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Building Community Resilience to Violent Extremism through Community-Based Youth Organizations: A Case of Post-Conflict North Waziristan, Pakistan

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Abstract: This paper presents the case of endogenously generated community resilience to violent extremism by discussing the formation and functioning of community-based youth organizations (CBYOs) in post-conflict North Waziristan. In doing so, the paper deciphers a micro-sociological phenomenon underlining the community (re)organization through their *new* mode of interaction and connectedness, sustaining a resilient social change in the post-conflict setting. The research employed a qualitative research design using the 'mini-ethnographic' case study method. For the purpose, twelve CBYOs and members of the local youth were interviewed, allowing for a subjective assessment of the emergence and sustenance of (community) resilience to violent extremism. Offering unique sociological perspectives on a post-conflict context, the study uncovers the community resilience generated through the formation of CBYOs by educated youth in North Waziristan. The social activities and engagement by youth, through education and awareness campaigns, are instilling a social change (by replacing the old ideas and customs with new ones) that aims at creating a peaceful society.

Keywords: community resilience; community-based youth organizations (CBYOs); North Waziristan; post-conflict; violent extremism

1. Introduction

The existing literature and practices concerning community resilience to violent extremism (CRVE) inform that the government-sanctioned CVE programming has been subject to substantial evaluation [1–4]. It is also important to note that the debate mainly developed to supplement counter-terrorism approaches, especially to the 'softer' side of countering strategies that attend to the engagement of individuals in ideologically motivated violence [5,6]. Additional data exploration suggests that CVE programming has been mainly formulated, executed and focused on communities through a 'top-down' approach by governments [7–9] or developmental organizations [9,10]. Therefore, it can be deduced from this broad appraisal that CVE approaches (as practice) are fragmented. Nevertheless, they underscore the alignment between community and resilience; the community is pivotal to resisting or countering violent extremism. However, it also elucidates the existing gap where endogenously generated community resilience, particularly in post-conflict contexts, has escaped scholarly attention.

With this in view, this paper explores the formation and functioning of CBYOs in post-conflict North Waziristan. It makes a case for collective actions of cooperation by youth in a post-conflict context with the potential for sociological evolution (in communities overall), and the transformative nature of a social context. Building on this understanding, post-conflict North Waziristan displays the formation of CBYOs on a self-help basis. The mandates of these CBYOs encompass the general welfare of communities with a particular emphasis on promoting education in North Waziristan with a common and resonant

slogan: 'we want peace'. In addition, the CBYOs make a convincing case of cooperation as a practice where they function through horizontal networks of voluntary engagement. The data suggest that most of these CBYOs are formed on the village level, as the communities are dispersed along with tribal affiliations where sub-tribes inhabit villages and locals bear similitude concerning their (tribal) identities. For instance, the CYO catering to the Eidak village in Mirali is called Eidak Beidar Zwanan (Eidak Aware Youngsters). Whereas, the CYO Peaceful Mashal Waziristan Association focuses on the Torikhel (Wazir) tribe and expands its services to the villages where the tribe's (Torikhel's) population is settled across North Waziristan.

Admittedly, this social evolution and transformation in post-conflict North Waziristan offer new insights into the social reconstruction in post-conflict contexts; it provides grounds to support a subjective assessment of community-based resilience toward (violent) extremism. Given that extremism underlies the emergence of conflict in the case of North Waziristan and has been vociferously interwoven into the community [11,12], the study of the post-conflict community's response to prevent extremism merits added scholarly attention. For instance, the formation of CBYOs creates new grounds for an empirical analysis of the (re)organization of post-conflict youth and/or communities. However, in post-conflict contexts, the consequences or outcomes of such a (re)organization generates equally substantive empirical queries. Therefore, this research offers insights into the (re)organizing and constitutive nature of communities in post-conflict contexts, which are substantially and structurally cultural. It further delineates the understanding over the emergence of (community) resilience as an outcome of the (re)organization of cultural communities.

The paper hereinafter devotes brief attention to the literature on CVE to elucidate a frame of analysis to study the (re)organization of community and its consequences in post-conflict contexts. Moreover, the paper has utilized an inductive approach through employing virtual ethnography to explore the contextual essence of resilience which further provides promising grounds for methodological innovation [13]. In concluding the findings, the discussion section joins the interplay between the CBYOs and the context to present *how* the 'community' in North Waziristan is generating local resilience to (violent) extremism.

2. Countering Violent Extremism and Community Resilience

The concept of resilience has gained an elemental position in the CVE discourse, primarily in advocating for a 'local turn'; however, it suffers from conceptual pluralism because of its broad application in socio-ecological, psychological studies, etc. [14–17]. To address these issues of theoretical sophistication to the concept in the CVE literature, it is important to understand how local (community) resilience emerges against violent extremism? Moreover, which factors are cardinals in promoting local resilience against violent extremism? Of particular concern is the materialization of community-based practices of resilience in response to the threat of violent extremism.

In this view, Wimelius and colleagues [18] correlate (de)radicalization and resilience to offer insights into the efficacy of nurturing local resilience by building partnerships with diverse local actors while keeping in view the 'cultural competence'. Adding more depth to the concept, Grossman et al. [19] explicate youth's role in resilience against violent extremism, but the conceptual distinction they offer between 'resilience' and 'risk' is arguably more pertinent. They contend that in the CVE discourse, resilience is the process of harnessing resources for community cohesion and positive (psychosocial) development, whereas 'risk' refers to increased odds of undesirable outcomes. Although, Mirahmadi [16] uses the BRAVE model, a community-led CVE program, to highlight a community-based approach against radicalization. Her findings suggest that engagement for social interaction in the community, education about warning signs of radicalization, awareness and cultural competency play a vital role in strengthening community resilience.

Given that the participation of local stakeholders is essential to community resilience, the role of religious actors remains another ignored aspect in the CVE discourse. Religion or religiosity has shared close proximity or causality with violent extremism, albeit non-

linear. Accordingly, in non-secular societies, religious actors hold significant ingress into local communities, so they can mobilize the communities to create solidarity and provide counter-ideologies/narratives [20]. Halafoff and Wright-Neville [21] also make noteworthy contributions to the CVE discourse by emphasizing 'inclusive networks' through multi-faith engagement between secular and religious actors in communities.

3. CRVE, Youth, Education and Community of Practice

Many studies have demonstrated the participation and susceptibility of youth toward violent extremism by highlighting early warning signs [22] which inversely sheds light on the role of education. Generally, the literature supports the role of education as a 'proactive' CVE measure rather than a reactive counter-terrorism approach. However, education merits distance from over-simplifications in view of community resilience against violent extremism. Mainly, education has been used by extremist/terrorist outfits to promote their specific worldview, or radical indoctrination, such as the case of certain madaris in Pakistan [23,24]. Therefore, in CVE, education pertains to expansion over countering the appeal of the terrorist narratives and ideas [25] (p. 4). Additionally, the role of education adheres to fostering a critical worldview and also to develop skills for a critical and resilient citizenship to nurture tolerant and inclusive societies. Another relevant, yet unattended, concept linking education to CVE is religious literacy. Religious literacy [26] recognizes that certain religious or cultural beliefs are dehumanizing. In doing so, religious literacy urges for the respect of diversity by capacitating and understanding religious, social, political and cultural factors to avoid confrontation about religious ideologies or ideas. Furthermore, both violent extremism and education are grounded in the process of 'transformation'. For instance, violent extremism or terrorism is pursued through certain pathways or psychological processes [27,28] where radical ideas transform into violent actions.

On the other hand, education through transformative learning [29] (pp. 6, 7) addresses external academic learning but also builds resilience and moral agency. Taylor et al. [29] present this argument for CVE through the Bali Peace Park and the subject-specific content in the shape of the 'Beyond Bali Curriculum' that reflects upon the 2002 Bali bombings. The peace park has been conceived to enhance community resilience and the curriculum offers various modules to further understand both the subject and CVE. Using the peace park and the devised curriculum, the idea of 'learning to be' is promoted which 'requires a new perspective on education that transcends an instrumentalist approach: it aims at educating the 'complete person' (p. 5). Meanwhile, the discussion by Aly et al. [30] on moral engagement and education informs that only external factors such as alienation and political disenchantment should not be the central focus of education. Rather, cultivating moral agency to overcome moral disengagement increases the chances of humane behavior. Diverting back to external academic learning by presenting the case of the provision of social services, especially education, in the post-war Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Leinweber [31] shares some peculiar findings. Despite the weaknesses of the Congolese state, the education sector seems to be flourishing with aid from parental contributions or religious organizations/faith-based organizations (FBOs) where these non-state actors can be contributed to 'reproducing the state at meso-level'. In sum, limited beneficiation by state and an increased role of FBOs have established the public schooling system as a 'hybrid institute' in the post-war DRC. While the aforementioned perspectives on education are important, empirical studies linking the role of education to violent extremism are lacking in the counter-terrorism discourse. Therefore, there is a need to explore the cognitive processes that involve identity transformation in students of varying fields that choose the path of violent extremism.

Regarding youth and violent extremism, another variable focuses on social media and communications, counter-propaganda/narratives, identity-based violence and CVE [32]. Under CVE, countering propaganda efforts are pursued through the language of 'counter-narratives', (reactive) communications framed with positional and intentional characteristics against another set of information [32] (pp. 7, 8). In the C/VE discourse, counter-

narratives are employed as a strategic form of communication where the aim is not discursive but rather confrontational. However, the literature remains relatively silent on how communities utilize their 'communication potential' to generate local resilience against violent extremism.

Nevertheless, Macnair and Frank [33] present the case of a community-based CVE counter-narrative campaign, 'Voices against Extremism'. Their work showcases that the social media CVE campaign (using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) was undertaken by students (youth) and was modeled around a counter-narrative challenging extremist views by humanizing minority groups through education, engagement and awareness. Besides the efficacy of such CVE campaigns, they represent an organized, structured, intentional top-down approach to addressing violent extremism. Communication, however, forms the essence of local communities; hence, how communities (themselves) develop strategies to use (digital) communications to build community resilience remains an empirically unchartered territory, especially in post-conflict contexts coupled with CVE efforts. Nonetheless, based on these studies, it can be contended that education and communication strategies (especially social networking) play a pivotal role in spreading or countering extremism. However, the application or significance of these variables in countering extremism through community resilience merits an inverted glance at community and a more subject assessment of resilience.

4. Research Context: North Waziristan

The North Waziristan Tribal District (NWTD), formerly known as the North Waziristan Agency, is one of the seven tribal tehsils in the (former) Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region. In May 2018, the FATA was merged with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, resulting in significant administrative and political changes for the whole region. Despite the ongoing post-conflict development measures, North Waziristan continues to face issues of security due to repeated attacks by militants, a lack of political representation and access to education facilities, a lack of employment opportunities and issues with compensation packages for relief and recovery caused by the military operation by the state [34,35]. In order to elucidate the impact of these changes on the local people and the society as a whole, especially how the people view extremism, certain explications about the indigenous culture are required on tribalism, Wazirwalla, the Maliki system and Maraka.

Wazirwalla is the term given to the unwritten customary law (Riwaj) practiced in Waziristan under the authority of the tribal elders (Mashraan). The Mashraan govern their respective villages and sub-tribes (Qoum/Khel) through Wazirwalla to deliver justice and resolve disputes [36], reinstating their authority and establishing trust within communities. On the other hand, the British introduced the *Maliki system* in the northwestern tribal areas in the nineteenth century in order to manage and control the Pashtun tribes. From a cultural perspective, Malakaan from within tribes held remarkable personal attributes, including adherence to traditional values, leadership skills, eloquence in speech and conversation, preferably a greater number of male heirs and relatives, added with family wealth and influence [37] (p. 3). It is important to note that in the tribal setting, the Malik and Mashraan were the patrons and guardians of their communities and villages. The tribal communities relied on the Malakaan and Mashraan to solve their disputes and address their problems through *Maraka* (tribal council) [37] (pp. 10–12). These practices continued in the tribal areas, including North Waziristan, even after Pakistan gained independence at the beginning of the 21st century, but they started to decline as the tribal areas became infested with militancy, extremism and terrorism.

Taking into account the rise of terrorism in North Waziristan, the use of the territory of tribal lands for jihad (holy war) in Afghanistan after 1979 became the underlying cause for the spread and strength of ultra-right Islamist groups [38,39] (pp. 61–63). These detrimental circumstances, especially the post-9/11 scenario, brought irreversible impacts on the socio-cultural and security landscape of North Waziristan [12]. The unhindered deterioration of

the security situation in North Waziristan culminated in Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 by the military establishment of Pakistan to eradicate foreign operating terrorist sanctuaries in the former Agency [40].

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design and Objectives

From the perspective of the society, people, culture and violence, (post-conflict) North Waziristan makes an appealing case to study community resilience to extremism. More so, the context of post-conflict North Waziristan foregrounds the 'endogenous' emergence of community resilience through the formation of CBYOs. This notion merits further exploration to understand how local (community) resilience emerges against violent extremism in post-conflict contexts? Moreover, which factors are cardinals in promoting local resilience against violent extremism? Of particular concern was the materialization of community-based resilience practices in response to the threat of violent extremism. To address these research objectives and questions, a qualitative research design using 'mini-ethnographic case study method' [41] was developed to conduct this study. The mini-ethnographic case study method combines virtual ethnography with case study research methods. Virtual ethnography [13] was found suitable in two inter-related aspects as a starting point. Firstly, it allowed the online excavation of various CBYOs functioning in North Waziristan which would have been quite difficult otherwise due to the lack of visibility allotted to the former Agency. Secondly, the activities of the CBYOs were very detailed through their social media presence (i.e., Facebook, Twitter and, in some cases, YouTube) where they were also reachable for further discussion.

5.2. Data Collection and Analysis

For the purposes of data collection, the authors took inferences from virtual ethnography and relied on online observations (e.g., Facebook and Twitter presence and activities) along with informal discussions and unstructured interviews with the local youth members of the CBYOs. Moreover, the authors thoroughly navigated and observed the online activities of the CBYOs for two months, mainly focusing on the followership of CBYOs, interaction with other CBYOs and locals, and developed short case studies and notes on each CBYO. Similarly, the interview and discussion-based data collection spanned over two months, from August to September 2020. It should be mentioned that because CBYOs existed in almost every village in North Waziristan, the authors particularly engaged those CBYOs with followership greater than one thousand on their Facebook pages. In order to engage the youth members for interviews and discussions, the authors reached out through the social media profiles of the CBYOs. The twelve CBYOs (see Table 1) that were chosen for interviews and discussions were functional in the tehsils (administrative units) of Miranshah, Mirali and Razmak in North Waziristan (see Figure 1). The respondents were provided with the research 'Informed Consent Form' and a detailed project information sheet. Researchers and respondents mutually agreed on not disclosing the identity of the respondents and abiding by all the ethical considerations outlined in the informed consent form.

While the authors developed an interview guide for discussions, the questions or discussion points were often altered due to context or the activities of the CBYOs. For instance, the Waziristan Student Alliance primarily used education to generate resilience to extremism, while the Youth of Waziristan relied on protests and demonstrations. Nonetheless, the recurring modalities of the CBYOs provided the basis for posing certain questions, admittedly including but not limited to the following: (i) the reasons for formation, purpose and function of the CBYO; (ii) the structure, composition and membership; (iii) tribal affiliation or ideological adherence; (iv) activities, local engagement and presence on the ground; (v) community acceptance with a particular focus on the Malak and traditional authority figures and also relations with local administration stationed Army personnel; (vi) views on and presence of extremism (pre and post-conflict); (vii) possible means by

CBYOs of resisting the emergence of (post-conflict) extremism; and (viii) views and vitality of education, protests, counter-narratives, informal spaces (i.e. social media or study circles) in countering extremism in North Waziristan. It should also be mentioned that for the interviews and discussions, usually the president, chairperson or the general secretary of the organization were engaged. Furthermore, follow-up interviews and informal discussions took place with the same members of the CBYOs to probe the ongoing activities on their Facebook pages which corresponded with the research objectives. In addition to that, three local youths (differentiated as 'local a', 'local b' and 'local c') from North Waziristan, who did not hold membership(s) in any of the CBYOs, were also interviewed to understand the perspectives of the locals about the CBYOs.

Table 1. List of CBYOs.

|	Name of CBYO	Area of Function
1.	Eidak Biedar Zwanan	Eidak Village, Mirali Tehsil
2.	Youth of Waziristan	Mirali and Miranshah Tehsils
3.	Waziristan Students Alliance	Mirali Tehsil
4.	Shakhimar Welfare Society	Shakhimar Village, Razmak Tehsil
5.	Hamdard Welfare Foundation Pakistan	Khaddi Village, Mirali Tehsil
6.	Peaceful Mashaal Waziristan Association	Razmak Tehsil
7.	Malakan Welfare Society	Malakan Village, Miranshah Tehsil
8.	Tribal Youth Association North Waziristan	Hurmuz Village, Mirali Tehsil
9.	All Qabail Student Organization	Mirali Tehsil
10.	League of Waziristan	Razmak and Mirali Tehsils
11.	MiranShah Welfare Society	Miranshah Tehsil
12.	Tappi Youth Welfare Society	Tappi Village, Miranshah Tehsil
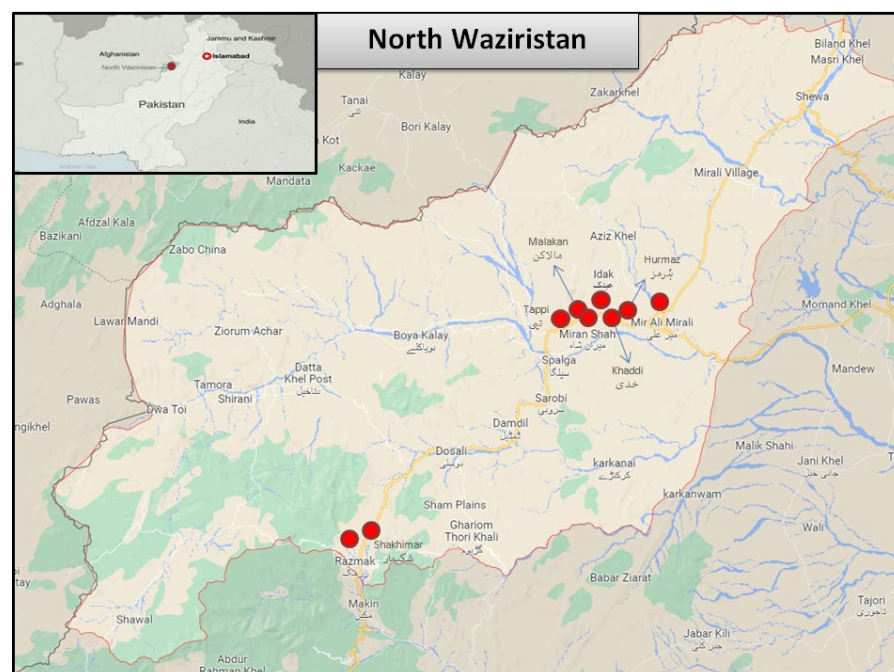
Figure 1. Location of interviewed CBYOs.

Data analysis was premised on identifying recurring and emerging themes from the interviews and discussions. The thematic analysis informed the local underpinning(s) on resilience to violent extremism in post-conflict North Waziristan. The themes were further complemented by the CBYOs case studies and notes based on online observations and activities of the organizations. The flexibility offered by thematic analysis helped to contrive not merely the formation and activities of the CBYOs in a post-conflict con-

text but also provided grounds for analyzing the impact of the locally built resilience to violent extremism.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

While the study makes pertinent contributions to the qualitative assessment of community resilience to violent extremism, it grapples with certain limitations. Most prominently, working on resilience to violent extremism in a transitioning (i.e., post-conflict) context hindered active trust with possible study respondents, given that the topic was not an open subject of discussion in North Waziristan. The sensitivity of the subject, coupled with engaging potential study respondents through social media platforms (i.e., Facebook Messenger), further complicated the process of gaining the trust of the locals. To overcome this, the authors became transparent and open regarding their own information and took the initial steps in introducing themselves(s) in detail. The authors also gave references to the information and activities they had observed on the Facebook timelines or Twitter feed of the CBYOs to the respective study respondents to reinforce their intentions of engaging solely for the purposes of research.

Other limitations of the study include the lack of participation of the female(s) or the Malkaan (i.e., tribal elders and leaders). However, given their lack of use of social media or the absence of female participation in CBYOs due to cultural conservatism, the views shared in this research are overwhelming of male 'educated' youth in North Waziristan. Lastly, it is important to indicate that the authors reached out to numerous CBYOs in all the *tehsils* of North Waziristan, but the CBYOs in Mirali, Miranshah and Razmak were exceptionally responsive, albeit other active CBYOs were identified in other *tehsils* as well. Hence, this study provides the views of the locals in the aforementioned areas primarily. Table 1 provides a list of CBYOs and their area(s) of function that remained engaged throughout the duration of the study and actively contributed their insights. In the following sections, with an emphasis on the qualitative approach, the article extensively uses primary data from online observations and interviews to build arguments and present a context-specific analysis of the functioning of CBYOs to counter extremism.

6. Results

6.1. Formation and Functioning of CBYOs in North Waziristan

The interaction with the local youth informed that the formation of the CBYOs dates back to the internal displacement when the people from North Waziristan, particularly Mirali and Miranshah, were settled in the Bakka Khel internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp in Bannu. For instance, during an interview with the Secretary of Media and Communications of Youth of Waziristan, he informed that the CBYO was formed principally to protest an early return of the people of Waziristan back to their homes. He further commented that the CBYO (i.e., Youth of Waziristan) quickly became the voice of the displaced population, professing their discontentment over the compensation packages or distribution of rations in the Bakka Khel IDP camp (personal communication, 13 August 2020). Over time, and after the return of the displaced local population, and especially in encountering the difficulties in access to basic facilities in post-conflict North Waziristan, the educated youth began to (re)organize themselves into groups with like-minded locals. This phenomenon of community youth organizations mushroomed rapidly across tehsils, union councils and villages and, resultantly, CBYOs began to spring up in North Waziristan.

Commenting on the formation of the CBYOs, the Chairman of the Waziristan Student Alliance stated that the priority of the CBYOs had been to 'deconstruct old ideas and then bring about change' (personal communication, 21 August 2020). Sharing similar views, the representatives of the CBYOs shared that they had formed the organizations to fill a certain 'vacuum' that directly addressed the needs of the local people, gave them representation, a platform to voice their grievances and, very importantly, to direct and invest the local youth of Waziristan toward betterment. Given such a broad aim, the mandates of the CBYOs expanded to include the overall welfare of the people in the respective areas of the CBYOs.

More specifically, the CBYOs focused on the issues concerning the revival of education, the importance of female education, the availability of health services (with a special emphasis on blood donation drives), promotion of tourism, fostering cultural and social activities and, very principally, to lodge protests against any injustice or issue that the locals faced.

The locals further elucidated on the realization of 'self-help' in the youth. In doing so, they explained that the membership of the CBYOs was mainly composed of the educated youth pursuing tertiary education in various universities outside Waziristan. The youth had also designed semi-formal structures to govern the CBYOs in which the president, chairperson or general secretary was considered the head of the organization who was supported by a vice-president. Moreover, other portfolios, such as head of finance and social media, were also distributed to members. These founding members usually formed the executive level of the CBYOs with the addition of youth volunteers who were registered with respective organizations. In short, the CBYOs were composed of a 'governing wing' and a 'volunteer wing', and this structuring was found recurring in all the CBYOs. Certain CBYOs had also established formal offices in Mirali and Miranshah, where they were accessible to the community, and most of them reported that the executive wing of the CBYOs held meetings often. While discussing the status of their registration, relations with local administration and the Pakistan Army in North Waziristan, the member of Youth of Waziristan shared that:

> 'We are not formally registered but work closely with the local administration and the military. In addition, we frequently hold jirgas with military officials. [However] we don't plan on registering our organization because we wish to work independently.' (personal communication, 13 August 2020)

It is also noteworthy that the CBYOs had no stable and continuous funding source for their activities; hence, they largely relied on charity from the community. Some of them also reported that they installed charity boxes at the local mosques and received generous donations from certain locals who were established outside Waziristan. One CBYO in particular, the Hamdard Welfare Foundation, had devised innovative means to ensure continuity in funds for the organization. They shared that they allotted membership cards for each member to deposit a small sum of money every month to the organization, which was used to source the welfare activities of the organization (personal communication, 2 September 2020). However, it was further stated that the organizations did not subscribe to any political affiliation or parties and had strict guidelines for their members to remain apolitical while representing the organization.

6.2. 'New Waziristan': Resilience to Extremism through Education, Awareness and Social Media

The youth reiterated that the improvement of education had been the central focus of the CBYOs in North Waziristan. For this, the CBYOs held education-related seminars, announced admissions in universities for youth, organized admission camps in Mirali and Miranshah (for erstwhile FATA-reserved seats), arranged after-school classes to help students with their homework, provided career counseling and made lists to keep records of students who wanted to pursue further education. For instance, providing a detailed account, the youth from the League of Waziristan reported that the CBYO had also been collecting data from various schools to record the names of students who had been avoiding or missing education and had registered the names of such children in schools, ensuring their enrolment (personal communication, 29 September 2020). The representative of the Waziristan Student Alliance summed up their activities for 'deconstructing old ideas to bring change' as:

> 'We distribute pamphlets, talk to people and organize discussions. We aim to introduce different and alternate ideas, hoping that "new" thinking will take place for acceptance, eventually. Similarly, we hold seminars and organize study circles. But our focus is not just on students; we work a lot with teachers, and that's where real change is needed. We

train them about teaching and interacting with students.' (personal communication, 21 August 2020)

The CBYOs also detailed the lack of education before the operation and the impact during the Zarb-e-Azb when the infrastructure of the educational institutes was destroyed due to heavy bombardment. The youth began highlighting the issue of education by protesting for the reconstruction of the schools that they dubbed as 'education dharna' (personal communication, 13 August 2020). Along with this, the youth were also trying to address the problem of 'ghost schools', which was the practice by the local Malakaan and Mashraan of converting government schools into bethak/hujra (guest rooms) as the schools were allotted to them in the administrative system before the merger (personal communication, 4 September 2020). The CBYOs had advocated and protested with the Education Department that the government schools needed to be reformed and that the local elites should hold no control or oversight. Moreover, the CBYOs had been attentive toward the impact of the 'cheating culture' in North Waziristan, where students were given fake degrees or marks due to the corruption within the Education Department in the former Agency.

While the CBYOs were limited in their capacities to establish schools or colleges within North Waziristan, some had found alternate means to collectivize their resources and influence education within their villages. For instance, the Malakan Welfare Society had established an institution named the 'Bright Learning Academy'. Through this academy, the CBYO helped dedicated students to prepare for entrance examinations in better educational institutes outside Waziristan. In this aspect, the CBYO shared that five students from the academy had been selected (after test and interview) in Ummah Children's Academy in Nowshera, and the organization had ensured all formalities and documentation (personal communication, 17 September 2020). In another instance, the Shakhimar Welfare Society informed that they had established two primary girls' schools which comprised two rooms each and were constructed using chipboard, given that the CBYO could manage this conveniently (personal communication, 25 August 2020). The Miranshah Welfare Society had opted to collect data on the students and made sure that the private schools, in particular, gave them concessions in their school fees. The organization also organized private tuitions for students after school through their educated volunteers (personal communication, 29 September 2020).

The locals were unanimous in their opinion that the membership of the CBYOs on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube grew quite rapidly. While internet services were limited in North Waziristan, the youth in Mirali and Miranshah were found to be relatively more active. Moreover, the locals iterated that the use of social media served to reform the image of the Pashtuns that had been distorted due to frequent insurgencies in the tribal areas, so through social media, the locals wished to show the activism and awareness of the Pashtun youth. They also added that since mainstream media in Pakistan ignored the entire erstwhile FATA region, social media provided the only outlets where the world could see North Waziristan from within. The representative from the Tribal Youth Association North Waziristan summed the importance of social media for the CBYOs and the youth in general in North Waziristan as:

> ' . . . *Social media is the "blood" of the society in North Waziristan and the backbone of our CBYOs. It provides access to the local government officials, to political leaders, to the locals of North Waziristan who are settled abroad*.' (personal communication, 29 September 2020)

Apart from the emphasis on education and the use of social media, the CBYOs advocated certain aspects that were intentional in inculcating awareness and engagement in the locals of Waziristan. In this regard, the chairperson of the Waziristan Student Alliance shared that 'we aim to introduce different and alternate ideas' (personal communication, 10 August 2020). Adding to this, a representative from Eidak Biedar Zwanan informed that they had created a group called 'Aman Pakhto Adabi Totolan' (peaceful Pashto literary

group), which gathered local poets and artists from and around Eidak Village where they convened weekly to recite their poems, write and sing songs. Furthermore, these artistic expressions of the group were showcased on Facebook, which provided recognition to the local artists and advanced the peaceful image of the Pashtun in North Waziristan (personal communication, 20 August 2020). Similarly, the Shakhimar Welfare Society ran an awareness program called the 'Green Shakhimar Campaign' to promote tourism in the region, especially given the scenic beauty of Razmak. The locals of Shakhimar furthered the idea of keeping the area clean while also protesting against the deforestation. Moreover, the CBYO also organized local carnivals (mela) where the whole village participated, and their signature games, such as tug of war (rasa kashai), were played (personal communication, 25 August 2020). The representative from the Peaceful Mashaal Waziristan Association, who was also a local journalist, summed up the impact of CBYOs in post-conflict North Waziristan as:

> '... *When the people moved from North Waziristan, their mindsets started to match [adapt] to those of the people of Bannu, Kohat, and Peshawar. And when these people came back after the displacement, they came with the realization of the harmful side of their certain customary norms and practices [riwaj]. They also saw the benefits of protesting peacefully and other facilities such as education, health. So, these years brought a great deal of change in the mindsets of our people; they realized the real power of education, protests and also unity. Indeed, such a change impacted the control of Malkaan and Mashraan*.' (personal communication, 4 September 2020)

6.3. The Challenges Faced by Community Youth Organizations in North Waziristan

The formation of the CBYOs in post-conflict North Waziristan and their persistence toward change can also be explained by recounting the challenges and the resistance the CBYOs face from the community overall. The CBYOs predominantly associated the lack of funds as the most pressing issue (as mentioned previously) because that hindered them from installing material changes. Over the lack of funds, a local commented, 'these organizations [CBYOs] are not selective in their approach; they do not discriminate; they try and help anyone who is in need. But they cannot offer long term solutions'. ('local b', personal communication, 27 August 2020).

Moreover, the local youth reasoned that rather than religious beliefs, there existed a certain 'mindset' in North Waziristan that needed reform. This particular pattern of thinking in Waziristan displayed the malleability of minds, mainly due to a lack of exposure to alternate ideas. A local youth supported this argument by stating that, in Waziristan, there was a natural inclination toward Afghanistan and the determination for 'Afghan Jihad' because everyone was raised with these ideas ('local a', personal communication, 25 August 2020). Adding another contribution to such a mindset, the local youth explicitly detailed how the social systems, such as maliki, perpetrated and perpetuated submissiveness in the communities while increasing the personal wealth and prestige of the tribal elites, creating grounds for social divisions and discontentment ('local b', personal communication, 17 September 2020). Moreover, the same social system further pronounced the tribal identities—Dawar and Wazir—within North Waziristan due to competition among the tribal elites, which consequently defined separate territorial demarcations between the two dominant tribes in North Waziristan ('local b', personal communication, 1 October 2020).

Due to cultural particularities, the CBYOs lamented over the resistance they faced from tribal elites and elders in North Waziristan. The local youth contended that education was the underlying difference between the mashar (elder) and kashar (youth) in Waziristan; the youth favored modernism while the elders feared that their youth and communities, in general, were ebbing away from their core traditional values, such as by promoting educating females ('local c', 2020, personal communication). However, the CBYOs blatantly rejected the social systems or structures which promoted the authority of the tribal elites. For instance, the respondent dismissed the decision making through the maraca or jirga system:

> *'We do not agree with such a nomination; we believe know-how of justice and the rule of law takes precedence over age and prestige. Other than this, females from our area [North Waziristan] cannot participate in jirgas and we believe they should be given a voice as well.'* (personal communication, 21 August 2020)

In addition, the CBYOs commented that the Mashar felt replaced by the youth in Waziristan, especially since the locals had started to bring their problems to the CBYOs and not the Malakaan or Mashraan. The CBYOs also had access to the local administration, whereas that was the prerogative of the Malakaan previously ('local a', personal communication, 29 September 2020).

The CBYOs also claimed that the post-conflict insecurity in North Waziristan in the form of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, cross-firings at the border, attacks by militants on security check-posts, etc., hindered the activities of the organizations, mainly because the gatherings of youths were viewed with suspicion, and they often had to face questioning by officials of the Pakistan Army. However, the locals contended that the responsibility to maintain peace in post-conflict North Waziristan was with the security agencies of the state. Detailing the difference between extremism and terrorism in North Waziristan, the locals stated that terrorism in the former Agency was apparent through attacks. However, extremism was evident through open calls and charities for jihad in Afghanistan, everything (undesirable) being declared un-Islamic by the ulema (religious clergy) in the mosques without a logical justification: open carry of weapons, general discussions on jihad, anti-stateness, no realization of individualism, no education, no rights for women, etc. (local c, personal communication, 15 September 2020). Another local further explained that:

> *'Before the operation, people were inclined towards talibanization and Afghan jihad, or even against our own Army. [Now] extremism in North Waziristan has changed; it has shifted from religiosity to nationalism. The people, especially the youth, are becoming disaffected because we demand our rights and we gave our allegiance to the state, and accepted its constitution; then why are not we given the same rights as the others? Why am I not safe in my own home?'* ('local b', personal communication, 27 August 2020)

7. Discussion and Conclusions

Several studies reveal that curbing violent extremism through law enforcement is a short-term strategy, as extremist behavior results from the sociopolitical and ideological perspectives that override the punitive objectivity of laws. To counter the ideological or systematic violence in polarized societies, locally relevant strategies are pivotal in any CVE program, especially through community-based initiatives [42,43]. The discussion in this paper revolves around the role of CBYOs in developing community resilience to violent extremism in the context of post-conflict North Waziristan. In doing so, it provided a subjective assessment of the emergence and sustenance of (community) resilience to violent extremism.

The assembling of youth groups into organizations—structured or unstructured, formal or informal—displays the (re)organization of the local community in North Waziristan. Although North Waziristan constitutes tribal communities and local communities bear close adherence to tribal affiliations and identities, the formation of CBYOs ushers a potential change in the social order. Community-led CVE initiatives support a non-securitized space for building the capacity of the locals to help reform society and create the enabling conditions for tolerance, peace and resilience. Similarly, the processes and practices of community-based organizations help society to understand the genesis of violent extremism and create a more inclusive and sustainable approach to counter it [44]. The findings explicate how the North Waziristan-based CBYOs have mobilized the local communities on the principle of 'self-help' which has further ascended their collectivism and connectedness. Their scope expands to general welfare but especially addresses the education and awareness of the local communities. The observations from their online activities and posts, corroborated through interviews, elucidate their two functional modes. Firstly,

by holding Jirga/Maraka (meetings), proceeding to social media campaigns to raise their issues and then launching protests in the streets if their demands remain unattended. In the second instance, the focus has been to 'deconstruct' (literally and normatively) old ideas and customs, introduce change and emphasize acceptance. The latter approach was found to be more resonant with issues surrounding promoting education, especially female education. While the activities of CBYOs may indicate the functioning of informal and unstructured/semi-structured organizations, in the case of North Waziristan, they possess more depth.

The activities of the CBYOs depict their social connectedness through their collective actions by essentially preventing the reoccurrence of violent extremism. Most starkly, it bears contrast to the social ordering where the Malkaan and Mashraan were the guardians of their respective communities. Instead, the CBYOs have created horizontal networks of community engagement in which the power of the tribal elites has been reduced in establishing (post-conflict) change. Even more so, this divide or social evolution and transformation has drawn demarcations between the community, dividing the elders and the youth, and the apparently increasing activism of the youth signifies the ascendency of the ideas supported by the youth. This is also where the context-specific extremism in North Waziristan is given more shape. Moreover, the (re)organization of youth showcases the realization within local communities to prevent the reoccurrence of conflict by confronting old ideas and customs with new ones.

In the aftermath of conflict and counter-terrorism operations in North Waziristan, the education sector was severely affected, and it was evident by the attacks on schools which were often used as temporary shelters for IDPs. Concerns were also raised about the radicalization of the curriculum in tribal areas [45]. In this view, CBYOs conceived that access to education could serve as the main barrier between them and extremist organizations. Building on these ideas, the aspirations and activities of the CBOs are generating a projection into the future: an idea of Waziristan that has been (re)invented with new possibilities.

In addition, the activism and engagement of CBYOs have created new significations in the post-conflict scenario. For instance, the organizations project a peaceful image of post-conflict communities and promote education (female or otherwise). Overall, they have created diversification in the networks of meanings that dictate social interaction, hence producing *new* significations (i.e., meanings). This has consequently ushered a new 'new' Waziristan, building resilience that stands as a barrier to the return of extremism in the community.

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