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Precarious attachments: soldiers and erasures of the feminine in the Pakistan military

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ABSTRACT
Militarism and soldiering are materialized by gendered imaginaries and enabled through physical and emotional labor within military households. Soldier households in Pakistan are rarely nuclear, and soldiering in the Pakistan military is filtered through the structures of rurality, postcoloniality, and localized manifestations of patriarchy. This article draws upon interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and participant observation in villages in Pakistan and institutions of the military to examine the emotional labor in relationships between soldiers and their female kin, wives, and mothers. The silences and disconnects experienced in these relationships are not a side effect of soldiering and its demands; on the contrary, they need to be understood as the essence of the processes that create soldier-subjects. These attachments and enablers of soldiering are also, paradoxically, premised on ideas of precariousness, a disjuncture that can be better understood through the prism of the military institution's complicated relationship with the female subject – a relationship built on (dis)enchantment with the feminine (other). This article sets up these erasures of connection, the enabling yet fragile relationships between the soldier and his female kin, as intimate sites to understand militarism. These relationships both sustain the war project and hold the potential for diminishing it.

KEYWORDS Soldiering; military households; emotional labor; gender; postcolonial militaries

Introduction

Gendered dynamics of military power, including the indispensability of women's labor in military households, have been unequivocally established by a range of scholarship in global political economy and international relations (Elshtain 1995; Enloe [1989] 2001; Goldstein 2001; Yuval-Davis 1997). In postcolonial militaries, military service for soldiers can mean time and lives away from the family for extended periods in terrains and under

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regimes of living that are far removed from home. This article deepens the notion of women's emotional labor by drawing attention to the role of relationships within military households in rural Pakistan to understand how militarism and its geopolitical extensions find their way into the intimate and the everyday (Brickell 2012; Enloe 2000; Lutz 2006). Nuanced through notions of feeling and belonging, these relationships are precarious and navigated carefully by the military institution, soldiers, and female family members. They are precarious not because they may break, but because they are premised on absences and erasures of connection between military men and their female kin. These disconnects are not a side effect of soldiering, but instead a necessary pre-condition for service in the military, one that is actively desired if the soldier is to commit to the labor of war. This article sets up the military household and the family as the *feminine other* and delineates how their exclusion forever haunts soldier relationships and projects militarism.

Studies show that gender and colonial legacies perpetuate political economies of war by maintaining a ready supply of military labor. Work that traces the gendered and affective logics that sustain militarism is mostly centered on militaries in Western contexts (Basham 2018; Enloe 2000; Lutz 2001; Macleish 2013). However, several critical interventions acknowledge the legacies of the colonial empire, including the stereotyping of certain races as especially suited to the work of war (Barkawi 2017; Streets 2004). Chisholm and Ketola's work with Gurkha communities in Nepal documents how colonial, racialized, and affective logics underpin the supply of troops for the global security market, where "militarism is an affectively felt logic that organizes the *colonial* present, gives meaning to Gurkha's [*sic*] colonial histories, and renders the pursuit of military service as a knowable path to a secure future" (Chisholm and Ketola 2020, 275, emphasis in original). This article adds to this much-needed body of research on armies of the Global South that are uniquely positioned in the encounter between colonial legacy, rurality, and localized manifestations of patriarchy. It offers a contextualized reading of a postcolonial army that both resonates with earlier work on militarism and brings up peculiarities that deepen our understanding of how military power and gender work with and through each other to enable and potentially destabilize war making in these settings.

Feminist scholarship locates the household as critical to military operations and brings the social relations therein under scrutiny, including the physical and emotional labor of women (Basham and Catignani 2018; Fluri 2009; Gray 2016; Jervis 2011). Social reproduction within the household refers to the range of everyday tasks that sustain life, such as cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and caring for the sick and elderly (Douglass 2012; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014). Other practices are less tangible, such as maintaining extended community relations and emotional support. These practices are configured through social relations that are gendered and managed through the institution of the family, which in Pakistan continues to be highly patriarchal. Traditionally regarded as private and apolitical, the household is populated and run by women. Public spaces dominated by men stand distinct from the household, and the domestic sphere is considered feminine regardless of the actual power that women may possess in these spaces (ADB 2016; Shaheed 1998).

Research on military wives demonstrates how domestic spaces such as kitchens and living rooms are intimately connected to war through affective and personal relationships (Hyde 2016). Hedström's (2020) typology of "militarized social reproduction" makes visible the kinds of women's labor that underpin state and parastate conflicts. This article complicates Hedström's categories of gendered labor that are sympathetic to the war economy – namely, acts that are "enabling," "supporting," "symbolizing," and "legitimatizing" (Hedström 2020, 6–14). It argues that the fifth typology – that is, "rejecting," which refers to "the gendered duties undertaken by women in opposition to war making" (Hedström 2020, 13) – is not always distinct from other categories. In fact, the challenge to the war project bleeds into typologies of gendered labor that ostensibly support enlistment and service.

This article also extends the notion of emotional labor that female family members provide in military households through attention to the realm of relationships, which are theorized as living, dynamic exchanges between sets of actors, particularly between military men and their wives and mothers. These bonds emanate from and also inform the uneasy associations between the military institution, the soldier's female kin, and the notion of the feminine. The article contends that this focus on relationships enables us to better understand the precarity that underlies the "perpetual ambivalence" in attachments to militarism that allow for both commitment and disaffection (Basham 2018; Chisholm and Ketola 2020, 278).

The "greedy" institutions of the family and the military place competing demands on the soldier, with the latter determining how much time he can spend at home (Segal 1986). This not only has implications for his physical presence but also refers to more arcane connections, such as his ability to maintain family ties, including his integration into civilian life (Jolly 1996). Recognizing these tensions, militaries have attempted to assimilate military spouses in a bid to ensure loyalty and service readiness for the soldier (Harrison and Laliberté 1997; Horn 2009). Just as there are rules and regulations that govern the soldier, wives maintain military expectations of femininity and act as supportive partners (Gray 2017). Military families often identify as extended family. These are "relationships of solidarity" in which "morals and affection" as a community are established (Da Silva 2017, 211).

Much of the focus in the scholarship on military households has been limited to the study of the nuclear household, looking at families that function within the military's physical spaces, such as bases and cantonments

(Cooley 2008; Lutz 2001; Macleish 2013). Unlike the wives of military officers in Pakistan (who move from cantonment to cantonment along with their spouses, barring postings to non-family stations or foreign deputations), the wives of military soldiers by and large stay rooted in their rural terrain. Limited housing for families of soldiers is available at some points during military service, depending upon rank and place of posting, but it is not always guaranteed.[1] In these sites outside the bounded spaces of the military, where families of the Pakistani soldier class reside and the military's ability to influence is constrained, the precarity within soldier relationships is thrown into sharp relief.

The Pakistan Army[2] is an all-volunteer force, traditionally drawing its male soldiers and its non-commissioned and junior commissioned officers from the lower economic class residing in villages in Pakistan.[3] The term "soldier" in this article refers to this group; it is distinct from the officer class, which has its own training regimes, eligibility criteria, and geographic demographics. For an appreciable time after Partition, the Pakistan military relied predominantly on designated "martial areas" in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab for its labor force (Rizvi 2003). It took Pakistan nearly 50 years to move toward a quota-based regime for soldier enlistment that aimed at representation from all parts of Pakistan.[4] Despite the shift in policy, the number of applicants to the army from the martial belt in KP and Punjab far exceeds the quotas for these regions, a result of the consistent recruitment of military labor in these areas (Pasha 1998; Yong 2005). A deeply entrenched racialized logic, coupled with limited alternative livelihood opportunities, keeps these areas securely attached to the military.

Soldiers' households are composed of extended families, fathers, mothers, wives, brothers (and their wives), and unmarried sisters and any offspring thereof. This article focuses on two primary members of the soldier's extended family: his wife and mother. The cue for this selection comes from their conspicuousness in soldiers' narratives about their homes and frequent references to them in interviews with training instructors and senior officers.

This research is based on 39 interviews,[5] ethnographic fieldwork, and participant observation in villages of the famed martial area of Chakwal in Punjab as well as an army recruitment center in Chakwal and an infantry training center in Abbottabad in KP. In-depth semi-structured interviews conducted over a number of sittings were carried out with 19 soldiers (both serving and retired) and 14 women. Those selected for interviews in the village setting were approached during the ethnographic fieldwork because of their current or previous association with the army as soldiers or mothers/spouses, and their willingness to be interviewed. Domains of life probed in the interviews with the soldiers tended to be broad, spanning the respondents' entire lives rather than an overtly specific focus on the military. With the women respondents, interviews focused more on their marriages and relationships. Four of these men and women belonged to the same household. They were either related by marriage (wife–husband) or birth (mother–son) and were interviewed separately. Interviews were also conducted with six military training instructors and recruitment officers. Ethnographic work and participant observation added much-needed context to the interviewees' narratives (Soss 2006).

The article proceeds in three sections. The first section examines the attachments between soldiers and their mothers and wives, bonds that are not only marked by physical absences but also defined through emotional erasures. The second section traces these erasures to the formation of the masculine solider-subject and his carefully constructed disenchantment with the feminine through military training regimes. The third section establishes why these erasures of being and attachment are important for the military institution and, in doing so, positions soldier complicity with service and female support for soldier service as precarious and negotiated. The article concludes that these intimate domains that make war possible are also possible sites of disruption.

Bringing the military home

Becoming a soldier requires initiation into military ways of thinking and behaving (Goldstein 2001; Hockey 2003). Research shows that the influence of military culture bleeds into soldiers' relationships at home and extends into the private, intimate spaces of everyday life (Gray 2016; Hyde 2017). In Pakistan, soldier households are more often than not located in civilian terrain outside the fold of the military space. This section provides a glimpse into how these relationships are lived and made sense of by both sets of protagonists: the soldiers and the women in their lives.

During the considerable time that the soldier spends away from home while on duty, he relies on his extended family, including his mother, wife, father, and brothers, to manage his personal life. Male family members, be they fathers or older brothers, run the external affairs of the home in the soldier's absence, in many ways replacing the soldier as temporary heads of the household. The relationships between the soldier and the women who manage his household are largely supportive, enabling the soldier to be away for months on end and to come home on leave for short periods and for one long leave granted annually. These relationships are gendered reciprocal arrangements in which military men provide for the family, and the women (and civilian men) manage family life, bringing up children and keeping the home running. These relationships are also marked by distance, both geographical and intimate – a sense of disconnection that is often articulated, and at times bemoaned, but above all intensely experienced.

Mothers and wives came up repeatedly in the life narratives of the soldiers, earlier when they mentioned their training and later as they talked about time spent at home during leave. The essentialized trope of women as fragile and unable to bear stress was repeated, often in reference to men not discussing their experiences of soldiering when at home. Mothers and wives were seen as *jazbati* (emotional), and therefore weak, and the deliberate withholding of information was a way to protect the family from stress. As Ashraf, a 24-year-old soldier stationed in Wana,[6] stated, "I don't tell them I am calling from Wana. They [women] can't withstand tension." During the interviews, many soldiers dwelt on their yearning for home or for their mothers during their military training, but they also expressed a reluctance to share this with their mothers. Shafiq, who had served in the military for over nine years, said, "We [fellow soldiers] used to miss our mothers, many used to cry, but it [this intense feeling] passes, but we don't talk about this."

The avoidance of discussion of feelings or the stresses of army life was mirrored in the unspoken rule among soldiers regarding discussion of the emotional impact of battle experiences. The ability to shrug off feelings was a sign that the soldiers were battle hardened and suitably stoic in the face of pain and suffering. It was seen as an appropriate (masculine) way of coping. Ashraf said, "We were cowards before, now all our fear has gone. We don't talk to each other about it, we distract ourselves. Talking about it brings it back." The determination to not share was associated with the fear that the expression of feeling could destabilize a much-desired and carefully crafted soldierly stoicism around separation and hardship. Voiced as a need to protect women, the desire to avoid bringing up these experiences and emotions also shielded a deep fear of being undone by emotion, and therefore becoming feminine. Here, women's (perceived) inability to bear the details of military life mirrored the soldiers' reluctance to talk about their experiences, but the women's inability to withstand this information was a confirmation of their weakness and the soldiers' own discomfort with discussing this, a sign of manliness.

Within these rural communities, the job of maintaining social relationships falls to the women, traditionally a role that is viewed as inferior in comparison with the more productive, manly task of breadwinning. Women connect with extended family, a role that is accentuated in military households in which the male is away, and perform the vital work of assimilating in a close-knit community where lives are collective and closely intertwined with others in happiness, joy, or sorrow. Soldiers' narratives mentioned women's emotional range and their ability to feel, respond, and be "normal" when it comes to socializing and relating with others. Nawaz, who served in the military's commando force,[7] shared, "A soldier changes, so does his everyday life. Socializing with people like you do in villages, like women will do, we can't." Two things are important to note here. First, a lack of social skills is articulated as a deficiency rather than as a marker of superiority, unlike in patriarchal societies, where socializing is delegated to women and therefore undervalued. Second, women's ability to socialize is expressed in comparison with soldiers' own selves, which are different from selves that are not militarized. Soldiers experience themselves as less spontaneous, relaxed, and assimilated within these surroundings. Women's capacity to feel emotions like worry, fear, hesitation, and tension is compared with soldiers' inability to do the same. Interestingly, Ashraf also spoke about this with respect to his relationships with other men:

> We get angry easily, we keep getting into arguments. We don't know the ways; our socializing isn't practical. We are bound to discipline and are not comfortable with practical life or the rules of living. Our brains don't function like that, they only hear the sound of the sergeant's whistle and act on it.

This comparison extended to non-military men, their fathers, brothers, and school friends. Their own incapacity to perform this function was linked with an inability to process and express emotion and attributed directly to military training. For some, the sense of having changed after being in military service was pointed out to them by the women in their life. They acknowledged that there was truth in this, and at times, they almost seemed to welcome the women's ability to sense their emotional state. It was almost as if the act of sensing and expressing their emotion was something that they could experience vicariously through the inferior other – their mothers and wives.

For many of the women in the study, exposure to military norms and habitus took place through their relationship with the soldier-subject; in other words, they experienced the military through him. Many of the younger wives (aged between 20 and 30) interviewed for the study had been to secondary school, but many of the older women had limited education (two to three years) or none at all. The younger women were able to talk to their husbands while they were away because of mobile phone network connections in villages, a relatively recent phenomenon. The older wives and mothers reported that in the past, contact with their husbands or sons while in service had been limited to letters (that, too, occurred through male family members who were literate) and the occasional phone call at the village post office. In these narratives, the older women hinted at how soldiering and relationships had become easier with the advent of technology and how their own lives had been much harsher because of geographical constraints and relationships that were mediated not only through military norms but through literate male relatives.

Mothers and wives were very conscious of the difference between the life of the village and the norms and culture that their husbands or sons experienced while they were away. The sense that it was a different, almost antithetical world was strong within them, and they articulated this through the mold of their relationship with the soldier. Almost mirroring the sense of unfamiliarity that soldiers experienced, these women found their men different from others. They empathized with and accommodated the soldier, sensing his alienation and the challenges that he faced in socializing and being "normal." Erasures in communication and withholding information also came up in many women's narratives. Mothers and wives were keenly aware that their spouses or sons did not tell them certain things, such as where they were stationed or whether they were in danger or even injured. They were also aware that this withholding extended to feelings. Saima, a widow whose husband had died in combat six years earlier, shared, "The last time he went, he was very pale, and sweaty as if feverish. I asked him what was wrong, but he wouldn't talk. I asked him to not go, but he refused." Feelings and emotion were sensed through the body and rarely offered willingly. Saima went on to say,

> My husband used to keep things to himself. Not matter what happened, he didn't say anything at home. Sometimes, he would say that things were very bad there – "Once I leave here, there is no telling if I can come back" – but this was rare. They [soldiers] think if women find out, they will feel tension and wither away because of it.

Parveen shared that her husband would not tell her when he was due back and only announced his departure on the morning of the day that he was leaving. When she complained to him, he told her that by doing so, he avoided all of the stress associated with his leaving. In some cases, it became a reciprocal unspoken rule to withhold emotion. As one mother said,

> I keep it to myself. Of course, I am upset. I lie awake in bed when I don't know where my son is. I wonder if he is safe. But I never say this to him. I tell him all is well. I keep it in my heart.

The reciprocity of withholding information as a way to control excess emotion was a theme that ran throughout the interviews. Mothers and wives imbibed the stoicism that is valued in the military and the erasures within relationships as a way of coping, much like the soldier-subject – an extension of military norms and values beyond the soldier.

Many wives complained that their husbands acted as if the home was like an army unit and should be run the same way. Wives joked about their spouses' love of discipline and order and shared that their spouses often organized the day at home for everyone. Nawaz's wife shared that, unlike her sister-in-law, whose spouse was not in the military, she had to inform her husband a set number of days in advance before she could go to her parents' house:

> You know how these people are about discipline. They are the same way at home as they are in there [military unit]. If they need to do anything, they will do it with discipline. So if you are going somewhere, he will have to give instructions. He will tell us that "You are going there and you must behave and say things that are appropriate to the environment of that place." Whatever he will say, it will be like an order – you can't argue with him.

Although none of the women could converse in English, they often had an impressive repertoire of English vocabulary, including words such as "order," "duty," "routine," and "discipline." The choice of words was indicative of what they encountered in their relationship with the soldier. Conflicts around how strictly the children should be disciplined were voiced, and wives reported that strictness imposed by husbands was often a source of strain. Disobedience was rarely tolerated by these soldier-husbands, and emotional outbursts and rage were mentioned by the wives, although none spoke of outright physical violence. Parveen shared a particularly severe incident:

> He had asked me to iron his clothes, I forgot and went to the neighbour's house. When I returned, he was fuming – he had taken out the stove and put the clothes on it and as we watched, he lit them with a match. His father asked him what he was doing. He said, "You don't understand, I am ironing these clothes." He didn't say anything to me. Later, when he calmed down, he regretted it. That's how he is – quiet but then suddenly boils over.

The expectation of order and discipline often created situations of discord in the house, and yet, at the same time, the wives often spoke of this in a half-joking manner. The light tone belied the description of arguments and sometimes violent outbursts in the home, such as the incident described above, but was indicative of a tacit understanding that the soldier-husband cannot help behaving this way because he is a soldier. There was an accommodation and an attribution of his peculiarities to his military service, tendencies that must be borne because it is beyond the soldier's ability to control them. Minimizing men's violent behavior is common in Pakistani society, which is deeply patriarchal, yet in this case, the accommodation was more nuanced. Soldiers' conduct was seen as different or an accentuation of the way in which other non-military men behave, and there was a good-natured and almost sympathetic accommodation on the part of the women. Along with imaginaries of the brave stoic soldier, wives and mothers saw him as helpless and caught up in ways of being and doing that are alien. The accommodation was also easier, perhaps, because the soldier was not always present and moved between the military and civilian worlds, allowing wives more freedom (than other women whose husbands live in the same house) to run the household and raise children more independently. In addition, the financial trade-off – a secure, stable income with considerable social welfare, including a pension, as well as the status accorded to military service – was a strong factor in women's willingness to put up with the long physical absences and the emotional challenges of these relationships.

It is important to note here that these articulations of difference, as well as the accommodations that follow, are deeply embedded in the area's history of military service and imaginaries of its population as a *martial* race. A generalized perception that soldiers are different from civilian men exists among the area's population, but, interestingly, this distinctiveness is attributed to military exposure and not to race, by both soldiers and the women in their lives. Therefore, the area's history as a provider of military labor enables accommodation of this difference, but this does not mean that this dissimilarity is innate or an essentialized feature of the soldier.

Uneasy contours of the militarized self

The absences of affect and connections in the soldier described in the previous section can be traced to regimes of soldier training. The intent in this section is to bring into view these practices of training and their impact on the soldier's sense of self and ability to form relationships.

Military masculinities are constituted in contrast with, and as superior from, other forms of subordinated masculinities as well as femininity (Bayard de Volo and Hall 2015; Connell 1995; Diamond, Kimmel, and Schroeder 2000). Cockburn (2001, 16) suggests that the military institution is guided by the "differentiation and asymmetry of masculine and feminine as governing principles, as idealized qualities, as practices, as symbols. One thing you can say about militaries is: these are not feminine cultures." Training, therefore, involves the deliberate cultivation of disenchantment with the home and the feminine, which are set up as polluting and inferior. Military socialization expects service members to adopt a hegemonic form of masculinity that dictates what "real men" are, including defining emotions and practices that are permissible and those that are not (Kovitz 2003; Sasson-Levy 2011).

After ten years of schooling, young men between the ages of 17.5 and 23 can apply for induction as soldiers at recruitment centers established across Pakistan. Successful applicants to the Pakistan Army undergo six months of training at military training centers. These centers are bounded fortress-like spaces with high walls, cut off from the cities within which they are based and with strict regulations regarding entry and exit. They are systematically programmed in terms of space, time, and movement, operating to the rhythm of strict military discipline, which aims to create "docile bodies" (Foucault 1991, 154). For many young men, this is the first extended time without their family, away from home, and the regulated life within the center is far removed from what they are used to.

Soldiers described their experiences in training vividly; many referred to themselves as children when speaking of that time. The training was articulated as transformative, and soldiers saw the transition from civilian to soldier as dramatic, a distinct departure from what they saw as the uncouth, emotional, and unreliable child who had arrived at the center (Rashid 2020). Soldiers' memories of these times emphasized the rawness and emotional lability of the recruit and his unformed body and mind, which are amenable to molding. Ahmed, a 31-year-old soldier, remembered his training 13 years ago: "When you are 18, you have yet to understand relationships or the value of attachments. Your mind is emotional, unpredictable. You are careless, can barely tell the difference between what is good and what is bad."

Two distinct but associated domains in which the soldier changes during training emerged from these narratives.[8] The first domain is the affective register of the soldier. The soldiers' infantilization of the self that existed before training allowed them to emote the panic, desolation, and fear of the first few weeks. According to Ahmed, "We are but children at this point. We leave school in year ten and go straight into the military." The ability to express the earlier self in the affective idiom – as one who cries and longs for the village and seeks comfort in its familiarity, the lack of routine, and the warmth of attachment with his mother – stood in marked contrast with the way in which these soldiers experienced their affective range as restrictive and controlled after training and service in the army. This inability to freely experience emotions such as joy, fear, and sadness was largely expressed as the incapacity to sense and resonate one's mood with others. This was a stifling of the ability to relate to and connect with the self and with others.

The second domain is a sense of disenchantment, of standing apart from lives and close kin who were once dear and, in the earlier phases of training, missed intensely. In time, soldiers experienced themselves as dissimilar to earlier ways of being, and from spaces and people with whom they had identified in the past. Hafeez, a retired soldier who had served 24 years in the military, shared,

> In the *civil[ian]* areas, there is dishonesty, *these* people lie to you … *These* people don't value time. This is a big weakness in *these* people. *These* people don't have discipline. *They* don't have tolerance and want to belittle each other. Soldiers are not like this. In *civil[ian]* areas, people will fight and will not consider consequences … *they* will not compromise. I will, because I am a soldier. *These* people … will be stubborn. (emphasis added)

What is remarkable in this passage is the number of times that the soldier distinguished himself from "these" people living in "civilian" areas, a dissonance from spaces and people that became more pronounced with years in service. The soldiers experienced themselves as distinct from the civilian world; while this difference was perceived as a sense of superiority, the soldiers were also haunted by what had been lost in this transition, as highlighted in the previous section. Soldiers reported a sense of never really being complete, and many expressed an inability to be rooted in either of the "worlds" to which they now belonged: the unreliable, uncertain life of the village or the orderly, predictable military space (Rashid 2020). For retired soldiers, many of whom had lived without their wives and families for anywhere between 15 and 30 years, this distancing could be much more intense (Jolly 1996).

The shift in both of these domains, of feeling and belonging, is achieved by prizing apart older and more intimate kinship bonds, a disenchantment with earlier objects of love. Bonds with female members of the family are singled out by instructors as "stubborn objects of attachment" that must be weakened if the recruit is to be persuaded to stay (Rashid 2020, 98). Through persistent and relentless discipline, military training inculcates new bonds with the institution and the recruit's new family – his comrades in arms as brothers and senior officers as fathers. Homesickness and anxiety are intense, brought on by the separation of the recruits from loved ones and the unfamiliarity of the regimes of discipline around them. Interviews with instructors reveal that the strict constraints imposed during training rest on the notion that the harsher and more unfamiliar the regimes of training, the more completely the young pliable mind can turn away from less disciplined, primitive ways of being that are inferior to military ways of thinking and doing (Rashid 2020, 96–101). The recruit's ability to survive training rests on how well he controls his affective self and the lure of the feminine home. It is through the formation of attachments with the military institution – ties with the unit, fellow soldiers, and the institution of the army – that the soldier becomes masculine, so that his comraderies lie with other men, as brothers and fathers.

Military training regimes echo the prototypical separation of the male from the female as the male transitions to manhood. These boys become soldiers by weakening their bonds with the home, and mastering emotion, where home, family, and emotion are seen as feminine. Kimmel (2004, 184–185) invokes terms such as "flight from women" and "repudiation of femininity" to explain masculinity: "What we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves" (Kimmel 2004, 188). Hence, the fear of not being man enough or of being tainted by the feminine remains strong, and the soldier-self constantly seeks to erase parts of itself that could be perceived as feminine or weak. In these soldier transformations, the polluting feminine and the female subject remain important in producing differentiations between men and women, for they are "the ground from which the male imagines, produces or transforms himself" (Chopra, Osella, and Osella 2004, 23).

Just as the national project requires the image of the virile muscular army to defend the weak and defenseless nation, the masculine self of the soldier must be constantly juxtaposed with the weaker feminine. The move away from, or the negation of, the feminine is ironic in that the idea of the feminine must simultaneously be held onto and kept close, as without referring to it and bringing it up in contrast, the contours of the masculine remain unclear and fragile. Echoing colonial tropes of the primitive, effete local and the manly, civilized white man (Sinha 1995), these transformations in a postcolonial military signify the troubled shift from the inferior, feminine civilian to the superior masculine soldier.

The feminine as disrupter

An examination of the soldier's relationships with the feminine and with his family as foundational to the formation of the soldier highlights how these relationships are forever in flux and constantly being brokered. To make these negotiations visible, this section examines moments when the soldier hints at a residual enchantment, fissures that betray a desire for reversion back to the feminine. These moments challenge the notion of female partners of soldiers as militarized subjects and set up a feminist provocation of the war project that moves away from the celebrated, somewhat essentialist notion of the female inclination toward pacifism (Ruddick 1980). Instead, this section sets up the challenge by highlighting a more insidious discomfort with the feminine that exists within the masculine military institution.

The debate on whether marriage or attachment to a family hampers or aids the soldier's fighting ability remains unresolved (Enloe [1989] 2001, 71). Howell (2015, 151) hints that in the case of US deployments since 9/11, wives are increasingly seen as an "affective workforce" expected to carry out the emotional labor of supporting the soldier returning from combat. Notwithstanding the potential success of these strategies aimed at instrumentalizing women in the service of militarism, mothers and wives of soldiers are *civilian* women who continue to hold an "ambiguous position, poised between victim and agent, military and civilian, the combat zone and the home" (Hyde 2017, 196). They represent competing aspirations, loyalties, and subjectivities that lie outside the institution, and their ambiguity in the project of war is even more pronounced in armies that do not accommodate these women physically.

The specter of the over-attached soldier-subject who is swayed by disruptive family obligations is ever present within the military imagination in Pakistan. The soldier who runs away from military service training is feminized and ridiculed. He is called *bhagore* in Urdu, which literally translates into "one who runs away" and implies cowardice. The feminization is attributed to his inability to fulfill his breadwinning role and withstand harsh physical training.

Soldiers recalled longing for home, mothers, grandmothers, and younger siblings during their training. The desire to run away during the first few weeks was intense, and many did, only to be brought back to the training center by male members of the family, who were insistent that these boys return. Many men reported that during training, when they would return home on leave, their mothers would remark on how weak they had become and often shed tears at their departure. Mothers, too, reported anguish at parting with their sons, including distress at seeing the impact of harsh physical training on the body. In the early days of homesickness and bewilderment, women – or, more accurately, mothers – were seen as allies who could possibly abet escape from the military. It was the attachment to the feminine and the familiar to which these young men fled, and it was the men in the family and in the military who pulled them back in.

The male recruit's desire to return and escape the masculinizing of the self was articulated through a yearning for feminine love and affection. This rarely translated into them actually managing to leave, as mothers were often complicit with men and turned the recruit back, urging him to resume service. Yet what is important to note is that it was female sympathy and concern that was sought by these men. The support remained unspoken: "She feels for me, she can tell, I don't need to speak." The very silences that the military craves and sets up between these relationships became subversive spaces where communication lingered.

Stories of mothers pressuring their sons to discontinue service once posted in a combat zone or not permitting another son to enlist after a son's death in service were common.[9] What is interesting in these narratives is the portrayal of the mother as a matriarch. It would be tempting to suggest that mothers hold the authority to forbid the son's entry into the army through some inexplicable subversion of traditional male power in these rural spaces. What these confounding narratives instead signify is a deliberate obfuscation of the family's decision to break away from the military, attributing it to the weak female whose emotional and unreasonable demands must be placated. Placating the female allowed the men of the family, including the soldier himself, to refuse the call to arms without having to give up aspirations to masculinity. This is similar to the soldier's need to not talk about difficult war experiences highlighted earlier. In that instance, avoidance was attributed to a desire to protect weak women, when it was actually a coping technique needed by the soldier to maintain stoicism. In this case as well, men – whether they were fathers or the soldiers themselves – reluctantly agreed to discontinue service with the aid of the *weak* female.

The soldiers resorted to taking leave or deserting by appealing to the needs of the family or some family emergency. At times, these were genuine demands, such as an elderly parent needing care or some other familial obligation that made it impractical for the soldier to remain in service that entailed long periods away from home. These reasons could also be deliberately falsified, as Shafiq explained: "If a soldier wants to quit, he will make an excuse and stay behind. … If the man has decided to run away, then he will arrange for a phone call that his mother is gravely ill." The veracity of these claims aside, what is perhaps more relevant is that the soldier's departure from the military was legitimized through appeals to family obligations often involving a female relative. In other words, the desire to leave the military was only justified if there were competing familial demands. Soldiers felt pulled in different directions, and they reported increased pressure after marriage. Sadiq, who was married four years earlier, said,

> Before you get married, you have your parents. Your mother doesn't say it so openly, she keeps it inside, but a married man has a wife and children. She [the wife] keeps reminding you that she exists and that you have a child, and you feel torn. I can only attend to her once the military leaves me alone.

The soldier's ability to manage these familial demands in ways that allow him to stay becomes critical for the institution of the military. The persuasion to stay is routed through appeals to his role as breadwinner and masculine aspirations of emotional hardiness, and it rests on the cultivation of distance from the feminine home and the corresponding development of bonds within the military institution. Distancing is also a survival skill for combat and demands the capture of the soldier's mind and attention, not just his physical presence. The soldier's attention must be on all things military and his mind untroubled by family matters; such distraction can prove fatal, for him and those around him. Nawaz explained this:

> A soldier can get distracted because of worries about home; he tries to be present in two spaces [home and unit]. … He needs to focus on his duty; if he thinks about his family, he will be indecisive and endanger himself and others.

Soldiers also hinted at other compulsions that made this disenchantment necessary. Saleem, a 27-year-old soldier who had served in restive areas, talked about his experience of battle:

> We engaged in combat at this one spot … and later found that there were women and children inside. … Sometimes you don't know that, but sometimes you know [that there are families inside], and yet you fire because you have been ordered. So there are things that you have to do even if you don't want to. … I have a house, I have children – who wants to do this to someone's house?

For soldiers to be able to follow orders and commit acts of violence in war, they have to dissociate from the memory of what they did in battle and function by compartmentalizing experiences in their minds. Forming a connection between the feminine and family in the home and the feminine and family that needed to be destroyed in the line of duty is counterproductive for the military's ability to execute war, as well as for the soldier's ability to survive its brutalization. Silencing within relationships allows for further distance between harrowing memories of combat and life back home, a technique that helps soldiers to cope. Hence, severing the connection with the feminine through protectionist tropes of shielding the weak female members from the realities of soldiering and the sights, smells, and horror of battle – both in terms of what the soldier suffers and the acts of violence that the soldier commits – secures the soldier's service and also allow him to function within the home. The disconnects and the erasures experienced by the soldier are necessary and actively desired by both the military and the soldier to enable the destruction and violence of war. The disconnection and compartmentalization between the military world and the civilian world – the family that must be destroyed and the one that must be protected – is not an unintended consequence of the demands of military life or experiences of combat; on the contrary, it is a way to make obedience and, through that, violence possible.

Conclusion

This study tells us how militarism and war making work in postcolonial armies that are configured through ghosts of the colony and conditions of rurality, as well as local patriarchal relations. By drawing attention to the relationships within military households, the article complicates the notion of emotional labor in war, foregrounding it as precarious, ambivalent, and constantly negotiated between soldiers, military wives and mothers, and the military institution.

The article attributes the precariousness within these relationships to the formation of the soldier and the training regimes that require a shift in the domain of feeling and belonging. This shift is achieved through a disenchantment with earlier objects of love that are associated with the feminine. In doing so, the article turns away from the suggestion that the disconnects and silences so pronounced in the relationships of soldiers with the women in their lives are an unfortunate effect of soldiering. Instead, these erasures of being and attachment are a deliberate product and requirement of military training and service. Here, these ruptured relationships signify not the effect of soldiering but how soldiering and the violence of war are made acceptable to the soldier. The article sets up a feminist challenge to war, whereby the feminine and the female subject must be continuously banished if the soldier is to stay in service, stay obedient, and commit to violence. The military's (and soldier's) desire to banish the feminine and yet keep it close to accentuate its own form, inherent in the way in which these subjectivities are shaped, requires a constant negotiation. The contradictory negation of and obsession with the feminine that lies at the heart of soldier formation is diligently cultivated by the institutions and managed by men and women within the intimacies of these attachments.

An examination of soldier relationships with the feminine brings into view how the practices of militarism are situated in spaces far away from the battlefield and the military institution (Chisholm and Eichler 2018; Lutz 2006). By examining the everyday lives of those implicated as labor in the war project, this study has revealed that the working of military power remains unstable and forever in flux.

Notes

1. Two of the 14 women interviewed had lived for a short period of time with their spouses in a military cantonment.
2. The Pakistan Army is the land-based force of the Pakistan military. It is the largest branch in terms of manpower.
3. Pakistan has the highest rate of urbanization in South Asia, with 36.4 percent of the population living in urban areas, according to the 2017 Population Census. The impact of this on soldier recruitment merits further study. In KP and Punjab, where the bulk of enlisted personnel come from, 63.3 and 81.2 percent of the population, respectively, live in areas still classified as rural (UNDP 2018).
4. As per interviews conducted by the author in 2015 with the Personnel Administration Directorate at the Army General Headquarters.
5. All names have been changed.
6. Wana is an area in northwest Pakistan where the army is engaged in military operations as part of the War on Terror.
7. The commando force is a special operations force known for its grueling training regime.
8. I give a detailed description of the military training practices and their impact on the soldier in my book *Dying to Serve* (Rashid 2020, 89–107).
9. Pakistan Army policy allows for enlistment of a male member of the family (often the brother or son of a deceased soldier) as part of its compensation package.

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