Celebration and Rescue:
Mass Media Portrayals of Malala Yousafzai as Muslim Woman Activist

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty
of
Drexel University
by
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in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
November 2016
Dedication

To Allah – my life is a culmination of prayers fulfilled
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have possible without the love and support of my parents Shoukat and Zaheera Choudhary, my husband Ahmad Malik, and my siblings Zaheer Choudhary, Aleem Choudhary, and Sumera Ahmad – all of whom weathered the many highs and lows of the thesis process. They are my shoulder to lean on and the first to share in the accomplishments they helped me achieve. My dissertation committee: Dr. Brent Luvaas and Dr. Ernest Hakanen for their continued support and feedback; Dr. Evelyn Alsultany for her direction and enthusiasm from many miles away; and Dr. Alison Novak for her encouragement and friendship. Finally, my advisor and committee chair Dr. Rachel R. Reynolds whose unfailing guidance and faith in my ability shaped me into the scholar I am today.
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Abstract

Celebration and Rescue: Mass Media Portrayals of Malala Yousafzai as Muslim Woman Activist
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This research examines prominent visual mass media featuring Malala Yousafzai in order to understand what happens when Western media celebrates a Muslim woman rather than primarily dwelling on the narrative of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of “saving.”

This dissertation analyzes visual images, keeping at the forefront the question of Malala’s celebrityhood as a South Asian Muslim woman. She is not the first Muslim woman engulfed in the spotlight; many of have preceded her. However, as this research shows, the narrative of Malala is a crucial step toward the changing discourse of Muslim women as portrayed in Western mass media. This study uses primarily two qualitative methods: critical discourse analysis and focus groups. Chapters two and three use critical discourse analysis to unpack visuals about and co-authored by Malala. Using the same visuals examined in chapters two and three, chapter four reports audience analysis findings from focus groups with South Asian American Muslim women. Based on the findings from the critical discourse analysis and focus groups, this study concludes that Malala represents a new phase for Western representations of Muslim women where a Muslim woman is not only heard but can freely express commitment to Islam without fear of backlash. Even with certain Orientalist, subaltern tropes that make her brand problematic, Malala nonetheless represents a significant step in fuller and better representational practices among Western portrayals of Muslim women.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the spring of 2016, on a whim I attended a seminar at the Sandy Spring Museum in Maryland, not expecting much beyond a pleasant afternoon with invigorating discussion. Jen Cort, an education consultant, presented on the question, “is peace a universal value?” As this seminar was an interfaith event, Ms. Cort’s hand-out for the audience cited how peace is conceptualized in several major world religions. Towards the top of the hand-out was a small colored illustration accompanied by a quote from the illustrator: “A picture I painted when I was twelve, just after we came back to Swat from being IDPs [internally displaced person]. It shows the dream of interfaith harmony.” The illustrator was Malala Yousafzai. Here, at a small Maryland museum showcasing the local history, Malala Yousafzai, a girl from the northern mountainous regions of Pakistan, was our inspiration, our guide, our hope in establishing interfaith peace.

That the name of a teenage Pakistani girl should become synonymous with global peace is definite cause for intrigue. While the near-fatal shooting Malala survived is the reason she quickly rose to fame, that alone did not establish and sustain her career as an international ambassador for girls’ education. Two other girls were shot the same day in the same bus as Malala. Yet, it is Malala’s story that reverberates around the world, inspiring a bestselling memoir and an internationally released documentary produced by an award-winning director. Photographed by famed photographers and gracing the covers and pages of national magazines, Malala has charmed the world. In the era of digital media where pictures travel faster than words, and images have a particularly strong valence, visuals of Malala are key to understanding her significance. That is the purpose of this dissertation: to examine and
unpack prominent visual media featuring Malala Yousafzai, and understand what happens when Western media celebrates a Muslim woman rather than only dwelling on the narrative of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of ‘saving.’ This dissertation probes into the depths of these visuals, keeping at the forefront the question of Malala’s celebrity-hood as a South Asian Muslim woman. She is not the first Muslim woman engulfed in the spotlight; many of have preceded her. However, as this dissertation shows, the narrative of Malala is a crucial step toward the changing discourse of Muslim women as portrayed in Western mass media. By no means is Malala the perfect personification of the Muslim woman. In fact, she poses a number of problems and complexities. Some of these problems harken to old Orientalist, subaltern tropes. But these complexities nonetheless open a new and exciting chapter for the Muslim woman.

As stated earlier, Malala is not the first Muslim woman to gain media attention. Those who have preceded her are largely grouped into one of three camps: (1) voiceless and nameless Muslim women whose veiled appearances plaster Western media publications, (2) apologetic Muslim women who seek to reform Islam (e.g., Irshad Manji), and (3) those vehemently opposed to Islam (e.g., Ayaan Hirsi Ali). Malala, however, does not fit any of these molds. She defies the first camp in that she has a voice and a name, and she is easily able to access various media platforms to relay her message. She further defies the second and third camps because she is unapologetic of her faith and instead proudly represents her religion. I argue, and as this dissertation demonstrates, Malala represents a new phase for Western representations of Muslim women where a Muslim woman is not only heard but can freely express commitment to Islam without fear of backlash. While the manner in which Malala rose to fame is problematic and her narrative is not totally purged from Orientalist
and postcolonial tropes, she represents a significant step in fuller and better representational practices among Western portrayals of Muslim women.

Malala’s significance and celebrity-thood come at a critical time as the faultlines that drive anti-Muslim sentiment deepen. The popularity of both apologists and anti-Islam advocates demonstrates the media attempt to appear balanced by representing opinions that seek to change or malign Islam. Often left behind are voices advocating a fairer representation of Islam, likely because these voices conflict with the right-wing agenda to highlight negative portrayals of Islam. Particularly in 2016, both Western Europe and the United States have witnessed a sharp uptick in public support for nationalistic policy that bear palpable overtones of xenophobia and racism. Malala herself is not the singular solution for the rise of racist policies; however, she represents the hope that with more portrayals like hers, the rise of the new right nationalist era will be offset by more positive and inclusive representations.

After a review of previous literature relevant to representations of Muslim women in Western mass media, this dissertation examines visual depictions of Malala in three ways. In chapter two, I examine visuals produced about Malala without express credit to her. Chapter three explores visuals where Malala is expressly credited in the production process. Using the same visuals examined in chapters two and three, chapter four reports how South Asian Muslim women interpret said visuals. Finally, the fifth chapter pulls together the three aforementioned data-driven chapters to assess where amongst the landscape of Muslim women representations the Malala discourse falls and the possible future trajectory of the Malala brand.
Brief Profile of Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai rose to international fame as an adolescent Muslim girl from the Swat district in Pakistan who survived a near-fatal targeted shooting by the Taliban. She has become an international icon for human rights, particularly access to education for all children. Before her international celebrityhood, her family ran a chain of schools in the Swat region. In early 2009, when she was approximately 11 years old, Malala wrote a blog under a pseudonym for the BBC detailing her life under occupation by the Taliban, their attempts to take control of the valley, and her views on promoting education for girls in the Swat Valley. The following summer, *The New York Times* produced a documentary about her life as the Pakistani military intervened in the region (Ellick, 2012).

On October 9th, 2012, fifteen-year old Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head and neck by Taliban gunmen while riding a bus on her way home from school. Within days, the critically injured Malala was transported to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England where she steadily made a full recovery. During her time in international spotlight, Malala has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. As of 2016, she resides in the U.K. with her immediate family: father Ziauddin, mother Tor Pekai, and younger brothers Khushal and Atal. Malala is the founder of the Malala Fund to encourage and support the education of girls in regions where female illiteracy rates are high.

Literature Review

**Visuality, Reading Visual Media, and Representation**

In this section, I introduce the basics of semiotics and semiotic theories relevant to reading visual images. I especially focus on social semiotics as a strong foundation for the visual analyses proposed for this dissertation.
In analyzing visual media, we must first consider basic models of sign-systems. Following the Saussurean (1959/2011) model of the sign, I use the process of signification to begin building a system for visual analysis. According to Saussure, a sign has two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the form the sign takes whereas the signified is the meaning of the sign. For Saussure, this dyadic model is purely psychological: the signifier and signified do not exist as separate entities, nor is their existence predicated on material reality, thus, Saussure’s driving thesis was the arbitrary relationship between the signification process/sign system and its corresponding material manifestation. Therefore, Saussure was uninterested in the materiality of sign systems. Other theorists, including Derrida, who continued the Saussurean model critiqued Saussure’s dismissal of materiality (Chandler, 2007). Historically, the spoken or oral word was valorized as an almost transparent means of conveying the signified. Derrida disrupted this assumption by revitalizing the materiality and importance of the written word, thus assigning significance to the signifier or medium of the communicative act. In this way, this dissertation proposal follows Derrida and other poststructuralists who recognized the importance in analyzing both the meaning and medium of the signification process.

While the above discussion introduces semiotics from the perspective of oral and written language, semiotic analysis is equally useful for the deconstruction and explication of non-verbal and visual signs. Many scholars have used semiotics for visual analysis, most notably Roland Barthes. Barthes’ (1972) seminal example of the “French Negro” combines several crucial theoretical threads, especially semiotic analysis and postcolonial depictions of the ‘Other.’ In this example, Barthes moves beyond denotation (what or who is being
depicted) to connotative meaning (what broader concepts, ideas and values do the depictions stand for):

And here it is now another example: I am at the barber’s, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great empire, that all of her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier.

This excerpt from *Mythologies* (1972) addresses the semiological layers of the Otherization process of visual media. Barthes begins with a surface description of the magazine cover picture: showing us details like who is the subject, how is he dressed and his posture. Barthes next enters a second layer of meaning in a rather hedging manner (“whether naively or not”) connecting the visual of the young black man to French patriotism and France’s purportedly color-blind, nondiscriminatory attitude towards formerly colonized people. Finally Barthes explains the relationship between the signifier (the visual of a black soldier in French military regalia) and the signified meaning (fierce patriotism among all French subjects, regardless of historical context). In a single visual, the image of the young black soldier acts as an erasure of France’s colonial history, whitewashing presence of racism within the French identity.
Interestingly, Barthes also mentions the setting in which he finds the magazine: a barber shop. This seemingly inconsequential detail is meaningful in the deconstruction process Barthes later embarks: the barber shop, an apparently mundane and routine place and experience, becomes the site of a rich ideological encounter. In the space of everyday practices, Barthes is offered this magazine to read while he waits, a magazine potentially read and offered to many before him and many barber shop patrons after Barthes. Thus, the placement and occurrence of this magazine incident is significant: we are bombarded by complex ideological materials in places (i.e., a barber shops) where such politically and socially charged media materials are not designed to be absorbed and reflected on. The photographs of Malala in mainstream magazines thus hold a similar significance as Barthes’ example: magazines like Time and Glamour are commonly found in the recesses of routine human activity, like a barber shop, doctor’s office, or the magazine rack by the checkout lane in a grocery store. Potent ideologies are thus smartly placed in areas where their consumption is only superficial, hence leading to the formation of preferred readings of a visual text (Hall, 1997).

Barthian semiotics is useful in dissecting the details and nuances of a single visual. Other semiotic traditions critique Barthian semiotics as myopic in its failure to consider the effect of context on interpretation (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). Iconography, for instance, takes into account other literary and visual texts that are contemporary to the unit of analysis (e.g., the image under analysis) thereby commanding fuller meaning and contextual understanding of the unit of analysis. For example, one of the images from the corpus of this dissertation is a cover photograph from a 2013 issue of TIME magazine depicting Malala Yousafzai as one of the 100 most influential people. To command greater context of this
photograph, I also reference the other cover photographs from the same TIME issue depicting other people regarded as influential. Social semiotics takes another step further and emphasizes the sociality of meaning production. While traditional semioticians reference ‘codes’ as the means with which viewers of a sign can interpret the sign, social semiotics conceives of a broader system of ‘resources.’ Whereas the term coding has a restrictive connotation, resources are more expansive by factoring in the perspective of the viewer. These resources are dialectical in that they “are at once the products of cultural histories and the cognitive resources we use to create meaning in the production and interpretation of visual and other messages” (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001: 136). Furthermore, social semiotics is not only interested in dissecting the visual but is also concerned with the manner in which said visual, and its associated resources, are used. This concern of social semiotics is shared by cultural studies scholars, to be explored in greater depth later in the literature review.

The resources social semioticians utilize in visual analysis are better understood when considering the definition of representation according to social semiotic theory:

We see representation as a process in which the makers of signs, whether child or adult, seek to make representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, and in which their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complex one, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign-maker produces the sign. That ‘interest’ is the source of the selection of what is seen as the criterial aspect of the object, and this criterial aspect is then regarded as adequately representative of the object in the given context. In other words, it is never
the ‘whole object’ but only ever its criterial aspects which are represented. These criterial aspects are represented in what seems to the sign-maker, at the moment of sign-making, the most apt and plausible fashion, and the most apt and plausible representational-mode (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 7).

Of critical importance from this definition is not only the acknowledgment of the representational process as complex but also its incompleteness. Kress and van Leeuwen point to the selectiveness of the sign-maker, the choice of “criterial aspects” (7), to construct the representation which always already falls short of the object as a whole. Furthermore, as Kress and van Leeuwen aptly indicate, this complex representational process arises from the “cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker” (7). This sociocultural and historical contextualization of the sign thus emphasizes the socialness of the semiological processes. Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen situate the visual representational process in a more public setting than the semioticians who preceded them. Previous semioticians were primarily concerned with visual analyses of ‘highbrow’ productions, such as artwork. Kress and van Leeuwen do not discount these previous studies but rather recognize the need to expand analysis beyond elite and niche visuality. For Kress and van Leeuwen, studying the visual representation as a social process is of critical importance in modern society where visual literacy is an increasingly crucial component in social and economic spheres:

We believe that visual communication is coming to be less and less the domain of specialists, and more and more crucial in the domains of public communication. Inevitably this will lead to new, and more rules, and to more formal, normative teaching. Not being ‘visually literate’ will begin to attract social sanctions. ‘Visual literacy’ will begin to be a matter of survival, especially in the workplace (3).
Kress and van Leeuwen thus point to a larger pedagogical concern that requires greater contributions to the visual communication field: social and workplace expectations are increasingly including visual literacy and analysis skills, hence the call to expand the reading of visuals beyond niche academic circles. In part, this dissertation answers this call by choosing to examine popular and mass distributed visuals rather than niche artwork and photography. Visuals as a unit of analysis have been generally avoided in academic scholarship. For instance, in communication studies, quantitative methodologies, such as content analysis, continue to dominate. While a handful of studies have employed content analysis to analyze visual media (Dill and Thill, 2007), content analysis is predominately used for nonvisual, textual media analyses (Krippendorff, 2012; Schultz, 1999; Druckman and Parkin, 2005). Although content analysis may have some merits in analyzing visuals, it does not offer the depth made possible by qualitative methods such as discourse analysis. These are serious observations of the social science disciplines: since we live in a moment of rapid and robust visual media circulation, study of these visual media is crucial and time sensitive.

The choice of examining visual representation of Muslim women is also supported by other scholars from a visual literacy perspective. Diane Watt’s (2012) pedagogical study on improving visual literacy in the post September 11th, 2001 era especially bolsters the necessity of my dissertation proposal: Watt recognizes the need for greater examination of visual representations of Muslim women in mass media as Muslim women have become the focal point in the political and cultural collisions of the ‘us-versus-them’ power dynamic. Watt’s findings are based on a course she teaches on the sociology of schooling in the Bachelor of Education program at University of Ottawa. In this course, Watt introduces the
importance of visual media in inculcating and reproducing inequalities among youth which can manifest in the classroom. Watt posits classroom three strategies for teaching visual media centered on the representation of Muslim women: (1) in-depth inquiry of the visual, including deconstruction of the visual and factoring any contextual elements; (2) consider intertextual cultural sites that relate to and can expand upon the visual under analysis; and (3) reflect on the viewer (students’) subjectivities in relation to the visual under analysis. Watt therefore challenges dominant and binary conceptualizations of the self and Other and proposes greater and nuanced analyses to be introduced in classrooms.

Cultural Studies and Representation in Mass Media

The social semiotic concern for publically displayed and received visual representations is shared by cultural studies. To understand the cultural studies approach to visuality, we must first establish the key theoretical commitments of the cultural studies tradition. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), theorist Raymond Williams presents in his discussion on hegemony a definition of cultural studies. In framing cultural activity as both tradition and practice, Williams states:

Cultural work and activity are not now, in any ordinary sense, a superstructure: not only because of the depth and thoroughness at which any cultural hegemony is lived, but because cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than superstructural expressions – reflections, mediations, or typifications – of a formed social and economic structure. On the contrary, they are among the basic processes of the formation itself and, further, related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of ‘social’ and ‘economic’ expression…All these active experiences and practices, which make up so much of the reality of a cultural and its cultural
production can be seen as they are, without reduction to other categories of content, and without the characteristics straining to fit them…to other and determining manifest economic and political relationships. Yet they can still be seen as elements of a hegemony: an inclusive social and cultural formation which indeed to be effective has to extend to and include, indeed to form and be formed from, this whole area of lived experience (Williams, 1977: 111).

Williams makes a key move in the passage: he stresses the importance of culture as a foundational social process. Culture cannot and should not be dismissed as mere reflections or abstractions of base economic or social structure, but rather culture contributes to this foundational structure and much of reality is based on and expressed through culture. Williams further explains the significance of culture by situating it as a hegemonic force. In explaining culture’s hegemonic quality, Williams reinforces the centrality of culture in the basic formations of the social and hence confirming the viability and importance of cultural studies as an academic discipline. Furthermore, as will be explained below, cultural studies has been highly influential in the cultural critique of mass media representations, hence providing a rich area for examining the ‘Other’ through a cultural studies lens.

In particular, cultural studies is cross-disciplinary, borrowing from other fields in the humanities and social sciences to produce multi-perspective theories that best address the problem at hand. As Kellner (1995) states, “cultural studies thus operates with a transdisciplinary conception that draws on social theory, economics, politics, history, communication studies, literary and cultural theory, philosophy, and other theoretical discourses” (27). As such, cultural studies offers an accommodating backdrop for my proposed study which crosses theoretical and disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, cultural
studies is committed to the critical appraisal of power structures that reify inequities and subordination, which is a concern consistent with both Orientalism and postcolonial studies.

Of primary importance to this dissertation, cultural studies scholars have been especially concerned with the media representation of minority and historically marginalized groups. In the introduction of *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Stuart Hall reviews the circuit of culture model. Developed by Hall and other cultural theorists, the circuit of culture models the steps or ‘moments’ of the representation process. Hall identifies five moments: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Of crucial importance is the dialectical flow of the model: each step is relationally connected to the others. While the circuit is depicted as a circular flow or motion, the interlaced arrows flowing from one moment of the process to other reifies the complexity of the representational process. While each point in the process plays a crucial role in examining mass media texts representing Muslim women, the point of representation is at the core of this dissertation. As such, I use Hall’s definition of “representation” to guide the forthcoming analyses:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and languages which enables us to refer [sic] to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall, 1997: 17).

Furthermore, while semiotics offers a comprehensive toolkit for examining the poetics of representation, the emphasis on discursivity in the cultural studies field is of crucial importance in the present study. Hall’s definition of this discursive approach to
examining mass media texts figures prominently in critical expositions of representations of Muslims:

It [the discursive approach] examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied (Hall, 1997: 6).

Thus one of the key uses of the discursive approach is parsing the impacts of discursive texts on the construction of identities and subjectivities. How do the media that people consume shape their subjectivities? Previous scholars have explored the relation between media products and the construction of social identities (Kellner, 1995) and particular subjectivities such as gender (Gauntlett, 2008). Through specific, recurring representations, hegemonic understandings of culture and identity are re-inscribed as reality. Thus, while representation and modes of its production is the preoccupation of chapters two and three, chapter four is concerned with the production of identities and subjectivities vis-à-vis mass media visuals. How do mass media visuals shape concepts of the self and social identity? More specifically, how does the subaltern self-identity emerge in the face of mass media visual tropes that invoke Otherness?

As evidenced above, cultural theorists are greatly concerned about Otherness, its deep-seated position in hegemonic representations in mainstream culture, and its repercussions for identity construction. In the following sections, I draw attention to two theoretical traditions that also share the cultural studies concern of Otherness and tackle particular forms of Othering rooted in the histories of colonization, primarily the Othering of
Muslims/Arabs/Middle Eastern peoples (Orientalism) and people of the greater Indian subcontinent (postcolonialism)\(^1\). In describing these two bodies of theory, it is my hope the reader continues to recognize the keys elements of Othering and hegemony that I previously described in the discussion of cultural studies.

### Edward Said and Orientalism

In the late 1970’s, Edward Said challenged Orientalism – the study of the Orient and its people – as a serious academic discipline. Said proposed that Orientalists, scholars who studied and produced Orientalism, were guilty of bigoted writings about the Orient and Islam, the dominant religion of the region. Orientalist scholarship justified the practice of colonialism. Following Said’s publication of *Orientalism*, the term ‘Orientalism’ has become a pejorative, describing, at best, inadequate and, at worst, racist works of so-called scholars.

As Shohat (2013) writes, Said’s work was timely in that he helped “to transform the so-called Other from the object into the subject of history” (43). While Said’s *Orientalism* was more so a historical critique of Orientalism as veritable scholarship, Said’s next book *Covering Islam* focused on media depictions of the Muslim world and the intellectual and political hierarchy that has made such depictions possible.

Said explains that the title of the book – *Covering Islam* – has a double meaning. First the more obvious meaning in the context of news: journalists covering news stories about Islam and the Muslim world. What is perhaps most dangerous, however, is the second meaning: through their news stories, journalists and media outlets ‘cover up’ the socioeconomic and political realities of the Middle East. By covering up these realities, news

\(^1\) It is crucial to understand that the histories and theories of cultural studies, Orientalism, and postcolonialism are interwoven. I present these theoretical traditions separately purely for the sake of organization, not to indicate any rigorous boundaries between them.
media continues to project the same racist sentiments of 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century Orientalists. According to Said, the colonizing spirit of the Orientalists is alive and well as neocolonialism today, enacted through both policy and news media which are two sides of the same coin. Herein lies the crux of Said’s argument: borrowing from the Focaualdian dialectic of knowledge and power, Said posits that the production of knowledge lies in interpretation. Orientalism historically ignored the inevitability of interpretation in knowledge production and therefore assumed value neutrality when approaching the study of Islam and the Muslim world. Following Said’s work, this emphasis on the interpretive nature of knowledge production has been the basis for studies on media representations of Muslims. Shohat (2013) further expands on Said’s use of the power-knowledge nexus and extends Said’s ideas as part of a larger theory of Eurocentrism:

The notion of Eurocentrism signifies the discursive residue of colonialism and its consequence – Western hegemony. Eurocentrism is the discursive precipitate of colonialism, exerting its power even in the absence of colonialism or even explicitly colonialist discourse…Summing up, ‘colonialism’ refers to the actual historical practices of domination; ‘colonial discourse’ refers to the apologia for these practices; ‘Orientalism’ refers to the discursive dimension of these practices insofar as they have to do with the East/West binary; while ‘Eurocentrism’ refers to the discursive residue of colonialism and neocolonialism globally, in the broadest possible sense” (Shohat, 2013: 44).

Shohat thus provides a clear transition to include postcolonial studies in conjunction with Orientalism, as she later states Said’s \textit{Orientalism} was a seminal, foundational work for multicultural theorists who later transitioned into postcolonial theory (45).
Postcolonialism

As Said’s critique of Orientalism forms a crucial theoretical foundation for this study, postcolonial studies figures prominently in the history and subsequent analysis of South Asian Muslim women. Postcolonialism, as an umbrella term, covers a multitude of histories, literatures, theories, and theoretical approaches occasionally leading to contradictory projects within postcolonial studies. As such, I will highlight the features of postcolonial studies most relevant to the present study. Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* provides a theoretical foundation for further discussion of postcolonialism. Like Said’s work, postcolonialism is also anchored in the Foucauldian knowledge/power dialectic. Explaining the pervasiveness of this dynamic and its social impact, Loomba states that “human beings internalize the systems of repression and reproduce them by conforming to certain ideas of what is normal and what is deviant (40).” Loomba thus touches on the function of hegemony as all-encompassing and inescapable. This is especially important in considering Malala Yousafzai, who hails from formerly colonialized land (the greater Indian subcontinent). Are visual representations of Malala Yousafzai reproductions of said internalized repression?

A particular strain in postcolonialism, called subaltern studies, offers an instrumental perspective to this question. The term subaltern, adopted from Antonio Gramsci’s work, refers to oppressed groups outside of the hegemonic power structure, particularly in colonized areas. Postcolonial scholars such as Gayarti Spivak (1988) have further theorized the subaltern subject, examining questions such as, can the subaltern speak? Harkening back to the Foucauldian knowledge/power dynamic, Spivak asks whether the subaltern can truly speak or represent themselves when the modes of speaking and representation (i.e., the modes of ‘knowing’ or knowledge production) are rooted in Western histories of knowledge production. The subaltern’s capability of self-representation is not the core of the question
“Can the subaltern speak?,” but rather the question ironically highlights the limitation for the subaltern in acceptable modes of representation that are located in Western modes of knowing.

Spivak’s essay explores the criminalization of sati, the practice of self-immolation of widows at the cremation pyre of their husbands, during the British colonial rule in India (1988). Far from condoning the practice, Spivak focuses on the semantic and ideological perversion wrecked by British colonial powers in declaring sati as an illegal practice which is juxtaposed with Indian native revivalist movements that opposed criminalization of sacred religious rites. Spivak examines the British’s bastardization of the term sati, calling upon Lyotard’s concept of diffrend. In the struggle for dominance in meaning, Spivak concludes that the subaltern, the brown female subject, is excluded and left without a foothold: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine of nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (102).

Spivak’s assessment of the subaltern postcolonial subject raises critical questions in the case of Malala Yousafzai. As a postcolonial female subject, does Malala Yousafzai represent Spivak’s figuration of the white man saving the brown woman from brown men? Is she the impoverished brown girl, destined to be rescued by western powers? What does it mean that Malala’s communicative acts are primarily oral presentations in English, which is not her native language? For a person whose primary mode of communication is outside the (Western) hegemonic structure, can she truly speak for herself? Furthermore, when Malala
‘speaks,’ by who is she heard? These questions of agency have been raised by other scholars in the postcolonial context.

Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety* (2005), an ethnographic account of women’s roles in Egypt’s Islamic revivalist movement, wrestles with the issue of women’s agency in patriarchal societies. Mahmood’s argument is striking as she claims that traditional liberal notions of agency are stuck in a dichotomous model of subordination and subversion – that subjects cannot act agentively in the social world if they live in an oppressive society that deems them subordinate subjects. Mahmood suggests that subjects can enact agency within the restraints of patriarchal society, hence acting freely and of their own accord while not disturbing the dominant power structures yet still enacting change. Mahmood’s conceptualization of agency beyond the dichotomous liberal definition offers another frame of analysis in the case of Malala Yousafzai: Is Malala portrayed in mass media as an actor behaving with agency in a society (Pakistan) with social and institutional repression? As an example, Malala regularly attended school and even become the subject of Western media coverage much to the chagrin of local Taliban leaders. If attending school was an agentic act, how and where can agency be conceptualized when fame and international stardom are prominent variables in Malala’s life? I use “where” in this question to signal not simply Malala’s physical whereabouts but her social locations. More specifically, how is her agency mediated based on her social subjectivities as a girl, teenager, woman, daughter, activist, student, etc.? Also, does Malala’s fame and status detract from her agency as she assumed the international spotlight and communicated her narrative through Western epistemologies, e.g., a memoir for Western educated audiences published in the English language, English
language interviews, etc.? These questions will be explored in greater depth throughout this dissertation.

Orientalism and Contemporary Media Representations of Muslims

Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism and its operation in media productions of Islam/Muslims has inspired decades of scholarly work. The following section describes some works that have examined media representations of Islam/Muslims. Deepa Kumar (2012) in *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, identifies five Orientalism myths, grounded in Said’s work, that persist today. Kumar’s use of ‘myth’ is duly operative, calling upon both the popular notion of myth as false fiction and the literary/academic use of myth as a form of storytelling that figures prominently in the history of a nation/people/society, albeit based on selective, distorted truths.

The first myth is Islam as a monolithic religion. This myth denies the very real diversity and complexity of Islam and instead it conceives of Muslims as a homogenous body. This imagining of Islam and Muslims as a monolithic whole is truly the foundation of the next five myths Kumar describes and is also the premier method of otherizing Muslims/Islam, hence Kumar proposes a framework of enemy talk (41-44). If Islam/Muslims can be perceived as a homogenous body, the rhetoric for justifying war against Muslim-majority countries becomes straightforward and clear. Later in the literature review I will specifically address theorizing the attempts by media producers to demonstrate the complexity of Muslims, attempts which often times fail and ironically revert to simplified notions of portraying Muslims.

The second myth comments on gendering practices, specifically the depiction of Islam as a “uniquely sexist religion” (44). The oppression of women is viewed as both
codified within, and unique to Islam, unfounded in any other world religion. Women’s bodies are at the center of this myth – bodies that are used as the justification for war and liberation of oppressed Muslim people. This myth figures prominently in the case of Malala Yousafzai as the Malala narrative presents conflicting narratives the Muslim woman as oppressed by brown men but also uplifted by other, select Muslim men, namely Malala’s father.

The third myth claims that the ‘Muslim mind’ is incapable of reason and rationality. Stemming from the myth of Islam and Muslims as a monolithic whole, Muslims are represented as fanatical and crazed people who act on passion and emotion rather than (Western) logic and reason. Ignoring the Golden Age of Islam, several centuries of scientific and philosophical advancement in Muslim societies, this myth also disregards the historical realities that have led to the present state of discord and discontent in Muslim majority countries. Justified or not, it is these historical realities that have been the basis of violence by Muslim extremists, not random assaults born of irrational hatred for ‘freedom’ in Western societies.

This leads to the fourth myth of Islam as an inherently violent religion. Kumar points to recent examples such as the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ controversy. Opposition to the building of a mosque near the site of the September 11, 2001 attacks was rooted in an understanding of Islam as the culprit of the atrocities. Proponents of this view decontextualize Qur’anic verses and Ahadith (textually recorded verbal sayings of Prophet Muhammad) to underscore their claim of Islam as inherently violent. The final and fifth myth is Muslims’ inability to self-rule and to maintain a democracy. Many early Orientalists were convinced that Muslim majority nations were only capable of despotism (55). This perspective continues today and has often been the popularized premise for American wars in
the Middle East: the white man’s burden of introducing democracy to developing nations. Kumar further adds that recent U.S. ‘attempts’ to develop democratic systems in Middle Eastern countries were purposely futile as the actual objective was never to establish true, functioning democracies but rather to maintain U.S. presence in the region in order to control oil resources (57). The white man’s burden is a critical concept for this dissertation because it serves as a point of entry for the white male savior, echoing Spivak’s conceptualization of the subaltern brown woman in need of saving by the white man from the brown man.

In addition to influencing governmental policy (Kumar, 2012), each of these myths figures into the production of verbal and visual depictions of Muslims. Later sections will outline major findings from recent publications related to the representation of Muslims in the media. These findings include both verbal and visual framing, with special emphasis on authority/authenticity in representing Muslim communities (Morey and Yaqin, 2011), the role of multiculturalism and the post-racial order, particularly in who speaks for Muslims, and gendered representations of Muslims (Alsultany, 2012).

In Fueling Our Fears, Nacos and Torres-Reyna offer a significant first step in assessing the representation and media coverage of Muslim Americans. What sets Fueling Our Fears apart from other studies concerning the representation of Muslims is Nacos and Torres-Reyna’s specific focus on Muslim Americans, thus making a noteworthy contribution to a field that is presently dominated by the representation of Muslims in the European, Canadian, and Australian contexts. Elizabeth Poole’s (2006) work on news media

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2 British poet and propagandist Joseph Rudyard Kipling wrote in 1889 the poem “The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands.” American imperialists interpreted Kipling’s poem as justification to pursue colonization via the logic of white men civilizing non-Euro-Americans. The term ‘burden’ is especially key as this endeavor was viewed as a moral obligation of the civilized white man.
representations of Muslims has been particularly influential in Britain. Furthermore, the delineation of Muslim Americans offers a perspective on how Muslims who are American citizens/reside in the U.S. are perceived and portrayed. Historically, representations of Muslims have been centered on the premise of the Muslim as a foreign subject residing in a foreign land, which is also the focus of Edward Said’s work. Research like *Fueling Our Fears* draws on the nuances and complexities of representing Muslims who are also American. Otherizing the unknown and foreign is a simpler task, for the consumer of the representation is unaware of the realities that contradict and complicate the representation. Otherizing can become problematic when the represented subject is one’s neighbor, colleague, or friend; thus the viewer must contend with and reconcile possible discrepancies between the represented subject and the subject as ‘real.’

For many researchers, including Nacos and Torres-Reyna, the September 11th, 2001 attacks are a pivotal moment for the Muslim American community and media representations of it. Nacos and Torres-Reyna find that compared to the twelve months prior to September 11th, 2001, news coverage of Muslim Americans six months after the attack was much more thematic, or comprehensive. This comprehensive coverage is, however, short lived, as media representations revert to episodic, or narrow, framing around the time of the first anniversary after the attacks. This was a troubling finding for Nacos and Torres-Reyna who, instead of reporting improvements on media representations of Muslims over time, found quite the opposite. Studies like Nacos and Torres-Reyna open questions of identity construction for American Muslims, which bears importance for chapter four of this dissertation.

Other studies have explored the moment of production and the hegemonic power structures that guide media productions depicting Muslims and Islam. Part of representing
Muslims is appropriation of Islamic terminology in methods that distort initial readings from within the Muslim community. In *Framing Muslims*, Morey and Yaqin (2011) discuss a ‘War of Words,’ specifically addressing the almost exclusive use of the term *terrorism* with acts of violence committed by Muslims. Furthermore, Morey and Yaqin contend that terms like ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islam’ have narrowed in their popular meaning, whereas ‘Americaness’ and ‘Britishness’ continue to expand, thereby constricting the possibility of diversity and complexity in the interpretation of ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islam.’ Researchers, like Kumar (2012), hold that this restriction of meaning serves the power objectives of those who wield it – to represent Islam as a singularly, monolithic, violence-prone body. The restriction on rhetoric and who is authorized to wield key terminology is a critical question to consider in the case of Malala Yousafzai. How do visual cues serve to restrict meaning and shape power objectives, especially if Malala operates as an authoritative figure in global discourses regarding Islam and Muslims?

Morey and Yaqin further maintain that even when the Other – in this case, Muslims – are offered some semblance of input and influence over matters of policy, representatives of the Othered group must meet certain standards. In the case of Western countries, this often means both the ideals of a neo-liberal democracy and previous policy decisions of said democracy. Morey and Yaqin specifically address the appointment of the Muslims Council of Britain (MCB), a consultative body to the British government established in 1997 at the behest of Conservative home secretary Michael Howard who preferred to deal with a single representative body. Although a consultative body, the MCB has been forced to bend to the will of the British government, such as declaring a position on the War on Terror and retracting certain political stances (84). The role and history of the MCB bears the mark of
Britain’s uncomfortable relationship with multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism in the United States was a policy oriented movement that implemented programs to encourage the politics of recognition, Britain maintains a history of establishing ethnic and racial recognition before implementing any associated policy. Multiculturalism continues to play a vital role in the politics of representation of Muslims, particularly in association with notions of a post-racial society in the United States. I will return to this point later in the literature review.

**Visuality and Gender in Media Representations of Muslims**

Verbal framing is a dominant unit of analysis for researchers interested in the representation of Muslims. Another crucial unit of analysis is visual media. Visual media such as photographs, cartoons, television shows and films bring to life the signifying rhetoric of Muslim representation. In *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian Rose (2012) surveys the social effects of visual materials. Most relevant to the present discussion is visuality as social difference – how certain persons/social groups are rendered invisible in most instances and, when represented, are based on stereotypical features. Feminism, cultural studies and postcolonial theory offer a plethora of examples of images as social difference, perhaps epitomized by studies of representations of black male athletes as hyperathletic and hypersexualized (Hall, 1997). The visual framing of Muslims is also rife with simplified conceptions of the Muslim Other. This is especially relevant when considering how gender is framed in the representations of Muslims, specifically how Muslim women are depicted.

As previous scholars confirm, the responsibility of modeling, maintaining, and transmitting the moral ordering of a culture is often relegated to women, which is also evidenced in cultural productions such as literature (Bennett, 1997). Clothing and dress is a
means by which said moral ordering is communicated (Masquelier, 2005). Clothing and
dress can also be a means of entering/accessing a culture. This history of dress (and undress)
as a visual representation of culture is also applicable to the dress and fashion of Muslim
women. The body of the Muslim woman becomes the crossroad for the gazing Westerner,
especially when these bodies are represented in news and other mass media. In Geographies
of Muslim Women, Ghazi-Walid Falah (2005) explores the visual representation of Muslim
and Arab women in American newspaper where he finds that the use of certain images of
Muslim women reflect editorial choice which, often times, aligns with dominant ideological
meanings. Thus, the image of Muslim/Arab women become ideological spaces that have
meaning thrust upon them through the various elements of the image itself (e.g., framing the
shot, color or lack thereof, action, behavior and facial expressions of the subject) and its
surrounding context, particularly accompanying captions and articles. For the photographs in
Falah’s study, he found they supported Western liberal agendas of ‘freeing’ Muslim women
from oppressive societies and providing support and aid to the poor and down-trodden of the
Muslim world. Falah also found that in photographs where Muslim women were depicted as
politically, and sometimes militarily, active, the supporting text depicted them, and Islam by
association, as fanatical and incapable of rationality and reason. These findings are consistent
with Deepa Kumar’s (2012) work as explicated earlier. Furthermore, these photographs are
reflective of foreign policy stances by the U.S. government: depicting which countries
require American ‘help’ and which countries should be feared.

Falah’s (2005) analysis centers on visuality in news coverage, particularly of then
ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Other researchers, such as Evelyn Alsultany (2012),
have focused on cultural media depictions of Muslims other than news media. Alsultany’s
work captures the current state of representations of Muslims on television. She proposes ‘simplified complex representations,’ a theoretical framework that identifies and interrogates representations of racial and ethnic minorities embedded in the post-race society rhetoric. Alsultany argues that simplified complex representations are a set of strategies used by television and film producers to give the impression of a complex, well rounded portrayal of Arabs and Muslims based on the ideals of a post-racial, multicultural society. However, these representations are seemingly complex, hence the term ‘simplified,’ for the same television and film productions that boast complex representations also engage in promoting and legitimizing racist policies and practices, such as torture tactics and infringement of Arab and Muslim Americans’ civil liberties. Thus, the strategies attempt to portray Muslims as members of the complex, multicultural society; however, these attempts largely fail as Muslims are continually represented through markers of difference and Otherization.

Alsultany describes seven simplified complex representational strategies. The first strategy is the insertion of patriotic Arab or Muslim American characters. This type of representation allows for a positive Arab/Muslim character who is simultaneously a ‘good’ Muslim and a ‘good’ American. Typically, the purpose of this strategy is to combat stereotypes of practicing Muslims as incapable of American patriotism. The second strategy is inspiring sympathy for the plight of all Arab and Muslim Americans post-September 11, 2001. This strategy attempts to challenge the stereotype of American Muslims/Arabs as undeserving of sympathy from their fellow Americans. The third strategy challenges the conflation of the Muslim-Arab identities and thus emphasizes the diversity of characteristics among Arabs and Muslims. The stereotype of ‘all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs’ is a prominent one and, according to Alsultany, not frequently challenged by T.V.
producers. The fourth is flipping the enemy, where viewers are led to believe a Muslim or Arab villain is the culprit but it is later revealed that the Muslim/Arab character is merely a pawn or front-man for a Euro-American or European terrorist. The fifth strategy humanizes the terrorist. In this instance, viewers are introduced to some humanizing element: the terrorist as a loving father and husband, or perhaps viewers learn the tragic backstory that explains how the character develops into a terrorist. The sixth strategy depicts the United States as a multicultural society. Racism is utterly unacceptable. This truism is evidenced by inter-racial relationships and creating terrorist characters from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. The final strategy fictionalizes a Middle Eastern or Muslim country. The logic here is that by avoiding associations with real nationalities, T.V. and film producers do not offend the people of any particular country.

It is evident how each of these strategies qualifies as simplified complex representations. Just taking the seventh strategy as an example, we see T.V. and film producers attempting to avoid vilifying a specific nationality. However, as Alsultany posits in her analysis, the racializing elements remain evident, and perhaps even more so, as the lack of a specific enemy in turn vilifies any and all who resemble the fictional character and setting. Hence, the attempt at a complex representation becomes simplified.

Alsultany marks a pivotal moment in academic literature concerning media representations of Muslims. Beginning with the more so blatant and offensive Orientalism critiqued by Said, the Orientalism we witness today – if the term Orientalism is still applicable – is far more subversive and hidden but just as present. As I have alluded to thus far, there are real social and political consequences of media representations of Muslims. The relationships between these sociopolitical consequences and the media representations is
dialectical: media representations are influenced by sociopolitical decisions and in turn these decisions further support the production and maintenance of said representations. In addition to expanding analysis of how gender is represented in visual media of Muslims, the impact of these representations on the minority groups they resemble is of critical importance, especially considering mass media and cultural studies models that recognize identity construction as a pivotal part of the media production and representational process.

A critical concern of this dissertation is examining the identity nuances of South Asian Muslims. Scholars like Alsultany and Shohat (2013) recognize the semantic conflation of varying ethnic/national and Muslim identities often face due to the current cultural politics in the Euro-American hemisphere:

The European fear of an Islamic takeover of Europe lurks in the background of the debates in the United States. In this sense, while South Asia might appear to be outside the scope of a volume dealing with Middle Eastern / North African diasporas, the current cultural politics make it necessary to address ways in which Islamic Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Indonesia, etc.) and the Middle East become conflated (Alsultany and Shohat, 2013: 5).

Largely speaking, the conflation of these identities results in fear of what I term any person appearing ‘ambiguously brown.’ The reason I use ‘ambiguous’ is to emphasize the diversity of ‘brown’ markers that are considered Other and threatening. This becomes problematic for scholars who want to explicate identities like Muslim or Arab but are faced with conflicted usages, ranging from Otherized, fear-inducing ‘ambiguously brown’ persons to distinct cultural, ethnic and religious identities that may overlap in a myriad of ways. Thus, I echo Alsultany and Shohat’s recognition of Euro-American politics as the guiding post for which
identities need greater explication. They further provide justification for invoking both Orientalism and postcolonial studies when discussing South Asian Muslim identities and diasporas. My dissertation also explicates the notion of ‘ambiguously brown’ as a theoretical construct to examine the identities and diasporas that are considered, to varying degrees, as oppositional to Western political agendas.

**Mass Media and the Social Construction of Identity**

As stated in an earlier section, mass media representations influence the construction of social identity. This is a critical component in examining how South Asian Muslim women process, reflect, and interact with media representations of another South Asian Muslim woman, Malala Yousafzai. Communication scholars have long regarded mass media, to varying degrees, as an influence on how societies and social roles are constructed (Lowery and DeFleur 1995). Harold Lasswell (1948), too, regarded mass media as a means through which societies pass down social mores and roles to the next generation, hence constructing mass media as a teaching tool. This perspective is in fact consistent with the visual social semiotics literature presented earlier (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

In Tuchman’s (1978) “The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media,” two key concepts are explained in relation to mass media production and social construction. The first, the reflection hypothesis, states that “the mass media reflect dominant societal values” (7). These dominant societal values are thereby represented symbolically in mass media. Next Tuchman introduces the driving thesis of the chapter: how women are symbolically annihilated in mass media productions, either by absence/lack of visibility or restricted social roles and settings reserved for female characters. This symbolic annihilation works in tandem with the reflection hypothesis: media producers construct images of women...
that are consistent with dominant social values. These values are thus reinscribed and confirmed in the social world when visually represented in mass media. Contemporary scholars have continued to explicate Tuchman’s thesis, particularly Carolyn Kitch’s (2001) *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*. Based on a close reading of seventy-five photographs of cover art of American magazines from 1895 to 1930, Kitch theorizes that these visuals constructed dominant meanings and expectations of femininity, masculinity, and socioeconomic status. Kitch’s work is especially relevant to this dissertation as I propose to examine aspects of gender and sexuality in the depictions of Malala Yousafzai in popular American magazines. Furthermore, as Kitch identifies a particular audience for the magazines she examined, the visual media I examine also have implications for identity reflection and construction among its audience.

Scores of communication scholars have theorized the effects of media consumption on audiences. Two theories in particular are worth mentioning: cultivation theory and social cognitive theory. Cultivation theory, which is primarily concerned with television media, posits that the greater the media exposure, the more likely viewers will cultivate worldviews about reality that are consistent with the media messages. Social cognitive theory proposes a constructive perspective where viewers process media messages based on their personal characteristics, thus reception of media messages is contingent on individual experience and social identity. Rivadeneyra et.al (2007) utilized both of these theories when examining Latino adolescents’ self-conception based on their televisual media exposure which consisted of primarily stereotypical representations of Latinos. The researchers found Latino adolescents generally follow the same pattern as Euro-American adolescents where greater
media exposure and involvement leads to lower levels of self-esteem, particularly in regards to appearance and physical attractiveness.

The impact of mass media on minorities is also supported by Pompper and Koenig’s (2004) study on cross-generational attitudes and perceptions of body-image based on magazine visuals. In this qualitative study, the researchers interviewed two sets of respondents: Hispanic women belonging to Generation X and Hispanic women of the Baby Boomer generation. Across the generational line, Pompper and Koenig found that regardless of age, magazine beauty standards were the primary influence on the participants’ perception of body image. The generational groups diverged when accounting for behavior: Generation X members actively strove for the thin body ideal (and largely encouraged by their mothers) while the baby boomers were more concerned with achieving a healthy body and not necessarily a thin one. This study offers an example of how constructivist mass media theories operate: the single difference of generation (also mediated by differing experience) impacted the behavior of each group in divergent ways.

Recent scholarship also indicates how Muslim women are influenced by media representations of Muslim women. Hebbani and Willis (2012) conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with Muslim women who observed various forms of veiling from the headscarf to the burqa. The researchers identified Muslim women in Australia as a muted group, suggesting that certain groups are privileged more than others in every society and the privileged groups define the communication means and patterns for the rest of society. Through the interviews, Hebani and Willis discovered the interviewees largely felt the media portrayed Muslim women negatively. Furthermore, the researcher use Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural communication theory, which posits a typology of “verbal and non-verbal
communication strategies that muted group members apply to negotiate their mute status within dominant cultures” (Hebbani and Willis, 2012, p. 92). Muted members engage in one of three practices in the negotiation process: (1) assimilation, where markers of cultural difference are eliminated with the intention of full integration into society; (2) accommodation, where muted members develop “appreciation, interdependence, and skills to communicate effectively with persons from other cultures;” (3) separation, where muted members totally reject integration and forming social bonds with the dominant group (p. 93).

Hebbani and Willis’ results indicate the interviewed Muslim women primarily fall in the accommodation category: “the women felt that the onus of correcting inaccurate and biased reporting lay on them; it was their responsibility to show Australians what Muslim women were really like” (p. 97). Hebbani and Willis’ findings play a critical component in the forthcoming chapters, specifically reflecting on South Asian Muslim women’s interpretations of media portrayals of Malala Yousafzai as they, too, occupy the status of a muted group within the American social landscape.

Native informants, Saving Muslim Women, and the Politics of Pity

In “The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader,” Mohja Kahf (2011) conducts a close reading of a New York Times column about the rape case of a Pakistani Muslim woman. Kahf argues that neither the pity of Western feminists nor the defense of sexism-ignorant Muslims accurately represent, let alone rectify, the injustices committed against Muslim women who are stereotyped as both victims and escapees of violent Muslim men. She develops a framework of key elements that appear in the victim-escapee stereotype. The first element is the “mute marionette” or the “exceptional escapee.” The oppressed Muslim woman is voiceless and the benevolent Westerner speaks on behalf of the escapee. The second and third elements coincide, “meek mother” and “forbidding father” respectively.
Victims are represented as without any empowered female relationships and are instead subjected to the cruelty of an evil and authoritative father. The fourth element, “rotten religion,” blames Islamic values for the victim’s circumstances. Even if a victim claims Islam as empowering and uplifting, this part of the narrative is conveniently omitted in accounts published for widespread Western consumption. The fifth element “cruel country” paints the informant’s native, Muslim majority country as cruel and anti-woman, whether through the nation’s social mores or state laws. “Erased economics,” the sixth element, is the absence of socioeconomic context. Thus the erasure of poverty – which significantly contributes to the victimization experienced by informants – provides an incomplete narrative. The final element, “vile veil,” is where veiling is used as a visual indicator of oppression and victimization of Muslim women.

Native informants serve a key role in the dissemination and authentication of narratives from the East. Moustafa Bayoumi (2010) explores the role of neo-orientalism among three contemporary Muslim commentators: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, and Reza Aslan. Bayoumi argues each of these commentators meshes multiculturalism with classical Orientalism, producing publications and narratives palatable to a Western audience. The allure of these commentators is their insider status: as native informants, they serve to ‘reveal’ the inner-workings of the Muslim world and Islam to the West. Typically, this exposure to Islam is pursued in a fashion that places Islam at the center of all the Muslim world’s problems; each commentator has her/his own take as to how Islam needs to be ‘fixed’ or ‘improved’ to rectify said problems. Bayoumi argues that these Muslim neo-Orientalists publicize a version of Islam produced in a vacuum, devoid of historical context. Bayoumi succinctly summarizes the problem with the ‘analyses’ posited by the likes of Ali,
Manji, and Aslan: “the problem arises not when a faith system is placed in history but when it is used to explain history” (84).

This lack of nuance at the center of Bayoumi’s thesis also rings true for Lila Abu-Lughod’s seminal book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Abu-Lughod explores one of the central publicized reasons for the United States to declare a war on terrorism: to save Muslim women from oppressive regimes, mainly the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. As an anthropologist, Abu-Lughod describes various ethnographic encounters with Muslim women; these accounts show the difficulty in categorically classifying a Muslim woman as oppressed or free. To avoid such decisive dichotomization, Abu-Lughod poses two criteria to consider before engaging in any rescue narratives: “first, we might have to accept the possibility of difference” (43). Abu-Lughod is not making a case for simply cultural relativism; rather, we have to input ourselves in the cultures and histories of the women purportedly in need of rescuing; if we liberate them, what does liberation mean for them? What one person may wish to do with her freedom can be vastly different than another person. Next, Abu-Lughod argues that “we should be vigilant about the rhetoric of saving others because of what it betrays about our attitudes” (43). This criteria cautions against a savior complex.

**Research Questions**

Building on previous scholarship, this dissertation asks three major questions:

**RQ1:** How do visual media produced about Malala Yousafzai problematize, challenge, and reinscribe Orientalist and postcolonial tropes, particularly discourses of saving and celebrating Muslim women in Western mass media?
RQ2: How do visual media co-produced by Malala Yousafzai problematize, challenge, and reinscribe Orientalist and postcolonial tropes, particularly discourses of saving and celebrating Muslim women in Western mass media?

RQ3: How do American South Asian Muslim women interpret visual media representations of Malala Yousafzai and how do these interpretations reflect their construction of self-identity?

Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the “Malala narrative,” “Malala discourse,” and “Malala brand.” Below is a discussion detailing the specific use of each of these terms and how they contribute to the broader understanding of the Malala phenomenon.

The term “narrative” appears throughout this dissertation; I use it to describe Malala’s telling of her life events. One of the key characteristics of how Malala’s narrative is strengthened is the consistency of her story across a variety of mediums. The same elements of her story are reiterated without any deviations. Pivotal moments of her life are told and retold in magazines, television interviews, and film. This narrative evokes a sense of authorship: Malala, and those around her, carefully select which pieces of her story are narrated. Thus consistency is the defining characteristic of the Malala narrative.

I use Jorgenson and Phillips (2002) broad definition of discourse: “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (1). In the context of Malala Yousafzai, I use the term discourse to describe the overlaps and intersections of a myriad of discourses that, together, generate ideas about and provide greater understanding of Malala. These multiple discourses include, but are not limited to, humanitarian work and
organizations, the condition of women in Pakistan, education rights for children, and media representations of Islam. The Malala discourse exists at the intersection of the aforementioned discourses.

In this dissertation, I also describe the Malala brand, which is a marketed amalgamation of the Malala narrative and the Malala discourse. By using the term “Malala brand” I highlight the purposeful production of Malala’s story and associated discourses for the sake of palatable (Western) consumption. The brand is carefully crafted to propose the positive portrayal of a young subaltern Muslim woman whilst underscoring relatable narrative motifs such as the love of family, the pursuit of education, and triumph in the face of evil.

My purpose for using all three terms – narrative, discourse, and brand – is to underscore the seamless ubiquity and completeness of how Malala is represented.
CHAPTER 2: “WOULD HE BE MAD IF I ADOPTED YOU?”: VISUALS OF MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Introduction and Methodology

In this chapter, I present and analyze visual media representations of Malala Yousafzai. These media items differ from those that will be presented in chapter three in that they were produced without Malala’s credited involvement in the production process. This is significant because without Malala’s credited involvement, as consumers of these media we must assume she had less involvement in the production process than those media where she is credited. The data for this chapter includes three still photographs from magazines (Time and Glamour) and video footage from The Daily Show in which Jon Stewart interviews Malala.

The overarching theoretical framework and methodological toolkit for chapter two and chapter three are based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Machin and Mayr 2012; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Jorgensen and Phillips outline the five basic features of CDA which form the framework of the proposed visual analyses: (1) social and culture processes and structures are partly linguistic and partly non-linguistic; (2) discourse is both constitutive and constituted; (3) the necessity of empirically analyzing language within its social context; (4) the ideological functions of discourse; and (5) the necessity of critical research as committed to social change (p. 60-64). As this is a visual analysis, I also use Machin and Mayr’s conceptualization of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) which is similar to CDA but with a slightly different toolkit to examine visual elements, rather like the linguistic tools of CDA. The purpose of MCDA “is to identify and reveal these choices through a careful process of description…but what is central to Multimodal Critical
Discourse Analysis is the sense of being critical” (Machin and Mayr, 2012 p. 9). Thus, the goal of MCDA remains the same as CDA: to critically examine a text.

Finally, I am organizing my analysis using the elements recommended by Machin and Mayr (2012). First, based on the CDA assumption that all signs are semiotic choices, I will conduct a lexical analysis and determine the lexical fields produced in the visuals. A lexical analysis investigates the language and vocabulary chosen by the author/producer. In addition to analyzing the text that both surrounds and is embedded in the visuals under analysis, I will extend the lexical analysis technique to elements of the visual, by decomposing and questioning visual choices such as color, lighting, and composition of objects. Next, I will examine the way in which these lexical choices are represented. Based on Machin and Mayr’s visual semiotic resources I will investigate the gaze and the position/pose of the represented person (Ibid., 49-56). The third toolkit involves examination of the represented person/people with emphasis on cultural/social identity. For instance, which aspects of subjectivity are highlighted and which are downplayed or perhaps omitted? The fourth and final part of the analysis investigates the action(s) of the represented person/people. These means of breaking down the semiotics of an image can also reveal power dynamics, especially when considering the relational processes between two or more represented persons. With each toolkit, there is a progression from observing the materiality of the visual to examining both the social meaning embedded within the visual and the greater social meanings the visual calls upon to communicate with the reader/viewer.

The data analysis for chapter two and chapter three are also greatly influenced by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s social semiotic works on visuality (1999; 2006). Their handbook, Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, also offers tools for the
varying functions of visuals: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (2006: 41-44). The ideational refers to the function of any and every semiotic mode as a representation of some aspect(s) of the social world. This function can manifest in a myriad of ways as there are many choices in the modes of representation for world objects. The next function, interpersonal, accounts for the relationship between the producer of the semiotic sign and its receiver. The focus of the interpersonal is the relationality between the social actors involved and how they communicate. Finally, the textual function interrogates the capacity of a semiotic sign to form texts that communicate and cohere both internally (within the sign) and externally (with objects/subjects outside the sign). Each of these functions will be considered in chapters two and three.

The interpersonal function is a particularly significant analytic tool for the present visual analysis, as it bears importance across all three data-driven chapters. Kress and van Leeuwen (1999) stress the importance of recognizing and subsequently analyzing the relation between the represented participant (i.e., the subject[s] of the visual) and the interactive participant (i.e., viewer of the visual). Discourse is a dialectical process of the constitutive and constituted. The represented and interactive also engage in this dialectical process. However, this process is often a disjointed conversation, lacking the elegance of a synchronized dance. Producers of the visual may make certain choices to convey a particular meaning, yet this meaning may or may not register with the viewers who may view the visual in a context that is wholly different. While this relation can yield an infinite number of results, the purpose of the critical researcher is to explore the likely (and sometimes unlikely) possibilities and their ideological implications. I follow Kress and van Leeuwen’s social
semiotics approach in breaking down the elements of each image, consider the modes of production, and delineate critical viewer perspectives of the given image.

In addition to the aforementioned methods of visual inquiry, Stuart Hall’s theories of encoding/decoding and the circuit of culture play a significant role in the analysis of televisual and film media. While the footage of the interview was retrieved from the official Daily Show YouTube channel, the video was initially broadcast on television. Moving away from the linear models of communication, Hall’s encoding/decoding theory is a discursive approach to aural-visual media production. Hall describes each stage of the discursive process whilst highlighting the dialectical relationship between producer and audience. Hall provides key questions of inquiry, particularly issues of the industrial complexes that produce media materials and influence preferred readings. The circuit of culture further breaks down the key steps or ‘moments’ in the representation process. Each of these moments offer a methodological lens to analyze the data set of this study.

It is important to note that while CDA is the overarching methodology for chapters two and three, both social semiotics and cultural studies are greatly influential in filling the potential gaps. As evident through the literature review, each of these disciplines has produced important work in the reading of visuals. One of the contributions of this dissertation is to cross disciplinary boundaries for the purposes of a thicker and more comprehensive analysis.

This chapter examines mass media representations of Malala Yousafzai. The images selected for the corpus of this study are as follows:

1. *Time* magazine’s cover from the December 31, 2012/January 7, 2013 “Person of the Year” issue, featuring Malala Yousafzai as the runner up.
2. *Time* magazine’s cover from the April 29/May 6, 2013 “100 Most Influential People” issue, featuring Malala Yousafzai as an influential icon.

3. *Glamour* magazine’s photograph of Malala Yousafzai in the December 2013 issue featuring Malala as “Woman of the Year.”

4. Video footage from the October 8th, 2013 episode of Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* featuring Jon Stewart interviewing Malala Yousafzai.

As the purpose of critical discourse analysis is not generalizability, the selection of visuals for this analysis is not the result of any formal sampling. On the contrary, these visuals were chosen based explicitly on their reach and prominence. Furthermore, examining influential mainstream media yields the best examples of what images are majorly ubiquitously distributed, consumed, and shared, and therefore provide the best example of hegemonic images and ideas regarding South Asian Muslim women.

As of 2011, *Time*’s print circulation averaged about 3.3 million (Matsa et.al, 2012). According to Conde Nast’s 2014 Print Media Kit, *Glamour* has a circulation of 2.3 million (“Glamour – Media Kit Print,” 2015). The viewership of *The Daily Show* was reported as 2.5 million per night in 2013 (“Ratings”, 2013). On *The Daily Show* webpage, Stewart’s interview with Malala Yousafzai has garnered over 3 million views and over 2 million views on the extended video interview (“Malala Yousafzai”, 2013; “Malala Yousafzai Extended Interview Video,” 2013). Therefore, in selecting these visuals, I examine each aspect of the image and also explore the context in which each appears. Context includes examining elements such as captions, accompanying article, and related images. This internal contextual examination elucidates the greater social interpretation of the visuals. For the 2013 issue of *Time*, the magazine printed six covers other than the one featuring Malala Yousafzai. These
covers included the following people: musician Jay-Z, actress Jennifer Lawrence, politician Paul Rand, entrepreneur Elon Musk, Bollywood actor Aamir Khan, and athlete Li Na. Furthermore, while Malala Yousafzai was selected as a ‘Woman of the Year’ for Glamour’s December 2013 issue, musician Lady Gaga was featured on the cover of the issue, therefore offering another element of internal contextual examination.

In deconstructing these visuals, I keep a particular interpretive audience in mind: the readership of Time and Glamour. In 2014, Time reported its readers earned a median income of $70,682 and had a median age of 49. Their reader nearly evenly split between 52% female and 48% male. Glamour reported a slightly lower median income than TIME readers ($64,280) and an overwhelmingly female audience (96% female and 4% male). Glamour did not report a median age; however, the magazine did include that 72% of its audience is between the ages of 18-49. Thus, the interpretive audience for this study can be broadly characterized as middle-aged, middle class non-Muslim Americans.

Time Magazine April 29/May 6, 2013 Issue (Appendix 1D)

A headshot of Malala in grayscale graced the cover of the 2013 issue of Time’s “The 100 Most Influential People.” Mark Seliger³, the photographer for this issue of Time, chose a similar grayscale style for all the other photographs featured in the issue. Among the cover shots, six people other than Malala were featured on individual covers: musician Jay-Z, actress Jennifer Lawrence, entrepreneur Elon Musk, politician Rand Paul, Bollywood actor Aamir Khan, and athlete Li Na (Appendices 2A-2F). Mark Seliger is well renowned in the magazine industry: he was chief photographer for Rolling Stone magazine before he moved

³ Mr. Seliger’s office was contacted for an email interview however no response was received.
onto Conde Nast where he shot for several of their publications (Seliger). As a celebrity photographer, Seliger is well known for his portraiture.

The issue divides the 100 most influential people into five categories: titans, pioneers, leaders, icons, and artists. Malala is featured as a most influential icon. In her cover shot, Malala dons a loosely draped headscarf, which appears less like the traditional lightweight dupatta (shawl) and more like a heavier shawl. The shawl is dark, unadorned, and worn by Malala somewhat haphazardly: the fabric sticks up awkwardly on top of her head. Though her face looks smooth, young and childish, the dark fabric of the shawl weighs her down: not quite the fabric to adorn a teenage girl. This shawl calls upon images of women living in oppressive Islamic regimes: the dark black Irani chador and the enveloping Taliban sanctioned burka. Though the headscarf is not tightly bound, Malala appears to be carrying a weight or an unforgiving shadow.

Like other photographs of her, Malala’s hair is visible: appearing coarse and hurriedly brushed to the side. Malala’s hair is unlike the other two women featured on Time’s cover: Jennifer Lawrence’s hair is artfully swept back and Li Na’s hair is blow-dried sleek and straight. Malala facial expression is difficult to decipher. The grayscale filter make her eyes appear distant and glassy. She is barely smiling, perhaps even looks melancholy.

Compared to the others featured on the covers of this issue of Time, Malala appears the most solemn, morose and inactive. Her solemnity implies piety and purity, which we can also read by her draped scarf, offering her a nun-like religiosity akin to activist celebrities like Mother Theresa. The moroseness indicates the burden of oppression borne through years of a robbed childhood. Her inactive pose, however, is the most perplexing detail of this visual. Malala stares straight at her audience but, unlike the other celebrities featured on the magazine
covers, she sits completely still without any indicator of motion or movement. Jay Z, for instance, is pictured with his right hand partially holding his chin in pose indicating thoughtfulness (Appendix 2A); Elon Musk, too, shares a similar pose as Jay Z (Appendix 2C). Li Na demonstrates the most motion as she is photographed mid-swing: right arm grasping the tennis racket behind her back, left knee curled up, and hair and skirt whisked back by the wind (Appendix 2F). It is therefore confounding that Malala is depicted as inactive considering she is an activist.

However, we can also interpret Malala’s overall aura as indicative of the discourse she occupies, as do each of the other featured celebrities: as Malala represents more ‘serious’ issues, she is portrayed as sober and pensive. Malala is certainly demanding a reaction from the viewer as she stares straight at the audience. Are we meant to pity her, recalling all of her early life obstacles and challenges. Is this why Malala stares, to force acknowledgement from the viewer of her existence? The simplicity and solemnity of the photograph is juxtaposed by the text on the cover: “The 100 Most Influential People in the World.” The impoverished brown girl appears yet again, but this time, we are to acknowledge her greatness and influence. Malala’s photograph inside the magazine is accompanied by a two paragraph profile written by Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former United States President Bill Clinton. Clinton’s profile of Malala centers on the violence Malala has endured despite her youth and Malala’s unasked for iconicity: “The Taliban almost made Malala a martyr; they succeeded in making her a symbol” (Clinton, 2013) Appropriate for the 15-year old icon, the profile concludes with a cliffhanger: “her story so far is only just beginning” (Clinton, 2013). Paired with the somber grayscale photograph, the profile of Malala affirms her symbolism as the
world’s best hope for universal education in a ‘to-be-continued’ fashion. Readers are left anticipating what Malala will do next.

Two years later, Malala would once again appear among *Time*’s “The 100 Most Influential People” list for 2015. She was among the ranks of other influential icons, including Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Pope Francis. Notably, Malala’s profile is written by Mezon Almellehan, a teenage girl known as the Malala for Syrian refugees (Goldberg, 2015). Whereas Clinton’s 2013 profile of Malala was more so biographical, Almellehan’s 2015 profile of Malala shares fewer specific details about Malala’s life. Instead, Almellehan draws on examples from her own life as a refugee advocating for girls’ education and how Malala’s activism has strengthened Almellehan’s. Taken together, Clinton’s 2013 profile foreshadows the inspirational and symbolic work Malala performs, now realized in Almellehan’s 2015 profile: the sparks of influence are now coming to fruition.

*Time Magazine Dec 31, 2012/Jan 7, 2013 Issue (Appendix 1C)*

Seliger’s photograph, however, was not the first time Malala graced the cover of *Time*. Malala was ranked as a runner-up for *Time*’s 2012 “Person of the Year.” In addition to “Person of the Year” winner American President Barack Obama, Malala and the three other runners-up were individually featured on the cover of *Time*. The other runners-up included: physicist Fabiola Gianotti, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, and Apple CEO Tim Cook. Although four different photographers photographed the five portrait shots, the photographs are similarly styled in their heavy use of spotlighting and shadowing.

The photograph for Malala’s “Person of the Year” cover is strikingly different than the April/May 2013 cover photograph. The photographer, Asim Hafeez, is a freelance photojournalist based in Karachi, Pakistan, and considers himself a realist photographer: “I
just want to capture the real unadulterated picture of the world as I see it through my lens” (Hafeez, 2013). In this photograph of Malala, she wears a heavy, brown shawl that blends in with her skin complexion. The color scheme is drab, reminiscent of the dirt roads of Pakistan, which is ironic as Malala often in interviews, her memoir and the documentary describes Swat as beautifully lush. The photo is heavily shadowed, lighting only part of her face. She appears to be emerging from the dark and stepping into sunlight that shines at a slant through a window. Unlike other visuals, here Malala does not resemble a child at all: the choice of dress, lighting, body language and facial expression make her appear at least middle-aged.

She is not the colorful, playful young girl from the cover of her memoir or from *He Named Me Malala*. Instead, she exudes power and control with her folded arms and a curiously knowing expression on her face, as though she is aware of something that the viewer is not privy to. She stares directly at the audience, demanding and expecting their attention, but even though she has captured the viewer, her face reads as though she keeps a powerful secret that she will not yet reveal. Stepping out of the darkness, Malala is here to reveal some piece of knowledge – but she will do so at her own will, not for others.

Overall, while Malala appears at least twice her age in this photograph, she has never looked so powerful and in control. Particularly fascinating is that the one photo where Malala exudes such influence is the same photograph shot by a fellow Pakistani man. Although Malala is depicted as the victim of senseless violence by oppressive brown men, a male Pakistani photographer captured this pose where she looks most powerful, perhaps even slightly menacing. This lends a twist on the otherwise universal narrative of Muslim/Middle Eastern/brown men as cruel and barbaric.
The process of producing this photograph is described by photographer Asim Hafeez through an email interview (A. Hafeez, email interview, January 30, 2016). In early 2011, Hafeez traveled with Canadian journalist Rick Westhead, writer for *The Star*, to Swat Valley. Hafeez says the travel and visit to Malala’s town was easy despite the Pakistani army’s ongoing anti-militant operation in Swat. Gaining access to Malala, however, was tricky due to the military and political environment, and the nature of Malala’s advocacy work. Through his sources, Westhead found Ziauddin’s mobile number and proceeded to convince him that he and the photographer were purely journalists looking to interview Malala, not harm her. Ziauddin sent a transporter, a man who called himself Malala’s uncle, to bring Westhead and Hafeez to Ziauddin’s school, which was located next to the Yousafzais’ home. Following the interview with Westhead, Hafeez asked Malala to show him the classrooms of her school. This is significant as eventually Hafeez takes the photograph of Malala in a natural setting, whereas Seliger’s shot of Malala is in a studio. Hafeez states:

I walked around with her and could feel the power of her body language while she was moving her hands and explaining things to me. She was talking about the students and teachers walking in a classroom and came a point when she was standing in the center with sunlight coming from the window on her right side. I thought this was the right time and moment to take her photos. She was confident and slightly shy at the same time but I could see the spark and shine in her eyes and that special smile.

Throughout the email interview, Hafeez refers to Malala as confident and brave. This assessment matches the resulting photograph as printed on *Time’s* cover. As discussed earlier, Malala appears bold and assertive. In the interview, and as demonstrated in the above quote, Hafeez also offers a slightly different assessment that Malala simultaneously exhibited
confidence and shyness. Additionally, Hafeez notes “that special smile” – evoking the idea that Malala’s smile is unique. This is particularly noteworthy as this is the only visual included in the dataset of this study which was taken before the Taliban’s attack on Malala which, consequently, resulted in a noticeable facial distortion on the left side, preventing Malala from smiling and blinking as she did before.

Hafeez’s photographs of Malala – one of which was printed in Toronto’s The Star – were later sought by Time two months after the shooting. Hafeez felt honored that Time chose to print his photograph of Malala, also noting it is a frequent topic of discussion among Pakistanis, many of whom do not have a favorable opinion of Malala. Hafeez rejects these unfavorable notions and instead lauds Malala for standing up “against terrorism by voicing support for girls to get education and equal rights. She was shot in the head for that and this struggle deserves recognition” (Hafeez interview). In Hafeez’s comment, we observe the competing struggles Malala faces as an individual activist changing a broken system from within and the social limitations ever restricting the poor brown girl from achieving her goal. That Malala has overcome these struggles is the point of admiration she receives from her many admirers like Hafeez. This recognition is observed in the article accompanying the cover image of Malala.

Written by Aryn Baker, the title of the article simply reads: “Runner-Up: Malala Yousafzai, the Fighter.” Far lengthier than the two paragraph profile in the “100 Most Influential People” issue, Baker’s article runs three pages on Time’s website, chronicling Malala’s lifelong love of learning which she sought to preserve at any cost. Baker describes the events leading up to the October 9, 2012 shooting: Malala’s participation in the anonymous BBC blog, her outspoken criticism of the Taliban, and her demand of
government officials and politicians to increase education funding in Pakistan. Baker concludes the article by returning to Malala’s old classroom at the Khushal school where a desk is left unoccupied in anticipation of Malala’s return. Baker notes the bravery of the Swati girls to return to school – a bravery, Baker claims, the girls possessed innately but blossomed fiercely under Malala’s actions. Given that Baker’s article appeared less than three months after Malala was shot, the photograph of Malala on the cover appears to be an attempt to portray Malala as a courageous fighter while, at the time of publication, Malala was still healing from the near fatal shooting. Baker, too, was aware of how Malala was pictorially represented: she mentions the first pictures of Malala after the October 9, 2012 event, which showed a weakened and injured Malala, the victim of violence. This image, Baker claims, quickly dissipated as subsequent photographs depicted Malala with a book in hand and headscarf carefully wrapped to conceal her injuries. Thus Baker paints a very heroic image of Malala, yet she also manages to insert some criticism of Malala. Baker quotes psychiatrist Mohammad Ayub who manages the hospital in Swat where Malala was first taken: “[She] was like a suicide bomber, brainwashed into putting herself in danger. Child prostitutes, child soldiers, child laborers and child heroes – they are all exploited children, in my opinion, and it shouldn’t be allowed” (Baker, 2012). Ayub raised a point that would later recur in other media texts involving Malala, such as her memoir and documentary: whether Malala was capable of making the decision to become a child-rights activist when she herself was still a child.

Glamour Magazine December 2013 Issue (Appendix 1E)

In 2013, Malala was nominated for Glamour’s “Woman of the Year Award.” She was among eleven nominees chosen by the magazine. The other ten women/groups included: (1)
pop artist Lady Gaga (also winner of the award); (2) U.S. representative Gabby Giffords and her spouse Mark Kelly; (3) Costume and production designer Catherine Martin; (4) actress Kerry Washington; (5) Models and maternal health ambassadors Liya Kebede and Christy Turlington Burns; (6) Founder of Net-A-Porter.com Natalie Massenet; (7) athlete and surfing champion Carissa Moore; (8) singer and actress Barbara Streisand; (9) teacher Kaitlin Roig-DeBellis; and (10) philanthropist Melinda Gates (Cacich, 2013).

The photo was captured by portrait and style photographer Norman Jean Roy, prominently known for his editorial and advertising photography. Malala appears center-left in the frame, sitting on a burgundy school chair. She leans forward, smiling and facing the viewer head on. In classic lady-like fashion, her legs are tightly crossed. Malala sports tan espadrille peep-toe wedges on her feet. She wears a traditional shalwar kameez in shades of orange. Typical for Malala, her headscarf sits further back on her head, showing a few inches of her side parted and pinned black hair. The kameez is colorfully decorated and partially hidden behind her shawl. Her sleeves are pushed up to her elbows, exposing her forearms. She wears a gold-chain bracelet on her left wrist.

Unlike the photographs examined previously, the Glamour shot has a busier backdrop: a classroom named in her honor at Girls Prep in Bronx, New York (Leive, 2013). The photograph is set in a classroom. The room is slightly dingy: peeled paint on the window pane and tape marks on the blackboard. The academic environment is not overwhelming: viewers are offered a taste of classroom props through the globe on the floor in the left corner of the frame and the paper and pencil atop the student desk on the right. The drabness of the classroom – dominated by shades of blue-gray – appears in stark contrast to the lively and brightly adorned Malala. Her orange embroidered dress instantly draws the viewer’s eye: she
is the focal point of the photograph. Malala does not fill the frame: she sits center-left and slightly hunched over. Yet, while demure, she enlivens the photograph: in this dreary classroom sits a bright-eyed young woman, enticing and welcoming her viewers into this world as she leans forward inviting them.

Malala’s profile that appears alongside the photograph is written by Glamour’s Editor-in-Chief Cindi Leive. Below the article’s headline, “Malala Yousafzai: The Girls’ Hero,” is a quote by the United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon explaining why Malala is a Woman of the Year: “By targeting her, extremists showed what they feared most: a girl with a book. Malala embodies the power of education to build peace. She is truly a role model for the world” (Leive, 2013). Ban’s sentiments are captured in the photograph: in the drabness of an inner-city classroom, Malala stands out as a bright role model. Leive’s article subsequently serves to explain how and why Malala became this role model. The article begins by invoking the events of October 9, 2012 – the day Malala was shot in the head. Leive quickly backtracks, asking the same question the Taliban gunman asked on the school bus: who is Malala? In four paragraphs, Leive summarizes the first fifteen years of Malala’s life, recounting the same narrative relayed in numerous other texts about Malala: named after the legendary female Afghan war-hero Malalai, Malala was the exceptional daughter of an exceptional Pashtun man, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who refused to mourn the birth of a baby girl but rather rejoice. The exceptionalization narrative continues as we read about Malala’s disdain for the conservative culture of Swat Valley and her keen desire to rehabilitate the broken world she observed around her. Leive offers examples of an “emboldened” Malala who openly spoke out against Taliban influence in the region and made pointed demands of
the Prime Minister of Pakistan to improve the condition of girls’ education when she was awarded the country’s National Peace Prize.

Next, Leive abruptly returns to the day of the shooting: “And then came October 9.” She describes the shock Malala’s father felt and the overwhelming response by individuals from around the world rallying to support her and anticipate her recovery to a normal life. Leive challenges this notion of normalcy, however, claiming that “for Malala, normal was never the goal.” She next lists Malala’s achievements (publication of her memoir *I Am Malala* and her address at the United Nations General Assembly) and the notable persons she has dazzled (comedian Jon Stewart and President Barack Obama). She is lauded the hero for an issue desperately in need of attention. Malala’s faith also earns a mention: in quoting Malala, Leive mentions the teen’s favorable assessment of her religion, claiming the Taliban have ignored the equitable education that Islam espouses for girls and boys alike. Thus, Malala’s achievements, activism, and determination serve as *Glamour*’s evidence to nominate her as Woman of the Year. Leive concludes with an anecdote from her final Skype interview with Malala. Asking Malala what she would like *Glamour*’s readers to know, Malala said:

You can tell them a story from my imagination! When God created man and woman, he was thinking, Who shall I give the power to, to give birth to the next human being? And God chose woman. And this is the big evidence that women are powerful. Women are strong. Women can do anything. Come out and struggle for your rights; nothing can happen without your voice. Do not wait for me to do something for your rights. It's your world, and you can change it (Leive, 2013).
Malala’s words offer another perspective that is not championed as loudly as her call to education: the status of women through motherhood. Malala determines the nexus of power as procreation and the ability to carry and birth a human child. Ironically, Malala’s advocacy of girls’ education is to escape early motherhood. In the documentary *He Named Me Malala*, Malala recounts that if she did not have her extraordinary parents and was an ordinary girl, teenage Malala would be the mother of two babies. As such, because Malala is the extraordinary daughter of extraordinary parents, her delayed (potential) motherhood is another marker of her extraordinariness. This, however, is the same extraordinary fate she is fighting to offer millions of young girls around the world. If (or preferably when) this goal is achieved, would Malala lose her extraordinariness?

The *Glamour* photograph of Malala and the accompanying article maintain the same narrative other visual media and articles about Malala claim: she is the most exceptional ordinary girl you will ever meet. A cheerful young woman who enjoys teasing her brothers and fangirling *Ugly Betty*, she also socializes with dignitaries and delivers speeches on international platforms. The *Glamour* photograph echoes a similar sentiment: here is a young woman in an unassuming classroom, sitting casually – apart from her choice of dress, she is like any of the other students who attend Girls Prep, with the exception that no other student has a classroom named after her.

**The Daily Show Interview with Malala**

The interview with Malala Yousafzai aired on October 8th, 2013. The first approximately six minutes of the interview were aired on Comedy Central, while an additional ten minutes were filmed for the web exclusive. The following analysis explores the interview in its entirety: both the broadcasted and web exclusive portions. Jon Stewart
begins by introducing Malala in a fashion that is typical of most interviews and articles involving Malala: she is an advocate for the education of young girls, the youngest nominee for the Nobel prize, and author of a memoir titled *I Am Malala*. As Stewart announces her, Malala makes her entry to the stage. She wears a white *kurti*, a long tunic-like shirt popularly worn in Pakistan, with a multi-colored geometric panel, and a bright orange *dupatta* (shawl) adorned with sparkling sequins. The *dupatta* wraps around her shoulders and upper torso with the front half of her hair visible as the *dupatta* rests on the center of her head. This ensemble is Malala’s usual form of dress and evokes a strong Pakistani/South Asian style. The half-covered *dupatta* is especially noteworthy as it departs from typical western media encounters with Muslim women who either do not wear a headscarf or wear a stricter form of veiling (e.g., the Iranian chador, the Afghani burqa). Therefore, Malala’s form of veiling is unusual for a Western audience.

Malala shakes Stewart’s hand – a notable departure from the strict physical separation of men and women in predominately Islam-observant societies – and sits down across from him. Stewart delivers the first joke of the interview after Malala comments what an honor it is to be on his show. No, he says, “it is an honor for us. I know me.” The audience laughs along with Malala in this endearing exchange where Stewart places her on a pedestal. In a girlish manner, Malala covers her mouth as she giggles.

From the onset of the interview, Stewart dotes on Malala: “Nothing feels better than making you laugh,…I enjoyed that very much.” Stewart objectifies Malala as a young girl from whose laughter he gains pleasure. In the above quote, Stewart is the subject *making* Malala, the object, laugh. Furthermore, Stewart’s feelings are the emphasis, as “nothing feels better” and “I enjoyed,” hence Malala is, from the very beginning of the interview, an object
of Stewart’s affection and pleasure. Malala’s personhood is quickly reduced to laughter at the behest of a man. In emphasizing his endearment of Malala, Stewart overextends in his comments, relegating Malala into an exaggerated girlish subject position, thereby knocking her down a few pegs. This is the first challenge to Malala’s agency in the interview.

Stewart’s first question to Malala: “Where did your love for education come from?” Malala then describes her experience in Pakistan, where she did not fully appreciate education until access to it was snatched from her. She ties education to the empowerment of women which, Malala believes, is the reason the terrorists have discouraged women from attending school. This statement prompts applause and cheers from the audience. Next Malala discusses the Taliban’s arrival in Swat Valley, describing their benign beginnings and gradual transition to crueler practices such as murder and bombing schools. Upon hearing the dire circumstances in Swat, Stewart inquires how Malala mustered the courage to speak openly about the cruelty of the Taliban. Malala cites her father as her inspiration to “raise my voice” as he is an activist for women’s education. In spite of her vocal activism against the Taliban and having heard rumblings of a threat against her life, Malala maintains she “didn’t think the Taliban would be so cruel to come after a child.” This is a pivotal moment in the interview. Until this point, the cruelties of the Taliban remain removed and abstract for the audience: bombing hundreds of schools, cold-blooded murders, and public floggings. However, at this moment, Malala effectively poses the question, can you believe the Taliban targeted me, a fifteen year old minor? Malala’s braveness and the Taliban’s savagery are highlighted here: Malala defies normative expectations of children (e.g., children should behave in a frightened manner) and the Taliban exceeds all boundaries of humanity (e.g., targeting an innocent and helpless child).
Stewart’s behavior now changes to augment the viewers’ awe of Malala and her life events. Malala describes how she would imagine the Taliban coming to kill her and what she would do in response. Initially, she imagined throwing a shoe at the Talib\(^4\) to protect herself. But she concludes that in doing so – retaliating violence with violence – she would not be much different than the Talib. Instead, she decides she would inform the Talib of how crucial education is – how she is ready to fight for the right to obtaining an education for even the Talib’s children. Next in this imaginary conversation, she says to the Talib – do what you wish. As the audience cheers, the camera pans out, showing a shocked Stewart as he covers his mouth with his hands demonstrating his awe. The crowd continues to cheer, and slowly Stewart attempts to regain composure, puffing his cheeks and exhaling slowly. He remains silent to allow the audience to vociferously applaud. As the applause simmers down, Stewart furrows his brow, tapping his pen, and assuming a serious attitude. What Stewart says next has been subject to significant criticism: “I know your father is backstage, and he’s very proud of you, but would he be mad if I adopted you? [audience and Malala laugh] Because you sure are swell.” This quote bears all the markers of the white male savior complex. Stewart acknowledges the pride Malala’s father, Ziauddin, has for his daughter. In spite of this, Ziauddin’s pride is not good enough, thus as a white man, Stewart, asks to “adopt” (re: save) Malala from the brown man, Ziauddin. On the surface, Stewart likely asked this question as a sign of endearment. However, this endeavor for endearment recalls the colonial history of Euro-American white men saving brown Muslim women from brown men even if, as in Malala’s case, the brown man in question is, by normative standards, a good person.

\(^4\) Singular form of ‘Taliban’, translated literally as ‘student’
Throughout the interview, Malala remains composed, speaking in a steady manner – in fact, too steadily. There are rarely any pauses in her speech and her manner of speaking has a tonal rhythm, all of which indicate rehearsed speech. Her speech lacks naturalness: she appears to be on autopilot, reciting the litany of prepared stories and arguments. One cannot be too harsh, however, about the scripted quality of Malala’s speech. After all, English is not her native language and intelligently discussing sociopolitical issues is not necessarily common for sixteen year old children. What is significant, however, is the repetition of this litany across various interactions Malala has had with Western media. The narrative is tightly packaged and neatly delivered by an eloquent Malala. For instance, Malala uses the same narratives, nearly verbatim, in the documentary film *He Named Me Malala*.

In the web-exclusive portion of the interview, Malala speaks about the beauty of Swat. She describes it as a lush paradise, the most beautiful place on earth – a description also expressed in Malala’s memoir. Swat is depicted as a heavenly place, but its charm and purity are ravaged by the Taliban who perform acts of violence against the land and its people. Thus, Malala herself serves as a symbol of Swat; she too who is portrayed as young and innocent has been attacked by the Taliban much like how Swat has been maimed by extremists. The West has managed to save Malala from the clutches of the Taliban, therefore she now advocates for her homeland to be saved also. This becomes the true test for Western viewers: do we care enough for this young girl to save her home? Has Malala’s narrative pulled at the heartstrings of viewers to such a degree that we are moved to save all that which is connected to her?

In this particular interview, these questions are left hanging as Stewart undoes Malala’s effort for Western audiences to see the same purity and innocence in Swat as they
see in her. Stewart concludes the interview by stating, “I don’t know where you come from but I’m very glad you’re here.” Malala’s entire effort throughout the interview to contextualize herself and her mission within the history of her home is abruptly erased by Stewart. While expressing his joy in meeting Malala, Stewart rhetorically displaces her. It is untrue that Stewart is unaware of where Malala comes from: a sizable portion of the interview is devoted to Malala’s life in Swat and the impact of the Taliban’s rule in the region. As such, Stewart’s statement instead means “it doesn’t matter where you come from,” effectively whitewashing Malala’s history and local ties to Swat.

Furthermore, Stewart’s continued expression of surprise throughout the interview is patronizing: Malala is bravely advocating universal education for all children but Stewart’s exaggerated awe consistently reminds viewers of Malala’s youth, thereby diminishing the impact and gravity of her mission. Most importantly, Stewart’s behavior underscores how Malala is repeatedly exceptionalized: by expressing his awe and excitement, viewers are led to believe that Malala is one of a kind – unparalleled in her commitment to education and human rights and unique among other brown women and girls. We are taught that few, if any, exceptional young women like Malala have existed, and thus she deserves praise and fanfare, hence Stewart’s ongoing reverence for her through the interview. This reverence, however, cannot be conflated with the possibility of Malala occupying the dominant power position in the dynamic of the interview. Stewart is the interviewer, hence he (and his production team) have set the agenda, particularly in developing the questions. As noted earlier, however, Malala appears particularly well-prepped for the interview, thus some collaboration between Malala’s representatives and The Daily Show production team seems likely. The process of crafting this interview begs a crucial question: how much input did
Malala have in the production of this *Daily Show* segment? How much agency does a minor (by American legal standards) have to not only consent but influence the agenda?

Jon Stewart, while granting Malala the opportunity to explain her story and activism, enacts classic Orientalist and postcolonial tropes of ‘saving’ by subsequently silencing brown/Muslim women, and the paternalistic patriarchal pattern of treating young women and girls as sweet and innocent. In the case of Malala, Stewart’s behavior – the persistent shock and awe – remind viewers of not only her youth but her subaltern status and the uniqueness of Malala as a brown/Muslim woman who appreciates and fights for education rights of children. While the interview offered the chance to explicate the nuanced sociopolitical context of the Taliban’s presence in Swat Valley which ultimately resulted in the near fatal shooting of Malala, Stewart’s conduct throughout the interview only reified Malala as the subaltern.

**Discussion**

In each of the four visuals examined in this chapter, a common theoretical thread emerges: the rhetorical challenge of portraying the downtrodden generic brown girl and Malala the intrepid individual and activist. Is she an activist with objectives who faces challenges or is she the object of obstacles and oppression? While patronizing, Stewart’s (mock) speechlessness is understandable: through multiple subjectivities, Malala refuses to be boxed. She bears all the markers of a subaltern subject – a victim of violence at the hands of brown men – yet brazenly championing her education campaign. Furthermore, Malala would have remained the subaltern subject in Western media like her predecessors (e.g., Sharbat
Gula and Bibi Aisha\(^5\) if it were not for her activist father and her command of the English language, thereby making her accessible to Western audiences. The influence of her father and Malala’s communicative abilities are further examined in the upcoming chapters.

\(^5\) See appendices 2G and 2H
CHAPTER 3: A WORLD LEADER AND EVERYDAY TEENAGER: VISUALS AUTHORED BY MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Introduction

A crucial aspect of the representational process is authorship and the manner of production. This dissertation is organized to differentiate between media where the represented subject does and does not play an active role in production. The previous chapter explored the manner in which Malala Yousafzai has been visually represented on a variety of mass media platforms. The media included in this chapter are largely autobiographical in that they are visuals related to media texts written or produced by Malala. That Malala had greater influence over these visual media than those in the previous chapter speaks to authorship and the extent of control a celebrity like Malala has over her own brand.

Therefore, this chapter is a critical analysis of visual representations of Malala where Malala played a key role in the production of said visuals and/or the texts with which the visuals are associated. For instance, while Malala is not credited as the photographer or producer of her memoir’s cover photos and her biographical documentary respectively, her authorship is key in both media texts (i.e., the cover photos are associated with the memoir she wrote and Malala is the first credited cast member of the documentary). Therefore, in addition to critical analysis of visuals, this chapter examines imaging of Malala as a brand marketing her activism prowess.

Methodologically, this chapter follows the same toolkits as chapter two. To review, these toolkits include critical discourse analysis, social semiotics, and cultural studies. Repeated viewings of, active engagement with, and full immersion in the visuals ensured a thick and comprehensive analysis. In this chapter, I separately analyze each of the following
visuals and conclude with a discussion of the key insights derived from the analysis of the visuals:

1. Front photograph of the jacket cover from Malala Yousafzai’s memoir, *I Am Malala*.
2. Back photograph of the jacket cover from Malala Yousafzai’s memoir, *I Am Malala*.
3. The biographical documentary *He Named Me Malala*.

**I Am Malala: Front Cover (Appendix 1A)**

*I Am Malala* is an autobiography of Malala Yousafzai’s life from birth to her present life, concluding with her address to the United Nations in July 2013. Publisher Little, Brown and Company describe the memoir on their website:

*I Am Malala* is the remarkable tale of a family uprooted by global terrorism, of the fight for girls’ education, of a father who, himself a school owner, championed and encouraged his daughter to write and attend school, and of brave parents who have a fierce love for their daughter in a society that prizes sons. *I Am Malala* will make you believe in the power of one person's voice to inspire change in the world.

The memoir is co-authored with Christina Lamb, an award-winning British journalist and foreign correspondent who has reported on Pakistan and Afghanistan since the 1980’s. In her article “My Year with Malala” for UK’s *The Sunday Times*, Lamb describes the process of co-authoring the book. In January 2013, Lamb was approached by a literary agent representing Malala, propositioning that Lamb write Malala’s story. Lamb vividly recounts her first meeting with Malala, amused that she was nervous meeting a teenage girl when in fact Lamb had 25 years of experience interviewing far more daunting subjects, including
warlords, dictators, royals, and members of the Taliban. Her bemusement is plain to readers: how can a teenage girl from Pakistan be intimidating? Yet Lamb’s bewilderment is justified, as she herself describes the “circus of people around Malala” ranging from celebrities like Angelina Jolie to prominent politicians such as Gordon Brown. Her description of Malala aligns with the general assessment of other media producers: “She is enchanting. Her face lights as she talks and her voice is girlie and full of wonder. Her English is fluent — as her school taught in English — and charmingly old-fashioned, using expressions like ‘kith and kin.’” Lamb successfully juxtaposes Malala’s uniqueness and celebrity-hood (“enchanting”) with age and gender appropriate descriptions (“her voice is girlie”), thus reifying the image of Malala as both exceptional and ordinary. Furthermore, in the same quote, Lamb exoticizes Malala, expressing amazement at her fluency in the English language and her delightful use of antiquated phrases.

The jacket cover of the book features a front photograph and a back photograph, both of which were shot by Antonio Olmos, a photojournalist born in Mexico, who attended photojournalism school in California, and is now based out of Britain. Olmos is especially concerned about issues in human rights, the environment and political conflict (Olmos, 2013). He was commissioned by the Little Brown and Co. Publishing House to photograph Malala for the book cover of her memoir. The photographs were taken during July of 2013 in Malala’s home in England. Olmos was selected based on his extensive experience as a photojournalist covering regions like the Middle East and South Asia. In describing the process, Olmos states he was granted full creative control during the photoshoot but he also considered and valued Malala’s input as the photoshoot progressed (A. Olmos, email interview, January 25, 2016). Olmos sent the best photos to the publisher who, along with
Malala’s input, selected the cover shot. Olmos admits he would have selected a different photo for the cover from among those he sent to the publisher, however he ultimately felt pleased and privileged to played a key role in process (A. Olmos, email interview, January 25, 2016). While Olmos doesn’t believe this is his best work, he agrees it is the most recognizable.

The front cover of *I Am Malala* features a portrait shot of Malala, specifically a headshot. This portrait is an involvement photo, where Malala smiles slightly and looks directly at the viewer, demanding their attention through eye contact. Her complexion appears brightened, giving her a glow of innocence and youth. This youthfulness is further compounded by her deep pink headscarf, commonly known as a *dupatta* in Pakistan. Like a traditional *dupatta*, Malala’s is semi-sheer, made from georgette or a rougher chiffon fabric. The scarf calls attention to Malala’s youthful femininity: she is very clearly female but the girlish pink and the unassuming smile prevent the viewer from sexualizing her. As will be apparent in the other photographs, it is vital that Malala is not sexualized. Malala’s non-tweezed eyebrows also contribute to her appearing young but not beautiful and desirable. Her unkempt and bushy brows also evoke an unpolished, tribal quality – that Malala comes from a place where extensive personal grooming is not practiced.

That Malala’s girlish qualities are highlighted in this photograph makes her more approachable to the audience, saying this could be your daughter, your bright-eyed little girl. The cover is meant to openly invite readers to know and understand the story of the teenager whose face has appeared regularly across international news media. Furthermore, Malala’s girlish appearance evoke certain sympathies for her activism driven brand; namely, she appears authentic in her youth, hence lending authenticity to her mission.
Malala’s headscarf calls for greater discussion because, in addition to Malala’s face, the headscarf (*hijab*) is one of the most salient objects in the photograph. Furthermore, the Islamic headscarf is rife with symbolism and competing and ongoing interpretations (Shirazi, 2001; Dreher and Ho, 2009). In this particular image, the headscarf appears loose, perhaps even playful, as compared to other media representations of Muslim women who don a headscarf. Some of these other representations feature headscarves in darker or bland colors and often tightly tied around the wearer’s head. For a viewer who is unfamiliar with regional and religious differences that influence the type of *hijab* a Muslim woman may wear, Malala’s tidy yet loose *dupatta* may be perceived as a loosening of the stereotypically oppressive *hijab*. Malala’s *dupatta* is so loose that her black hair is easily visible which, according to some religious interpretations of *hijab*, is antithetical to the very purpose of *hijab* and the principles of modesty in Islam. Malala’s headscarf thus lends an opening up of what, in the Western viewer’s eye, is considered appropriate or traditional Islamic dress. However, this conclusion can only be drawn if the viewer even considers Malala as Muslim. More explicitly put, is Malala viewed as Pakistani first and Muslim second? Or does this distinction even matter for the Western audience? While these questions could only be answered via an audience analysis, we can speculate the varying approaches and standpoints from which Malala may be viewed.

*I Am Malala: Back Cover (Appendix 1B)*

Unlike the front cover which solely features Malala, the back cover is a photograph of Malala and her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. Ziauddin dons a traditional Pakistani dress known as *shalwar kameez*, which is paired with a charcoal grey sports jacket. Not only is the *shalwar kameez* Pakistan’s iconic dress, the choice of white *shalwar kameez* is significant: this is the color of aristocrats. Only elites have the luxury of wearing the least stain resistant
color in a country where the continuous presence of dust and dirt in the atmosphere soils any outfit within minutes. The sports jacket simply adds another layer of elitism signifying that Ziauddin is wealthy, educated, or both. For a Pakistani audience, Ziauddin’s choice of dress (*shalwar kameez* and sports jacket) would seem ordinary attire for an upper-middle class Pakistani man, perhaps working as a politician or a business-owner.

However, for the viewers who are unfamiliar with the aristocratic symbolism of white *shalwar kameez*, Ziauddin is dressed to represent his ethnic and foreign identity, hence clothing acts as a tool of Otherizing Ziauddin, rendering his choice of dress as non-relatable to the Western audience. But the attempt is made to ‘modernize’ Ziauddin through the sports jacket and by the lack of a beard. Although he sports a mustache, Ziauddin looks relatively well groomed: his hair and mustache are both trimmed and styled, which flies in the face of stereotypical portrayals of the unruly and unwashed Oriental. Thus Ziauddin occupies a gray area between the modern and the traditional: he is unburdened by the weight and symbolism of a Taliban-like beard yet still garbed in Pakistani dress.

Malala’s *shalwar kameez* and *dupatta* additionally act as ethnic and foreign markers, signifying her Pakistani heritage. For a Pakistani audience, Malala’s dress would be recognized as within the expectations of 2014 national fashion trends. While some of the patterns on Malala’s dress are vaguely reminiscent of traditional Pashtun fabrics, more than anything, this outfit is styled according to the contemporary fashion trends in Pakistan. Even though this would only be evident to a Pakistani audience (or even those outside of the country who follow Pakistani fashion), the choice of mainstream Pakistani dress is telling: Malala identifies as Swati and Pashtun before Pakistani (Yousafzai, 2013 p.25), yet visually she primarily dresses according to her Pakistani identity. In particular, the point I strive to
make here is the series of choices (either made by Malala or someone else), that comprise the
discourse of Malala Yousafzai and appeal to a variety of audiences. For instance, Malala’s
facial features and her name are distinctly Pashtun. The wider Pakistani audience, however,
would recognize her as mainstream Pakistani. Malala might have worn traditional Pashtun
garb or even a Taliban approved burka. But she did not, thereby signifying the importance of
identifying with mainstream Pakistanis – an effort perhaps influenced by the legacy of
Malala’s political idol, Behnazar Bhutto, who was the daughter of an Irani woman but
dressed the part of a Pakistani woman, especially her iconic white dupatta.

What does the presence of these Pakistani and Pashtun identity symbols on the jacket
cover of a U.S. bestseller mean and what do they perform? First, they require the audience to
identify and differentiate Malala’s outfit from other forms of covering in the Muslim world.
On the one hand, Malala’s outfit and the presence of her memoir on bestseller bookshelves
may help to normalize the perceived foreignness of Pakistani dress, and by extension
mitigate the Otherness of Pakistan. For the Malala brand, the choice of Pakistani dress over
typical Western attire intends to push forward the notion of Pakistanis as present and
conversant in Western public discourses on education and activism while still remaining
authentic to ethnic identifiers. However, this perception is contingent on the audience’s
ability to identify Malala’s dress as Pakistani and her features as Pashtun. For audience
members unable to do so, other markers – particularly choice of color and body language –
play a more prominent role in discerning how Malala is meant to be perceived.

Body language is immensely important in this photograph. With her hands folded
before her, Malala is looking up at her father, smiling slightly. Her expression reads
admiration and respect for father. The very action of Malala looking up reifies her position as
a child looking up to a parental figure. With her folded hands, Malala appears wrapped up or contained: although her hands are folded somewhat loosely, all that makes Malala is neatly contained within the least possible space, signifying a certain meekness that foils her otherwise confident and brave personal qualities. Her father’s arm, however, reaches beyond his body to wrap around Malala and keep her close. Ziauddin’s skin complexion is noticeably darker than Malala’s, thus he appears aged, rustic and experienced as compared to Malala’s soft and creamier complexion. In her memoir, Malala mentions Ziauddin’s self esteem issues when he was younger due to his darker complexion. Ziauddin, standing tall, smiles widely but instead of returning his daughter’s gaze, he looks directly at the audience. He is not trapped by the photograph or its viewers, for he appears confident and in control. Even something about his smile implies that he knows or is aware of something the audience is not. What may be relatable to the audience is interpreting this photograph as fatherly affection: Ziauddin is over the moon with pride and joy for his daughter and her accomplishments. He defies Oriental portrayals of brown men as oppressors who discourage women from achieving any status or recognition outside the home. The viewer is left asking, is Ziauddin an accurate representation of a Pashtun/Pakistani/Muslim man or is he the exception? The memoir answers this question as Malala begins the autobiography by relating Ziauddin’s sheer joy at the birth of first born, Malala. Malala describes his happiness as unusual among Pashtun culture where only boys are so warmly and jovially welcomed into the world (Yousafzai, 2013 p.13-14).

Yet, in the photograph, even as Ziauddin clutches Malala, the happiness on Ziauddin’s face is not to be shared with her but rather the audience, which blemishes the idea of pure paternal affection. Perhaps we could read this visual as Ziauddin’s pride for himself:
after all, he is the one gazing assuredly at the audience while Malala looks on with an expression of not only admiration but also seeking approval. It then becomes clear why this photograph appears on the back of Malala’s memoir: this memoir is meant to celebrate Malala and her life, yet here we see who is pulling the strings from the back. The conundrum that is Malala Yousafzai – how a young girl rose to international stardom – is explained by the superintending presence of her father Ziauddin.

**He Named Me Malala**

The documentary film *He Named Me Malala* was directed by renowned documentary filmmaker Davis Guggenheim who spent over eighteen months with the Yousafzai family to shoot and produce the film. The film’s official website describes the documentary as follows:

*He Named Me Malala* is an intimate portrait of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai, who was targeted by the Taliban and severely wounded by a gunshot when returning home on her school bus in Pakistan’s Swat Valley. The then 15-year-old was singled out, along with her father, for advocating for girls’ education, and the attack on her sparked an outcry from supporters around the world. She miraculously survived and is now a leading campaigner for girls’ education globally as co-founder of the Malala Fund. Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth, Waiting for Superman*) shows us how Malala, her father Zia and her family are committed to fighting for education for all girls worldwide. The film gives us an inside glimpse into this extraordinary young girl’s life – from her close relationship with her father who inspired her love for education, to her impassioned speeches at the UN, to her everyday life with her parents and brothers (Fox SearchLight, 2016).
The plot of the documentary generally follows the narratives Malala shares in her memoir, which is confirmed in the film’s production notes published on Fox Searchlight’s website: *I Am Malala* is credited as inspiration for the documentary. Even the documentary’s marketing materials resemble elements from the front cover of Malala’s memoir. For example, the film poster (Appendix 1F) features a portrait photograph of Malala wearing the same headscarf also depicted on the cover of her memoir. The photograph on the poster, however, is transformed into an illustration, the colors and effects seamlessly blending into the backdrop featuring a sunset bursting with pages from a book, steadily transitioning into leaf-like birds. The colors are particularly striking, and consistent, across the Malala franchise: a gradient of marigold and magenta, borrowed from the color and trim of Malala’s headscarf.

While I engaged in multiple viewings and close readings of the film, the overarching motif of the film can be discerned through a single viewing of the documentary: a classic superhero story with a behind-the-scenes look at the titular character’s life. Malala, the heroine of this story, has all the markers of a superhero: courageous, outspoken, and willing to take a bullet for the greater good. Director Guggenheim takes us behind the making of this heroine and asks, who is she really? Is she as unique as she appears to be or is she troubled with the same demons that plague the rest of ‘us’? As will be evidenced in the forthcoming analysis, Guggenheim answers ‘yes’ to both of these questions.

This analysis benefits significantly from the production notes from Fox Searchlight Pictures’ press kit. The forty-four page document provides a detailed synopsis of the film and comments from key members of the filmmaking team, namely director Davis Guggenheim and producers Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald. The document also gives a brief biography of each member of the filmmaking team.
As indicated in the production notes, *He Named Me Malala* is inspired by the memoir *I Am Malala*, which is evident by the similar sequencing of events and choice of stories. For instance, both the memoir and the film open with a *tuppa*, a Pashtun story, about the legendary war heroine Malalai of Maiwand. Malalai encouraged the Afghan warriors who were losing a battle against the British army. Using her white veil as a flag, she marched to the front lines and spoke words of inspiration to galvanize the dispirited Afghan army. Her valor, however, came at a cost: Malalai was killed in the battle. Her story, however, lived on and inspired generations of Pashtuns, including Ziauddin Yousafzai who named his daughter after the Pashtun heroine.

In the documentary film, the legend of Malalai is visually represented through an animation sequence while a voiceover by Malala narrates the story. In the animation, a female figure dressed in pink goes to the top of the mountain, holding a flag. The choice of pink is noteworthy since it is unlikely to be historically accurate – pink is a vibrant color not often associated with warzones – but significant as it is color of choice when depicting Malala; the movie poster, for instance, makes generous use of pink. The female figure’s face is almost featureless – just a hint of eyes, nose, and ears are visible. Viewers of the film are thus introduced early on to the animation style utilized liberally throughout the documentary.

The next scenes breakaway from animation and instead include a groggy Malala waking from a coma, wondering where she is, and a voiceover from a pensive Ziauddin. The camera focuses on a pair of reading glasses and a cell phone, next transitioning to a side view of Ziauddin. The mood is intense as Ziauddin makes his opening statement: “What will Malala be thinking? ‘I was a child. You should have stopped me. What has happened to me
is because of you.” This is followed by a black screen with the title card: He Named Me Malala.

These opening scenes with the legend of Malalai, Malala’s condition in the hospital, and Ziauddin’s introspection set up the primary conflict and controversy of the film: was Malala destined, or perhaps pushed, to be attacked? The similarities are unnerving: Ziauddin named his daughter after a young woman who was martyred for standing up to the enemy. Did Ziauddin purposely set into motion his daughter’s fate by virtue of not only her name but his encouragement of Malala’s activism? These questions linger in the narrative backdrop throughout the documentary but are later resolved by Malala as she definitively answers the question of her father trapping her into this life. Malala claims she chose this life for herself – some of the animations support this, such as when Ziauddin leaves the BBC diary in Malala’s room, giving her the choice to help the BBC reporters with an exposé piece about the Taliban’s presence in Swat Valley.

After the intensity of the Malalai legend, Malala in the hospital, and an emotionally tortured Ziauddin, the next scene after the title card transitions to snippets of the Yousafzais’ homelife: Malala working on a speech in her bedroom, Malala’s youngest brother Atal playing the recorder, and the Yousafzai family sitting around the breakfast table. Viewers also catch moments of Malala and her bother Khushal arm wrestling. Viewers get a taste of the Yousafzai children’s personalities. Khushal calls his sister “the naughtiest girl on earth” and dishing insider knowledge: “People think she’s so kind and speaks for people’s rights, but that’s not true. In home she’s so violent.” Malala acts the role of the bossy yet loving elder sister insisting her brother only praise her and, admitting that while she can be
“naughty” at times, it is her “right.” Most endearing and comical is Atal, who adorably complains that Malala slaps him every time she meets him. Malala insists the slapping is simply a sign of her love.

Abruptly after the light-hearted moments of family life, the next scene features Malala in the hospital as she undergoes a head examination to assess her rehabilitation from the shooting. The remainder of the film follows this pattern: light-hearted and innocuous scenes followed by serious and sober scenes. This juxtaposition of light and heavy moments drives home the theme of Malala as simultaneously an ordinary and extraordinary girl.

Malala’s relationship with her father is a key theme in the documentary, recognized early on by director Guggenheim, hence inspiring the title of the film: “My first instinct in making this movie was that it was very much about a family, about a father’s love and about a girl who feels empowered to do amazing things” (Fox SearchLight, 3). Several scenes depict this closeness: Malala leaning her head on her father’s shoulder; Ziauddin grinning widely as he watches his daughter’s interview on The Daily Show; father and daughter holding hands as they walk through an airport. Ziauddin says, “We became dependent on each other. Like one soul in two different bodies.” The father-daughter closeness and

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6 In the British context (including former British colonies where the influence of the English is significant), when describing children, “naughty” is typically used to describe badly behaved children. For adults, “naughty” often signifies misbehavior with a sexual undertone. It is unclear how an American audience would perceive this word as “naughty” is not as prevalently used in American English to describe misbehaved children as it is in British English.

7 Ziauddin’s choice of words in this quote are not only noteworthy but problematic. His words seem to paraphrase a verse from the Qur’an that reads: “He it is who has created you from a single soul and made therefrom its mate” (7:190). This verse, however, refers to the relationship between husband and wife, not father and daughter. Whether Ziauddin chose his words to intentionally mirror this Qur’anic verse, it is unknown. However, the similarities are uncanny in an unsavory manner.
evidence of ‘normal’ family activities are crucial for crossing potential cultural gaps between the Yousafzais and the audience.

Viewers are privy to Malala’s struggle adjusting to celebrity-hood in a new country. She says, “I don’t really understand this new society and new rules.” Ten minutes into the film, Malala is feverishly photographed by a throng of photographers before her interview on CNN with Christiana Amanpour. Malala appears dazed by the photographers, unsure of which camera to face. Amanpour guides Malala, showing her where to look. In the next scene, Malala walks down a hallway but quickly runs in the opposite direction as she hears a dog bark at the other end. There are two sides of this struggle. On the one hand, these scenes demonstrate Malala’s Otherness or foreignness: she is not accustomed to being photographed and is afraid of dogs, an animal most Westerners are not shy of. However, the scenes, if viewed from Malala’s perspective, cast Western society as the Other as she is the one expressing her confusion.

Perceptions of the Other also played a key role in the decision to produce the documentary with the support of Image Nation, an Abu Dhabi based media firm. Walter Parkes, a co-producer of the film, said:

We not only have a long-standing relationship with Image Nation, but with the entire region. We produced *The Kite Runner*, a film admired for its diverse depiction of Muslim characters, and I subsequently attended the US/Islamic Word Forum, sponsored by the Brookings Institute, for two years as a cultural representative. We felt that given the religious and political sensitivities that we wanted Image Nation to be on board from the outset (Fox SearchLight, 2016: 7).
Parkes and MacDonald used their credentials as the producers of *The Kite Runner* to lobby support from Image Nation to produce *He Named Me Malala*. Furthermore, Parkes and MacDonald position themselves as media producers seeking to rectify some of the Western world’s Orientalist stereotypes of Muslims. Their choice in which story to produce, however, is not entirely innocuous: both *The Kite Runner* and *He Named Me Malala* are based on best-selling books written with a Western audience in mind (i.e., both books were first published in English and later translated to other languages). Thus, the choice to produce and market films based on books highly ranked on *The New York Times* Best Seller List is hardly risky and sure to be well received by the audiences they were already intended for.

The goal to move beyond Orientalist stereotypes was echoed by director Guggenheim. He explains the contrast between Western news reportage of Pakistan and how the Yousafzais describe their home country:

> So often, when we see a report here about Pakistan, it’s something harsh or scary. But when Malala and Ziauddin tell the story of their past, it’s something wonderful. The way they spoke, their memories felt like a storybook to me…as something beautiful and charming, like a fairy tale (14).

Guggenheim goes on stating that, “When you think of Pakistan, you tend to think of grainy footage and bad news – but when I looked at pictures of the Swat Valley, I saw a paradise” (16). Guggenheim’s effort is laudable – to offer another, less “harsh or scary” depiction of Pakistan. However, the results fall short of his goal. The film relies heavily on repetitive stock footage of the Taliban, and scenes of violence and blown-up buildings. The footage of the Taliban is in fact “grainy,” including the main antagonist, Mullah Fazlullah, the Taliban cleric accountable for enforcing politicized Islam in the Swat region which prevented girls,
like Malala, from attending school. Furthermore, instead of relying on filmed reenactments to relay the “wonderful” story of Malala and Ziauddin’s past, the film uses animations to bring to life their memories. The implication is clear: the real, unanimated Pakistan is too ugly to show.

Additionally, Guggenheim explained his desire to challenge the apparent foreignness of Malala and her family.

As it turned out, their cultural differences never felt much like differences at all. Guggenheim saw their Muslim faith and Pashtunwali (Pashtun code of life), though central to their lives, as driving their generosity, honesty, and affection… “It was no different from the way faith operated in my home… I think it’s fantastic that this film brings a Muslim family to the screen in a way everyone can relate to” (9)

Guggenheim’s sentiments call for a utopian vision of humanity’s unity: he makes a Muslim family palatable and relatable to “everyone.” Who is included in “everyone?” This is unclear. What is clear, however, is while Guggenheim’s objective of portraying the Yousafzais as a normative family is commendable, the above quote signifies an erasure of cultural nuance and differences. Furthermore, as the next quote shows, Guggenheim aimed to protect the family’s authentic narrative:

It was a delicate thing to tell a story about a family who have come from a very different culture. But the most important thing to me was to tell their story in a way that is respectful of and truthful about their experience. I didn’t ever look at it as me telling their story. I looked at the film as a chance for them to tell their own story (8).
Again, Guggenheim’s intentions are likely well-meaning, however he does not follow-through entirely on this claim. At times, Guggenheim pushed issues that were not necessarily central to Malala’s narrative and clearly made her uncomfortable as they are taboo topics in Pashtun/Pakistani culture. About halfway through the film, Malala and her brother Atal browse through photos of their favorite cricketers on Google Images. As the siblings discuss the talents of the cricketers, Guggenheim suggests Malala enjoys viewing the cricketers for more than their athletic ability. Guggenheim pushes the subject of boyfriends and dating on a clearly embarrassed Malala who shyly laughs and is mortified by Guggenheim’s suggestion to call a boy she likes.

As the film continues to make liberal use of juxtaposing the ordinariness of Malala’s life with the extraordinary moments, the cultural difference narrative continues to be carefully shaped. In a scene where viewers are introduced to Malala’s school in the U.K., she describes her struggles in adjusting:

I don’t feel comfortable when people can see my legs, so my skirt is longer than most of the girls. And then my life is quite different than their life. Most of them have boyfriends…I don’t know whether they [the other girls] will like me, whether they are interested in me.

In this scene, Malala is a typical teenage girl, worried about her social life and fitting in with her classmates. She fears they would not understand her life. And the next scene following Malala’s school woes demonstrates why she harbors this fear: Malala rides in an airplane sitting next to the pilot as she heads to Kenya to check on the state of schooling for Kenyan girls. Few other teenage girls fly across the world on human rights missions. Or as producer Walter Parkes succinctly states, “She presents this wonderful dichotomy of being a world
leader on the one hand and just like every teenage girl you’ve ever met on the other” (Fox SearchLight, 11).

Throughout the film, viewers are exposed to another dichotomy: “good Islam” (practiced by Malala and her family) and “bad Islam” (practiced by the Taliban). Approximately twenty-five minutes into the film, Ziauddin states the women of Swat were easily influenced by the Taliban leader Mullah Fazlullah because they were illiterate. The statement is accompanied by a montage of Muslim women wearing face veils. Shortly thereafter, Malala describes how her mother used to cover her face out of tradition, not for religious reasons. This statement is paired with a scene of Malala and her parents going inside a mosque in the U.K.; Toor Pekai advises her daughter to cover her face as they pass by some men outside the mosque, but in a voiceover Malala insists that “covering my face made me feel like I was just hiding my identity, who I was.” After the mosque scene, the Yousafzais are shown riding in a vehicle, and in Malala’s voiceover she says, “I think she’s [Toor Pekai] not independent or free because she’s not educated.” Within five minutes – from Ziauddin commenting on the illiteracy of Swati women to Malala’s characterization of Toor Pekai’s independence – the connection between the face veil, or niqab, and poor education is clear.

The overlay of veiled women imagery during Ziauddin’s comments and Malala’s rejection of the niqab, coupled with her assessment of her mother’s education all associate face-veiling with social backwardness and illiteracy. This association is concerning on several fronts. First, the implication that the niqab indicates the educational level or achievement of the wearer is as problematic as closeted xenophobic white ‘feminist’ liberators who urge Muslim women to cast off their hijabs and embrace the enlightenment of
modernity (Hirschmann, 1998). Simply put, to classify the *niqab* as inherently anti-education brings the film in line with anti-Islam propaganda that promulgates veiling as oppression.

To the documentary makers’ credit, the film is about Malala and her worldviews, hence the inclusion of Malala’s comment about face veils hiding her identity. Also, Malala’s unfavorable opinion of the *niqab* is likely based on the Taliban enforced culture of forced veiling and the erasure of women from society. This erasure is shown, quite literally, thirty-six minutes into the film: footage of billboards in the Taliban controlled area where the faces of the women featured are painted over. However, this becomes a criticism of Malala – that on the one hand, she is advocating equality and inclusion, yet on the other, she is highly judgmental of a particular form of veiling that has historically been associated with and ubiquitously adopted as symbolic in the propaganda war about women and their status under Islam. Furthermore, assessing Toor Pekai’s freedom solely on her lack of literacy betrays the naiveté of Malala. Her comment appears judgmental and dismissive of her mother – the same mother who birthed and nurtured the fiercely independent Malala. Toor Pekai’s strong character, however, is appreciated by producer Laurie MacDonald:

Malala’s relationship with her father is very special. But I think she is equal parts her mother. Toor Pekai is someone who observes cultural traditions and has tremendous, yet quiet, strength, which I think has a lot to do with who Malala has become. Toor Pekai is a tremendously moral person (Fox SearchLight, 10).

The film, unfortunately, hardly delves into the characteristics of Toor Pekai and her role in Malala’s life. Her appearances are limited to two themes: (1) her lack of education and subsequent struggle in adjusting to life in the U.K. and (2) her marriage to Ziauddin. Toor Pekai, in fact, is an exception to Ziauddin’s feminist outlook that is responsible for his
daughter’s independence, activism, and interest in education. Early in the film, during the scene about Malala’s birth, an animated depiction of Ziauddin is shown adding Malala’s name to a centuries old family tree bearing names of only male ancestors. This is portrayed as a bold, feminist move by Ziauddin – his audacity to include a female relative on a patriarchal family tree. If Ziauddin’s feminism is so thorough, why did he not include the name of his wife? Or perhaps add the name of his own mother and sisters?

Other aspects of the film, however, were less problematic in their portrayal of “good Islam” as a foil to the Taliban’s political Islam. Almost forty minutes into the film is a scene with Malala sitting on the ornately carpeted floor of a mosque. Her dupatta is wrapped tightly – a different look for her – as she reads from the Qur’an. In a voiceover, Malala conveys a powerful philosophical assessment of the Taliban’s concept of the Divine: “The Taliban are a small group of people. They think that God is a tiny, little, conservative being. But for us, God is not that tiny. God has sent us to this world to see how would we live. Would they choose a good way or a bad way?” Malala’s choice of words is particularly poignant in this passage. In pointing to the Taliban’s conception of God as a “tiny, little, conservative being,” Malala implies her interpretation of God is the foil of that of the Taliban’s. To conceive of God as omnipresent and ubiquitous is not unusual in philosophical and theological discussion of the Divine. To describe the Taliban’s God as conservative, however, is a politicized choice. The term “conservative” evokes the sociopolitical dichotomy of conservative/liberal. Thus, Malala, whether inadvertently or not, politicizes the concept of Divine will.

Another scene where Malala enacts the “good Muslim” model is when Ziauddin offers the BBC diary to Malala. In this animation sequence, Ziauddin is shown in his
classroom being reprimanded by the father of a young girl who initially volunteered to write the BBC diary. The father is incensed, saying he does not want his daughter to be killed. Afterwards, Ziauddin returns home and walks into Malala’s room. As she sits working at her desk, Ziauddin offers her the red BBC diary and asks, “Would you like to?” Ziauddin exits and as she begins writing in the diary, in a voiceover Malala quotes the Qur’an, verse 82 in chapter 17: “Truth has to come, and falsehood has to die.” This Qur’anic verse alludes to a kind of religious truth; specifically, it refers to the Prophet Muhammad’s migration to Medina after he was exiled from his home in Mecca due to religious persecution. While Malala more-so paraphrases the verse in the film, the more accurate English translation is “Truth has come and falsehood has vanished.” The Arabic term Zahaqa, meaning “vanished,” specifically connotes gradual disappearance. In reference to the Prophet Muhammad’s migration to Medina, the verse indicates that he would slowly triumph and his enemies would disappear, ultimately allowing his victorious return to Mecca. Thus, by quoting this verse, Malala invokes religious truth to empower her campaign and endeavors. The BBC diary marks the beginning of Malala’s activism which she overtly links to her faith. The connection is clear: Malala’s activism is inspired by her religion, Islam. The triumph of truth is a recurring theme throughout the documentary. An earlier scene shows a montage of television and interview clips of Ziauddin speaking in public venues addressing how the Taliban have tarnished the name of Islam. This montage is spliced with clips of, presumably, the Taliban, half a dozen men riding threateningly in an open-bed truck, which likely foreshadows that Ziauddin could become a target of the Taliban. This is underscored in the next scene when Ziauddin states, “If my rights are violated and I keep silent, I should rather die than to live.”
Central to Malala’s appeal, and effectiveness, as a brown female representative to the Western world is her ability to communicate in the English language. As one scene in the film demonstrates, Malala is acutely aware of this fact. As Guggenheim interviews a bespectacled Malala, he inquires about the many post-it notes stuck on the wall of her bedroom. Malala responds that this is her method of increasing her vocabulary especially now that she is living in English society. She reads aloud one of the post-its – the definition of “cat burglar.” This scene signals a moment where Malala, the subaltern subject, is quite literally learning to ‘speak.’

Malala’s production role is confounding. Malala’s name appears among the cast list and later as a ‘subject’ in the credits. This would distinguish Malala as a cast member and not part of the production team. However, among the list of production team members Malala’s memoir *I Am Malala* is credited, but not Malala herself. At best, Malala is indirectly credited as part of the production team by means of her memoir. At worst, her role in the production process is erased: she is replaced by an object, the book she wrote, hence objectifying her. It is worth noting though that Malala’s role as a cast member is in itself a significant production role. When the film producers first set out to lay the groundwork for the film, they imagined actors playing the parts of the Yousafzai family. However, the producers felt no actor could portray the Yousafzais and Malala’s story as the Yousafzais themselves. Hence, Malala, and her family, are indispensable in the narrative production and representation in the documentary.

Another point of controversy Guggenheim addresses in the film is the perception of Malala among Pakistanis. The film shares a range of views from those who praise her, to the skeptics who are critical. The skeptics – ‘randomly’ selected people from the Pakistani public
– appear about an hour into the film and their criticisms largely ask why has Malala’s story been highlighted in mainstream media? Two quotes summarize the main points of criticism. One person says, “Malala is just the name of a character. It can be anyone. She’s a girl, she don’t know anything.” Another adds: “Her father wrote everything for her. That’s why she’s so famous.” In referring to Malala as a “character,” the critic posits Malala is not a real a person but rather a persona that could be adopted by anyone. Her youth and gender are also points of contention: because she is a girl, she is not knowledgeable. The second critic drives this point further pointing to her father as the puppet master behind the Malala “character.”

If Malala’s genuineness is compromised in the previous scene, Guggenheim quickly erases viewers’ doubts of Malala’s authenticity in the following scene:

Guggenheim: You don’t like to talk about your suffering.

Malala: *(chuckles, pauses)*

Guggenheim: You’re avoiding my question.

Malala: Of course I am.

Guggenheim: You don’t like to talk about it.

Malala: Well, I don’t know.

In this exchange, Malala is unwilling to discuss her suffering, hence underscoring the genuineness of her struggles: as a typical victim of trauma, she does not wish to re-live it. In the production notes, Guggenheim offers another perspective on Malala’s unwillingness to speak about her personal suffering:

One place Malala would not go was discussing the depth of her physical and emotional suffering. Though Guggenheim can’t know for sure why she won’t speak about it, he guesses that it is because she has seen so many people suffering in the
midst of war and repression – both at home and abroad – that she does not wish to
draw attention away from others who have been through even worse (Fox
SearchLight, 2016: 11).

Producer Parkes further philosophizes this point:

I think her refusal to acknowledge her suffering is tied into her utter focus about what
she’s on this earth to do. I also think Ziauddin’s assessment that the one who pulled
the trigger on Malala wasn’t a person but an ideology is really key here. From their
point of view a basic tenet of Islam is forgiveness, and they are walking examples of
it. They channel everything into trying to make the world a better place (11)

Between Guggenheim’s and Parkes’ interpretation of Malala’s reluctance to discuss this
issue, it appears Malala is attempting to remain as selfless as possible, which further
augments her general worldwide appeal as an admirable person and undercuts the Pakistani
critics in the previous scene. Additionally, Parkes ties Malala’s forgiveness of her attackers
to her faith, thereby extending the “good Muslim” motif. From a production standpoint, what
is most crucial here is the absence of Guggenheim’s and Parkes’ commentary of Malala’s
suffering in the actual film. The above quotes, pulled from the production notes, certainly
add some context to Malala’s silence in the film. By not including these interpretations in the
film, however, the filmmakers demonstrate an effort in remaining true to Malala’s voice; if
she herself has not voiced these interpretations, they are not included in the film, hence
reifying He Named Me Malala as a documentary to bring Malala’s voice to life.
Discussion

The repetitive use of Malala’s name is especially theoretically significant. Her first name appears everywhere as the title of her book (*I Am Malala*), documentary (*He Named Me Malala*), and charitable fund (The Malala Fund). In choosing the title of the documentary, director Davis Guggenheim said, “I chose the title for its mystery. I hope people will come into the film wondering why did her father name her Malala? And why is that so important?” (Fox SearchLight, 2016: 13). Malala’s name is like a battle cry for children’s education – which is fitting as she was named after a war heroine. Her name belongs to a movement as much as it belongs to herself (13). Thus, Malala’s name is semiotically poignant: her (first) name carries such importance and recognition that, like some celebrities (i.e., Madonna, Oprah), the single moniker demands attention from audiences. Malala has become such a household name that her name is floated about – even if incorrectly. During a session with the Council on Foreign Relations in January 2016, GOP Presidential candidate Jeb Bush referred to President Barack Obama’s daughter – presumably Malia Obama – as ‘Malala’ (Gass, 2016). Thus, the recognition and fame Malala has achieved is noteworthy – and will become even more apparent in the next chapter.

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8 The latent racism in Jeb Bush’s comment is also noteworthy: he mistakenly referred to one nonwhite woman with the name of another.
CHAPTER 4: “SHE’S NOT GOING TO DISAPPEAR:” AUDIENCE INTERPRETATIONS OF VISUALS OF MALALA

Introduction and Methodology

This chapter examines how mass media representations of Malala Yousafzai are received by South Asian Muslim women in the United States. One of the significant features of representational studies is minority groups observing their subgroups as portrayed in mass media. As my literature review indicates, most mass media representations of Muslims are framed by markers of violence, anti-intellectualism, and gender inequality. Using the example of Malala Yousafzai, this chapter examines how South Asian Muslim women reflect on the media representation of a prominently portrayed South Asian Muslim woman. In conducting this audience analysis via group discussions, I used Morgan (1993; 1997) to guide the methodological process. In mass communication research, the use of focus groups enjoyed a resurgence in the mid-1980s and has since held a credible role in investigating audience sense-making practices and reflections on mass media (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996).

Through focus groups, I examined the nexus of media representations and identity construction. The research participants included women who identify as Muslim and South Asian and/or South Asian-American, primarily recruited from college campuses and mosques on the American East Coast. The recruited participants included generally younger women, ranging from eighteen to mid-thirties. This range allowed for data collection among women who are either 1) at the crucial moment of identity formation (i.e., college-going women in the eighteen to twenty-five range), or 2) those who have moved beyond this stage (i.e., late twenties to mid-thirties) and have entered different occupations whether as working
professionals or mothers or both. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in the findings and analysis portion of this chapter, generational and cultural ties to the Indian subcontinent (i.e., having lived a portion of their life in the Indian subcontinent and/or maintain strong cultural ties to the subcontinent through preservation of language and social mores) partially determine participants’ outlook and perspective on Malala Yousafzai and her celebrated status in American mass media.

The focus group format was modeled after Elaine Richardson’s (2007) study of the discourse produced by young black women exposed to hip hop. Through group interviewing, Richardson traces the discourse practices among a small group of young African American women and how they absorb the visuals and lyrics of hip hop music. In addition to Richardson’s (2007) study, Phinney’s (1992) work on ethnic identity at the nexus of self-concept among youth populations also supports this study’s methodological choice in sampling primarily younger women. The focus groups engaged participants from a self-reflective perspective, examining if and how media imagery of Malala Yousafzai is implicated in their sense of self-identity. The advantage of group discussion over individual interviews for this study is the collective understandings and processes reached in a social setting. Mass media are widely distributed and can impact the image of subgroups on a large scale. Therefore, the focus group format allowed for the represented subgroups to discuss the implications of the representations on the collective identity. I arrived at this methodological decision whilst piloting visual interpretation focus groups between January to August of 2015. This ongoing study, which is primarily concerned with pedagogical strategies for teaching critical analysis of visual media, has been influential and insightful in developing the methodologies for this audience analysis (Choudhary 2015).
This study followed grounded theory and concluded data collection once saturation was reached. In total, I report findings collected from twenty-eight participants (one classroom discussion with seventeen participants and two focus groups, one with six participants and the other with five) This coincides with my initial proposal, estimating twenty to thirty participants to reach saturation. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and were required to meet the following criteria: South Asian/South Asian American Muslim women. The discussions were held in venues that were convenient for the participants: a college campus, a local mosque, and a Muslim youth retreat. The focus groups lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Participants were asked to reflect and respond to selected visuals from studies one and two.

The findings are divided into three sections, one section per focus group. Organizing the findings by focus group is also a methodological choice to maintain the integrity of each discussion. Each group discussion had a distinct flavor in the composition of participants and their worldviews. After reporting the major findings of each group, I conclude this chapter with a discussion section to compare and contrast the three groups.

**Group One: Muslim Women Youth Retreat**

This first focus group organically evolved into a classroom discussion after a special event. I contacted the coordinator of a Muslim Women Youth’s Retreat to possibly recruit participants for this study at the event. After explaining my research goals, she informed me retreat organizers had already scheduled a film-viewing of *He Named Me Malala* and I was welcome to use the timeslot for any of my research needs. As such, I developed a secondary interview guide that focused on the film and asked questions pertinent to the research
objectives. Due to the size of the group (seventeen participants), I conducted the session more-so as a classroom discussion than a traditional focus group.

Before the film viewing, the participants were asked to share any prior knowledge they may have about Malala. Most of their prior knowledge was nonspecific. Many of the participants agreed that they did not know Malala until after she had been shot by the Taliban and her story was aired internationally. There was also some confusion about Malala’s whereabouts today, whether or not she still resides in Pakistan. Most participants had a favorable feeling about Malala, particularly given the near fatal shooting she suffered, the Nobel Peace Prize that she won, and the bravery and wisdom she exhibits that are beyond expectation for a teenager. Participants also noted Malala’s manner of dress, praising her for maintaining her cultural and religious identity.

Next, as the participants viewed the film, they were also asked to take notes of their observations of the film. Participants were assured that there was no right or wrong method to take notes, as the written observations were to help them follow-along with the film and effectively discuss the film-viewing afterwards.

Immediately after the film-viewing, some participants felt the film was “intense” and overwhelming in the gravity of describing Malala’s life events and her dedication to education rights for girls. Participants were impressed by her peaceful and calm demeanor. They were surprised she did not appear angry considering the violent shooting she endured. The film also altered some participants’ perception of Malala. Laeeqa said:
Before watching this video, I was one of those people who was against Malala because I thought it was just her luck that she wrote that book. I was like, why is she getting that much attention? But after watching this, I realized that she suffered, she has gone through pain. Now I realize that she deserves what she got.

Laeeqa’s comments demonstrate a direct PR effect of the documentary: to promote a positive image of Malala. Some follow-up comments also noted the uniqueness of Malala’s situation. One participant, Aliya, commented that Malala was “lucky enough to be raised in an unusually liberal family…She was raised in a family where her father stressed education for women and for everybody, so I admire both of their bravery.” Thus, early on in the group discussion, Malala’s circumstances are distinguished as anomalous and unlike the circumstances of other young girls living in Swat Valley. As described in the previous chapter, the film points to this assessment as well. For instance, the scene where the father of the first girl who volunteered to write for the BBC blog angrily returned the diary to Ziauddin. This nameless, faceless father is meant to represent the average Swati man: protecting his daughter’s honor and safety. Ziauddin, on the other hand, encourages his daughter to tread a different path, therefore Aliya assesses both Malala and Ziauddin as “brave” to follow an unpopular and dangerous road.

Further commenting on Malala’s courage, Aliya drew connections between the Taliban and the rhetoric of 2016 Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump:

The fact that she says that Islam is something different than what the terrorists say. Like I had never before heard the actual words of what terrorists say and those words are very intense and very intimidating for people of an uneducated background. It’s like what Trump is saying to uneducated white Americans now, that you should vote
for me, I’m rich and I can kill Muslims and I can keep Mexicans out of the country. That’s very shocking speech and very scary for us but those people believe that. So the things the terrorists were saying, that women don’t need to get a secular education and you know what we can do to you if you speak out against us. Those are all very scary things and those uneducated people have no other choice but to accept the message of the terrorists. I relate to her because I feel like that’s what we struggle with, the image of Islam, that presents Islam as a religion of hate. We struggle with it in this society because people look at us like, oh you’re oppressed and stand for a religion of hate.

Aliya’s sentiments are significant as they represent the primary way in which most of the participants related to Malala: religion. However, Aliya’s comments also demonstrate an acute awareness of how Islamophobia operates like other forms of hate speech. Aliya’s comparison of the terrorists’ rhetoric and that of Trump’s is poignant as it shows the power of fear-inspiring speech. She finds Malala’s attitude towards terrorists as inspiration and a roadmap to cope with what Aliya considers is a parallel struggle among Muslims in the United States, namely combating Islamophobia. Another participant, Maliha, further draws on Malala’s representation of Islam on-screen:

Islam has been described as an oppressive religion to women. And the fact that she’s speaking out about it. And so many times [in the film] Islam was mentioned and the Quran was mentioned about the rights of women and that’s something I can definitely relate to because it’s something I’m dealing with every day. People having negative feelings towards me because I wear a headscarf…The power that she has, the
responsibility that she takes for herself, that’s definitely something to aspire to, it’s very inspirational.

Maliha thus finds Malala’s courage of self-representation through religion as inspiring. Maliha associates parts of her identity (e.g., wearing the headscarf) with the struggle of accurately representing Islam – a task she finds Malala taking on responsibly.

Other aspects of Malala’s life also appeared relatable to the participants. Maliha found Malala’s challenges of fitting in at her school similar to her own experiences:

Going to a school and trying to fit in with everyone, all of the girls, all of the girls have boyfriends, the way they dress, that’s very similar to when we, or I, go to school. You kind of have to set yourself up apart from each other because you’re not having the same experiences. You’re Muslim, you have certain qualities. That kind of stuck out to me because she’s going through the same thing, trying to fit in and yet she can’t… I think there’s a greater impact when it comes to younger women, to younger girls, because most of the younger generation don’t take impact from other people unless it’s [someone] around the same age… I think Malala being so young kind of gives us a perspective that isn’t really given to us when it’s someone much older. We can relate to it, we can see ourselves in that situation, we can see ourselves going to school, we can see ourselves playing with our brothers and sisters and having that family dynamic of who’s going to win the card game or that sibling rivalry. I don’t think it would be the same if it was someone much older because they have less to relate to us and the younger generation is the generation that is growing up and making change.
Maliha touches on several ways she finds herself reflected in the image of Malala on-screen. Maliha recalls the struggle of dressing differently than her classmates and avoiding romantic relationships. She attributes these choices to religious identity. However, Maliha also believes Malala’s youth makes her a compelling role model for other young people. Specifically, Maliha points to Malala’s experiences in school and the relationship with her family as the major components of any young person’s life, hence normalizing Malala’s life. But unlike Maliha who was born and raised in the United States, Malala left Pakistan at an age that has left her nostalgic for her home. Aliya comments:

I think she’s very Pakistani. She wears Pakistani clothes, she talks about Pakistani cricketers (laughs). I felt really sad for her because you can tell how much she misses Pakistan and she can never go back there. She lived in a rural community but to her that’s the most beautiful place in the world. That’s where she grew up and she can’t ever go back there.

Malala’s longing for Swat Valley is observed in other representations of her, including her interview on *The Daily Show*. Malala’s nostalgia for Pakistan is a recurring theme in Malala related media so much so that single-time viewers like Aliya take notice. In some ways, Malala’s memory of Pakistan helps to humanize the otherwise unidimensional manner in which Pakistan is portrayed in Western mass media. Unlike other survivor stories where victims show little to no desire of returning to their home country, Malala holds fast to the possibility of one day returning to Swat Valley. However, while this nostalgia is recognized and appreciated by observers of the film, they are also acutely aware of the social realities of Swat Valley that lead to Malala’s current circumstances of self-imposed exile: Malala was shot by the Taliban for her social activism. In discussing whether a child could bear the
burden that Malala undertook, participants pointed to the varying perceptions of Malala’s age and maturity. A running theme in the Malala narrative is labeling the Taliban as deplorable for shooting a child; even in the documentary film and the interview on The Daily Show, both Malala and her father expressed their disbelief that the Taliban could target a child. However, designating Malala as a child is not necessarily a universally accepted norm. For instance, Atiya made the following observation about Malala’s maturity in the context of Pakistani/Pashtun culture: “The fact that Malala was old enough in that culture to be regarded as like almost a grown woman, she was targeted specifically because she has ideas and she’s spreading them and being active about it.” Barring an interview with the Taliban leaders in Swat Valley who targeted Malala, we can only speculate their assessment of when childhood begins and ends for female members of society. If we limit the analysis to the data collected for this study, two points emerge supporting Atiya’s observation of Swati culture regarding Malala as a matured woman. First, there is the Taliban’s insistence on barring girls from school and limiting them to the domestic sphere in preparation for life as wives and mothers. Second, there is Malala’s comment in the film about the likelihood of her being a wife and mother as a teenager if she were raised by a different set of parents. Thus, this begs the question, in the eyes of the Taliban, were they targeting a child or an adult? Granted taking the life of an adult is by no means an acceptable activity; to the contrary, it is deeply deplorable. But, as the Malala narrative has shown, shooting a child is, by Western or non-Taliban logic, socially and culturally far more deplorable than shooting an adult. Had Ziauddin been targeted and shot, would the world know his name as widely as Malala’s is recognized today?
As the participants noted several items they learned about Malala, there were a few areas where participants felt the film could have delved into further. After expressing that she enjoyed the film, Beenish made the following insightful observation:

I think, it was interesting to me that they had like one sentence about the fact that she went and visited President Obama and she talked about how we should like stop the drone strikes. There was just one sentence about that, even though I’m assuming that’s very important to her, obviously because of her background and things like that. I wish we could’ve known more about that because, I think it’s interesting – I don’t know how to say this – it was almost like inconvenient to go into detail about that because it’s almost like not the image that the public wants to be portrayed. I guess we want her to be like, yeah girls education! If she talks about things that are against what America’s doing, it’s like, let’s not talk about that.

Beenish’s comment aptly summarizes the focus of the Malala brand despite what Beenish suspects isn’t Malala’s only concern: girls’ education. As shown in the film, Malala is clearly concerned about the American-controlled drones that have killed scores of innocent Pakistanis. However, the film offers very little screen time to the issue (“they had like one sentence”), and as Beenish accurately notes, “it was almost like inconvenient to go into detail.” Beenish’s choice of words is significant as she attempts to describe her feelings about the filmmakers’ choice to skirt the issue of American-driven drone strikes in Pakistan.

Beenish clearly feels an important issue has been ignored for publicity reasons – to maintain
Malala’s image as the girls’ education rights activist because to be the anti-drone activist is not as popular nor easily packaged into a mass media friendly message.9

Other participants bemoaned the lack of breadth of Malala’s activism. Laeeqa, who acknowledged previously how much she learned from the film, still held onto one criticism: “She’s one of the most influential persons in the world. She supports women’s education. She’s done so much for us, for women. Then why doesn’t she stand up for Palestine?” For Laeeqa, Malala occupies a prominent position in the international media spotlight and has access to a platform that is scarcely available to others, therefore why not bring awareness to the injustices Palestinians are suffering? Aliya disagreed with Laeeqa’s criticism:

She can’t be a voice for every issue because that would make her seem really convoluted, you know. You can’t just have one brown girl talking about everything related to Muslims. We were talking about her identity earlier, she’s very specific. A young Muslim Pakistani woman who comes from a culture where women are not religiously but culturally oppressed. I remember my mom once telling me in the third world areas, like the really rural areas of Pakistan women just accept their fate that we are going to be a lower status than our husbands and we’re going to be beaten by our husbands and there’s nothing we can do about it. She could stand up for Palestine, I feel she probably did at some point because she is very vocal about issues that pertain to the Middle East and Muslims. We saw her visit the Syrian refugees and visit rural African communities. But I think it’s important for her to stay focused on one issue because she’s strongest when she’s focused on one issue.

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9 See conclusion chapter for further comparison between the Yousafzais, the Pakistani family championed for their liberal values in a conservative society, and the family of Pakistani schoolteacher Rafiq ur Rehman who suffered the loss of a close relative in an October 2012 drone attack.
A key point from Aliya’s comments: “You can’t just have one brown girl talking about everything related to Muslims.” Aliya hits at the very heart of this dissertation: the struggle of representation, whether a subaltern subject can speak not only for herself but for all others concerning all issues. Both Laeeqa and Aliya represent compelling sides of the problem. On the one hand, it is tempting to use the one person who – no matter how she got there – commands media attention to arouse awareness for any and all issues related to brownness and Muslimness. However, is it truly fair and justified to burden one figure with the task of representing a complex and amorphous identifier as “brownness?” As Aliya states, the focus of Malala’s campaign runs the risk of becoming muddled. However, from a macro perspective, Malala’s single-issue concern – girls’ education – is intricately linked to the issues that both Beenish and Laeeqa addressed. (i.e., the plight of Palestinians, the indiscriminate use of drones in Pakistan). How can young girls expect to be educated in schools when they live in daily fear of violence and bomb attacks? Is this not the same fear Malala felt as a schoolgirl in Swat, the same fear she fights to abolish? The only caveat, it appears, is the difference in the perpetuators of violence: the Taliban and Western powers.

Towards the end of the group discussion, participants commented on aspects of Malala’s personal life, namely her appearance and relationship with her father. In regards to her appearance, Rasheedah and Aliya had the following exchange:

Rasheedah: I don’t know why this bothers me but her scarf always falls down…She does it like a hundred time in an interview, it literally falls down.

Aliya: That’s like a lot of desi aunties though [laughter]

Rasheedah clearly expresses her distaste for Malala’s headscarf slipping repeatedly. Aliya relates Malala’s slipping scarf to “desi aunties,” a euphemism for middle-aged and elderly
women who are immigrants from South Asia. The participants laugh in unison after Aliya’s comment, thereby verifying the validity of her statement. This exchange between Rasheedah and Aliya indirectly distances Malala’s experience, personhood, and identity from the young women in the discussion group: Malala, although a young woman and similar in age to the discussion participants, is classed with the “desi aunties” due to her slippery dupatta.

Malala’s slipping headscarf next transitioned into a conversation about whether she cares about her appearance. Maliha believes Malala does not:

She’s seventeen years old. How many of us cared? When I was in 11th grade, my wardrobe – I didn’t know what my style was. You’re still growing up, you’re still going through the changes of womanhood. I think it’s important to remember that she’s still a girl, she’s going through all the problems we went through

Sadeeka, on the other hand, finds Malala’s outfits well-coordinated:

I don’t get the impression that she doesn’t care what she wears because she’s always wearing a nice matching kurta shalwar, a nice dupatta that goes with her suit. She always fixes her hijab before she takes a picture… I think she looks really nice

Finally, the participants discussed the role of Malala’s father, Ziauddin. Unanimously, the participants found Ziauddin be a kind-hearted and supportive father whose primary concern is the well-being and success of his daughter. Beenish, while agreeing with the general sentiment about Ziauddin’s good-heartedness, offers a more nuanced perspective, especially in response to the narrative involving Malala’s name:
It was very beautiful, very inspirational, the relationship with her father. Very sentimental. It was also kind of eerie – very eerie – how he predicted what was going to happen to her. It was weird to me that it was almost not a coincidence, it was like the hand of God guiding her life. She was destined for something great and you can see that. It was kind of scary, the parallel between her namesake and her life story. It was also very interesting when at the end they were talking about – the interviewer asked her, your father chose your name for you and he also chose your life. And she said, no not at all. He chose my name but I chose this. That was very inspiring.

[Interviewer: Did you believe her?] I think she did have a choice to stay silent. Like she said she could’ve just had two kids at that point. But she didn’t, she really took a stand.

**Group Two: Local Mosque**

The participants of group two comprised of six South Asian/South Asian American Muslim women from late twenties to mid-thirties. The participants also had stronger ties to South Asia. These stronger ties include having been born and spent their formative years in the Indian Subcontinent before migrating to the U.S., greater South Asian cultural influence on worldviews, and fluency in a South Asian language (primarily Urdu). Because all participants and the interviewer were fluent in Urdu, parts of the conversation were discussed in Urdu, therefore providing a more comfortable and inviting space for the participants to share their views. Recruited through snowball sampling, the participants agreed to meet at a local mosque which is attended by all, thus at minimum all participants were acquaintances and some even friends. As compared to the first group which required extra coaxing and
probing by the interviewer, this second group only required minimal direction, ultimately producing an impassioned discussion lasting well over an hour.

The focus group opened with a general question, asking participants to relay whatever prior knowledge they have about Malala. Bisma, who grew up in Pakistan and migrated to the U.S. a few years ago expressed sentiments similar to other Pakistanis who are critical of Malala and her rise to fame:

[In reference to the BBC blog] She wrote about education, and you know that’s the kind of topic American and European media eat up. In Pakistan, she doesn’t get much support because she isn’t the only one standing up for education. Two of her friends were also injured by the bullets but they weren’t highlighted in the media as much as Malala. I believe her father had some connection to higher up authorities, so he used his daughter and pushed her into the limelight…A girl who was unknown in Pakistan, she’s written a book, won the Nobel Prize, attended conferences, represented Pakistan at the UN, and all she does is read from papers – I’ve never seen her deliver a speech without notes. She’s just good at memorization. Now she’s supposed to be a role model for Pakistanis, but what has she really done? This high level of appreciation she’s received, it’s definitely political.

Bisma’s criticism of Malala was shared by other members of the group. When Bisma mentioned that Malala has won the Nobel Peace Prize, another participant, Aleena, interjected and said: “I still can’t stomach that.” While Aleena was raised in the U.S., she has strong ties to Pakistan and its culture. Thus, Bisma and Aleena voice the common criticism of, why Malala? Why was an “unknown” girl chosen to represent Pakistan on the international stage? Bisma further highlights Malala as undeserving by criticizing her
speeches which appear memorized. This appears to cement Bisma’s suspicion that Malala is not working of her own accord but is rather influenced and controlled by external forces, e.g., her father Ziauddin. Finally, Bisma’s last question, “what has she really done?” is echoed by other participants throughout the focus group discussion. As will become evident soon, the participants debated the varying importance of concrete action/activism and Malala’s media representational presence. Dania, in her late twenties, picks up on Bisma’s criticism of Malala as political\(^\text{10}\) but takes a different perspective:

> I agree that there’s definitely a little bit of political agenda behind the level of fame she got and the Nobel Prize. But I also agree that even though she got perhaps unnecessary attention, at least it’s something positive. The media highlights enough negativity about Pakistan so at least they picked up on something positive. Even if there is a political agenda, she’s promoting education, she’s promoting the true teachings of Islam. You don’t see a single picture of her without a hijab on her head. She’s simple, she’s nice. I think she has a lot of positive aspects to her and she brings a good name and good image to Pakistan that you know what, Pakistan does have people who are pro education, pro human rights, pro women’s rights. So sometimes I wonder, even if there was a political agenda – I don’t understand why Pakistanis are so negative like, oh she’s out there for attention! Be proud.

Dania seeks to balance the positives and negatives. She acknowledges the distinct possibility of Malala’s rise to fame as less than above board, however she appreciates Malala as a positive representative of Pakistan and Islam. In fact, instead of criticizing Malala, Dania is

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\(^{10}\) Throughout the focus group, participants used the term “political” pejoratively in the lay sense to signify something as unseemly, corrupt, and inauthentic.
critical of Pakistanis who bemoan Malala’s fame and instead encourages Pakistanis to “be proud.” Aleena, however, is unsatisfied by this and she, Dania, and Bisma have the following exchange:

Aleena: Whatever she says, let’s put that aside. What has she actually done?

Dania: Most of all I think the Western perspective of Pakistan or education in Islam has changed, not so much for Pakistanis but other people’s view

Aleena: But she set out to – wasn’t the point of the blog to bring change to the [Swat] valley?

Bisma: Maybe in the future when she’s older she can do something, once she has some higher education. But I have heard she’s started a foundation to help oppressed girls in Pakistan

Aleena: She’s a 15-year-old girl. What can she do?

In this exchange, Aleena is resistant to any explanation of Malala’s value. In the first part of the exchange, she is unsatisfied by Dania’s explanation of Malala changing perceptions of Islam and Pakistan in the Western world. Aleena is concerned about actionable change in Swat Valley that, she believes, Malala has promised. However, when Bisma brings up the Malala Fund as evidence of Malala’s actions, Aleena questions Malala’s youth: how can a 15-year-old girl be capable of instituting real change? Thus, Malala is repeatedly faulted for her inexperience, evidenced by her relatively unknown status prior to the Taliban shooting and her young age. Malala’s inability to personally lead changes in the educational infrastructure of Pakistan can also be explained by the realities of self-exile. As she has stated on several occasions, including the documentary film *He Named Me Malala*, the Taliban continue to threaten her should she return to Pakistan. This partially explains why Malala has
chosen to focus on building educational resources for girls in other parts of the world such as Kenya and Nigeria, both of which she has personally visited. The Malala Fund webpage does indicate, however, that grants have been earmarked for funding local Pakistani schools since 2013, ranging from Malala’s home state Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa to repairing flood damaged schools in Punjab.

Participants’ comments later in the conversation further confirm Malala as an active subject. Dania begins by comparing Malala to Sharbat Gula, the teenage Afghani girl featured on the June 1985 cover of National Geographic (Appendix 2G). Rather like Malala, or perhaps even more so, the photograph of Sharbat Gula has been widely printed and shared since its publication. Referring to this photograph, Dania said:

Have you guys seen that picture of the Afghani girl with like really light green eyes? What did she do? She just looked at a National Geographic camera man and snapped – oh there it is [interviewer pulls up photo] – and she’s all over. What did she do? She did nothing but it’s a representation of Afghanistan. So it’s not so much what did the individual do – she’s probably 15 or 16 – but how they represent Islam, Afghanistan, Pakistan and those societies in the West… So of course there are people who are more deserving [of the Noble Peace Prize] but I feel like the role these people play in Western media and how the West looks at the East is important.

It is worth noting that the photograph of Sharbat Gula was included by the interviewer in the slideshow of visual stimuli for the participations to discuss. Dania, however, referred to Sharbat Gula without being prompted and shown the image, thus underscoring the ubiquity and fame of this National Geographic cover image. Dania describes Sharbat Gula as passive: an object posing for the photographer. In this passage, however, it is unclear how Dania is
comparing her to Malala. Is Malala, like Sharbat Gula, just a passive representation of the East too?

To draw out these nuances, I asked the participants if Malala is similar or different than Sharbat Gula. Everyone agreed that these two teenage girls are different. Dania further explained: “This is just a representation of an Afghani woman, an Eastern woman. Malala actually suffered a tragedy. It’s not easy to get shot in the head.” Truly, sustaining a bullet wound to the head is painful and tragic. As narrated in *He Named Me Malala*, Malala’s injuries were such that her doctors were uncertain whether she would fully recover cognitive and motor functionalities. However, it is a misstatement that Sharbat Gula did not endure tragedy. In 1984, millions of Afghans fled to Pakistan during the Soviet Russia and Afghanistan war. Twelve year old Sharbat Gula was among those millions who fled. *National Geographic* photographer Steve McCurry photographed her while she was living in a refugee camp along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. McCurry discovered her in a large tent serving as a temporary girls’ school. McCurry didn’t learn Sharbat Gula’s backstory, or her name, until seventeen years later when he located her in Afghanistan. He learned that Sharbat Gula was orphaned when a Soviet airstrike killed her parents. She made the journey to the Pakistan refugee camps with her grandmother and siblings. Today, Sharbat Gula is married and the mother of three daughters for whom she hopes will be the beneficiaries of the education she was deprived of due to the social conditions created by war (Hajek, 2015; Newman, 2002).

Compared to Malala, Sharbat Gula is far more objectified. Whether stated unintentionally, Dania refers to Sharbat Gula via the photograph (“This is just a representation”) whereas Malala is assigned a more-so active role (“she actually suffered”).
As subaltern subjects, Malala is afforded greater privilege than Sharbat Gula: Malala’s backstory is widely known while Sharbat Gula is reduced to the Afghani girl with striking green eyes. Arguably, Malala, too, is widely known for a single event – having been shot in the head by the Taliban for her public criticism of them. However, Sharbat Gula’s background was only discovered over a decade after her photograph appeared on National Geographic – of which she had no knowledge until McCurry met with her seventeen years later (Newman, 2002). Malala, on the other hand, is not only aware of the media produced about her but has taken an active role in producing said media. Thus, the comparison between Sharbat Gula and Malala propose a spectrum when considering Spivak’s question, can the subaltern speak? Perhaps she does not completely speak on her own yet, but Malala is a shade closer to having a voice than Sharbat Gula.

The question of Malala’s voice is further complicated by the presence of her father. Throughout the focus group, participants grappled with this issue, beginning with Bisma who, quoted earlier said, “I believe her father had some connection to higher up authorities, so he used his daughter and pushed her into the limelight.” However, even Bisma appeared ambivalent about Ziauddin’s involvement and intentions, as later she reconsidered her position saying: “See the father issue is not necessarily negative. Look at us, we’re here because of our parents, so her father is doing the right thing. But I don’t know, it looks like he’s using her for his own…[trails off].” This ambivalent attitude toward Ziauddin was echoed throughout the discussion. One explanation is the normative understanding of parents as outside the realm of criticism. Parents give life to a child, hence the social obligation to perceive parents as selfless and wishing their offspring only the very best. This feeling of social obligation appeared to be at odds with the participants’ sense of Ziauddin’s intentions.
Suffering from lethologica, the participants could not express the specific reason why they were wary of Ziauddin but they felt suspicious nonetheless. Clearly, producers of the Malala brand were aware of this suspicion, hence inclusion of Ziauddin in Malala’s memoir and the documentary as the benevolent father who “did not clip her wings.”

Saliha, who grew up in Germany, was the only participant in this group who had previously watched *He Named Me Malala*. She stated the reason why she felt obligated to watch the film: “Everyone talks about Malala and I felt really bad I don’t know much about her and thankfully no one had really asked me. You know how it is, as a Muslim people are going to be like, do you know Malala? So I wanted to get a little bit more knowledgeable.” Saliha’s comment underscores Malala’s prominence as a Muslim activist. In learning more about Malala, Saliha, as a Muslim herself, can better represent her religion to those who encounter it in the media. This example highlights how closely Malala is being watched by everyone, particularly other Muslims who feel Malala is representing them. In this instance, representation is a relationship. Saliha feels obliged to learn more about Malala as she is a representative of Islam. In conversations with a non-Muslim, Malala becomes a point of connection between Saliha and the non-Muslim conversant, and also a platform to discuss Islam as a religion.

Thus, as Malala is perceived by Saliha as a representative of her religion, Saliha critiqued Malala’s Muslimness in a nuanced, detailed manner. Much of this critique arose after showing the group the first part of Malala’s interview with Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* in 2013. In reference to the interview, Saliha said:

She came and shook his hand. And I was thinking, I wish she didn’t…If she had told them ahead of time. She talks behind the scenes right? If on the first show she went
on, she said I’m a Muslim, I don’t shake hands with men. So then they tell the host, she’s not going to shake your hand. And he makes a point of that in his interview and all the world is like, whoa the first female [Muslim] who came on his show and did not shake his hand. I would’ve been so happy [laughs]. But the things she says, everything she said I was like, wow I wouldn’t have thought of that answer. Wow that’s a good way to say it. So in a way I was thinking aren’t we rehearsed? …

Growing up in Germany, there was so much negativity towards foreigners. And I was just thinking, how lovely it would have been to have a figure like Malala…Because I remember, just about pork, there was a German doctor who had written a book about how pork is bad for your health and we would quote that so much because we were like, it’s a German doctor, it’s not a Muslim, you have to believe him. It’s someone who is known to them. Like Karen Armstrong for example, who talks about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (salla llāhu ʿalay-hi wa-sallam)\(^\text{11}\) in such a revered way. You just want to quote her because that’s someone they will be more willing to listen to or something. So I feel like having someone to get your point across is good.

Saliha believes Malala missed a teaching moment by shaking Stewart’s hand. Saliha attributes the scale, prominence, and preparation that goes into a televised interview as an ideal time to demonstrate modesty as practiced in Islam. Saliha, however, does not fixate on this point but rather moves on to praise Malala’s interview answers as elegantly crafted. Other participants bemoaned that Malala’s answers appeared too stiff and prepared, thereby compromising her authenticity. Some participants defended Malala’s preparedness by citing entertainers like Justin Bieber who are heavily prepped before appearing on a talk show. It is

\(^{11}\) Translated as “may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him” is an Arabic salutation of respect accorded to the Prophet Muhammad.
possible, however, that audiences may expect a higher grade of authenticity and genuineness from activists like Malala than Hollywood celebrities whose primary occupation isn’t the delivery of truths but rather entertainment. Still, Saliha argues, “aren’t we rehearsed?” By calling upon examples of the German doctor who cited pork as detrimental to one’s health and Karen Armstrong’s publications praising Islam and its founder Prophet Muhammad, Saliha places Malala in the same category of prominent figures who are largely trusted by the public. This is an important parallel she draws because, while both are used as references by Muslims to evidence the authenticity of Islam, neither the German doctor nor Karen Armstrong are Muslims. Yet, Malala, who is a Muslim, is perceived by Saliha as having the same impact as the former two individuals, hence further codifying Malala’s celebrity status.

Not all of Malala’s means for representing Muslims impressed Saliha. In reference to the documentary, Saliha said:

Even watching the video [film], the youngest brother, the reporter was asking him, how do you feel about the role of women back where you used to live. And he was like, well, he was laughing, he said, all they do is wash dishes and cook and clean. And the reporter said what’s so bad with that? What’s so wrong with that? And the brother says, I don’t know but it’s bad. And I was thinking, he got a touch of the Western culture so I was thinking this is how you can tell that he – in a way I feel like it’s not good they’re portraying it to be so negative. Just because they got out of that situation and now they think that they are educated and she did not have to marry early whereas other girls would have to be married by sixteen, seventeen. So she thinks she’s above them somehow. And I was thinking, that’s not really good. Just because – you shouldn’t portray others as bad, maybe they are content with their
lives, you don’t know, who are you to judge is their life is good or not. Don’t be arrogant about it in the media and say it’s bad somehow, we don’t know why it’s bad. I mean, why? Maybe they’re happy.

In this quote, Saliha is defensive about the film’s portrayal of women who perform house labor. While Saliha makes it abundantly clear throughout the focus group that she supports women’s right to education, she seems deeply offended by the film’s insinuation that being a housewife is inherently inferior to other occupations. She finds that the Yousafzais have “got a touch of the Western culture” which is prompting them to be dismissive of women whose primary occupation is the unpaid labor of domestic chores. Saliha’s assessment also echoes the analysis of Toor Pekai in the previous chapter – that her portrayal in the film was limited and one-dimensional. Saliha may also feel personally offended as she is a stay-at-home parent caring for her children. Overall, Saliha’s sentiments point to one aspect of Malala’s feminism that may be lacking: the women who choose to be caretakers in the home.

Another instance in one of Malala’s media appearances was a cause for concern among some participants. In the video clip of Malala’s interview with Jon Stewart, Stewart asks if Malala’s father would be upset if he (Stewart) adopted Malala. This instance, discussed at length in a previous chapter, was intended to be endearing on Stewart’s part. The focus group participants understood this endearment but they also inserted a Pakistani perspective. Both Saliha and Khadija were somewhat perturbed by Stewart’s comment: for a man who has no relation to Malala, Stewart’s comment would be a violation of ghairat, loosely translated as “honor,” particularly referring to protecting the honor and chastity of women and girls. For the Western viewer, Stewart’s comment may appear endearing but for a Pakistani, he crossed the boundaries by making such a bold statement. Some participants
did not identify with Saliha and Khadija’s interpretation of Stewart’s comment, arguing that
the age difference between Malala and Stewart connotes a wholesome father-daughter type
of relationship where Malala’s modesty is not compromised. Using herself as an example,
Saliha challenged the notion that age difference inherently justifies apparently endearing
comments from an older male to a younger female:

That happens to me for example. Like elderly men will say, oh you’re such a good
mother. And from their perspective, they’re fatherly and talking nicely to me. But
how I feel is – they’re kind of belittling me and giving me the feeling that, ‘there,
there, you’re doing a good job’, whereas I feel like that isn’t real izzat (respect) if you
do that. It’s not real honor. If you really honor someone you take a step back and just
honor them. If you’re saying to someone, oh you’re sweet to raise your children by
your religious standards. To me, that gives me the feeling that you’re above me
somehow, whereas you saying that to me isn’t going to make me do good because I
want to do good.

Saliha’s comments echo the analysis of Malala in the previous chapter – that her message,
her cause, her work was belittled by Stewart in his constant sense of amazement and awe at
this 15-year-old girl who defied the stereotype of the selfish and unaware teenager. Saliha,
too, feels belittled when elderly men gawk at her parenting skills as though she requires their
approval to be a good mother. This is an empowering statement by Saliha who, as a stay-at-
home mother, does not seek the attention or approval of patriarchs but rather sets her own
standards of what it means to be a good parent. Saliha’s example can be likened to Saba
Mahmood’s work Politics of Piety, chronicling the feminism and agency of Egyptian Muslim
women operating in a patriarchal society.
At the conclusion of the discussion, all the participants agreed that in order for Malala to continue down her path of success, she needs to remain true to and grounded in her faith, and also aware of her Pakistani culture and how she represents it. The participants were fearful that if Malala were to take a misstep, she would ignite a media frenzy reiterating Orientalist tropes of Muslims as the enemy and untrustworthy. Saliha succinctly said, “She is the face of the religion, the nation, the culture.” Furthermore, as a Noble Peace Prize recipient, she bears great responsibility in enhancing world peace and combating human rights violations. With her fame and her many accolades, the participants remained optimistic about her continued relevancy. As Dania put it, “She’s not going to disappear. She’s going to be a historical figure at this point.”

Group Three: College Campus

The final focus group consisted of five college students in their early twenties. The group convened in a university college classroom, conveniently located and accessible to all participants. The participants responded to a series of visuals of Malala (see appendices 1B and 1C.) Before discussing aloud, participants were asked to write their thoughts on paper. This method allowed for greater self-reflection before the group discussion. All five participants were American Muslim women of South Asian descent; throughout the discussion it was apparent the participants identified more closely with their Muslim American identity than South Asian background. While they expressed a firm understanding of South Asian culture, they were critical of it.

The focus group opened with a general question: what comes to mind when thinking about Malala? The responses were varied. Huma first viewed Malala as a “fighter.” Shazia was impressed by Malala’s “strong willpower” which she found is “empowering for me.”
Rehana jumped into media depictions, stating she found Malala is a “good representation for Muslims because she’s able to combat that stereotype of girls being oppressed in Islam.”

Huma, Shazia, and Rehana generally had positive and optimistic initial reactions to Malala. Nousheen and Ambreen also viewed Malala favorably, as they indicated later in the focus group, however their initial reactions leaned toward the challenges Malala has endured.

Nousheen said, “When I think about her, I think about all the people who criticize her for being open.” Nousheen’s comment alludes to the controversy Malala’s fame has wrought. Ambreen reflected sympathetically, “I almost feel a sense of sorrow [when I think about Malala]. She’s been exposed to so much at such a young age.” These five opening comments accurately summarize the narratives that more widely encompass the Malala phenomenon: she is inspirational as a brave young woman; she is changing the manner in which Muslim woman are represented; she is the object of criticism; and she has endured tragedy and grief.

Ambreen’s comment is especially noteworthy. As evidenced in the earlier group discussions, participants rarely express sorrow for Malala. They are often impressed by her confidence and in awe of her bravery. Bravery is typically the lens through which most participants had viewed the near fatal shooting Malala endured; for Ambreen, however, she flips this interpretation as her initial assessment of Malala is grief and pity.

Next, the participants were shown the visuals of Malala one by one. After viewing the visual, participants noted their observations on paper, then discussed in the group their reflections. The moderator did not provide any additional information or context for each of the visuals until the end of the discussion in order to minimize any priming bias. The participants were first shown the photograph from the back cover of Malala’s memoir. This
photo includes both Malala and her father, Ziauddin (Appendix 1B). Shazia found the photograph culturally relatable:

She’s looking up to her dad and her dad looks proud. I thought it was a very cultural representation because coming from a Pakistani background, as a child or as a daughter you want to make sure you’re living up to your parents’ expectations. And being able to see how happy her dad was, is her sense of approval and her happiness making sure she’s doing the right thing. And she’s getting that stamp of approval from her dad. It seems like they’re both blessed and happy to be alive, that she’s alive at this time.

Shazia thus viewed the photograph favorably; to her, it is a celebration of a daughter winning her father’s approval. Ambreen echoed Shazia’s sentiments and reflected how the photograph of Malala and her father reflects her own experience: “Pretty sure my graduation picture is exactly like this [everyone laughs]. Me and my dad.” Nousheen’s comments summarize Shazia’s and Ambreen’s ability to relate to the photograph as a testament to the photo’s universal appeal:

I feel like when it comes to parents being proud of their kids, it’s universally (sic) – that’s just such a natural pose. Even if it was like two Puerto Ricans, I would still think that’s a natural pose for a father and daughter. Coming from South Asian culture, fathers and daughters are close. Fathers take pride in their daughters. I think it’s natural, regardless of South Asian or not.

What is striking about Nousheen’s comment, however, is her belief that South Asian culture fosters a close relationship between fathers and daughters, to the extent that “fathers take pride in their daughters.” Nousheen, it appears, is speaking from her own experience as the
very purpose of the Malala narrative is to *counter* the purportedly dominant cultural norm of fathers treating daughters as unworthy and burdensome. Furthermore, while the participants appear to view this type of relationship – where a daughter seeks her father’s approval – as favorable and aspirational, this outlook also perpetuates a dangerous cycle of earned love. Indirectly, the participants’ comments link achievements to parental approval, hence making love for one’s child conditional. As college students, it is not mysterious that for these participants, achievement and success is linked to parental approval. Ambreen in particular refers to her graduation photograph mirroring that of Malala and Ziauddin. Malala, too, is successful and accomplished at such a young age – and therefore clearly her father’s favorite child. This does not bode well for the Malala brand – and ultimately the campaign Malala has launched – if fatherly love is predicated on achievement only.

The next photograph shown to the participants was the cover of the 2012 “Person of the Year” issue by *TIME* magazine. Reading from her observation notes, Nousheen commented on Malala’s attitude: “I literally wrote ‘you can’t mess with me.’ What I like about this picture is it shows light and darkness. It’s like what she overcame, it’s only going to get better from here.” Rehana and Huma also agreed with Nousheen’s sentiments, commenting on Malala’s appearance as strong and bold. Observations of Malala appearing as assertive and courageous also led to a discussion of her *hijab*, or headscarf, in the photograph:

Ambreen: Looks like a superhero pose. Her scarf is almost like a cape.

Shazia: Very camouflage sort of colors. With the light coming it shows her stepping out of the darkness, ready for, not the spotlight, but to conquer the world. Her stance is also ‘ready to fight back’
Nousheen: The scarf is like a protection to her, like from anything evil or bad. It’s like, as long as I have this identity – it’s like the most outward way to show ‘I have God. I don’t need anyone else, I have God. Come at me, bro,’ (everyone laughs).

Ambreen: It’s also saying the scarf isn’t holding me back, it’s protecting me.

Shazia: It’s her armor.

Ambreen: But I don’t know if that’s what I want to see in it.

Nousheen: But I don’t wear it and I see it. That’s why I think it’s an important part of her identity. Even like the media could be like, oh my, what’s happened to Malala, where’s her scarf. Whatever she’s going through, as long as she has that scarf – I feel like that’s something she knows too, I have me, I have my identity, I’m from Pakistan. If I was able to make it out of there alive, then what is there that I can’t do?

Ambreen’s comment first places Malala in the class of legendary heroes, with her scarf as a replacement for the classic superhero cape. Nousheen takes the superhero comparison a step further, attributing to the scarf powers of protection, which Shazia later elaborates is also Malala’s armor. The above exchange not only interprets moral meanings of a material scarf, but offers goodwill and comradery among the focus groups participants. While Ambreen worries that she, as a hijab-observant woman, is interpreting Malala’s scarf as protective because Ambreen dons a scarf too, Nousheen, who does not observe the hijab, reassures Ambreen by tying the headscarf to the core of Malala’s identity. Nousheen therefore implies that the sanctity and protection the headscarf offers Malala should be visible to all – hijab-observant or not. Overall, Malala’s observance of the hijab is interpreted as empowering: she draws resilience from her hijab as it protects her from “anything evil or bad.”
The final visual of Malala shown to the participants was the televised portion of *The Daily Show* clip with Jon Stewart interviewing Malala. The resounding sentiments among all participants was awe and praise for Malala. The following paragraph and three quotations below evidence the narrative structure Malala constructs when narrating the incidents – both imaginary and real – that she endured as a victim of the Taliban. The participants’ comments reveal how these young American Muslim women are reflecting on not just how Malala handles these situations, but what lessons can be drawn from Malala’s experiences. Huma finds Malala to be at a moral level and sense of self-control achievable by only a few:

She’s such a good person because honestly if someone attacked me I would not have been able to do what she did, I would have fought back. But she’s such a great person that she could be under attack and be there and still hold her values and say what she needs to say. She’s probably more mature than I am… She’s such a good person. As I was listening I was thinking, I would not be able to sit back and not fight back. But in the same way she’s fighting back too but in a different aspect. She’s using her words whereas I would go crazy about that. I’m still dumbfounded, I would not be able to do that, so I applaud her for that.

Malala’s wisdom beyond her age was acknowledged by Rehana as well who, like Huma, gauged Malala’s maturity against her own:

He introduced her by saying her age, she was only 16. But she seemed so different than the average 16 year old, which she is. She’s so mature. You wouldn’t expect her to be 16. She’s really well spoken. Sometimes I feel like she’s more mature than I am but that’s because she’s lived through all those experiences that most of us haven’t.
Rehana notices a key aspect of the narrative formation of the interview, namely the manner in which Stewart introduced Malala: by stating her age. Audiences, like the participants of this focus group, are thus primed to consider, engage with, and ultimately be in awe of Malala when comparing the account of her life events against her youth. Shazia, too, was shocked by the methodical approach Malala described if she were to encounter a member of the Taliban:

It was very fascinating and inspiring to me to see that she was able to think through the steps she would have gone through if that were to happen and she was able to restrain herself without speaking to anyone or taking anyone else’s advice, like maybe you shouldn’t do that or maybe you shouldn’t throw your shoe. But it was her own thought, her own view on the whole situation like, no I’m not going to do that, I’m going to tell him great things about education and say do what you will. That’s so inspiring. I’m just amazed.

Like Huma, Shazia was also impressed by Malala’s “restraint” and thoughtful decision to refrain from engaging in a physical fight. This fixation on Malala’s conscious decision not to engage in physical violence is purely derived from Malala’s narrative but not based in a likely scenario. Realistically, what chance does a teenage girl without a weapon save her shoe have against an armed adult male trained in combat? It is true that Malala’s imaginary conversation with the Talib who poses an immediate threat is inspirational, however what alternative would she have in such a situation? Flight would be the other probable reaction. Thus, participants’ fixation on Malala not fighting back is rather misguided as her two likely options were engaging in a dialogue with the Talib or running away. The fault of this fixation
is not on the participants’ part; rather, Malala narrates the imaginary incident in a manner that implies the only alternative to dialog is violence.

The next set of reactions to the interview clip involve discussion about Malala’s father, Ziauddin. Listening to Malala’s admiration for her father in the interview, Rehana was reminded of the photograph with Malala and Ziauddin:

When she was talking about her father it kind of reminded me of the picture that you showed us previously and how she was looking up at him in admiration. Even when she talks about him you can see that level of respect that she has for her father. She sees him as her role model. Like that’s where she kind of learned how to stand up for women’s rights and be an advocate, an activist.

Nousheen concurred with Rehana and added the following comments:

I think it was great that she mentioned her dad during this interview. She’s getting so much media attention – even if she loves her dad and they have a good relationship, she could easily have talked about me, me, me, me. But the fact that she even mentioned her dad and not just like, oh yeah I have a dad, instead it’s, I have a dad who spoke up for women’s rights. I think that’s very humble of her to do so and to give the credit where it’s due. He’s definitely a role model her and the fact that she made that apparent is really good rather than saying, I’m the one who got shot and survived.

Between Nousheen’s and Rehana’s comments, there is a repetition of Malala’s respect for her father and Ziauddin as a role model for his daughter as an advocate for women’s rights. Nousheen views this as a selfless gesture on Malala’s part as she credits her father for her success.
Next, the discussion transitioned to the role of Jon Stewart in the interview. Shazia said:

Yeah, his reaction where he covers his mouth up after she goes on – it’s like, yeah she’s pretty badass. There’s no other way of describing it…. He like bowed a little in the beginning. It was very respectful. That’s very hard to find, especially nowadays when women are fighting for equality… But with her she gets more of a dignified respect. Around her everyone is very conscious of what they’re doing and want to leave a good impression because they have this impression of her that she’s a great person and they want to live up to that and not seem stupid or dumb or beneath her.

Of course I don’t think she thinks that way.

Shazia’s impression of Jon Stewart, which was shared by the other participants, centers on his awe of and respectfulness for Malala. Shazia especially points to Malala as a special figure deserving of such dignity; since Malala is “a great person” those around her desire to remain in her good graces. Still, Shazia concludes that Malala is humble and extremely non-judgmental because despite everyone putting forth their best effort not the appear “stupid or dumb or beneath her,” Malala would never think badly of them – Stewart included.

Ambreen – the only participant in this group who had previously viewed the interview – similarly praised Stewart:

I’ve watched this a lot of times. It gives me the same… I feel really happy every time I watch it. I think I watch The Daily Show a lot and what I found interesting was, Jon Stewart doesn’t talk as much in this interview. The time that she speaks without him interrupting or making jokes is like very rare [when he interviews others]. He seems star struck and this is a guy who interviews the President like it’s no big deal. I think
the ending has always stuck with me every time I watch it where he’s just like, be my daughter, which is like the best complement you can give someone. Like people don’t want daughters because they’re a hassle or you’re always worrying about them. But she’s the perfect daughter. For someone to say that about a Muslim girl is amazing. Ambreen’s last sentence, “For someone to say that about a Muslim girl is amazing,” betrays the unfortunate state of Western mass media – that praise for a Muslim girl is so uncommon that when it does occur, it is beheld by viewers in shock and amazement. As a young Muslim woman herself, Ambreen’s comment shows just how infrequently a person resembling her is lauded on television. Also noteworthy is Ambreen’s characterization of Stewart’s comment to adopt Malala as his daughter. As discussed in a previous chapter, Stewart’s comment, however well-intentioned, is laced with white male privilege. Further illuminating is Ambreen’s interpretation of Stewart’s comment, that unlike other people who “don’t want daughters because they’re a hassle or you’re always worrying about them,” Malala is “the perfect daughter,” hence Stewart is lobbying to adopt her. This implies that only ‘perfect’ daughters are desirable and wanted. However, alternatively, perfection may also imply iconization of Malala as a celebrity and symbol for Muslims women like Ambreen to draw inspiration from.

Participants were next informed that some Pakistanis are critical of Malala’s fame and Stewart’s comments about adopting her. The participants rejected these criticisms. Nousheen vociferously reprimanded anyone with this attitude:

With South Asian people, it’s literally their way or the highway. They can’t bend the rules. It doesn’t matter if they’ve been living in America for 15 years. You will rarely find families that are from a South Asian, desi background and they’re willing to
understand that we live in another country, not our home country. I also feel like it’s people who can’t be happy for one another. For South Asian people, anything good happens and it’s the end of the world, like why didn’t it happen to me?

Nousheen’s comments have a personal touch, as though she too has experience with the envious criticism Malala faces. Nousheen discredits the critics as jealous of successful people. However, as Nousheen dislikes the South Asian penchant for jealousy, she is also protective about the media perceptions of South Asian countries and their peoples:

I have the BBC app on my phone and if I go to the Asia section, if there’s some story about a marriage gone wrong, it’s usually a South Asian woman who was 15, 16 in this random town married to a 50 year old. But this happens in other countries too. But no one is making that a big deal and putting that in negative light... When it comes to anything South Asia, people always think about it for a little longer just to make it worse. They purposely think, how can we spice this up? [laughs]

Placed together, the above two comments by Nousheen demonstrate the spectrum of internal and external issues in representing the South Asian woman. On the one hand, the South Asian woman is subject to the criticism from her own people. On the other hand, she is object of the Western gaze.

**Discussion**

As the findings from the three group discussions indicate, for various Muslim women informants Malala has maintained her cultural and religious values despite the volume of media attention. She unabashedly wears cultural identifiers (i.e., *shalwar kameez*) and speaks freely about her Islamic values. Nearly all participants in the three discussion groups appreciated and praised Malala as a representative of Muslims. There appeared, however, a generational/cultural gap between the focus groups when assessing Malala’s rise to celebrity-
hood. As the second focus group at the local mosque shows, those in their mid-30’s with stronger cultural ties to Pakistan expressed skepticism about the Malala narrative and why her story gained prominence. This skepticism is shared by some in the Pakistani public (Walsh, 2012; AFP 2014). This gap in perception of how Malala rose to fame can be explained by both worldview and group belonging. Those with stronger ties to Pakistan perhaps operate closer to the Eastern end of the epistemological spectrum, whilst those participants with stronger American influence operate within a more-so Western epistemological understanding. Epistemology is, however, the broad-stroke, while group-belonging is a further nuanced explanation. Among the group of Muslim women raised in the U.S. with South Asian immigrant parents there exists a frustration with the South Asian cultural narrative that breeds doubt and consternation regarding the good fortune of others.

Such rise to fame as Malala has experienced could be viewed as tainted by immigrants who are wary of her instant success. However, based on the focus group responses, Malala is appreciated for remaining true to her cultural and religious roots. The respondents in the second focus group especially underscored this point – that they desire Malala to maintain the reputation of her ethnic culture and religion. If her religious and cultural values were to be compromised, Malala could potentially become a less trustworthy source for both general mass media audiences and specific groups like South Asian Muslim women.

When applying Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model to the Malala related media, we discover the most of the focus group participants operate under the dominant code. By operating under the dominant code, most participants agreed with and interpreted the Malala brand message by normative standards: that Malala is deserving of her fame and is working
toward a worthy cause. Select focus group responses were, however, within the parameters of
the negotiable code, where participants partially disagreed or criticized the Malala brand.
These dissenters were largely critical of how and why Malala rose to celebrity-hood, but they
interpreted the overall effect of the brand as a positive force for both increasing awareness
regarding childhood illiteracy and improvements in the media representation of Muslims.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Malala Yousafzai represents a significant shift in the representation of Muslim women in mass media. Hailing from a region that is typically represented by nameless and faceless bodies, Malala has a voice. It is a complicated voice, challenged by years of Orientalism and postcolonial representational tropes and problematic production. However, the result is a positive and promising one, slowly inching toward better and fuller representational practices. Often, the downside of critical analyses is dwelling solely on the problems of a certain representation. Problematic representations should be examined because critique is the catalyst for improvement. Yet realistically, a representation will always already lack some nuance, some element, some idea. Something will be overlooked which will potentially be its downfall. But the successes must be appreciated. Malala is a new chapter in not just the rescue of Muslim women, but the celebration of one.

Veiling is often at the center of representational studies of Muslim women in mass media. As Macdonald (2006) succinctly states, “Muslim women, rigidly and defensively essentialised by the Western media in their veiled representation, are rarely heard to speak, and hardly ever in their own words (15).” Malala, too, dons a headscarf identifying her as a Muslim, however her veiling practices have receded into the backdrop. Instead, Malala’s brand foregrounds and highlights her courage and tenacity as an education rights activist. As some focus group participants noted in chapter four, Malala’s headscarf does not hold her back but instead propels her forward to accomplish her ambitious goals.

In addition to rejecting a unidimensional definition as a veiled woman, Malala also moves past the image of the poor brown girl. Malala was not content to stand on the sidelines as an object of pity; she was determined to do something. Malala endured a major, traumatic
attack on her life, and a slow, painful recovery. Evidence of the shooting follows her every time she looks in the mirror. Rather than hiding her wounds, Malala decided to use the international media platform she was offered, no matter how it was earned. How many teenagers, who are among the most vulnerable in physical appearance and self-esteem, would agree to stand in the spotlight for cameras to capture every nuance of facial reconstruction surgery? Malala put her campaign before her own pride and vanity. All but one of the visual media examined in this dissertation were produced after Malala was shot, which also indicates that the Malala brand does not solely rely on appealing to visual consumers via Malala’s wounds; particularly in print media, Malala’s facial reconstruction is only subtly noticeable. This is crucial, for as a potentially poor brown woman, by the standards described in Kahf’s (2011) “The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader,” Malala could easily be pitied for her wounds inflicted by dangerous brown men. While the Taliban attack on Malala’s life is a key component of the Malala narrative, her brand transcends the violence, circling back to root of the attack: education rights. Thus, Malala is not pitiable, but rather a leader asking the global community to join her cause.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I asked, based on Saba Mahmood’s work, how has Malala transitioned from an agentic actor in a country (Pakistan) where she face vehement opposition to an agentic actor in a country (Britain) where she is praised and lauded? Malala’s experiences in Pakistan as a grassroots activist provided her a grounding in courage and determination which, in different ways, has benefitted her in her campaigns outside of Pakistan. While she has had a much more receptive and appreciative audience in the Western world, the toughness Malala learned from her years in Pakistan have helped her to face new challenges, mainly language and cultural barriers. Malala thus possesses a kind
of transferable agency that is manifesting in various ways depending on the needs of her social context. Specifically, her agency is especially evident in her capacity as a global activist celebrity. She bridges numerous worlds: celebrity-hood, activism, and every-day girls. As an extraordinary ordinary young woman, Malala has validated the notion that anyone can make a difference so long as one tries.

Chapter four also demonstrates threads of agency among the focus group participants, as they freely made sense of the visual media representing Malala. Whether intentionally or not, the participants reflected their own subjectivities in not just how Malala *is* represented but how she *should be* represented. Some even began to pave a path for Malala’s future, making requests of what they would like to see from her. There is a certain boldness in this: to demand particular action from a public figure who, whether directly or indirectly, represents you. Another key finding of this dissertation is the political and media savviness of the focus group participants. In multiple instances, the participants not only made personal connections with Malala, they were also able to link Malala to other media personalities (e.g., Justin Bieber). They also tied Malala to broader political narratives, such as the hate speech that plagued the 2016 American Presidential Election. These connections further augmented the ubiquity of the Malala narrative. Another way the Malala narrative has become widespread is its consistency. As demonstrated in the data chapters of this dissertation, her story and image are carefully branded. There are no discrepancies in how her life events are narrated. Her physical appearance is (nearly, see below) unwavering in her typical choice of traditional Pakistani attire. It is this consistency that even those who entertain doubts about Malala – as evidenced in the focus group hosted at the mosque – concede that there are
positive elements to her popularity. Malala thus far remains authentic and untainted. Future research could entertain if she ever compromises her authenticity.

In November 2015, Malala appeared in a video interview with actress Emma Watson to promote *He Named Me Malala* (Associated Press, 2015). The conversation between the two is largely dominated by Watson’s campaign, “He for She,” a global cause in promoting feminism particularly among men. Malala states her initial uncertainty in associating herself with the label of feminist, but after watching Watson’s UN address in support of the “He for She” campaign, Malala proudly calls herself a feminist “because feminism is another word for equality” (Associated Press, 2015). For the first time, Malala departs from her usual Pakistani dress and instead wears a blue pant suit. Is this a new look for Malala who turned 18 a few months before the interview? Furthermore, the interview’s focus on feminism also draws a link to Malala’s choice to don a pantsuit, as pantsuits have long been associated with second-wave feminism and the entry of women in traditionally male dominated workplaces.

Additionally, Malala’s interview with Emma Watson points to another significant element of Malala’s brand: to be associated with Malala is ‘cool’; Malala exudes such clout that she is sought by Hollywood celebrities. Her popularity is such that Senator Marco Rubio, while vying for the 2016 Republican Party presidential nomination, said at Anselm College in New Hampshire he would enjoy having a beer with Malala (Kaplan, 2015). Rubio was responding to a question about who he would like to enjoy a beer with outside politics. Rubio’s response caught the attention of several media outlets, including Gawker.com where writer Jordan Sargent pointed out the ironies and cultural insensitivity of Rubio’s statement: first, that Malala is underage (18 years old at the time) and second, she is an observant Muslim and likely does not consume alcohol as it is forbidden in Islam (Sargent, 2015).
While Rubio’s comment ignores the reality that Malala could not actually enjoy a beer with him, the sentiment is clear: in this manner, Rubio, a major American politician, expressed his admiration for a teenager from Swat Valley. Malala has thus joined the ranks of admirable public figures sought by other public figures.

Despite repeated reminders of her subaltern and underage status (see chapters two and three), Malala has transitioned from being saved to saving others. Malala has raised global awareness about the paucity of educational resources for girls living in developing countries in several ways including her leadership of the Malala Fund. As of 2016, the Malala Fund has four country-specific programs. In Pakistan, the Fund issues grants to increase girls’ enrollment in schools in Malala’s home province, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and other tribal areas in northern Pakistan. In the same region, the Malala Fund has provided resources to an Internally Displaced Persons camp. In the province of Punjab, the Malala Fund has helped repair and provide supplies for schools affected by flooding. In Nigeria, Malala advocated for the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram and the Malala Fund has helped in rehabilitating some of the girls who were released. The Malala Fund also provides funding to the Centre for Girls Education in northern Nigeria which offers a safe space for girls to continue their education. Furthermore, the Malala Fund supports Syrian refugees. The Fund opened a new school in Lebanon on Malala’s 18th birthday and supports educational programs for Syrians in Jordanian camps. Finally, in Kenya, the Malala Fund has invested in building information technology skills among young girls who live in the slums of Nairobi. The Malala Fund also subsidizes secondary school education fees for girls in rural Kenyan communities.

As evidenced throughout this dissertation, the Malala brand has benefitted from several influential contributors who, in some form, helped craft the consistent narrative and
choice of discourses that comprise the brand. But Malala herself commands such presence
and voice that it would be both cynical and unfairly dismissive to attribute the production of
the Malala brand to those influential contributors only. Malala’s vision and voice are integral
to the brand, the cornerstone without which this empire could never exist. The data in this
dissertation paves the path for this claim: unlike some of her predecessors, Malala is not just
a flattened, passive image but a fiery and fearless advocate. Sharbat Gula, the unforgettable
face on the cover of National Geographic, does not have a bestselling memoir or immediate
access to the U.N. and leaders of nations. Malala drew the international attention and mass of
resources partly because she was capable of it: she possesses the language, poise, and drive
to wield these powerful tools. Thus, while she is surrounded by a team of experts and
creators, she is the ultimate author of her story, her brand.

The Malala narrative hinges on Malala’s determination to survive and persevere,
which is contrary to the classic subaltern subject who is at the mercy of more powerful
forces. This is due, in part, to the near flawlessness of the Malala narrative. She hails from a
village, but belongs to an astonishingly progressive family. She communicates comfortably
via Western modes of knowledge, i.e., the English language. She was a victim of the right
nemy (re: the West’s enemy), the Taliban. Momina Bibi, a sixty-seven year old
grandmother and midwife from Waziristan, Pakistan did not, unfortunately, bear the same
privileges as Malala, even posthumously. On October 24, 2012 – just weeks after Malala was
shot by the Taliban – Momina Bibi was killed in an American driven drone strike while her
grandchildren helped her pick okra in their garden. A year later, Momina Bibi’s son, Rafiq ur
Rehman, and her two grandchildren presented their case at Capital Hill. Four
congresspersons attended. Compared to the Malala narrative, Momina Bibi’s case has been
woefully underreported in the media as well. Even Sharbat Gula, the young Afghani woman who captured the attention of Western audiences on the much-circulated cover of National Geographic, suffers the same fate as many other brown women who are voiceless and without resources. As of November 2016, Gula has been found guilty of identity fraud by a court in Peshawar and has since been deported to Afghanistan (Harris, 2016). Unlike these other women (and their families), Malala has transitioned from rescuee to rescuer.

In several ways, Malala also differs from other Muslim women who have been celebrated as the premier voices for Muslim women. Namely, Malala is never apologetic of her religion nor does she seek to rectify or reform Islam for the modern era as others have proposed, such as Irshad Manji and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Conversely, Malala utilizes Islamic principles to support her campaign. Furthermore, Malala unabashedly wears her faith and overtly identifies as Muslim. This is similar to another woman celebrated in the summer of 2016: professional fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, the first hijab-clad Muslim American Olympian. While Muhammad occupies a slightly different discursive space from Malala (i.e., Muhammad is African American and an athlete), she too holds an honored position as an Olympian. Olympians occupy a type of sacred space as representatives of their nation on the international stage. Within this honored position, Muhammad blends a (Western) sacred space – the Olympics – with Islam. Nor is she apologetic of her faith or her country, wearing and representing both proudly.

Another aspect of visual representations of Malala that would be beneficial for future research is Malala’s presence on social media. From a visual analysis perspective, Instagram is especially highly pictorially saturated as the ultimate purpose of this particular social media platform is sharing visuals. How, if at all, does Malala’s social media presence
advance Malala’s campaign and her brand? By taking a cursory glance, it is evident that the Malala Fund Instagram account highlights much of Malala’s travels to various countries as a part of her campaign to institute girls’ education in countries lacking the resources and infrastructure to do so. Furthermore, another area for future research is establishing direct contact with Malala herself to determine her involvement in the production of her brand.

From a policy perspective, positive and well-rounded representations of Muslims are desperately needed in the Western hemisphere. As communication scholars have long established, media influences how social actors shape and construct social roles and society (Lowery and DeFleur 1995; Tuchman, 1978; Kitch, 2001; Rivadeneyra, 2007; Pompper and Koenig, 2004). On June 23rd, 2016, Britons voted on a referendum to leave or stay in the European Union. Infamously known as “Brexit,” 52% of voters voted to exit the European Union (Hunt and Wheeler, 2016). Since the passage of the referendum, Britain has experienced a surge in hate crimes against immigrants and ambiguously brown people (Khaleeli, 2016). In the 2016 American Presidential election, GOP candidate and eventual President-elect Donald Trump campaigned in favor of a Muslim ban, which initially was floated as a ban on all Muslims including American citizens, but quickly was modified to a ban on Muslims from entering the United States (Diamond, 2015). Following the Presidential election Trump’s proposal was further revised to a Muslim registry, essentially a revival of a Bush-era database where immigrants from Muslim majority countries were registered (Lind, 2016).

The FBI reports a 67% increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes from 2014 to 2015 (Ansari, 2016). While statistics are not available at the time of publication of this dissertation, there appear to be dozens of hate crimes reported on social media in the days
following the 2016 Presidential election (Wendling, 2016). Examined closely, Trump has only proposed to continue and expand a system of discriminatory policies already in place. How many Americans are aware of, let alone willing to protest, federal Countering Violent Extremism programs that disproportionately target and profile Muslim Americans? What about the covert surveillance of mosques by the New York Police Department? In a twisted way, we can, at minimum, appreciate Trump’s honesty in labeling this watch list as Muslim Registry, while prior surveillance of Muslims has been covert and used proxy terms like ‘terrorism’ or ‘extremism’ to cover up the racist agendas. The public outrage over the Muslim registry demonstrates that Americans will protest racist policy only when it is overtly defined.

Between the rise in hate crimes and the expansion of discriminatory policies, the need for better and realistic representations of Muslims is crucial. I do not claim that positive representations of Malala alone will fix the aforementioned issues; in fact, Malala herself is problematic in that she is positioned as a survivor of ‘bad’ Muslims. However, holistically, she offers a profoundly different perspective of who a Muslim can be and the good of which she is capable. Incrementally, the Otherization and vilification of ambiguously brown people can diminish if more media representations continue improving the work performed by representations of Malala.
List of References


Appendix

Appendix 1A-1E: Print Visuals of Malala Yousafzai

Appendix 2A-2H: Print Visuals for Discourse Analysis Contextualization

Appendix 3: Focus Group Guide Sample
Appendix 1A

I Am Malala
THE GIRL WHO STOOD UP FOR EDUCATION
AND WAS SHOT BY THE TALIBAN

MALALA YOUSAFZAI
Appendix 2B
Appendix 2G
Inside: Joe Klein on the challenge in Pakistan

What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan

BY ARYN BAKER

Aisha, 18, had her nose and ears cut off last year on orders from the Taliban because she fled abusive in-laws.
Appendix 3

Focus Group Guide Sample

Focus group set-up: Location is conference room. Participants will sit around conference table facing projector screen. Participants will be provided blank paper to write observations. Participants will respond to various visuals, first in writing then orally.

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this focus group. Today we will discuss your opinions, reactions and responses to some visuals. These are ‘mass media’ visuals, meaning they are distributed for widespread consumption. As the facilitator of this group, I am here just to do that – facilitate. I’ll pose some questions, steer the conversation if necessary, but consider this a group conversation. Talk to each other and respond with your honest feelings and thoughts. Any questions?

1. Let’s talk about news. Name the places where you typically get your news (i.e., which television station, particular mobile apps or websites)
   a. Why do you choose these sources?
2. In what kind of news stories do you hear about ‘Muslims’?
3. When you hear or see the term ‘Muslim woman’, what comes to mind?
4. (Slide 2 – Print Visual of Back Cover of Malala Memoir) Take a minute and jot down your observations of this photo. Note any details that stand out to you
   a. Now let’s talk about your observations
5. (Slide 3 – Print Visual of TIME Magazine Cover 2012) Let’s look at this photo. Write any details that stand out to you
   a. Now let’s talk about your observations.
6. (Slide 4 – Video from Daily Show interview) We’re going to watch a short clip from Comedy Central’s The Daily Show. This is an interview of Malala Yousafzai. Has anyone seen it before? You can write any observations while watching the clip.
   a. Now let’s talk about your observations.
7. Do you think Malala Yousafzai is an accurate representation of Muslim women? Why or why not?
   a. Do you see Malala as Muslim first or Pakistani first?
8. Can you relate to Malala? Why or why not?
9. How should Muslim women be represented in mass media?
10. What does it mean to be a:
    a. Muslim woman?
    b. South Asian woman?
    c. American woman?
11. How can your identity as a South Asian Muslim woman be best represented in mass media?

12. Is there anything we haven’t discussed but you would like to add?
Curriculum Vita

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EDUCATION

**Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**
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EXPERIENCE


September 2012 – March 2013: Teaching Assistant, Department of Culture and Communication, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

PUBLICATIONS

“You Are Not a Muslim: Minority Rights and Sharia Interpretation in Pakistan.” *Sharia Dynamics: Islamic Law and Sociopolitical Processes*. Palgrave MacMillan. (Forthcoming).

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


November 2016: “How Does the Pakistani Subaltern Subject Speak? A Visual Discourse Analysis of Malala Yousafzai” paper to be presented at Middle East Studies Association annual meeting, Boston, Massachusetts.

June 2016: “The Other Danger Zone: Framing Culture through Documentary after 9/11” paper with Novak, A. at International Communication Association’s annual meeting, Fukuoka, Japan.

December 2014: “You Are Not a Muslim: Minority Rights and Sharia Interpretation in Pakistan” paper presented at American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting, Washington D.C.


November 2013: “I’m declaring jihad on this #MuslimRage meme: Resistance and Agency on Twitter” paper presented at Mid Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association’s annual meeting, Atlantic City, New Jersey.


COURSES TAUGHT
- Principles of Communication
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SELECTED HONORS
- March 2014: Drexel University College of Arts and Sciences Research Day, Graduate Winner in Humanities.
- April 2013: National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Honorable Mention.
- September 2012: Drexel University Provost Fellowship for Graduate Studies.
- September 2012: Drexel University Teaching Assistantship.
- May 2012: Temple University Diamond Award for Academic Achievement, Leadership and Service
- May 2012: Robert K. Merton Award for Most Outstanding Student in Sociology, Temple University.
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