NWFP with Peshawar as the capital of the state and indirectly govern FATA with a separate set of laws known

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[2] The British colonial power in India and Afghanistan fought three wars, known as Anglo-Afghan Wars or Afghan Wars (First Anglo-Afghan War 1839-42, Second Anglo-Afghan War 1878-1880, Third Anglo-Afghan War 1919).

as the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). This division enabled the British colonizers to exert strategic control over Afghanistan at the extreme outer fringe of the British India (Siddique, 2014). Such layers of buffer zones facilitated the British Raj to effectively counter the growing Soviet influence in the region.

After the British withdrawal from India and the latter's partition in 1947, these administratively divided territories (NWFP and FATA) of British India fell under the control of the newly created state of Pakistan. As a result, these regions continued to be imagined as what the British called "lawless territories" (Yaghistan, subsequently *Illaqa Ghair* or the Land of the "Others"), hence the bordering tribal area was governed through FCR until 2018. Operating from this core, the colonial administration and the postcolonial Pakistani state (de)regulated life in the Pashtun belt, giving militarization a permanent form of life (Ainslee, 1977).

Using Britain's fabricated lawlessness as a framework, the Pakistani, in alliance with the U.S., appropriated the Pashtun belt for their strategic interests and legitimized their military aggression in the name of peace and stability (Ahmed, 2013; Khan, 2011; Shaw & Akhter, 2012). This imperialist alliance raised and equipped the Mujahedeen and Taliban as a proxy Islamist fighting force in the 1980s to stop the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan (Crile, 2007). The current U.S-led "war on terror" is not a break from the past. Instead, this systemic violence is in line with this bordering region's almost two centuries of imperialist history. The U.S. and its allied forces (NATO-ISAF) invaded Afghanistan to eliminate the hideouts of their former Islamist proxies (Ahmed, 2013). Among others, drone strikes and suicide bombings are the most lethal technologies in this asymmetric global war (Khan, 2011; Woods, 2015). Although the "war on terror" was launched in 2001, the first drone attack was carried out in 2004 (Shaw & Akhter, 2012). Ever since, over four hundred drone attacks have targeted the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Pakistani Taliban commanders in which close to 3,700 deaths, including 245 to 303 civilians, have been reported (Bergen et al., 2021).

This war-like situation did not exist in the metropolitan areas, but in tribal regions that were considered lawless by the alliance that indiscriminately used lethal technology to prosecute their deadly war against the Mujahedeen and Taliban. The collateral consequence of the "war on terror" exposed Pashtuns living in this region to the ire of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated local Taliban groups. Unable to stop the drones, these Taliban groups settled scores with the local population by carrying out suicide attacks against soft targets such as schools, music centers, net cafes, local theaters, etc. The majority of these attacks were carried out in Peshawar, Quetta, and Kabul, as well as other major Pashtun

cities, during the peak time of violence (Woods, 2015). From 2007 to 2009, for example, there was an average of two suicide-attacks each month in ex-FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2018).

Due to such persistent militarization and militancy in this area, forms of cultural events were silenced, and local voices against the war and violence either emerged in the form of *Pashto tapey*, a folkloric romantic genre of Pashto literature, or found expression in commercial songs the authors call "songs of terror." Essentially, these songs highlighted drones and suicide bombings as the twin technologies of indiscriminate violence that were featured in the "war on terror." How then did this genre produce and occupy a cultural space amidst persistent imperialist militarization? This question is addressed in the sections below.

A space thriving on an economy of injury

The "songs of terror," produced in a space under the influence of high-tech warfare and its attendant responses, could best be analyzed in the light of Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics—a theoretical paradigm that discusses the subjugation of life to the power of death and a reconfiguration of the relation between sacrifice, terror, and resistance. Mbembe (2003) argues that Foucault's notion of biopower can no longer explain the new form of "social existence"—the creation of *"death-worlds,"* and the reduction of humans into *living dead* (p. 92). In his critical theoretical formulation, Mbembe primarily focuses on two things: the sovereign's exercise of the right to kill and the deployment of technology for maximal destruction of human life. Though these technologies are instructive here, we would like to take it further into the spatial formation that results from the incidents of destruction and their attendant responses. We argue that when an act of terrorism occurs and its spectacle subsides, a new necrospace emerges, not just in the form of deadly practices (revenge, suicide bombing, etc.), but in the speech acts (in this case the "songs of terror") that continue to proliferate and reproduce the imagery of violence and death. Thus, instead of a single event like a drone strike or suicide attack, which in itself certainly devastates human life and the conditions of their survival, the cultural proliferation and reproduction of violence in the form of these songs create an imaginary space in which death takes center stage.

Additionally, this spatial production and reproduction is useful to the necrosovereigns because it keeps the population in a state of what Jasbir Puar (2015) calls "deliberate debilitation." However, it is pertinent to mention here that debilitation is not the same as disability. Differentiating between debility and disability, Puar (2015) says that the former is a "slow wearing down of

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population" while the latter "hinges on a narrative of before and after for individuals who will eventually be identified as disabled" (Preface, p. xiv). Put differently, people in a state of debilitation are restricted to an open-air incarceration where all forms of life support (food, water, health, communication, and digital technology) are being constantly modulated by the technology of power. For example, Pashtuns have historically remained marginalized under both colonial (British India) and postcolonial (Pakistan, after 1947) regimes. Most wars, including those that were cultural, in both periods were fought on their soil and body (Fowler, 2007). Both regimes applied a separate set of laws on Frontier Crimes Regulation, Action in Aid of Civil Power) to maim the Pashtun body and environment in order to make available for sustaining the economy of injury.[3] Thus, debilitation is "a practice of rendering populations available for statistically likely injury" (Puar, 2015, p. xviii).

Disrupting the categories of disability, Puar (2015) uses the concept of debility to expand understanding of injury in order to encompass a wide range of people into its fold. By doing so, she also adds debility ("will not let die") as an additional component to the logic of biopolitics ("make live and let die") and necropolitics ("make die and let live"). Puar (2015) argues, "debilitation and the production of disability are in fact biopolitical ends unto themselves, with moving neither toward life nor toward death as the aim" (p. xviii). This existence between life-in-death and death-in-life is what Puar calls the sovereign's right to maim. In postcolonial Pakistan, for instance, the state machinery encourages patriarchy as a social system with focus on increased reproduction without provision of sufficient means of life support system (see Khan, 2005, 2016). In this way, a Pashtun benefits the state not only by keeping the border as an unpaid soldier (*bela tankhey mulazem*) but also the destruction of resources on their land compel them to work as laborers in the foreign countries where they earn and send back remittances to meet Pakistan's economic needs (Nichols, 2008). Thus, maiming, as Puar (2015) says, is "a source of value extraction from populations that would otherwise be disposable" (p. xviii). Produced in this debilitating space, even a text as entertaining as commercial songs could potentially be a macabre expression of this maiming. Using "drones" and "suicide bombing" as their catchwords, the emerging genre of commercial

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[3] In 1948, for instance, the State sent a tribal militia for *jihad* in Kashmir against India and then, dispatched them against India to fight on the Lahore front in 1965. In 1979, the tribal youths were even sent to fight a US-funded *jihad* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In 1998, the then military dictator Pervez Musharraf sent Pashtuns to the war against India in Kargil.

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Pashto songs is one of its examples, an argument we extend below in examining the "songs of terror."

Music and Violence

As Carvalho (2013) contends, music is "born of a contract between the violence of noise and the silence of death" (p. 111). This complicated relationship between music and violence has intrigued many of its critics and researchers. McDonald (2010), for example, discusses the Palestinian wedding songs and performances (*debke*, *zeffa*, and *sahja*) to underscore how music assumes a political meaning in a conflict zone by forming communal connections between shared history of home and family and ideals of nation and resistance to occupation. Unlike such oft-romanticized vision of music as a voice of resistance to war and oppression, Attali (1985), by focusing on the noise and sound of music, finds music itself as an instrument of death and violence. He argues that in "its biological reality, noise is a source of pain. Beyond a certain limit, it becomes an immaterial weapon of death" (Attali 1985, p. 27). This fusion of music and violence is taken further by Daughtry (2014) in his framing of *thanatosonics*, which he says is "the acoustic instantiation of what Achille Mbembe has called 'necropolitics': 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death'" (p.40). He argues that "the potential for violence is structurally embedded in all music…all of which have been consciously manipulated in detention centers throughout the 'war on terror'" (Daughtry, 2014, p. 42). Similarly, Cusick (2013) also highlights how "loud music" was weaponized as a technique of torture in the US-led detention centers to disorient the prisoners' subjectivity and disintegrate their psyche. Thus, music has the potential of creating solidarities among communities to form a coherent response to forces of oppression as well as the capacity of acoustic coercion and torture that play into the hands of the very forces of oppression.

However, it is beyond the purview of the present study to rehash previous research on music and violence or prove the innocence or complicity of music in itself in sustaining or resisting violence in general. We would still like to point readers to Elaine Sandoval's exhaustive review of literature on the role of music in multiple contexts including in violence and peacebuilding. Sandoval (2016) categorizes a large body of literature into "music and peace" and "music and violence" to discuss how various authors have engaged with the role of music in preventing or ending a conflict, or its traumatic and therapeutic functions in the aftermath of a conflict.

In this chapter, however, we focus on the relationship of Pashto music, especially the lyrics, with the organized global violence in the Pashtun belt to see how decades-long militarization produces a spatial mutation in local

cultural artifacts. Though we partly agree with Sandoval's (2016) assertion that "understanding detailed, specific local contexts of violent conflict is crucial to thinking through music's potential role in such situations, and whether it can be one of peacebuilding or further violence" (p. 212), we would like to take it further than a mere dyadic understanding of music in terms of peace and violence. We focus on the specific context of the emergence of Pashto 'Songs of Terror' in the wake of decades-long militarization and organized global violence so as to understand how music mutates and creates a spatial contagion.

Violence and Pashto Music

This chapter was largely motivated by an article that appeared in a Pakistani English daily discussing one of these songs (Khan, 2012): "My gaze is as fatal as a Drone attack" (*Za Kaom Pa Stargo Stargo Drone Hamla*) that aroused mixed response from the song's viewers. The article claims that though "the song and video do not have anything new to offer, with an unimpressive melody and some dance moves by Dua, it seems the audience cares more about the lyrics" (Khan, 2012). According to the article, most respondents resented the trivial representation of drones and suicide attacks which they believe were otherwise meant for entertainment. Some even called for the censor board to filter out the content of these and other similar items. The article in itself generated mixed comments from its readers. One respondent, Gul, in the comment section of the article, apologetically denied the popularity of such songs. Another user, Imran Con, justified a death sentence for the musicians who sang the songs, arguing that "From what I gather, the fact they make music is enough for a death sentence from them anyways (sic)" (Khan, 2012). A couple of online users, Enlightened and Romo, however, appreciated the song and prayed for the safety of the singers.

We accessed about 20 songs in a random YouTube search that were composed in the last decade, all of which addressed the "war on terror" from different perspectives. Only five songs, however, used the metaphors of "drone strikes" and "suicide attacks." The five songs were therefore purposively selected as the data for our qualitative analysis.

Since no effective copyright regulations were in effect locally, some of the selected songs are available in different versions in Pakistan. Additionally, they are also available as playback tone in various self-promotional videos on different social media sites. Since most of these songs are recorded in small studios in the interior city areas of Peshawar and Lahore, they are also used by professional artists as background music to stage performances. This randomness makes it difficult to authenticate the original source of their creation, hence this poses a problem of proper academic citation when they are referenced. Also, it

is pertinent to mention that the general fear of the necrosovereigns, owing to decades of systemic violence, conditions a forced anonymity for some musicians. For example, the Taliban destroyed many local entertainment spaces such as the commonly known "CD" shops and Internet cafes, and forced many artists either to quit the profession or seek asylum elsewhere. Authenticating the authorship of these songs, therefore, becomes muddied in the terrorized space of their production.

Some newspaper articles and reports make interesting revelations about the forced anonymity of these songs. Ali (2011), a journalist with *The Express Tribune*, a leading English Daily of Pakistan, claims that Shakir Zeb, a popular local composer, directed the song, "Khudkasha Damaka," that was written by Lyricist Rashid Johar and sung by Sitara Younis. He adds that initially Zeb refused to compose the song but "an anonymous influential figure of the Pashto film industry pressurized Zeb to work on the controversial song" (Ali, 2011). As far as these singers are concerned, they could only be guessed by their voices or appearance if available in video version. Quite often, as *YouTube* empowers people to create a channel and upload content, sometimes even without strict copyrights enforcement, the general users upload these songs to their respective channels and subsequently share them on their social media spaces in multiple forms. In this unauthorized scenario, some if not most of these songs are often duplicated, edited, and shared in such a way that it is difficult or impossible to determine their authorized and original versions. In other words, no standard repository of Pashto songs exists to authenticate the date of their composition and release.

Therefore, given the availability of these songs as multiple variants, shared on multiple platforms via multiple users, our choice was determined by the audience's maximum engagement based on the number of "views," "likes," and "comments" associated with the songs. From our investigation, we found out and determined, for example, that all the five songs discussed in this chapter had an aggregate total of 1.36 million views, with "Rolling Eyes Like a Drone" (Stargey Laka Drone Garzawey) receiving the highest tally of 773K views as of February 22, 2021. We chose and referenced the songs that were not merely depicting drones and suicide attacks—the focus of this study—but also had the most "views" and "likes" on YouTube only—a site that is popular among Internet users in Pakistan. Therefore, for more clarity, the two factors that determined the choice of songs analyzed in this chapter are: (a) songs that were about drone and suicide attacks; and (b) such songs that had the highest "views" and "likes" on YouTube.

Although it is outside the remit of the present study to dive into the parallel history of war and songs in Pakistan, nonetheless, a brief overview of the genre

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is instructive here so as to show how these songs have engaged with and intervened in the spatial reality of the Pashtuns. This background will be useful to the readers in understanding how these cultural artifacts adopted the imagery of drone and suicide attacks while depicting everyday Pashtun life enveloped in a state of war and terror.

"Songs of Terror:" The birth of a genre

Suffice it to say that the imagery of war and resistance in Pashto songs is as old as militarized violence in the region itself. In order to categorize these songs into their relevant time periods, therefore, we relied on the visual and textual clues of these artifacts, taking this Pashto genre as far back as the 1980s, the years in which the USSR's intervention in Afghanistan prompted the U.S.-backed Mujahedeen resistance, locally called *Jihad*. We found, for instance, one song on social media entitled, "Afghan War Song" (ABR Video, 2016), whose black and white flickering visual and textual clues could be conveniently placed into the Mujahedeen time. Sung by Afghan singers, as the edited *YouTube* video shows, the celebration of resistance in this song is supported by some blurred visuals of the armed Mujahedeen attacking the Soviets, aiming and shooting at a building where people run for their lives. These visuals also juxtapose the images of the Mujahedeen with those of Mohammad Najibullah, a pro-communist Pashtun president of Afghanistan (1987-1992), and different leaders of the Parcham faction of Soviet-backed Afghan People's Democratic Party. As no effective copyrights exist, already discussed above, almost all these songs are edited over and over to keep their appeal in contemporary "war on terror." Based on these production clues, we historicize this commercial text into their relevant time periods to trace a Pashto genre in the process of becoming.

Deriving orientation from the sacred and profane, these early Pashto songs feature the religious Islamic concept of *Jihad* as a spectacular nationalistic theme, associating it with local defiance against foreign oppression. For instance, the song, "The Brave Pashtun Freedom Fighters Resisting the Biggest Occupation of Modern History" (TheAbdaliBacha, 2011), juxtaposes the jihadist narrative with the nationalistic spirit. On the one hand the singer relies on the Islamic concept of martyrdom (sacrificing oneself in the way of God) as the lyrics glorify, "Young are martyred, orphans cry" but on the other hand, the singer claims possession of the Pashtun belt and intends to drive out all invaders (TheAbdaliBacha, 2011). The lyrics, for instance, talk about:

> Gun on my back, prayers on my lips
> I will not lay down my arms
> Until I drive enemy out of my land
>
> (TheAbdaliBacha, 2011)

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Similarly, another song titled, "Afghan War Song" (ABR Video, 2016), adopts the same approach, establishing a dichotomous relationship through lyrics such as:

> Our pure land was desecrated by Khalqyan
> The disheveled Russian
> The disheveled Parchamian
>
> (ABR Video, 2016)

In this song, the local jingoistic affiliations are sometimes appropriated for fomenting religious sentiments through juxtaposition of nationalistic undertones and visuals of mujahedeen era fights against the Russians. This approach of mixing the love of land (patriotism) and the imagery of jihad sometimes invokes colonial cues, a theme we found in another song entitled, "Patriotic Pashto Song/Brave Pashtunz" (Nasar, 2012). This song clearly depicts the imagery of Pashtuns as a "martial race"—a colonial objectification of the local people to use them as cannon fodder in their colonial wars. This cultural artifact invokes a nationalistic tone by emphasizing that Pashtun belong to Pakhtunkhwa and they:

> Love this beloved (land)
> In life or in death
> This land belongs to Pashtuns
>
> (Nasar, 2012)

By equating Pashtun identity with the space, the song makes a temporal move by claiming that their "History is a witness" to their identity as "Fearless Pashtuns," and their capacity to drive out an infidel (Russian) enemy from their land (Nasar, 2012). Despite their apparently nationalistic tone and message, these songs carry visual features that also glorify *jihad* and the Mujahedeen in the context of war. It is the juxtaposition of these four divergent elements: secular identity, ethnic identity, extremist religious ideology (*jihad*), and colonial categorization (brave and fearless race) that are mixed together to construct a *perverted* form of cultural narrative that defines Pashtuns as warriors. Ruling the Pashtun belt for many decades, this retrogressive imperialist approach is detrimental to any trace of alternative progressive worldview, yet it is also a popular myth that is reinforced in some sections of academic and popular literature as well (Fowler, 2007).

As a result of this somewhat orchestrated spatial and temporal retrogressive representation, Pashtuns' cultural identity and religious beliefs are intertwined to define their character and nature stereotypically. Most of these songs do not only serve the binary categorization of the local resistance and foreign aggression, but some of them also extend historical forms of colonial stereotyping to perpetuate contemporary war and violence in the Pashtun belt (Fowler, 2007).

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Before the US-Soviet's proxy war, Pashtuns traditionally based the locus of their ethnic identity in their rich culture, commonly known as *Pashtunwali*. But the importation of *Jihad* by the Pakistan state, in conjunction with global powers (USA and their allies) into the region, instilled in Pashtuns an ethnoterritorial sensibility, and inculcated among them a sense of brotherhood across religious and national lines. Such political experiments in imperialist engineering did not only open the Pashtun belt to foreign elements (jihadists from Gulf and elsewhere)[4] but also promoted a worldview depicted in the "songs of terror."

This phenomenon was not so intensely felt during the *Jihad* years when the Pashtun belt was used for a fight between the two global powers: the U.S. and Soviets. In the Post 9/11 scenario, however, the Pashtun land and space in themselves became the means and the end of an asymmetrical war between the Mujahedeen-turned-Taliban groups and the US-led "war on terror." This contemporary imperialist violence almost permanently grounded and mutated violence into the local space, giving birth to a new category of enemy, the nonbeliever. This imperialist practice, taking up the form of local cultural narratives, reduces indigenous reality into a footnote. The spectacle of the post-9/11 Pashto songs does not just cobble Islamic *jihad* with nationalism, but also creates a spatial mutation that blurs the boundary between invasion and resistance, and the sacred and the profane. This takes a further complicated turn in the appearance of the contemporary "songs of terror," where the representation of suicide bombing and drones, the twin technologies of indiscriminate destruction, serves the same ends: systemic violence.

Post-9/11 imagery in Pashto songs[5]

In post-9/11 context, "drone" and "suicide bombing" were used for the first time as a metaphor in Pashto songs around the year 2011. Experimented in a fast musical track, "Suicide Bomb" (*khudkasha dhamaka*) (Zeb, 2012), this innovation—cooptation of the technologies of drone and suicide—brought an apparent shift in the local news and entertainment industry, inviting immediate attention of symbolic means of local representation, along with generating several responses among the viewers/readers (Ali, 2011; Khan, 2012; Shah, 2012).

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[4] For details, watch US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton's interview (2014, July 12). *Hillary Clinton: "we have helped to create the problem we are now fighting."* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwpR6ngoSjQ

[5] This section contains close textual analysis of songs; therefore, some songs are referenced and parenthetically cited several times.

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Beginning the song with the catch phrase, "Illusion, illusion," the singer adds the concept of suicide almost synonymously in the next lines, "I am an illusion/I am a suicide bomber, suicide bomber" (Zeb, 2012). This narration runs through the song as its dominant refrain. In this process, the song accommodates several aspects of a local perception of an actual suicide bomber. An actual suicide bomber, for instance, is locally taken as an uncontrollable, daringly ruthless, spontaneous, and terror-striking enemy — reducing its targets (human bodies) to indistinct smithereens. It is this perception that the song aims to capture. The essence of this local imagery is caught in the song through a series of characterizations of this phenomenon: "I do everything by force, everywhere I govern," and boasts an emotional control over people when the singer says: "Hearts I have plundered" (Zeb, 2012). As an embodiment of a suicide bomber, the female singer, therefore, assumes an absolute power over the audience/listeners.

The "suicide" song also points to the evasive, fearless and treacherous nature of the bomber, when the singer says, "None can capture me, none can scare me" (Zeb, 2012). To further reinforce her might, halfway through the song, the singer transitions from subjective empowerment to the spatial contagion in order to justify her absolute and total control over her targets. She creates a disjunction between spectacle of horror and love by saying, "Here you can merely see, here you can't love," and folds in the whole society into this collective relationship of enmity, "I am nobody's friend, I am everybody's enemy" (Zeb, 2012). The lyrics empower the singer to pinpoint the love-hate relationship between the deadly suicide bomber and the innocent masses in general when she says, "Neither can you stay away, nor get endeared," and coquettishly finishes off as a sovereign of the place and space: "I have besieged you" (Zeb, 2012). Overall, the song portrays the duplicity of the local technology of war, introducing suicide bombing as a form of lethal agency that eliminates all visible and invisible boundaries of distinction and creating a total war-like situation.

Sung by a non-Pashtun female singer, Sitara Younus, the lyrics of this fast-beat song foreground the deathly technologies of the imperialist war while signifying indiscriminate violence through a characterization of different ingredients of suicide bombing. Stylistically, this musical track also represents a war of all against all. Using the first-person pronoun "I," for example, the female singer exhibits strong agency, asserting control over the message, "I am an illusion/I am a suicide bomber." These lines, as a refrain of the song, create a powerful ambience of its own recurrent happening. The use of "suicide bomber" as an extended metaphor is also coextensive with the song's overall message and the spatial effect that it forcefully creates. This lyrical composition

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drags audience/listeners to clearly see the striking similarities between an actual suicide bomber and its lyrical and spatial representation. The very fact of the singer's presence on stage among a crowd of people reminds them of the devastation packaged in the lyrics.

The song also has a male chorus that compliments and enhances the singer's message by signaling the audience through an objective reference to her lethality. When the singer sings, "I am a suicide bomber," the chorus in the background repeats, "Suicide bomb! Suicide bomb!" (Zeb, 2012). The male chorus, as is typical of this literary device, both as a singer and a spectator, complements as well as enhances the enormous effect of this deathly speech act. This spectacle-spectator juxtaposition in the form of a female singer and a male chorus points to the spatial reality that thrives on a disjunction between actual experience and its remote representation. Thus, this imagery aims to represent suicide bombing as a concrete act of destruction and as a symbolic weapon of all pervasive terror. More than representing the lethality of love, the song actually seems to celebrate the loss of human relations (love) at the altar of a total war.

In another five-stanza long Pashto song, "My gaze is as fatal as a Drone attack" (*Za kawum, za kawum pa stargu stargu drone hamla*) (Zainali, 2014), also sung by a female Pashto singer, the innovative way of celebrating violence over a traditional definition of love, i.e., sacrifice, tolerance, humanity, etc., takes an unnoticeable trivial touch. Each stanza of the song picks up a different conventional metaphor of cultural aesthetics and replaces it with the imagery of a war machine in the refrain. The first stanza, for instance, while picking up the conventional association of sweetness with a beloved's lips, uses drones as a metaphor to weaponize the traditional notion of love. Similarly, the singer associates the "touch of [her] lips" and "Intoxicating wine" with the imagery of the destructive nature of drone technology: "My gaze is as fatal as a Drone attack" (Zainali, 2014). This combination of the imagery of conventional love and high-tech weapons tends to develop a new physiognomy of the "destructive" beloved that does not just skirt metaphorical death in its lethal beauty, but also emphatically enforces it by embodying the same annihilating technology.

The song continues this treatment in the second stanza as well. Picking up the beloved's traditional attributes of love, the stanza portrays a beloved's gaze and smile as "amorous pangs" that ensnare and debilitate lovers. The beloved's "coquettish stare" is presented as "a snare of beauty," and her smile as "early morning dew" (Zainali, 2014). This stanza, however, also does not leave the lover in the masochistic pain of conventional love but reminds him of the fatality of the beloved's gaze that strikingly resembles a drone strike. The third stanza moves away from suggestive language into an explicit message of torture

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and death as the singer says that she is "A leaping flame and a rose bud" burning a lover to death (Zainali, 2014). Such a spectacle of unforgiving death is reinforced by the imagery of drones in the refrain. The fourth stanza evokes the humming noise of drones through the clinking of the beloved's bangles that "leaves one enchanted" and "Tests lovers' courage" (Zainali, 2014). In traditional Pashto music, evoking the clinking sound of the beloved's bangles is aimed to create an evocative sensation in the onlookers or lovers, but this new mixing of the conventional metaphor of local love (clinking) and modern signs of violent global warfare (the humming of drones) could not just be dismissed as a trivial form of local representation in a state of war, but the effects of this macabre treatment go beyond the apparent. It potentially passes a chill through the spine of those affected people who actually live under the agonizing humming sound of drones, hovering 24/7 over their heads; thus, the sound of music and drone become indistinguishable from each other. Also, the next stanza rounds up the parts (lips, eyes, smile) into a whole (body and prime) that deceives and "leaves many... astray" (Zainali, 2014). This analogy between the freshness of the beloved's beauty and newness of drone technology point to the new gore and uncanny reality that apparently cannot find apt expression in the existing local cultural artifacts.

Although the song thrives on juxtapositions and subversions, this treatment rarely unearths the gruesome experience of life caught in a state of an imperialist war. The traditional imagery reflected in these songs and evoked through literary devices, such as the metaphors and similes, not only fail to grasp the essence of the gruesome local reality but also subvert the conventional notion of love by picking up metaphors of traditional aesthetics in Pashtun folklore. This treatment further romanticizes and trivializes the reality of this deathly space. By superimposing the imagery of a high-tech drone as a refrain in every stanza, the song, for instance, convolutes the experience of the deadliness of a drone as a gruesome phenomenon and mixes it up with veneration of a beloved femme fatale — a beautiful and seductive woman who charms her lover into a deathly trap. This macabre treatment, instead of representing a local, brutal reality as an experience from the perspective of local people, glamorizes drones as an unmatched weapon of total war—an innovation that helps sell these commercial cultural artifacts. As a result of such representation, two types of understanding immediately become apparent. On the one hand, the beloved's most sought-after "looks" are replaced with a "gaze" that not only changes the notion of the beloved's "looks" in itself, but also subverts the beloved's positionality from *being gazed at* into *gazing at* her lover—and that too with a formidable threat of fatality (emphasis added). On the other hand, the appropriation of drone imagery for expression of romantic

love and its juxtaposition with the trite metaphors of local aesthetics normalizes the lethality of drones as the self-inflicting wounds of love.

Another song, "Never mess up with a Drone" (*Drone sara ba na cherey*) (Arts, 2020) takes this celebration and romanticization to new heights. Referring to the lethality, superiority, and invincibility of drone strikes, the song invites listeners to admit the omnipresent and godly power of this modern and destructive war technology. In the song's first stanza, perhaps for lack of a better metaphor, as is the case with the representation of this gore reality elsewhere, the lyrics compare the lethal drone with a "Thunder from the sky" (Arts, 2020). The drone and thunder have striking similarities: both strike from above, carrying out devastating effects on the ground. Yet thunder is less dangerous in the sense that it produces a harrowing and roaring spectacle attributed to nature without necessarily causing material damage to the people below, unless in exceptionally rare situations. On the other hand, the drone is a man-made indiscriminate weapon of war and destruction, known for its guided precision and creating a deliberate and targeted terrorizing effect through the subjugation of everything into its surveillance and devastation. The lyrics, referring to the drone's asymmetrical power, tout the war technology as "invincible on every front" while rhetorically inviting listeners to admit its power with the rhetoric, "Won't you admit Drone!" (Arts, 2020). A call for an all-out submission, this song represents the awesome power of drone technology commanding and dictating local life from above.

But this sovereignty in the sky is not detached from its attendant spectacle on the ground. The song's second stanza conveys this pragmatic logic. Personifying a drone as a wrestler (locally called *pahlawan*), the stanza imagines the drone's movement "with a swagger" when it "Tosses to the ground" and "Indulges in carnality" (Arts, 2020). Portraying this war technology as a master of the earth, the stanza ends this death-dance-like imagery with a different refrain: "Never mess up with a Drone" (Arts, 2020). This time, the forceful use of refrain as a literary device is an imperative that mainly attempts to secure an unquestionable acceptance for its asymmetrical power. The song's next stanza reinforces the Drone's uncritical acceptance through an in-group/out-group discourse by informing the listener that, "Everyone has recognized Drone," so as to comprehensively secure their unconditional recognition of this phenomenon. And, the stanza with the same rhetorical trope as the refrain in the first stanza, "Won't you admit Drone!" (Arts, 2020). This stanza gives permanency to the drone's on-ground rule, thus conveying that the technological might in the sky is replicated only in its act of tossing and continuity of death and destruction on the ground.

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The rhetorical question, "Won't you admit Drone!" is a technique that constricts room for alternative perspectives and secures a quiet acceptance of the statement of a pliable speaker. In order to continue to establish this unquestionable superiority of this war machine, the singer projects a local understanding of power to this new phenomenon. By highlighting its uniqueness, for example, the lyrics say, "None parallels its might/ None can overpower it/ Drone is one of its kind" (Arts, 2020). The song also mentions the local people's inability to counteract this technology, saying: "None can resist it;" it is omniscient, "None can escape its gaze" and its lethality, "Drone drops atomic bombs" (Arts, 2020). Ironically, the song ends on a happy note, stating that "Drone is unparalleled, Mafroor/ Be happy forever, Mafroor" (Arts, 2020). The song's lyricist who, with an authoritative voice has robustly secured the listeners' attention and instructed them to admit the Drone's unquestionable necropower, finally partakes in its pleasure in a carnivalesque manner. The end, though it may seem baffling at first, points to an alternative reality of the use and abuse of Drones in the Pashtun belt. Some people appreciate its precision and accuracy and its capacity to kill terrorists that are hidden and harbored in their region (Khan, 2011; Shahzad, 2011; Shaw & Akhter, 2012).

A number of variations appear between this "Drone" song and the previous "Drone" and "suicide" songs. Unlike the female singer of the two previous songs who embodies the modern technologies of death and romanticizes them through her looks and gaiety, the male singer here personifies the drone and celebrates its unmatched might as a partisan spectator with a certain degree of detachment from local grievances. This gender variation also affects the style of singing. Unlike a threatening language in the first two songs, here the singer alternates between rhetoric "Won't you admit" and the imperative of "never mess up" to indulge in a dialogic way with his attentive listeners.

Like a typical drone strike, there is an impulsive and determining movement in this "song of terror." Depicted not just as a weapon of war, the lyrics portray Drone with unique predatory agency. It begins like a thunder flash in the sky, hovering up in the air with a swagger, and drops bombs indiscriminately, killing human beings on the ground below. Such a movement symbolizes the complete control of aerial and earthly local space of everyday living. No evidence of resistance seems to exist in a space where Drones are absolute necrosovereign. This celebration of the heroics of war in glorifying tones and fast beats, depicts a complete occupation of every sphere of the surrounding environment below. Like the imperceptive strike of a Drone that turns its target into ashes within a wink of an eye, the song's musicality and lyrics create a sense of total effects, filling the surrounding sphere with absoluteness, leaving no room for reflective and alternative thought.

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The imagery of Drone, or the language of this macabre celebration, has so imperceptibly infiltrated into the spaces of entertainment and artistic expressions in the Pashtun belt that a new trilogy of songs on *YouTube* that appeared in July 2020 became an instant hit. Though these songs do not exactly speak to the drone technology as we found in the case of previous two songs, their mere title, "Drone Songs," and a passing mention of Drone in this series attract numerous viewers. For example, one of these songs, "Rolling Eyes Like a Drone" (*Stargey Laka Drone Garzawey*) (Khan Bangash Creation, 2020), has a single stanza about Drone in this 17-stanza long song about the clichéd expression of love and beauty. In addition to its rising viewership, this entire series is also being marketed in the name of this war machine.

The sixth stanza of this seventeen-stanza-long song, like one of the songs discussed above, focuses on the two prominent understandings of Drone: positional elevation and surveillance. The singer uses the drone analogy to discuss his beloved's bride, "Hovering in the sky" and "Rolling eyes like a Drone" (Khan Bangash Creation, 2020). The drone's appropriation of romantic appreciation of the beloved's beauty and clout, on the one hand, trivializes the lethality of this war technology, but on the other hand, romanticizes and submerges its lethality in the expression of love. As shown in the next line, "Roaming with a few scoundrels/Didn't I befriend you," the singer/lover here celebrates his friendship with a drone-like dangerous beloved, the femme fatale (Khan Bangash Creation, 2020). Interestingly, as is typical of a male singer of these songs, the singer here too, instead of embodying this war machine as female singers do, objectifies and reifies it. The lover here externalizes his emotional pain into the drone's capacity for surveillance and killing. The receding of this male subjectivity is a typical trope that emphatically recurs in much of Pashto literature in various forms, including these songs, since the onslaught of the "war on terror."

Thus, by dealing with the textual and stylistic attributes of this commercial production, we see three important threads articulated in the "songs of terror:" disarticulation of the modern technology of death, a sense of banality in responding to this gore reality, and a glimpse of receding male subjectivity— that of the traditional Pashtun patriarch. Based on these threads, we found that the immediacy and contemporaneity in the imagery of the relatively new technologies of war (drones and suicides) create a unique predicament; it seems to evade a linguistic grasp, reverses the cultural positionality of gender roles, and trivializes and romanticizes an otherwise existential threat in the commonplace language of romance and love. However, we argue that it is neither the inability of the local cultural toolkit nor a unique set of anthropological characteristics (of Pashtuns) that results in an ineffective counteractive strategy

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and negotiation of this deathly space. Rather, this depiction is the result of a four-decade war and the employment and deployment of absolute military means that create a spatial mutation in the Pashtun belt. Such a portrayal also completely captures the thought-making process of the subjected population and forecloses alternative possibilities of nonviolent resistance and existence. It is this spatially degenerative phenomenon that we turn to in the next analyses section, with focus on the context of the given text production.

Musicalization of death: Disarticulation, Banality, and Receding Male Subjectivity

An initial glimpse into and a peripheral understanding of the "songs of terror" may be taken as a confusing articulation of a complex phenomenon: a selective picking of the imagery of drone strikes and suicide bombers for the expression of love. Also, the relative newness of these technologies of death may mistakenly lead to the assumption that it can hardly be articulated in the available cultural discourse. A deeper look into these songs, however, reveal a temporal disconnect and a spatial collusion. In other words, Pashto songs are not a spontaneous outcome of the local cultural industry, which means that examining the given text in a temporal sense, i.e., profit-making, market trends, or mere entertainment, is a deception. Instead, we argue that meaning-making in the Pashtun belt is a contextual process that is subject to geo-strategic compulsions, a colonial legacy rooted in the history of British ideas about Pashtuns and the region itself. As a result, expression of war, such as "I am a suicide bomber" or "don't mess up with Drone," feels like either romanticizing or trivializing violence. But this self-image of the Pashtun population as a violent and belligerent people is a much talked-about colonial trope that is used by successive empires in the region to advance their hegemonic policies at the cost of the Pashtun bodies (Fowler, 2007).

This spatial realization is reinforced through the instrumental use of state apparatus in postcolonial Pakistan. In other words, history itself becomes a specter, a force to realize its existence in the structure of the state which then reduces textual production to the compulsions of a necrospace. Allowing drones in the Pashtun belt (and not outside of it) engenders not only a phenomenon of suicide bombing, but these technologies of imperialist war, while dictating everyday life, also regulate speech acts (songs in this case). This vantage point thus allows us to clearly see limitations of the local cultural industry in its continuity with its imperialist wars, a perspective to understand local violence in its colonial and postcolonial context. In other words, we maintain that the visceral realities of war and their depiction in the "songs of terror" are interconnected. Thus, the representation of the technologies of the war cannot,

therefore, be taken at its face value—a rootless and temporal reality with impulsive reactions of random local singers. Moreover, the seemingly textual evasion of this organized violence should also not be taken merely as a sign of local indifference to this absolute power. Instead, these songs, associating agency with destruction and celebration of the technologies of war, need to be understood as an indication of an acute sense of spatial besiege that encloses and hinders all kinds of possibilities of a peaceful life.

That is why many songwriters engaging with this phenomenon (songs of terror) take recourse to the familiar vocabulary of the past to tease out a meaning of the profound local, lived experience in the present. However, an existing resource of symbolic expression cannot keep up with the constant spatial mutation. The decades-long total war has destroyed all possible places of local artistic negotiation, including music and entertainment avenues. A society that has lived and breathed war for years can see war as the only leading narrative and hence its tools become the elements of their communication. We call this the "musicalization of death," that is, a representation of graphic violence (or sharing its pathos) in songs that generate a musical celebration or collective nostalgia. This form of contemporary commercial music does not negotiate or resist the violent events as music traditionally does, but reproduces ennui and at times, unknowingly, glorifies the local form of the organized global violence, a phenomenon that gradually developed under spatial compulsions—that is, creating the Pashtun belt as a site and sight of militarized violence.

Interestingly, the trivialization and romanticization of violence in music and entertainment spaces is a somewhat recent phenomenon in the Pashtun belt. This has emerged in the context of "war on terror" through years of necro-linguistic engineering experiments by the Pakistani state (Khan, 2016). In this process, for instance, the local Pashtun population, among others, was force-fed with the ideology of Pakistan—erasure of local cultural differences and fostering an Islam-based religious identity—via Urdu-medium textbooks, glorification of an inorganically unified national identity through mass media, and denigration of local ethnic identities (Khan, 2016). Such experiments by the postcolonial state of Pakistan reduced Pashto, both as a language and as a mode of thinking, to a footnote. In other words, this duality—glorification of a unified and state controlled national language and denigration of the ethnic languages—on the one hand empowered the state to mediate all cultural forms of publications in Urdu language[6] and on the other hand, reduced the ethnic

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[6] Mohammad Hanif's widely acclaimed novel, A Case of Exploding Mangoes (2008) that satirizes General Zia ul Haq, the then military dictator of Pakistan (1977-1988) remained unnoticed until its Urdu language publication that was immediately rolled back. For

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languages to a mere medium of communication among the downtrodden and uneducated laypersons within their respective communities.

Consequently, music or entertainment that is being produced in these ethnic languages rarely make it to the larger society. Such a dismissive attitude about these languages creates a general indifference to their organic messages too; they are either taken as trivialization or romanticization of what seems to be a reality beyond their semantic grasp. However, as we have argued in this chapter, such an apparent disregard for ethnic and local cultural artifacts is not a sudden eruption or the inherent inability of the local languages to be effective channels of expression. This reality goes deeper into an organized political engineering by successive empires in the region and the continuity of such attitude and neglect, also by successive governments and administrations in postcolonial Pakistan.

On the issue of the context of the songs analyzed in this chapter, we note that the Pakistani state has attempted to appropriate the image of Pashtun space and body to exercise strategic control over Afghanistan. For example, their living space has been touted as the "graveyard of empires," which, in reality, has merely turned out as a graveyard of Pashtun bodies and culture. So much so that one of the primary routes, known as Khyber Pass — connecting and facilitating the business of Pashtuns on both sides of the border — has been romanticized as a passage of warriors and a gateway to the Indian subcontinent. The colonial image of the local Pashtun as a brave and ruthless imperial warrior was invoked when their body as a "mujahid" (fighter) was needed for an anti-Soviet force. When that purpose was served, their new identity as a militant facilitator and their region as the hideout of the US-Pakistan-created jihadist force were invoked as an excuse to legitimize the post-9/11 "war on terror" and its resultant mayhem.

Such successive appropriation of the local place and space has also carved out a typical image of the Pashtun male. Since the local culture is patriarchal and androcentric, therefore, underscoring or undermining its male subjectivity, either directly or in relation with women, favors the systems and structures of power at the top. Any discussion of male subjectivity in this study does not, in anyway, support or vouch for the Pashtun tribal and patriarchal culture—a great deal of which has been artificially created and officially sustained by the successive regimes of power—rather, we examine the textual representation of male

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details see *Pakistani Author Comes Under Fire for Satirical Novel After Urdu Edition Is Published.* (n.d.). NPR.Org. Retrieved February 21, 2021, from https://www.npr.org/2020/01/10/794538415/pakistani-author-comes-under-fire-for-satirical-novel-after-urdu-edition-is-publ

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subjectivity under the necrospatial condition of their existence. These "songs of terror" offer a glimpse into how the interplay between expectations and experiences operates in complex relation with factors such as gendered positionality in the officially patronized space that is thriving on local patriarchy. Whereas the pre-9/11 Pashto songs valorize male subjectivity by processing their image as the brave and fearless Pashtuns who resist the greatest occupation of the modern times, the post-9/11 contemporary "songs of terror" show a receding male subjectivity. In the post-/911 songs discussed above, we see both male and female singers. The latter assume a necroagency and take pride in their femme fatale identity in a necrospace that either shoves local men to the background or subjects them to violence, albeit in a symbolic form. The male singers/lyricists, instead of assuming agency and claiming ownership of their land and culture as was the case in the earlier songs, take recourse to a debate with their fellow men to warn and caution them about the mighty power of the foreign technology of imperialist war, a degeneration of space thriving on systemic violence and perversion of local values of resistance.

Conclusion: The Economy of Injury

Taking "drones" and "suicide bombing" as two markers of systemic violence, as we have examined in this chapter, the newly emerged genre of Pashto songs— "songs of terror"—does not only represent different stages of militarization in the Pashtun belt but it also reinforces geostrategic interests of postcolonial Pakistan. Given the subjection of local lives to the rule of the deathly technologies of "war on terror," and the resultant counter-terrorism measures, one would expect music, especially lyrical songs, to raise a voice of resistance to represent the genuine plight of the local Pashtuns. Quite the contrary, the songs under discussion valorize the imagery of imperialist violence and appropriate it for commercial purposes in the local spaces of entertainment. The singer's identification with the suicide bomber — imagery that would otherwise give shudders to listeners — is not only being welcomed as an image of a modern-day femme fatale but also internalized as a new normative standard of beauty. One may wonder whether it is the singer's physical beauty, mellifluous voice, accompaniment of music with the lyrics, the dance steps, or the crowd cheering that transforms the meaning and message of the songs altogether. But the mass media attention and the wider circulation of these cultural artifacts on social media reveal a somewhat local infatuation with their lyrics. These songs do not only empower the singer or anyone who lip-syncs them, but they also appropriate the voice of death in a troubled space that would otherwise hardly find any room in common conversation. Our emphasis on the spatial aspects of these songs was meant to connect imperialist wars with Pakistan's geostrategic compulsions in relation to regional power dynamics—to exercise strategic

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control over Afghanistan—continued to be imagined and shaped in line with the British colonial legacy.

The local Pashtun population, neither a counteractive force nor empowered and equipped with the latest tools of war to protect themselves, were reduced to a zombie-like existence in this foreign war on their land. Living on the cusp of Afghanistan and Pakistan, they are politically and militarily subjected to the alliance of regional and global powers. This subjugation reduces them to mere spectators to the death and destruction of their fellow Pashtuns, their land, and resources. It is this spatial contradiction that translates itself into Pashto songs and hence creates an economy of injury—that is, debilitating population and making them expendable for war economy—the representation of which reinforces and benefits the regional and global powers.

The "songs of terror," for instance, are symptoms of a contradiction between tradition and modernity that continues to converge in the Pashtun belt. In other words, the conflict in the Pashtun belt is of historical nature and needs to be understood within its own socio-cultural (ethnic and tribal complexity) and political dimensions (relationship with the postcolonial state). Exploiting this complex spatio-temporal phenomenon, the contemporary global interest in the Pashtun belt uses their geographical location and ethnic identity to the ends of free-market war economy and geo-strategic interests. Therefore, the development of the Pashtun region and understanding of their culture never capture this global imaginary. As a result, Pashtuns are either compelled to leave their space or, if they choose to stay, are treated as expendable, to be disposed of in the State's collusion with the market forces whenever needed. Drone warfare on the Pashtun land is just one example of this collusion.

In order to make sense of this complex spatial engineering, local Pashtuns take recourse to music and lyrics. This cultural engagement with the contemporary economy, as discussed above, mobilizes and appropriates the imagery of high-tech warfare, which in turn creates nercospatialization.

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