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The War on Terror is a War on Women: The Impact of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism on Women's Education in Swat, Khyber Pukhtunkhwah (Pakistan)

By Shabana Shamaas Gul Khattak¹

Abstract

This article was derived from the author's Postdoctoral Study, *'The War on Terror is a War on Women in Swat Valley: Women's Education under Terror and Displacement (2006-2011)*. Women's education was affected the most during periods of terrorism in Swat Valley. The main targets of the militants were women's educational institutes. The situation further worsened when the state government launched military operations in the name of the war on terror (counter-terrorism), which forced a huge number of local inhabitants to leave the valley and utterly blocked their educational accessibility for a long time. This study addresses how those women experienced or somehow challenged terrorism and counter-terrorism for their continuation or discontinuation of education. The study is based primarily on the qualitative data analysis of seven in-depth semi-structured interviews from the seven *tehsils* (sub-districts) of Swat. The study examines the actual role of women under conditions of patriarchal-peace, armed conflicts (terrorism and counter-terrorism), and displacement. This includes the local politics of *Tanzeem-i-Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi* (TNSM²), and the influence of patriarchal culture on the country's politics are further analysed. While addressing the above issues, this study also highlights the need to embark on further in-depth research on Swat with special reference to women's education; such research can be used to support Swati women in their struggle for education, well-being, and empowerment.

Keywords: women's education, Swat, terrorism, war on terror, displacement, Pakistan

Introduction

Terrorism and the war on terror are two major sources of disruption and violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan. These conflicts have greatly affected the common peoples' lives with intense destruction of their education system, particularly girls' education. This study includes a case study of the district of Swat (in Pukhtunkhwah Province, Pakistan), which had been under

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² The Movement for the Restoration of Islamic Sharia law is the local Taliban group in Swat.

the direct control of the Taliban for more than two years (2007-09). This is a story about the birthplace of the renowned education and peace activist Malala Yousafzai, who was the target of a murder attempt for her explicit support of girls' and women's education. The Taliban wanted to stop her voice but failed, and now the Swat valley echoes with many similar voices.

Sadly, Malala's story is not unique. Throughout the world, girls are neglected, denied education, physically mistreated, sexually abused, sold into slavery, mutilated, and married against their will in the name of tradition, religion, honor, and male entitlement (Mary Ellsberg, George Washington University). My study will introduce more Malalas who stood up for their education and to date are living in Swat serving in peace-building and peace-keeping efforts.

Swat was a developed princely state of North West India in the 17th century. Mian Gul Abdul Wadud was the first *Wali Sahib* (ruler) of Swat in 1917. He developed a well-established education system for both genders along with other amenities for his people. His own judicial system (*Dasturul Amal*) was famous for prompt law and order. The state provided access to higher education in the early 1950s. The state had good educational infrastructure; from 1949-69 there were 3 colleges, 36 high schools, 30 middle schools, and more than 270 primary and lower primary schools (both girls and boys), as well as 16 hospitals and 45 dispensaries (Rome, 2009). According to the NWFP Annual Statistical Report (2009), before the conflict, the total number of schools for both genders was 1270 primary schools, 132 middle schools, 87 high schools, 17 higher secondary schools, and 8 degree colleges (See Rome, 2009 and 2008 for further contextual background information of Swat). After the incorporation of Swat into Pakistan in 1969, Rome (2008) criticised the development works in Swat because, while the educational institutes, schools, colleges, and vocational training centers for women increased in numbers, they decreased in quality standards. The government of Pakistan failed to integrate Swat fully into Pakistan (Aziz and Luras, 2010) under PATA (Provincially Autonomous Tribal Area) regulations. According to Fleischner (2011),

the absence of democratic representation at local level exacerbated class differentiation and left the poor powerless against the political elite in terms of access to justice and economic inequalities. Over to these, the decades long social, economic and political inequalities, Khanism (Landlordism), ethnic or religious fractionalization and weak government judicial system locally know as western judicial system increased the grievances of the people particularly marginalized classes instead of giving them relief. (cited in Rome, 2009:27)

These factors have led to the fragmentation of the social system and coerced local people to support and join the new networks of the Taliban with hope, greed, and grievances (Aziz and Luras, 2010). The Taliban destroyed and damaged both girls' and boys' schools in the area; while they did not openly oppose boys' education, they damaged it along with girls' education. Similarly, the state military operations (2007- 2009) further destroyed and damaged schools and caused the displacement of 600,000 inhabitants to other parts of Pakistan.

The aim of this study is to explore the cause and effect relationship of war and displacement on women's education attainment and to analyze women's lived experiences of their education attainment. Furthermore, their struggle, which includes facing physical and psychological traumas, are examined in this study. In addition to women's future educational opportunities and socio-educational problems they faced or are still facing, the continuing effects of an immobilized educational infrastructure are also under consideration in this study.

Theorizing Terrorism in the Valley

My theoretical framework is informed by structural functionalism, or the theory of functionalism³. It theorizes that the societal structure of Swat left a space for the rise of Taliban, and it explores a set of human behaviors and complexities of a society that maintain harmony and peace (Ritzer, 2010).

Thus, I theorize terrorism as a socially structured concept for social change, but this dysfunctional group (the Taliban) challenged the prevailing social functions of the society. The main focus of Talibanization was various social institutions of Swat, such as family units, government, judiciary, health, education, and religion. As a dysfunctional group of the society, the Taliban did not change the mega social structure of Swat; they therefore chose the strong, stable social institutions (like family, judiciary, and education, especially women's education) that were relatively easy to dominate. The social structural ideology of the Taliban defined conservative gender roles (according to their patriarchal ideology) to control women's 'agency'. They declared women's education and work un-Islamic and inculcated by western values and obscenity (Ali and Zeb, 2014), while propagating ideals of stereotypical oppressive gender-roles. The society strongly rejected this new notion of gender allocation and confronted the dysfunctional groups of the Taliban.

Eventually, the Taliban increased violence and vicious persecution in the valley. Hence, the patriarchal understanding of religion and culture underlined the Taliban's focus on gendered bodies and sexuality (Bari, 2010:33). Bari argues,

They use patriarchal religious and cultural frameworks to justify the atrocities they commit against women to preserve their traditional roles in the reproductive sphere, within the four walls of homes. The most prominent feature of Talibanization is its gendered nature. They use political violence to ensure the continuity in sexual hierarchy and gender status quo. They destroyed educational institutions in general and women's schools in particular as it symbolizes modernity and holds the promise to open new avenues for women's empowerment. They were particularly strict in controlling women's mobility outside the home in the public sphere. They reasserted their misogynist myopic view of Islam and Muslim identity through compulsory veiling of women through shuttlecock *burqa* and impinging on their rights. (Bari, 2010:33)

Conceptualizing Women and Education in Armed Conflicts

For several decades we have been theorising that poverty and patriarchy affected women's education in Pakistan, and preference has been given to male education (Azhar, 2009). This gender bias in education has contributed to the current culture and patriarchal nature of society. However, the recent decades raised new critical issues of women's security in education, where education is under attack, particularly women's education, in conflict zones. However, recent decades have raised new critical issues of women's security in education since education, particularly women's education, is under attack in conflict zones. In Syria, up to January 2013,

³ Robert King Merton (1910-2003) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) are the two prominent figures supporting this theory.

more than 3,900 girls' schools have been destroyed, occupied, or used for purposes other than education (Martinez, 2013:5). Similarly, in Afghanistan, 213 girls' schools have been destroyed, affecting 51,000 girls who now have no access to education (Martinez, 2013).

Studies of women living under conditions of war and terror is an emerging field of study, but there are virtually few empirical quantified studies on the issue in Pukhtunkhwah (for examples, see Khan, 2015; Ali and Zeb, 2014; Bari, 2010), and those lack in-depth analysis of women's own voices. While international organisations bombard us with facts and figures, UNESCO (2010) estimated about 120,000 women students and 8,000 women teachers were killed during 2009 as a result of the attacks on women's educational institutes in Swat. Similarly, Ahmad (2012) observed a radical decline of enrollment of girls as compared to boys in state primary schools of Pukhtunkhwah during 2007-2010. Militancy in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) destroyed 458 educational institutions (317 boys' and 141 girls')⁴ with respective dropout rates of 63% and 77% (Naqvi et al., 2012). In Swat, 213 schools (120 fully and 93 partially) were damaged (Ali and Zeb, 2014). However, the NWFP: ASR (2009) reported that 282 girls' schools (121 fully and 161 partially) were damaged (Khan, 2015; ESP, 2012; Ahmad, 2012). Nevertheless, illiteracy, poverty, and ignorance of the local masses in Swat and FATA encouraged militants to manipulate Islamic teachings with mystified cultural and religious discourses. The ideology of the Taliban brainwashed the poor and ignorant inhabitants with promises of money and direct entry into Paradise after martyrdom. Education is the key to reducing militancy and terrorism (Afzal, 2011), but poor educational infrastructure and security discourages parents to send their daughters for education.

Very few writers focused on women's lives during war and the war on terror in Muslim societies; Bellamy et al. (2009) and Burke (2010) open up important conversations between hitherto under-exploited strategic, economic, ethical, and legal approaches, joining them to rethink how states can best respond to terrorism with a focus on the security of women and children in conflict zones. Lorentzen and Turpin (1998) argue why war and terror are considered 'men's business' while the majority of casualties and displaced refugees are women.

Similarly, Lee-Koo (2010:42) argues that both war and the war on terror are synonymous with a war on women⁵ because their rights and dignity are exploited. The women of Afghanistan and Iraq who faced (and are facing) terror, sexual harassment, and domestic violence because of a lack of education in families tightly guard their gendered identities. Consequently, during the war, 90 Iraqi women became widows every day and are more likely to become victims of honour crimes or trafficking, deprived of education, and impoverished (Beaumont, 2006; cited in Lee-Koo, 2010:43). After the Gulf War, the enrolment rate of women and girls in schools dropped to 92% in the mid-1980s and 70% in the 1990s (Amr, 2003; cited in Kirk, 2003:5). Lee-Koo's (2010) critical feminist security studies analysis unwraps misinterpretation about the 'war on terror,' arguing that it is a destruction and degradation of women's lives at war and cannot bring peace in the world. Although, Kirk (2003:2) argues by referencing Smith and Vaux (2002) that

There are no clear causal linkages between lack of education and conflict nor between conflict, gender and education, as girls are disproportionately represented within the numbers of out of school children in conflict and post-conflict situations, understanding the linkages between gender, education and conflict is

⁴ Pakistan education statistics 2007-2008, Ministry of Education
<http://www.moe.gov.pk/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202007-08.pdf>

⁵ My study's title is inspired by this study.

an important Education For All issue. It is also a human rights issue, and more specifically a women's and girls' rights issue.

Women's education in Swat was attacked by the Taliban to subjugate and to maintain an un-Islamic ideology (Mohsin, 2014). Women discontinued their education while living with trauma, fear of destruction, killing, and chaotic memories of blasting and shelling. Similarly, during conflicts in Kosovo, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, girls were kept away from schools because of their fear of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse (Kirk, 2003). However, no sexual incidents have been recorded against the Swat Taliban. Indeed, their public violence harassed locals, and parents preferred to keep their daughters home rather than travel to long-distance schools. In Northern Uganda, people got their daughters married to the militia for the protection of their families' honour, daughters, and themselves (Kirk, 2003).

Theories of war and conflict have always impacted women negatively; Bari (2010) and Kirk (2003) acknowledge that gender experiences vary from society to society and culture to culture. Conflicts contribute to the worsening of gender enrolment when it comes to girls as compared to boys because of the threat to their sexual vulnerability and dignity. In Rwanda, 66% of teachers fled or were killed (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; cited in Kirk, 2003). Likewise, women teachers were threatened and forced to isolate themselves from public life in Swat. Lack of safety and security imprisoned them or compelled to change their locality. Thus, the terms anti-war, anti-militarism, and peace movements can be best addressed by mainstreaming gender and women's active roles in the restoration of peace, justice, and democracy (Cockburn, 2012).

I argue that feminists' peace and conflict theories are urgently necessary to analyse war and conflict in relation to violence against, oppression and exploitation of women in FATA and Swat. Violence against women, whether it is in the household or due to war, is an essential paradigm for feminist peace and conflict theorists, which 'is symptomatic for feminist studies, the questioning of normative standards is grounded in women's epistemology' (Weber, 2006:1). Since the mechanism of silencing is often used against women in conflict zones around the world, it is important to disseminate unreported women's knowledge and experiences, because:

Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory reflects on the need of visibility of women in conflicts and has led to a broader understanding of security issues. It introduced the interconnectedness of all forms of violence: domestic, societal, state based and inter-state and its gendered dimension. It critically discussed the collaboration of the 'Beautiful Soul' (Jean Bethke Elshtain, 1987) in the machinery of violence. The slogan of the Western nineteen-sixty' women's movement: 'The personal is political' can still be seen as the common ground for feminist peace and conflict theory to transform normative legitimization of the use of violence. (Weber, 2006:2)

We need to think about more rational arguments instead of emblematic points of view for war and conflict initiatives by aggressive, active men, who are portrayed as trouble makers or creators of war, conflicts, and destructions; while women in the passive or submissive roles are always portrayed as sufferers or victims of those conflicts. According to Betty Reardon (1985) and Carol Pateman (1988)⁶, this is a dominant argument of feminist peace and conflict theory.

⁶ cited in Weber, 2006.

Moreover, feminist peace and conflict theories overwhelmingly highlight women silencing their own experiences during war and conflict. According to Weber (2006), feminist peace and conflict theory recommends broader measures to address women's security issues, because gender issues or violence against women, such as familial, societal, and state and inter-state violence, all have gendered dimensions. Therefore, this study is an attempt on one side to fill the existing gap in the literature of knowledge regarding gendered perspectives and experiences during terrorism and counter-terrorism in Swat, and on the other end, an initiative to give some voices to the unvoiced Swati women sufferers of the conflict. Moreover, feminists' peace and conflict theory/ies may help to bring more gendered peace and stability in Swat.

Methodology

This qualitative research approach involved seven in-depth semi-structured interviews of life stories from research subjects from seven *tehsils* (sub-districts) of Swat District. The research subjects were randomly selected from the University of Swat. Most of them were MA/MSc students between the ages of 24-30, while two of them were recent graduates from winter 2016, the first ever convocation of the University of Swat. Their confidentiality and anonymity were assured according to the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London (SOAS) Research Ethics Policy. I used pseudonyms for my interview subjects to protect their identities for security reasons.

My research questions were:

- How were their educational experiences during 2006-2011?
- How did terrorism, counter-terrorism, and displacement affect their education and gender identity, experiences and expressions?
- What were the dynamic life changing experiences which made their education possible or impossible?
- What were their main struggles towards their own higher education opportunities?

I acknowledge that the sample size of my study could be considered a limitation. However, this method of qualitative data collection tool gives us lived experiences of the interviewees that we can use to make generalizations and understand the broader picture of the main issues which I am concerned about in Swat. Therefore, my study legitimizes some information rather than documenting the complete experiences of women that affected their education. Indeed, this limitation had a positive impact: it enabled me to focus on a smaller group and thereby gain and interpret data that was in-depth and focused more sharply on the chosen issues.

Data Analysis

I observed a clear impact of terror and displacement on women's education. I consciously wanted to hear about their experiences under different conditions: first, in a peaceful, pre-conflict environment; then, in the conflict era; followed by episodes of displacement; and, finally, in a post-conflict environment.

My research subjects's experiences under terror and displacement may furnish unique new theories for western academia, which stereotypes the women of Swat. Thus, the interviews

contain content and theme analysis, which identifies emerging themes from the data rather than predicting what themes will occur before the analysis. I randomly ordered their details. I observed a great deal of courage and audacity in my research subjects, which they explicitly shared with their sorrows and happiness. Being a native from the same province, I was privileged to converse without language barriers in a comfortable way and encourage them to talk truthfully. We expressed amusement, tears, anxiety, dejection, and happiness, but had fun.

Thus, my content and theme analysis has enriched all of the feelings evolving around gender role dynamics, patriarchy, and educational provisions.

Education under Peace and Pukhtunwali⁷

The stories begin with the boisterous laughs of my research subjects running around in the greenery of Swat in peace and patriarchy:

My sweet memories of childhood are playing with my siblings. Our most exciting moments were when we go outside without our mum's permission. (Kashmala)

My childhood was in peace and joy. I remembered that I loved to play with my dolls in a doll house. Every single day there would be a marriage of my doll with my other cousin sisters' male doll. We enjoyed those moments and pretended to have a wedding with all our Pukhtun customs and rituals. (Perkha)

In their childhood, they never felt or remember feeling any kind of traditional or patriarchal gender discrimination. Later, in adulthood, they realised the Swat patriarchal societal norms, but stated, 'We do not have the courage to talk against it explicitly' (Spalmai).

The societal structure in which men grasp influence over property and family members is considered patriarchy. The traditionalist society of Swat and Pukhtunkhwah overall has set rules that males of the family are superior to women, and when the father dies, the authority will be transferred to the eldest son. If the family has no son, then this authority will be handed over to uncles or cousins in the family because, in Pukhtun, extended families stand with each other in every hardship and consider themselves as a whole family. This extended family system makes a strong family unit that protects each other and an enjoyable bond among siblings, cousins, brothers, and sisters.

I enjoyed being with my siblings and cousins in joint family system. We were living in a peaceful atmosphere. As you are aware Swat is one of the famous tourist spots in Pakistan, the Switzerland of Asia. (Zarghuna)

I miss when I would go to my granny's house especially on Eid, when all my cousins got together. We used to play all sorts of games such as hide and seek, cricket, watching three or four films on VCR all night, swinging outside the house

⁷ The traditionalist society of Swat and Pukhtunkhwah overall has the unwritten yet strict code of social behaviour, known as *Pukhtunwali* (پښتونوالی). Pukhtunkhwah sets patriarchal rules that males of the family are superior to women, and when the father dies, the authority will be transferred to the eldest son.

under the shade of tree and Banri chakh⁸, wow! Returning home and leaving my cousins was such a huge grief that it always took few days to heal after [Smiling]. (Gulalai)

This is a positive side of the extended family, which resulted in a high rate of cousins' marriages, which further strengthened male-domination. Similarly, Rehman (2015) concluded that a strong tie of cousin marriages lies in conceptions of modesty and Pukhtun culture is deeply rooted in a patriarchal system⁹. However, Shah (1998) believes that following the unwritten yet strict code of social behaviour, known as *Pukhtunwali* (پښتونوالی), and the strongly held belief that it is superior makes the people of the region conservative in outlook, but to some extent liberal, too. The research subjects enjoyed their childhoods with family boys, and going to school with them was never criticized:

There were no restrictions for girls and boys playing or studying together. We played in our Hujra [male guest house] all day with our boy cousins; back then we did not distinguish our children in boys' and girls' categories. (Gulalai)

Swat is one of the most conservative areas of Pukhtunkhwah, which has stricter traditions of women's honour and *purdah* (veiling). The majority of women in Pukhtunkhwah follow the Islamic or more culturally-specific veiling (*burqah* or *panroney*, long shawl). Men do not like mixed-gender gatherings. Therefore, the patriarchal society favours single-sex schools and universities for their daughters. They had the opinion that daughters are financial burdens because of dowry arrangements for marriage. Thus, investment in their education is considered a waste because they have to be well-trained for doing household chores when they are married. So, parents are always in search of good and early marriage proposals.

We are culture slaves; therefore, girls' education isn't welcomed in our village. It is the prevailing culture here that people criticise when they see someone's daughters or sisters are going to school. Actually, they do not want us to think liberally and overtly, nor let us get married of our own choice. We follow culture, not Islam. Women are always considered a financial and social burden, so parents really want to get her married to the person of their choice. (Gulalai)

Islam gives men the role of the protector and provider for the family, so it is believed in Pukhtun society that there is no need to educate women to be part of the workforce unless the family circumstances make this a necessity. This is because the Pukhtun do not like working women. Women who work are seen as a disgrace to the family honour, as well as giving the impression that the family men are not capable of earning good money. Therefore, men's education is considered more important, and if a woman pursues education, she would naturally want to work outside the home, bringing shame to the entire family. Thus, women's education did not get any appreciation for centuries.

⁸ Banri Chakh is a tradition swing for four people.

⁹ For further detail of cousins' marriage politics in Pukhtuns, see Anderson, J. (1982) 'Cousin Marriage in Context' *Folk*, 24 (2) Pp. 7-28.

Education under Armed Conflicts

Patriarchy granted a fertile ground for militancy and encouraged the Taliban to begin their strategic overhaul of women's rights through FM radio sermons:

Mullai Saib [Maulana Fazlullah] attracted women folk with his sermons on FM radio service. He principally discussed rulings of women's rights, such as wife, inheritance, and polygamy. Women felt valued that Mullai Saib is pro-women's rights. Every household bought a radio to listen to him. Our people are very religious-minded; we love and are proud of our religion, so whoever talks about Islam, we listen to them carefully. Thus, the Taliban got this weak point and used it against the innocent people. We saw that both genders were attracted to Deeni [Islamic] education. When they realised that the pulse of society was in their hands, the tune and temperament of his sermons turned towards gender violence. (Gulalai)

A women's right of inheritance is half a share of her father's property, but she may be denied it as an alternative to giving a dowry. It is against *Pukhtunwali* for a woman to take a share from her brothers. In addition, for centuries women have been sold and exchanged in order to settle family or land disputes, a practice known as *swarra* (see Shaheen, 2000 for further details). These and similar gender issues were explicitly addressed by Fazlullah's *Shaheen Force* on the spot that made him the most famous protagonist of Swat;

Mullah Fazlullah deliberately picked gender topics. As you are aware [pointed at me], the majority of Pukhtuns do not give shares to their sisters and daughters. So, he always chose relevant Quranic verses supportive of women's inheritance. None of the men in our area had the courage to refuse giving a share to his daughter or sister during the reign of the Taliban. He resolved so many inheritance disputes between women and their brothers. Thus, the women felt empowered that there is a man who is talking about our rights and standing beside us; that made them his blind followers. More interestingly, his Shaheen Force marched street by street solving women's property and domestic issues with their husbands; that made Fazlullah a king without a crown. Women started discussing their personal and family disputes and problems. (Kashmala)

The Taliban, after completely hypnotizing the women folk, targeted their education and attire with the strong conviction that the conservative minded women and men of the society would support their atrocities.

'This is not Europe, where women will go out for education and work,' once Fazlullah started his sermon furiously. Then he started mentioning girls' names with their father's and villages' names: 'That Miss Y, daughter of X, left the school and Allah will reward her and her family here and the Hereafter. A long list of duas [invocations] was mentioned for the family for their courageous act of leaving school. This was so fascinating for the listeners, from the voice of Fazlullah, a celebrity! In response, lots of women and girls wanted their name to

be mentioned by Mullahi Saib with his blessing [Gulalai started laughing; we really enjoyed these stories]. (Gulalai)

When the Taliban realised that most of the girls in private, non-elite English schools continued going to school, they started street threatening them with the justification that *'on the Day of Judgment, Allah will ask me why I did not stop my people from evil doing'* (Malghalara).

In Year 9, I was not observing purdah [veiling] and not covering my face as was the prevailing custom in our Swat. My high school was quite far away from my village, so I used to go by local transport. Once, I was waiting with my friend at the bus stop when a person came near us and warned us: 'Wear a burqah from tomorrow, otherwise we will not let you go to the school.' I was very frightened, so from the next day we started proper veiling because we really loved and wanted to continue our education. (Spalmai)

Malghalara adds:

I was in Year 11 when I started wearing the shuttlecock burqah because of the Taliban's terror. Since whoever wore a panrone, they lashed her in public, which they called 'sang saarol' [stoned to death]. Therefore, my parents said to wear a burqah- at least you would continue your education. However, that was not enough. They took our burqahs to check our shalwar kameez [traditional outfit], are they tight or loose, and do we put on some make up, or do we pluck our eyebrows? They were criticizing and asking such silly questions to irritate us, so eventually we may stop going to college. Therefore, at last, I was so fed up with their day-to-day insults and humiliation that I discontinued my education.

The Taliban did not rely on only threatening the girls. They moved to the most barbaric actions:

Once, I was going to school; then, all of the sudden, the driver stopped the bus because there was a dead body in the middle of the road and his head was put on the top of his chest. All the students felt sick and started screaming and vomiting. (Spalmai)

Actually, the Taliban wanted to spread their extreme atrocities around Swat so that no girl would leave the house to go to school. Thus, school girls' security was a major problem and the majority of parents stopped sending them to schools. However, the crisis between the state army and the Taliban was out of control during the first operation in 2007. There was constant bombing, firing, and shelling that paralyzed all parts of Swat life.

During the military operation, regular curfews badly affected our education. So sometimes my school opened on Sundays because of our board exam. Once, in the morning, all of a sudden we heard heavy firing and a drastic blast in the Baghicha Army camp. Resultantly, the bullets started striking in our classrooms.

Our teachers told us to sit on the floor, but all the students were very terrified and shivering. I spent that day in the school. (Spalmai)

Another planned strategy of the Taliban was their targeting of uneducated youth, who have a very limited understanding of Islam and could be easily brainwashed:

The boys who were from poor families studied with us in primary schools and were constantly failing in their grades. Later, we came to know that they joined the Taliban's group. So, when a person has no basic education, how could he understand the teachings of the Quran? (Spalmai)

So, lack of education and poverty were some of the causes of juvenile radicalisation. The role of gender was misinterpreted and they declared women's education un-Islamic:

The Taliban proclaimed girls' education un-Islamic. They said, 'In Islam, education is not important for girls. As soon a girl reaches puberty, she should get married. Education is not for girls. It is only for boys to be a bread earner for the family.' (Spozhmai)

Although Islam made it obligatory for men and women to attain education, the Taliban wanted to restructure the societal norms by the introduction of their own misogynistic interpretation of Islam, claiming that '*contemporary education is taking us to indecency and vulgarity*' (Malghalara).

My research subjects admitted that militancy and military operations both negatively affected their education:

Our schools used to close for weeks and weeks due to unlimited curfews, sometimes 72 hours, 48 hours, but we were aware that their entire struggle is to get rid of these nasty militants. But I can see now that both Talibanisation and military operations have negative effects on education. (Zarghuna moaned)

Most of my research subjects were very disappointed with the state army strategies:

The shelling, rocket launchers, and bombardment harassed, injured, and killed local innocent residents. Then the state army proclaimed that we should leave because they would soon begin an intense operation. We were asked to leave Swat within few hours, but before we reached a safe place, they ordered a curfew. We were at the mercy of Allah, just sitting by the road side. People were walking towards unknown destinations and spent days and nights on the roads. (Spozhmai)

Spozhmai further adds:

After the military operation, my family came back to Swat with great optimism of peace, but there was no peace. Day-to-day curfews badly affected our education access in our hometown. We requested provincial government and Armed forces

authorities to kindly reduce the hours of curfew in the morning and afternoon home times, please, because our children's education has already been destroyed by the Taliban.

Thus, militarization has been used as a tool for cultural governance of identity and maintenance of gender stratification (Sjoberg and Via, 2010). However, Perkha was pleased with the cooperation of military forces:

During the military operations of 2009, I was on my preps leave [examination preparation leave] for first year [Year 11] exam. The inhabitants of Khwazakhela [a sub-district of Swat] were happy with the cooperation of the state army. Our curfew hours were lenient, and all the local schools gave their examination details to the armed forces, so they scheduled their curfew timing accordingly. Thus, our final exams went smoothly without any interruption. (Perkha)

Thus, we can say that armed conflicts immensely affected education. However, the research subjects had mixed feelings of disappointment and appreciation in response to war on terror strategies. In some areas, access to the educational institutes was made possible for both genders, while in other areas, where the Taliban was stationed, they continued enforcing curfew hours and shelling.

Education under Displacement

The years 2007 and 2009 saw massive displacement in the South Asian region. The first counter-terrorist operation, *Rah-e-Haq* (Righteous Path), launched in October-December 2007 (Ahmad, 2012). However, this did not stop the Taliban's destruction. Then, the second counter-terrorist operation, *Rah-e-Rast* (the Straight Path), was launched on 28 April 2009 against the militants in Swat (Afridi et al., 2014). The people were not happy with their forced temporary migration to other districts because of the government's insufficient facilities to accommodate such a massive crowd, but they had no option left. Leaving Swat was the most grievous and distressing experience for my research subjects:

I didn't pack my clothes and other things of necessity because I want to take my books to get prepared for my matric [Year 10 matriculation] exam. I ensured my Mum that I will carry my heavy bag of books because we need to leave through a mountainous area. We left Swat with heavy hearts for Asband and then Swabi. Most of the government schools were opened for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to consult the school libraries as well as accommodate families. Those schools were over-crowded. There was a lady in the Pakistan Air Force who offered free help to prepare students for the matric exam. I often visited her for maths and science revisions. (Spalmai)

Spalmai's experience as an IDP was a mix of positive and negative incidences. Her family was auspicious to find a safe place with her family-friends and therefore did not face a disgraceful situation, while Spozhmai and Perkha's families stayed behind during the conflict:

Most of the people of my village left the village, but I stayed behind with my Baba [father] to look after our family houses. One of my cousins was very intelligent, so I started lessons with him. He lived far away, so I wore my burqa to visit him along with my Baba. We were so many times stopped by the Taliban; but Baba always lied by responding, 'I am taking my daughter to the madrassa for Quran learning.' Alhamdulillah we haven't been IDPs. About three months we stayed with limited food and drink. The first week was very terrifying because of the bombardment and shelling on Taliban headquarters, but our houses were safe. But obviously we lived under immense fear and terror. (Spozhmai)

My research subjects and their families were more conscious about their honour and dignity during the armed conflict because the joint venture *paroney* (purdah) and *patkay* (literally meaning turban, but symbolises men's honour, including that of the women in his family) of Islam and *Pukhtunwali* were dishonored.

My father knew the shameful and embarrassing situation of the [IDP] camps, and we did not have any relatives in other districts. Therefore, we preferred to [stay and] die with modesty and honour. We are not rich people, but we have our own self-respect and honour that we did not want to lose at any cost [she got emotional and her voice shivered with tears and pain]. (Perkha)

Most of my research subjects had a strong conviction to continue their education during times of conflict and displacement:

I was so determined; I thought if my education was affected by the conflict, I will leave Swat and go down [to the plain areas] to another district, Mardan or Peshawar. Most of the girls who stayed behind in Swat during the conflict continued their education by having lessons at home. I cannot forget the miserable condition of the people when they have been asked on short notice to leave Swat. Women, children, young and old people were walking; no one was aware of their destination. My heart was bleeding for my people, but there was no one who could come forward to help them. That was a time when I was determined to become a journalist to show to the world how we have been put in such a pathetic situation. When I close my eyes now, I still can feel the pain and see my people and the fear of death on their faces. (Kashmala)

However, in spite of Kashmala's sacrificed year of education, she was later determined to mold her past experiences of deprivation into motivation for studying journalism. Now she is a successful journalist affiliated with renowned news channels.

The conflict inflicted feelings of discrimination among the research subjects; Gulalai doubted her ethnicity as a Pukhtun. Her education was affected due to her family's suffering. She could not focus on her studies:

I moved to Islamabad with my two brothers while my parents stayed in Swat. We did not contact our parents for two months. I was crying and depressed. What kind of country is this that Swat is burning and the rest of the country is enjoying

their life? Is my Swat not a part of Pakistan? Or are we not human like them? I went through severe mental and psychological stress because of my family, so how could I concentrate on my studies? (Gulalai)

Moreover, my research subjects were very disappointed with local people's attitudes towards them when they were living as IDPs. This further decreased their interaction with the locals and confined their education and study opportunities.

Talibanisation also stigmatized Swat as a backward area. As IDPs, people thought we were Taliban too. They were scared of us [and thought] that we were ignorant and uncivilised people. When we passed by a road, people started whispering about our clothes and different Pukhtu language accents. (Zarghuna)

Zarghuna and her family were displaced during the first military operation in 2007, but the overwhelming disappointment and discourteous experience did not encourage them to migrate again in 2009. She advanced to Year 11 directly without taking her matriculation examination by doubling her Year 9 marks, because the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Swat (BISES) had no educational infrastructure left after the conflict to conduct the examination. Certainly, it created feelings of frustration and disappointment among students:

I was really upset and disappointed, but I couldn't do anything. I cried a lot for few days and then accepted the decision because I had no choice [her eyes were full of tears and her voice broke down from sorrow and distress]. (Zarghuna)

Thus, the episochades of displacement for Gulalai, Zarghuna, and Malghalara were full of stress and discouraging experiences as IDPs. While for Spalmai and Kashmala it was a source of stimulation and encouragement, Spozhmai and Perkha put their lives at risk by staying behind in the war zone waiting for Allah's help!

Education under Burnt Ashes...

The post-conflict era brought a paralyzed education system in the valley. Most of the schools were in open-air spaces without proper buildings and infrastructure.

After the conflict, some schools are repaired to make it better for educational needs, while most are in open-air tents without sitting mats, drinking water, toilets, and blackboards facilities. Teachers are writing on a plain rock slate for the students. We can only pray and hope for better educational facilities because after more than five years, most of the schools are in the same conditions. (Zarghuna)

Furthermore, the conflict destroyed social and Pukhtun societal norms:

Families had grand get-togethers, which are missing after the conflict. I feel an unseen change in our family units. We lost our peace and hospitality and

Pukhtunwali. The conflicts made us the most unwelcomed people now; our attitude and behaviours have a negative impact. (Gulalai)

The research subjects were disappointed with the state social and security arrangements:

Our struggle did not stop with the disappearance of the Taliban. We are still fighting for our fundamental rights of education, employment, and social security. There are so many children whose fathers were arrested and disappeared during armed conflicts; they have no idea where they are now. So, the government should take measures for the rehabilitation of those children; otherwise, it will be a new generation of the Taliban in the future. (Spozhmai)

Most of my research subjects were and some still currently going through mental stress and psychological trauma. They still see those horrendous nightmares:

One of my father's-friends was warned by the Taliban that he needs to stop talking about them in his dispensary, otherwise they will not leave a single space in his body, meaning they will shoot him to death mercilessly. The next day, the Taliban did what they said; I cannot forget his daughters crying on his dead body. Their mourning... screaming... and they were really mad. These events depressed me so much and I went back to my psychological traumas. I still have those nightmares. (Spozhmai)

Malghalara adds:

During the conflict, we were so mentally and psychologically tortured that, after the conflict, the sound of a pressure-cooker frightened us, and we start running inside because of the panic of shelling and bombardment.

Those tragic incidents are affecting their daily life to date. Some survived with their illness and some didn't. Their personal family and educational lives are the most affected because of their loss of independence.

In contrast, some of my research subjects were well-motivated for their future plans. They took the episodes of conflict as a challenge to serve their community. Malghalara was planning to open a middle or high school in her village with some vocational training for adults in the afternoon. At the time of the interview, she was helping the students with home lessons to prepare them in distance learning for their Year 9 exam:

I want to open a middle or high school for my village girls with a vocational centre after school, because for how long we will wait for the government? Education for our area is not their priority at all. These girls are so innocent; they have been given food just like hay in front of animals, who could survive on it? Similarly, my village girls are surviving on food only. (Malghalara)

Although, Malghalara appreciates the present government (*Pakistan Teheek-e-Insaf*, Pakistan Movement for Justice, PTI):

A good thing about the government is that they filled all the teaching vacancies in all schools of our tehsil; otherwise, before, we did not see a single teacher in our local schools. (Malghalara)

However, the conflicts have brought some encouraging signs of a women- and education-friendly atmosphere. Women are more motivated than before:

After the conflict, our girls are more active in education and motivated to do something for Swat and their people. Unfortunately, Talibanisation destroyed our peaceful image of Swat, so now we cannot see any tourists in our area. People are scared of the name of Swat and its people now. Both the Taliban and State Army contributed to the huge number of human loss and economy destruction. Both are responsible for our destruction in one way or the other [she finished with tears in her eyes and a heavy voice]. (Spozhmai)

The research subjects show some optimism regarding girls' education in Swat, but at a great human price. However, they do not like the social and environmental changes in the natural beauty of Swat. They want their free and peaceful atmosphere back without armed security interference now:

We enjoyed peace, stability, and greenery in Swat. We were free and running around in the fresh full of fragrance breeze of wild flowers, catching butterflies. I don't know whose evil eyes destroyed my Swat that snatched our liberty and filled the atmosphere with the nasty smell of ammunition and smoke. We need security, but not at the price of our liberty. We want to move freely without our identity pass; we feel imprisoned. (Gulalai)

Overall, the ugly episode is over, so far. Now, my research subjects are hoping for a beautiful, bright, educational-friendly future.

Discussion and Conclusion

My research subjects went through the most disastrous phase of violence and terror. Their life stories give us their diverse lived experiences of suffering, fear, and oppression, yet with hope and optimism. The three phases, terrorism, counter-terrorism, and forced displacement, were all more gendered episodes, and the women discovered the negative impact of armed conflict on their lives. In the words of Sjoberg and Via (2010:10), 'masculinist endeavors, war and militarism have significant, distinctive, and heart-wrenching effects on women.' Women are the greatest sufferers before, during, and after the conflict.

The tragic story of Swat commenced with unjust socio-legislature and exploitation of the locals' fundamental rights: when the Pakistani government failed to integrate fully the Princely State since its incorporation in 1969 (Rome, 2008), it left a vacuum for TNSM. Indeed, at first it was a peaceful restoration of Sharia law by Sufi Muhammad against the corrupt and inefficient judicial system (Hussain, 2001), but later it became a root cause for the rise of militancy (Majeed 2016; Rome, 2008). Thus, the discourse constructed by Fazlullah was based on *wahabism* and

revolved around *jihad*, extremism, anti-modernism, anti-statism, and anti-women views (Hussain, 2011; cited in Majeed, 2016:97). To suppress the Taliban's conservative, barbaric ideology – which I am not calling Islam, because it has nothing to do with the peaceful philosophy of Islam – they reached their extreme form of violence and aggression for their political empowerment. Their sympathy for the idea of women's rights starts with the name of Islam, but finishes with their own ideo-political and malign Islamic stance.

For centuries in Pukhtun society, lack of education deprived women of socio-political and economic participation, which were considered main impediments in their path to empowerment (Naz and Chaudhry, 2011). The *Pukhtunwali* code of practice defined Pukhtun values, customs, and traditions to control women. Thus, uneducated women predominantly were ideal wives in Swat. This neglect of girls' education was easily manipulated by the Taliban into banning it altogether because of prevailing societal trends. Women's vulnerability and ignorance also strengthened the Taliban's attack on their 'agency' and attire; because women's chastity is related to family honour and prestige, the family men kept them at home.

Targeting education, especially that of women and girls, was a means of gaining political strength for Talibanization that was already subjugated by their patriarchal Islam. Education for them is only religious education, reading the Quran and *Hadiths*; and contemporary education was declared a source of endorsing westernised thoughts, values, and obscenity. This was a clear excuse for their bombardment of 213 government and 7 private schools' buildings (Ali and Zeb, 2014). Furthermore, this overlapping of culture and religious discourses has deeper and stronger roots in the illiteracy (or limited knowledge) of many Pukhtuns, primarily women.

Islam gives men the role of protector and provider for the family, so it is believed in Pukhtun society that there is no need to educate women to be part of the workforce unless the family circumstances make this a necessity. But Pukhtuns do not like working women, either. A woman who works is seen as a disgrace to the family honour, as well as giving the impression that the family men are not capable of earning good money for the family. Therefore, men's education is considered more important, and if a woman is educated, she would naturally want to work outside her home, bringing shame to the entire family. The whole mechanism of this patriarchy functions to keep the women silent and subservient, which is a main argument of radical feminism for giving voices to the unvoiced. However, the societal structure of Swat forces parents to follow the status quo and raise their daughters as passive, non-argumentative, obedient servants for men.

The manifestation of gendered and educational attacks can refer to the main arguments of radical feminism and feminist peace and conflict theorists. Their famous phrase is 'personal is political,' because the personal problems my research subjects experienced are not due to their miscalculations, but are rather an output of systematic patriarchal and political oppression within Pukhtun society. So, educated Pukhtun women have to stand up for themselves against women's marginalisation and tyranny. I saw some of these women's liberal thoughts in my research subjects who were ready to take more responsibilities of their sense of 'self' and 'agency' as women.

By stating the above, I am not supporting equal power relations between genders in Pukhtun society, because Islam empowers woman with the most prestigious status by calling men *qwamoon* – a constant, active supporter of women to achieve their full potentials. This is a term from the Quran that is frequently misinterpreted as 'authority' by misogynistic religious scholars.

Similarly, *Pukhtunwali* did not allow strangers to talk to women. Out of respect for a woman, a man has to lower his gaze and get on his way. However, the Taliban violated both their Islamic and Pukhtun norms with public harassment, physical abuse, and threatening all of the female-specific professions, such as teachers, women visiting health practitioners, beauticians, and women shopkeepers of *Cheena Bazar* (women's only market). Yet, no abductions and sexual abuses were reported, which are the critical mechanisms in war and conflict theories (Lee-Koo, 2009), along with masculine weapons of war and militarization (Sjoberg and Via, 2010).

Furthermore, the conflict destroyed positive Pukhtun societal norms, strengthening the findings of Elahi (2015:230). *Milmastiyah* (hospitality), *Jirga* (a tribal council), *Hujra* (male guest house), and honour were negatively affected during Talibanisation, even though these were the prominent principles of *Pukhtunwali* and socio-political features of Pukhtunkhwah. My research subjects confessed the disappearance of such values: '*Families had grand get-togethers, which are missing after the conflict*' (Gulalai).

The institution of *pardah* was dishonoured during the conflict; Majeed (2016:98) highlighted similar concerns that the security forces ruthlessly violated the Pukhtun norms of '*chadar and chardiwari*' (veil and the privacy of homes). My research subjects, until now, felt timidity '*when all of a sudden someone (security forces) came to my house without any prior notice, it was indeed an embarrassing and insulting situation*' (Spozhmai). This fear of dishonouring (*bi pardah kidal* in Pukhtu) also played a major role in girls' giving up their education. However, after huge casualties before, during, and after the conflict of those near and dear to them, the majority of people did not want to leave Swat.

Pukhtu: *Zamung marg ow zuvand Swat sara taraley dy, pa marg ba hm mung khpal Swat napredo, ow da marg napas ba hm dagha khwara ki khakhigo.*

Translation: *Our life and death is for Swat, so no one can separate us from this sacred land; even after death, we will be buried in this land.* (Spozhmai)

This intense love and patriotism for their land did not encourage any discussion about Malala Yousafzai. Their overall message was, '*Sorry, I do not want to comment anything about Malala; a true lover of Swat never leaves Swat.*' This might be because of the fear of the Taliban who disappeared in the Swat Mountains or their distress over Malala's migration to the west. Nonetheless, When the Swati Taliban sent threatening letters (*shabnama*, night letter), an intimidation tactic borrowed from the Afghan Taliban (Johnson, 2007), most of the non-elite English middle schools, like those founded by Malala's father, challenged them by staying open, while the government-run schools closed to avoid risking lives and destruction."

In terms of temporary forced displacement, it not only shut the doors of education for locals, but wasted their whole year. Later, the education department justified the unfair decision of advancing all the students to the next year without formal examinations. This further increased my doctoral study argument: our educational system is producing educated *jahils* (ignorant people), who just need a piece of paper (degree) to prove their qualifications and the 'banking' concept of Freire (1992)¹⁰.

¹⁰Freire's 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only to receiving, filing, and storing the information given, rather like a banking deposit. See Freire, P. (1992) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin.

Moreover, the episodes of conflict called into question Pukhtun ethnicity. Being Pukhtuns of Swat, my research subjects lost their patriotism and legitimacy as Pakistanis, because, during displacement, the non-Pukhtuns refused to rent them a place to live or even interact with them socially on humanitarian grounds.

As far as some positive impacts on my research subjects's collective 'agency' during the conflict and displacement is concerned, they have challenged stereotypes of women's professional roles: Spozhmai was studying law and an active leading counselor of a peace and stability NGO, while Kashmala became a renowned news journalist. Gulalai achieved a lectureship at her local college.

Most of my research subjects were unmarried, further rejecting the theory of Naz et al. (2011), who found Pukhtun society to prefer early marriages over higher education. Interestingly, the post-conflict period has seen an increasing number of women in schools, in colleges, and at the University of Swat and Malakand, and an increase in positive attitudes of family men towards women's higher education. In addition, the government sanctioned a women's university, keeping in view the conservative nature of the society.

All of the women I interviewed experienced mesmerizing, heartening, and simultaneously depressing, disastrous, and demoralizing situations. Their devastating and shocking life incidents gave me the impression of continuous struggle and now determination for more women-friendly educational environments. The research subjects have chosen 'education' as an empowering weapon for their socio-economic well-being.

For peace-building and peace-keeping in Swat, my suggestion is to follow the Middle East's examples of interacting with women's experiences, both intentional and inadvertent, in conflict situations; and increasing opportunities for women's participation in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as in longer-term prospects for peace and security (Al-Ali and Praat, 2009). Women's participation is also recommended by UN Security Council Resolution 1325, as women always oppose warfare more than men. Furthermore, a scholarly movement of Swati women's academia and activism is indispensable now, based on an anti-militarist (Sjoberg and Via, 2010) and feminist peace-restoration standpoint.

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