

# Beyond Critique: Global Activism and the Case of Malala Yousafzai

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## KEYWORDS

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On October 9, 2012, a Talib boy stopped a small school bus in the Swat Valley of Pakistan and asked, “Who is Malala?” Though no one spoke, he identified Malala when the girls nervously glanced at her. Then he shot her in the head. She survived, miraculously, after an ordeal that included Pakistani national helicopters; a Saudi Arabian jet; a hospital in Birmingham, England; and multiple surgeries. A year later, she published her memoir *I am Malala* and toured the world. When Malala spoke to the United Nations on her sixteenth birthday, she conveyed the same message that had garnered the attention of the Taliban in the first place: girls everywhere have a right to education; girls will demand it.

The media coverage of Malala in the United States and Europe has been unabashedly doting. ABC’s Diane Sawyer, NPR’s Michel Martin, and CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, among many others, praised her bravery and her perseverance. When she was a guest on *The Daily Show*, host Jon Stewart was rendered speechless by her principled responses: she would not raise even her shoe to a Talib, she said. Instead, we should “fight others . . . through peace, and through dialog, and through education” (4:20). Stewart joked that he’d like to adopt her. This interview has been viewed over two million times. *I am Malala* remained on the *New York Times* Bestseller list for twenty-one weeks. The European Union awarded Malala Yousafzai The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In 2014, she received the Nobel Peace Prize—the youngest person ever to do so.

But the response to this response has been less celebratory. Critics, while impressed with Malala and her courage, question why she is a darling of the Western media. “Why Malala?” asks Fatima Bhutto, niece to the late Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in an otherwise positive book review in *The Guardian*: Why not “Noor Aziz, eight years old when killed by a drone strike in Pakistan” or others killed by drones in Yemen or Iraq? Murtaza Hussain’s answer in *Al Jazeera* is blunt: “Since Malala was a victim of the Taliban, she, despite her protestations, [is] seen as a potential tool of political propaganda to be utilized by war advocates.” Ibrahim Khan, a senator and leader in Pakistan’s Islamic Jamaat-e-Islami party, warns in a *Washington Post* article, “She is now being used—rather, misused—in the West by portraying a wrong image of Pakistan as a violent and anti-women society” (Craig and Meshud).

Because the West was able to scurry Malala out of Pakistan and into the safety of England, her

story fits a typical narrative: the West rescues poor (Muslim) women from the edge of civilization. Likewise, Malala's cause—access to education for all girls and boys around the world—fits another popular Western story that education is the (only) necessary precursor to democracy. As if the deteriorating infrastructure of Pakistani civil society is unrelated to the harsh conditions of the International War on Terror. As if access to information is enough to create agency, power, and the legal infrastructures of equality. The story told about Malala obscures broader, critical analysis of the conditions that led to her cause or her attempted murder.

Critique of the coverage of Malala rightly cautions viewers not to fall for the typical narratives of imperialist discourse. I understand this critique; I find it accurate and valuable. But I am frustrated that the critique ends there. Indeed, given our understanding that *any* hegemonic discourse appropriates everything it can, I find the media coverage distressing but unremarkable. What distresses me more, however, is that the analysis focuses only on how Malala has been re-written by the West. Well-intentioned as it might be, the critique positions "appropriated activists" as helpless victims. It "smacks of a patriarchal nature," as Omid Safi has said: "No amount of analysis or concern—even righteous concern—should take away from [Malala's] agency, her will, and her resistance. To negate her agency, even by would-be allies, is yet another attempt to negate her humanity."

Instead of noting only *that* such appropriation happens, I want to look at another part of this question: Given that any hegemonic discourse appropriates everything, can critics do more than describe that appropriation? Is it possible to make visible moments of resistance, moments of potential agency? More specifically, when we examine Malala's actions and rhetoric, can we identify any counter-narratives, places where she exceeds the stories told about her? To begin to answer this question, I study Malala's performance in her US appearances between July 2013 (when she spoke to the UN) and October 2013 (when her book was published and she was nominated for the Peace Prize.) I argue that even as Malala relies on Western media to circulate her message, she persistently disrupts its dominant messages. The role of critics, then, should be to amplify these disruptions.

## CAN MALALA SPEAK? CRITICAL CONCEPTS FOR POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS

Malala, as Western audiences know her, serves the ideological purposes of a dominant power in ways typical of imperialist appropriation. In this case, Western media re-presents Malala so that her story justifies military intervention in Afghanistan, drone strikes in Pakistan, continued antipathy for all Muslims, pity for Muslim women, and a belief that Pakistan would be better off if the country adopted Western ideals of secularism, capitalism, and liberal democracy. For decades, such trends have been exposed, named, traced, and fought by scholars and activists in postcolonial studies, a field which examines how oppressed people are controlled by and resist the dominant culture. A concept central to postcolonial studies, *subalternity* provides a useful structure for analyzing the coverage of Malala.

The term *subaltern* is thought to originate with Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci, who uses it to refer to people who are outside of power and without access to systems of cultural reproduction

(Hall). Theorizing (from prison) about how Italian workers might resist Mussolini's National Fascist Party, Gramsci argued that oppressive power is secured not only through physical coercion, but also through *cultural hegemony*: ideas and dispositions are perpetuated in schools, religion and so on; through them, the oppressed consent to their conditions (Hall 18-19). Gramsci was interested in those among the working class who are *not* compelled by that cultural hegemony; he called them *organic intellectuals* (Hall 20-21). How do organic intellectuals extend such class consciousness, he asked, given that they do not have access to political or cultural institutions through which to disseminate their perspective. Within Gramsci's framework, the *subaltern* are marginalized, class-conscious individuals with no access to tools or institutions of circulation.

When Gayatri Spivak joined the conversation six decades later, she called out the lack of self-reflection that she saw among subaltern scholars who continued to pursue this question. The language anyone uses to talk about or for the subaltern is not neutral, she observes; neither are the epistemologies of academic inquiry (275). For Spivak, intellectuals—even "benevolent" ones—establish their own central positions by selectively defining Others. She sees a great danger of "first-world intellectual(s) masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves" (292). Scholars can never represent the subaltern, she says; at best, they re-present them (275).

In particular, Spivak warns that re-presentations of the subaltern continue to presume a unified and homogenous "subaltern voice" among colonized people. She warns against essentializing the subaltern, particularly in terms of class identities. Her concern is not just that oppressed groups have to use the dominant discourses to speak, but that intellectuals then try to separate out the "real" voice, the authentic speaker, from the dominant discourse. The "real" subaltern voice that postcolonial scholars would advance is no more pure or trustworthy than those of the discourse they critique.

Postcolonial scholars continue to identify mechanisms through which non-Western perspectives are unseen, ignored or distorted by Western (political, economic, cultural, and academic) actors, and raise a host of questions about how Malala represents herself and whom she claims to represent. But the line of inquiry I take up examines not Malala but rather those who claim to represent her. When postcolonial writers and activists critique the Western re-presentations of Malala, how well have they reflected on their own part in shaping this overall media event? I examine the coverage of the coverage to consider what is left out, what potential moments of resistance Malala provides which are not taken up by the critical analysis. I call on progressives to amplify *that* message instead of only the message of imperialism.

Recognizing the impossibility of this task, I nevertheless attempt it here. I don't presume to fully "hear" Malala. My analysis of her work is based on articles and interviews already refracted through the lens of media coverage, a memoir that was ghost-written with a Western journalist and my own location as a white, US academic. My review has come through English-language materials. I have selected only some components of the broader picture, and I have left out much, both because of the constraints of space and because, I am sure, I have not seen it. My goal here is not to identify the "real" Malala or to suggest that anyone could put forward her "real" intentions or identity. Rather, my goal is to examine, carefully, some of the potential alternative representations that I see circulating in

the accounts, and, by doing so, to model some strategies critics can use to amplify counter-narratives.

## RHETORICAL RESISTANCE: MUSLIM IDENTITIES ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

### *Malala and the White Savior Complex*

In his *Huffington Post* piece, “Malala Yousafzai and the White Saviour Complex,” Assed Baig notes the racial and gender overtones of the Western coverage of the Taliban attack:

This is a story of a native girl being saved by the white man. Flown to the UK, the Western world can feel good about itself as they save the native woman from the savage men of her home nation. It is a historic racist narrative that has been institutionalised. Journalists and politicians were falling over themselves to report and comment on the case. The story of an innocent brown child that was shot by savages for demanding an education and along comes the knight in shining armour to save her. The actions of the West, the bombings, the occupations the wars all seem justified now, “see, we told you, this is why we intervene to save the natives.”

Although he does not mention her, Baig has forwarded Spivak here quite directly. In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” she poses the sentence, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (296). On the one hand, Spivak offers this sentence to summarize the efforts of postcolonial scholars, and this is the way that Baig uses the trope. The “modern savior” vs. “primitive culture” narrative treats violence as inherent to a (savage) people, and feeds a “good Muslim” vs. “bad Muslim” dichotomy. The Taliban’s gruesome attack on Malala serves as a powerful illustration of “bad Muslims” monstrous immorality: they attacked a young girl in her school bus; all she wants is education. The line of critique that I presented in the introduction also follows this train: in asking why coverage focuses on Malala and not the other girls killed by drones or the Taliban, the critics argue that Malala is chosen because she is a good, pathetic figure who fits the story well. And so she does. But this insinuation glosses over Malala’s own agency. Which brings us back to Spivak.

When Spivak offers the sentence “White men are saving brown women from brown men,” she uses it to examine how gender works within postcolonial analysis. She wants us to notice not only the white/brown dynamic, but also the man/woman dynamic. Even as the sentence guides us to see how the “white savior” narrative strips power from the brown man, the woman in the sentence remains an object (299). No one asks her view; both the white and the brown man presume they know what she would say. This move is especially galling in the case of Malala, who had spoken out often before her attack: she and her father were frequently on the radio in Pakistan promoting their goal of education for girls; she met with Pakistani politicians at the regional and national levels; she wrote a blog for the BBC; she was featured in a *New York Times* documentary; she had been nominated for the International Peace Prize and had already received Pakistan’s first National Youth Peace Prize (Hesford, “Introduction” 412). While much Western coverage does present the Taliban as the savages from whom Malala must be rescued, she is not the agent-less, subaltern figure that the postcolonial critics seem to presume.

I'll provide a quick example of how the "white savior" critique eradicates Malala's agency. Consider a point later in Baig's *Huffington Post* piece:

I support Malala, I support the right to education for all, I just cannot stand the hypocrisy of Western politicians and media as they pick and choose, congratulating themselves for something that they have caused. Malala is the good native, she does not criticise the West, she does not talk about the drone strikes, she is the perfect candidate for the white man to relieve his burden and save the native.

Baig, it seems, hasn't thought enough of Malala to verify his claims. In her book and in her interviews, as I'll explain in more detail later, she does criticize the West. Indeed, when she met with President Obama, she told him that drones "fuel terrorism." By overlooking all this, Baig criticizes the White Savior and keeps Malala in the same agent-less position that very narrative implies.

When we look more closely at how Malala tells her own story through her book and through her interviews, we can identify some of the rhetorical strategies she uses to resist the "White Savior" story. For one, she refuses to position the Taliban as Muslim savages. For another, she implicates the West in the rise of the Taliban.

#### *Malala's Counter-Narrative: Taliban Boys and Their Mothers*

First, it's worth noting how Malala takes control of the narrative about her attack. In Malala's story, the Taliban do not get the upper hand. Malala repeatedly explains that she had thought a lot about the possibility of such a moment—she had anticipated the attack and had decided what her action would be. Even though she was not able to carry out her plan at the time—they shot her before she could speak—she tells the story at every opportunity; she gives herself an active role, which she wants her audience to adopt.

Malala consistently deflates impulse to use the brutal school bus shooting to justify revenge on the "bad Muslims." She refuses to seek violence against them. In her UN speech, she asserts, "I am not against anyone. I'm not here to speak in revenge of the Taliban or any terrorist group. I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban" (7:29). Each time she is asked to talk about her experience, Malala repeats that she would not even "raise a shoe" against her attackers. This is the story that knocked over Jon Stewart (whose response that he would like to adopt her, it should be noted, presumes both that she didn't already have a good father and that she would want to join Stewart's world). Malala says the same phrase, with the same inflection, in her interview with Amanpour. Malala describes how she had imagined a day when she might be shot, and the conversation she had with herself about how to respond:

First I thought I would just take my shoe and hit him. But then I said, if I hit him with a shoe, and if I become cruel to him, that means there is no difference between me and the Talib. He is also choosing a harsh way for his cause, so I shall not use that harsh way. So then I said, Malala speak to him what you have in your heart. (30:57)

Omid Safi, writing for the University of Missouri's *Religion News Service*, compares Malala's approach to the profound nonviolence and love advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Indeed, in

her UN speech, she hailed many philosophical ancestors:

This is the compassion that I have learnt from Muhammad—the Prophet of Mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change that I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that I have learnt from Gandhi Jee, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa.<sup>1</sup> And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father. This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone. (7:52)

By linking her philosophy to world religions, international leaders, Pakistani and Pashtun history and her family, Malala dispels any sense that her approach is merely a child's naiveté, or that her approach is unique to her. She calls upon a long, international history of nonviolent action to refute calls for revenge.

Malala humanizes and even feminizes the Taliban in her attempt to dismantle the revenge narrative: instead of monstrous men, they are misguided boys in a network of caring women. When Amanpour asks about the “man” who attacked her, Malala gently corrects her: “We may call him a boy. There were two boys that day. . .” (9:50). As part of her “I would not lift a shoe” story, where she talks to herself about how to respond to a potential attack, she explains that she had hoped to speak to her assailant:

So then I said [to myself], Malala . . . speak to him that you want education for their children, that you want peace for their families as well. Because we never think about their families—how their wives would be feeling, how their daughters would be feeling, how their mothers would be feeling, how hard it would be for them. Because when they leave home, when they go on their own jihad—how the feelings of their mothers would be. . . So I think we also must think about them. So that's why I want to tell Talib, be peaceful, and the real Jihad is to fight through words . . . and that is the Jihad that I am doing. (31:00-32:20)

If the Western patriarchal narrative suggests that the attack on a young girl requires a vengeful response, Malala positions her assailant within a web of women—daughters, wives, mothers—and turns the patriarchal reading upside down. You cannot help women by killing the people they love, she says. Do not protect us from cruelty by being cruel. She positions herself as part of a “we” who has been taught to deny the humanity of the Taliban, but who should take another look.

#### *Malala's Counter-Narrative: Who Created the Taliban?*

At the same time, Malala does not defend the Taliban in her book. As she describes their violent intrusion into Swat Valley—the terrorism, the murders—she does not mince words. Rather than allow their brutality to serve as justification for Western intervention, however, she contextualizes their actions within broader historical international, national, and cultural conflicts. Their appeal, she suggests, is not some inherent religious message, but rather the consequence of a long series of events in which international forces have played a significant role.

In *I am Malala*, a chapter titled “The Radio Mulla” begins with the line: “I was ten when the Taliban came to our valley” (111). Malala describes the initial appeal of Maulana Fazlullah's radio messages and the subsequent terror of living in an area under his influence. She described the edicts

against certain behavior (smoking, women not being covered, women shopping) (112-119) and notes that Fazlullah "began holding a *shura*, a kind of local court," which solved local disputes through public whippings. Ultimately, he declared "two-legged animals will be sacrificed," and began killing the local khans—the feudal leaders—and secular political leaders (121). Malala describes many such killings: a friend and a local political leader (121); her teacher's husband, a local policeman (124-25); a young dancer (147); a teacher (148) and more. A photo in her book shows a man being whipped in the public square. The *New York Times* documentary shows men being shot in the head. The Taliban are not good guys here.

And yet, Malala contextualizes their actions within a broader international context. For example, early in her book, she describes how the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered a US willingness to encourage the Islamization of Pakistan. Although General Zia had taken control of Pakistan in a military coup, she writes, "The Russian invasion transformed Zia from an international pariah to the great defender of freedom in the Cold War" (32). Just as General Musharraf would years later, General Zia secured his power through Islamization, and Malala insinuates an American hand in this (33). She cites a local information minister: "If we had not put guns in the hands of madrasa students at the behest of foreign powers, we would not be facing this bloodbath in the tribal areas and Swat" (173).

Perhaps more pointedly for contemporary audiences, Malala extends her critique to the US policy of sending drones into Pakistan. These acts, she says repeatedly in her book and in interviews, fuels the Taliban. The first 2004 drone attack in South Waziristan galvanized Pakistanis from across the political spectrum. Malala writes that the Radio Mullah's campaign in Swat Valley intensified after his brother and three nephews were killed in a 2006 "American drone attack on the madrasa in Bajuar" where "eighty people were killed, including boys as young as twelve" (120). Her explanation about how young men signed up to fight because of their outrage against a foreign attack seems to parallel the US response to 9/11.

When Malala met with President Obama in October 2013, she spoke to him about drones. She told the Associated Press: "I also expressed my concerns that drone attacks are fueling terrorism. Innocent victims are killed in these acts, and they lead to resentment among the Pakistani people. If we refocus efforts on education it will make a big impact" (Rucker).

Malala admits that the Taliban are bad guys. But as much as Malala decries their brutality, she resists attempts to use her story to justify drones or wars. From her perspective, Western military intervention is the exact wrong response. The right response, she insists, is education.

## RHETORICAL RESISTANCE: MUSLIM WOMEN AND POLITICAL RELIGION AS CONTESTED SITES

Education for girls, the cause that Malala brings to the UN, is presented within the discourse of international human rights. But the discourse of international human rights is not receptive to the identity of a Muslim citizen. Current human rights law views the public sphere as "the only viable place for freedom and reason," whereas religion is viewed as private, natural and uncontested

(Sunder, 266). Universal human rights law takes place *outside* of religion, and religious freedoms are left to the discretion of religious leaders.

The discourse in the Pakistan national arena is equally inadequate for making a case for a pluralist democracy and critical, civic education. Pakistani activists who seek national, political protection for human rights operate within a context of Islamization, in which extreme politico-religious groups define civic action and public space according to their own set of rules, limiting the political power of their opponents. Activists who would challenge this do so in a context where any criticism of the Taliban is dismissed as Western and anti-Islamic.

Malala takes on the challenge from two angles. First, she embraces her Muslim identity while she disputes religious arguments that would confine her role as a woman or silence her political voice. That is, she challenges claims for Islamic law based through her own reading of Muslim texts. Second, she resists Islamization by treating it as a political, rather than a religious, movement.

*Malala's Counter-Narrative: Pluralist Democracy is a Muslim Value*

In 2009, Malala agreed to write a blog for the BBC. Her choice of pen name, Gul Makai, reveals a great deal about how she sees her own role as a Muslim girl in this political struggle. As she explains in her memoir, Gul Makai is a heroine from a folk story in which a young couple from two different tribes fall in love. Unlike Romeo and Juliet, however, Gul Makai and Musa Khan do not die. Instead, "Gul Makai uses the Quran to teach her elders that war is bad and eventually they stop fighting and allow the lovers to unite" (155). Malala steps into this role of the young Muslim girl who will use her knowledge of Islam to persuade her elders to change. She challenges the idea that Islam is monolithic or that only mullahs have the power to define religious meaning. Thus, Malala engages the larger battle that Muslim activists face: the "battle over who has the right, in a democratic society, to represent the identity or social category of Muslim in matters of political, economic or cultural issues" (Jamal 68). Like feminist Muslim groups around the world, Malala offers alternative readings of the Quran that are progressive on women's issues.

In her United Nations speech, Malala performs her Muslim identity clearly. Her opening follows tradition: "*In the name of God, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful. . . . Assalamu 'Alaikum*"; members of her audience respond "Wa 'Alaikum Assalaam."<sup>2</sup> Then, in the speech itself, she differentiates her idea of Islam from the Taliban's version:

The terrorists are misusing the name of Islam and Pashtun society for their own personal benefits. Pakistan is peace-loving democratic country. Pashtuns want education for their daughters and sons. And Islam is a religion of peace, humanity and brotherhood. Islam says that it is not only each child's right to get education, rather it is their duty and responsibility. (9:50-10:29)

Malala depicts the Taliban as uneducated and their edicts as ignorant of the Quran. She describes the madrasses of the Taliban as places where young boys are indoctrinated by falsehoods. In contrast, she was taught to read Arabic and to study the Quran herself. In her memoir, when she explains that the Radio Mullah banned women from shopping, she counters that she had learned in school that the Prophet's first wife Kjadijah was a successful businesswoman (116). The Taliban are afraid of



education, she repeats, because it is easier to control and manipulate people who cannot read or who don't know enough history or politics to question what they are told about Islam.

*Malala's Counter-Narrative: The Taliban as a Political Party*

Along with challenging the *religious* component of the politico-religious parties who control the public sphere, Malala exposes the *political* dimensions of their actions. This move pushes back against both the Taliban and dominant Western discourse; both talk as if the Taliban's particular vision of Sharia law were intrinsic to Islam itself. In contrast, Malala's approach follows one that Amina Jamal advocates:

[I]t is important to approach Islamization as an attempt to construct a particular type of nation/society. . . . We should understand the process of Islamization as a historically situated policy that was implemented within specific socialpolitical conditions in Pakistan, rather than approaching it with reference to assumptions about Islamic revivalism or fundamentalism. (64)

Malala uses this tactic extensively.

One way that a group can secure *political* power is to appeal to "discontent with indigenous social class and cultural inequalities" (Kandiyoti qtd. in Jamal, 64). Malala identifies how the Taliban accomplishes this. Although the Taliban clamp down on the social behavior of some groups, their rhetoric appeals to other groups that have been long marginalized within the culture—those who are at the bottom of cultural hierarchies. Her description of the Radio Mullah suggests that his real appeal is not religious, but grounded in unfair class systems and weak judicial oversight. She explicitly names the class system in Swat Valley:

We Pashtuns love shoes but we don't love the cobbler; we love our scarves and blankets but do not respect the weaver. Manual workers made a great contribution to our society but received no recognition, and this is the reason so many of them joined the Taliban—to finally achieve status and power. (148)

Within a context of class hostility, Malala notes growing frustration with inadequate local courts, which provided no avenue for justice. It was this persistent oppression that the Radio Mullah tapped into: "one of [Fazlullah's] favorite subjects was the injustice of the feudal system of the khans. Poor people were happy to see the khans getting their come-uppance. They saw Fazlullah as a kind of Robin Hood" (115). The Taliban are presented as a political rather than religious group. Most significantly, those who support them are *people* who have been wrongly *persuaded* about a way to end classism; they are redeemable. The situation in Swat is one of political manipulation, not inherent evil or fundamentally Islam.

Malala treats the Taliban as a political party that consolidated its power by tapping into class rivalry and then used that power to shut down oppositional political discourse. Through this claim, she levels a critique at the highest levels of Pakistani government. As Jamal has explained, General Musharaff himself used such political maneuvering to secure his own power. Before the 2002 elections, Musharraf attempted to weaken the political strength of the two main political parties in Pakistan (run at the time by exiled leaders Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif). As a result, he created

the conditions in which politico-religious parties gained unprecedented electoral success. Musharraf then worked with these politico-religious parties to solidify his own power, creating “a military-Mullah alliance” (Jamal 62).

Perhaps the biggest indication that Malala views the issues she confronts as political is the growing political persona she has adopted. In the *New York Times* documentary, Malala first says she wants to be a doctor when she grows up; she later says she wants to be a politician. In her UN speech, she explains that she is wearing a shawl that once belonged to Benazir Bhutto. In her interview with Amanpour, Malala said she'd like to be Prime Minister of Pakistan one day (48:18).

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GLOBAL ACTIVISTS

For global activists to be heard—to garner the attention of global publics in the West and around the world—activists need to access Western media. Twitter and Facebook notwithstanding, Malala's reach depended on a long, slow process of creating relationships with conventional media and allowing them to extend her words through their forums. Malala explains in her interview with Amanpour,

There are different ways you can speak. Through interviews, through writing articles in newspaper, through writing blogs. And media at that time played a vital role because the world was not aware what was happening in Swat. We spoke, we raised our voice, media transported our voice, and the whole world were listening. (24:27-24:55)

To garner international and national attention to the conditions in the Swat Valley and for young people without education around the world—to rally money and political will to support education for girls of all classes in Pakistan—Malala needs to reach a global audience. She has begun to build new schools and achieve her goal of increased access to education.

I don't mean to suggest that Malala is not appropriated by Western media, or that her audiences always understand when and how she resists the media frameworks she operates in. She does not control her image; no one can. I also don't mean to suggest that Malala never aligns herself with imperialist ideologies. She has endorsed *The Girl Effect*, Nike's campaign which has been critiqued for its misogynist and consumerist framework (See Hesford, *Exceptional Children*). Nor do I know whether she is speaking for those without a voice, as she claims.

What I do want to say, however, is that Malala's story serves as an important caution to those who study the rhetorics of power and the rhetorics of resistance. As Spivak has reminded us, well-meaning academics work within the very ideology we would critique, and we must regularly examine how we forward that ideology. As we critique imperialist appropriations of voices of the global South, for example, we should not be content to use the occasion to illustrate the power of hegemony. Rather, let's return to the full context of the question that Gramsci asked so long ago: How do organic intellectuals extend their critique when they do not control those political or cultural institutions that disseminate their perspective? Gramsci and Spivak remind us to focus on the potential agency of subaltern voices. Recognizing all the many layers of cultural hegemony that get in the way—language, religion, transnational histories, along with media genres, modes of publication

and so on—the broader transnational, postcolonial project is still to figure out how anti-imperialist perspectives might circulate. With all humility and optimism, we should not lose track of that goal.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the founder of Pakistan; Bacha Khan, a Pakistani Pashtun, was close friend of Gandhi.

<sup>2</sup>The translation is roughly “Peace be with you” and “And upon you be peace.” It’s interesting to note that the greeting and response is not captured in the official transcripts of the speech, though it is clear in the video.

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