

The Songs of the Taliban: Continuity of Form and Thought in an Ever-Changing Environment*

Mikhail Pelevin

St. Petersburg State University

Matthias Weinreich

Yerevan State University

Abstract

The second half of the 1990s saw the emergence of a new, distinctive type of Afghan poetry, the Taliban *tarana* performed in Pashto by one or more vocalists without instrumental accompaniment and characterised by the melodic modes of local folk music. Over the last fifteen years the *tarana* chants have gained wide distribution within Afghanistan and Pashto speaking parts of Pakistan, as well as among the Pashtun diaspora. Considering their unambiguous ideological status and their immense popularity within the country of origin they can be regarded as the signature tune of the Afghan insurgency. The present article, which focuses on the literary roots of these songs, attempts to demonstrate that their authors are following century old patterns of Pashto oral and written poetry while adopting traditional material to the needs and the milieu of contemporary Afghan society. The publication is supplemented by a transcription and English translation of five *tarana* chants.

Keywords

Taliban, Afghanistan, Oral Literature, *Tarana* Chants, Pashto Poetry, Jihad, Islam, Nationalism, Kerbela Battle.

For reasons of both a historical and cultural nature, poetry can be considered the most popular and illustrious form of literary expression in Pashto. Educated Afghans pride themselves on belonging to a “Nation of

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Poets” and even the most unsophisticated villager is able to recite *Rahman Baba*¹ or to relate the words of a popular song. Describing the truly extraordinary position poetry occupies in Pashtun daily life, the great connoisseur of Pashto literature James Darmesteter (1895: 112) pointedly observed, that “Wherever three Afghans meet together, there is a song between them”; and everyone who has visited Afghanistan or North-Western Pakistan in recent years knows that this state of affairs has not changed much since.

Spanning almost four centuries of recorded history, Pashto poetry has been cast into many forms and deals with a considerable variety of subjects. Contemporary types of lyrical expression include a sizable number of poems articulating the feelings and opinions of authors who adhere to the tenets of the Taliban Movement.

PERFORMANCE STYLE

These poems, commonly subsumed under the term *tarana* are always performed as unaccompanied songs. Normally, there is only one singer, but sometimes, especially during public recitals, there are two or three of them, singing closely in unison, or alternating in a kind of dialogue style. The voice of the singer is usually highlighted by heavy delay and reverberation, electronic devices much favoured also in Qur’an recitation and in secular music of the region. Many vocalists try to hit notes above their natural voice type, which gives their chanting a rather forced appearance. The singing is normally nicely in tune and strongly rhythmic. According to the British ethno-musicologist John Baily (2001: 43), it is characterised by the melodic modes of Pashtun music, whereas many items have the two-part song structure typical for the region. Some chants are very long and monotonous and tend to create in the listener a trance-like feeling.

The customary performance of Taliban poetry as songs seems to stand in contradiction to the Taliban’s well-known rejection of music, one of the characteristic features of their Movement. In 1996, shortly after the capture of Kabul, the Taliban leadership issued a number of

¹ Pashto proper names and terminology in this article are rendered in simplified form. The phonetic transcription used for Pashto original text (in both quotations and the appendix) includes two elements of historic phonology: 1) historically stable (long) *ā* and unstable (short) *a* are marked as opposed, although in most positions they appear as the same sound; 2) historically cerebral *ǰ* and *ǰ̣* are marked as cerebrals although they are pronounced according to Eastern Pashto norms, i. e. like non-cerebral *g* and *x*. The transcription characters are the same as in Cheung 2011 except for /dz/ which we transcribe as *z*.

public edicts, which banned music from Afghan people's daily life. One of these rulings, dated December 1996, equates the distribution and enjoyment of music with a criminal offence, which ought to be punished with incarceration: "In shops, hotels, vehicles and rickshaws cassettes and music are prohibited... If any music cassette is found in a shop, the shopkeeper should be imprisoned and the shop locked. If five people guarantee, the shop should be re-opened, [and] the criminal released later. If a cassette [is] found in a vehicle, the vehicle and the driver will be imprisoned. If five people guarantee, the vehicle will be released and the criminal released later" (quoted after Baily 2001: 35). This negative view of music was upheld and enforced until the very last day of Taliban rule in Afghanistan and is current still, wherever the Movement's ideology rules supreme.²

One of the authors of this article (M. W.) worked in Afghanistan from 1997 to 1999. During those years, all over Taliban-administered territory trees and poles situated close to road checkpoints were decorated with black and brown ribbons. These ribbons were the innards of smashed audio cassettes, confiscated from disobedient drivers and hanged as a warning for everyone to see that Mullah 'Umar's ban on music was to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, it was, as we shall see further on, exactly during the second half of the 1990s that the Taliban *tarana* emerged as a distinctive literary type. This apparent incongruity was already addressed by John Baily (2001: 21ff.), who pointed out that in Afghan thinking about sound art a basic distinction is made between music created by an instrument and an unaccompanied vocal performance.

Mullah 'Umar's ban on music concerned only the former, including accompanied singing. Apparently, the Taliban associated the playing of instruments with un-Islamic relaxation and merrymaking, activities in clear variance with their own austere ideology, which denounces any form of worldly pleasure.

Unaccompanied vocal performance, in contrast, did not disturb the Movement's ideologists, possibly because in Afghanistan this art form was traditionally represented by recitations of the Qur'an, poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (*na't*) and other recitals linked to the religious sphere.

² On the partially violent imposition of a ban on the sales of music in Taliban-controlled areas of North-Western Pakistan in 2007, see Freemuse 2007. According to Khushal Yousafzai (2009), only two years later, in Swat District alone, nearly 500 shops that sold music recordings had been forcibly closed.

In this way, the Taliban *tarana*'s distinctive style of performance clearly played in their favour, as it not only freed the chants of any suspicion to be part of illicit music, but also associated them with Islam and the Sacred, notions close to every Afghan's heart. Moreover, the fact that under the conditions of the imposed ban, Taliban *tarana* evolved as the only officially tolerated, not-strictly-religious musical art form accessible to listeners may provide an explanation for the songs' rapid diffusion.

EVOLUTION OF A DISTINCTIVE LITERARY TYPE

The earliest information available about the existence of Taliban songs dates back to the end of the 1990s. In John Baily's detailed and well-documented report on censorship of music in Afghanistan we are provided with two *tarana* sound specimens (according to the author, both from "around 1998") and offered a first description of the songs' themes and distinctive performance style: "The only forms of musical expression permitted today are the singing of certain kinds of religious poetry, and so-called Taliban "chants", which are panegyrics to Taliban principles and commemorations of those who have died on the field of battle for the Taliban cause" (Baily 2001: 7, 43). Another early testimony is contained in a 1998 reportage by the Pakistani journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai dedicated to the consequences of the ban on music in Kabul. In his feature the author describes how Afghan drivers while approaching Taliban road checkpoints used to replace banned instrumental music recordings they were listening to with cassettes, containing officially promoted "Taliban political chants" (Yusufzai 1998: 136; after Baily 2001: 42). The year before, in July 1997, the American scholar Larry P. Goodson (2001: 128) witnessed in the outskirts of Herat a traditional Afghan singer perform a cappella for a group of young Taliban, entertaining them with "songs of the Taliban Movement and its heroes".

One of the authors of this article (M. W.) encountered these songs for the first time in January 1999, on the occasion of a professional visit to the town of Kunduz. The morning after his arrival he was awoken by an ear-splitting monotonous singsong, reminding him of a Qur'an recitation, only that it was entirely in Pashto. At breakfast his similarly energated Afghan colleagues informed him, that the Governor had taken to the habit to please the town's people with the public transmission of songs in praise of the Taliban Movement. Few others seemed to share the Governor's passion for this kind of poetry and when around midday the central electricity supply was finally cut off, it was not the author alone who sighed in relief.

This evidence indicates that the Taliban *tarana* must have emerged as a distinctive literary type in the period between 1994 (the year when the Taliban appeared on the Afghan scene) and 1998-99, as at that moment they could already be easily identified by their formal characteristics and themes covered.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OTHERS

The immediate thematic predecessors of Taliban chants are poems related to the Afghan conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. The very first documented specimens of this, as it is often called, “resistance” or “*jihad* poetry”, date back to the time immediately following the Afghan communist takeover in April 1978.³

Although early *jihad* poets were normally not linked to any specific ideology or political faction, arguing their case from general religious and/or nationalist positions, later authors did not usually hesitate in professing their allegiance to particular resistance groups. Such a tradition of political positioning is also at work for the Taliban chants. This does not only appear from their strongly opinionated contents, but is already clearly expressed by their original Pashto designation as *də tāli-bāno tarāne*.

Opposing the Afghan communist government pen and paper in hand, early resistance poets professed their willingness to die on the battlefield while defending both homeland and honour; they denounced the immorality of their enemy and rebuked those country fellows, who were perceived as unwilling to stand up for the common cause. At a later stage, when the war intensified in the wake of the Soviet invasion, the poets’ defiant exhortations to moral, honour and bravery were augmented by lamentations for fallen friends and ponderings on the evil represented by the infidel occupants and their Afghan collaborators. All these themes are also present in the Taliban chants.

With violence, suffering and death emerging as a daily reality and human losses, among both fighters and unarmed civilians, growing at an unprecedented rate, resistance poets rapidly moved Islam to the ethical centre of their verses. Considering the largely unchanged state of affairs in most of contemporary Afghanistan, it is not surprising that regular re-affirmations of religious values are still at the very heart of the songs written by the Taliban authors.

³ On Afghan *jihad* poetry in general, see Edwards 1993; 2003; for a sample of early resistance songs among the Hazara, see Bindemann 1988.

CIRCULATION AND POPULAR APPEAL

By a curious coincidence, the emergence of Afghan resistance poems concurred with the appearance of the first affordable portable cassette recorders on the South Asian market. As a result, oral transmission of popular poetry, practiced in Afghanistan since times immortal, was almost completely replaced by analogue recordings. To Afghan resistance poets this was a welcome development, as it not only guaranteed them a much wider audience than they could have ever dreamed of in pre-recorder times, but also helped them to establish their work as an effective ideological counterweight to governmental radio and TV transmissions.

Still today, within Afghanistan and its geographic surroundings, audio tape recordings are the most popular technical means used for the reproduction of poetry and music. There are many reasons for such lasting popularity: portable recorders are independent of a regular power supply, they are not difficult to repair and available in many homes and almost every car; cassettes are cheap and durable and can, if needed, be easily concealed or slipped into a pocket. The last feature not without importance for a trouble-free enjoyment of ideologically suspect songs, be that nowadays, in the second half of the 1990s or 30 years ago.

In addition to tape recordings, and as to be expected in the computer age, which the Taliban fully embraced, their songs are now also accessible in digitalised form. As text or audio files they can be downloaded from different internet sites and shared within the expanding community of Afghan PC and mobile phone users.

The latest trend, however, are *tarana* videos, represented by two formally distinct but thematically overlapping types: recordings of live performances and clips where the chants are used as a soundtrack for Taliban propaganda footage. Let us provide some rough statistics to give an impression of these videos' immense popularity: a casual search on YouTube for *taliban tarana* in December 2011 resulted in a choice of 59 short films, the most popular of which, featuring images of Mullah 'Umar, had been requested since May 2007 more than 125.000 times.⁴ These numbers, which are corroborated by recent observations within Afghanistan, suggest that since the late 1990s Taliban chants have significantly expanded their appeal, and are now also enjoyed by an audi-

⁴ Cf. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h4AwEkiZog> (accessed 15. 12. 11).

ence outside the narrow circles of the Taliban movement.⁵ In fact, they seem to have turned into the signature tune of the Afghan insurgency.

CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Notwithstanding their local appeal and recognition Taliban chants have attracted surprisingly little attention outside their target audience. Besides the already quoted references, we noted only three other publications dedicated to them.

The first, published in 2009, is a magazine feature article by two German journalists, Felix Kuehn and Christopher Große, who interpret the *tarana*'s growing popularity as a reflection of contemporary Afghan sentiments and propose to use their lyrics as research material for a better understanding of the reasons behind the Taliban's on-going resistance. The article also contains a German translation of two verse samples.

The two other publications, both by authors related to the US military, evaluate *tarana* specimens as examples of Taliban war propaganda. Wali Shaaker's paper "Poetry: Why it matters to Afghans" from 2009, which besides the English translation and Pashto transcription of six chants also contains other samples of Afghan poetry, is designated to serve as self-instruction material for US military personnel interested in how to win local hearts and minds while on combat mission in Afghanistan. Johnson and Waheed's article from 2011 scrutinises fourteen chants, all given in English translation, and comes to the conclusion that a timely consideration of the concerns and emotions they express could have spared the US and its NATO allies in Afghanistan many of their present troubles.⁶

LITERARY BACKGROUND

However, it is not only their role in the contemporary Afghan context, which makes the songs of the Taliban such an attractive subject for academic research. Equally interesting are their links with the Afghan literary past. The following study of form, contents and literary roots of the Taliban chants is based on sixteen specimens, all of them part of a *tarana* collection acquired by one of the authors of this article (M. W.) in

⁵ On the popularity of Taliban *taranas* among Afghan listeners, see also Johnson/Waheed 2011: 5; Kuehn/Große 2009: 28, as well as <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14713523> (accessed 25. 10. 2011).

⁶ A book, "Poetry of the Taliban" by A. Strick van Linschoten and F. Kuehn, which, according to its editors' advance notice, includes "a selection from the odes and ghazals of today's [Afghan] conflict" is announced for March 2012.

2005, during a short professional sojourn in Khurram Agency (Tribal Areas of Pakistan).⁷

The texts of the songs assembled in this collection belong to the most popular type of Pashto folk literature, which is characterised by combining features of both written professional and traditional oral poetry. Regarding authorship and strictly formal elements it shares similarities with the former, while its functional purpose for being transmitted orally through singing brings it closer to the latter. The swift rise of this type of literature, according to the available bio-bibliographical data (Asar 1963; Bakhtanay 1968; 1978; Hewadmal 1977; Rafi' 1975; Sa'id/Hotak 1987; etc.) and the oldest collections of Pashto popular songs (Darmesteter 1888-90; Nuri 1944; Zhwak/Sapay 1955-56), starts in the second half of the 19th century, although its roots may be traced back as far as the times of the Hotak rulers of Kandahar (1709–1738).⁸

Two factors affected the growth and spiritual domination of Pashto folk poetry with marked authorship the first specimens of which were recorded by J. Darmesteter in the 1880s. On the one hand, there was the rather significant progress of literacy and learning among the Pashtuns under the emirs Sher-'Ali Khan and 'Abdurrahman Khan in the 1860-80s when after decades of political turmoil Afghanistan experienced a visible revival of socio-economic and cultural life based on the newly formulated idea of national unity. The considerably widened literary environment then absorbed a new generation of Pashto poets with folk backgrounds. Being usually illiterate, they were, nevertheless, well learned in Pashto classic literature and followed it in some aspects. Their own popularity on all social levels and an ever-intensifying public

⁷ The transcription and English translation of five of these songs is given in an appendix to this article. The entire collection consists of more than 80 separate items originally recorded on nine audio cassettes. The collector will be pleased to share digitalised versions of these songs as material for further academic research. Pertinent requests can be addressed to: mweinreich@hotmail.com.

⁸ Literary life in the Kandahar principality under the Hotak rulers is known primarily according to the odious poetic anthology *Pata khazana* ("Hidden Treasure") the authenticity of which has been questioned since its publication in 1944. Having no room and task here to comment on this old scholarly dispute, it should be said that *Pata khazana's* reports on and quotes from the poets of the Kandahar literary circle (around 1709–1729) may be considered as not totally fictitious but to a certain degree historic, though belatedly fixed in writing. Among mainstream poets belonging to the written poetry tradition the anthology mentions names of about ten lyricists who sang verses in folk forms (cf. Hewadmal 2000: 199-213). Hotak songs pertaining by contents to the same period (published and studied in Rafi' 1970) are obviously of much later origin as well.

care for Afghanistan's national cultural legacy would not let their names and texts fade away. On the other hand, folk poetry with marked authorship was the natural outcome of a certain "folklorisation" of 19th century Pashto written literature—a process, which implied not so much the replacement of mainstream normative poetry with folk verse but rather the merging of the most efficient elements from both. In other words, folk poetry with marked authorship represented an expected reconciliation of two literary traditions—written normative and oral traditional—which had been at odds with each other since the very emergence of Pashto writings in the 16th century (Pelevin 2010: 10-12).

The explicit indication of authorship in poetical texts addressed to an ordinary, by and large uneducated rural audience is the most conspicuous trait of this poetry. The practice of mentioning the poet's name, usually in the last strophe of a poem, if not originally stems from, at least deliberately adjusts to the rules of classic written poetry, where marking a poem with the author's literary name, *takhallus*, has long been regarded as a regular formal element.

Among the sixteen songs chosen from our collection for close study twelve are marked with *takhallus*, thus giving the literary names of nine poets: Hamidi (three texts), Darwesh (two texts), Zakir (App. text 1), Haydari (App. text 3), Samimyar (App. text 2), 'Adalatyar (App. text 4), Badruddin, Muttaki, and Hanifi.

STROPHIC PATTERNS AND METRICS

As a customary mark of authorship *takhallus* was likely to appear in those verse forms, which had more or less evident ties with authorised written poetry and were not typical for anonymous folk songs. The most popular forms of Pashto folk poetry, which link written and oral traditions are *ghazal* and *charbayta*.⁹ All the texts under discussion are composed in one of these two forms.

Ghazal has come to folk culture directly from written poetry and, therefore, it keeps to a steadier strophic pattern based on the general scheme *aa-ba-ca-da...* At a live performance it may acquire a number of strophic variations, mostly due to the reiteration of distiches (*bayts*), like *aaba(aaba)-ca-da-eafa(eafa)* in one of the songs at our disposal. Compared to other poetic forms *ghazal* tends to preserve the classic *bayt* structure and a fixed metrical scheme of a verse as well.¹⁰ Three regular

⁹ For a description of the main strophic forms in Pashto poetry, both oral and written, see Dvoryankov 1973.

¹⁰ A detailed study of Pashto metrics is presented in MacKenzie 1958. Standard Pashto meters have full and apocopated variants, e. g. *xx-xxx-x* (8-syllable full) and

ghazals in our selection have a standard classic 12-syllable pattern *xx-xxx-xxx-(x)* (*špa aw wra3 rā-ta yādeḡe pə mā grāna*), while the fourth, which shows a certain variation is based on a 10-syllable pattern *xxx-x[x] / xxx-x* (*če šwəm mukim šimāla stā pə yeḡ-ke*), which is characterised by a caesura.¹¹

It should be borne in mind that in folk poetry any lyric monorhyme verse without refrain may be called *ghazal*. To avoid this misnomer (or, better to say, contamination of terms) it is reasonable to set apart regular *ghazals* from those folk poems, which are also known under the widespread name *loba*¹². In fact, *lobas*, on the part of strophic structure and metrics, often look much more similar to *charbaytas* or *bagateys* than classic *ghazals*.

Charbayta, as truly noted by D. N. MacKenzie in his paper on Pashto metrics (1958: 321), differs from popular *ghazal* principally by having a refrain, which opens a poem and is repeated after each strophe. A strophe in *charbayta* may have a good deal of variations built up on a basic model *AA-bbbaAA-cccaAA-dddaAA...*¹³ This scheme clearly demonstrates that the very name *charbayta* is a sort of misnomer, too, for despite its literal meaning “four distiches” a strophe in *charbayta* is based more precisely on four semistiches (*misra*). Though commonly considered to be of purely folk origin, *charbayta* in fact partly replicates such classic forms as *murabba* and chained *ruba’i* (or *muqatta’at*), which have been part of Pashto written poetry since its very beginning (see Pelevin 2005: 79-89).

In the studied songs one may discern three types of *charbayta* patterns. The first type has both lines of refrain rhymed¹⁴:

xx-xxx- (8-syllable apocopated). Full variants are taken as a basis, so general patterns are designated like *xx-xxx-(x)*.

¹¹ The 10-syllable metric pattern with caesura has been obviously derived by early Pashto lyricists from folk poetry where it underlies the first line in a popular distich called *landey*. In written poetry this meter has been used almost exclusively in quatrains (*ruba’i* or *calorizi*), which are always perceived as having folklore roots. However, some rare examples of applying the 10-syllable meter in regular *ghazals* can already be found with early Roshani poets (see Pelevin 2005: 141-144).

¹² Sometimes these are also called *milli* (popular) *ghazals*.

¹³ About fifteen variants of “simple” *charbaytas* only are identified in Rafi’ 1970: 226-234.

¹⁴ In the patterns given below repeated lines are shown in brackets; refrain lines repeated as compositional elements of strophes are marked in bold; the apostrophe in A’ signifies a reduced line, i. e. with final words omitted (e. g. *wa spina bayraya os rapeḡa [pə kamāl]* “Hey, White Banner, wave now [with dignity]”).

kinsmen's or one's own bravery, vigour, high moral qualities and merits always constituted a major subject in the songs of tribal bards of whatever ethnic backgrounds and cultural traditions. In Pashto written poetry it was Khushhal Khan Khatak (1613-1689), the recognised founder of Pashto national literature, who introduced this kind of motives into verses and hence enlarged the thematic field of mainstream lyrics, which had focused beforehand mostly on mystical love or religious philosophy and didactics. Ideologically *tura* verses are based on the rulings of the well-known Pashtun Code of Honour (*Pashtunwali*). The very term *tura* signifies one of the Code's fundamental principles, which deals with warfare skills and courage.

The most spectacular example of *tura* poetry among the songs at our disposal is App. text 3. It has very typical elements of contents and rhetoric associated with this poetic genre. Each of the other *tura* songs places its emphasis on a particular issue; this may be an expression of pride for being a hero ready to self-sacrifice, or the Taliban's political credo, or a prayer for Taliban fighters, or lyrical meditations on spiritual steadfastness subtly interwoven with feelings of love and patriotism.

*I am a butterfly of the ramparts, to the ramparts I rush.
In glowing coals I suffer, but I laugh at them...
I am not like Majnun without any flesh.¹⁵
I became red coloured because of the blood from my chest.
I have gone and become the glory of whole Kabul...
(də sangar-yəm parwāna sangaro-ta dāngəm, by Hamidi);*

*It is the end of black nights; the clear morning has come to us.
Deep darkness is fading away, the bright sun is rising now...
The beginning of our revolt is swift and triumphant.
In people's life this revival is a beautiful day of celebration...
Along the silky road we lead our caravan of justice.
In this movement there is a brave man from every tribe...
I am proud of him, Haydari, for he is a symbol of national unity:
The leader of victorious men, the fighter for faith, Muhammad 'Umar, he is...
(pāyān də toro špo-dəy rā-xatəlay ruṅ sahar-dəy, by Haydari);*

¹⁵ A famous personage from a Muslim romantic legend, the most famed poetic versions of which were composed by the Persian poets Nizami Ganjavi (1188), Amir Khusrav Dihlavi (1299) and 'Abd ar-Rahman Jami (1484). In Pashto classic poetry the love story of Majnun and Layla was first versified—probably on the basis of Nizami's version—by Sikandar Khan Khatak, a son of Khushhal Khan, in 1679/80. According to the legend, while living in a desert Majnun (lit. "madman") became terribly emaciated as a result of his love sufferings and refusal to eat. On miniatures illustrating this story Majnun is often depicted in bony shape or "without any flesh" as described in the cited song.

O, weary, weary Taliban, God help you!
 O, those going to battle, God help you!
 You are going along God's way for the sake of God,
 O young fighters of Islam, God help you!
 You have sacrificed your life and wealth for the faith,
 O, honourable Afghans, God help you...
 (stəro stəro tālibāno xdāy-mu mal ša);

Over the tops of thorns I came up to Your abode.
 Over the tops of lances I came up to Your abode...
 I shortened my passageways through the paths in my heart.
 Over the tops of eyelashes I came up to Your abode...
 You watched me, You saw me in so many heavy battles.
 Over the tops of wounded bodies I came up to Your abode...
 (də azyo pə cuko cuko stā tər kəli-pore rāyləm, by Hanifi);

Mourning verses, whether popular (*matamuna*) or literary (*marthiyya*), historically developed from funeral songs, which are likely to be as old as folk poetry itself. We have a unique testimony of the fact that this kind of verses had been current among Pashtuns long before Pashto written poetry appeared. Muslim preacher 'Abd al-Karim (d. 1661/62), a son of the revered Afghan theologian Akhund Darveza (d. 1618/19 or 1638/39), in one of his writings at length criticises the old and popular, but ideologically non-Islamic Pashtun practice of singing bereavement songs (*də wir sandəre*) over deceased persons (see Pelevin 2005: 262). Since the literary works of Khushhal Khatak the traditional genre of *marthiyya* in Pashto poetry has been enriched with a new topic devoted to the commemoration of friends fallen on the battlefield.

All the *matamuna* elegies in our selection are dedicated to the martyrs of Dasht-i Layli, a desert strip west of Mazar-i Sharif where within a period of a few weeks in autumn 1997 hundreds of starved Taliban prisoners of war were massacred by forces loyal to the Northern Alliance. A mourning song included in the supplement (App. text 4) presents a nice specimen of these elegies for it is not only very emotive, but quite factual as well. In other elegies there are touching memories of a perished friend (Hamidi's *nən-me yādeği haya ĵkulay āšnā // dašt-i laylā-ke šahid šə-way āšnā* "Now that beautiful friend is coming to my memory, the friend who became a martyr of Dasht-i Layli"), sombre ruminations about martyrs while having a meal (Hamidi's *ay toṭe-toṭe dā yale mā xo wu-na-pežandəle // stā šahid bašar-ta žāṛəm ay pə sro wino laṛalay* "O, morsel, morsel, I have not even recognised that meal. I am crying over your slain body; O, the one who is stained with red blood"), and a vigorous call to commemorate the heroic deeds of the fallen martyrs in the form of an address to the Taliban's White Banner:

*The wind of freedom has stirred up gusts in the north.
 Hey, White Banner, wave now with dignity...
 To Dasht-i Layli go fast with dignity...
 Over those oppressed flap your wings with dignity...
 Talk to that oppressed Talib with dignity:
 Squalls of dust have fallen on your oppressors...
 Well, if they killed Talib being in his young age and with dignity,
 After they [i.e. the invaders] had gone, the lands of ancestors were kept
 intact with dignity...
 (də āzādəy šamāl wahəli di lahruna pə šimāl, by Badruddin)*

The figurative style of the mourning songs is distinguished by recurring references to Islamic mythology and legendary traditions. For Pashtun poets a potent symbol of martyrdom has always been the historical battle at Kerbela (modern Iraq) in 680 when Husayn, a grandson of the Muslim Prophet, and twenty other members of the Prophet's family were massacred by the order of the 'Umayya ruler Yazid. Although this event, which marked the final breaking-off between Sunnites and Shiites within the Muslim community, turned into a corner-stone of Shiite doctrine and rites, Pashto Sunni poets since early times have employed the battle at Kerbela as an icon of heroic self-sacrifice and eagerly made use of its images in their lyrics. Modern Taliban poets still keep to this old poetic tradition when comparing the centuries-old Kerbela tragedy with the recent massacre in Dasht-i Layli. In one of his poems Hamidi says:

*Kerbela was prepared for you, whether you were young or old.
 Torments went down on you, whether you were healthy or sick...
 Yazid came out to the battlefield and slew our dear Husayn;
 He tore the bonds of heart from the cradle of mercy...*

Among other legendary figures and subjects mentioned in the *mata-muna* songs there is Abraha, an Ethiopian ruler from the Qur'anic 105th Sura "The Elephant", who unsuccessfully tried to invade Mecca ("To the torrent of Truth, o Badruddin, with dignity... Even Abraha's hordes will bow with dignity..."), the Canaan well into which Yusuf, the Islamic Joseph the Beautiful from the Qur'anic version of the famous Biblical story, was thrown by his brothers (see App. text 4), and Hajjaj (d. 714), the notorious 'Umayya governor of Khurasan, whose name in literary tradition has become synonymous with a cruel tyrant ("The doings of Hajjaj brought a disaster; the tyrant assaulted you. Such a torrent of blood it was, that the edges of the sky turned red...").

Religious homiletic songs, which belong to the *diniyya* genre include clear-cut instructions or declarations of strict obedience to Islamic beliefs and norms. To state one's credo in verses was a rule already among early Pashtun men of letters. The Roshani mystics propagated the tenets of Islam while asserting submission to the teachings of their spiritual master Bayazid Ansari (d. 1572). Later the Hanafi preachers composed poetical discourses on Islamic dogma and ritual, not least because of their aim to discard the most extreme views of the Roshani mystics, their ideological opponents. In the poems of Khushhal Khatak we find plain proclamations of his firm adherence to Sunni Hanafi Islam, which, in respect to their simplified rhetoric, have much in common with the Taliban *diniyya* songs. Naturally, the latter can not avoid modern time realities, like the ones listed in a plea to fellow Muslims: "Reject narcotics, abandon TV and VCR..." (see text 5, App.). The most distinctive contemporary idea in modern *diniyya* homilies is the one, which appeals to the listener's ethno-religious consciousness on a nation state level.

*This land belonging to Islam will be;
Every infidel and wayward here disparaged will be.
Buddhism, and Christianity, and atheism,
And every other impious Law futile will be.
Each one unworthy or other alien
In clash with Afghans perplexed will be.
There is the firm belief of Darwesh in Holy Allah
That inevitably the rule of Shariah here will be.
(daya xāwra də islām islām-bə wi, by Darwesh)*

The patriotic songs are of particular interest, since the *wataniyya* genre, although being a familiar theme in Pashto poetry from its early period was totally extraneous to classic Persian literature, which initially served as a model for Pashtun authors. Patriotic motives with a tribal touch were for the first time fully expressed by Khushhal Khatak in his so-called jail verses (*habsiyya*) written in 1664-69 during the poet's imprisonment in Mogul India. Khushhal's words from "The Book of Separation" (*Firaq-nama*, 1665-66)—"The love for the Homeland, O my dear, has come to me through the faith." (*də watan mina ay jāna // rā-paydā-da lə imāna*) (Khushhal 1984: 28)—may well be regarded as a kind of epigraph to all later Pashto writings of the *wataniyya* genre.

However, a few decades earlier the Roshani poets had already used the term *watan* (lit. "homeland") with its religio-philosophic connotation "homeland of the soul" (i.e. God). Mirza Khan Ansari (d. 1630/31), the most prominent Roshani poet, played on the double meaning of the word *watan* when he rhetorically asked himself: "Where is your perma-

nent homeland, if you are constantly on the way? O you, who is going through his life always unsettled!" (see Pelevin 2005: 156). The poet's biography tells us that around 1619/20 he left his homeland in Pashtunistan (presumably, in Tirah) and settled with other members of the Roshani community in Mogul India. His obsessive longing for his homeland Mirza Khan expressed in verses, although under a mystical veil.

Yet, for modern authors, including the Taliban poets, the *wataniyya* tradition can be traced back to two preeminent sources: the classic verses of Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1772), which are popularly perceived as poetical markers of Afghan national statehood, and the vast heritage of Pashto folk poetry, in our case mostly specimens relating to the troubled times of the Anglo-Afghan wars¹⁶.

The songs of the Taliban clearly demonstrate how contemporary poets continue to draw on the same old repertoire of principal national ideas, stylistic means and lyrical imagery. In App. text 1 the lines *tāl-ye āzādāy-ta zalmo ixi-di saruna // dero atalāno kurbān kəri tre zānuna* sound like a paraphrase of the opening words of Ahmad Shah's most celebrated *ghazal*, which is thoroughly studied and learned by heart in every Afghan school—*stā dā 'išk lə wino dak šwə zigaruna // stā pə lāra-ke bāyli zalmī saruna* ("The hearts become filled with blood of love for You. On Your way young men have lost their lives (lit. "heads)"). All Taliban *wataniyya* texts are remarkably permeated with a range of terms, which in *Pash-tunwali* refer to different aspects of the concept of honour, these being *nang*, *himmat*, *'izzat*, *ghayrat*, *tura* (cf. Khadim 1952).

Other typical attributes of these patriotic songs are the names of the Afghan national heroes like Mir Ways Khan (d. 1715), the founder of the Hotak principality in Kandahar, Ahmad Shah Abdali, the first ruler of the Durrani Empire, Akbar Khan (d. 1846), the son of Afghanistan's Emir Dost Muhammad Khan and a key figure in the 1st Anglo-Afghan war (1838-1842), Malaley (b. 1862 ?), an outstanding woman and poetess who in 1880 participated in the famous Maywand battle, and Amir Kror of Ghor (8th century ?), the legendary Afghan tribal chief who is supposed to be the author of the first specimen of Pashto verse.

In this list of national heroes there is also the name of Mahmud Ghaznawi (d. 1030) accompanied by his popular epithet "Idol crusher" (*but-šikan*), which deserves special attention since it directly links the historical past with modern times. Mahmud gained this epithet together with his overall reputation as zealous defender of Islam due to

¹⁶ Pashto people's songs echoing historical events, mostly battles with British invaders through the whole 19th century up to the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war of 1919, are extensively studied in Girs 1984.

his military campaigns in Central India, particularly after his notorious raid in 1026 on a temple at Somnat where he not only took extraordinary booty but also destroyed the huge statue of a local deity. By fervent Muslims all over the world the destruction of the Somnat idol has ever since been perceived as a symbolic act of struggle against paganism and for the sake of the true faith. It is in the context of such deep-rooted “idol-crashing” ideology that we ought to understand the Taliban authorities’ annihilation of the Bamiyan Buddhas in spring 2001, although modern common sense will suggest that it was not anything else than an absolutely unnecessary act of wanton cultural barbarism.

Since the *wataniyya* songs largely dwell on traditional poetical phrasing and reiterate principle ideas connected to national sovereignty, independence and pride, they are nearly free of any allusions to contemporary political developments. An isolated sign of modernity in them is the inclusion of “the Russians” (*rusān*) in a list of foreign intruders whose assaults on the “abode of tigers” have dramatically failed. It was the English, of course, who in the past dominated this national blacklist, but in the Taliban songs of the last decade, as one might have expected, new enemies of Afghanistan have removed them from their traditional first position.

APPENDIX

Text 1

pām kawa ʔalima zmunǰ ʔāʔobay pə munǰ grān-də (2 times)

daʔa zəmunǰ mina-da daʔa zəmunǰ zān-də (2 times)

(2 times; refrain)

(1)

dəltə ʔer də asər fir'awnān rā-pəzədəli-di

ʔer yarʔalgarān pəke nākāma šarmedəli-di

ʔer pə ʔiʔo stərgo lə armāna-sara tləli-di (2 times)

ʔak lə ʔayratuno pə tārīx-ke kahramān-də (2 times)

daʔa zəmunǰ mina-da daʔa zəmunǰ zān-də (2 times)

(Refrain)

(2)

gorəʔ duǰmənāno də ʔəxtəli abdāli kor-də

dā də but-šikan sultān mahmud-i ʔaznawi kor-də

dā də mir-ways-xān aw akbar-xān də har bači kor-də (2 times)

haska-ye šamla-da lwaʔ himmat pə ʔol ʔahān-də (2 times)

daʔa zəmunǰ mina-da daʔa zəmunǰ zān-də (2 times)

(Refrain)

(3)

zāla də zmaro-da ʔalimān-ke oseday nə ši

baŋ də bulbulāno-də zāyān war-ta rātlay nə ši
šān lari šawkat lari cok bad war-ta katay nə ši (2 times)
dā də nango kor də ‘azmatuno yaw nišān-də (2 times)
daya zəmunğ mina-da daya zəmunğ zān-də (2 times)
 (Refrain)

(4)
təl-ye āzādəy-ta zalmo ixi-di saruna
đero atalāno kurbān kəri tre zānuna
rang-ye-di pə wino ʔola same-di ka ʔruna (2 times)
mina də zākir-da pāka xāwra də afyān-də (2 times)
daya zəmunğ mina-da daya zəmunğ zān-də (2 times)
 (Refrain)

Translation

Be cautious, enemy, our home hearth is dear to us.
 It is our love, it is our soul.

(1)
 Many tyrants of the time have made assaults upon us here.
 Many invaders have been put to shame here, [struggling] in vain.
 Many of those contemptuous have gone away from here in distress.
 It is full of dignity, it is a hero of times.
 It is our love, it is our soul.

(2)
 Look, enemies, it is a home of strong Abdalis.
 It is a home of sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi, the Idolcrasher.
 It is a home of every offspring of Mir-Ways Khan and Akbar Khan.
 The end of its turban is high¹⁷, it is of great valour in the whole world.
 It is our love, it is our soul.

(3)
 It is an abode of tigers, adversaries cannot live in here.
 It is a garden of nightingales, crows cannot come in here.
 It has grandeur, it has might, no-one can look scornfully on it.
 It is a dwelling place of honour, it is a token of pride.
 It is our love, it is our soul.

(4)
 Young men have always laid down their heads for its freedom.
 Many brave men have sacrificed their lives for its sake.
 All the plains and all the mountains are coloured with their blood.
 It is a love of Zakir, it is a sacred land of the Afghans.
 It is our love, it is our soul.

¹⁷ The long end of a turban is an old Pashtun symbol of pride and high social status.

Text 2

də irādo ɣurur-de rasi tər āsmān āsmān maɣlub kedəlay na ši
zəmā hewāda pə tā wyāri har afyān afyān wahšat zɣaməlay na ši
 (2 times; refrain)

(1)
byā-de də wino rud-i nil də nang cape kɣe xware
sre fawāre kɣe xware
 (2 times)

pə-ke lāhu šwəl rakibān jor šu tufān tufān ārāmedəlay na ši
 (2 times)
 (Refrain)

(2)
byā-de də nang tiyuna zi də sardaro pər zigar
awri pə kahar kahar
 (2 times)
war-zi ɣatar-ta də ɣalim pə sar nišān nišān bəl xwā-ta tləlay na ši
 (2 times)
 (Refrain)

(3)
tā-ke loy šəwe hara peyla də ‘izzat nāwakəy
dā də maywand malāləy
 (2 times)
lari də nang ihsās dā stā wāra zalmiyān zalmiyān teray manəlay na ši
 (2 times)
 (Refrain)

(4)
də himmat tura-ke-de zāngi kakarəy də angrez
wāra-de kɣə rez-marez
 (2 times)
šwəl rā-naskora-de kadam-lara rusān rusān nor pācedəlay na ši
 (2 times)
 (Refrain)

(5)
də samim yār kalam-bə təl stā hamāse yādawi
stā kārname yādawi
 (2 times)
tārix də wyār-de yādawi-bə-de dāstān dāstān tā herawəlay na ši
 (2 times)
 (Refrain)

Translation

The dignity of Your willpowers reaches the sky, the sky cannot be subdued.

O my country, every Afghan is proud of You, the Afghan cannot bear violence.

(1)

Again the Nile river of Your blood scattered the waves of honour,
Scattered the red fountains.

Enemies went swimming in them, the storm began, the storm cannot settle down.

(2)

Again the blades of Your honour strike in the heart of mountain valleys,

Move with great anger.

At the chest of enemy the target goes, the target cannot go at another place.

(3)

Every girl of Yours has grown up to be a bride of honour,
Like Malaley of Maywand.

All young men of Yours have a feeling of honour, young men cannot accept oppression.

(4)

The skull of an Englishman is hanging on Your saber of bravery,
You hacked to pieces every of them.

The Russians fell down under Your feet, the Russians cannot stand up again.

(5)

Kalam of Samimyar will memorise forever Your courage,
Will memorise Your heroic deeds.

It is the day of Your pride, the story will remember You, the story cannot forget You.

Text 3

ihsās-me pə naṛəy-ke yurzanguna xwaḫawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaḫawi

(2 times; refrain)

(1)

bāwar-me-də ʕe xdāy lə ɣayratmāno-sara mal-də (2 times)

zəmā ɣayrati xdāy xo ɣayratuno xwaḫawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaḫawi

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(2)

pə de xabəra təl-yəm də benango porawəṛay (2 times)

ʕe zṛə-me xpəlwāki aw ‘azmatuna xwaḫawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaǰawi

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(3)

də bəl čā-bə xwaǰeǰi tore zulfe ameluna (2 times)

fitrat zəmā šamle aw šax bretuna xwaǰawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaǰawi

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(4)

hickala-me kāni də yulāməy pə žwandun nə kɾo (2 times)

wijdān-me zawalane aw zanžiruna xwaǰawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaǰawi

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(5)

nāǰār šu də pālang aw də xāluno lə stāyəlo (2 times)

kalam də haydari də nang ši'runa xwaǰawi

zamir-me hamāse inkilābuna xwaǰawi

(2 times)

(Refrain)

Translation

My feelings enjoy swift raids in this world.

My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

(1)

I believe that God helps men of honour.

So, my proud God enjoys prides.

My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

(2)

In this matter I am always in debt of vengeance toward those having no honour.

For my heart enjoys freedom and dignities.

My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

(3)

Others will enjoy black locks and garlands.

My spirit enjoys end of turban and coarse bristle.

My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

(4)

I never accepted the life of a servant.

My mind enjoys better chains and fetters.

My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

(5)

It has rejected the praising of bride-bed and moles,
The *kalam* of Haydari enjoys verses of honour.
My heart enjoys braveries and revolts.

Text 4

(1)

stā pə sina-ke pə mazlum wušwəl fāyruna naʔede wale na aw dašte layle
žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(2 times; refrain)

cə loy mātām loya yawyā wa tā hec na wayəl (2 times)

pə tā-ke joʔa kirbilā wa tā hec na wayəl (2 times)

(2)

če ražedəl də pāk nabi də bāy guluna naʔede wale na aw dašte layle

žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(Refrain)

toʔi prātə wu be kafana də stā pə yeğ-ke (2 times)

belə yamxora be madfana də stā pə yeğ-ke (2 times)

(3)

lāsuna pxe pə wino srə ləka guluna aw dašte layle

žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(Refrain)

də zankandan obə-ye yuxte yamxor-ye na wu (2 times)

səlgəy wahəle dərə saxte yamxor-ye na wu (2 times)

(4)

če lambedəl pə xpəlo wino-ke la'luna naʔede wale na aw dašte layle

žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(Refrain)

pəʔməx prātə wu lās-taʔəli səlgəy wahəle (2 times)

pə xpəlo wino lambedəli səlgəy wahəle (2 times)

(5)

war-bānde joʔ wu də marmayo bārānuna naʔede wale na aw dašte layle

žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(2 times)

pə dər wahšat-ye šahidān kʔəl də din tālibān (2 times)

band-ye kuhi-ke də kin'ān kʔəl də din tālibān (2 times)

(6)

'adālatyāra xežāwəl-ye pre tākuna naʔede wale na aw dašte layle

žarede wale na spin gulān pə xpəlo wino srə wu

(2 times)

(Refrain)

Translation

(1)

On Your chest the sufferers were fired down. Why didn't You break?
 Oh, Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.
 What a great mourning it was! What a great turmoil! But You said
 nothing.
 A Kerbela was built up on You. But You said nothing.

(2)

When these flowers from the Holy Prophet's garden fell down why
 didn't You break? Oh, Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.
 Those torn in pieces were lying with no shrouds in Your arms.
 With no one mournful over them, with no grave.

(3)

Head to foot they were red with blood like flowers. Oh, Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.
 A last drop of water in death agony they needed but there was no
 one mournful over them.
 In death agony very hard they breathed but there was no one
 mournful over them.

(4)

When these rubies bathed in their own blood why didn't You break?
 Oh, Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.
 With faces up and tied hands they were lying and breathing hard.
 In their own blood they were bathing and breathing hard.

(5)

Rains of shells were dispatched on them. Why didn't You break? Oh,
 Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.
 Out of strong fear enemies murdered Taliban of faith.
 In the Canaan well they imprisoned Taliban of faith.

(6)

O, 'Adalatyar, enemies moved up tanks over them. Why didn't You
 break? Oh, Dasht-i Layli!
 Why didn't You cry? White flowers were red with their own blood.

Text 5

amār bi-l-ma'ruf muslima nahy 'an-al-munkar kawa
sam safā amal pə ʔkuli lār də payyambar kawa (2 times)
 (2 times; refrain)

(1)

*tə xo musalmān-ye bāyad wukri pə qur'an amal (2 times)**fikha ahādis aw də allāh pə har farmān amal (2 times)**preğda dā naše tiwi wisyar na dar-guzar kawa**sam safā amal pə xkuli lār də payyambar kawa*

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(2)

*gora kāfirān stā də fikro xarābawəl γwāri (2 times)**špa-wraze kušiš kři stā də din barbādawəl γwāri (2 times)**tə ham γayrat wukra har lādin pə zidd laškar kawa**sam safā amal pə xkuli lār də payyambar kawa*

(2 times)

(Refrain)

(3)

*rāša də hak mal ša wə γulām-ta γulāmi mə kři (2 times)**loy rab-ta taslim ša šark aw γarb-ta salāmi ma kři (2 times)**xə də din askar ša kurbāni pə māl aw sar kawa**sam safā amal pə xkuli lār də payyambar kawa*

(2 times)

(Refrain)

Translation

O Muslim, obey command for doing good and prohibition of doing bad,

Act righteously and fairly on the true way of the Prophet,

(1)

You are a Muslim, and you should act according to Qur'an.

You should abide Fiqh, Hadiths and every order of Allah.

Reject narcotics, abandon TV and VCR,

Act righteously and fairly on the true way of the Prophet.

(2)

Look, infidels want to disrupt your mind.

Day and night they are trying to destroy your faith.

And you, exert your dignity and fight against every unbeliever,

Act righteously and fairly on the true way of the Prophet.

(3)

Come on, be a follower of Truth, do not serve to servant.

Obey the Great God; do not bow to East or West.

Be a good warrior of faith; sacrifice your life and wealth,

Act righteously and fairly on the true way of the Prophet.

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