

# Reading Malala

## (De)(Re)Territorialization of Muslim Collectivities

Shenila Khoja-Moolji

In this article, I trace the various articulations for the rights of girls made in, by, and through the figure of Malala Yousafzai, a fifteen-year-old girl who was shot in the head by a member of the Tehrik-e-Taliban, a tribal political formation in Pakistan, in 2012. Malala has recovered since then; however, her story and voice have been taken up by a number of transnational organizations and activists to articulate the need for girls' education in Pakistan, in particular, and the global South, in general.<sup>1</sup> Informing these campaigns are the sturdy narratives about the oppression of Muslim women by an imagined mass of Muslim men/Islam/Taliban; the emancipatory promise of education; and the valorization of a particular kind of girlhood grounded in neoliberal assumptions of personhood and citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Malala, then, symbolizes a call for justice for girls in the global South—from condemning the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Nigeria to seeking resources for refugee children from Syria.<sup>3</sup> She joins a long list of other “emancipated” Muslim women, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Mukhtar Mai, and Irshad Manji,<sup>4</sup> whose lives and voices rearticulate the trope of oppressed Muslim girls and women in need of rescue.<sup>5</sup> In this article, I attempt to understand this phenomenon of specific girls and women being taken up periodically to represent the collectivity of Muslim women—and, relationally, reveal characteristics about the collectivity of Muslim men—by focusing specifically on Malala. What kinds of knowledges about Muslim girls, women, and men does Malala make available? What narratives, tropes, and terms are used to describe and understand Malala? What visceral reactions and affects are elicited from the audience? What contradictions and paradoxes, if any, does she make visible? What geopolitical, economic, and historical conditions and interests thrust her, and not others, into the position of representing Muslim women and girls? Why her? Why now?

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1. See, for instance, the UNESCO campaign *Stand Up for Malala* and the Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown's campaign, *I Am Malala*.

2. For more see Khoja-Moolji, “Empowered Girls.”

3. See Quist-Arcton, “Young Pakistan Activist Urges Nigeria to Do More,” and “Activist Malala Meets Syrian Refugees in Jordan.”

4. I recognize that there are significant differences among these women and girls in terms of age, national origins, and desires for self-promotion, among other factors. However, these differences are sometimes elided,

and at other times emphasized, to produce different readings of Muslim women. Mainstream readings of these women's archives, however, often reinscribe essentialized and reductive views about Muslim women and men. Elsewhere, I have written about how constructions of youth as vulnerable are particularly at play in Malala's archives, which differentiates her from the mass of older Muslim women such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Irshad Manji. See Khoja-Moolji, “Empowered Girls.” For a broader discussion around the focus on girls in international educational development, see Khoja-Moolji, “Suturing Together Girls and Education.”

5. See Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*; Dabashi, “Native Informers”; and Mahmood, “Feminism, Democracy, and Empire.”

Drawing on literature from the field of affect studies, I delve into the myriad affects and positions that Malala, as a sign, accumulates and how they make possible different kinds of knowledges about Muslim women and men. Grounding myself theoretically in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I provide two readings of Malala—*molar* and *molecular*. Deleuze and Guattari describe processes that seek to produce collective representations or aggregates to organize spatial and social life as *molar*. These processes attempt to totalize, as well as segment and categorize, life. The binary of oppressed Muslim women and oppressing Muslim men, for instance, forms one such segmentation or large-scale aggregate that seeks to make the lives of Muslim men and women more comprehensible. However, Deleuze and Guattari observe that aggregates often undermine, and are undermined by, *molecular* flows—“There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the over-coding machine.”<sup>6</sup> While molar processes seek to create rigid lines of segmentation by colonizing and territorializing life, molecular flows direct our attention toward the supple nature of life, or that which seeps through, exceeds, and evades molar segmentation. Thus, where molar lines of segmentation signal toward states of *being*, the molecular point to modes of *becoming*.

I argue that mainstream affective attachments to Malala solidify molar or aggregate representations about Muslim women as oppressed/victimized and Muslim men as oppressors or threats. I first examine the affects of shock and pain that surround the event of Malala’s shooting and note that these affects are mediated by a politics that recognizes only particular kinds of suffering and pain as morally legitimate for action. These affects enroll the audience in a politics of pity, where instead of a face-to-face engagement of compassion to relieve the suffering of the Other, the suffering is generalized, decontextualized, and mapped onto a mass of people. The audience attempts to address this suffering through acts of what Sarah Ahmed has called “charitable compassion.”<sup>7</sup> This

form of compassion, however, has its own politics in that it appropriates the suffering of others for the purpose of empowering the self. I then describe the affects of hatred that are felt toward those assumed to be the perpetrators of violence against Malala and, through her, the collectivity of Muslim girls. Hate produces an imagined mass of brown/black/bearded/Muslim/Taliban men that seems to be the source of all violence. Thus, the affects of shock, pain, pity, compassion, and hatred that stick to Malala also reaffirm the long-standing molar coding of Muslim men as oppressive and Muslim women as oppressed. It is here that I point to the circulation of power, whereby the interests of power centers—such as nation-states, monetary institutions, and media centers—translate into the consolidation or crystallization of particular representations and segmentations.

However, reading Malala’s coauthored autobiography, *I Am Malala*,<sup>8</sup> against the grain unravels this molar overcoding of all Muslim women and men. While securely grounded in the genre that Dohra Ahmad calls “pulp nonfiction”<sup>9</sup> or what Lila Abu-Lughod describes as writings “about the wrongs other women suffer,”<sup>10</sup> the text, paradoxically, provides evidence that evades the very binaries of victim/savior, oppressed/oppressor, and progressive/traditional that the genre seeks to create. Such a molecular reading casts doubt upon the mainstream understandings about, and affective attachments to, Malala. It also elicits hope by indicating the potential for revised molar configurations of Muslim women and men. Hence, I argue that it is only by choosing a molecular reading of Malala that we can attempt to deterritorialize or thwart normative claims made about the collectivity of Muslim women and men, as these molecular readings show the gaps and slippages within molar representations. In the concluding sections, I push my analysis further to theorize Malala as the “anomalous” of the collective (or as Deleuze and Guattari call it, multiplicity) of Muslim women. The anomalous, which according to Deleuze and Guattari is “the cutting edge of deterritorialization,”<sup>11</sup> has the potential for embarking upon lines

6. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216.

8. Yousafzai and Lamb, *I Am Malala*.

10. Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 82.

7. Ahmed, *The Politics of Emotion*, 192.

9. Ahmad, “Not Yet beyond the Veil,” 105.

11. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244.

of flight that can muddy molar overcodings. Malala as the anomalous, then, has the potential of showing the limits of the moral coding of Muslim women and men.

In short, this article attempts a theorization of the sturdiness of the trope of the oppressed Muslim woman/oppressing Muslim man that exists despite the prevalence of numerous contradictory narratives. By engaging with the affective economies of Malala, I show that, while molecular readings of Muslim women and men are possible, configurations of power crystallize molar readings. Molar lines of segmentation and molecular flows, however, coexist. Indeed, molecular flows reconfigure molar representations. As Deleuze and Guattari note, “Molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organization to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions.”<sup>12</sup> Herein lies the potential for molecular readings of Malala.

#### **Methodology: Working with Multiple Archives**

A project that seeks to trace affects, positions, and intensities as ways of knowing resists being collapsed into neat narratives informed by one set of data, as that would constrain possible readings and restrict the exploration of the work that the line of flight is doing. I, thus, rely on multiple archives that afford me different vantage points. These include Urdu- and English-language newspaper articles, blogs, videos, advertisements, photographs, posters, and Malala’s book (*I Am Malala*). In addition, comments from readers in response to the blogs and newspaper articles also became a source of data for me. Each element of this archive has its own idioms. However, when put together contingently for the purpose of this article, the archive produces complex, even contradictory, narratives about education and Muslim girlhood/womanhood that gesture toward the differently constituted desires and fears of the various stakeholders

and histories of affective investments.<sup>13</sup> These different cultural expressions can be conceptualized as “public pedagogies” of affect,<sup>14</sup> in that they reside outside formal schooling contexts and, yet, do the educative work of teaching us about how to feel and think about Muslim women and girls.

#### **Affects, Positions, and Politics**

Working with/about affects can be pleasurable as well as challenging. There is limited consensus about the definition of affect and ways of studying it, and different academic disciplines have advanced their own conceptualizations of it.<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of this article, I employ Deleuze and Guattari’s theories and distinctions between affects, feelings, and emotion. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi has described feelings as personal and biographical sensations that an individual can compare to previous experiences and interpret accordingly; thus, people draw on their personal histories and experiences to interpret their feelings. Emotions, on the other hand, are the *social* expressions or projections of those feelings, and they can be genuine or feigned as they are for the consumption of others. Affects, meanwhile, are “pre-personal intensities” that cannot be fully realized in language and are always prior to and/or outside of consciousness;<sup>16</sup> hence, affects move the body to react by adding to its energies or intensities. It is critical to remember that the distinctions between affect, feeling, and emotion are difficult to sustain during analysis and often bleed into each other. This, however, is precisely the kind of productivity that Deleuze and Guattari direct us toward. Said differently, affects are open-ended and not fixed, making possible different kinds of journeys and understandings.

Specifically, in the context of this article, exploring affects enables me to consider the ways in which intensities are transformed into feelings, interpreted within specific discursive contexts, and

12. *Ibid.*, 217.

13. A complexity that emerges in writing about Malala is the blurring of boundaries between the social categories of “women” and “girls.” Texts about Malala often draw on, and rearticulate, prevailing discourses about Muslim women. Yet, in her archives, the figure of the schoolgirl or girl-child is also quite promi-

nent. This aligns Malala’s archives with the broader focus on schoolgirls within the field of international development (see Switzer, “Disruptive Discourses,” on this point) where girls have emerged as a “representational regime” and positioned as targets for development. Thus, Malala’s archives draw not only on wide-ranging current and historical narra-

tives about the oppression of Muslim women but also on the incitement to protect innocent girls through education.

14. See Sandlin et al., “Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship.”

15. See Thrift, “Intensities of Feeling.”

16. Massumi, “Notes,” xvi.

given particular names. That is precisely why, when discussing affects, scholars often analyze feelings, which are observable and can be interpreted and located within politics of visibility and recognizability.<sup>17</sup> Yet, since affects are prepersonal and unstructured, there is always the possibility for them to exceed the boundaries or meanings that we assign them, making space for new interpretations in the future. Particularly in regard to media, Eric Shouse observes that “given the ubiquity of affect, it is important to take note that the power of many forms of media lies not so much in their ideological effects, but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning.”<sup>18</sup> What kinds of resonances about Muslim women and men do mainstream portrayals of Malala elicit? What kinds of feelings do audiences express when they encounter Malala’s stories? What politics of visibility and recognizability do these feelings draw on? What exceeds and evades the boundaries of these forms of knowings?

As I trace the affects and positions that accumulate in Malala, I seek to ground them in the histories, contexts, and politics that make them recognizable, which are in turn produced by specific configurations of power. This way of conceiving of affects lends itself to inquiring into the political and sociological contexts that mediate affect, which is particularly effective for my analysis. Affects then no longer remain free-flowing energies and intensities but transform into forces that can be harnessed, invested, and modified. As Lawrence Grossberg notes, “Affect is produced, that it is always affected and effective in multiple and complex ways, and that it is always structured—existing in and produced by machines—in ways that cannot be separated from the articulations together of reality and power.”<sup>19</sup> Affects, thus, become both pedagogical and political. Below, I present some affective attachments to Malala that codify Muslim women and men differently. To theorize these differences, as noted earlier, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of segmentarity and anomalous.

### Representations and the Flows that Evade

Deleuze and Guattari observe that an impetus toward segmentarity, as a way of organizing spatial and social life, is inherent across all strata in society. Processes of segmentation often emerge in a binary (such as men/women, adult/child), circular (where segments extend outward, such as from a neighborhood to city to nation-state), or linear (moving from one site to another such as from family to school to workforce) fashion and are bound up with each other.<sup>20</sup> The authors further note that in societies that did not have a fixed center or specialized political institutions, “the social segments [had] a certain leeway, between the two extreme poles of fusion and scission.”<sup>21</sup> Modern societies, too, have similar overlaps; however, the nation-state exercises power over the segments that it seeks to sustain, as well as imposes its own segments. Hence, “Modern life has not done away with segmentarity but has on the contrary made it exceptionally rigid.”<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, direct us to consider two types of segmentarity—supple and rigid. Elsewhere, they use the terms *molecular* and *molar* to describe the ways in which such segmentation of spatial and social life comes into being. Molar lines seek to aggregate, colonize, and territorialize life to create rigid representations, while molecular flows seep across, exceed, and evade molar segmentation and draw attention to the “realm of subrepresentative matter.”<sup>23</sup> It follows that “every society, and every individual, are thus plied by both segmentarities simultaneously: one molar, the other molecular.”<sup>24</sup>

Below, I will show that the mainstream molar coding of Malala seeks to articulate her through terms that reproduce the long-standing rigid representations about Muslim men as oppressive and Muslim women as oppressed. Yet, a molecular reading of Malala can unravel this molar overcoding of Muslims and has the potential to deterritorialize or decolonize normative claims made about them.

17. See Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

18. Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” para. 14.

19. Grossberg, “Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual,” 337.

20. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 209–10.

21. *Ibid.*, 209.

22. *Ibid.*, 210.

23. *Ibid.*, 219.

24. *Ibid.*, 213.

## Molar Readings of Malala

### Shock and Pain: Politics of Recognition

In October 2012, photographs of Malala covered in blood-stained bandages, on a stretcher, and after surgery flooded newspapers, blogs, and online social media websites; the images were blown up into posters and made into illustrations.<sup>25</sup> The news of Malala's shooting and accompanying images elicit a combination of shock—they shot a young girl!—and sadness—a child's bright future has been taken away from her!—from the viewers as they recognize her pain. The story of Malala's injury and its repetitive circulation since then has created a community that shares this bond of shock and pain with her. Judith Butler notes that experiences of loss and vulnerability make a "tenuous 'we' out of all of us" and bind us together as our fates seem inseparable.<sup>26</sup> We come together around the figure of the girl and temporarily forget the differences of nationality, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic positions; we see ourselves in Malala and cohere around her figure and idea.<sup>27</sup> It is critical, however, to note that Malala's "pedagogical address" has a distinct quality;<sup>28</sup> her suffering is recognizable only within a particular framework. For instance, many commentators in their respective blogs have identified populations whose suffering and pain is not recognized by the same people who rally behind Malala. Saadia Toor, for instance, points to the children who have been killed by NATO drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan as one such population.<sup>29</sup> What, then, is particular about Malala's suffering that makes it *visible* and *recognizable*? Why does it outrage audiences in the global North and South alike and bring them to tears?<sup>30</sup> What kinds of subjects of care are produced in and through it?

Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin has argued that, while the language of morality or moral im-

perative to alleviate bodily suffering has become the dominant discourse of humanitarian agencies today, only particular kinds of suffering bodies are read as legitimately worthy of this protection and care.<sup>31</sup> Citing her work with the *sans-papiers* in France, she notes that, in the context of the anti-immigration climate, only a pathologically diseased brown/black body or an exceptionally violated female body activates human compassion and is deemed a morally legitimate case for care and protection in the form of eligibility for citizenship. Ticktin observes that this notion of suffering invisibilizes laboring and exploited bodies: "These are not the exception, but the rule, and hence are disqualified as morally legitimate."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the suffering of living in poverty, or with the effects of unemployment, hunger, threat of violence, and denigration of one's culture, often does not constitute suffering in the new humanitarian regimes of care. Such forms of suffering, according to Talal Asad, are often seen as "necessary" or "inevitable" in the process of becoming "fully human."<sup>33</sup> Attention is, thus, directed away from the structural causes of the suffering, and the pain of poverty, violence, and hunger is made natural by pointing to the exceptionality of bodily suffering. In the same vein, Asad explains that particular visions of humanity and sensibilities toward pain and suffering now dominate modern secular societies. Torture, in the case of warfare, is assumed to be permissible as it is read as a strategic means to maintain the interests of the nation-state: "Human life is sacred, but only in particular contexts that the state define(s)."<sup>34</sup> The suffering of living in poverty or giving up one's traditions, as noted earlier, is not deemed worthy of an outrage. Furthermore, Asad observes that particular engagements with pain have emerged as *excess* because they do not align neatly with the modern secular conception

25. See Than, "Malala Yousafzai."

26. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 10.

27. A vivid representation of this "we" can be observed in the circulation of Malala face masks, which were worn by teenage girls in New Delhi in 2013 as they protested governmental budget allocations for health and education. See Sarkar, "Indian Students Demand Better Budgetary Allocation."

28. Ellsworth, "The U.S. Holocaust Museum," 18.

29. See Toor, "Ask the Right Questions." For other similar critiques see "Malala Yousafzai—The Praise and Pity"; Grayson, "Malala Becomes Poster Girl"; and Baig, "Malala Yousafzai and the White Saviour Complex."

30. It is significant to remember that while a large number of people connect affectively with the figure of the girl-child and, hence, feel

sorry for Malala, it is only particular audiences, especially in Western nations, that assimilate this episode as yet another evidence of Islam/Muslims' intractability.

31. See Ticktin, *Casualties of Care*.

32. *Ibid.*, 4.

33. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 113.

34. *Ibid.*, 117.

of humanity. These include a willing, positive engagement with pain (such as during particular religious practices or in sadomasochism), as well as displays of bodily pain (consider the photograph of a man being flogged that is included in Malala's book to, perhaps, elicit shock). The disfigurement of Malala's body as a consequence of the shooting becomes recognizable within this framework; her pain signals excess. It takes place outside the context of "legitimate" drone strikes, and its bodily dimension is visible as it is captured in public archives such as newspaper photographs. Furthermore, it fits within already circulating narratives of the oppression of Muslim women and the terrorism of brown men; it lends itself to narratives of girl power and the emancipatory promise of education; and, most of all, it helps rearticulate the difference between Pakistanis and Americans/Europeans along the continuum of civilized/humane versus uncivilized/inhumane.

Through these affects of shock and pain mediated by a politics of recognizability, we come to know not only Malala but also the multiplicity of Muslim women as a suffering collectivity. Malala comes to represent the plight of all brown and black girls and, hence, facilitates the overcoding of Muslim women as perennially oppressed by the mass of Muslim men/Islam/culture. Gordon Brown's comments illustrate this quite tellingly: "As she fights for her life in a hospital, Malala . . . is rightly becoming the icon for the 32 million girls out of primary school—and for the global fight to ensure by 2015 the right of every girl to an education. . . . As she fights the Taliban . . . her courage should be celebrated and we should think of her as everyone's daughter."<sup>35</sup>

Here, Malala symbolizes the 32 million girls across the world (primarily in the global South) who are unable to access schooling. She seems to be fighting single-handedly against the Taliban, and Brown enrolls us affectively into considering her our own daughter. Such portrayals of Malala erase her specificity and overcode her as a girl who shares commonality with every girl, every daugh-

ter, and every victim. Her loss, pain, and suffering become markers of the collectivity of Muslim girls, or even all girls from the global South. This recognition of pain and suffering, however, forecloses possibilities for a deep, localized, face-to-face engagement, based on compassion, with her in order to relieve her specific suffering. Instead, it enrolls the audience in what Luc Boltanski has described as a "politics of pity,"<sup>36</sup> to which I now turn my attention.

### Pity and Compassion: Creating Distances

Drawing on Hannah Arendt's work, Boltanski contrasts pity with compassion: "The principal characteristic of compassion is that it is directed towards particular individuals, particular suffering beings, without seeking to develop any 'capacity for generalisation.' It possesses thereby a *practical* character in the sense that it can only be actualized in particular situations in which those who do not suffer meet and come face to face with those who do."<sup>37</sup>

Pity, on the other hand, "generalizes in order to deal with [the] distance" between those who suffer and those who do not.<sup>38</sup> In addition, "Politics of pity regards the unfortunate together *en masse*, even if . . . it is necessary to single out particular misfortunates from the mass in order to inspire pity."<sup>39</sup> In the case of Malala, the specific events surrounding her shooting are made invisible in favor of a more generalized figure of "the girl who wanted to go to school,"<sup>40</sup> as the *New Yorker* headline puts it. Yet, she is singled out to stand in for the suffering of all girls and children. Consider, for instance, the statement by the United Nations Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, who after condemning the attacks on Malala generalizes it by saying: "Education is a fundamental right for all children. . . . [The Taliban] must respect the right to education of all children, including girls, to go to school and live in peace."<sup>41</sup> All girls and children are, thus, read as victims of the Taliban. Furthermore, the specificity of the gunmen who shot Malala is made invisible, and the crime is grafted onto the nation of Pakistan.

35. Brown, "Malala's Fight Is the World's Fight."

38. Ibid.

36. See Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*.

39. Ibid., 4.

37. Ibid., 6.

40. Peer, "The Girl Who Wanted to Go to School."

41. Zada and Santana, "Malala Yousufzai, Teenage Pakistani Girl Activist."

For instance, Kamna Arora, writing for *Zee News India*, titles her article “Salute to Malala Yousafzai, Shame on Pakistan,” and notes that “Malala is an inspiration, a ray of hope for a country like Pakistan, whose army is either unable to or unwilling to face Taliban.”<sup>42</sup> This to and fro motion between generalization and particularity is critical for enrolling audiences in a politics of pity.

Pity, however, does not necessarily lead to compassion, which, as Boltanski has noted, demands a face-to-face presence to alleviate the suffering of specific individuals. Yet, a plethora of fundraising and charitable campaigns for Malala have emerged in Western contexts. Here, instead of relieving Malala’s suffering—since she was taken to a hospital and has already recovered—or creating a secure environment for girls in her province of Swat in Pakistan—since most Western audiences do not have access to them—audiences are enrolled in an alliance based around charitable compassion.<sup>43</sup> Through acts of charity and consumption, Western audiences assume that they can interrupt the suffering that awaits Muslim girls. They express compassion for Muslim girls by purchasing designer clothing from Barneys New York so that 10 percent of the contributions can go to the Malala Fund, by baking and selling brownies, and by buying Malala’s book and assigning it for book clubs.<sup>44</sup> These actions often do not involve understanding the politics, histories, and contexts of Malala’s shooting. They depoliticize Malala and can be read as practices of distancing. Moreover, during such engagements, the suffering of others is, in some ways, appropriated for the empowerment of the self. Ahmed has considered this form of appropriation in her analysis of the self-shaming by Australian citizens around their past treatment of Aborigines.<sup>45</sup> Ahmed analyzes a range of cultural expressions (such as letters by charitable organizations, sorry books, and speeches by politicians) to show that sometimes, through such engagements, not only is the suffering of

others appropriated for the empowerment of the self, but audiences also often forget that the very socioeconomic relations that position them to engage in charity simultaneously create conditions of suffering and pain for others.

In short, Malala makes possible relationships of pity and charitable compassion with the multiplicity of Muslim girls, through which audiences can come to know them in a generalized, molar, and distanced fashion.<sup>46</sup>

### Producing and Hating the Mass of Muslim Men/Islam/Taliban/Pakistan

Finally, affects of loss and the politics of pity also activate feelings of disgust and hatred toward those who are imagined as the perpetrators of violence against Malala, in particular, and Muslim women, in general. As noted earlier, I observed that in the newspaper archives, instead of discussing the specific gunmen who shot Malala, blame is often assigned to a mass. Hatred for the gunmen moves sideways, forward, and backward, sticking to Muslim men, Islam, Arabs, brown people, Pakistan, Pakistanis, and the Middle East. We end up with a mass of figures of hatred that are bound together as a common threat; they come to embody characteristics against which a “we” can come into being. It is this we that produces molar readings of Malala to understand and assimilate her within already known segments.

Ahmed describes how certain objects can be judged as causing particular affects even before they have been encountered as such.<sup>47</sup> In the context of the long history of oriental representations of Muslim men, it is not surprising then that Muslim men are coded as objects to be feared and hated. As a result, in the story of Malala, the need for nuance or complexity is overpowered by molar understanding of Muslim men as fear-causes. Terms such as “barbarous,”<sup>48</sup> “gangsters,”<sup>49</sup> and “enemies”<sup>50</sup> are often used to describe the Taliban; however, the specificity of the Taliban is often relinquished and they merge into the mass

42. Arora, “Salute to Malala Yousafzai.”

43. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 192.

44. Rudisill, “Girl Power.”

45. Ahmed, “The Politics of Bad Feeling.”

46. For more see a discussion about the book *Three Cups of Tea* in Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

47. See Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*.

48. Green, “TIME Magazine Honors Malala.”

49. *Ibid.*

50. Brenner, “The Target.”

of Muslim men. This does not mean that everyone feels hatred toward Muslim men; that, in fact, is not even necessary. Insofar as affects of hatred and fear accumulate in the object of Muslim men, it allows others to cohere as a collectivity around it—a collectivity that detests or is disgusted by the object.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, during a briefing around Malala's shooting, United States Press Secretary Jay Carney noted that "President [Obama] found the news reprehensible and *disgusting* and tragic. . . . Directing violence at children is *barbaric*, it's *cowardly*."<sup>52</sup> These feelings also make it possible for Western audiences, such as the US State Department in this case, to view themselves as feminist, civilized, and developed, even while their own actions result in violence against children—such as through drone attacks in Pakistan.

The ahistorical and decontextualized representations of the Taliban, and the grafting of the crimes of particular gunmen onto entire populations and nations, serve a critical role in contemporary geopolitics, from legitimizing military engagements (such as Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and threats to Iran) to encouraging soft interventions in the form of educational assistance and other aid projects. This is in line with Sara Ahmed's observation that affects have social purposes. She notes that in being directed toward or away from particular objects, audiences are enrolled in affective communities, where they invest in some objects and distance themselves from others.<sup>53</sup> In aligning against the mass of Muslim men, audiences produce a claim for American-ness, civilization, education, and girl power. Overcoding of Malala thus makes possible molar segmentation of Muslims and avails forms of civilized belonging for varied audiences.

Yet, even holding the collectivity of the Taliban responsible for violent acts against Muslim women hides the complexity of this political entity and movement—the variations within it, its purposes, locations, and desires, and its renegade outliers. The history of their production and circulation is erased and we seem to experience what

postcolonial scholar Hamid Dabashi calls "politically expedited collective amnesia."<sup>54</sup> We view its formation as delinked from history and fail to recall the involvement of the United States in cultivating the mujahideen in Afghanistan to halt the advance of the Soviet Union in the region, the contracting of the Pakistani army to train these militia members, and the later role of the Pakistani army again in propelling the Taliban. This is accompanied by "selective memory,"<sup>55</sup> where the violence against women in Afghanistan or Malala's shooting are marked as symbolic of the barbarity of the Taliban.<sup>56</sup> The dialectics of amnesia and selective memory erase the history of the production of this movement, the role of structural violence in pushing people to take up drastic measures to feed themselves and their families, and the emergence of Pakistan in the global geopolitical arena as a military subcontractor. In addition, painting a highly complex movement in broad strokes cripples our capacity to then undertake an analysis about its structural similarities with any other tribal formation or groups that engage in acts of (gendered) violence to mark their identity. Dabashi has, thus, called for historicizing and contextualizing such events and figures.<sup>57</sup> For instance, he argues for resituating specific events—such as 9/11 or even the production of the Taliban—within "the long-standing re-militarization of American foreign/domestic" as a way to recover from the "Vietnam syndrome."<sup>58</sup> It is only by reentering the figure of the Taliban back within its history and context that we may be able to evade, or at least muddy, the molar segmentations of Muslim women and men. Paradoxically, it is Malala's own coauthored text, *I Am Malala*, that gives us a glimpse into such complexities.

#### *I Am Malala:*

##### Molar Overcodings of Muslim Women and Men

*I Am Malala* falls securely within the genre that Dohra Ahmad calls "pulp nonfiction,"<sup>59</sup> which bestows a "false sense of awareness that supplants both a deep historical literacy and . . . an under-

51. See Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 38.

52. Carney, "Press Briefing."

53. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 38.

54. Dabashi, "Native Informers."

55. *Ibid.*

56. See Stout, "A Nation Challenged."

57. See Dabashi, "The American Empire."

58. *Ibid.*, 86.

59. Ahmad, "Not Yet beyond the Veil," 116.

standing of the flexibility and imaginative quality of literary works.”<sup>60</sup> Here, through first-person accounts and the language of human rights, we learn about the abuses that women (mostly Muslim) experience in Asian and/or African countries at the hands of their brothers, fathers, and sons (also mostly Muslim). These stories contribute to what Abu-Lughod describes as the “new common sense about rescuing women,”<sup>61</sup> and they have a distinct style and character: the protagonists are often “plucky individualists” with feminist ideals;<sup>62</sup> they desire freedom; they denounce Islam and Muslim men as causing the oppression of women; and their stories are often mediated, in that they are coauthored with American or European journalists.<sup>63</sup> In these texts, the specificity of the lives and experiences of the protagonists are transformed into truths about entire populations. These same characteristics frame Malala’s book as well. *I Am Malala* includes a discussion of themes that appear in almost all texts within this genre: honor (*nang*) (14), veiling and purdah (66–67), beating of women (21), arranged marriages (21), hypersexual men (148), sharia law (113), jihad (33), discussions of Salman Rushdie (45), 9/11 (56), al-Qaeda (85), flogging (170), selling of women (66, 81), tradition of revenge (73), forbidding of music and television (114), the emancipatory promise of education (3), and the corruption of politicians and the army (75). Yousafzai and Lamb represent Pakistan and Pakistanis through the molar binaries of modern/traditional and oppressed/free: “My country is centuries behind this one [England]” (3); “Here [England] everything is so modern” (3); “Most Pushtun men never do this [share everything with their wives as Malala’s father did with her mother], as sharing problems with women is seen as weak” (22); and “As we got older the girls would be expected to stay inside. We’d be expected to cook and serve our brothers and fathers. While boys and men could roam freely about town . . . this was the tradition” (26). Our protagonist aims to reject these restrictions—“Malala will be free as a bird” (26). Thus, while Malala has a voice in the text, the ways in which she tells her story and the

desires she expresses map onto that which might be familiar to Western feminist audiences.<sup>64</sup> Consider the strong narrative thread throughout *I Am Malala* that rearticulates the molar framing of Muslim women/girls as victims of brown/Muslim men. In the very first paragraph of the book, we learn that Malala’s birth—the birth of a girl, instead of a boy—was not well received: “When I was born, people in our village commiserated with my mother and nobody congratulated my father. . . . I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children. For most Pashtuns it’s a gloomy day when a daughter is born” (13).

From the onset, then, the reader is enrolled in recalling the familiar script about the oppression of Muslim girls, and this becomes the framework within which the rest of the text is to be read. This notion is reinforced throughout the text through vivid illustrations:

A teenage girl wearing a black burqa and red trousers was lying face down on the ground being flogged in broad daylight by a bearded man in a black turban. “Please stop it!” she begged in Pashto in between screams and whimpers as each blow was delivered. “In the name of Allah, I am dying!” You could hear the Taliban shouting, “Hold her down. Hold her hands down.” At one point during the flogging her burqa slips and they stop for a moment to adjust it then carry on beating her. They hit her thirty-four times. A crowd had gathered but did nothing. One of the woman’s relatives even volunteered to help hold her down. (170)

Such illustrations, with dense details, attempt to jar the reader and give her certainties about the poor conditions of all Muslim women and the violent propensities of all Muslim men. They distract attention from understanding the intersectional causes of violence against women and instead point toward religion and culture as the primary sources of abuse. In discussing the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, for instance, Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood

60. *Ibid.*, 107.

61. Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?,” 82.

62. Ahmad, “Not Yet beyond the Veil,” 108.

63. Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?,” 88.

64. Ahmad, “Not Yet beyond the Veil,” 109.

observe that the trope of the Islamic fundamentalist was deployed as a “ready-made explanation for whatever violence to which Afghan women were subjected.”<sup>65</sup> Toor similarly notes that liberal concerns with women’s rights and guilt have legitimized interventions and occupation that have led to a serious decline in the status of Afghan women.<sup>66</sup> The role of US foreign policy in reconstituting the economies, politics, and societies of Muslim countries often goes unrecognized. For instance, Hirschkind and Mahmood point out that the negative consequences of US military intervention in Afghanistan—such as increased insecurity in rural areas and drugs trade—were made invisible and deemed as the sacrifice needed for the country’s own good. This was not unlike the economic, social, and military impact that participation in the Cold War conflict had on countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. For its role, *I Am Malala* provides the potent “twin figures of the Islamic fundamentalist and his female victim” that preempt molar readings and allow individuals in the West to assimilate the text to reproduce truths about Muslim men and women, Pakistan, and Islam.<sup>67</sup> For instance, Michael Taube, writing for the *Washington Times*, notes that the book is “a brave girl’s tale in an unsafe country,”<sup>68</sup> and Laura Eggertson, writing for *Toronto Star*, finds the fact that a Muslim woman had the opportunity to go to school unusual: “Unlike Malala, Tor Pekai [Malala’s mother] quit school at age six even though her parents, unusually, gave her the opportunity to attend.”<sup>69</sup> Such readings reestablish Pakistan as an unsafe nation and reinscribe assumptions about Muslim women as illiterate and premodern.

It is, therefore, not surprising that many Pakistanis who earlier supported Malala are now questioning her motivations and reconsidering their own advocacy on her behalf. For example, Kashif Mirza, the chief of the All Pakistan Private Schools Federation, noted that while 152,000 private schools supported Malala when she was shot, his organization has now decided to ban Malala’s book: she “was a role model for children, but this book has made her controversial. . . . Through this book, she became a tool in the hands of the Western powers.”<sup>70</sup> Even in her own provincial capital of Peshawar, the book launch was cancelled because of its potential to attract further attacks and fuel controversy. Yet, this, too, is a molar reading where the text is viewed as evidence of anti-Islamic sentiments or an American conspiracy.

A molecular reading of *I Am Malala*, however, reveals ethnographic evidence that unfolds a story about an act of violence that is complicated and specific.<sup>71</sup> Even though the metanarratives about Muslim girls as “crisis objects” are prevalent, reading the text against the grain<sup>72</sup> points to the slippages and gaps that thwart the very stories that are supposed to elicit shock, compassion, and pity from a Western audience.<sup>73</sup> Here, Muslim men and women destabilize the certainties that readers may have about them by exceeding the narratives that mark them as oppressed/oppressive.<sup>74</sup> These slippages generate feelings that, depending on the positionality of the reader, can make her either paranoid or hopeful about the possibility of different narratives. Perhaps that is also why individuals like Malala produce anxieties, since groups can cohere around her story in such

65. Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” 347.

66. Toor, “Imperialist Feminism Redux,” 148.

67. Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” 341.

68. Taube, “Book Review.”

69. Eggertson, “*I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai: Review.”

70. Arkin, “Pakistani Private Schools Ban Malala Yousafzai Autobiography.”

71. Ethnographic studies about Muslim women’s lives in Pakistan provide evidence and de-

stabilize essentialized depictions of women. For example, see Khurshid, “A Transnational Community of Pakistani Muslim Women”; Khan, *Zina*; and Shah, “Role of the Community in Honour Killings.”

72. I am influenced by Abu-Lughod’s reading of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s text against the grain. See Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

73. The glossary at the end of the book, a map of Pakistan, translations, and detailed contextualization of politicians collectively reveal that the book is intended primarily for a non-Pakistani audience.

74. Through this reading, I do not intend to minimize Malala and her coauthor’s inten-

tions for the book; that is, I do not intend to discover the truth of Malala’s experiences but only seek to highlight different ways of reading the text. Additionally, in line with postcolonial and feminist scholarship such as Saidiya Hartman’s (see, in particular, *Scenes of Subjection*), I acknowledge that the experience of violence is a critical site of subject formation, and Malala’s experience of violence, too, is constitutive of complex subjectivities, which can be manipulated (such as through the assimilation of her violence within molar narratives of female oppression) and/or become spaces for contingent and tentative resistance (such as through molecular flights when Malala critiques American drone strikes in her province).

different ways; while for some her story confirms molar codes around Muslim men and women, for others, it represents a line of flight.

### Reading against the Grain:

#### A Molecular Reading of *I Am Malala*

In *I Am Malala*, we come face to face with vibrant cultures and societies, an abundance of strong-willed women, and kind, thoughtful men. The text reveals aspects of the Pushtun culture and its people; we learn about their hospitality (14), their oral traditions of poetry (23), their love for knowledge (38, 41), the imperatives for kindness (73), and the beauty and precarity of mountain societies (63). There are incidences when the religion of Islam emerges as a source of generosity and peace. For instance, the only charities that stay behind to help local people after the earthquake in 2005 are local Muslim charities (106).

We come to know Muslim women who shatter the trope of the victimized Muslim woman waiting for a savior. From Malala's namesake, the Malalai of Maiwand, who fought the British (14), and her great-grandmother, who "walked forty miles alone over mountains" in order to appeal for the release of her son (22), to the women of Spal Bandi "who had great freedom and were not hidden away" (44) we find evidence of women's enactments of agency that are emergent within the constraints of socio-economic and political structures. Consider Malala's own mother, Tor Pekai, who often engaged in social work outside her home and sometimes did not even cook lunch for her husband (81). Indeed, Yousafzai and Lamb note, "I also knew from watching my own mother that Pashtun women are very powerful and strong" (116). These glimpses into the lives of Muslim women add complexity to, and work against, the narrative that reduces freedom to resistance against local practices. However, it would be simplistic to read these actions axiomatically as moments of women's empowerment and agency; yet, they do signal the possibility of differently constituted lives where empowerment and

agency may or may not look the same as that proposed by Western liberal feminists.<sup>75</sup> Here, women seem to be working to establish their rights within local frameworks and against domestic and global patriarchies.

In addition, we also come across a wide range of kind, thoughtful, and intelligent Muslim men who work for the betterment of their communities, including contesting the advances of the local Taliban-inspired militants. Figures such as Malala's father, Ziauddin Yousafzai (an activist), Jehan Yousafzai (Ziauddin's cousin who brought a gift upon Malala's birth) (13), Uncle Dada (a conscientious teacher) (43), Nasir Pacha (a stranger who helped Ziauddin complete his college education) (43), Akbar Khan (Ziauddin's mentor) (44), Usman Bhai Jan (the beloved school-bus driver) (245), and Dr. Javid (the Pakistani-British doctor who arranged Malala's hospitalization in the United Kingdom) (266) all strike at the heart of the ahistoricized and decontextualized figure of the violent, brown, Muslim man. Even the key Taliban characters in the book, Fazlullah, Sufi Mohammad, and the mufti who tried to close Ziauddin's school, are viewed by these local men and women as "madmen" (95); they seem to be an irregularity, and their actions are contested by local men and women. Indeed, the challenge to Fazlullah comes from within the community—the Pushtuns called their assembly of elders to oppose him (138), and those who viewed him favorably earlier retracted their support when his initiatives did not align with their sensibilities (149). Challenges to Fazlullah's militancy were also featured prominently in the local media (139).<sup>76</sup>

More broadly, the text reveals Malala's and her father's activism and political entanglements that led to her shooting. In *I Am Malala*, the issue does not seem to be access to education or attitudes toward girls' education, as UNESCO, the Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown, or the Malala Fund would have us believe. Instead, the story is one of a radically specific event, where the rise of

75. Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

76. Readers should be reminded that often liberal, urban Pushtuns view Pushtuns like Fazlullah as insufficiently modern and even back-

ward. Hence, the same narrative that is taken up by Western audiences to mark all Pakistanis as backward/uncivilized is also used by some elite, liberal Pakistanis to marginalize particular groups within Pakistan.

a particular type of Taliban leadership in the Swat area, their contestations with the Pakistani army, and their opposition to American military interventions in Afghanistan and their own backyards, as well as Malala's and her father's vociferous opposition via Western media channels, led them to mark girls' schooling, as well as other aspects of contemporary life such as music, as a problem and eventually make Malala a target. This specific event, the workings of "mad men," however, is symbolized as an ontological reality of all girls in Pakistan, all Muslim girls, and all girls in the global South. Specifically, we learn that it was after Fazlullah and his cohort gained strength that this particular group of Taliban was radicalized and sought to hinder girls' access to schooling; prior to that, girls like Malala attended schools.

Another key finding that emerges from the text is that the Taliban do not seem to be opposed to schooling per se. They are more focused on maintaining their system of morality as symbolized by customs of gender segregation, and they seem to have become disaffected and radicalized over time as a result of a conglomeration of issues: class-based divisions (30, 148), tribal conflicts (30), lack of employment opportunities in rural areas (34), dependence on US aid (30), attack on tribal fellows in Afghanistan (96), drone attacks (for instance, we learn that Fazlullah's brother and three sons were killed in drone attacks along with eighty other people) (120), harsh realities of living in poverty (99), as well as the pull between national and tribal identities in which the Pakistani government itself also plays an active, and sometimes violent, role (98). One of the effects of their radicalization emerges as attacks on schools, as these spaces are seen as sites where gender segregation norms are presumably not maintained. Gender segregation customs in general, however, are not contested by the "good" characters in the book: Malala's father does not seem averse to them, as is exemplified by his creation of a different entrance for girls in his school (95), and Malala's mother ob-

serves modesty by covering her head and refusing to appear in photographs and videos. Thus, we find a more complicated picture of the Taliban in the book, which points to a range of historical, structural, and political issues that are productive of contemporary fissures in the tribal societies of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Indeed, in a letter to Malala, a member of the Taliban, Adnan Rasheed, notes that the attack on her was not caused by her message for supporting girls' education but a result of her public oppositional stance against the Taliban: "Please mind that Taliban never attacked you because of going to school or you were education lover, also please mind that *Taliban or Mujahideen are not against the education of any men or women or girl*. Taliban believe that you were intentionally writing against them and running a smearing campaign to malign their efforts to establish Islamic system in Swat and your writings were provocative."<sup>77</sup>

In 2009, BBC Urdu approached Malala to write explicitly about her life under the Taliban, and the *New York Times* featured two short documentary videos during the same year as well.<sup>78</sup> That BBC Urdu and the *Times* approached a teenage schoolgirl is telling in itself; in fact, Malala and Lamb note that BBC Urdu explicitly wanted a female teacher or schoolgirl to be the protagonist of the story<sup>79</sup>—and not a Muslim boy or even Malala's father, who was a recognized activist. The contours of what these media outlets intended to discover and reinforce about the Taliban, Pakistan, and Muslim girls then seem to be predetermined. She was to write about the atrocities of living in Taliban-controlled spaces and as a schoolgirl-under-threat elicit feelings of anxiety from the audience. An analysis of her Urdu writings for BBC Urdu reveals precisely that. Malala (as Gul Makai) writes about recurring nightmares,<sup>80</sup> migration out of Swat because of her fear of the Taliban,<sup>81</sup> the imperatives to cover her head,<sup>82</sup> the incitement of jihad,<sup>83</sup> and the bombing of school buildings.<sup>84</sup> Personal issues, such as having a sore throat, appear-

77. Imtiaz, "Taliban's Letter to Malala Yousafzai."

78. Ellick, "Class Dismissed in Swat Valley," and Ellick, "A Schoolgirl's Odyssey."

79. Yousafzai and Lamb, *I Am Malala*, 154.

80. Makai, "A Student's Diary."

81. *Ibid.*

82. Makai, "There Are Huris in Heaven."

83. *Ibid.*

84. Makai, "Why Are They Punishing Buildings?"

ing in exams, and taking care of siblings, do make their appearance, but the diaries primarily address the horrors of living under the Taliban. Featuring a schoolgirl as the protagonist, then, functions to not only lend credence to the long-standing narrative about the oppression of Muslim women but also provide an authentic voice from within that confirms that narrative. Indeed, as Toor notes, authenticity or insider status is often deployed “as a weapon to legitimize racist violence against Muslims.”<sup>85</sup>

Malala does not seem to be unaware of the political instrumentalization of her voice and the intentions behind these media endeavors that use her to overcode Muslims at large. At one point in *I Am Malala*, she notes that “they [the United States] seemed to be more alarmed about Pakistan than Afghanistan. Not because of girls like me and my school but because our country has more than 200 nuclear warheads.”<sup>86</sup> This passing comment contextualizes her shooting in the wider dynamics of geopolitical conflict in the region. Her shooting emerges as a specific event, an effect of the nature of both her and her father’s activism against the Taliban, the rise of a particular kind of leadership within the Taliban, and, more broadly, the histories, political economies, urbanization, and national/provincial/ethnic/tribal struggles. Its specificity and complexity deserve an equally nuanced engagement. This, however, has clearly not been the case in the ways in which Malala’s story has circulated in some circles in Pakistan and especially abroad. Investment in formal schooling of Pakistani girls has emerged as the primary response to her shooting. This is exemplified by the mobilizations for girls’ education by the United Nations and other advocacy organizations, as well as the numerous awards given to Malala, which include the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (2013) awarded by the European Parliament, the Humanitarian of the Year Award (2013) given by Harvard University, the United Nations Human Rights Prize (2013) from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Nobel Peace Prize (2014), among others. These awards signal,

and produce, Malala as a symbol of advocacy for girls’ education. More broadly, it is assumed that girls in Pakistan do not have the freedom to go to schools. Brown, for instance, notes, “When I met President Zardari, we agreed to draw up a plan to put Pakistan’s 5 million out-of-school girls and boys in school.” He continues, “Pakistan needs to be shocked into action, with the Taliban shamed and forced into accepting the basic freedoms of every girl.”<sup>87</sup> What are these freedoms? Who gets to name them? Gordon Brown? The United Nations? The people of Swat? The people of Pakistan?

Studies by anthropologists about what constitutes freedom reveal that it means different things to different people, and its enactment is radically specific and entangled in local histories, politics, cultures, and economies. Consider, for instance, Ayesha Khurshid’s ethnographic work with low-income female teachers in Pakistan, where the author sought to understand meanings of women’s empowerment. She notes that “modern educated subjectivity of Pakistani women from low-income communities is informed by a complex movement between the globally circulating ‘empowerment through individual rights’ discourse and their desire to establish and maintain strong family and community ties.”<sup>88</sup> Participants in her study constructed their identities through notions and practices of “wisdom,” which allowed them to bring coherence to discourses of human rights and honor, concepts that are often pitted as oppositional. There was, thus, a sense of hybridity in their accounts. Similarly, during my work as a human rights educator in rural and city communities in the province of Sindh in Pakistan, I found that it was not so much access to schooling but the public/private divide in schooling—with its disparity in quality of teaching, career trajectories, and everyday security—and opportunities for employment that were the topics of discussion and debate. Participants in my project critiqued the liberal promise of education by consistently pointing to the many individuals with masters’ degrees in their villages who were unemployed. They argued for gendered division of labor, especially when it

85. Toor, “Imperialist Feminism Redux,” 154.

86. Yousafzai and Lamb, *I Am Malala*, 174.

87. Brown, “Malala: Everyone’s Daughter.”

88. Khurshid, “A Transnational Community,” 236.

provided them safety and security in the harsh economic realities of rural Sindh, and pointed to the depression that their brothers and fathers had to experience when unable to ensure safety and economic independence for their families. This kind of analysis is different from the simple proposition that formal schooling can improve the lives of all girls.

### Uncertainties, Hope, and Paranoia

A molecular reading of Malala's coauthored text thus evokes uncertainties around normative understandings of Muslim men and women. Even as the text rearticulates the trope of victimized Muslim women, it provides material for establishing its own counter-discourse. The audience is able to peek into the lives of its characters and imagine their complicated existences in Swat, none of which fit neatly within the molar binaries of oppressed/free or traditional/modern. Depending on the location of the reader, *I Am Malala* can produce hope or paranoia.<sup>89</sup> At the very least, it shows the possibility of a different life script and narrative. Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry can be useful in understanding this paradox. Bhabha notes that mimicry is one of the ways in which a colonial administration exercises its domination; it needs indigenous imitators who have similar cultural logics to help maintain the mechanics of the imperial control: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse on mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence."<sup>90</sup> In this sense, Malala—who, perhaps, was selected as the indigenous imitator because of her skills in the English language, as is signaled by the two *New York Times* videos that feature her—is to mimic the molar discourses about Pakistan, Islam, and Muslim men and women that reinforce and legitimize the current modes of colonial intervention and engagement; she is to per-

form the role of a "good native." A columnist for Huffington Post, Assed Baig, believes that she does exactly that: "She does not criticise the West. . . . She is the perfect candidate for the white man to relieve his burden and save the native."<sup>91</sup> However, the slippages in *I Am Malala* demonstrate the possibility that the colonial subject can also become a menace: "The ambivalence of the colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to menace—a difference that is almost total but not quite."<sup>92</sup> The slippages reveal that Malala can be coded either to colonize or to decolonize representations of Muslim men and women; she has one leg inside the collectivity of Muslim girls and another leg outside it; she is a phenomenon who can *play* at the border. This liminality of Malala can function as a counter-gaze that can effectively displace social control: "The reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double."<sup>93</sup> Malala thus makes these contradictory, molecular movements possible.

### Theorizing Malala as the *Anomalous*

Across these archives, Malala emerges as an assemblage of positions and affects. She makes different kinds of knowledges possible in relation to the collectivities of Muslim women and men. Whereas mainstream affective attachments to Malala reinscribe molar representations of Muslim women as objects of loss, pity, and compassion, thereby solidifying the binary of oppressed Muslim women/oppressing Muslim men, molecular readings (as shown above) make possible knowledges about Muslim women that point to the "subrepresentative matter" and destabilize such binaries.<sup>94</sup> Here, women's lives appear more complicated, and agency and empowerment are interpreted, experienced, and enacted within possibilities and constraints presented by local and global structures, economies, politics, and histories. These latter practices of knowledge making problematize the

89. We find evidence in the text that resists repeating the metanarratives, which can be a cause of hope for those who want to destabilize these metanarratives, or of paranoia for those (such as entrenched state and nonstate entities that rely on this trope) who might see this as a menace.

90. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

91. Baig, "Malala Yousafzai and the White Saviour Complex."

92. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 131.

93. *Ibid.*, 123.

94. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 219.

former. Therefore, a molecular reading of Malala has the potential to deterritorialize normative claims made about the collectivity of Muslim women and men. And, it is precisely such a reading that configures Malala as what Deleuze and Guattari have called “an anomalous” or “cutting edge of deterritorialization.”<sup>95</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari have used the term *anomalous* to describe a set of positions and affects that have the potential to unravel the molar coding of a multiplicity. While the term today is used as an adjective, the authors point to the Greek noun *anomalie*, which “designates the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization.”<sup>96</sup> Reading Malala’s autobiography against the grain has the potential to allow the reader to take rhizomatic journeys into differently constituted desires and fears of Muslim women/girls/men/boys, thereby providing the possibility of deterritorialization. This does not mean that the collectivity loses its rigid or *molar* representation. As Deleuze and Guattari note, any collectivity has both rigid and supple lines of segmentarities; it is the politics of recognizability, visibility, and our prior affective situations, as I demonstrate above, that allow particular affects and positions, as opposed to others, to become more prominent ways of accessing the multiplicity of Muslim women. What Malala as the anomalous does make possible, however, is to cast doubts about these rigid/molar representations.

It is significant to remember that different individuals at different times can move toward the border. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari note that the anomalous is not a specific entity; it is a “phenomenon of bordering.”<sup>97</sup> A useful way to understand this is to imagine a flock of birds where, at various points in time, different birds take a turn to become the edge of the whole.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, different people can flow through the anomalous and disclose different aspects, characteristics, and movements of the multiplicity of Muslim women, making possible the unraveling of its molar coding. From this perspective, women such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali or Irshad Manji, who are taken up to rearticulate molar representations of Muslim women as

oppressed, do *not* function as an anomalous. Similarly, it is only by choosing a molecular reading of Malala—and not the mainstream molar reading—that we can understand Malala as the “cutting edge of deterritorialization.”<sup>99</sup>

Returning to my initial inquiry about the function of particular women being taken up periodically to represent the collectivity of Muslim women, I propose that instead of viewing them as representational, we examine, first, the kinds of knowledges that they make available and, second, the configurations of global and local politics, economics, and media that rigidify some of these knowledges as representing the collectivity. Such an investigation will give us insights into the molar coding of Muslim women and its molecular flows. *Who* gets to the border, *when*, *why*, and *what* they reveal, then becomes an exercise that requires an analysis of politics, history, and economics to expose and explain the dynamics. Said differently, the task is to examine what molar lines are being formed and which molecular flows are evading these lines.

In conclusion, this article presents molar and molecular readings of Malala to highlight the processes in and through which different kinds of knowledges about Muslim women and men become possible. I specifically highlight the productivity of molecular readings of Malala, as they make possible for us to observe the constantly shifting and elusive borders of Muslim women. Our desire for the whole, essence, or meaning is, thereby, brought to a pause, and the anomalous or bordering phenomenon makes apparent the contingencies, dependencies, and messiness of the multiplicity of Muslim women in their expansions and narrowings. We are directed to view the multiplicity of Muslim women as a *becoming* instead of seeking final representations that describe them as oppressed or free, empowered or disempowered, or consider their interactions with others (such as transnational organizations, the media, or Muslim men) in reductive and essentialized engagements of disciplining or empowerment. At the same time, we are unable to escape the politics that underpin the production of

95. *Ibid.*, 244.

96. *Ibid.*, 244.

97. *Ibid.*, 245.

98. Lee, “Memories of a Sorcerer.”

99. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244.

the anomalous as a representational entity or molar phenomenon. While the analytics provided by Deleuze and Guattari become useful in dismantling final, molar representations, they raise the need to inquire into the forces and strategies that work to rigidify molecular flows. ■■■■

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