

Transgressing Pashtun Boundaries: A Spatial Critique of the Pashtun Woman's Position in Pashtunwali

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Abstract: Pashtunwali, an unwritten tribal code of conduct, has been shaping the lives of millions of Pashtuns, outlining the contours of their socio-cultural hierarchies. This study explores Pashtunwali's role in creating spatial hierarchies that place Pashtun women at the peripheries of Pashtun spaces, thus making Pashtunwali a patriarchal tool to exert and maintain spatial dominance of Pashtun patriarchy. Using theoretical underpinnings of spatial theory as propounded by Tim Cresswell, Edward Casey, and David Sibley, this study explores Pashtun women's spatial experiences of in-placeness, out-of-placeness, and transgression within the normative geography constructed through Pashtunwali. The study offers a critique of the Pashtunwali to comprehend how it creates spaces of exclusion for Pashtun women and hampers their leadership within the Pashtun society. The current research concludes that Pashtunwali creates an ambivalent normative geography where Pashtun women experience being out of place and excluded from leadership spaces.

Keywords: Pashtunwali, Pashtun Spatial Hierarchies, Pashtun Women, Pashtun Normative Geography

Introduction

The song "The Blind Cannot Remain Here," written by Ustad Rashid and beautifully rendered by Ustad Shah Wali, extols the virtues of Pashtunwali, the code of life for the Pashtun people. These practices and institutions are crucial for the Pashtunwali society and its social system. Pashtunwali is a blend of social traditions, ethics, and moral values that are essential for the well-being of the Pashtuns. The poem begins by asserting that the homeland of the Pashtuns is a place for the sighted, not the blind. This is a reference to the importance of courage and honor in Pashtun culture. The poem then goes on to describe the qualities of the ideal Pashtun. The Pashtun is someone who is brave, honorable, and willing to die for their homeland. They are also someone, particularly women, who are modest and full of zeal. The Pashtun way of life is one that is bound to the homeland. The Pashtuns are a people who are deeply connected to their land and their culture. The poem concludes by declaring that the Pashtun homeland is a place of angels. This is a metaphor for the purity and beauty of the Pashtun way of life. The Pashtuns believe that their homeland is a special place, and they are determined to protect it from those who would seek to destroy it. Pashtunwali is a complex and multifaceted code of honor that has been practiced by the Pashtun people for centuries. The poem "The Blind Cannot Remain Here" is a powerful reminder of the importance of Pashtunwali to the Pashtun identity. The poem celebrates the virtues of courage, honor, and zeal, and it reaffirms Pashtun's life. Pashtunwali is an ethnocentric concept that focuses on the values, norms, customs, and habits of the Pashtuns, distinct from other ethnic groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These values, norms, customs, and habits have evolved into a strong set of rules that define what constitutes

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honorable behavior and include various sanctions for those who violate them. The idea that Pashtuns are trusted and expected to act honorably qualifies Pashtunwali as a code of honor.

Pashtunwali, an unwritten tribal code of behavior, shapes the lives of millions of Pashtuns, defining their sociocultural hierarchy. This study examines how Pashtunwali enforces patriarchal domination by establishing spatial hierarchies, placing Pashtun women at the margins of leadership positions. The research examines Pashtun women's spatial experiences, focusing on in-placeness, out-of-placeness, and transgression within Pashtunwali's normative geography. The paper critiques Pashtunwali, highlighting its limitations on Pashtun women's spatial and exclusion within Pashtun's normative geography.

Since the seventeenth century, when the first attempt was made to establish rules of conduct for the Pashtuns, the norms and values of Pashtunwali have been passed down orally for generations. Khushal Khan Khattak's book, *Dastarnama* ('Book of the Turban'), describes twenty abilities and virtues that a Pashtun man must own to become worthy to wear a turban. Some of these values, such as self-knowledge, bravery, consultation, modesty, honesty, respect for the elders, ambitiousness, pride, and honor, are close to the values of Pashtunwali. Pashtunwali is a mix of social traditions, ethics, and moral values that have been passed down through generations and become the legal code for Pashtuns. It includes various elements, such as the *Hujra*, a public guest house, mosque, and *Godar*, which are administered by *Malik*, the head of the dominant family. Other significant traditional practices and institutions include *Jirga*, *Parda*, *Nang* (Honor), *Namus* (female chastity), *Ghyrat* (Honor) *Melmastya* (Hospitality) *Hujra*, *Nanawati*, and *Badal* (revenge) (Ullah & Din, 2018). According to Lutz Rzehak (2011), Pashtunwali has different tenets for individual and group honor, fighting and bravery, equality and respect of elders, consultations and decision-making, willpower and sincerity, compensation and retaliation, generosity and hospitality, pride and zeal. These ideals include "*nang, namus, tura, musawat, jirga, merana, badal, sharm, melmastya, ghyrat and badraga*" (Rzehak, 2011, p. 16).

Literature Review

Pashtunwali creates a normative geography that puts the Pashtun patriarchy at the center and Pashtun women at a marginalized place. Normative geography focuses on the sense of propriety that results from expectations of behavior in relation to a certain location and place (Cresswell, 1996). People's social presuppositions and geographic sense of appropriateness are influenced by this sense of "proper", which is defined by the junction of geographical location and social status (Cresswell, 1996, p. 10). Those who hold social dominance within a social group determine if a given conduct is proper or wrong. These socially superior strata create laws that specify or outline what constitutes appropriate behavior in a certain locale. The categorization of behaviors as proper and wrong in relation to a certain location reveals the presence of "normative geography" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 9). This normative geography that is widely recognized by society serves as the core model of a person's relatedness to space and place.

In 2007, Pashtun folk singer Zarsanga sang the song *Shinwari Lawangena*, written by Zaiton Bano.

*These floodwaters fail to scare me.
My Courage Will Carry Me Across
Help me leave the darkness behind
That I may Spread Light across my homeland*

In the song, Zarsanga pleads for spatial emancipation so that she may "spread light across [her] homeland." She also expresses her frustration with the patriarchal rules and regulations of Pashtun society, which restrict women to the domestic sphere and prevent them from participating in public spaces. The song is significant because it provides a rare glimpse into the spatial experiences of Pashtun women under patriarchy. It also challenges the dominant narrative of Pashtun women as passive and voiceless victims. Instead, Zarsanga presents herself as an agent of change who is determined to overcome the challenges of patriarchy and achieve spatial freedom. The song has been significant in raising awareness of the plight of Pashtun women's spatial subjugation and in challenging the location of Pashtun women in Pashtun normative geography as passive and voiceless victims. It is a powerful example of how music is

used to voice against the spatial marginalization of Pashtun women. The song exemplifies Pashtun women's struggle for spatial empowerment.

Similarly, in her letter to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, aka Bacha Khan, Alif Jana Khattak makes a strong case for Pashtun women's access to education and academic advancement. In the letter, Khattak laments the dearth of opportunities and educational opportunities for women in Pashtun society and encourages Khan to utilize his power to change things. Khattak starts by expressing gratitude to Khan for his efforts in providing solace and peace to the Pashtun people. She continues by describing the dearth of educational opportunities in Pashtun communities. In many communities, she claims, there are no schools, and even in those where there are, local elders sometimes forbid youngsters from attending. Khattak further claims that the local elders frequently think that education is not for the woman.

Khan is then asked by Khattak to utilize his influence to make things better. She wants him to inform the village elders that education is crucial for women since she has read in "Pashtun" that Khan has a great deal of sympathy for the predicament of Pashtun women. She also requests that Khan make attendance at school a requirement for all kids. Khattak's letter serves as a potent reminder of the difficulties Pashtun women have in getting access to school. Additionally, it serves as a monument to the fortitude and tenacity of Pashtun women who are pursuing their right to an education. The letter is important because it demonstrates that Pashtun women have long battled for the right to an education. Despite the fact that Khattak's letter was written at the beginning of the 20th century, Pashtun women continue to endure the difficulties she mentions. The letter serves as a reminder that the battle for universal access to education must continue and that everyone, regardless of gender, color, or ethnicity, must have access to it.

The present study investigates the idea of Pashtun women's experience of space and place to understand the Pashtun women's spatial-cultural practices that led to the instability of Pashtunwali normative geography. Since normative geography involves the interaction between place and approved conduct, the present research is conducted to understand the relationship between Pashtunwali spatiality and Pashtun women's behavior in these settings, including the appropriateness or impermissibility of various factions within the Pashtunwali normative geographic structure. When people act inappropriately, this connection between persons and their acts is severed, and they are thought to have breached the law. Transgression is defined in the current study as both crossing a geographical space and a social boundary. Pashtun women commit a transgression when they go beyond or go against the traditional socio-spatial patterns of Pashtunwali that are set by Pashtun patriarchy. She is out of place because of the way she behaves in relation to the predetermined and conflicted normative geographies of Pashtunwali.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Tim Creswell's formulations of normative geography, the experiences of in-placeness and out-of-placeness, and transgression in Pashtun women's spatial experience in the normative geography of Pashtunwali. This framework also encompasses various theoretical formulations, Edward Casey Ralph's theorization of existential space and spatial experience, David Sibley's theory of spatial exclusion, and the sociocultural conceptualization of Pashtunwali.

The concept of place and space has long fascinated humanity, with humans responding to these spaces in unique ways. The idea of being "somewhere" is not complete without the sense of being "somewhere." Places are regarded as both authentic and inauthentic experiences of life. The relationship between place and space is complex, with different definitions and interpretations. Eric Prieto (2013) defines place as a geographical site that is meaningful to someone for whatever reason, emphasizing its meaning over its physical dimensions (23). Tim Cresswell (2004), on the other hand, defines place as a particular location on the earth's surface that stands out from other locations owing to its unique sense of belonging and attachment (7). Furthermore, Cresswell (2004) contends that the process of "naming" a specific location, which is imbued with significance within the framework of power, is how the concept of place is established (8). Additionally, the act of designating a certain location might accomplish this meaningfulness. At its most basic level, the place is a location that has been given meaning within the framework of power, which clarifies that places are not inherently meaningful but rather are the socially

dominant class that creates meaning. However, because spaces are volumes and areas without a name, they are a more abstract concept than a place. By analyzing John Agnew's three essential components of a place—location, locality, and sense of place—Cresswell (2004) clarifies the significance of a place. According to Agnew, each location has "objective coordinates" that indicate where it is on the global map, and a location's physical surroundings give clues about its shape (Cresswell, 2004, p. 9).

The concepts of transgression, in-placeness, out-of-placeness, and normative geography make up Cresswell's (1996) concept of spatiality. Both the geographical component and the social outside of the concept of place are included in these essential elements. Normative geography, according to Cresswell (1996), is a spatial coordinate that is controlled by predetermined patterns and rules that indicate whether a given behavior is proper or wrong (6). Those who hold social dominance within a social group establish a set of rules that specify what constitutes right behavior and what does not within defined geographic coordinates. These rules determine whether a given behavior is permissible or wrong.

The basic paradigm for a person's relatedness or rootedness to a place is the idea of normative geography. Any attempt to destabilize this normative geographic universe necessitates some space and location, and undermining the center creates resistance and diversity. Out-of-place behavior and transgressions that occur in a specific location and space lead to this destabilization by generating "otherness" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 8). A similar assertion is made by Edward C. Relph (1973), who claims that space is amorphous and intangible and cannot be directly described or examined (13). Ralph also emphasizes three fundamental elements of places: meanings, activities, and the physical environment. The topography of a location is referred to as the physical setting, whilst the activities that take place inside a geographical area make up the social aspect (13). Individuals' experiences of location and space, rather than merely physical features or social constructions, are given meanings. The phenomenological foundation of geography, where the significance of a place forms the basis of human existence, gives rise to direct experiences and consciousness of geographical places. The physical environment, items, or activities carried out at a location can all have significance. Any change to these elements has the potential to create new meanings and undermine preexisting ones. According to Relph (1973, 45), these components form the basis of a person's perception of location, enabling them to feel either existential insideness or outsideness there.

Additionally, something that is constructed around the expectations of a specific physical region is referred to as being in place, according to Cresswell's (1996) idea. This idea could existentially precede the feeling of being out of place. A person's knowledge of being out of place shapes their notion of being in place. However, because an individual's acts go beyond what was once regarded as normal and common sense, transgression—an act of abnormality—is a foreground for discursive activities. The ideological underpinnings of location and space are brought to the forefront by transgression, as the margin responds and reflects the "normality" of the center (Cresswell, 1996, p. 10). Because it arouses feelings and emotions toward certain locations, the idea of subjectivity gives the concept of place exclusivity. According to Cresswell (1996), humans have subjective and emotional attachments to places, and human action creates and consumes places (12). The relationship between people and place is referred to as topophilia by Tuan (1977), who highlights an individual's emotional connection to their site of geographical occurrence.

According to David Sibley (1995), rules of inclusion and exclusion are reflected in constructed forms, which influence society and place, affecting some as repressive and others as enticing. Questions about places and those they exclude are crucial to comprehending exclusion. Because they need an explanation of obstacles, restrictions, and limitations on activities, legal systems, and social control organizations, which are fundamental to understanding exclusion (Sibley, 1995). Subject groups, which may be both dominant and subservient depending on how they are categorized, can experience socio-spatial exclusion. Men may be dominant in their interactions with women in a minority culture, even if both men and women may face exclusion as members of an oppressed minority group. Observers must be aware of these various realities and accept that their ability to comprehend the socio-spatial worlds of others will be constrained by their own experiences and viewpoints. To portray other people's experiences of socio-spatial exclusion, though, is both feasible and desired. However, while addressing the issue of positionality, it is feasible and desirable to portray other people's experiences of socio-spatial exclusion.

Individuals have varying degrees of possessiveness toward various sorts of places and spaces. For instance, national territory fosters sentiments of belonging and ownership, which is important in geopolitics, but it also fosters an exclusionary nationalism that rejects the idea that diverse cultures may coexist peacefully in a nation (Sibley, 1995). The legal recognition of an exclusive right to home space is a fairly common claim that can be made at the municipal level. The home is a personal or familial space into which guests may be invited. The geography and sociological makeup of the area determine whether or not people and organizations have territorial attitudes toward their communities (Sibley, 1995). People have varying degrees of possessiveness toward various sorts of situations. For example, national territory fosters sentiments of ownership and belonging,

Social and spatial exclusion can be influenced by people's feelings about others, which play a crucial role in social interaction. For example, residential segregation can stem from feelings of anxiety, nervousness, or fear, which contribute to shaping social space. Culturally constructed differences can trigger anxieties and a desire to distance oneself from others, potentially leading to economic consequences. Feelings about others may also be associated with places, such as nervousness or excitement in a dangerous space and/or place. Repulsion, desire, fear, and attraction attach to people and places in complex ways. The construction of the self and how individual identity relates to social, cultural, and spatial contexts are central to understanding the problem of social and spatial exclusion.

Analysis

The Pakhtun civilization has a basically tribal, very traditional, and, most significantly, patriarchal social structure. The extremism and terrorism committed by certain organizations in the name of Islam are the most significant. In addition, the customary disputes over land, money, and domestic matters have become more complicated as a result of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Tribal Districts' increasingly complex societies. The very disadvantaged position of women in Pashtun society is a crucial component of the conflicts there. Women's roles in this culture have traditionally been limited to taking care of the home, raising children, and providing for basic requirements like food and shelter, and the family's men's clothes. The inability of women to control their own lives and families has greatly exacerbated societal problems. Society's extreme conservatism, overall preference for keeping the status quo, reluctance to change, and consequent incapacity to adapt to complex conflicts have emerged as a result of adherence to Pashtunwali.

The Pashtunwali develops a normative geography defined by the Pashtun code of life and situated within the tenets of Pashtunwali. In the present study, I take *Hujra* and *Jirga* tenets of Pashtunwali to elaborate on how Pashtun women are excluded from the place and what attempts are made by Pashtun women to transgress the spatiality of *Hujra* and *Jirga*. Pashtunwali teaches Pashtuns how to treat women with respect and to preserve their status as chaste members of society. It teaches that while males provide for the family and labor outside, women stay at home and protect their virginity from the brutal outside world.

Hujra is a normative geographic location of Pashtunwali. Traditionally, Hujra, which doubles as a guesthouse, a place of hospitality, and a gathering place for the community to discuss problems and look for answers, is a crucial part of Pashtun culture. It is regarded as a crucial component of Pashtun culture and is essential for bringing villagers together. Hujra is crucial for tribal regions because it brings people together and serves as a permanent jury site. Hujra's elders render rapid, wise, economical, and impartial judgments that the populace owns and respects. Additionally, it serves as a hub for information exchange and a free training, education, and teaching facility (Rehman et al., 2021).

The Jirga and Hujra systems of the Pashtuns reflect mutual respect, sympathy, hospitality, solidarity, and courage. Hujra and Jirga are patriarchal places to gather for traditional activities. These are open community centers for all males, regardless of race or color, where they can take an active and positive part in the lives of their neighbors and fellow humans. The Hujra is a symbolic structure that represents Pashtunwali solidarity and traditional brotherhood. It is also made beautiful by the smell of several flowers, plants, fruit, and vegetables that are in bloom. Ahmad and Muhammad (2019) present nine codes under the subtheme of Hujra, emphasizing its significance as a house of peace, village judicial complex, village parliament, the transmission of peacebuilding knowledge, catharsis, counseling, music,

poetry, storytelling, hospitality, harmony, and communication hub. Hujra gives the populace shelter, food, and amusement while passing down information from one generation to the next and divulging trade secrets regarding commerce, illnesses, and weather forecasting. These spaces serve as a hub for social activities in Pashtun society. To safeguard their native and traditional identities, Pashtuns use a variety of resiliency techniques, upholding cultural ideals including brotherhood, kinship, familial ties, friendship, and reciprocity.

Aziz et al. (2021), in their study, claim that Pashtun women appreciate the meaning, history, and cultural composition of Pashtunwali but acknowledge the contemporary challenges faced by traditional Pashtun culture. Pashtuns emphasize the importance of being ghairatmand, maintaining basic principles and never compromising on basic principles of Pashtunwali. However, a Pashtun woman is spatially excluded from the hujra space. Pashtun hujras are home-based patriarchal spaces designed for male visitors, allowing male villagers working outside to feel part of a larger family. Hujra upholds and encourages adherence to Pashtunwali customs and thus maintains the Pashtun normative geographic structure where Pashtun patriarchy holds the center, and Pashtun women are subjugated to marginalized locations. These normative spaces hold communal rites and host social activities like wedding ceremonies and conflict resolution for the male members of the society. Women are not allowed to enter these masculine spaces, but they are always available to make food and meals for visitors. Pashtun Hujra gatherings are exclusively for men since Pashtun Hujra prohibits women from attending and participating (Ahmad, 2004). The Pashtun woman's phenomenological experience of spaces is based on the experience of insideness and outsideness at the Hujra. Since the notion of insideness and outsideness is constituted upon the experience of identifying with or against a particular place, being inside a place means an individual "belongs" to and/or "identifies" with a particular place, while the reverse is being outside (Relph, 1973, p. 49). The deeper the experience of insideness, the stronger the identity with a particular place. Pashtun women, because they are excluded from the hujra and jirga spaces, are unable to experience any emotional or subjective belongingness with these spaces. Therefore, their experience of hujra and jirga spaces is that of experience of outsideness.

The Jirga is a meeting of tribal men who have the authority to settle disputes in a way that is acceptable to both sides. The word "Jirga" comes from the Turkish word "Jirg," meaning "circle," and is an institution in public spaces, such as mosques or graveyards, where every male can attend. The different forms of Jirga vary depending on the group unit it is applied. For example, a Pashtun tribe (Tabar) is divided into many Khel, which are then divided into Plarinas, which are then divided into different Kayols. The Maraka is a Kalay's institution dealing with matters of small importance within families or between them. The Qawmi Jirga is a Kalay's institution dealing with more important issues central to the tribe's social order. The Loya Jirga is the "grand" or national Jirga, where tribal leaders gather to discuss vital national issues and make collective decisions (Bibi & Khan, 2020).

Jirga is a gathering of tribal males with the goal of reaching an amicable resolution to conflicts. The mashran (elders) of the khels (a group of tribal branches) participate in this sizable assembly to discuss and resolve significant tribal issues. While narkheyan, who is familiar with the Jirga's rules, also participates, the mullas participate in jirgas as spin patkeyan to pray for the Jirga's success. The Jirga is close enough for regular folks to sit and listen to the conversation. Every jirga member is referred to as an elder or a spin gieray (white beard). In conclusion, the Hujra and the mechanism of Jirga are major aspects of the Pashtunwali and Pashtun identity. To underestimate them is to risk compromising any effort towards peace in the region (Bibi & Khan, 2020).

The Jirga is an exclusively male institution where 'honorable men,' who are often family headmen, village elders, tribe chieftains, and landowners, judge disputes and offer remedies that are more concerned with reestablishing societal balance than with ensuring individual justice and human rights. Social obligations are imposed on the persons concerned by the group decision. According to Ralph (1973), spatial insideness is primarily subjective and constructed upon emotional attachment to the place, while outsideness is objective and emotionally devoid. In an inside experience, an individual becomes part of the whole of a particular place, while an outside experience observes the place from a detached positionality. Jirgas are based on the customs and values of the males in the area, and one of these values is honor.

Pashtun consider it immoral if their women enter the hujra or jirga spaces. This spatial exclusion takes place because, typically, a Pashtun leader's all-male Hujra is where the Jirga takes place. The neighborhood mosque or open fields might also be used as locations. All of them constantly exclude women from the jirga and hujra spaces. Even if they are the primary accuser or victim in the given case, women are not allowed to participate in a Jirga. Her advisers may offer her side of the story if she is charged with a crime. It is a wholly male institution that prohibits women from joining, testifying, or filing complaints. Only through a male relative may a woman attend a jirga. There is absolutely no remedy in the event of complaints against her male relatives.

Space and place are used to construct the normative landscape and contest and challenge normative notions. These notions define margins, enact resistance, and construct difference. The act of transgression establishes these notions and serves as a foundation for discursive practices. Transgression is defined as an individual's actions that go beyond what was previously considered natural and common sense. It foregrounds the ideological foundations of space and place, where the margin becomes respondent and reflexive to the "normality" of the center (Cresswell, 1996, p. 10). Normality is defined by those who occupy sociocultural powers, and the actions of people living on the margins are considered transgressions.

Transgression is a socio-cultural and material practice that constitutes subversive spatial movement within normative geography, set in opposition to values considered correct and appropriate. It is a reaction to the hegemonies produced through spatiality, attempting to contest the spatial hegemony of a spatially superior entity (Cresswell, 1996, p. 21). Transgression is not just an act of crossing geographical or social borders but also causes a transformation in the meaning of place, altering the meanings of a place that is not favored or supported by those involved in the initial process of meaning-making. In short, continuous transgression changes the meaning of place, ultimately resulting in a reorientation of place, both socially and geographically. The new meanings are dictated by those involved in the process of transgression, making the place in question as to their place.

Many researchers have investigated how Pashtuns comprehend Pashtunwali, largely concentrating on ethnographic texts. However, most of the Pashtunwali literature is male-centric and ignores women's perspectives. Most research focuses on Pashtuns in Pakistan's tribal areas, where males predominate, and women are marginalized. This absence of literature on Pashtun women's experiences of Pashtunwali is seen in the research that has mainly overlooked them. Women in Pashtun society have, as was already established, had a very small, if any, part in causing these conflicts due to their great marginalization in the male-dominated society. The deaths of their male family members and the widespread relocation brought on by the insurgency have caused them the most suffering, despite the fact that they have been the quiet observers of the entire scenario. The patriarchal nature of Pashtun society makes it difficult for women to play even a small role in sociopolitical events.

In the Pashtun social context, the authority rests with the Pashtun patriarchy to name places and dictate their meanings. However, Cresswell (1996) asserts that the meanings of a place may not be accepted by all members of a group or individual; rather, they may attempt to give their own meanings to a geographic location. Participation by a woman in public is despised and is seen as a source of shame and embarrassment for the family. As a result, Pashtunwali does not support women's active involvement or occupation of Jirga and Hujra spaces. Pashtun women are underrepresented, and we see their absence in jirgas and hujra places. The current patriarchal solidifies its spatial limits on women's space and autonomy are a result of Pashtunwali, which made women's roles in society more rigid, conservative, and exploitative. This is well reflected in the regionally well-known but contentious saying "*Khaza ya da kor da ya da gor da*," which restricts women to certain private spaces such as the home and graves. Understanding these historical distortions is essential because they create a difficult space for women to participate in Jirga, an indigenous method of dispute resolution that is characterized by male spatial dominance and male-dictated choices. Jirga, nanawatay, and Hujra are a few examples of the cultural practices and institutions that the Pashtun culture uses to preserve peace and settle disputes. These customs are a component of Pashtunwali, the traditional way of life for the Pashtun people. It serves as the Pashtun communities' equivalent of an unwritten constitution, directing people in general socioeconomic and

political issues. A spatial analysis of these components reveals the spatial bias against women in these traditional Pashtun institutions and customs. Due to inherited customs like male elders deciding the destiny of young women and honor murders, Pashtun women in Pashtunwali are frequently mistreated and understudied. Landowners and city-dwelling Pashtuns frequently disengage women; they dress in chader or burqa when they leave their family's home. Therefore, it is challenging to comprehend females' interest in women's rights, social insurance, and education, given that female participation in numerous elements is mandated by the Pashtunwali code.

Due to Jirga rules, women in Pashtunwali are not permitted to hold positions of decision-making authority in society. The majority of communities have local jirgas, but not a single one includes a woman as a decision-maker. Since Pashtun women are spatially marginalized, the Pashtun patriarchy occupies the arena of decision-making. In addition, women cannot defend themselves against charges made against them; instead, disputes are resolved by male family members as wakeel. Women are not permitted to represent themselves as complainants in jirgas on family conflicts; instead, male family members—such as fathers, brothers, or husbands—are designated to represent the female point of view (Barohi, [2016](#)).

However, a spatial transgression took place when the first *Khwendo Jirga* (sister's council) was established in Swat in 2012 by Tabassum Adnan. Tabassum Adnan, a Pakistani woman who was awarded the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, formed Pakistan's first all-women Jirga in 2013. Traditionally, jirga membership was reserved for male elders, but Adnan challenged this by forming the 25-member Khwendo Jirga, or Sisters' Council. The council, which initially faced opposition, gained acceptance after bringing culprits to justice in a child-rape case in Swat village in 2014. The council has since intervened in blood feuds, the sale of girls into marriage, murder cases, and trafficking of women. The Khwendo Jirga also advocates women's access to education and healthcare and supports their right to vote. Adnan's story is one of perseverance, having been a child bride and divorced by her family at the age of 13. She had attempted to seek justice through male jirgas but was unsuccessful. However, her idea to create her own Jirga was born from her rejection of male jirgas.

According to Sumara Gul and Fayaz ([2022](#)), the Sisters' Council in Swat, Pakistan was established to address women's rights and the violation of their fundamental rights. The establishment of Khwendo Jirga (the sisters' council) is a "material practice" (Moss & Dyke, [1999](#), 163) Pashtunwali dictates the ideological foundations of Pashtun society, resulting in a gender-specific, oppressive, and exploitative geographic structure. The Pashtun woman is pushed to the margins, leading to material practices that redefine her spatial identity, contest her marginalized location, and create her place within Pashtun spaces. These practices challenge and subvert hegemonic spatial boundaries set by Pashtun patriarchies, disbanding power relations that dictate her geographical location.

Conclusion

Transgression is a socio-cultural and material practice that opposes subversive spatial movement within normative geography, challenging the values considered correct and appropriate. It is a reaction to spatial hegemonies and aims to contest the superiority of a spatial entity. Transgression does not just cross geographical or social borders but also transforms the meaning of place, altering meanings that are not supported by those involved in the initial process of meaning-making. This continuous transgression leads to a reorientation of place, both socially and geographically, with new meanings dictated by those involved in the process.

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