

Sacred Necroresistance in India-Administered Kashmir

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Abstract: As a population is subject to necropolitics, what are the ways in which they resist the exposure to this systematic, deliberately inflicted death? Encompassing the case of India-administered Kashmir region, this article seeks to understand and examine this question. As the Indian state continues to enact insidious and expansive forms of necropolitics in Kashmir, the population has also turned death into a form of counter-conduct – a necroresistance to subvert the state’s necropolitics. Exploring this enactment of necroresistance, this article seeks to reveal the forms that it takes in India-administered Kashmir as well as the transformations that it brings to the socio-political milieu. Conversely, it also looks at how necroresistance in Kashmir acquires a contextual sacred dimension.

Keywords: critical theory, India, insurgency, Kashmir, martyrdom, necropolitics, necroresistance

The insurgency in India-administered Kashmir has increasingly acquired deeply symbolic characteristics in recent times. While performative symbolism has always been a dominant, associative feature of Kashmir’s insurgency against the Indian rule, with the advent of digital media and, consequently, an information ‘battlespace’, images and representations have taken a critical, if not a primary, role. During the past decade or so, while the insurgency has raged on with renewed vigour and continued popular support, the extent of its military success remains debatable. In addition to a robust Indian counterinsurgency grid, the insurgent groups perpetually face shortage of weaponry and military training, so much



so that many of the recruits are found possessing either low-grade weapons or no arms at all (Majid 2020b). My aim in this article, therefore, is to understand and elaborate on what, in the absence of material gains, drives and defines the political resistance and insurgency in Kashmir. And my answer to this question is, at least primarily, *necroresistance*.

In this article, in addition to delineating how India's necropolitics operates in Kashmir, I set out to explore the modalities of *shahadat*, or martyrdom, within the discourse of Islam and other Abrahamic religions while also explaining how Kashmiri insurgents, within the mostly indigenous insurgency, and the population in general have adopted this as a paradigm of anti-India resistance. While expanding upon Achille Mbembe's (2019) concept of necropolitics in the context of Kashmir, I look at the agency of subjects upon whom the biopolitical sovereignty of death is enacted. Through this expansion, I then attempt to establish how Kashmiris, particularly the insurgents, have appropriated necropolitics and imbued it with religious characteristics to subvert the necropolitics of the Indian state. By wresting away the sovereign right of the allocation of death from the structures of the Indian state, I demonstrate, Kashmir's *sacred necroresistance* has become a dominant mode of popular political resistance.

The term 'necroresistance' has previously appeared in the work of Banu Bargu, who powerfully traces how death, and its attendant rituals and discourses, can be transformed into a form of Foucauldian 'counter-conduct'. This counter-conduct, for Bargu, arises as the result of, as well as functions as an attempted disruption in, what is termed in her book as a 'biosovereign assemblage' of 'sovereignty, discipline, and security'. Within this work, it is consistently pointed out that necroresistance, despite being adopted by the supposedly non-religious Communist cadre in Turkey, assumes a theological character (2014: 240). Bargu explains this theologisation as a necessary precondition for the adoption of necroresistance, and explains that it has resulted in the production of a 'sacrificial Marxism' as opposed to a qualitatively different phenomenon of Marxist sacrifice, the former being a 'systematic appropriation of martyrdom as a central ethico-political value and its transformation into a vehicle for ... ideological and cultural propagation'. While transposing this notion of necroresistance to examine the culture

of martyrdom in India-administered Kashmir, I am interested in revealing, to borrow Bargu's words, its 'systematic appropriation' by the Kashmiris and its rise as an 'ethico-political value' for 'ideological and cultural propagation' as well as how it challenges the dominant state structure and dispersal of state power in Kashmir. However, I depart from Bargu's thesis by qualifying *necroresistance* with the term *sacred*. As the remainder of this article progresses, the function that the *sacred* performs for this exposition shall become more comprehensible, yet it suffices to mention here that while Bargu imagines necroresistance in terms of Marxist praxis and is, as discussed before, willing to rightfully assimilate what is regarded in her volume to be the 'theologisation' of necroresistance within the Marxist domain, I maintain that the Kashmiri practices of collective necroresistance unfold as an extension of contextualised (Islamic) religious belief and ritualisation, and, therefore, could be (re)imagined as, overwhelmingly though not exclusively, operating in concurrence with the *sacred*. Also, while Bargu analyses necroresistance purely in terms of its oppositional relationship to the Foucauldian biopolitics of the Turkish prison system, my concern is to demonstrate its position and functioning in opposition to what Mbembe (2019) calls 'necropolitics'. As my empirical focus remains on the necropolitics of the Indian state in Kashmir, I describe and analyse the necroresistance of Kashmiris against this version of necropolitical rule.

On India's Necropolitics in Kashmir

Mbembe points out the ways in which necropower or necropolitics creates 'death-worlds, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead' (2019: 92). The Indian state's exercise of territorial sovereignty in Kashmir through necropolitics constitutes acts of systematic human rights abuses against the local population and militarised control of public spaces (Hassan 2018; Osuri 2018). This necropolitics is experienced by the local population in Kashmir through their everyday lived experience of collective and individual immobilisation, exclusivity, besiegement or blockade, loss of access to shared and private

spaces, as well as through widespread temporal death, debilitation, censorship, confiscation of property, appropriation of land, extraction of resources, restructuring of indigenous spatial relations, infrastructural obliteration, detentions, sexual violence, and exposure to torture and other forms of systematic abuse (Ahmad 2013; Bukhari 2019; Waheed 2020).¹

With the modification of domicile and property rights, as India has now begun to accelerate the appropriation of land in Kashmir for both military use and for settlements, India's relationship with Kashmir fits with what Mbembe calls a 'splintering colonial occupation' (2019: 79–81). This colonial occupation, Mbembe writes, consists of the 'writing of new spatial relations (territorialisation) ultimately (amounting) to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the differential classification of people; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries' (2019: 79). In India-administered Kashmir, this can be observed in multiple forms. Mohamad Junaid, in his ethnographic exposition of how the initiation of Indian rule redefined the relations of Kashmiris with public spaces, writes that 'Kashmir was continuously divided and re-divided into military sectors, operational zones, and special police ranges. A totalising counter-insurgency grid, underpinned by a logic of 'security' and 'control', was laid over the region which not only prevented protests but also created elaborate restrictions on everyday life' (2020: 206).

Also, a system of exclusive access – apartheid – is consistently being set up by the Indian state that grants privileges of movement and access to public spaces, particularly roads, to convoys of Indian military personnel, tourists, and religious/nationalist pilgrims against the native population (Hassan 2019; Misgar 2019). In July of 2019, the police authorities publicised an order that conferred privileged access to certain roadways in Kashmir for the Hindu Indian pilgrims on the way to Amarnath Cave, which is located in the Anantnag (Islamabad) district in Southern Kashmir (Hussain 2019). I lived in Anantnag during this time and for the residents of the district, including me, my family, and my acquaintances, this diktat meant that while the Indian pilgrims travelled across the vital K.P. road that runs through my neighbourhood, we were forcibly excluded by Indian paramilitary troops from commuting on the

same road. This denial of access to a vital roadway continued for multiple months, and anyone who protested the arrangement was either beaten and humiliated, or detained.

While Indian rule over Kashmir has not, so far, been legally described as such, I use apartheid while following Nathan Thrall's exposition of Israel's military occupation in the West Bank and how the system already functions as apartheid. In his essay, Thrall maintains that 'apartheid does not need to be applied uniformly or everywhere in a country to be criminal' and that the phrase 'regime' does not appear anywhere in the original 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA), thereby suggesting that the crimes of apartheid can be called as such without being explicitly arising from, or backed by, a systematic regime of apartheid. When it comes to the issue of racial discrimination, a precondition for the designation of apartheid to apply, there are multiple legal interpretations and international human rights treaties that maintain a broader conception of racial discrimination encompassing, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'. The treaty was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1965. India signed and ratified the treaty in December 1968. In multiple annual reports of an independent expert committee that monitors the implementation of the treaty, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Kashmiris appear as a distinct group that face state discrimination, based on their identity, in Kashmir.²

Tabish,³ a young 26-year-old Kashmiri man, is one of the people who was assaulted and tortured by the Indian paramilitaries during this enactment of apartheid in India-administered Kashmir. I talked to Tabish in the summer of 2019 in an open-ended conversation. While driving on a two-wheeler near his home in Anantnag, Tabish was stopped by heavily armed Indian paramilitary forces, as the convoy of pilgrims commuted on the road, and ordered to wait for the convoy to pass. He instinctively took out his phone to scroll through

social media, but the paramilitaries accused him of taking pictures of the pilgrims and dragged him to an empty field nearby. Tabish described his ordeal as a return from the precipice of death. ‘*Yeli timo gun keir cock tathas, mea doup bus makleo sorui*’ (‘When they cocked their guns in that empty field, I thought this was the end’), he recalled. In a mix of the Keashur language, and Hindi, which the Indian paramilitaries generally speak, Tabish added: ‘*Tim aeis latto seit te gun seit chob diwan diwan mea wanan, tu rota kyu nai hai*’ (‘While kicking me and assaulting me with their rifles, they were constantly annoyed at why I was not crying’). He sustained multiple injuries during this assault and had to be treated in a hospital. Tabish’s ordeal reveals how mundane everyday activities such as using a phone or, purportedly, taking a picture are criminalised in Kashmir and, more vitally, the Indian paramilitaries’ attempts to assault not just his body but also break down, and preferably kill, his spirit through making him cry publicly within a cultural context where such acts can signify a loss of ‘honor’ or, in Tabish’s case, a challenge to his ‘masculine integrity’. In our conversation, despite the visibly painful nature of his physical injuries, Tabish consistently insisted on the attempted injury against his spirit, recalling, again and again, the paramilitary personnel’s aggravation at his refusal to cry. Thus, following Frantz Fanon’s (1963) monumental work on how colonial wars affect the psyche of the colonised, the Indian state’s necropolitics in Kashmir can be observed as consciously attempting to transcend even the material and targeting psychological and metaphysical aspects of Kashmiri life.

Moreover, in February 2020 mineral and sand-mining rights were entirely transferred to non-indigenous commercial groups (Parvaiz 2020). This was augmented by changes in the Control of Building Operations Act, 1988, and the J&K Development Act, 1970, the laws that regulate construction of buildings and other public infrastructure in India-administered Kashmir (Javaid 2020). According to the new regulations, the Indian state – at its discretion – can now designate a certain area as ‘strategic’ to enable the Indian military to carry out unhindered construction within it. Also, the construction of hundreds of thousands of new housing units have been approved. Considering that Jammu and Kashmir (the official designation for India-administered Kashmir) has one of the lowest rates of homeless people in comparison to India (Singh et al. 2018),

a sudden interest in house construction by the Indian government must be viewed within the framework of attempted demographic engineering. This becomes especially stark, considering that India's decision to scrap the region's supposed political autonomy in 2019, an amendment in property rights, has often been compared to the Israeli colonisation of the West Bank (Beilin 2019; Bhasin 2020; Mushtaq and Amin 2020; Parker 2019; Osuri and Zia 2020).

An Overview of Armed Insurgency in Kashmir

The insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir intensified in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Having exhausted all other means to persuade the Indian state towards fulfilling Kashmiris' inherent, and internationally guaranteed, right to self-determination, Kashmiri people embraced arms for ending the Indian rule by force. Kashmiri men began to travel to the Pakistani-administered parts of Kashmir, where the Pakistani state trained, armed, and funded them. Simultaneously, Kashmiri women also began to play a central role in the functioning of insurgency through acting as weapon couriers or, according to Inshah Malik, actively assisting in collective political mobilisation. Broadly, the insurgent groups enjoy widespread social popularity and support, regardless of their ideological affiliations. Paul Staniland notes that pre-existing social ties in Kashmir – both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' – enabled insurgent groups to create 'wartime organisations' swiftly (2014: 72). Other than the central aim of ending India's rule over Kashmir, to varying extents, all these groups are driven by the ideals of militant Islam or, more specifically, *jahad* (*jihad* in Arabic).

Martyrdom in Abrahamic Faiths

The purpose behind sketching the position of martyrdom within the Abrahamic religious discourse and practice within this article is two-fold. First, the prevalence of the popular social practices around the notion of martyrdom in Kashmir must be traced within a proper historical context of succeeding, and overlapping, Abrahamic religious traditions. This, in turn, aids in repudiating the

widespread Indian state narrative that places the social practice of martyrdom exclusively, and thereby reductively, within the domain of Islam in general and Kashmir – a Muslim majority region – in particular. Besides, the deployment of *sacred* – in contrast to solely *Islamic* – in explaining popular *necroresistance* in Kashmir carries a comprehensive epistemic significance when the sacred martyrdom has not been, evidently, confined to one religious tradition, which, in the case of Kashmir, is Islam. Although, it is pertinent to mention here that the performance of sacred *necroresistance* in India-administered Kashmir, as detailed through this article, cannot be conceived of as bereft of its Islamic character. Additionally, it must be pointed out here that Abrahamic religions contain differing, oftentimes oppositional, theological elements even within the discourse of martyrdom. What follows is a brief demonstration of how different Abrahamic religious traditions deal with the category of martyrdom both theologically and practically.

Martyrdom has always had a distinctive position within the Abrahamic religions, of which Islam is a part. In fact, according to Meir Hatina, the enactment of martyrdom was a consistent feature within settled societies of the Mediterranean basin (2014: 19). During the Greco-Roman period, the persecution of Jews enforced the role of martyrdom in Jewish life and theology (2014: 20). Faced with forced conversion and the violation of religious tenets, martyrdom in God's way was fostered consistently within the Jewish ethos, according to Hatina, particularly after the death of Hannah and her seven sons at the hands of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus (167 BCE) and the Bar Kochba Rebellion (132–136 CE) against the Romans. This 'passive' attitude of self-sacrifice was transformed into an active approach for territorial annexation by the settler-colonial Zionist movement, which demanded 'sacrifice' for consolidation of national sovereignty (2014: 20).

Taking this forward, it has been consistently observed that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) operate within a theocratic framework of sacrifice that 'helps maintain the war spirit' within the organisation (Levy 2012). It is imperative to mention here that Zionism, and the IDF, do not singlehandedly encompass either the Jewish theological doctrines, or the evolution of Jewish militancy and the Jewish culture of martyrdom. Conferring the category of martyrdom upon Jewish victims of the First Crusade (1096 CE) persists

among religious and secular Jews, according to Jeremy Cohen (2004: 159). The martyrdom culture is also heavily evidenced in the literature pertaining to numerous instances of collective and individual Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, including uprisings in the Ghettos and concentration camps (Henry 2014; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2000). Although one should mention here that Shira Lander (2003) suggests that multiple Jewish traditions problematise the notion of martyrdom within the Holocaust because, during these atrocities, death in no way was a matter of choice.

Coming to the Christian tradition of martyrdom, it began with the crucifixion of Jesus, which continues to be one of the foundational facets of Christian theology and belief. Signifying a redemptive act in service of people, Christian theology maintains that Jesus was crucified to atone for humanity's sins. While crucifixion is sometimes presented as a passive act of sacrifice, the simple fact that it continues to resonate within contemporary Christian culture, particularly in the discourse of the passion, makes it anything but unassertive. In the apostolic age, the veneration of martyrdom increased because of the significant addition in the number of martyrs (Ayoub 1987: 68). Mahmoud Ayoub maintains that a rich and elaborate cult of martyrdom evolved within the early Christian culture so much so that when Polycarp (69–155 CE), a bishop who is now venerated as a saint within multiple denominations, was immolated by the Romans, Christians had to be forcefully prevented from gathering his remains for any future veneration.

This culture continued with renewed vigour during the Crusades. During the Middle Ages, those who were believed to have been martyred in the cause of faith were held in renown by the Christians (Smith 2002: 189). In his influential *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE), one of the most magisterial theologians within the Catholic Church, elaborates on the question of martyrdom. Replying to various contemporary objections to the virtue of martyrdom, Aquinas presents it as an act of 'virtue' and 'fortitude' and as the 'most perfect of human acts' (1981: 2292). Also, visible acts of self-sacrifice – especially at public spaces in large urban centres – elicited widespread popular discussion of Christian values, thereby aiding the cause of the nascent Christian Church (Bowersock 1995: 42).

In the Islamic tradition, the origins of the notion of martyrdom can be traced to its foundational text, the Quran. The concept of martyrdom in the Quran is closely tied to the struggle for the cause of the faith, and the martyrs remain a deeply venerated category of individuals. Multiple verses in the text attest to this, the oft-repeated ones being from chapters Al-Baqarah and Al-Imran. The Arabic term for martyrdom, which also appears in the Quran, the *shahid*, also, literally, refers to the act of witnessing. Etymologically, this is close to the English, Greek, and Syriac words for martyr, *martus* and *sahda*, respectively, that also, literally, mean ‘witnessing’. The idea of ‘witnessing’ in the broader theme of martyrdom appears in the Christian tradition, which could refer to anything from witnessing the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ to the confession of faith to God (Ayoub 1987: 67). Coming back to the Islamic tradition, the word *shahid* is repeated over fifty times in the Quran and can hold diverse meanings, from someone who bears witness to the oneness of God and prophethood of Muhammad, which is the foundational principle of the religion, to anyone who dies in the ‘way of Allah’ (cause of faith). The act and metaphor of ‘witnessing’, therefore, holds a distinctive place within Abrahamic religions and, in many ways, signifies an ultimate authenticity of the belief, especially when a person is willing to expend their life as a witness – that is, a martyr (*shahid*).

The performative culture of martyrdom has also been a consistent feature of Muslim societies. Apart from an extensive number of written and oral recollections in praise of martyrs who died for the Muslim cause, when a Muslim is deemed to be a martyr their family members and acquaintances are discouraged from mourning their death. Rather, they must express gratitude (Bonner 2006). Moreover, in contrast to the dead Muslims who are washed and wrapped in a shroud before burial, Muslim martyrs are displayed on an open casket in the attire that they wore while dying, and do not require the otherwise mandatory *ghusl* (ritual washing of the body). This is because, according to the Islamic tradition, they have been already purified of all sins by their selfless act in service of the faith. The burial spaces of martyrs are often separated from the regular graveyards, and these special spaces often hold reverential status within Muslim societies. Also, special rituals and occasions are often associated with the remembrance of the martyrs’ sacrifice, especially those slain during the formative years of Islam. This links to the Quranic verses about

the martyrs not being dead ‘but alive and well-provided for in the presence of their Lord (Allah)’ (Quran 3:169). In a temporal sense, the continued rituals of remembrance around martyrdom do keep them alive through performativity and memory. However, when it comes to the theological interpretations, there exists a vivid detail on how martyrs are alive under the protection of *Allah*.

Assemblage of Martyrdom in Kashmir: The Performance of Sacred Necroresistance

In India-administered Kashmir, the popular tradition of venerating those who are regarded by the population as martyrs (*shahid*) has been a consistent feature of anti-India politics. As one observes the funerals of insurgents, and civilians, killed by Indian forces, which I have done on multiple occasions across Kashmir between 2008 and 2019, this veneration becomes more apparent.⁴ The killed insurgents and civilians are buried according to the Islamic rituals reserved for martyrs as described above. For instance, the otherwise mandatory *ghusl* (ritual washing of the body) is not performed, as it is believed that the person has already achieved symbolic purity through martyrdom. Moreover, in line with the Islamic rulings, during the funeral procession the person is displayed on an open casket in the attire that they were wearing at the time of their act, rather than being wrapped inside a *kaffan* (‘shroud’) as is the norm.

During my graduate studies in a university in India-administered Kashmir between 2015 and 2017, I observed that campus politics were mostly performed around the killing of a Kashmiri insurgent or a civilian by the Indian military forces. Although unionising and protesting inside the academic campuses in Kashmir remains virtually banned, the students on campus regularly organised funeral prayers, in absentia, for insurgents and civilians. Thereafter, the students also shouted slogans against the Indian state and in favour of Kashmir’s *azadi* (‘freedom’), as they continued rallying within the campus and, during some instances, on the main streets outside. While the goal, around which these assemblies formed, was rooted in demanding an end to Indian rule in Kashmir, the contingent bond for these assemblies was always provided by what was seen by these students as sacred death or *shahadat* (‘martyrdom’).

The martyrs, regarded as the ones who ‘sacrifice’ their lives in the way of Islam and fight against India’s rule, and their families, broadly receive increased social recognition within the community, regardless of their position in the socio-economic hierarchy. Martyrdom, especially in the past thirty years of armed insurgency, has become a politically and socially loaded category, around which the performance of resistance politics and discourse coalesces. Take the instance of the funeral of Ishfaq Ahmad Malik, who was killed by the Indian forces in April 2018. In one of the pictures of his large funeral procession in Kashmir Valley’s Shupian district, mourners can be seen touching Ishfaq’s shoes in admiration (Syed 2018). In Muslim societies, touching the feet of a person is generally considered to be like idolatry – which is strictly forbidden in Islam. Although within some Islamic sects, which also exist in Kashmir, people touch the feet of someone who is believed to be excessively pious such as a *peer* (‘saint’), it is still generally frowned upon.

However, in case of insurgents, who are believed to have sacrificed their life in the cause of Kashmir’s *azadi* (‘freedom’) and Islam, mourners assemble in massive numbers and try to get as near to the body as possible. This is followed by touching the beard, feet, or other body parts of the martyr’s corpse and then, in an act of reverence, touching one’s own body as if one is trying to expropriate piousness and attain salvation. This act also signifies a contextual sacralisation of the martyrdom and of necroresistance in Kashmir. It is contextual, I stress, because while the discourse around Islamic martyrdom including that in Kashmir – both in academic and state narratives – is located mostly within the Salafi interpretations of Islam,⁵ the performative veneration of martyrdom in Kashmir appears to also be affected by Kashmir’s deep-rooted Sufi traditions. Thus, following Fait Muedini’s study on the anti-colonial outlook of Sufi orders in Algeria and Libya, the purportedly oppositional social undercurrents of Salafism and Sufism seem to co-exist within the domain of performative martyrdom in Kashmir.

During these funerals, the family members of the insurgents apply henna on the hands and feet of the killed insurgents, in addition to showering them with sweets and confectionaries. This is done in imitation of the rituals that are generally carried out during elaborate marriage ceremonies in Kashmir. The mixing of celebratory and mourning rituals happens under the belief that the

martyr has attained the highest level of spiritual salvation, *jannah* ('paradise'), that can be accorded to a Muslim. The participants in these funeral processions see the bodies of insurgents as 'assets' (Gettleman 2018) that bolster the struggle against Indian rule, while the processions represent a certain symbolic victory of recapturing public spaces from Indian military control.

The commemoration and veneration of martyrdom also has a spatial aspect in India-administered Kashmir. Insurgents, believed to be martyrs, are mostly buried in designated graveyards. These martyrs' graveyards or *shaheed mordguzar*, as they are known in Kaeshur language, are attached with insurgent symbolism while also serving as repositories of insurgent memory. According to Junaid (2018: 251), martyrs' graveyards form a vital element within Kashmir's counternarratives against the attempted erasure of the Indian state's history of violence in the region. The sense of permanence that these graveyards exhibit, as Junaid writes, makes them an instrument of 'spatial resistance' against Indian rule in Kashmir. In December 2020, on a sunny winter afternoon, I visited one such graveyard in Machpun village in Kashmir's Pulwoam district. The graveyard, which has been created by appropriating land from the village's common graveyard, is separated from the latter by a chain fence and iron bars. It contains a single grave, of Firdous Ahmad Mir, an insurgent commander who was killed during a gunfight with the Indian military in November 2018. Machpun's martyrs' graveyard emanates a sense of symmetrical neatness, thereby heightening its permanent character, and its emptiness, except for one grave, signifies Kashmiris' morbid foreboding. It is as if the graveyard remains forever prepared to inter more people.

While they have, occasionally, been able to carry out high-profile military operations, like the 2019 bomb attack that killed forty Indian paramilitaries and brought India and Pakistan to the brink of an all-out military conflict, the insurgents in Kashmir heavily rely on performative non-kinetic symbolism to amplify their cause; within this symbolism, relaying the intent of sacred martyrdom becomes crucial. Take the instance of multiple videos and pictures that the armed insurgents upload over different social media websites in the immediate aftermath of joining the militant groups and subsequently. These pictures and videos mostly show the person, the insurgent, touting a gun and pointing the index finger of his

right hand to the sky, the latter action signifying the *shahada* or ‘witnessing’ of the oneness of God, which, as pointed out above, is etymologically close to *shahid* (‘martyr’ or ‘witness’) and *shahadat* (‘act of martyrdom’). In these videos or audio clips, whose circulation through encrypted chat applications such as Telegram, WhatsApp and Signal has almost mandated the creation of a digital culture of subversion, the insurgent recruits recurrently focus on two themes – first, what they call *zulm*, ‘oppression’, which Indian rule has unleashed in Kashmir in the form of extensive human rights abuses, and second, their choice of taking up arms to end this rule by fighting in *khodai sinz watth*, ‘the sacred path of God’.

In recent times, the insurgents and their families have also recurrently recorded what are known as ‘last’ or ‘final calls’. In these phone calls, an insurgent, who is caught in a gunfight with the Indian military and has no hope to escape alive, calls back home for a final farewell. These deeply personal and intense phone calls, which are recorded and then circulated within social media channels, give riveting insight into the dynamics of the insurgency in Kashmir, particularly throwing some light on the motivations that drive the insurgents to fight in spite of the fact that they are facing overwhelming odds against India’s enormous counterinsurgency grid. In the calls, after an exchange of pleasantries, young insurgents mostly emphasise their proximate martyrdom (*shahadat*) for the sake of Islam and urge others to carry forward the *mission*, a euphemism for armed insurgency against Indian rule. Parents often ask their sons to remain steadfast, and discourage the young insurgents from surrendering, which is seen as an act of weakness or betrayal, and which can condemn the person to a lifetime of penal and social humiliation. Farewells and promises of meeting in the afterlife with the extended family are also exchanged during these calls, and the insurgent is requested to pray for the salvation of everyone. Uzma Falak (2018) aptly describes these phone calls as ‘artefacts of resistance’ in which ‘textures of loss, stoicism, and resistance are magnified in the (exchange of) quotidian details’.

Meanwhile, as the insurgents are engaged in gunfights in a certain village or town, young women, and men from and around the place, gather in protest, throwing rocks at the Indian military and paramilitary forces, in an attempt to rescue the insurgents (Bhat 2017b). These acts often come at a deadly or debilitating cost for the protestors.

This entire matrix, which I term *sacred necroresistance*, of elaborate funeral processions and correlated rituals, martyrs' graveyards, rescue attempts, final phone calls and digital propaganda associated with the insurgent groups, is bound by the common thread of sacred death or martyrdom as well as resistance politics.

This voluntary confrontation with death cannot be simply termed as nihilistic but, as G. W. F. Hegel (1977: 19) says, forms an essential element of subject-formation. In Terry Eagleton's terms, this 'living' of one's death is aimed at overcoming the 'demonic compulsion' of the Freudian death drive which results in the transformation of a necessity into a practice of freedom (2018: 64). Fanon's (1963: 35–40) treatise on how violence constitutes an essential element of the redemptive pursuit of the colonised subject can also be transposed in here, even if this violence finds its ultimate expression in the seemingly wilful annihilation of the subject.

One other important point of contention that arises in this exercise of sacred necroresistance in Kashmir is its functional scope. In other words, to what functional ends does this form of resistance in Kashmir serve? While the purview of this article does not encompass analysing sacred necroresistance from the military-strategic point of view, it can be emphasised here that due to the expansive and intensive nature of the Indian state's counterinsurgency mechanisms in the region, the necroresistance in Kashmir, in its kinetic manifestations, does not inflict heavy/desired military costs on the Indian state. However, Walter Benjamin (1996: 236) writes that the primary positionality of what he calls 'pure violence' remains in means rather than ends, and it may be said here that the necroresistance in Kashmir situates itself predominantly in the realm of means. Following Benjamin, the functional basis of sacred necroresistance in Kashmir should therefore be situated in means in that it, as Benjamin writes, 'threatens ... (the law) not only by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law' (1996: 239). This conception of violence is also related to Giorgio Agamben's close reading of Benjamin, wherein Agamben reiterates that pure violence, in the aftermath of its application, can assume a wholly manifest character rather than being instrumental towards any defined ends (2005: 124). Emphasising the non-instrumentality of necroresistance does not, however, attribute a futility to it, nor does the instrumental and non-instrumental operate across a strict binary, especially in a

context where the coloniality of state violence, as Fanon (2018: 654) argues, takes a ‘three-dimensional’ character by presenting itself as temporally eternal. In this situation, Fanon maintains, the subject people are ‘*logically* confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary’ (2018: 654; my emphasis).

State Repression against Sacred Necroresistance

The power and critical position of sacred necroresistance within anti-India politics in Kashmir can also be gleaned from the state’s response towards it through the systematic exercise of what can be considered as necropolitics in one of its most essentialising forms, which further enforces the logic of a camp, as elaborated by Agamben, within the region by entirely appropriating the violence being enacted in the state of exception. In April 2020, amidst the coronavirus pandemic, the regional police announced that the bodies of insurgents killed during gunfights with the Indian military will no longer be returned to their families, who bury them in the local graveyards (Zargar 2020). While the police, in its official statements, maintained that the funerals of these insurgents can turn into virus-spreading events, the continued denial of bodies and last remains to their families even after the pandemic subsided points to a very different motivation.

In October 2020, while talking to a local publication, a police official said that the insurgents’ funerals ‘evoke an emotional response’ from the local population and inspire recruitment (The Kashmir Walla 2020). According to a 2018 study, commissioned by the police department in Kashmir, half the new recruits came from within a ten-kilometre radius of the residence of a killed insurgent. ‘It has been observed that many a time, friends of killed militants manifest a tendency of pledging to join militancy on seeing the dead bodies and funerals of their friends’, the study, cited by an Indian newspaper, revealed (Jaleel 2018). Another report by Observer Research Foundation, an influential Indian thinktank, observes that, as the funerals were occasionally attended by active insurgents, this brought civilians in contact with them and ‘such an interaction is one of the first and important steps in facilitating (militant) recruitment’ (K. Shah 2020). Therefore, according to Indian military officials, the funerals had to be stopped (Ashiq 2020).

Until October 2020, at least 125 bodies of Kashmiri insurgents had been buried by the state authorities in remote areas, away from their native village and towns. This seizure of Kashmiri bodies can be compared with the Israeli confiscation and prolonged freezing of Palestinian bodies, who were killed by the Israeli police, during the Al-Quds Uprising in October 2015. According to Suhad Daher-Nashif, these confiscations indicate a governmentality of the management of death and mourning. Furthermore, Daher-Nashif says, that by withholding Palestinian bodies the Israeli authorities foment a situation in which death assumes the form of a spiral as opposed to a linear experience.

Moreover, this confiscation of bodies, and consequent denial of mourning, by the Indian state in Kashmir, contravenes international human rights obligations as well as India's own legal tenets (Afshana 2020) but is justified by the Indian state under the necessity of fighting what they call terrorism and preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India, thereby corroborating that Indian legality in Kashmir is perpetually advanced through a juridical exception, as described by Carl Schmitt (1985: 6–7) and Giorgio Agamben. This practice may also have led to a rise in what are known as 'fake encounters/gunfights' in Kashmir (Naqash 2020). The gunfight is termed as 'fake' when the Indian military, in pursuit of official commendation and/or compensation, kills civilians in a staged violent encounter and passes them off as insurgents. In 2020, at least 125 Kashmiri insurgents were buried by the state authorities away from their native places/graveyards. Among these, at least three people, Abrar Ahmed, Imtiyaz Ahmed and Mohammed Ibrar, a teenager, were later identified as civilian labourers, who were killed in a fake encounter under the orders of Bhoopinder Singh, an Indian army officer.

The extraction of monetary value from a Kashmiri body, through its attempted annihilation, can be viewed through what Mbembe calls the 'slaving logic of capture and predation' (2017: 4–6). In this work, subtitled 'The Becoming Black of the World', Mbembe attempts to establish how the phenomenal logics of slavery, and other conditions of imperial and capitalist depredation that the people of African origin were subjected to, has now been dispersed and generalised as a normative condition of planetary existence, especially vis-à-vis the subaltern populations. This forced extraction

of capital from Kashmiri corporeality, which is captured and often-times annihilated, also draws one's attention back to the feudatory exploitation of the region by multiple preceding regimes of monarchical rule such as the Dogras (1846–1947), Sikhs (1819–1846) and Afghans (1752–1819), wherein the rulers drew revenue from the labour of Kashmiri subjects under conditions of servitude, unpaid labour and feudal tax arrangements. Therefore, it may be said that the Indian state's systematic, forced extraction of capital from Kashmiri corporeality represents a feudal praxis advanced through modern counterinsurgency formations. Although, while, as expressed and demonstrated above, the individual logics of slavery – in many dispersed forms – do pervade within the functioning of Indian rule in Kashmir, this is not to suggest that the Kashmiris are 'enslaved' under Indian rule in terms of transatlantic or chattel slavery.

In December 2020, the Indian Army was again accused of killing three Kashmiris, Zubair Ahmad Lone, Aijaz Maqbool Ganai and Ather Mushtaq Wani, a 16-year-old schoolchild, in a fake gunfight (Fareed 2021). The bodies of all three people were buried in Sonmarg, which is around 100 kilometres away from their hometown of Pulwoam. Ather Mushtaq's body, according to his father Mushtaq Ahmad Wani, who was present at the burial, was buried in a pit dug by an excavator machine (Wani 2021). A few days after Ather's body was buried in Sonmarg, a video circulated across social media in which Ather's father can be seen digging an empty grave for his son in the local graveyard. Mushtaq Ahmed has consistently demanded that Ather's body be handed over to him, so he can bury his son in this local graveyard, writing in a local publication that 'I'll wait till my last breath for his body' (Wani 2021; see also Abbas et al. 2021; and Aljazeera English 2021). The Indian state, labelling Ather as a 'terrorist', has, so far, denied Mushtaq's pleas. Mushtaq and other members of Ather's family have been charged by the police with a stringent piece of 'anti-terrorism' legislation for demanding his body (Free Press Kashmir 2021). 'Mourning is officially a terrorism act in #Kashmir', a Kashmiri social media user said of this 'terrorism' charge against Mushtaq Ahmed (Bhat 2021). The reason for the Indian state's intransigence in this case seems to be a denial of collective mourning for Ather Mushtaq, which could entail practices of sacred necroresistance including a widely attended funeral procession that simultaneously carries

the characteristics of a protest rally and other rituals, as discussed above.

The Indian state's crackdown against rituals and spaces associated with sacred necroresistance is even more evident in the militarisation of graveyards where Kashmiris, both insurgents and civilians, are now interred. In the autumn of 2020, I conversed with a childhood friend of Rouf Ahmad Mir, an insurgent who had been killed by the Indian Army on 29 August 2020, during a gunfight in Pulwoam district. Rouf was interred in Sheeri, Varmul, around 100 kilometres away from his native village of Machpor, Pulwoam. Rouf's friend, let us call him Hanaan for the sake of anonymisation, described the state-controlled graveyard in Sheeri as a militarised space with tightly regulated system of access maintained by the Jammu and Kashmir police. According to Hanaan, situated near the local police station, the graveyard remains under a constant surveillance by the police personnel. 'Before entering the graveyard, the police verify your relationship with the particular person who is buried inside and confiscate your phone', Hanaan recalled. 'The graves are marked with numbers, which correspond to a certain name in the police database and the police instantly remove any epitaphs, plaques or memorials that are erected by the grieving family members. This removal of clear identifiers and memorials has a two-fold purpose: to render the Kashmiris who lie in these graves nameless and thereby erase any transcendental memory of dissent.

Despite these multi-layered hurdles, the family members try to visit the graves as frequently as possible. Hanaan, who has also visited the grave of his friend Rouf, along with Rouf's family, described these visits as deeply moving and intensely reverential. "*Aeis ha aayee*" ("We have come for you") is the first phrase that the families utter', Hanaan said. 'Then they cry bitterly, along with touching and kissing the graves'. In addition to Hanaan, I also talked to the family of Junaid Rashid Wani, a 20-year-old college student and an insurgent, who was killed by Indian forces on 8 October 2020. Junaid's body was buried at Rajwad in Handwoar district, around 100 kilometres away from his home village of Tumlahall, Pulwoam. Although they do not hesitate to visit Junaid's gravesite whenever possible, both his mother, Naseema, and father, Abdul Rashid Wani, described the inaccessibility of the place of his burial. 'I can never bear to visit Junaid's grave, but the rest of the family

has to book a cab and it takes them an entire day to reach and return from Handwoar', Abdul Rashid said. 'We could have buried him in the local, ancestral graveyard that is only two minutes away from our home', he added. Again, the only reason that Junaid's family was denied the right to his body seems to be the state's cracking down on all forms of sacred necroresistance.

One other stark, pre-emptive, instance of this crackdown was on display on 12 February 2020. An unconfirmed piece of news circulated across social media about the passing away of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a widely popular Kashmiri political leader and member of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat (Movement for Liberation), who, at the time, was over 91 years old (R. Shah 2020). The Indian state had consistently put Geelani under house arrest, at least since 2008. As soon as the rumours of his death began to circulate, the Indian authorities in Kashmir seemed to get into overdrive. They banned the internet across the region and began deploying extra military and police forces on the roads leading to Geelani's residence while putting the entire military grid on 'high alert' (IANS 2020; Majid 2020; Shah 2020). Simultaneously, an official letter was published by Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, elaborating how, in case of the confirmation of Geelani's death, his funeral would be organised. The letter detailed a 'route plan' through which the nonagenarian's funeral procession would pass so that as many people as possible would be able to attend, as well as his desire to be buried in Srinagar's *mazaar-e-shuhada* ('martyrs' graveyard') (Majid 2020; The Wire 2020). Although, the news about Geelani's death was eventually dismissed as incorrect, the paranoia of the Indian state machinery vis-à-vis Geelani's possible death, and elaborate funeral, again displayed the state's deep aversion towards the collective rituals of sacred necroresistance in Kashmir.

Conclusion

As the Indian state's necropolitics becomes more forceful in Kashmir, what I am interested in, and what I have tried to indicate in this article, is how Kashmiris have appropriated death to resist this necropower. Appropriating death through the performative rituals and discourse of the sacred – the Islamic religion in the case of Kashmir – enables the people, who live under the regime of

necropower, to forcefully resist it as well as, according to Rouf Dar (2018), the state's power to dictate the terms of their lives. This resistance to the conditions of Agambenian bare life, according to Bargu, is not carried out in a desperate attempt to 'embrace' bare life or to even 'upend' it but should be viewed instead as a prefatory struggle to not be reduced to bare life in the first place (2014: 81).

Also, this sacred necroresistance, however, as I have laid it out, is not exclusive to Kashmir but has formed an important strategy for the assertion of agency by the people at the receiving end of systematic necropower – from early Christian converts to Jews during the Holocaust and to Islamic cultures elsewhere. Moreover, the notion of *shahadat* ('martyrdom') forms a central feature of popular resistance against Indian rule in Kashmir not just in a finite, ontological sense but also within a socio-political sense. Thus, I imagine necropolitics as not just an expression of the Indian state's structural necropower but as a form of resistance appropriated by the agents – in this case the Kashmiris – on whom the state's necropolitics is being enacted.

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Notes

1. See also Ali (2021); Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights (1993); Bhat (2017a); Ghoshal and Pal (2019); A. Hassan (2012); K. W. Hassan (2020); International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-Administered

- Kashmir 2012; Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (2015, 2019); Javed (2020); Jha (2014); Misgar (2021); Nabi and Ye (2015); Naqash (2018); Parvaiz (2020); and Zia (2019).
2. See, for instance, the CERD reports of 1996 (52) and 2019 (6).
 3. The name has been changed for safety reasons.
 4. The auto-ethnographic data contained in this article is derived from my experience of living in Kashmir, as a native Kashmiri, throughout my life. This experience encompasses around three decades of my life, from childhood through to adulthood from 1993 to the present.
 5. See, for example, Dehlvi ; D'Souza and Routray ; Mir (2012); Mohanty (2018); and Pandya .

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