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WRITING BACK AND/AS ACTIVISM

Refiguring victimhood and remapping the shooting of Malala Yousafzai

Rachel Fox

On 9 October 2012, Malala Yousafzai, a fifteen-year-old girl from the Swat Valley in Pakistan, was shot by the Taliban. It was an event which garnered international attention. This chapter primarily focuses on Yousafzai's memoir, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), co-written with British journalist and foreign correspondent, Christina Lamb. Drawing from her memoir, as well as the documentary *He Named Me Malala* (Guggenheim 2015) and her 2014 Nobel Lecture, I discuss the ways in which Yousafzai's various identifiers – activist, spokeswoman, feminist, victim, girl, Muslim, Pakistani – are represented, propagated, and challenged. Before the shooting, and since, Yousafzai has campaigned for girls' right to education and she is now a recognisable feminist icon. Her identifiers of activist and spokeswoman, derived from her role of campaigner, are tied to explicit acts of agency. Although these identifiers might be seen to have diminished against the image of Yousafzai as a victim or – in a more positive frame – a survivor, I argue that the recounting of the shooting as a remediated event by Yousafzai herself unfolds a space for her to establish her own position of agency.

In her 2014 Nobel Lecture, Yousafzai draws attention to multiple facets of her identity. She identifies her position as both a victim and an activist for girls' right to education and also proudly declares that she is 'the first Pashtun, the first Pakistani, and the youngest person to receive this award' (2014: n.p.). These various facets of her identity – victim, activist, female, Pashtun, and Pakistani, alongside the identifiers of Muslim and feminist – are all integral parts of both her public image as it is represented in news and social media, and her self-representation in her memoir and other public speeches and interviews. In this chapter I explore the ways in which the homogenising of some of the individual labels attributed to Yousafzai are challenged, or at least complicated, by her own narrative, and the narrative form of the memoir. I argue that Yousafzai's memoir, as an act of writing back, reframes the events of the shooting in light of her political convictions. She utilises both her victim and activist identities as part of a feminist discourse and her personal narrative galvanises her political campaign for girls' right to education.

A bestselling memoir, a 'veiled bestseller'? Personalising/decentring the political

I am Malala is an international, *bestselling* memoir. Here, I complicate the connection of *I am Malala* to the notion of the 'veiled best-seller' coined by Gillian Whitlock (2007: 88). 'Veiled

bestsellers', so-called for the image of veiled women usually featured on their covers, are conceived as biographies of Muslim women which 'can be harnessed by forces of commercialization and consumerism in terms of the exotic appeal of cultural difference. They can also be used to buttress aggressive Western intervention in so-called primitive or dysfunctional national communities' (Whitlock 2007: 55), especially in the context of the War on Terror in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001.

The circumstances that Yousafzai describes in *I am Malala*, and the conditions which led to her shooting, are the consequence of a rise in Islamic extremism, especially in rural northern Pakistan, in the political climate of the War on Terror. Aroosa Kanwal connects these political events: 'The post-9/11 situation in Pakistan owes a great deal to [President] Zia [ul-Haq]'s Islamisation policies, which resulted in the rise of Islamic extremism and *Jihadist* culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan' (2015: 15). Arising from these contexts there has been a general shift in focus from the Indo-Pak to the Af-Pak border, which has been reflected in recent Pakistani anglophone literature (Chambers 2011: 125). In the case of *I am Malala*, the Af-Pak border is particularly pronounced given the proximity of the Swat Valley to the northern border of Pakistan, the Taliban activity experienced in the province, and Yousafzai's Pashtun heritage. In *Offence: The Muslim Case* (2009), Kamila Shamsie explains the complicated relationships between Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Pakistan and the US in the context of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Shamsie states that although the Pakistani government was ally to the US in its invasion of Afghanistan, 'Pashtuns of the Frontier Province saw it as a war on Pashtuns. The Durand Line, which divides Pakistani Pashtuns from Afghan Pashtuns, had always been viewed as entirely artificial by the Pashtuns themselves' (2009: 69–70). These regional and political contexts, as part of the rhetoric of the War on Terror and alongside Yousafzai's subject matter, which represents the Taliban threat to Muslim women, incorporate *I am Malala* into the literary market of the 'veiled bestseller'.

'Veiled bestsellers', which are marketed on the representation of the oppression of (veiled) Muslim women, are typically read ethnographically or, in related fashion, in ways that enable the metropolitan reader to display 'cosmopolitan tastes, openness, sympathy, political commitment, and benevolent interest in cultural difference' (Whitlock 2007: 55). This cosmopolitan approach to 'veiled bestsellers' is further accentuated by the publicity of Yousafzai's shooting, and therefore her positioning as a clearly recognisable victim of the Taliban. Yousafzai's image as a wounded victim and, in particular, a wounded child, which was expedited by news and social media coverage at the time of the shooting, prompts well-meaning, but almost inevitably un-actioned (or futile) sympathy and 'charitable compassion' (Ahmed 2014: 192). Shenila Khoja-Moolji describes the notion of 'charitable compassion' as an affective response which possesses 'its own politics in that it appropriates the suffering of others for the purpose of empowering the self' (2015: 540). In *I am Malala*, Yousafzai describes some of the gifts, cards, and good wishes she received in the aftermath of her shooting. In one example from her memoir, she describes how 'Beyoncé had written me a card and posted a photo of it on Facebook' (2013: 243–244). This gesture by Beyoncé, a famous feminist icon in her own right, demonstrates the notion of 'charitable compassion': her charitable act is not a private act, but one which is publicised online. Given Beyoncé's popularity, sharing this photograph online may serve to further spread the news of Yousafzai and her cause, but it also receives a metric value of 'likes' and 'shares' which reflects positively on Beyoncé herself.

Khoja-Moolji argues that 'Through acts of charity and consumption, Western audiences assume that they can interrupt the suffering that awaits Muslim girls' (2015: 545). She goes on to add that such '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' (2015: 545).

As with the ‘veiled bestseller’, in which the hugely complex religious, historical, and cultural contexts of the practice of veiling are diminished, instead symbolising oppression, cosmopolitan and charitable responses to Yousafzai’s shooting decontextualise the specific regional contexts behind the shooting. In tune with Whitlock’s account of the ‘veiled bestseller’, Jasmin Zine argues that, in the context of Muslim feminist literary production, some ‘didactic texts’ seeks to ‘teach us “truths” about imperilled lives of Muslim women’ (2014: 185). Zine argues that ‘these kinds of texts construct a “pedagogy of peril” as the central lens through which Muslim women and girls are viewed’ (2014: 185), at risk of religious and patriarchal oppression. Yousafzai’s memoir, literally marketed off of the shooting that imperilled her life, is at risk of belonging to a market that, as part of a neo-imperial feminist agenda, homogenises, or even demonises, Muslim identity, in spite of the pride with which Yousafzai often speaks about her religion.

This risk is explained by Fatima Bhutto whose own memoir, *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2011), gives a personal account of her family’s political history. In an early review (30 October 2013) of Yousafzai’s memoir, the niece of the former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (1993–1996) states that:

[H]ere in Pakistan anger towards this ambitious young campaigner is as strong as ever. Amid the bile, there is a genuine concern that this extraordinary girl’s courageous and articulate message will be colonised by one power or other for its own insidious agendas.

(2013: n.p.)

Indeed, when it was first published, *I am Malala* was banned in many private schools in Pakistan on the grounds of this same concern (‘Malala Yousafzai’s Book Banned’ 2013). *I am Malala*, a bestseller in English-speaking countries, can be appropriated as part of the literary market of ‘veiled bestsellers’, or ‘pedagogies of peril’ wherein the cosmopolitan reader who buys the memoir in an act of charitable compassion – or an act of charitable consumption – reads Yousafzai’s suffering as representative of the suffering of ‘all’ girls from Pakistan or, even more broadly, all those who are Muslim and from the Global South (Indo-Pak border) and/or the Middle East (Af-Pak border).

I am Malala is a pedagogical text; a means of ‘knowledge production’ (Taylor and Zine 2014: 2). However, despite the risk that *I am Malala* could be appropriated as a ‘pedagogy of peril’, I argue that the written content of the memoir – which, despite her reservations, Bhutto finds ‘courageous and articulate’ (2013: n.p.) – undermines its paratexts. Yousafzai’s self-representation of her personal experiences alongside her political convictions in *I am Malala* challenges homogeneous readings of her identifiers as a Muslim woman and as a victim. Whitlock describes memoir as ‘a genre for those who are authorized and who have acquired cultural legitimacy and influence’ (2007: 20). Yousafzai proudly identifies with both her national (Pakistani) and her ethnic (Pashtun) identity in her Nobel Lecture and repeatedly in her memoir. Consequently, she situates herself in a position of cultural authority in her discussion of the politics and events that have directly affected her family both before and since her birth.

Yousafzai presents a personal narrative that is explicitly tied to and contemplates within its writing the political, social, cultural, and religious contexts of her recounted life experiences both prior to and since her shooting. Norbert Bugeja describes the genre of the memoir as a remediation of the past:

By narrating a representational space, the memoir forges the encounter between the claims of unrequited pasts and the present narrative as it interpellates the surviving

traces of those pasts for the world literary stage, hence perpetrating new forms of witness and testimony to their oppression.

(2012: 24)

In memoir, the remediation of past events is inextricably tied to the personal perceptions which are written down retrospectively and subjectively. These past events are remapped through the changing personal, political, and cultural perspectives of the author, who writes back to the events under the influence of experiences that have occurred since. In the case of *I am Malala*, Yousafzai's narratives of historical-political events in Pakistan and the experiences of her parents and herself living and growing up during these events are interpellated through two significant lenses. The first is through Yousafzai's eyes as a Muslim, Pakistani, Pashtun girl, and the reader's perception of these identities; the second lens is the foreknowledge of both the writer and the reader that the earlier events narrated by Yousafzai culminate in her shooting: an experience with huge personal ramifications for Yousafzai, and political ramifications for her campaign for girls' right to education.

The act of writing back as remediation – interpellating the past through both personal and retrospective experience – can be interpreted as a form of border crossing, which I link to Henry A. Giroux's definition of 'border pedagogy' as something that is 'both transformative and emancipatory' (1993: 29). This is established by shifting perspectives in place, time, or media: 'Border pedagogy decenters as it remaps. The terrain of learning becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power' (Giroux 1993: 30). As previously discussed, *I am Malala* has the potential to be appropriated by neo-imperial economic markets and political propaganda, as part of a rhetoric of 'rescue' in support of the War on Terror. However, I argue that in Yousafzai's feminist narrative, which campaigns for girls' right to education in light of both her personal experiences and political convictions, the retrospective nature of writing decentres and remaps such 'Western' neo-imperialist imaginaries.

Female – and feminist – (auto)biographies are typically relational and dialogical. As has been comprehensively argued by numerous critics (see Smith and Watson 1992; Moore-Gilbert 2009), female and postcolonial (auto)biographers aspire, consciously or unconsciously, towards a plural and collective self as opposed to the individuated self that is more commonly recognised in sovereign male autobiography. Supporting this argument, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley asserts that:

Writing, for women, becomes a way to provide spaces within which women can talk about the complexities and pluralities of their selves. The individualistic model, provided by male writers, especially in the west, becomes inadequate to the lives women lead.

(2003: 69–70)

Thus, (auto)biographies written by women are predicated on the constitution of a plural and dispersed model of self-representation, which forms dialogues socially and locally. As a dispersed model of self-representation, such (auto)biographies enable a space for decentring and remapping female identities, both as they are understood by themselves and by sociopolitical discourses and/or stereotypes. Yousafzai writes within this literary context and her memoir works to establish the complexities and realities of the multiple facets of her identity (e.g. victim, Muslim, woman) which are subject to appropriation and stereotyping by neo-imperial readers and markets.

In the context of black female subjectivity, Mae G. Henderson argues that postcolonial women (auto)biographers speak within two discursive spaces: the space they write about and

the space they are writing to; their subject and their market. They 'speak in dialogically racial and gendered voices to the other(s) both within and without' (Henderson 2014: 61). In this sense, their narrative is relational and, publicising the private, 'When a woman writes her own story down on paper or tells it to others, she is asserting her autonomy by ordering her life into a composition and to that extent moving toward feminist consciousness' (Golley 2003: 81). The act of writing or speaking about oneself explicitly builds relational ties with the surrounding world, not only to respond to social, cultural, and political circumstances, but also to establish the writers' own set of politics. In Golley's configuration of the (auto)biographical act, (auto) biography is not merely a form through which the female writer situates herself within a localised or global space. It is also a way of reformulating the way one embodies the space they are writing from or to.

As such, I posit that *I am Malala* is a feminist text wherein Yousafzai publicises her personal experiences as an aspiring student, as an activist for girls' right to education, and, just as significantly, as a survivor. By situating herself in relation to both the identities of activist and victim (of the shooting *and* of Taliban edicts banning girls from school) at the same time, Yousafzai upsets the simplified binary one could imagine between the two roles, and rejects a homogenous identity for herself. By occupying both roles she refigures (or remaps) the way in which her victimhood, or 'oppression', might be understood by a neo-imperial readership, instead using it to galvanise her political roles of activist and spokeswoman.

Yousafzai's role of spokeswoman is also strengthened by her personal connection to the political message she expresses. This is captured in her account of the closing of her school by the Taliban on the 14 January 2009. She tells the documentary makers present at the event: 'They cannot stop me. I will get my education if it's at home, school, or somewhere else' (2013: 135). This bold political statement is immediately followed by her confession that 'When I got home, I cried and cried. I didn't want to stop learning. I was only eleven years old but it felt as though I had lost everything' (2013: 135). Her political message is motivated by her passion for learning and her fear of losing access to her education. Her devastation ('it felt as though I had lost everything') makes her previous statement, 'They cannot stop me', sound not just bold, but also brave. Her account of such personal experiences has the potential to resonate with other women and girls living through similar experiences – relational in a way that politics by itself is not – as the personalised narrative draws attention to, and enhances, her polemical message.

'I am Malala': remapping the shooting of Malala Yousafzai in *I am Malala* and *He Named Me Malala*

Yousafzai does not remember being shot. In the prologue of her biography, she writes that 'I remember that the bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint as always and rounded the corner past the deserted cricket ground. I don't remember any more' (2013: 5). Despite her amnesia regarding the event, the shooting is still revisited by both her memoir and the documentary *He Named Me Malala*, twice in each. I argue that in her own recounting of the shooting Yousafzai refigures the identifier of victim/survivor. By 'writing back' to the event of the shooting, Yousafzai charges the political with the personal and unfolds a space to establish her own position of agency within her multifaceted identity. As such, recounting the shooting, in her own words, allows Yousafzai to challenge and decentre neo-imperial and homogenising understandings of 'victimhood' and 'oppression' as it relates to Muslim women's experiences within the context of the War on Terror, by speaking for herself, and for girls' education as part of her own feminist politics.

Yousafzai's memoir covers an expansive period of her family's life, spanning from her father's activities before she was born and then during her youth; her own experiences as a schoolgirl in Pakistan and her rising involvement in the political scene; and the shooting, her recovery, and her early experiences of living in the UK. These experiences, especially those which occurred prior to Yousafzai's shooting, are written and read with the foreknowledge of the consequences for Yousafzai's and her father's beliefs about education. The narrative anticipates the shooting. This is indicated, first and foremost, in the biography's titular subheading, which casts Yousafzai as 'The Girl Who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban'. While the order of the statement suggests that she is an education advocate first and foremost, and that the shooting is secondary, the event of the shooting remains embedded in Yousafzai's story: we cannot read her story without it having some kind of impact on our reading of her.

The shooting is also the first point of discussion in a memoir that is otherwise chronological. In the prologue, Yousafzai recounts the shooting in uncensored, graphic detail: 'The first [bullet] went through my left eye socket and out under my left shoulder. I slumped forward onto Moniba, blood coming from my left ear, so the other two bullets hit the girls next to me' (2013: 6). The matter-of-fact sentences that clinically set out the sequence of events of the shooting are shocking to read. At this early, critical stage, the shooting itself is not told sensationally or romantically. It does not pander to faux-interested readers. It warns the reader early on that no matter what else the narrator says, or how it is said, lyrically, fancifully, or otherwise, the events of the shooting are to be treated with horror, disgust, and apprehension.

Lyrical wordplay is used in the prologue of *I am Malala*, which anticipates the shooting, and reminds the reader that, once the narrative proper begins, it will eventually lead back to this point: a shooting of a fifteen-year-old girl. The opening of the prologue reads: 'I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday' (2013: 1). The mirroring of coming/leaving and midnight/midday in these two lines aspires towards a lyrical or poetic expression, but the intrusion of 'just after' discombobulates what would have been an easy symmetry in the depiction of these two moments, alluding to the disruptive reality of the shooting. The following line, 'One year ago I left my home for school and never returned' (2013: 1), is similarly poetic and nostalgic in its expression, ringing like the first line in a fictional story, but again the fatalistic certainty of the words, that the speaker will 'never return', undercuts the illusion that this story is made for children. As we read of her experiences as a child growing up and going to school in the Swat Valley, we read it with this same certainty that one day she will leave home for school and never come back.

The narrative in *I am Malala* thus anticipates the shooting. However, Yousafzai also 'writes back' to it, very explicitly, insofar as her memoir can be read as a direct response to the shooting, and to the shooter. Before choosing his target, the shooter asked, 'Who is Malala?' (2013: 6), to which her declarative title, 'I am Malala', answers. This declarative statement is reiterated at both the opening and close of her book: she ends her prologue and epilogue, respectively, with: 'Who is Malala? I am Malala and this is my story' (2013: 6) and 'I am Malala. My world has changed but I have not' (2013: 265). By bookending her memoir with the self-declarative and oft-repeated phrase 'I am Malala', Yousafzai explicitly emphasises her own position of agency. The framework of her memoir – from its title to the aforementioned bookends, to its manifesto for girls' right to education – as a *response* serves to positively refigure her position as a victim of the Taliban.

Recalling Giroux's definition of border pedagogy as something established through shifting perspectives in place, time, or media, *I am Malala*, as memoir, as a remediation of events, 'decenters as it remaps' (Giroux 1993: 30). Yousafzai writes retrospectively. The foreknowledge, and therefore expectation, that the shooting will occur by both writer and reader codes

the events that occurred prior to the shooting with a politics of inevitable injustice and the Taliban threat to Yousafzai's and, by extension, Swat Valley girls' right to be educated. In this way, Yousafzai's personal experiences and recollections about attending school in the Swat Valley become intrinsically political. At the same time, the retrospective nature of *I am Malala*, as an expression of border pedagogy, allows Yousafzai to reframe – or remap – certain events. This is especially notable in her second recounting of the shooting, where she narrates: 'I didn't get a chance to answer their question, "Who is Malala?" or I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters' (2013: 203). The retrospective genre of the memoir affords Yousafzai the opportunity to refigure – decentre – the homogenising image of victimhood in this moment. She reframes the events according to her polemical message. Here, the answer to the question 'Who is Malala?' is not an affirmation of her name ('I am Malala') as appears in the title and bookends of her memoir, but an explanation as to why girls should be allowed to go to school. This serves to explicitly tie Yousafzai's identity to education advocacy, and since the shooting she has, in many ways, been both a figurehead and spokeswoman for the campaign for girls' right to education. Aligning her identity with her cause, explaining how she would answer her shooter (and the Taliban) with her manifesto, Yousafzai remaps the event of her shooting, not through the lens of victimhood, but through survival (as she is able to give her answer now) and through her political, feminist vision.

Davis Guggenheim's documentary similarly covers a range of material that is familiar to the memoir, encompassing stories of Yousafzai's family life before and after the shooting and footage of several of her public engagements. The documentary uses an aesthetic and affective conceit in which moments of Yousafzai's narrated past are depicted in animated graphic episodes, often accompanied by composer Thomas Newman's emotively charged music for additional affect. The opening scene depicts the narrative of Yousafzai's namesake, Malalai, which Yousafzai tells in the form of a voiceover.¹ Malalai is dressed in a veil and loose pink clothing, and she resembles, not accidentally, the iconic image that Yousafzai has come to be seen as today. Around her are the men who are fighting to defend Afghanistan against the British in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. As Malalai's words encourage Afghanistan's men to fight to defend their lands, Yousafzai's voiceover states that: 'She led the army to a great victory. But she was shot [...] Her name was Malalai' (Guggenheim 2015). As this voiceover is heard, the music, which has been building up to a climax, quietens, and we see a close-up of the flag Malalai had been carrying as it falls from her hand.

The moment which the narration, music, and action onscreen anticipates has occurred, and in the moment of Malalai's death there is only quiet. This is immediately interjected with live-action footage of Yousafzai being carried on a stretcher following her own shooting, her treatment by the doctors, and the vigils being held for her, with archived news reports reporting her shooting. The shift from animated narrative to live-action footage of Yousafzai in the immediate aftermath of the shooting has a jarring effect on the viewer. Ohad Landesman and Roy Bender, writing about the concluding scenes of Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which also effectively moves from animated to live-action footage, consider the effect to be:

an unexpected dénouement, a final chord providing the spectator with an eye-opening, rude awakening. Any layer of shielding distantiation that that may have persisted due to the animated form's beauty [...] is peeled off to disclose the naked, visible evidence. (2011: 366)

The shift in cinematographic mode in *He Named Me Malala* results in a rude awakening for the audience at the advent, not the conclusion, of the documentary. The viewer is barely settled when they are confronted with the shocking real-life footage of the shooting. As with

the memoir, this first interruption of the shooting's aftermath, using stock live-action footage, serves as a persistent reminder that at the core of this narrative is the violent act of the shooting.

The documentary returns to the events of the shooting some time after its initial recording of it. In this later remediation, the documentary again employs both animated and real-life footage. The animation begins with a remediation of the documentary prologue, showing Yousafzai's namesake Malalai encouraging the men on the battlefield and providing the voiceover, narrated by Yousafzai, that 'When every man was losing courage on the battlefield, a woman raised her voice' (Guggenheim 2015). We are then shown an animation of Yousafzai walking to and attending school, which is spliced with live-action footage of her speaking publicly in Pakistan and audio clips of Radio Mullah. There are also reconstructed scenes which show fragments of moments that immediately led up to the shooting, and which can be recognised from her written account in *I am Malala*: boots walking alongside a bus; the shadow of a gun being raised; two girls holding hands; and a hand held up against a gun being raised, shadowed against the glare of the sunlight. The screen blanks white, the music that has been rising into a crescendo fades abruptly, and then there is silence as the animation returns, showing Malalai's flag from the opening prologue falling to the ground.

There are several layers of remediation at play here: the instant of the shooting is fragmentally reconstructed in live-action cinematography, and draws from elements of Yousafzai's written narrative in her memoir. In particular, Yousafzai writes of a moment in which 'Moniba tells me I squeezed her hand' (2013: 6), which is rendered visually onscreen in the documentary reconstruction. Both the events of the shooting and the death of Yousafzai's namesake Malalai are remediated from when they were recounted in the opening of the documentary, and in this later segment they are remediated alongside one another. The inclusion of the animation with the flag falling to the ground embeds the two stories into one another: both are women who were shot for raising their voices.

The gunshot is signified, paradoxically, by silence. The moment in which the shot occurs is not signified by the sound of a gun firing, but by complete silence as the music abruptly fades and the flag falls. We neither see nor hear the shooting. We see (and hear, via the music) the anticipation, a flurry of movement and noise and voices, and then we hear silence and see still photographs of the aftermath (of the school bus with blood on the seats) which appear onscreen. Given how much the shooting defines Yousafzai's public image onscreen, in writing, and in the news, perhaps the most effective remediation of the event is the one that renders it through absence, omitting it in the form of silence and blank screens. The event of the shooting, which is usually so hyper-present, becomes almost invisible. The audience expects to see it; the onscreen narrative anticipates it. Instead there is only silence and still photographs of the aftermath. And in this audio silence and visual stillness, Yousafzai's voiceover, spoken loud and clear over the top of the reconstruction, is what echoes: 'I will get my education if it is at home, school, or any place. They cannot stop me' (Guggenheim 2015). This statement recalls that which she narrates to the documentary crew in her memoir, which was mentioned earlier. In the space where the audience anticipated a dramatisation of Yousafzai's shooting, there is instead only her voice, declaring her right to be educated. She remains a survivor of a shooting by the Taliban, but at the centre of the narrative of her shooting, and rising above it, is her raised voice, campaigning for her right, and other girls' right, to education.

Writing back and building platforms

Both in emphasising her pride in her Pashtun, Pakistani, and Muslim heritage, and by revisiting (remapping and decentering) the event of her shooting, Yousafzai builds an image, or

platform, from which to deliver her politics. Her dual identities of shooting victim and education rights activist, coupled with the remediated events of the shooting, tie her experiences to her continued campaign, and strengthen and substantiate her polemical message. The personal materialises in self-conscious and self-reflective writing, and is politicised not just by the message implied by spoken/written words, but also in Yousafzai's intention to reach the ears of others, to empower others. This is encapsulated in her Nobel Lecture, when she states that 'I tell my story, not because it is unique, but because it is not. It is the story of many girls [...] I am not a lone voice, I am many' (2014: n.p.). In this speech, which continues the polemical message she sets out in her memoir, Yousafzai makes a case for girls' right to education. She does not present herself as exceptional ('unique') in her cause; by aligning herself with other girls, transitioning from 'I am Malala' to 'I am many', Yousafzai testifies on their behalf. This testimony, as with the tenets of postcolonial women's (auto)biography discussed earlier, is relational, not hegemonic. Her 'singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole' (Sommer 1988: 108). Since *I Am Malala* is co-authored with Christina Lamb, there is no certainty as to which words belong to who (although the first-person nature of the memoir means that Yousafzai claims them as her own). In her Nobel Lecture, 'co-authorship' transitions from the British journalist to the other girls', both within and beyond Pakistan, who are unable to gain an education. Yousafzai uses her public platform in order to authoritatively and, as she grows older, increasingly autonomously represent her own and other women's different personal experiences in support of her political, feminist agenda.

This chapter has examined how Yousafzai's ethnicity and gender identities – Pakistani, Muslim, woman – have the potential to be appropriated as part of a neo-imperial project of cosmopolitan interest, sympathy, charity, and 'rescue' within the context of the War on Terror. I have argued that these appropriations are not straightforward, and that Yousafzai's own pride in and presentation of these various identities in *I Am Malala* in regard to both her personal life and her politics serves to challenge the homogenising of these categories. These identifiers, in particular her positioning as a survivor and as an activist, are complex, nuanced, and interconnected, especially in Yousafzai's accounts of the shooting. Yousafzai refigures – or remaps – the events she narrates in her memoir in ways that allow her to return to her position of advocate for education. The strength behind Yousafzai's delivery of her polemical message is partly determined by the interdependence of the two identifiers of survivor and activist. In *I Am Malala*, and in the documentary *He Named Me Malala*, she wields the event of the shooting, and the anticipation of its occurrence, in order to further her agenda for education advocacy. By revisiting the shooting in her own writing and words, by 'writing back', Yousafzai gains control over the narrative, exercising agency and shifting the focus onto *her* politics.

Note

- 1 Malalai was a Pashtun Afghan girl who encouraged the Afghan army to fight and ultimately defeat the British in 1880 during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, but was killed by enemy fire.

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