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Malala Yousafzai and the Post-9/11 Politics of Gender and Governmentality

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Abstract

Malala Yousafzai was catapulted on to the global stage after she was attacked by *Tehrik-e-Taliban* militants while on her way to school in the Swat valley of Pakistan in October 2012. The attack against Yousafzai ignited debate around her status as a Muslim female school going-child and led to a global campaign for education rights for Muslim girls. This essay examines the conflicting narratives around Yousafzai in the international public sphere in order to develop a critical narrative on the politics of gender and governmentality after 11 September 2001. We locate Yousafzai within the frame of the global War on Terror and its relationship to Pakistan as a proxy state in global hegemonic politics and argue that as much as her entry on the global stage was presented as a victory for Muslim women that (a) nothing significant has shifted for them and (b) her celebration as an icon of freedom for Muslims is, in fact, intrinsically wedded to a discourse which utilizes gender equality in a utilitarian fashion to maintain a larger hegemonic system.

Introduction³

Malala Yousafzai (b.1997) hails from the Swat Valley, part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. She became an international icon after the Pakistan based *Tehrik-e-Taliban* (Taliban) militants allegedly attacked her on her way to school on 09 October 2012. This incident was extensively covered in the international media and the regular updates on her changing health condition made her one of the most famous young people in the world. Yousafzai⁴ recovered, going on to become a global celebrity lecturing on the importance of education for all, global peace and the rights of children. In 2013, *Time Magazine* featured her as one of “The 100 Most Influential People in the World” and in 2014 she won the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest person ever to do so.

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⁴ Yousafzai is routinely referred to in the media by her first name ‘Malala’. While this is the norm for celebrity figures and has connotations of endearment, we prefer to adhere to the academic convention of using the surname.

This essay examines the international circulation and consumption of Yousafzai as an icon in public discourse and as part of the on-going discussion on Islam, gender and the politics of contemporary global hegemonic power. We locate Yousafzai within the dominant public perception of gender politics that both informs and is informed by contemporary empire,⁵ particularly, after the attacks on targets in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. From this perspective, Yousafzai had a unique relationship with contemporary global hegemonic power and is not merely a passive victim of contemporary developments, including violent expressions of Muslim radicalism.⁶ This essay views Yousafzai at the intersection of different forms of power such as gender, class and imperialism/colonialism from a decolonial perspective.

Considering these larger contexts and different readings of gender discourse and terrorism in respect of the South Asian provides an alternative contextualisation for the debates around Yousafzai and extend the discussion beyond liberal assumptions. This requires a discussion on gender and the politics of governmentality in which Yousafzai is embedded. There are far too many instances where critics ignore state violence and exclusively focus on non-state actors in Pakistan, particularly in relation to Yousafzai.

De-Coloniality and Gender

From its earlier chronological meaning which simply designated post-colonialism as 'after-colonialism', since the late 1970s, the term "has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization."⁷ Post-colonialism now deals with the persistent and broader legacy of colonization and its various systemic, ideological and cultural manifestations in communities and societies—usually collectively referred to as the Global South. Post-colonial critics such as Homi Bhaba and Hamid Dabashi expanded the notions of imperialist domination from the Marxist rigidity of class to the broader category of culture which transcended the economic determinism and structural biases of earlier

⁵ The term 'empire' is used in the sense first elaborated on by Hardt & Negri. Empire now "establishes no territorial centers of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries and barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm with its open expanding frontiers." (Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000, xii). While the USA occupies a privileged place in this Empire, it is not synonymous with it.

⁶ Shenila Khoja-Moolji 2015. 'Reading Malala: (De)(Re)Territorialisation of Muslim Collectivities.' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. Special Issue: "Languages of Justice at the Limits of Feminism," Volume 35, no. 3.

⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies – Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge. 2000, 168.

Marxism to understand the diverse situations of post-colonial communities⁸. Post-colonial discourse thus insisted on the capacity of the colonized people to imagine their own worlds and national liberation unshackled by the developments in the European history.⁹ Post-colonialism itself was subsequently critiqued by decolonial theorists who rejected the post-structuralist epistemology that characterised it. Ramón Grosfuguel (b. 1956), a leading decolonial thinker, argued that while many post-colonial critics are socially situated in the Global South, epistemologically they remained wedded to the Global North.¹⁰ The decolonial movement criticised Latin American and South Asian subaltern studies for its epistemic bias, especially in privileging the post-structuralist/postmodernist turn in northern social theory, and argued for an epistemic disobedience to the colonial legacy of knowledge. From this perspective, both post-modernism and post-structuralism emerged as theoretical traditions that are caught within the culture of Western canons “reproducing within its domains of thought and practice a particular form of coloniality of power/knowledge.”¹¹ Decolonial Theory proposed an alternative theoretical paradigm named ‘border thinking’ as an epistemic perspective that captures the depth and breadth of decolonial criticism. As an ever-expanding area without any universal truths and with a South-South conversation at its core, the proposed border thinking is not another essentialist, fundamentalist and anti-European criticism.¹² This epistemic perspective criticises both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalism. It rejects the fundamentalist premise that speaks about the ways of finding Truth and Universality from one epistemic tradition.

The problem of imperialism/colonialism and gender from a post-colonialist feminist perspective is reflected by Anne McClintock who holds that “[i]mperialism cannot be understood without a theory of gender power.”¹³ Gender power was not the superficial patina of empire, an ephemeral gloss over the more decisive mechanisms of class and race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset fundamental to the securing and

⁸ Cf. Homi Bhaba 2004. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge Press and Hamid Dabashi, 2008. *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror*. New York: Transaction Publishers, 2008

⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*. New York: Princeton University Press. 1993, 25.

¹⁰ Ramon Grosfuguel. 2011. *Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking and Global Coloniality*. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, Volume 1, no. 1, (2011): 1-37

¹¹ Grosfuguel, “Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies”.

¹² Grosfuguel, “Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies”.

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maintenance of the imperial enterprise.”¹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also argues that gender was formed around the issues of imperialism/colonialism and cannot be separated from issues of power such as community, class and race.¹⁵

Yousafzai’s public personality brings to the fore a web of power relationships of various sorts such as race, class and location. Rather than viewing the discussion on Yousafzai utilising a top-down model of male oppression/female victimhood, we interrogate the issues of class, caste, regional location, sexuality, governmentality, race and imperialism. This intersectional approach to the debate challenges the dominant paradigm of the simple victimhood of women by a peculiarly reified Muslim patriarchy.

In the first part we discuss the events that contributed to the creation of an icon like Yousafzai. The second part looks at the historico-political context of the Pakistan–Afghanistan region where Yousafzai was born and raised. This context of the regional wars and the resistance against the political hegemonic power players is particularly significant to avoid a simplistic liberal ‘good modern girl versus bad traditional men’ narrative. The third part locates the debate on Yousafzai within the context of global debates on gender and Islam after the events of 11 September 2001, and more particularly, in relation to the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by NATO forces, led by the US. In the last part we deconstruct the claims of global governmentality that celebrates the extraordinary achievement of Yousafzai by looking at recent critical theories on gender, state and governmentality, thus problematizing assumptions about Muslims and gender violence that became particularly widespread after the September 11th attacks.

Gender and Governmentality

Michel Foucault’s work on governmentality directs us to consider the ways in which discourse, knowledge, and practices enable the government of subjects.¹⁶ Developed in the later years of his life, the notion of governmentality deals with the policies and organised practices

¹⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Contest*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 6-7.

¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretations of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-315.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault. ‘Governmentality’, trans. Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, (1991), 87-104.

(techniques, rationalities, mentalities) that governments create to produce pliable and compliant subjects who can best buy into its discourses and policies and offer least resistance to them.¹⁷

Foucault made a distinction between the Machiavellian art of government and modern science of government. The former was mainly concerned with ways in which the prince could hold on to his principality. The latter refers to the ways in which an ensemble of institution and procedures allows the exercise of power over the population as a whole. This complex modern regime is no longer motivated by a relatively simple desire to maintain a prince; it is rather a logic that sets out to frame and regulate all aspects of social life.¹⁸

The lack of interrogation of the intersection between gender, Islamic fundamentalism and governmentality is a significant theoretical problem. Despite the work of Muslim feminists such as Saba Mahmood¹⁹, Leila Ahmad²⁰ and Lila Abu-Lughod²¹ who have consistently shown how some forms of feminism function as an extensions of Northern, white and or liberal hegemonic discourses, the dominant discourse on Muslim women in the Global North still views Muslim women as marginalised subjects in a position that requires them to be rescued by liberal governments or the supposed freedom loving Euro-Atlantic forces. This discourse also frames Islamic fundamentalism solely in terms of exercising control over women's bodies.²² Such control, we argue, is also a function of modern liberal governments. Liberal gender discourses seem to have only vague notions of governmentality but in relation to Muslim societies it largely follows the notion that attempts to exercise control over women's bodies is a feature peculiar to Islamic fundamentalism.²³ The debate about fundamentalism and Islam is often conducted from a presumption of Islam's supposed control of women's bodies. Thus, any Islamic attempt to follow Islamic codes of conduct relating to women is immediately viewed as fundamentalist from which the only escape is the codes of conduct imposed on women by the 'free' and liberal West, post-colonial elites or

¹⁷ Thomas Lemke. "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique" in *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*. Volume 14, Issue 3, (2002): 49-64.

¹⁸ Salman Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, London: Zed Books, (2003), 27.

¹⁹ Saba Mahmood, 2005. *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁰ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011.

²¹ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2013

²² Sayyid, "A Fundamental Fear,"10.

²³ Sayyid, "A Fundamental Fear,"10.

powerful governments. When other situations emerge where secular states in Europe imposes a dress code for Muslim women using a white male dominated parliament to implement such legislation such as in France, this is not considered as exercising control of women's bodies.

In the case of Yousafzai, most public debates were focused on the aspect of control over women's bodies without considering the techniques of governmentality by the Pakistani state together with the active encouragement and support of the global empire. For example, Pakistani liberal discourse has a profound obsession with the Taliban that "feeds into the military project of a neoliberal security state" that "couch[es] the very real grievance and issues of Pakistani people in the language of security and specifically in combating Islamic militancy."²⁴ The calculated preponderance of the language of security makes invisible other idioms and forms of resistance that are used by Pakistanis to advance their welfare.

The Local Context of the Public Discussion on Yousafzai

In considering the complexities around the broader debate around Yousafzai we briefly look at the family that shaped her worldview, the education rights movements in which she participated, and the impact of her father in shaping her politics and her journey from Pakistan to Britain after her injury. Yousafzai's political formation begins with her family—especially her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, (b. 1969) who was active in local political and social movements that seriously conflicted with anti-government movements such as the Taliban.²⁵ Historically the region where Yousafzai and her family were actively politically involved is also very significant in understanding the discussion around Yousafzai. The populations of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland area have historically interacted with both local and international political actors and movements from the time of the Anglo-Russian competition to the current post-9/11 period.²⁶ The Swat valley, at the intersection of these two countries has been a particularly significant terrain where national and international contestations have played out from the time of British colonialism in the eighteenth century. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Dec. 1979 - Feb. 1989.), its subsequent defeat there, the spillover of resistance into Pakistan and the presence in the northern parts of Pakistan of more than 3 million Afghan refugees, including veterans of that Jihad—many of

²⁴ Toor, "The State of Islam," 198.

²⁵ Malala Yousafzai and Chrisina Lamb, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education*. London: Weidinfeld and Nicholson. 2013.

²⁶ Shahzad Bashir and Robert D, Crews. *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands*, London: Harvard University Press, (2012), 8.

whom later became leaders of the Taliban, the resulting emergence of the US as the sole global power with proxies all over the world and the active connivance of western plutocracies²⁷ intensified the local contestations in this region.

The fight in Afghanistan spilled over into Northwestern Pakistan, which resulted in clashes between the Pakistani army and local militant groups as well as in US military drone strikes. These military engagements have been severely contested by Afghans and Pakistanis due to the civilian casualties and displacements that have ensued. They form the material conditions within which opposition for all things Western, as well as the state, takes its grounds and become the site for increasing radicalization.²⁸

This larger local political context wherein Yousafzai and her family emerged in the political history of this particular region is important in shaping the events that led to how Yousafzai was imagined by those who regarded her as an enemy.

While still a primary school student, her father prompted her to write a blog about educational reform – something that he was particularly interested in—for the BBC Urdu service. Yousafzai’s blog, modelled on the diary of Anne Frank (d. 1945) written under the Nazi occupation of Holland²⁹ provoked the ire of the Taliban who opposed Western forms of education which they regarded as an assault on their traditional values and an extension of Western hegemony in that region. This blog allegedly led to the attack against her outside her school by the Taliban.³⁰ This attack was widely denounced in the international media and by organisations and politicians—both Muslim and non-Muslim—and garnered intense media attention heralding the beginning of Yousafzai’s image as a global icon of girls’ right to education a symbol of bravery against unjust political forces. With the assistance of Christina Lamb, a British journalist, she authored a book, entitled: *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* and continued her schooling in Britain. Yousafzai is portrayed as succeeding against all odds, as a heroine, or, as *TIME*

²⁷ Bashir and D. Crews, “Under the Drones,” 8

²⁸ Cf. J Gagnon (2012). “The Taliban did not create the Taliban, imperialism did”. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 7(1), 23–42, for more about the connection between imperialism and radicalization.

²⁹ *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, New York: Doubleday (1967)

³⁰ ‘Tehrik-e-Taliban’, literally means ‘Taliban movement’. In Afghanistan the movement is simply known as ‘the Taliban’ whereas in Pakistan, it is often referred by the full term. ‘*Taliban*’ means ‘students’ and is a reference to the origins of the movement when students in religious seminaries in Afghanistan and the Pakistan abandoned their studies in 1991 to bring about some order based on Afghan tradition and a conservative interpretation of Islam in the wake of the chaos of a post-Soviet Afghanistan.

magazine called her, “the champion for girls everywhere.” “She is made exceptional by practices such as celebrating “Yousafzai Day,” receiving a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, and book deals worth millions of dollars. Even the title of her book centres on her person, emphasising her uniqueness.”³¹

Appearing at various international fora, including the United Nations, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with the Indian activist for child rights, Kailash Satyarthi (b. 1954) and was praised by politicians such as former UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.³² She also met with President Barack Obama who was lauded for taking the time to meet the young activist.³³

Yousafzai in Conflicting Narratives of the Left and Feminist Politics

The narratives around Yousafzai resulted in different sets of positions within larger Leftist movements on the one hand, and what could be viewed as her own commitment to social change and her critical positions towards some of the more obviously militaristic adventures of the US, on the other, added complexity to the public discussions about her. This part discusses the debates within the Left regarding the positions taken by Yousafzai.³⁴

Though well received in Washington DC, Yousafzai criticised the US for conducting military operations in Pakistan such as drone strikes.³⁵ Ziauddin Yousafzai’s earlier association with communist parties in the Swat region—predating the attack on his daughter—contributed to the

³¹ Khoja-Moolji. “De-Stabilizing the Emergent Binary”.

³² Assad Baig commented on this rather cynically: “Gordon Brown stood at the UN and spoke words in support for Yousafzai, yet he is the very same Gordon Brown who voted for the war in Iraq that not only robbed people of their education but of their lives”. (Asad Baig, “Malala Yousafzai and the White Savior Complex,” http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/assad-baig/malala-yousafzai-white-saviour_b_3592165.html (Accessed 15 February, 2015).

³³ Ben Norton, “The Predictable Corporate Media: The (Socialist) Malala Yousafzai the US Media Doesn’t Quote,” <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/10/15/the-socialist-malala-yousafzai-the-us-media-doesnt-quote/> (Accessed 10 February, 2015).

³⁴ Acknowledging that all attempts at defining any ideological position risk of reification, ‘the Left’ in this article is used to denote a position which moves from the acceptance of socio-economic equality as an ideal and a critique of the systemic roots of such inequality. ‘The Right’ or ‘right-wing’ in this essay is used to denote acceptance of the inevitability of social hierarchy and inequality and the valorization of personalist (as opposed to systemic) responses to these. (C.f. Steven Lukes. ‘Epilogue’: The Grand Dichotomy of the Twentieth Century’ concluding chapter to T. Ball and R. Bellamy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁵ Norton, “The Predictable Corporate Media...”.

perception of her as a socialist icon for many leftists.³⁶ In a message to the International Marxist Tendency's National Marxist Summer School held in Lahore on March 2012, she said: "I would like to send my heartfelt greetings to the congress. I am convinced Socialism is the only answer and I urge all comrades to take this struggle to a victorious conclusion. Only this will free us from the chains of bigotry and exploitation."³⁷

Leftists such as Ben Norton have accused global right-wing politicians of not taking Yousafzai's voice seriously and of using her as a pawn for vested political interests. This was another turn in the conflicting narratives on Yousafzai.³⁸ In the words of Asad Baig:

This is the Malala the Western corporate media doesn't like to quote. This is the Malala whose politics do not fit neatly into the US' neo-colonialist, cookie-cutter frame of presentation. This is the Malala who recognises that true liberation will take more than just education, that it will take the establishment of not just bourgeois political "democracy," but of *economic* democracy, of socialism.³⁹

The most significant cleavage in the public discussion around Yousafzai, however, was among feminist activists who were conflicted in supporting Yousafzai's campaign which was rapidly appropriated by global political elites complicit in or openly supporting the killing of millions of women around the world. While some argued that "[F]or Muslim girls and women around the world...the story is more than just a tale of survival...Malala is proof that feminism, or the desire for equality through education and empowerment, is not the terrain of any one culture or faith,"⁴⁰ there was still significant debate on the feminist ideals that Yousafzai proposed as well as how to reclaim her from the secular elites and to position her within the Islamic tradition. One such critic argued that "some Muslim women make it into our headlines like [Yousafzai], who also clearly stated Islam as a core driver of her work, and who proudly wears her headscarf. The vast majority remain unheard of, working on the ground, inspired by their

³⁶ Omar Waraich, "Malala, Obama, Socialism: Nobel Laureate's political views are complex," <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/12/23/-hold-malala>. [Accessed 15 February 2015].

³⁷ <http://www.marxist.com/historic-32nd-congress-of-pakistani-imt-1.htm>

³⁸ Ben Norton, "The Predictable Corporate Media ..."

³⁹ Norton, "The Predictable Corporate Media".

⁴⁰ Rafia Zakaria, "Malala, the Feminist," <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/14/malala-yousafzaiislamfeminism.html> (Accessed 11 Feb., 2015).

faith.”⁴¹ It was clear that Yousafzai and the gender politics she subscribed to was one of the key factors in determining her celebrity status.

The dominant consensus on Yousafzai, however, is that any discussion on the larger context and the production of her image is not politically prudent in a world where few want to be seen as a spoiler of, to use Mahmood Mamdani’s term, ‘the good Muslim’ cause.⁴² The dominant public representation of Yousafzai made any alternative engagement about her person or representation that identifies contradictory elements and fissures in her public image well-nigh impossible. To understand the global public discussion regarding Yousafzai, we should consider both the larger context of imperialism/colonialism as well as the historical and social context in which the attack against her occurred. This will shed some light on the ambiguities of the leftist and feminist discourses.

The Global Context of the Attack against Yousafzai

A number of Pakistani activists who engaged with the local context of the attack against Yousafzai argued that the US drone attacks and the complicity of Pakistani elites were really the underlying causes behind the attack however misguided and brutal, against Yousafzai.⁴³ A 2014 study conducted by New York and Stanford Universities’ law researchers show that these US attacks on the Afghanistan and Pakistan border area “terrorize men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities.”⁴⁴ The attacks have caused between 400-1000 civilian casualties since 2004 and it still continues with impunity. This study also further shows that only two per cent of drone attack victims are Taliban or other Islamic militant leaders. The impact of these drone attacks and the larger political impulses underpinning them cannot be limited to the killing of people and the immediate consequence thereof. Scholars such as Engseung Ho have argued that drone attacks as a form of modern warfare represents the political logic of neo-colonialism of which the US-led empire is but one

⁴¹ Shelina Janmohamed, “British Muslim Women don’t Need the West’s Version of Feminism, OK?,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10702454/Islam-and-feminism-British-Muslim-women-dont-need-the-Wests-version-of-feminism-OK.html> (Accessed 13 Feb., 2014).

⁴² Mahmood Mamdani. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, New York: Random, 2004.

⁴³ Saadia Toor, “Ask the Right Questions,” <http://www.tanqeed.org/2012/11/ask-the-right-questions-saadia-toor/#sthash.V215bWAS.dpbs> (Accessed 11 Feb., 2015).

⁴⁴ Stanford International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (IHRCRC) & Global Justice Clinic (GJC) at New York University School of Law, “Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan” [Accessed on 12 Feb., 2015].

manifestation.⁴⁵ Using drones, the US operates without the stated intention of colonialism, thus making the task of identifying it as such more difficult.⁴⁶

In the mainstream political narrative—itsself reflective of a hegemonic discourse—the discussion around Yousafzai largely focuses on the politics of violence in the region, in general. More specifically it focuses, on the putatively ‘senseless’ violence of the Taliban, on the one hand, and ignores the invisible drone attacks, on the other. This narrative also ignores at least two important issues relating to global hegemonic politics in the area. First, when several million civilians were uprooted by fighting between the Pakistani Taliban and military in 2009, and by massive floods in 2010, precipitating one of the worst refugee crises in modern times, the drone strikes and other counterinsurgency operations continued unabated, while the vast resources of the US and NATO alleviated the plight of very few Pakistanis. Indeed, over the past four years, civilian deaths related to armed conflict in the region have increased annually. In 2010 these numbered 2,777 in Afghanistan and more than 3,000 in Pakistan. Although various observers attribute roughly 75% of these deaths to insurgents, the growing rates of civilian casualties caused by U.S. and allied forces, particularly as a result of drone warfare, suggest the extent to which the ideas that underpin Afghanistan and Pakistan as an uninterrupted war theatre are deeply flawed.⁴⁷ Second is the problem of the construction of Taliban militancy (the ‘bad Muslims’) as a form of terrorism and irrational violence juxtaposed with the narratives of life in general and that of Yousafzai as a hero of peace (the ‘good Muslim’), in particular. The problem with this narrative is that it ignores the larger contextual concerns behind the construction of the definition of terrorism⁴⁸ in respect of contemporary global politics, especially in Pakistan.⁴⁹

According to Junaid Rana, defeating terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan is the highest priority of the US security establishment after

⁴⁵ Engseng Ho. “Empire through Diasporic Eye: A View from the Other Boat,” *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 46, no.2 (2004): 310-46.

⁴⁶ Ho, “Empire Through Diasporic Eye...,” 329.

⁴⁷ Bashir and Crews, “Under the Drones,” 7.

⁴⁸ This article follows Mahmood Mamdani’s definition of terrorism as “not born of the residue of a pre-modern culture in modern politics. Rather, terrorism is a modern construction. Even when it harnesses one or another aspect of tradition and culture, the result is a modern ensemble at the service of a modern project”. (Mahmood Mamdani. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism*. American Anthropologist. Vol.104, no.3, (2002:767-775).

⁴⁹ Munir Akram, “Reverse Strategic ‘Shrinkage,’” in *Pakistan: Beyond the Crisis State*. ed. Maleeha Lodhi. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. (2011: 285).

the cold war.⁵⁰ For this purpose, the US financial aid provided to Pakistan assists in further centralising the Pakistani military industry and its tentacles in society. This has alienated the many local communities particularly in the Swat area where loyalty to the Pakistani state has always been very tentative.⁵¹ For the US security establishment, the greatest threat to its hegemony is the presence of Islamic militancy.⁵² The labelling of Islamic militancy solely in terms of terrorism presents a number of problems. The South Asian scholar, Faisal Devji,⁵³ argues that this becomes possible after the humanity is stripped from the supposed terrorist and her/his existence becomes a bare life by distinguishing between the grieving and non-grieving life. In this way, “[t]he War on Terror is formulated as an opposing binary: democracy and freedom versus terrorist radicalism and militancy.”⁵⁴ Rana further argues that “this is a racist binary, not simply in the sense of a system of control and hierarchy but also in the sense of determining who lives and dies to maintain and legitimize the authority of a colonizing force.”⁵⁵

This construction of Taliban terrorism is affixed to the victim figure of Muslim women which draws our attention to the gendered nature of South Asian politics and the war on terror. According to Saadia Toor:

Even as the United States officially begins to wind down its war in Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror—recently rebranded as the Overseas Contingency Operation by Obama—is spreading and intensifying across the ‘Muslim world’ and we can expect to hear further calls for the United States and its allies to save Muslim women. At the same time, we are seeing the mainstreaming and institutionalization of a gendered anti-Muslim racism within the West, which means that we can also expect to see more of the discourse which pits the rights of Muslim men against those of Muslim women.⁵⁶

During the 1990s, global politics were largely framed in terms of the concept of the clash of civilisation. According to this framing, the essential difference between Islamic and western civilisation was that of women’s rights.⁵⁷ After 11 September 2001, much of the rhetoric of the war on terror

⁵⁰ Rana, “Terrifying Muslims,” 7.

⁵¹ Akram, “Reverse Strategic ‘Shrinkage,’” 284-285.

⁵² Rana, “Terrifying Muslims,” 5.

⁵³ Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, (2008), 27.

⁵⁴ Rana, “Terrifying Muslim,” 5.

⁵⁵ Rana, “Terrifying Muslim,” 4.

⁵⁶ Toor, “Asking the Right Question.”

⁵⁷ Sarah Bracke, “From ‘Saving Women’ to ‘Saving Gays’: Rescue Narratives and their Dis/Continuities”.

was developed around the transnational feminist concern allied with global political elites over the oppression of Muslim women.⁵⁸ The veiled, victimized, docile Muslim woman's body was an important component of this discussion of a supposed civilisation of difference between Islam and the West.⁵⁹

One of the most consistent themes in the war on terror...is the contention that this war is waged in order to protect women's rights and, in particular, to liberate Muslim and Arab women from the yoke of their misogynist cultural backgrounds and religious traditions. The war on terror has been construed, waged and legitimised on gendered and, indeed, sexualised terrain with gender and sexuality producing both the hyper-visible icons as well as the ghosts that haunt the war machinery.⁶⁰

Here the free and liberated West represented freedom and equality, particularly for women, while Islam represented barbarism and a curtailment of liberty. Joseph Massad speaks about this binary division as the ideology of liberalism and a form of Western self-making.⁶¹ In this discourse Western liberalism speaks about the freedom of women in the West, contrasting this with Muslim women's lives. This liberal narrative has two other dimensions that are not visible in the mainstream discussions: first is the increasing denial of how the Muslim woman's right to veil in the West operates in relation to a careful silence in Western public discussions about Muslim women labourers as migrant workers.⁶² This assists the problem of neoliberal economic policy concealed in a set of cultural problems. Secondly, by pointing to Islam's supposed oppression of women western, liberalism can conceal domestic violence and the related issues of gender in the West as personal and pathological by positing that such violence is unrelated western culture and politics.⁶³ The dominant political discourse thus constructs the problems of Muslim women's as essentially associated with Islam and Muslims while in their own societies, gender-based violence is presented as unrelated to Western politics and culture.

There were certain important shifts in the gender discourse perpetuated by the Bush regime after the events of 11 September 2001.⁶⁴ While these

European Journal of Women's Studies 19, no. 2 (2012): 244.

⁵⁸ Bracke, "From 'Saving Women' to 'Saving Gays'....." 244.

⁵⁹ Bracke, "From 'Saving Women' to 'Saving Gays'....." 244.

⁶⁰ Bracke, "From 'Saving Women' to 'Saving Gays'....." 244.

⁶¹ Joseph Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", Chicago: Chicago University Press, (2015), 123.

⁶² Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", 123.

⁶³ Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", 123.

⁶⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790.

shifts did not signify anything new in the sense of its colonial ambitions, its mechanism was quite different. The US-based media and politicians did not show any interest in the women in the Taliban-ruled regions before these events⁶⁵ in the same way that one notes the persistent indifference to women's rights in Saudi Arabia, its most significant Arab ally and a country where women are not allowed to drive cars or travel without a male relative.⁶⁶ After the 11 September attacks there was sufficient evidence available to the US to prove the responsibility of Al Qaeda for the attacks. However, there was insufficient evidence to link the Taliban to them.⁶⁷ To bolster its justification for the invasion of Afghanistan the Bush administration started a campaign by focusing on the human rights abuses by the Taliban regime. The rhetoric of women rights abuses was the major cherry on top of this sales pitch for the pretext discourse on human rights. On 17 November 2001, with the imminent invasion of Afghanistan just days away, the former US First Lady, Laura Bush, told the American public that women in Afghanistan must not be forgotten and that the "brutal oppression of women was a goal of the terrorists" and that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women."⁶⁸

The difference between governmental control and non-state control in the public debates around Yousafzai needs to be considered within an alternative context of political violence that has serious implications for the gendered nature of violence and which further clarifies a problem which inheres in the construction of the relationship between gender and terrorism in terms of the hegemonic framework of global politics. One example of this occurred immediately after the military coup in Egypt in July 2013. Asma Beltagy, the 17-year-old daughter of Mohammed Beltagy a Muslim Brotherhood leader, died of chest wounds sustained as a result of gunfire from an Egyptian army sniper at a sit-in in Rabi'a al-`Adawiya Square in Cairo.⁶⁹ While Yousafzai was deemed fit for a Nobel Peace

⁶⁵ Deepa Kumar and Carol A. Stabile. "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and War on Afghanistan," *Media, Culture and Society*. 27, no. 5 (2005): 765.

⁶⁶ Since the early eighties there have been a few US-based NGOs that addressed the plight of women's rights in Afghanistan. These organisations, however, did not garner significant attention from the media or politicians before 9/11 (Kumar and Stabile, "Unveiling Imperialism," 765).

⁶⁷ Kumar and Stabile, "Unveiling Imperialism," 765.

⁶⁸ Washington Post. "Laura Bush on Taliban Oppression of Women". http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html [Accessed on 15 August 2015]. Here we see a similar re-enactment of the tale of women being used by a very patriarchal ideology (US Republicanism) to further the agenda of a military industrial hegemon in the name of women.

⁶⁹ Middle East Monitor, "Asma Beltagy being Shot by Egyptian Military Sniper," YouTube Video, 0:20.

Prize for her courage in the face of Taliban “terrorists,” Beltagy remained largely invisible because she was murdered by an Egyptian army which is a part of the modern state machinery. Her death was considered as an acceptable form of killing for purposes of contemporary empire. Similarly the lives of thousands of Muslim women activists lost during the recent Arab uprisings have gone unnoticed since the publicity of such deaths does not fulfil the objectives of the politics of governmentality, a governmentality which produces a particular kind of citizen/non-citizen, or pliant/non-pliant subject. Yousafzai fits into the stereotype which is “predicated on a whole history of Orientalism” of the “docile image of Arab and Muslim women, waiting to be ‘liberated’ by the US army.”⁷⁰ The dominant narrative surrounding Yousafzai evidently lacks a serious interrogation of the problem of contemporary global power and its relationship to the coercive apparatus of modern states.

Peace and Governmentality

Both post-colonial feminist studies and de-coloniality demonstrate that peace and order are not the productions of a just political situation but rather involves complex dynamics of power which include force and hegemony in a Gramscian sense.⁷¹ From a Gramscian point of view, coercion is the product of the direct use of visible force and hegemony which is the culture of internal disciplining using modern institutions such as schools, the workplace and the media.⁷² Global peace movements are more likely to work by asserting and reinforcing the hegemony of ruling powers rather than undertaking or initiating a meaningful conversation with the oppressed and marginalized.⁷³

From a decolonial feminist position, the idea that women, especially children and mothers, are generally peace loving people is not unchallenged.⁷⁴ However, the narratives framing Yousafzai made her an icon of peace employing vague politics of gender and, thereby, removing the political context of the region she emerged from. There are similar examples from Sri Lanka where the women’s movement, *The Mothers*

⁷⁰ Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Uprising: The End of Postcolonialism*, London: Pluto Press, 2012. 185.

⁷¹ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist*, New Delhi: Penguin, (2012), 168.

⁷² Marcus Green, “Gramsci Cannot Speak: Representation and Interpretations of Gramsci’s Concept of the Subaltern,” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 14, no. 3 (2010): 6-7.

⁷³ Menon, “Seeing Like a Feminist,” 168.

⁷⁴ “But women can be combatants, they can be violent; they can also want peace, they want to resolve conflict; just like men, they too can have a range of motivation”. Menon, “Seeing Like a Feminist,” 169.

Front, actively campaigned against the disappearance of their sons and male relatives at the hands of the Sri Lankan state. However, the movement did not utilise the hegemonic idea of peace.⁷⁵ In Kashmir, Muslim women peace campaigners fought against the Indian state for justice for the men who disappeared and were tortured to death by state institutions without adopting the hegemonic peace discourse.⁷⁶ The public discussion around Yousafzai which celebrates her status as a global peace icon ignores the complex intersection of gender and peace in South Asia.⁷⁷ This discussion furthermore, also ignores the role of the US-led empire and its military excursions together with the support of the Pakistani state. It is within this context that national states and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which ignore the political realities of the region, construct and use the image of Yousafzai as an icon of peace.

Joseph Massad highlights the historical emergence of international NGO politics in the service of the US neo-liberal regime after the Eighties and cold war.⁷⁸ These NGOs, he argues, replaced the independent civil society organisations in various parts of the Global South and shifted the aims and objectives of grass root activism into the larger policy concerns of the US in the fields of culture, law and ecology and, particularly, in the fields of sexuality and gender. By so-doing, NGOs destroy the existing political preferences in the Global South and replaced neoliberal values with the active support of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank⁷⁹. Massad specifically shows how some sections of the women NGOs and the women activists from the West, who are nationalist in the sense that they see the West as fundamentally free, have adopted the

⁷⁵ Malathi De Alwis, "Motherhood as a Space for Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka," in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and the Politicization of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Amrita Basu and Patricia Jeffrey. New York: Routledge, 1998: 185-202.

⁷⁶ Afsana Rashid, *Widows and Half Widows: Saga of Extrajudicial Arrests and Killings in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Pharos Media, (2011).

⁷⁷ In a challenging essay, Paul Salem critiquing conventional notions of Western approaches to conflict resolution and points out that its 'theorists and practitioners operate within a macro-political context that they may overlook, but which colours their attitudes and values. This seems remarkably striking from an outsider's point of view and is largely related to the West's dominant position in the world. All successful 'empires' develop an inherent interest in peace. The ideology of peace reinforces a status quo that is favourable to the dominant power. The Romans, for example, preached a *Pax Romana*, the British favoured a *Pax Britannica*, and the Americans today pursue a *Pax Americana*. Conflict and bellicosity is useful – indeed essential – in building empires, but an ideology of peace and conflict resolution is clearly more appropriate for its maintenance. (Paul Salem. 'A Critique of Western Conflict Resolution from a Non-Western Perspective'. *Negotiation Journal*, 9, 4 (2003): 361–369).

⁷⁸ Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", 138.

⁷⁹ Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", 138.

task of saving the oppressed sections women of the developed world as part of their nationalist mission.⁸⁰

In the case of Yousafzai, NGOs such as The Vital Voice (est. 1999) with the active assistance of Hilary Clinton (b.1947) developed the Malala Fund to assist in global education.⁸¹ According to their website: "Ever since then, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton founded Vital Voices sixteen years ago, and through its transition to a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, we have thrived with strong financial support and partnerships with both [US] Republican and Democratic administrations."⁸² The Vital Voice website says: "61 million kids around the world are denied access to education. 32 million are girls. Donate to the Malala Fund and get involved."⁸³ The organisers of Malala Fund speak about educational rights of children from the Global South without offering a critique of neoliberal educational policies developed by IMF and World Bank with the help of successive US administrations whose Structural adjustment program explicitly called for decreased spending on social services. These NGOs are building networks between elite politicians and imperialist policy makers such as Hilary Clinton and local women right activists in the name of global peace and global education rights.

Such a development, we suggest is an apt reflection of what Janet Halley terms "governance feminism."⁸⁴ White liberal feminist movements especially in Europe and US in the 1990s start to realize that even though they are theoretically powerful in confronting gender injustice and related inequalities, they are powerless in the realm of governance and building institutions in translating their theories into policy and programmes⁸⁵. In other words, feminists don't have the means to establish the gender policies at the level of institutions of governance.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Massad, "Islam in Liberalism", 138.

⁸¹ Vital Voice: Global Partnership. "Partners with Vital Voices". Accessed from (<http://www.vitalvoices.org/get-involved/partner>) [Accessed on 25 August 2015].

⁸² Vital Voice: Global Partnership. "Partners with Vital Voices". Accessed from (<http://www.vitalvoices.org/get-involved/partner>) [Accessed on 25 August 2015].

⁸³ Vital Voice: Global Partnership. "Support the Malala Fund". Accessed from (<http://www.vitalvoices.org/global-initiatives/support-malala-fund>) [Accessed on 25 August 2015].

⁸⁴ Janet Halley, Prabha Kotiswaran, Shamir Hila and Thomas Chantel, "From the International to Local in Feminist Legal Response to Rape, Prostitution/ Sex Work and Sex Trafficking: Four Studies in Contemporary Governance Feminism," *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 29, no. 2 (2006): 335-423.

⁸⁵ Janet Halley, "*Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*". Princeton : Princeton University Press,(2008), 22

⁸⁶ Halley, "Split Decisions", 22.

This led to the association of certain section of feminists and the powerful government institutions to establish progressive gender policies at the level of institutions, policies and laws.⁸⁷ However, in many instances, some feminists who associated with liberal governments and global institution were actually co-opted by these powerful governments and institutions and silenced any criticism of politics of governance in the respective institutions. This led to the criticism of the relationship between governance and feminism. Janet Halley particularly called feminist organisations that collaborated with global elites and accepted the ideas of US exceptionalism and the clash of civilisational thesis as governance feminism.⁸⁸ This feminist discourse sidelines the multiple locations of power and becomes yet another oppressive instrument in the established political order.⁸⁹

Conclusion

After 11 September 2001 and especially during the invasion of Afghanistan, global hegemonic powers used the issue of gender in South Asia to justify their colonial ambitions. We argue that many of the dominant assumptions on Yousafzai were utilised by global hegemonic powers whose aim was to exercise control of the region both ideologically and militarily. Even within the Left and feminist positions, there is an ambiguity in relation to the neo-colonial logic perpetuated by the empire when dealing Muslim women and their political rights. There are obvious limitations in an understanding of the politics of gender in South Asia especially in the borderland area of Pakistan and Afghanistan without appreciating the complex dynamics of gender and neo-liberal governmentality in this region. Considering the intersection of the politics of gender and neoliberal governmentality, Yousafzai's presence on the global stage as a peace icon and her 2014 Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 have not changed the discourse in any meaningful way.

Western, Northern and elitist feminism's relationship to global hegemony requires much more scrutiny and interrogation without in anyway detracting from the enormous injustices suffered by women all over the globe.

⁸⁷ Halley, "Split Decisions", 33.

⁸⁸ Halley, "Split Decisions", 32.

⁸⁹ Menon, "Seeing Like a Feminist," 146.

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