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Pashto poetry and drones: the necromaniac mutations of tapey

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Abstract

The material consequences of the US-led "war on terror" in Pakistan are always counted in statistical terms, that is, the number of casualties in drone strikes or suicide bombings. Little attention, however, is paid to the local public imagination to know how the ordinary people consume this everyday destruction and what kind of cultural production it ensures that shapes and inspires their imagination. In this study, therefore, we discuss the way systemic violence and cultural expression reinforce each other and how such an uneasy configuration depicts the pain and injury of people affected by this global war. We examine a purposive sample of Pashto tapey--anonymous couplets attributed to Pashtun women and conventionally reflecting war, valour, grief, longing, and love--to gain an insight into how this folk literature engages militarized violence, embraces the political and ideological challenges of the war, and reveals the hidden power contestation between actual militarization and symbolic representation. A close reading of these tapey depicts that Pashtun life is not only subjected to a rule of death, what Mbembe calls, "necropolitics" but these tapey create their own necrospace in local enunciative and cultural practices, thus reinforcing militarised violence in a cultural sphere.

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1. Introduction

The US-led War on Terror has caught global imagination in such a way that violence now has an invariable primacy over every mode of cultural production and expression. Pashto literature, produced in the Pak-Afghan conflict zone, is not an exception to the manifestation of such violent representation. Unlike the conventional similes and metaphors of love, the beloved's eyes, smile, and lips are compared now with drones, suicide bombs, and fire, to mention just a few. This urban subculture—appearing in the form of various cultural artifacts such as commercially produced songs, movies and even transport art and literature—not just depicts the militarized violence, but this imagery also romanticizes the human rights violations that is carried out in the underreported hinterland of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Shah, 2012; Khan *et al*., 2019).

This paper examines the cultural expressions of the U.S-led War on Terror in Pashto *tapey* that are anonymous couplets whose creation is generally attributed to Pashtun women. *Tapey* conventionally reflect war, valour, grief, longing, and love. Historically used as a popular vehicle of local resistance, this cultural artifact has remained a motivating source of eulogizing Pashtun's unity against foreign invaders. However, the ongoing splintered militarization of the Pashtun population has changed the subject of these poems. Appearing in the Pashtun dominated urban parts of Pakistan and Internally Displacement Camps, the contemporary form of the *tapey* depicts the pain and injury of people affected by the high-tech warfare. This disorientation leads us to argue that the decade-long global war has disjointed the Pashtun population from their local conflict resolution mechanisms, eroding their confidence in the tribal system as well as the State protection, and subjected the Pashtun belt to the rule of death, that Achille Mbembe (2003) calls "necropolitics."

The Pashtun belt, comprising northwest and southwest Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, has remained a battleground for imperial wars since the early 19th Century. First, the British divided the region through the Durand Line (an imaginary border) and further created a buffer zone (FATA) and a province (NWFP) as a bulwark against Russian infiltration (Ahmed, 1979). Second, the USSR invaded the region in 1979 in a bid to gain control of the trade route that was thwarted by US-Pakistan nexus through the latter's proxy called Mujahideen (Crile, 2007). Finally, the US invaded the region in the post 9/11 context to eliminate the Al-Qaeda-Taliban sanctuaries that were set up as an after effect of the US-USSR war (Siddique, 2014). This over a century-long militarization and manipulation of the region has not only dismantled the existing socio-political structure but has never allowed any formal juridico-political infrastructure to develop, represent, and articulate the voice of the local people. Pashtuns have always expressed the sentiments of their subjection to the imperial rule of death through folk literature, especially their distinctive couplets known as *tapey*.

This study, therefore, examines a purposive sample of *tapey* to gain an insight into, first, how this folk literature packages the destructive paralysis of terrorism in the form of popular cultural expression; second, the cultural relevance of the political and ideological challenges of war as it emerges in literary texts and, third, the hidden power contestation between actual militarization and symbolic representation. An examination of this literary text provides an insight into how necropolitics grounds and perpetuates itself through the cultural artifacts and reproduces a space that thrives on violence. This finding identifies the shrinking of space for effective articulation of resistance that is otherwise the essence of *tapey* as a traditional and representative medium of grassroots subversive discourse.

We do not identify all means of expressions as necropower. Only those practices, textual or actual, are considered necro in this study that extend the technology of war by making meanings around death—invoking the imagery of revenge, celebrating violence and eulogizing war and warriors. In order to indigenize Mbembe's concept of "necropolitcs," we use the term necrospatialization to make sense of the rule of death that creates an abject space in local enunciative practices (Ashraf & Shamas, 2020). This destructive process realizes itself in persistent militarized violence that gives birth to an unending anxiety, disgust, frustration, and invisible germs. Cultural artifacts emerging out of this subjective articulation of a warped space tend to develop their own expressive traits of a deformed order. Though not a commercial text, the *tapey* we examine here is a manifestation of the reproduction of this necrospace, a representation of organized violence taking a cultural form whether in text (imaginary) or context (history). Before grounding the politics behind the emergence of contemporary *tapey*, we would like to provide a brief background of the popular Pashto folk genre.

2. Literature review: *tapey*

Tapa, arguably the oldest genre of Pashto literature, is a couplet having 9 syllables in the first line and 13 syllables in the second line. Each *tapa*, though a couplet in structure, carries the complexity of an independent poem. Outside the Pashtun culture its plural form is anglicized as *Tappas* but Pashtuns commonly call it *tapey* when referring to the entire collection of this folk genre (Katozai, 2005; Shaheen, 1988; Tair, 1987). In this study, we use the Pashto nomenclature, *tapey* or its singular form *tapa* to stick to its original meaning. As a genre of folk literature, it is also commonly known as *Landay* or *Misra* that means a short, crisp and pithy sentence. Assuming a proverbial significance—often quoted as maxims and sayings in common parlance or parleys of the elders–*tapey* are the most popular medium of expression for Pashtuns' visceral experiences (Shaheen, 1988).

Tapey are predominantly composed by women to express their repressed expressions and unrealized longings (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Lacking any authorship, in other words, *tapey* represent a folk wisdom associated with a woman's cry, a passionate response to issues and events. In passing on orally from generation to generation, *tapey* undergo a variety of modifications and appropriation. Among other functions, *tapey* are used to instigate people, especially men, into accepting a challenge of a fight or a war. Thus, *tapey* traditionally reinforce the notion of bravery, as in the following case:

Even if I become a widow	كه تور اوربل مي مبراتېګي
I will not stop my lover from defending my homeland	په وطن جنګ دي جانان نه مني کومه

Tapey have the capacity to accommodate diverse themes. From resistance to the colonial occupation to commemoration of the mundane, from eulogizing heroes to condemnation of cowardice, and from expression of love to highlighting the pressing economic needs, they represent the most strenuous experiences of Pashtun folk (Khan *et al.*, 2015).[1]

The medium of *tapey* preserves Pashtuns' collective memory, a genre that derives meanings from land, people, and their history. When the British colonial onslaught in the form of three Anglo-Afghan Wars—1839-42, 1880, and 1919—turned the region into a site for jingoistic policies, *tapey* became a battle call of resistance as well as a medium for the aesthetics of pain. For instance, in the second Anglo-Afghan war, the following *tapa* was attributed to a Pashtun woman named Malalai of Maiwand.

If you do not get martyrdom in Maiwand.	که په مېوند کې شهېد نه شوې
You, my beloved, are destined to live an ignominious life	ګرانه لالېه بې ننګې له دې ساتېنه

The nationalistic aesthetic of *tapey*, however, adopted an ideological strand following the British withdrawal from the region in 1947. Pashtuns living on the periphery of United India became part of a newly independent Pakistan. Yet the regional politics of strategic domination continued in line with the colonial past (Alavi, 1998). Strained relationships between Pakistan and Afghanistan turned costly for Pashtuns. Their unique positionality of living in Pakistan and having cultural and ancestral ties with the people of Afghanistan suspected them of a divided loyalty. The situation became further complicated when the powerful Pakistani military became an ally of the US against the Soviet incursion in Afghanistan in 1979 and turned the Pashtun belt into a training ground for proxy Islamists, called Mujahideen. This neo-imperialist militarization created its own ideological aesthetics displacing the erstwhile nationalistic exclusivity and replacing it with an inclusive pan-Islamist imaginary, embedded in the State politics. *Tapey* preserve the memory of this ideological intervention in the following words:

O mujahid brother, I want to accompany you in this scorching heat	مجاهده وروره، په سره غرمه درسره ځم
You will operate the rocket launcher; I will supply the shells	ته راکټ چلاوه، زه به ګولۍ درته راوړم

After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan and the start of the civil war between Mujahideen proxy groups, for instance, this neo-imperial militarization not only gives birth to violent terrorists (Al-Qaeda-Taliban) but also reinforces violence as a permanent theme in Pashto *tapey*. More importantly, the post-9/11 US-led war on terror turned the Pashtun belt into a conflict zone. Though the war was initiated with a premise of eliminating Al-Qaeda but instead killed the local Pashtun population indiscriminately. This neo-imperial contradiction is reflected in the contemporary form of *tapa* that not just mocks, but also romanticizes, and proliferates the ongoing militarization. Contemporary *tapey*, in other words, are predominantly the embodiment of neo-imperial domination.

3. Theoretical framework: text, necropolitics and the reproduction of death

Since 9/11, neo-imperial militarization has become an everyday reality in the lives of people in some parts of the world. People in such spaces are invariably reduced to a sub-human category and hence killed with impunity. This subjection of life to the rule of death is what Mbembe (2003) calls necropolitics in which the elimination of one group is considered indispensable for sustaining the life of another. Mbembe draws inference for his concept of necropolitics, inter alia, from the Israeli-Palestine conflict in which life has been turned into a zero-sum game. The emergence of such a claustrophobic space is not accidental: it's deliberate and historically maintained. Using material and discursive means, a ruling regime has to constantly reproduce negative politics from time to time in order to fill every pour of the deathly space.

To assert its regional hegemony through the reinforcement of militarization in the Pashtun belt, Pakistan's powerful military reduces the local population into second-class citizens, thus creating a rupture between the national centre and the country's periphery (Fair, 2014; Ahmed, 2013). This turns war into everyday reality. The fragmentation of such spatial reality gives

birth to multiple sovereign nodes that may or may not operate independent of the official control (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006). Working as "nodes of opposition to the state," this de facto authority could be called "informal sovereignty" (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006, p. 306). As a product of the fragmented formal sovereignty, they thrive on the very rupture that such an arrangement produces. This negative material regime and its resultant militarized destruction, we argue, are not external to the 'everydayness" of culture—discourses, signs, symbols, and text.

Creating conditions of its own unending possibilities, the triangulation of violence, discourse, and space are co-constituted in the contemporary market economy creating a bare life existence outside of the protection of law, but exposed to political manipulation (Agamben, 1998). Pashtun belt is a vital example of this distorted space in which counter-terror violence, text, and meaning-making strategies of different sovereign nodes are co-constituted. This necrospatialisation represents a spatially situated retrogressive culture that is produced by necropower, but it is not reduced to necropolitics (Ashraf & Kristin, 2020). For instance, after every U.S drone strike (as an instrumental outcome of necropolitics) against Al-Qaeda, the Taliban typically cordon off those targeted sites where Al-Qaeda fighters are killed, remove the bodies of Arab fighters, and leave the local bodies for visitors to see. This grass-root meaning-making strategy provides a platform for oral text that reveals itself in anger, revenge, and hates speeches. The maimed bodies becoming a visceral site for the politics of death carries an effect beyond the sum of on the ground body parts. The body doesn't only assume a signification of its own, but every visiting party puts a spin on this visceral reality, giving this death a revengeful character with an outrageous representation. Such exposure to the dead bodies creates what Puar (2017) calls, an economy of injury. This economy runs on the debilitation of certain populations whose existence in a precarious condition is beneficial to sovereign nodes. It is this death world—life-in-death/death-in-life—that is captured and processed by the Pashto *tapey* in their contemporary form.

4. Research methodology

We collected a total of ten *tapey* in Peshawar in 2018, a few years after the city was besieged and subjected to a series of deadliest suicide attacks in its entire history. Some of these *tapey* were also collected from camps of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the vicinity of Peshawar city. After collection of the data, we assigned the English translation of these *tapey* to two experts whose mother tongue are Pashto and are well-versed in Pashto writing. Both experts were master's degree holders in English literature from the University of Peshawar. Once the translation was completed, the authors, whose mother tongue is Pashto and who can speak English fluently, supervised and reviewed the data. The translation was also proofread by an expert on the Pashto language.

Some of the *tapey* were found in more than one version. In some versions only names and places were changed. We accepted the version that we thought speak well to the ground reality under discussion in this paper. These differences were not merely restricted to change of names and places, as is common in the folk literature, but we also observed repetition and variations in expressions across various dialects of Pashto. Given the relevance and considerations of duplication, we used authorial discretion in choosing the ones with minimum variations in meaning and context and removing the ones with repetition of the same sentiments. For instance, the following two *tapey* having almost identical content but substitution of one name for another in a different context change their meaning as well.

زه لکه د ډرون جانانه ستا په لټون ګرزمه / ته شوې فضل الله جانانه هېڅ پته دې نه لګي
I am chasing you like a drone/ Dear, like Fazlullah no one knows your whereabouts

زه لکه د ډرون په هر ډګر ورپسې ګرزم / ته شوې اسامه جانانه هېڅ پته دې نه لګي
I am chasing you like a drone in every nook, and corner /You've become Osama, no one knows your whereabouts

After 2006, Peshawar was turned into the most dangerous city of the world—on average two suicide attacks were carried out by the Al-Qaida and the Taliban for three consecutive years. The death toll gradually rose in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 from 98, 507, 670 to 1221 respectively (SATP, 2018). As the Trump administration in the U.S has reduced drone strikes, this lull in violence seems productive for the emergence of contemporary *tapey*. We have been living in the city since 2001, the year the War on Terror started but we had never seen such an imaginative reflection of death in the Pashto folk literature. Because drone strikes are carried out in FATA, Peshawar's cultural status and its distance from the site of high-tech counter-terror operations provided its people some breathing space to make a light use of the metaphor of death—suicide bomber and drones.

The two metaphors provide an insight into the life lived in a state of war. The "drone" represents U.S aerial sovereignty and the "suicide bombing" identifies the Taliban's embodied weapon of indiscriminate destruction, their self-proclaimed "atom bomb." Our focus on "drone" and "suicide bombing" in this study, in other words, investigates the use of power and ideology not just at the level of metaphors, but also their associative necro-meanings, whether explicitly stated or otherwise hinted at in these *tapey*. These necrospatialisation represent, among other things, opposing realities resulting in an exchange of wholesale destruction with perfect impunity.

Before we discuss the complexity of the imagery of death, we would like to provide a close textual analysis of a purposive sample of these contemporary *tapey*. We provide the original Pashto *tapey* with their English translation followed by a brief close reading of each of these poems. Since *tapey* don't have distinctive titles, we have numbered and coded them through letter T, as the initial of *tapey* and Arabic numerals (for example T1 stands of Tapa number one). This textual strategy aims to provide a critical insight into the use of power and ideology in the text and its context. Employing this method, in other words, we examine a purposive sample of *tapey* (ten independent poems) to discuss and analyse visceral representation of this on-the-ground deathly politics.

5. Analyses and discussion

5.1. *Tapey*: an emotive expression

T1: زمکه آسمان راباندے تنګ شو/ ښکته خود کش دے بره ډرون حملے کوینه
The earth and sky have shrunken upon me/ Suicide bomber is raging the ground, drones humming above

This *tapa* reflects the existential threat to the life of Pashtun who, stuck among three sovereign nodes, cannot transcend the gruesome reality of their everyday angst. Every Pashtun is being kept in incessant fear of being killed in a jiffy on the ground or out of the blue, both literally and figuratively. The presence of immediate threat to their lives on the ground and the constant

surveillance and fear of death from the humming of drone reduce them to a bare life and deprive them of the minutest space required for breathing and survival and this is what "تنګ شو" (Shrunk) literally means. Put differently, Pashtuns' daily life is governed by the omnipresent US drones hovering 24/7, controlling FATA sky; and the Pakistan's military's web of security check posts stopping and frisking every passer-by as part of its counter terror operations thus controlling the local movements from dawn to dusk. The informal sovereign, the Al-Qaeda affiliated Taliban groups, rule at night-time, coming out of their daytime hideouts to monitor and strike in the dark. Depicting the narrowing of the breathing space, this *tapa* reveals a constant surveillance of the air and gasping reality of the ground to show how both have crippled the intellectual and emotional health of the people.

T2: پرېګده چې ډرون مې سل ټکړی کړی / په عسکري جانان زه ډ ېره نازيد مه
Let drone shatter me into a hundred pieces / I was too proud of my beloved warrior

This *tapa* represents the displacement of the traditional binary relationship between a beloved and a lover that would often make the woman, as beloved, look up to a man, a lover, for protection and security. The high-tech warfare changed the whole paradigm of this relationship, subjecting not only love to a third force (drone) but also rendering the lover helpless in providing security to his beloved. The beloved imagining her body as hundred splinters is not just a punishment for her pride (نازيد مه) but it also carries some deep form of perversion. In other words, the beloved's pride in proximity and mutilation of her body "سل ټکړی" through an association with her warrior beloved reveal the fetishization of painful death in the Pashtuns' expression of love. The beloved, in this discourse, gives vent to her masochistic pleasure that she derives from subjecting her body to violence.

T3: ګودر ته زې الله دي مل شه / دي الوتکي پرون دري وژلي وو نه
May God protect you on the way to *Goodar*[*]/ The drone hovering up has just killed three yesterday ([*]a spring in the village from where women fetch water)

Using the imminent threat of the indiscriminate killing of people, this tapa shows the bareness of everyday life to the destructive force of high-tech warfare. *Goodar* (ګودر), a stream from which women fetch water, is also a rendezvous where women share mundane matters. The fear of being killed on the way to *Goodar* reveals how even women's social and communal spaces are susceptible to this militarization. The conversion of the sovereign nodes into killing machines reduces people to such a helpless state that they implore a divine higher power to protect them from the earthly necropower as shown by the expression, الله دي مل شه. Moreover, this *tapa* underscores the speaker's unique choice between death and death rather than death and life. If they stay back due to the fear of being killed, they might die of thirst; if they risk fetching water from "ګودر", they might be targeted in a drone attack.

T4: زه لکه د ډرون جانانه ستا په لټون ګرزمه / ته شوې فضل الله جانانه هېڅ پته دي نه لګي
I am chasing you like a drone/ Dear, like Fazl Ullah no one knows your whereabouts

T5: زه لکه د ډرون په هر ډګر ورپسې ګرزم / ته شوې اسامه جانانه هېڅ پته دي نه لګي
I am chasing you like a drone in every nook, and corner/ You've become Osama, no one knows your whereabouts

In these two *tapey* (4 and 5), the analogy of drone is empowering the speaker/beloved to chase her lover the way drone hunts down Fazlullah, the dreaded leader of the Pakistani Taliban, and

Osama Bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda chief killed in Pakistan in 2011. Both were killed in the US covert operations using drone and Stealth Technology respectively. In these *tapey* the beloved imagines herself as an embodiment of drone "زه لکه د ډرون" hovering over and surveilling the lover's supposed hideout. Besides the manhunt, these *tapey* also express the idea of double destruction with a difference. By identifying the lover with Fazlullah and Osama, the beloved here intends to smoke out her missing lover and by extension destroys the object of her love. This double negation of self and love is a continuous suicidal theme that replicates itself in several *tapey*.

T6: جانانه لاړي امرېکه شوی/ درته طالب طالب کېدم شهید دي کړم
My beloved is so American/ He martyred me when I was just posing as a Talib

T7: جانان مې سم امرېکني دي / ورته طالب طالب کېدم شهید يي کړمه
My beloved is so American/ He martyred me when I was just posing as a Talib

Despite variations, these *tapey* (6 and 7) express the (in)visible US power to kill its identifiable enemy in the wink of an eye. Both *tapey* create a categorization of enmity in the form of Talib whose undifferentiated identity from Pashtuns' way of life blurs the boundary between an enemy and an innocent individual. The repetition of the Pashto term "طالب" exposes this duality of meaning: Talib literally means a seeker of knowledge; however, in the post 9/11 context, it has taken the associative meaning of an insurgent. The binary of American-Taliban, the killing machine and the enemy liable and justifiable to be killed, pervades the cultural discourse in which the cruelty of a lover is equated with America and its victim with the beloved. In the mainstream discourse, the Talib is fixed as an enemy category; therefore, any harmless identification with the Talib can't go unpunished. Similarly, this discursive fixation is replicated in the expression of love. Any deviation from or innovation in such behaviour, even if merely acted out is intolerable for the lover. This inflexibility of manners and acceptability of normative action in *tapa* not only represents but also radicalizes the most harmless human sentiments in line with the necrospace. Additionally, the slight variations of "امرېکه" and "امرېکني," in the *tapey* reveals a shift in the local imaginary of necrosoverigns. Instead of seeing America as a country and as a Western power, the local people tend to perceive the American culture and people as an embodiment of a necropower.

T8: ډالره دا ظلم دي بس دي/ چې مې طالب جانان نه واخستل لاسونه
Oh Dollar, enough of this cruelty/ That I have given up on my beloved

Articulating the materialization and militarization of Pashtun culture, this *tapa* identifies the toll of war economy on human connections and love. Here the word "dollar" carries two meanings: marketing of war and American hegemony. Attributing separation to the infiltration of dollars, the beloved agonizes over the loss of love and expresses her sense of alienation as she says, "چې مې طالب جانان نه واخستل لاسونه." Due to the complicated nature of loss, the Talib ceases to remain a lover. This cessation may be the result of his preoccupation in fighting American troops or merely reinforcing American hegemony through provision of himself as a category of enemy. In any case the attribution of cruelty to the dollar, and by extension to America, signifies the role of capitalism, materialism, and greed in the erosion of pure love in Pashtun culture. If the Pashto expression, "واخستل لاسونه" on the one hand means a sacrifice or a compromise, on the other hand, it also highlights the beloved's yielding of her love, her feelings, and a part of herself. Externalizing this psychological unwholesomeness and

helplessness, the term "بس" (enough!) shows the beloved's imploring America to accept her emotional sacrifice and spare her life.

T9: چی مطلب درنہ پورہ کڑی بیا دی پریگدی/ داسی خکلو باندی ڈرون حملے پہ کار دی
They desert you once they get their interests/ Such a beloved deserves to be droned

This *tapa* highlights the embodiment of drone imagery in the expression of punishment for a selfish lover. The expression "چی مطلب … پریگدی" means that the lover has used and abandoned the beloved; therefore, she wishes him to be bombed by a drone. Locally, many Pashtuns perceive the US-Taliban war in Afghanistan as a war between two disgruntled parties who were once strong allies against the Soviets. Therefore, the drone strike is associated with the necropower (America) that a party exercises against a former ally (Mujahideen/Al-Qaeda). It is this association of drone as a killing machine for a cheater that the beloved wishes to prey upon her lover. Moreover, this *tapa* also reveals how drones are being seen as an extreme form of punishment that could be deployed and wished for when one is at the extreme low in terms of severe personal injury—injury to one's ego. The lethal capacity of drones to exterminate and disfigure human body ignites the imagery of ignominious death which the beloved implores as a curse for her cheater-lover. The invocation of drone and identification with its lethal power foreground how a drone is simultaneously seen as a deadly war machine and something to be desired for in moments of extreme agony and frustrations.

T10 : کله په ډرون کله په بم مو وژني/ زمونږ ګناه مونږته معلومه نه ده
Sometimes droned, sometimes bombed/Our sin is not known to us

This *tapa* interrogates the subjection of Pashtuns to indiscriminate killing and the expenditure of death in high-tech warfare on their soil. Here "ډرون" and "بم" refer to the deployment of war machines and their use in identifying and killing humans irrespective of their conviction in a crime. The repetition of the word, "کله" emphasizes the alternative appropriation of weapons rather than the consideration of Pashtuns as humans worthy of life. Their complete unawareness of the reason for their killing as expressed in "معلومه نه ده" further exacerbates their precarity. By taking the sheer use of violence into account, the speaker not only highlights the instrumentalization of death as a tool of control but also raises a moral question of legality. That means, the victims demand an explanation of the juridico-political system before they are being dispensed with. Even when killed they die with their unrecognized wounds and unanswered questions. Every life-in-death or death-in-life Pashtun figure undergoes a cringy feeling of being observed and killed.

5.2. Debilitated bodies, death, and double destruction

As indicated earlier, the *tapey* we analyse here is different from commercial forms of cultural artifacts. The commercial texts—books and news text—are mediated in a space were juridical and political infrastructure draw legitimacy from power and ideology. Adherence to publication procedures filters reality and standardizes text production. In such a mediated text, the graphical and visceral elements of violence are professionally censored in the light of the text's intended effects on audiences and readers (Hall, 1971). The production of text does not give an accurate depiction of the lived experience. Hence, this representation is not 'violence in itself; rather 'it is about violence' (Gerbner, 1970).

Tapa, on the other hand, neither adheres to any publication procedures nor follows institutional

censorship. This genre simultaneously carries and skirts graphic details that are otherwise standardized in the mainstream textual artifacts. The anonymity of the folk character of *tapa* not just defies organizational procedures, but also demands a dialogical form of cultural analysis different from media text. Hence, *tapa* is not just about violence or its subversion, but contains a textual form of violence itself. Foregrounding this distinctive feature of *tapa* in our analyses, the imagery embedded in the given sample carries three dominant threads: debilitated bodies, death and double destruction, and necromaniac expression.

The representational values of these *tapey* are local in text and texture but global in sense and sensibility. For instance, the absence of any reference in these *tapey* either to the Pakistani military or State projects the presence of the formal sovereign in its absence—a lack identifying impotency of the country's military in defending the vulnerable population against drones. The formal sovereign has become as irrelevant and ineffective as the conflict resolution mechanisms of the local patriarchal structure. The fact that drone strikes are held only in the airspace of the Pashtun belt and not beyond it shows a spatial segregation that is revealed in the expression "زمکه آسمان راباندے تنگ شو." The maintenance of precarious lives within these limits is rooted in the power dance choreographed between Islamabad and Washington. Represented in the graphic language of these *tapey*, this local manifestation of necropolitics, which is national in character and global in design, connects this ongoing game of death with a wider economy of injury.

In the Pakistani context, the economy of injury has double meanings: to help the formal sovereign connect with neo-imperialism and to preserve the ruling ideology. Since 2001, for instance, Pakistan has received over 33 billion dollars as an ally of the US in the War-on-Terror (Harris, 2017). The U.S., however, mainly left it up to Pakistan to handle the Taliban groups inside the country but ignored the fact that the latter had a long history of serving as the State's foreign policy instruments in dealing with its neighbourly countries.[2] Put differently, violence is officially patronized in the Pashtun belt to raise a particular kind of jingoistic body, a category of enemy that is produced and reproduced to serve both the material and ideological interests of the State. Because the Pashtuns are successively and effectively used as a proxy force in Pakistan's strategic wars since its independence, they are part of the economy of injury. In strategic calculus of the Pakistani state, a Pashtun is considered corporeally necessary, yet politically superfluous. Simply put, the local precarity is a manufactured condition because the ruling elites benefit from (mis)using the Pashtun's land and body as a resource to stay relevant in playing power games in regional politics.

Given this necropolitics, it is interesting that the *tapa* is the only democratic form of cultural representation that provides a graphic insight into this officially patronized economy of injury. The imminent danger of being splintered into "سل ټکړی" by mere association with one's lover creates an affective disconnect (T2). The body of a Pashtun woman in the *tapa* does not only reveal itself in its intimate connection with the Talib-lover but it also carries the feelings of fears expressed in the lover's pain due to the beloved's inability to protect her. The imagery of disfigurement of the woman's body disengages her from an intimate relationship and leaves permanent scars on her psyche. This wounded existence renders her incapacitated to hold any progressive agency. Similarly, the killing of three persons ``دري وژلي وو نه" at a "گودر" (*goodar*) creates a visceral disconnect. As we know, a body can't survive without food and water for a long time, Pashtun women carrying drinking water from the *goodar*, a distantly located stream, deal with an existential struggle on daily basis. Moreover, walking for miles and exposed to the imminent threat of death by drone is an imagery that signifies the entrapment of body

between acute needs and the menacing fear of death. This instilling of looming fear, however, is not without a reason. It springs from a continuous subjection to killing with impunity as "کله په درون کله په بم مو وژني" and gets exacerbated through the repetitive occurrences that are still fresh in the memory of the people as "پرون دري وژلي وو نه". Death is not just an everyday reality for the local people, but it punctuates and creates a temporality through which they express and understand their life. The necrosoverigns, therefore, do not need an enormous amount of energy to direct these injurious feelings and debilitated bodies into potentially beneficial sights of violence.

In view of this crippling experience, Pashtuns don't know the difference between ability and disability or life and death but live in a debilitating condition—it does not matter whether they have amputated or wholesome organs. Living in a permanent state of war for the last four decades, they experience death on multiple levels and in multiple ways. From destruction of their homes and bodies to the destruction of their communal spaces and erosion of a culture of trust and filiation, daily life in the Pashtun belt has been unprecedently militarized. Whether it's the suicide bomber on the ground, the drone in the air, an association with a Talib-lover, or mere posing as a Talib, death determines the intensity of fear in every space, sphere and relationship. The Pashtuns, realizing their subjection to a limitless spatiotemporal arrangement, voice their helplessness through the contemporary *tapa* either in an agonizing manner, surrendering their agency and pleading mercy, or through the voice of the dead.

These *tapey* articulate this double loss or duality of destruction in two ways: the blurring of boundaries between norms and exceptions, and the domestication of masculinity. Pashtuns cannot differentiate between home and the outside (See T1), love with a man and love with a Talib (See T2), the individual and communal space (See T3), beloved and enemy (See T4-5), acting and genuineness (See T6-7). In the absence of an effective juridical-political structure (tribal or State), none knows the enemy from a friend, the innocent from the culpable, and the terrorists from the custodians. Every moving creature is punished (see T2) and every human association is liable to be killed (See T3). They live and love in a bare life situation where the ruthless destruction of the human body is the ultimate end. Living under an undifferentiated spatiotemporality, the mismatched positionality of the lover's potential in fighting against the high-tech drone has displaced the conventional masculine and heroic image of the tribal man. This form of contemporary life challenges the conventional masculinity of the tribal man that was previously based on pride and heroism. Taking pride in his valour, he had inspired love and awe in the opposite gender. But living under the drone, the past cannot be realized anymore. A glimpse of this nostalgia is visible in almost all contemporary *tapey*. The beloved's assuming agency through identification with the drones in manhunting their lovers reveal not only the double negation—negation of self and love—but also the subversion of the normative definition of romantic equation. The pervasive violence in some of these *tapey* has discursively displaced the pre-existing tribal structure so much so that it has challenged and transformed the local interpretation of social expression. Represented through the terseness of contemporary *tapey*, this multilayered—romanticized, but also trenchant—subjection of everyday life not just operates in but also creates its own discursive zone of indistinction—blurring the metaphorical boundaries between known and the unknown.

5.3. Necromaniac expression

Due to decades of militarized violence, the fear of punishing every moving lip in the Pashtun belt seems to have compelled common folk to put their spin on the significance of the dead

body. Some of the contemporary *tapey* are the embodiment of this necromaniac expression. Revealing a dark fear, the wounded speakers in these *tapey* displace their cry of resistance onto the tongues of the martyrs to avoid being implicated in it (See T6-7). This posthumous lamentation "درته طالب طالب کېدم شهید دي کړم" retrospectively foregrounds the visceral affect and disconnect of the living experience that the martyred speaker has undergone. On account of the reduction of the living into a diminutive existence, the expression through the language of the dead reveals a disoriented nature of the victims' social positionality and disarticulation of effective resistance.

For example, the overarching influence of death has created an indistinction between the language of the oppressor and the oppressed. The same indistinction is also visible in these cultural artefacts. Some of these *tapey*, transforming resistance into violence, connect with the aims and objectives of the sovereign nodes that use necropolitics as a means to run the economy of injury. For instance, in *tapey* 4, 5, and 9, the speaker imagines using the mechanism and tools of the necrosoverign (drone) to settle scores with her former lover, as the Other, and in this way the contemporary *tapey* reproduce the very effect of which it is an outcome. In such *tapey*, the speaker, unlike the traditional positionality of a man as a lover who woos a beloved, takes the necro-agency of hunting down her lover (See T4-5). This is what we call a necrospatialisation which means a meaning-making nexus around space, bodies and deaths, a form of life in which death is the ultimate goal. This process reveals those enunciations that the folk make around death in the form of communication material and strategies (hate speech, jihadi literature) as well as reactionary and commercial practices ((jihadi hymns, news-making) in which violence is reproduced based on local (mis)representation or revenge.

6. Conclusion

The analytical lens, which we developed in this paper, helps to reveal the destructive paralysis of violence, a cultural text examined as a symptomatic outcome of necropolitics and not an exception from it. Identifying the politics of death, which is a vital feature of precarious life under capitalism, the insights that these *tapey* share locate militarized violence inside the power relations. The contemporary *tapa*, with focus on deaths and destruction, is an expression of grass-root violence, confusion and revenge taking necropolitics beyond its fixed and exclusive geographical boundaries. *Tapa* as a form of representation, therefore, carries this temporal and spatial reality identifying the lack of Pashtun participation in the national distribution of power.

It is pertinent to mention here that the *tapa* 'as a violence,' as we theorize, means a necromaniac extension of space. Within the framework of necropolitics—absolute power over who is allowed to live and who can "justifiably" be killed—we discussed the Pashto *tapa* not as a graphic commentary on sovereign nodes, but also as a technology of necropower. We also do not just understand necropolitics as a deathly politics that is operational in utter disregard of a juridico-political framework but as a point of rupture that continues to reproduce itself on a wider scale in the everyday life of ordinary folk. Our main purpose was to use necropolitics as a point of departure to examine how actually this absolute form of power goes beyond just physical damage—a militarized form of temporal rules such as checkpoints, surveillance, day and night rule of multiple sovereigns—and perpetuates itself in cultural processes—text and practices.

Using systemic violence as a technology of absolute power, we argue that the sovereign nodes do not just destroy what could be seen through the naked eye but use unrelenting violence in

the form of systemic militarization. This necropolitics invariably leads to a social space in which the possibility of alternatives is exterminated. This is what we identified in the language of *tapey* as a poetic form that has lost its traditional meanings to the vagaries of war. Though academics generally locate necropolitics in a particular location and situation, however, we argue that it mutates beyond its specified positionality through the folk form of cultural artefacts. What we called necrospatialisation defines the adaptation of social spaces to the polluting effects of necropower. Signs of this abject social degeneration are visible in the cultural representation in which the desire of a beloved is replaced with the strikes of drones, making it difficult to identify one from the other. This transformation of necropolitics into cultural text is a special attribute of a particular space, where violence is mediated by the meanings that people give to their experiences—embodied ways of knowing and reproducing.

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Notes:

[1] It is pertinent to mention here that *Tapa* is not the only genre of Pashto folk literature that accommodates a variety of voices. *Charbeta*, literally means quatrains, like English Ballad is another genre of Pashto popular literature that has more or less similar function in highlighting folk wisdom and experiences. However, the differences between the two genres are quite obvious: *Charbeta* is an epic poem, lengthy in size and fast in tempo with a special rhythm, often sung by artists enriching Pashto music while *tapa* is short and epigrammatic.

[2] 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.