The Malala Yousafzai Phenomenon: Women Promoting Peace in Pakistan

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30 June 2016
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Abstract

Should Pakistan take pride in the Nobel Prize for Peace that was awarded to the young Malala Yousafzai? Should it in parallel regret the scant attention the ‘international community’ has given to the numerous other female and male civil society figures who have also worked for an enlightened education system and thus for the promotion of peace? There is no doubt that dramatic circumstances thrust Malala Yousafzai into an international limelight of which she had never dreamed. One could of course blame Western powers looking to soothe their conscience as they sought to avoid tackling head-on the terrible consequences of the ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Such an instrumentalisation of the Malala phenomenon should not, however, necessarily lead us to reject out of hand her contribution to efforts to improve the female condition. The first part of this paper will look at the path of this young Pakistani who dared (albeit under the guidance of an ambitious father) to make herself the advocate of literacy for girls. This will allow us to examine the context – often dangerous – in which Pakistani social workers act. The awards that Malala Yousafzai has collected around the world has provoked, in her country of origin, a debate worthy of analysis. One needs to try to deconstruct the West’s portrayal of Malala; she was in a sense projected as the only actor of note in a country overwhelmed by religious obscurantism. It is easy to understand the anger this has provoked in Pakistan. A civil society battling to promote durable peace has little use for simplistic Western analysis to make its own critic of the political and strategic direction taken by successive governments in Islamabad (and Rawalpindi).

Western and Pakistani perceptions of the concept of ‘promoters of peace’ differ. The former presupposes an acceptance of enlightenment ideas that have in fact been betrayed during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The latter rightly considers that it is a matter of facilitating a progressive change in dominant collective mentality. The second section of this paper will attempt to define the concept of ‘peace builder’ in a society that harbours a kaleidoscopic variety of conditions for women. The contributions of many other social workers who have fortunately not suffered the same kind of attack as Yousafzai remain anonymous even if their work can also be seen as small steps towards the objectives of resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)) of the Security Council of the United Nations, a body that, it goes without saying, is dominated by Western interests whose policies have, ironically enough, on occasions jeopardised peace. This text, adopted on October 31st 2000, calls for the political inclusion of female voices in conflict prevention and resolution. For the moment, this seems to remain a mere empty statement of intent, since not only are women often the most affected by conflicts, but there tends to be a retreat into tradition in times of adversity.
1. Introduction

1.1 On the Problem of Western Patronage

Has Malala Yousafzai\(^1\) given fresh impetus to the old controversy of the White Man’s Burden\(^2\) that allowed the West to portray its colonial conquests as glorious exploits? It appears that the entity that is still referred to as ‘the West’ remains attached to a concept that has crossed history. The West boasted of the superiority of the white Christian man who, following the establishment of the nation-state, bragged of being alone in democratic commitment and, after the start of the various colonial projects around the world, of his plan to spread civilization. A contemporary version of the dialectic of the white man’s civilizing mission, by now associating both sexes, was revived following the US intervention\(^3\) in Afghanistan in October 2001. It was, however, limited to a single domain: that of women of the Muslim faith. Moreover, it honed in on one aspect: women’s poor access to knowledge, something explaining their subjugation since time immemorial. Defenders of a ‘radical’ Islam who sought, with regard to the case we are looking at, to maintain the supremacy of the patriarchy, jumped at the chance this offered. They promoted a partial reading of religious texts that, they argued, confined women to an appropriate role. Such a reading recalled arguments made during the struggle for decolonization. If not explicitly so, it was critical of the various international documents, beginning with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of September 15\(^{th}\), 1995 (United Nations, 1995), that advocate for gender equality\(^4\).

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\(^1\)Malala first name (which means ‘struck by misfortune’) refers to a kind of Pashtoon Joan of Arc, Malalai of Mawand – a small town in the Afghan province of Kandahar, in which this young girl had managed to give new morale to her Afghan compatriots in the struggle against the British invaders.

\(^2\)The allegory of the ‘White Man’s Burden’, borrowed from the poem by Rudyard Kipling, underlined the supposed superiority of the white man’s civilisation, which would in time lead the rest of humanity along the path of ‘Progress’. The metaphor of a civilizing colonization allowed the leaders of colonizing states and their citizens to acquire at little cost a ‘clear conscience’. The Indian sub-continent, for its part, was much weakened by the time it exited a long period of subjugation: its resources had contributed significantly to the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. It is not a matter here of adopting unquestioningly a Third World approach that would portray former colonial powers as the solely or principally responsible for the policies and practices pursued by newly independent states. This issue requires study that goes beyond the scope of this work.

\(^3\)The researcher has a duty of impartiality, particularly when dealing with the contemporary period. We therefore prefer the term ‘intervention’ to that of ‘invasion’.

\(^4\)Many partisans of so-called radical Islam do not deny the theoretical equality between the sexes, but interpret matters in such a way as to sanction inequality. Thus Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (2004: 30) writes: “the Almighty has made it clear that the real sphere in which one should strive in outdoing others is not the sphere of inborn abilities and characteristics because in this sphere some have been ordained to hold preference over others. The Almighty has created some people superior to others as regards their mental, physical, economic and social status. Similarly is the case between a man and a woman. They have been created as counterparts such that one is by nature the active member and the other the passive. While the former trait needs domination, vigor and force the latter needs gentleness, subtlety and acquiescence... These are inborn characteristics and any effort to surpass one another in this area would be tantamount to waging war against nature. This would of course only leave them to mourn their own misfortune’.”
The discourse of Malala Yousafzai, whose name bears witness to her belonging to one of the branches – the Dalokhel – of the powerful\(^5\) clan or tribe of the Yousafzai, within which men, as is the case in most traditional societies, are the guardians of knowledge, is today the object of a polemic that casts a shadow over the struggle in which Malala Yousafzai has sought to portray herself as, if not the only, then at least the principal actor. She appears to have accepted only too readily the patronage of Western powers, themselves looking for issues to absorb the interest of domestic public opinion at a time when their economies and their chosen development models are going through a crisis almost unprecedented in scale. Thus the West instrumentalises an issue (the fate of women in the Muslim world) that it deems capable of rallying a public too concerned about the future to accord concerted attention to foreign policy issues. The choice is to arouse compassion, a strategy intended, at least in part, to bring solace to a populace worried about a model of economic development that seems to have run out of steam. As for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, its difficult position seems to lend itself to what might be termed a propaganda exercise that coincided by chance with the tenth anniversary of the unanimous adoption of October 31\(^{st}\) 2000 of Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)). The Security Council of the United Nations Organization\(^6\) had then attempted, in a sense, to battle against the weight of history in which the female sex had been seen as having played a paltry role. A solemn appeal was issued; it called for women to participate fully in determining the fate of the world, not least through contributing to the promotion of peace and international security.

Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)) drew on various earlier resolutions: Resolution 1261 (S/RES/1261 (1999)) of August 25\(^{th}\) 1999 dealt with children and armed conflict, Resolutions 1265 (S/RES/1265 (1999)) of September 17\(^{th}\) 1999 and Resolution 1296 (S/RES/1296 (2000)) of April 19\(^{th}\) 2000, both of which looked at the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and lastly Resolution 1314 (S/RES/1314) of August 11\(^{th}\) 2000 that examined children and armed conflict. The Security Council had emphasized the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of September 15\(^{th}\) 1995, the political declaration and outcome documents of which had called for "further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (United Nations (A/S-23/10/Rev.1), 2000: 1). The 23\(^{rd}\) Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly was dedicated to a debate on “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century” (June 5\(^{th}\) to June 9\(^{th}\) 2000) (UN Women, 2000). At the end of October 2000, the Security Council – in Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)) – reaffirmed “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building”, and stressed “the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution” (United Nations, 2000e: 2). The Security Council has since adopted three further resolutions on women, peace and security: Resolution 1820 (S/RES/1820 (2008)) of June 19\(^{th}\) 2008, Resolution 1888 (S/RES/1888 (2009)) of

\(^5\)It is doubtless useful to flag the social status enjoyed by the Yousafzai (or Yusufzai amongst other possible renderings in English). Malala Yousafzai, in her book titled I am Malala: The Girl who stood up and was shot by the Taliban (2013), chooses to draw attention to the difficulties her father encountered in trying to set up a network of schools in the town of Mingora (the main city of the Swat Valley). She writes that he had little influence in society since he was not of Khan ancestry – a prestigious title that originally indicated Mughal origin, but that has of late become very widespread. Malala Yousafzai’s father may not be a Khan, but his family name nonetheless gives him a certain prestige.

\(^6\)It is worth underlining one point: the Security Council, the supreme body of the United Nations Organisation created in the aftermath of the Second World War, is composed of victorious states (China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States of America) which, despite the changes in the international scene, remain the only member states to enjoy the right of veto.
September 30th 2009, and Resolution 1889 (S/RES/1889 (2009)) of October 5th 2009. These take note of not insignificant progress “in research and the development of positive policy language” (Taylor, Mader, 2010: 8). The position of women living in areas affected by conflict remains, to say the very least, difficult. It is therefore worth questioning the unequivocally celebratory tone attached to the wave of publicity surrounding Yousafzai7, especially in the West.

1.2 Outline of this Article

More than the media coverage and congratulations that political personalities around the world addressed to the young Malala Yousafzai, it is interesting to look at the various reactions in Pakistan itself. The country now has a second Nobel laureate, this time for peace8, but the issue is a matter of controversy. Does this prize aim to reward the whole of Pakistani civil society for its struggle for peace, or does it, to borrow the words of the President of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Thorbjoern Jagland, reward Yousafzai alone (or rather jointly with the Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi) for her combat “against the oppression of children and youth and for the right of all children to education”9? Did the Committee, which boasts of its apolitical if not to say neutral approach, intend to use an icon created artificially, especially through the efforts of a campaign orchestrated by “a team of Edelmann, a big British public relations agency10… that had offered its services free of charge” (Bobin, 11 October 2013)? In any case, it seems useful to wonder to which extent the Malala Yousafzai phenomenon is a Western political construction. This paper will endeavour – in a digression – to provide insight into the situation in Pakistan through an examination of the ‘careers’ of Ziauddin and

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7It seems a little long-winded to type ‘Malala Yousafzai’ each and every time we refer to the adolescent. Should ‘Malala’ be the abbreviated form of choice? Usage would support this, doubtless because of her young age and her gender. It is this second reason that pushes me to rather employ ‘Yousafzai’ as my preferred short form, which would doubtless be the choice were our lead character an older man.

8A first Pakistani received a Nobel Prize in 1979 when Mohammed Abdus Salam (January 29th 1926-November 21st 1996) was rewarded for his contribution to electroweak unification theory. He was little feted in his country of origin due to his belonging to the Ahmedi community that has been declared non-Muslim in 1974. One reader of The Dawn drew a parallel between Abdus Salam and Yousafzai, pointing out that both had gone into exile (Dawn, 10 October 2014).

9In a symbolic gesture at a time when Indo-Pakistani relations remains tense, Malala Yousafzai shared the Nobel Prize with a 60-year old Indian engineer, Kailash Satyarthi, relatively unknown to the wider public. He had founded the NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save Childhood Movement) in 1980. Announcing its choice, the Norwegian committee declared that: “It is an important point for a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, to join in a common struggle for education and against extremism” (The Nobel Prize Committee, 2014). Such an association provoked both enthusiasm and bitter criticism amongst Pakistani commentators. One reader of the Pakistani national daily, The Dawn, underlined in a comment on an article on October 10th 2014 (the date of the announcement of the Nobel Prize winners) that “the too politically charged Nobel Committee did not have the courage to give the Peace prize to only a Muslim, Pakistani girl. To show their political correctness, they picked an Indian from nowhere. Likewise, Edward Snowden was ignored” (Dawn, 10 October 2014). Another reader’s comment, posted the following day, noted that “Malala is world famous... the Indian guy not even famous in India and in my opinion not deserving of this award. This is just the world telling us that Pakistan will not be given anything without involving India in it” (ibid).

10This group “includes among its clients Levi Strauss and Hewlett Packard”. The French daily newspaper, remarking on the “frenetic activity” undertaken by Malala Yousafzai, underlined the fact that “five communication consultants” were dedicated to promoting her image (Bobin, 11 October 2013). They were led by “Jamie Lundie, former political advisor to the Liberal Democrat Party” (ibid).
Malala Yousafzai, even as society as a whole is the indirect victim of the calculations of a national politico-military leadership aiming for the country to regain its regional importance¹¹.

In the second section, this paper will examine the extent to which the efforts of the overly numerous social workers are aligned with the plans formulated by the Security Council, notably in Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)). In addition, the article will examine the role of states such as Pakistan, but also that played by the numerous national and international NGOs that operate there in promoting forms of political, economic and social development compatible with women assuming a greater role in society.

2. A Remarkable ‘Career’ Path

2.1 Malala Yousafzai, a National and then International Phenomenon

It was not in 2013, as some observers had predicted, but in 2014 that the Nobel Prize for Peace was awarded to Malala Yousafzai. From the terrorist attack of which the brave teenager had been the target on October 9th 2012¹² until this ultimate honour, awards have not ceased to rain down on her. One might rightly wonder at the infatuation of Western powers whose policy¹³, despite repeated denials, remains largely motivated by selfish geopolitical and geostrategic interests. These same states are ever eager to remind both their own citizens, as well as the world at large, as to the nobility of their aims. They also imply that they are the worthy heirs of the Enlightenment philosophy, in essence European – but also, implicitly, Christian, the values that should, they believe, guide the fate of humanity as a whole. Development, since decolonization, has allowed the countries of the South to benefit from better standards of living¹⁴. The poor situation of women in those countries and female empowerment have become issues prioritized by the West in its discourse. It is from such a perspective that one should try to analyse the homage paid in the capitals of Western Europe

¹¹ Already in 2008, Pakistan was itself the scene of attacks against the civilian population, and a subtle distinction came to be made between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Taliban. The former were to be accommodated in order to allow the country to regain the regional position it had enjoyed from when the Taliban had taken power in Kabul (September 27th 1996) through to Operation Enduring Freedom (October 7th 2001). The recent efforts at negotiations with the Taliban movement attempted by the government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have illustrated the difficulty of bringing about a harmonious process of reconciliation, all the more so without jeopardizing the fundamental rights of citizens.

¹² On October 9th 2012, Mingora was the scene of the kind of drama which has become only too familiar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (the colonial name of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) was replaced in April 2010): Malala Yousafzai, then aged 15 years, was shot while returning home in a school bus. Note that the literal meaning of Pakhtunkhwa is ‘homeland of the Pashtoons’.

¹³ The reader may question the use of the term ‘the policy’. The West is, of course, made up of various sovereign states free to define their own foreign policy. Nonetheless, they tend to retain an approach whose objective is to conserve the pre-eminence the region of which they are part has long enjoyed.

¹⁴ Indeed, the issue of poor standards of living in the ‘South’ that allows the ‘North’ to remain in an economically privileged position is a sensitive matter to which Western leaders evidently avoid public reference. However it would be reductionist to put all the blame on a West supported by, to use a term with Marxist connotations, a collaborating bourgeoisie. The elite of many countries in the developing world have failed to give adequate thought to the construction of a state for which they had themselves advocated in calling for the departure of the colonial power.
and North America to Malala Yousafzai. Following, as it were, in the footsteps of Malala Yousafzai and her father, we will also look, in the second part of this article, at the implications of such honours for social workers who seek to better the condition of women in Pakistan. It is not, we emphasize, a matter of in any way questioning the courage and genuineness demonstrated by this young woman in a context – that of the rise of the Taliban movement in Swat\(^{15}\) – in which the majority of adults who, lacking the financial means, had no choice but to remain in the area, and looked on the future with dread.

A far from insignificant part of public opinion was very happy at the nomination of the young women for Nobel Peace Prize. Another not negligible section of society did not conceal a certain resentment, if not to say annoyance. Was this an emotional reaction to the insidious defamatory campaign, against the nation as a whole, conducted when West’s Operation Enduring Freedom was launched on October 7\(^{th}\) 2001 against Afghanistan? The criticisms made by Pakistanis often appeared incomprehensible to a Western public opinion that seemed apparently resolutely aligned to the prevailing ‘black-and-white’, ‘either-with-us-or-against-us’ discourse. Such an explanation, however, is unsatisfactory, since many independent European and North American institutions sought to express an admiration that was genuine rather than ‘faked’. However, Western civil society all too often fails to go beyond the clichés that portray the condition of women as uniformly terrible across the whole of Pakistani society.

Apart from the Nobel Prize, Malala Yousafzai has received various other honours and nominations. Without listing them all, we can note here some of the more significant. On November 26\(^{th}\) 2012, Yousafzai was ranked sixth in the list compiled by the American magazine, *Foreign Policy*, of 100 top global thinkers. Three days later, the *Harmony Foundation*, a Mumbai-based NGO, conferred the Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for Social Justice on Malala Yousafzai and Sima Samar, chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. On January 9\(^{th}\) 2013, it was time for the French Simone de Beauvoir Prize for Women’s Freedom (*prix Simone de Beauvoir pour la liberté des femmes*), financed by the Institut Français, itself under the supervision of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. On March 20\(^{th}\) 2013, Malala Yousafzai was selected for the Index on Censorship’s Doughty Street Advocacy Award (Greek journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, Syrian internet activist Bassel Khartabil and South African photographer Zanele Muholi were also feted at the same event). On October 10\(^{th}\) 2013, the European Parliament deemed Malala Yousafzai worthy of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Finally, in addition to the Nobel Prize, she was also the winner of the International Children’s Peace Prize award by the Dutch Kid’s Rights Foundation to children committed to the struggle for education. It was, nonetheless, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that, after the attack on the adolescent, began what was to become a trend, as the state awarded her the *Sitara-e-Shujaat*, granted to civilians who have shown great bravery.

\(^{15}\)In fact, the Taliban were seeking to dominate Malakand Division, in particular the Swat Valley. On February 15\(^{th}\) 2009, the provincial government of North-West Frontier Province, after negotiations with the *Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM, Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law), made the concession of pledging to introduce the enforcement of this movement’s very restrictive understanding of Sharia law in Malakand Division. However, at the start of May of the same year, the Pakistan Army launched Operation *Rah-e-Rast* (Black Thunderstorm) that aimed to re-take control of Swat.
In collecting in person in Europe and North America the prizes she was awarded, however, Malala Yousafzai has contributed to the impression that her discourse and aims correspond to the Western vision of women subjugated in Muslim countries. At the very least, she has not sought to distance herself from this rather brazen manipulation. Was the Government of Pakistan genuine in its admiration of Malala Yousafzai? Or did it seek to show that the country adhered to the values espoused by the ‘international community’? Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulated Malala Yousafzai upon her Nobel Prize, describing her as the ‘pride of Pakistan’ (BBC, 10 October 2014).

As for the West, it took the opportunity to deny having instrumentalised the discourse of the adolescent, arguing that the attention given to her had pushed Pakistan into undertaking a difficult task: once again, the country had to face up to its “inner demons”. This was the expression retained by Frederic Bobin, correspondent of the respected French daily *Le Monde*, when recalling that the attack of October 9th 2012 had plunged the country into “stupor and dismay”, provoking demonstrations in solidarity in the major cities of the country (Bobin, 11 October 2014). Bobin added:

“Abroad, Malala Yousafzai quickly acquired iconic status. And this is where things turned sour, reflecting Pakistan’s ambivalence towards its inner demons. The young woman began to disturb a significant section of opinion. The more she was met with acclaim in the West, by the famous (Madonna, Angelina Jolie) and political heavy-weights (Hillary Clinton, Gordon Brown) as a figure symbolizing resistance to Islamist obscurantism, the more voices in Pakistan were raised to denounce instrumentalisation by ‘foreign forces’ [...].

“There are even those who denied that Yousafzai could have been born in NWFP of Pashtun parents. It is true that conspiracy theories generally fall on fertile ground across the Indian sub-continent. However, Frederic Bobin judged Pakistan a little hastily. The Islamic Republic was no doubt in a tricky position; both internally and internationally: its stability was in question. The journalist scarcely referred to the diversity of civil society and the many social workers active there; indeed, many Pakistani observers, of varied backgrounds, were, let us recall, happy at the good fortune of Malala Yousafzai. Doubtless such a reaction was above

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16This expression, which the media began to employ widely after the start of the Kuwait war (August 2nd 1990-February 28th 1991), has only recently become the object of belatedly analysis.

17A reminder is doubtless useful here for those less familiar with the context: foreign observers who do not speak the national language, Urdu, or any of the regional languages spoken in Pakistan tend to assume that English suffices to understand political, economic and social setting. Such individuals, however, are unable to converse directly with a range of social groups that help shape these changes.

This comment attempts to describe a general phenomenon rather than being a reference to this particular journalist (about the extent of whose knowledge of the sub-continent I am unaware). Moreover, he was writing for a French public and had but limited space.
all that of an elite, which had a sufficient knowledge of the West to unpack the various paradoxes. To put things simply, the West does not hesitate to commit itself to wage wars that many perceive as iniquitous, even as it goes on financing development aid in the same regions. Was it not somehow logical that Pakistani public opinion could be excused a certain exasperation? On the whole (male and female politicians, individual commentators and institutions), the West seemed to be getting away from a heavy responsibility rather too easily. It neglected the role of sorcerer’s apprentice it had played on two occasions (after the Red Army intervention in Afghanistan of December 1979, then following Operation Enduring Freedom) in a region that had served as something of a policy test laboratory. In this, one might note a condescending attitude that took on an almost neo-colonial tone. As one female blogger wrote, one could, when listening to Malala Yousafzai, ask oneself whether there were any women in senior positions in society and who were there on merit. Another deplored the shameless use of a “Western social elevator to go upwards, at the expense of the rest of the country”. It does indeed seem improbable that the father of Malala Yousafzai, Ziauddin, would otherwise have attained two positions to which he was appointed. Since the start of 2013, he is the Education Attaché at the Consulate of Pakistan in Birmingham. A further consequence of the fame his daughter’s plight has brought to him – for there are presumably others at least as well qualified as him, was his nomination as Special Advisor to the United Nations on Global Education, working alongside former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, himself United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education.

2.2 A Half-Hearted Commitment to Women’s Betterment

2.2.1 The Abrupt Assertion of a New Vocation

It was Western funds that flowed into Pakistan after September 11th 2001 and the October 2005 earthquake which gave great impetus to the growth of the vocation of social worker eager for the betterment of the conditions of women. Nearly fifteen years later, those familiar with these circles will have noted the emergence of this new group. Taking advantage of the

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18 We will not examine in this paper a paradox that also reflects the diversity of actors in Western civil society. By way of illustration, most of the many humanitarian workers who travel from countries in the West work unsparingly to assist the most vulnerable members of society.

19 We will, here again, employ the term ‘intervention’.

20 In the first case, the United States, leader of the ‘free world’, had aimed to hasten the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the latter case, they had sought to avoid leaving the perpetrators of the attack on their soil unpunished. Indeed, they took the opportunity to initiate a ‘war against terror’, the geopolitical ambitions of which were as ill-concealed as they were ill-defined.

21 Islamabad (and Rawalpindi), worried that Ziauddin Yousafzai would ask for political asylum in the United Kingdom in order to follow his daughter there where she would receive medical treatment, therefore facilitated his travel and that of his family. One should emphasize that after being attacked, Malala Yousafzai was initially treated in an Army Hospital. She was then handed over for further treatment to a team of doctors based in Birmingham who were visiting Rawalpindi.
West’s ‘generosity’, it has gradually increased its standing, to the extent that its financial clout, at least by national standards, is not inconsiderable. Will it, however, manage to attain the status of an ‘enlightened elite’? Whether or not this is the case, many social workers who have risen through the hierarchy consider themselves to have a mission, that of the cause of women. This mission has helped bring about a change in their social status in itself something of an achievement in the prevailing uncertainty. The traditional elite, its reputation tarnished by scandals as well as a level of wealth that clashes with the misery that haunts both countryside and urban slum, continues to employ a tactic in use since the first days of the country’s independence: there is a conspicuous show of defining policies that aim to eradicate poverty, but in reality the effects are very limited, and the elite’s main effort is to preserve the status quo as far as the social structure of the country is concerned.

In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the field of teaching and work in one of the very numerous NGOs or, for the more fortunate, an international organisation, does a little to help the supply of jobs that are in short supply given the demand from graduates who are also seeking rapid social advancement. A consequence of the country’s engagement in the process of globalisation, Pakistanis are looking for a better life that will enable them attain a level approaching that enjoyed by populations in the West.

In fact, numerous students from middle-class backgrounds opt to train as social workers. Are they motivated by a desire to modify a social hierarchy from which they themselves benefit? The bourgeoisie (to borrow, for want of a better term, from the Marxist vocabulary) is free to try to retain the social position it holds, manipulating the levels of power in order to maintain the status quo. The middle-class struggles against an insecurity caused by the economic crisis that has hit a country already rendered fragile by various forms of militancy. In such circumstances, the show of disinterested magnanimity with which many teachers and social workers greet the visitor from the West comes across as somewhat inappropriate. The career of Ziauddin Yousafzai, which we will look at here, is nonetheless illustrative of both a strong sense of initiative, but also of the sensitivities that social workers must negotiate.

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22 Until recently, this did not necessarily follow automatically the acquisition of monetary wealth. With the growth of a consumer society, things have changed.

23 For want of a better term, we will describe them in this way.

24 A state concerned to project its power regionally is ever willing to invest in its military. In 2013, according to the estimates of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the country spent 3.5% of its GDP on defence, a figure that no doubt reflects only part of the actual expense (CIA, 2015). The World Factbook published by the CIA states that the country spent 2.5% of its GDP on education during the same period (CIA, 2015). Public hospitals, for example, especially for those who lack the means to ‘encourage’ doctors, nurses and cleaners to do their duties, or buy medicine, look more like mortuaries. The zakat (Islamic system of charitable giving through which each believer contributes 2.5% of their annual income) represents an important element of solidarity that is on the decline, while poverty is widespread. According to figures from 2014, 12.4% of the population of 199 million was living below the poverty line. Note that the last census in Pakistan was conducted in 1998.

25 In the Indian sub-continent, the term ‘militancy’ refers to the activities of armed groups elsewhere qualified simply as ‘terrorism’. Apart from the Taliban movement that continues to weigh heavily over the future of the country, there are a number of other groups. One may note here Lashkar-e-Taiba, literally the Army of the Pure, that mainly operates in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir State; Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP, Army of the Companions of the Prophet); and Lashkar-Jhangvi (LJ, Army of Jhangvi, a group that broke away from the SSP, named after one of its founders). The two latter groups focus on attacking the Shia community.

26 We base ourselves on the book I am Malala. The Girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban published by his daughter in cooperation with the American journalist Christina Lamb.
For the reader less than familiar with the situation in Pakistan, it is worth emphasizing the immense gap between the majority of social workers and the population whose lives they are endeavouring to influence for the better. There are a number of expressions which are in vogue in Pakistan that leave one astounded when they are juxtaposed to the terrible conditions, particularly of villagers, many of whom struggle even to consume sufficient calories each day. NGOs and some media outlets are quick to evoke the need to raise ‘awareness’ with regard to new sets of values, to do ‘community mobilisation’, or to carry out ‘female empowerment’, seemingly arguing that this alone would suffice to bring about rapid change to ways of life and traditions around since time immemorial. Ziauddin and Malala Yousafzai, now so well-known in the West, have made use of this discourse. Their commitment to female access to education is certainly praiseworthy. However, one should not omit to pay tribute to those women – and men – who continue this struggle in today’s Pakistan, sometimes at risk to their own lives.

2.2.2 Ziauddin Yousafzai

Holder of a master’s degree in English, Ziauddin Yousafzai and his associate, Mohammed Naeem Khan, wanted to open a school in Shahpur, the village of the former, but they were beaten to it by another similar project. Malala, in recounting this episode, simply indicates that they opted for Mingora. Compared to the rest of the Swat Valley, at least at that period, the city boasted a superior infrastructure. Were the two associates simply hoping to promote the English language at a time when tourist arrivals, albeit modest in numbers, had not completely ground to a halt? Was it is matter of offering lower middle-class families of modest income English language learning, in a sense the key to any social advancement in a country that jealously safeguarded the legacy of the British colonisers? This would explain, at least in part, the difficult start the two men faced, investing their savings – quite considerable given the local standards of the time, and in addition borrowing a large sum of money. When it opened its doors, the establishment, the Khushal Public School, only attracted three children. Malala makes no indication as to their age or sex. She does, however, state that the idea was for the school to be mixed.

In 2004, the Mutthahida Majlis e-Amal (MMA, United Council for Action), a coalition of five religion-based parties, such as the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI, Party of the Clergy of Islam) that ran a network of ‘madrasas’ in which many Taliban had learnt philosophical underpinnings of their combat, came to power in North-West Frontier Province. Did this represent a desire on the part of President-General Musharraf to manipulate the political chessboard through a vote of dubious fairness? Was it a reaction of the electorate that condemned the American invasion (or intervention, depending on one’s interpretation of

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27 The retention of the English language is in part a result of two factors: a certain snobbism on the part of the ruling classes, as well as a desire to prevent social mobility which would challenge the status quo.

28 With the exception of what remain today a few isolated cases, notably in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Karachi, mixed or co-education was already unusual. No doubt Ziauddin Yousafzai and Mohammed Naeem Khan were attempting, in a setting they believed to be favourable (Mingora, a city of 175,000 inhabitants according to the most recent census – that of 1998, was the capital of the Swat Valley), a worthwhile experiment in a society that had stagnated, at a time when the view that boys and girls should learn to mix with one another, at least in school, was already in the minority within Pakistani civil society.
events) of Afghanistan and the subsequent eviction of the Taliban administration? The new provincial government was to encourage a tightening of morals in a region already deeply marked by the policy of Islamisation led by Zia ul-Haq. In effect, benefiting – as already mentioned – from significant funds from the CIA as to the use of which Zia enjoyed considerable freedom, he had promoted the opening of various networks of madrasas which had supported the struggle against the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan. These Koranic schools, a new kind of breeding ground for the mujahideen, were for a while celebrated by the West, before ‘brave Mujahideen’ morphed into the ‘malevolent Taliban’ so demonised after the attacks of September 11th 2001. Furthermore, they initiated another form of struggle in Pakistan: suicide attacks generally contracted to the inexperienced and unsophisticated from poor backgrounds.

The MMA set out to close down stalls selling CDs or DVDs; the owners who accepted what was in fact a legal obligation received financial compensation. Paradoxically, many Pakistanis, of varied political or religious orientation, are fans of Hollywood or Bollywood films, pirated copies of which are readily available. Supporters of the new government were thus given a free hand to attack cinemas and game halls. They ripped down the posters displaying figures of women, or pencilled in the faces of female figures, even though most were already portrayed in traditional dress (long, loose trousers, a long shirt and a dupatta, a shawl covering the chest). They forced clothes shops to stop using female dummies.

The few men who continued to wear western clothes were targeted; a number of them changed to traditional dress, shalwar kamiz (baggy trousers with a long shirt). Women in urban areas began little by little to cover their hair and a part of their forehead with a broad dupatta that also covers the shoulders and chest, while long sleeves reaching the wrists are de rigueur in winter as well as summer.

After the MMA came to power, the Khushal Public School limited its teaching to girls only. Did its two founders intend to permit the female sex to gain mastery of English, hitherto by and large, with the exception of the most privileged social class, a male prerogative? Were they hoping that a greater number of girls, upon attaining adulthood, would no longer be satisfied with the closed world of the couple and family, and would seek paid employment? Ziauddin was born into a traditional Pashtoon family in which only boys were sent to school. While he drank milk or ate eggs as a child, his sisters had to make do with leftover portions, sharing amongst themselves the chicken wings as the choice pieces were consumed by the men of the family. These are the examples recalled by Malala Yousafzai of the limited means of her grandparents. Between the lines, she draws attention to the iniquity of a patriarchal

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29 Pakistani families struggling to bring up a large household are often willing to give them into the charge of madrasas that offer, in addition to bed and board, the promise of an education. This is perhaps mediocre in quality, but the state’s neglect of schooling means it may still be highly valued. Ironically, the Islamic Republic declared its nuclear status in 1998.

30 The use of such an expression seems unavoidable, given the way politics and religion have become intertwined in Pakistan.

31 Bollywood refers to the films produced in the studios of Bombay, renamed Mumbai in 1995.

32 During his period in power, Zia ul-Haq had advocated for a return to strict observance of traditional Islamic dress of the sub-continent.

33 Women working in the fields in rural areas wear traditional shalwar kamiz, with their hair covered but forehead bare.
system that goes to the length of depriving women of sufficient food, notwithstanding their duties and responsibilities.

Did the difficult situation that Pakistan was traversing push Yousafzai and Naeem Khan, even if they were worried about the viability of their enterprise, to assume the role of reformers, or were they above all thinking of their profits? The school was struggling to achieve its goals. It presumably attracted very little attention: competition – given the weakness of the state system – was rude. It was thus the activism of Ziauddin, backed up by his daughter, which little by little drove the Khushal Public School towards public attention.

The author is not denying the commitment of two men who, according to Malala Yousafzai’s writings, challenged outdated methods of teaching that, moreover, stuck to a rigid social code. This weighed heavily on the dominant collective mentality of the less privileged social classes and excluded girls in particular. There was a blossoming of private schools. NGOs, meanwhile, numbered some 2000 in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to the figures given to the author when she was staying in Peshawar in 2011-12.

3. Promoting the Conditions and Social Empowerment of Women in Pakistan

3.1 The Poor Condition of Women

We should acknowledge Malala Yousafzai’s account. In targeting a Pakistani but perhaps above all a Western readership, it dares boast of the altruism of the society in which she was brought up, as well as of her genuine attachment to that society. Foreign travellers who have enjoyed Pakistani, and especially Pashtoon, hospitality can bear witness to this generosity; even the humblest of households spares no trouble in looking after guests.

No doubt the reader should read or re-read Malala’s account a few months after it was published. The attention it received in the western media was overbearing, tarnishing in a sense the battle waged by the adolescent. She never ceases to pay tribute to her father’s analysis of the Pakistan’s evolution, implying it is of extraordinary originality, despite the fact that it is shared by a large proportion of the middle-class. Her words when she deals with the political course of her country are those of an adult rather than of an adolescent, and moreover, one still recovering from terrible injuries. The leitmotif is to portray her father, his humble background notwithstanding, as a person of exceptional qualities that go to explain his social promotion in the aftermath of the attack of October 9th 2012.

Pakistani public opinion has rightly wondered about the role of defender of the right to education for girls that Ziauddin encouraged Malala to continue to play, despite the risk it

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34 Families tend to expend their meagre resources on boys. Girls, for their part, contribute to work in the home. In addition, there are often no schools near-by, still less those equipped with bathrooms. The fear of rape weighing on the social future of young girls, generally married off upon attaining puberty, is also a consideration.

35 No doubt the choice of Christina Lamb as ghost-writer was injudicious: she has been the target of the various conspiracy theories the sub-continent is so fond of.
entailed to her well-being or even life. The adolescent had undergone serious surgery and to this day is yet to recover full facial mobility.

Some voices, keen to defend Islam and Pakistan’s politico-religious model, spoke out when the book was published. A number of them appeared to take the opportunity to blame (not without reason) Western policies in countries like Afghanistan for the deterioration in the security situation. Women’s mobility had become still further reduced, even as they were the target of fundamentalist groups who aimed to reduce their access – already limited – to education. A YouTube video showed a female journalist, wearing a black veil, interviewing a woman resident of Swat dressed in the same manner. The latter refutes Malala’s account as to the poor status offered to women by the Taliban, declaring in flawless English that she herself and her fellow female students continued to attend school when the area was under Taliban influence (youtube, 10 October 2013).

Ziauddin Yousafzai, in a parody of the Pashtoon custom according to which sons are the source of glory, boasted of the path that his daughter had pursued thanks to the liberty he had granted her. It is true that the honours and prizes which have rained down on Malala are a reward for the courage shown by the young girl from the age of 11 years in keeping up an Urdu-language BBC blog during the time when Swat was under the iron rule of the Taliban.

In writing her book, Malala was undertaking a risky exercise as she was residing in Birmingham, an English city home to a significant community of Pakistani-origin that include a significant minority that adheres to a rigorous school of Islam. The adolescent, combining impartiality and moderation, strove to cast a critical eye over the society of her upbringing. She shied away from neither the poor level of development in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, nor the terrible conditions of women. For example, Shahida, a domestic aid who worked in her parents’ home, was only ten years old when her father sold her to an already married old man who wanted a young second wife. He selected a young girl rather than an adolescent, one may add for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with South Asia, since the cost of the latter would have been higher. In rural societies in the sub-continent of whichever religion, marriage at a very young age is not uncommon, notwithstanding legislation against the practice. Widespread and deep poverty, as well as a socio-political mentality across the sub-continent that looks upon girls and women from vulnerable families as exchangeable goods, help explain this.

“When girls disappeared it was not always because they had been married off” (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013: 38). Yousafzai tackles the issue of how Pashtunwali (literally ‘the way of the Pashtoons’, a Pashtoon tribal code of honour that remains of central importance) justifies ‘crimes of honour’. She gives the example of a fifteen-year-old neighbour, Seema, who had a passing fancy, consisting solely of casting furtive glances from time to time at a boy. One day it was announced that she had committed suicide, but Malala Yousafzai later found out that the girl’s own family had poisoned her. Another practice mentioned by the adolescent is that of swara; this allows two families to resolve a difference by the daughter of one being given to the opposing family. The resulting marriage seals an agreement, but the girl, often not out

36 We have not been able to find any official website whose contents would motivate such a discourse.
of puberty, may well find herself attached to a much older man only too keen to exercise his conjugal ‘rights’. Moreover, the young wife finds herself placed at the service of a stereotypically irascible mother-in-law within an extended family that, still harbouring thoughts of vengeance, may make her life miserable.

There are a number of archaic customs that are also relevant, such as the marriage to the Koran that is practised in Sindh Province. Families eager to preserve a superior social status can, in the absence of a suitable candidate, implicitly prevent their daughters marrying by irrevocably allying them to the Koran. The latter remain within the family structure, with the household catering to their needs until old age. Freed from the iron rule of marriage and over-frequent pregnancies, such women often enjoy a far more enviable status than their actual or metaphorical sisters. One down-side is that virginity is of course de rigueur.

In Pakistan, marriage between first cousins is frequent, a custom that has attained the status of a tradition. The primary aim is to avoid the fragmentation of property, especially land holdings. In the absence of serious sanctions that would bring about a gradual reduction in conjugal violence and with legislation endorsing polygamy, such unions afford wives certain protection from their mother-in-law – since the latter is also her aunt. Similarly, the clan can try to oppose second marriages by its male members. Men on occasion claim such a right, sometimes arguing that they had had no part in the choice of their first spouse. From a number of interviews this author conducted in the Islamic Republic, it seems that polygamy (which has become less widespread, perhaps due to economic constraints) is a kind of adornment for men, helping them to affirm their superiority. For their part, women do not dare display indignation in public for fear of being accused of contradicting divine fundamental principles. Pakistani feminists do point out that at the time of the revelation of the Koran, slavery was a practice that no monotheist religion had outlawed. It nonetheless gradually faded away; something similar, they hope, may happen with polygamy.

With regard to the so-called ‘crimes of honour’ seen across the territory of Pakistan, they illustrate the maintenance of a patriarchy having every intention of keeping its ascendancy over the female body and the ‘precepts’ of the Taliban movement are without doubt an extreme expression of this. ‘Crimes of honour’ are referred to by different names in different regions of the country. These affect both married and single women when they are suspected of having, or ever just thinking about having a relationship or simply a certain proximity. A promise of marriage to an unmarried ‘guilty’ women made by the ‘guilty’ man will not bring about any clemency. The reasons for what is, de facto, a death penalty for women declared sinners are not invariably linked to the defence of male honour as such. Sometimes, for example, there is a desire to get rid of a female relative who might otherwise lay claim to a legacy. Islam grants one-half part of what is granted to a male legatee. Women are thus ‘encouraged’ to renounce this right, taking into account the sacrifices the family may have had to make in order to marry them off. Islam in the sub-continent in effect adapted the ruinous practice of dowry from Hinduism.

Malala Yousafzai, in proclaiming herself the chief advocate for a better status for women in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, has to adopt an attitude that is beyond reproach. She aims to pre-empt critics who are quick to suspect or even accuse her of having renounced national
political and religious values to join up with the decadent West. As we have already underlined, her recent fame has provoked widespread outcry in her country of origin. The adolescent may have always refused to veil her face, but has nonetheless continued to cover her hair. This reflects both her opposition to rigorous orthodoxy as well as her attachment to a tradition that makes a key value of what Islamic cultures term female modesty. The observer little familiar with Pakistan may well be surprised at the rose-fuchsia colour of her scarf and long tunic (kamiz) on her book’s cover photo. However, there is a tendency in South Asia to favour lively colours. Furthermore, these may represent a kind of protest in Pakistan. It is a paradox in a country in which women are assigned the role of repository of male honour, markets are a riot of coloured material, the incessant purchase of which provide a living to innumerable merchants and tailors. Incidentally, Malala public attachment to Pashtoon and Pakistani traditions permits her to express prudent criticism of the lowly status assigned to women; like the majority of human rights defenders in Pakistan, she limits herself to advocating full access to education for girls and the end of archaic practices. Were these objectives to be attained, the condition of the Pakistani woman would see a marked improvement.

3.2 The Perils of Excessive Visibility

In her book, Malala Yousafzai emphasizes that, following the accession of the princely state of Swat on July 28th 1969, Pakistan simply named a Deputy Commissioner (DC), whose role was to administer the area. She adds that:

“It seemed to us that these bureaucrats came to our province simply to get rich, then went back home. They had no interest in developing Swat. Our people are used to being subservient because under the wali [prince] no criticism was tolerated. If anyone offended him, their entire family could be expelled from Swat. So when the DCs came from Pakistan, they were the new kings and no one questioned them. Older people often looked back nostalgically to the days of the last wali. Back then, they said, the mountains were all still covered in trees, there were schools every five kilometres and the wali sahib would visit them in person to resolve problems” (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013: 42).

Malala Yousafzai implicitly refers to the nostalgia felt by the people of Swat for a period that came to be looked back on as an idyllic past, in sharp contrast to the disillusionment that arose after formal integration into the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Swatis (but also the Pakistani population as a whole) tired of the snail’s pace of the judicial system, eventually coming to prefer the implementation of Sharia. This was an aspiration that the Taliban were

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37 Incidentally, she chose as a cover photo a picture in which she matches the norms of simplicity expected of young women from the provinces – far away from the skin whitening and eye-brow plucking offered in beauty saloons around the sub-continent.
38 "Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and Sunna), prescribing both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking. It has generally been supplemented by legislation adapted to the conditions of the day, though the manner in which it should be applied in modern states is a subject of dispute between Muslim traditionalists and reformists” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2015).
able to exploit. Their will to promote a return to ‘true values’ drew all the more support from individuals of modest means, especially in villages since the lower social layers, earlier somehow spared, had to face more and more difficulties in their interaction. Men, without it seems being able to formulate the reasons for their confusion, were concerned by the threat to their patriarchal prerogatives that they perceived as coming from western influences. They also believed that the ‘international community’, not content with humiliating Muslims through armed attacks, was also seeking to undermine the very foundations of their religio-cultural system.

Long after the start of a wave of attacks in 2003, the general public (what Urdu terms the aam log) preferred to detect a conspiracy fomented by the government with the help of the West. In this interpretation, the latter sought to tarnish the reputation of a rising Pakistani movement with two principal aims: to re-establish justice in a state undermined by inequality, corruption and nepotism; and to remind the population of the principles of Islam. These had two ‘merits’, firstly to confine women to a specific role, and secondly to revive, in a sense, the confidence of men undermined in their role of bread-winner by the economic crisis and the increasing number of women who claimed the right of financial autonomy.

The efforts of numerous Pakistani NGOs in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake raised sharp concern. In accepting generous financial contributions from the West, part of their role was to try to influence the dominant collective mentalities and to aim in this way to improve the situation of women. These NGOs were particularly active in villages, looking into the living conditions of the population. Female social workers, despite the reluctance of men, argued the need for specifically female issues to be discussed separately, between women only. Men knew very well what was going on, and came to object to the intrusion into their private lives of ‘city women’ with an elevated social status. These women nonetheless often simply tried to play an advisory role, notably with regard to marital or family disputes. Non-governmental organisations with Islamic funding captured the imagination, since they appeared at first sight to be both improving lives and reinforcing the existing, long-standing social structure.

39 Indian and Pakistani prisoners, when they lack the financial means to get themselves released quickly, may spend long years in jail on remand awaiting the outcome of their trial. During a period that can often last up to seven or eight years, the means of subsistence for their wife and children (for married accused) usually depend on the good will of the extended family that often sees this as a duty. In effect, males, sons and brothers, continue to live under the parental roof, with each expected to contribute to the family as a whole and to make up if necessary for the lack of income of one of the members of the household. The economic crisis, however, as well as the conflict that followed the American intervention in Afghanistan (the Government of Pakistan was intent on preserving the ‘strategic depth’ it had enjoyed in Afghanistan) had undermined traditional solidarity. It may be noted in passing that many Pakistani prisoners claim that if it was not for their lack of means they would be quickly cleared of all accusations. In this regard, they point to the numerous male and female politicians who boast of being representatives of the nation even as they or their families enjoy a wealth acquired subsequent to their involvement in political life.

40 Pakistan is still a predominantly rural country; 38.8% of the population lives in towns (CIA, 2015).

41 The reticence to agree to a polio vaccination campaign was perhaps, amongst other things, a reflection of a masculinity that felt itself threatened: the virus is still endemic in parts of the country. The Taliban movement banned it, denouncing a Western conspiracy to sterilise the population. Social workers, trying to earn a living, continue to get infants to consume the drops, but on occasion at the cost of their own life.

42 Hygiene was one of the many concerns; a bar of soap was too expensive a purchase, while rural dispensaries that included gynaecological services were, with the exception of Ismaili areas, frequently absent.
The Swat Taliban benefited, it is true, from the reputation the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Sharia-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) had acquired after the 2005 earthquake. In the space available we will not go over the circumstances of the rise of the TNSM in the Swat Valley or of the terror it exerted over the area. In following Malala Yousafzai’s account, we will underline the additional restrictions that have come to weigh still more heavily on the meagre freedoms enjoyed by women. According to estimates made in June 2012, more than 400 girls’ schools had been destroyed (Khan, 26 June 2012). Girls’ access to education was a principal concern for the Taliban, while many mullahs (some of whose knowledge of Islam left much to be desired) were of the view that educational access for girls contravened scripture. A young girl of eleven years old\textsuperscript{43} volunteered to write a blog for the BBC Urdu Service in which she dared depict daily life in Swat at the time of the Taliban. She asserted in determined fashion her desire to carry on going to school, implicitly refusing the fate of the majority of females in her country. On January 3\textsuperscript{rd} 2009, under the pseudonym Gul Mukai\textsuperscript{44}, she had written, in her first missive:

“I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat. I was afraid [of] going to school because the Taliban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools. Only 11 students attended the class out of 27. The number decreased because of the Taliban’s edict. On my way home from school I heard a man saying ‘I will kill you’. I hastened my pace … to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone” (Nasir, 15 January 2013).

Two days later, Malala Yousafzai narrated another episode from daily life under the Taliban regime:

“I was getting ready for school and about to wear my uniform when I remembered that our principal had told us not to wear uniforms and come to school wearing normal clothes instead. So I decided to wear my favourite pink dress. Other girls in school were also wearing colourful dresses and the school presented a homely look. My friend came to me and said, “For God’s sake, answer me honestly, is our school going to be attacked by the Taliban?” During the morning assembly we were told not to wear colourful clothes as the Taliban would object to it” (ibid).

In spite of the threats against her, Yousafzai doubted that the Taliban movement (which had taken on the name Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan)\textsuperscript{45} would physically attack a young girl. She

\textsuperscript{43}\textsuperscript{43}Fellow female researchers from Pakistan had the opportunity to meet Malala Yousafzai well before she became the darling of the media. They were struck by the determination shown by this girl from a provincial town, away from Pakistan’s metropolitan cities.

\textsuperscript{44}\textsuperscript{44}“Gul Makai… means ‘cornflower’ and is the name of the heroine in a Pashtun folk story. It’s a kind of Romeo and Juliet story in which Gul Makai and Musa Khan meet at school and fall in love. But they are from different tribes so their love causes a war. However, unlike Shakespeare’s play their story doesn’t end in tragedy. Gul Makai uses the Quran to teach her elders that war is bad and they eventually stop fighting and allow the lovers to unite” (Yousafzai and Lamb, 2013: 80).

\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{45}Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Taliban Movement of Pakistan), also known simply as ‘Pakistan Taliban’, is an umbrella organisation that includes different Islamist militant groups operating mainly in Khyber
agreed to do a number of individual interviews with the local media and a documentary made 
by Adam B. Ellick, the New York Times correspondent. Her classmates, approaching 
puberty, were less than ever allowed to express themselves in public, since their families were 
afraid of reprisals.

The TTP claimed responsibility for the attack on Yousafzai. Its spokesperson, Ehsanullah 
Ehsan, recalled that the group had repeated warned the adolescent, and added:

"She is a Western-minded girl. She always speaks against us. We will target anyone who 
speaks against the Taliban [...]"

"We warned her several times to stop speaking against the Taliban and to stop supporting 
Western non-governmental organisations, and to come to the path of Islam" (Al Jazeera, 10 
October 2012).

Laden with symbolism, the man tasked with the attack aimed for the head. The message was 
all the more powerful considering how the population was already living in a state of terror. 
The President, Asif Ali Zardari, did condemn the attack, while Prime Minister Raja Pervez 
Ashraf described Yousafzai a “daughter of Pakistan” (ibid). Similarly, the powerful Chief of 
General Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, expressed his indignation in the following 
terms:

“...The cowards who attacked Malala have time and again shown how little regard they have 
for human life and how low they can stoop to impose their twisted ideology”.46

Nonetheless, a weak civil society was struggling alone against a Taliban movement that was 
not unaware that the politico-military leadership, anxious about its strategic interests in the so-
called AfPak theatre, would take only half measures.

3.3 On the Difficulty of Promoting Peace in Pakistan

In the aftermath of September 11th 2001, conservative Muslim, or even Islamist, schools of 
thought scarcely troubled themselves to denounce western political instrumentalisation of the 
condition of women, something that had little to do with the Enlightenment principles of 
which Western Europe and North America declared themselves the guardians. On the 
contra, they seized the chance, as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, offered by the new 
Manichean approach to the world adopted by the USA and Western Europe, recalling to order 
those few who had gone astray and declined a literal interpretation of the holy book. They 
employed this to justify a terror that stifled moderate and lay voices that were just beginning 
to dare speak out.

The emergence of a terrorism claiming inspiration from Islam, the proclamation of a so-called 
Islamic State with internationalist ambitions, the response that this ideology has inspired in 
the West among a disoriented (and predominantly Muslim-origin) youth have eclipsed an

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46 Derville, 11 October 2013.
important issue: that of the difficulty of capitalising on the advances made by women around the world. With the exception of the West\textsuperscript{47}, domestic lawmakers and executives have often abstained from acting upon international resolutions. To these international dimensions, one may add factors related to the history of the creation of Pakistan and the sensitive elaboration of an identity that came to be more and more closely attached to a particularly rigourist version of Islam.

3.3.1 The Legislative Framework in Pakistan

We should look briefly at the wish of Pakistan’s law-makers to improve the condition of women. On July 15\textsuperscript{th} 1961, the prudent Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) made the registration of marriages and divorces within the Muslim community obligatory. While men had no intention of giving up the privilege of access to a quick (if not to say hasty) divorce through *talaq*\textsuperscript{48}, the Ordinance codified the procedures governing the ‘delegated right of divorce’ and *khula*\textsuperscript{49}. Polygyny, which remained permitted, was regulated by an Arbitration Council. Nonetheless, the marriage of a child was considered valid if it had been consummated; women were free to request a divorce once they attained majority\textsuperscript{50}. The ordinance was to be applied across the whole country, but no one sought to convince the tribal areas to implement it.

In summarising the various laws that deal with the condition of women, the Aurat Foundation (‘Women’s Foundation’) praises the significant steps achieved. Naeem Mirza writes that:

“Though women of Pakistan have reached a milestone on 12-13 December 2011, when three important bills, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices, 2011, Bill, Acid Control and Acid Crimes Prevention, 2011, Bill, and The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment)

\textsuperscript{47}The political, economic and social progress that has benefited women, even in developed countries, remains unsatisfactory, notably when it comes to breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ blocking promotion to top jobs or changing conventional wisdom about the woman’s place being in the home.

\textsuperscript{48}Following Shaheen Sardar Ali and Rukshanda Naz (1998: 117), one may delimit three principal forms of talaq: “Talaq-ashsan: a single pronouncement of divorce made during a ‘tuhr’ or period between menstruations, followed by abstinence from sexual intercourse for the period of iddat. Talaq-hasan: three pronouncements of divorce during three successive tuhrs, no intercourse taking place during any of the tuhrs. Talaq-i-bidat: three pronouncements of divorce either in one sentence or three separate sentences. The intention to pronounce an irrevocable divorce must be present. But since marriage is in the nature of a civil contract, a restraining stipulation to the effect that this right of the husband may be delegated to the wife, may be inserted as talaq-i-tafweez... this delegated right of divorce may also be given to a third person either conditionally or absolutely and either permanently or for a temporary period.”

\textsuperscript{49}Requesting her husband to grant her a divorce, the wife pays a level of compensation determined by the courts, which can be in monetary form. Following a case settled in 1967 (Khurshid Bibi vs. Muhammad Amin), the prior consent of the husband is no longer required. Apart from *talaq* and *khula*, divorce may also be granted through *mubarat* in case of mutually declared aversion.

\textsuperscript{50}Briefly back in Pakistan during the month of December 2007, the author accompanied a World Vision team in the tehsil of Ughi (Manserha District, NWFP). Social workers were trying to stimulate debate about the role of the genders, and in particular what ‘popular wisdom’ had to say on the subject, when a woman of perhaps forty, but who already conveyed an expression of exhaustion, gave us to understand that life had in a sense decided her fate; she had been married at the age of twelve before she had even attained puberty, and successive pregnancies had been her lot since then.
Bill\textsuperscript{51}, 2011 were passed by the Senate, there is a long way to go and the major challenge in the future would be to see how women parliamentarians and women's rights movement ensure that women of Pakistan in all professions, groups and classes and in all age-groups, benefit from these laws and the de jure equality for women is transformed into de facto equality” (Mirza, December 2011 : 1).

The activist goes on to add:

“Past seven years (2004-2011) are monumental in the context of legislative upsurge on crucial women's rights issues. This is unprecedented in Pakistan's legislative history that seven progressive and positive laws to cover specific areas of women's lives came in during just seven years. After a legislative drought for almost 28 years the breakthrough was made through the enactment of law on 'honour' killings in 2004; in 2006, came the Protection of Women, Act, amending two Hudood Ordinances\textsuperscript{52} […] ; in 2010, two laws came in on preventing and criminalizing the offence of sexual harassment of women and; in the present year, 2011, came these three laws - on customary practices, acid attacks and women in distress” (ibid).

Pakistan has no doubt gone through a dark period. And the political goal of full women's citizenship imagined by the founder of the Republic, proclaimed Islamic back in 1956, is yet to be realized. The country seems to have descended into a parody of these goals with the promulgation in 1979 of the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance. This instrument, emblematic of the intrusion of the state's repressive power into the private lives of believers, requires the courts to base their decisions on a specific interpretation of the injunctions of the Quran and the Sunnah\textsuperscript{53} when returning verdicts after men and women have been found guilty of zina (i.e. to have voluntarily engaged in sexual intercourse outside of the

\textsuperscript{51}This law “aimed at providing financial and legal assistance to the women languishing in jails on account of different allegations and facing extreme hardship” (Aaj TV, 14 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{52}The term hudood - the plural of hadd, which means limit or restriction - refers to the punishments that result from crossing those ‘limits’. This legislation, comprising five texts, limits the eligibility of both religious minorities and Muslim females to bear witness; in this it is based on an interpretation - that is not without ambiguity - of a Quranic text according to which the evidence given by two women is equivalent to that of one man. Apart from the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, the Offence Against Property (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance stipulates that the punishment for anyone guilty of theft is amputation by a surgeon of the right hand. The Offence of Qazaf (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance deals with false accusations of rape, a matter complicated by the discrimination against women who may have been victims or witnesses. The Prohibition (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance reinforces the criminalisation of the consumption of alcohol that applies, since 1977, to all Muslims. While the Penal Code stipulates punishment by six months of prison, a fine of 5,000 rupees or both, the Ordinance requires a punishment of eighty lashes, hence the relevance of the fifth text, the Execution of Punishment of Whipping Ordinance. It is intriguing to note how the judiciary tried to 'balance' the two legal ‘traditions’: while judging the Hudood offences outlined above, judges stubbornly handed down ‘conventional’, prison sentences that were officially no longer permitted, since the Penal Code had been amended.

\textsuperscript{53}The definition offered by the site www.islam-sunnite.com is as follows: “Sunnah: path or practice. The usual practice of the Prophet […] including his words, actions, behavior he tacitly approved or disapproved - what is also qualified as Hadith. The adepts of Hadith add his personal traits (including his physical characteristics) to his definition” (Islam Sunnite, 2006).
legal framework of a marriage – or nikah – duly authorising them to do so). Until the introduction of new legislation\textsuperscript{54} during the period of rule of President Musharraf, female victims of rape had to have the support of four male witnesses of irreproachable religious piety who were present during the act of penetration... who presumably made no effort to prevent the offence. If these conditions could not be met, reporting the crime was a perilous undertaking: the victim herself risked receiving a severe punishment, as she could be suspected of having ceded to ‘temptations of the flesh’. The 1979 Ordinance erased all distinction between zina (generally translated as ‘fornication’ or ‘adultery’) and zina-bil-jabr (rape), while children who had attained puberty were considered to be capable of criminal responsibility. The legislation adopted during 2006 clearly defines the age of maturity, raising it to sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys; steps were taken to free those guilty of zina\textsuperscript{55}.

3.3.2 Pakistan’s Membership of the ‘International Community’

UN Women, an agency of the United Nations Organisation was founded in January 2011, a demonstration of the importance of the role played by international organisations from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted on September 15\textsuperscript{th} 1995, onwards. The action engaged by such bodies was, it should be emphasized, supported by the drafting of feminist strategies aiming to bring to international attention an issue that remains a subject of lively controversy, that of gender equality. In its very first paragraphs, Article I, the ‘Mission Statement’ of the Beijing Declaration stipulates that:

“1. The Platform for Action is an agenda for women’s empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 1/ and at removing all the obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making [...] Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development

2. The Platform for Action reaffirms the fundamental principle set forth in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 2/ adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. As an agenda for action, the Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of

\textsuperscript{54}The following: The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006 (Act VI of 2006), the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004 (Act I of 2005), and the Code of Criminal Procedure (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2006 (XXXV of 2006).

\textsuperscript{55}Under the terms of the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, married women found guilty of zina were to be condemned to death by stoning; the sentence for unmarried women was up to a maximum of one hundred lashes and ten years of prison. In practice, the courts had been more inclined to consider admissible the evidence of men who, content with a denial, remained at liberty. As already indicated, the courts considered that it was sufficient to hand down a prison sentence to convicted females.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)) constituted the tardy conclusion of a process that bore not only the heavy burden paid by women in conflicts but also the necessity for women to themselves take on a full and active role. The exponential growth in information technology had contributed to the acknowledgement of an injustice that had long been deemed simply a ‘fact of life’: the heavy tribute paid by women during armed conflict worsened by the ostracism they often suffer after becoming victims of gender-based sexual violence or abuse. The sub-continent, scene of the bloody Partition of 1947, is a particularly glaring example of this. The female body constitutes a battle-ground for two countries trying to defend their foundational ideology. India advocated a secularism and the harmonious co-existence of different religious communities, the state treating them equally. Pakistan asserted that there were two nations, one Muslim, the other Hindu. The two adversaries implicitly considered that their respective womenfolk should quietly back up their country’s position. The Kosovo conflict in 1999 also helped draw attention to a phenomenon that the Partition of the sub-continent and the birth of Bangladesh out of what had been East Pakistan (1971) had already only too graphically illustrated: that rape was a weapon of choice that allowed peoples to inflict bitter humiliations on one another.

Representatives of Pakistan’s weak civil society looking at Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)) surely feel the grim irony of how the Western states that seat on the Security Council show de facto very little sign of the Enlightenment values that they profess to hold dear. The rise of extremism (religious in character) in the Af-Pak region, from the Red Army’s intervention up to today, serves to illustrate this. Sections of the population, oppressed by poverty and exposed to slogans that distorted the message of Islam, became the foot-soldiers of conflicts about which they had little understanding. Looking for leaders who would give a sense to their quest for a nation that would help out those society had left to fend for themselves, it fell to social workers and activists, female and male, struggling to improve the condition of women – and the masses as a whole, to try to influence a politico-military state that depended at least in part on the West for its funding. Islamabad and Rawalpindi, in their quest for regional power and their concern, from independence in 1947 onwards, about the risk of an Indian invasion, have neglected one dimension: that the social fabric of the country is threatened. In such a context, even the modest contribution of NGOs is precious: through constant pressure on the public authorities, they manage to mitigate some of the worst social problems.

4. Conclusion

It is perhaps here worth quoting the French-Tunisian essayist, Hakim El Karoui, who, in 2010, published a book titled Réinventer l’Occident (Reinventing the West). In an interview with the French daily Libération, the writer spoke of French society that, having struggled to integrate its Jewish population, was now having similar difficulties with regard to French Muslims or French with Muslim origins. He noted that the issue facing not just France but the whole of the West was not so much the difficult transition in ‘Arab and Muslim societies’ as the ‘de-Westernization of the world’. He added that:
“it is not the South that one must correct, educate and stabilize. It is the North that has lost its bearings, and fails to see that it is suffering from excess debt caused by low salaries and the rise in inequality. The historic change is not the rise in power of emerging countries, it is the end of the West’s one-man show” (Daumas, 2 October 2010).

Asked about the concept of the de-Westernization of the world, El Karoui recalled the unfortunate phrase employed by Nicolas Sarkozy in a speech made on July 26th 2007 at the Cheikh-Anta-Diop University in Dakar (Senegal). The French President had dared declare that “the drama of Africa is that the African has been insufficiently present in history”. The essayist, for his part, retorted that:

“it is the Europeans who are exiting from history. The Western model has run out of steam; it is no longer leading in technological innovation, it is no longer able to produce collective ideas, and the West no longer defines the history of the world, since the other countries no longer follow its lead” (ibid).

El Karoui concludes that the West had believed it enjoyed a monopoly of intelligence as well as, one might add, values.

This is doubtless an optimistic vision of the future that appeared quite bleak in a number of states in which Islam is the official religion. Not that these countries do not consider modernisation necessary: it is rather that the issue of human rights for women remains unresolved, since conservative schools of thought invoke a literal interpretation of scripture to oppose any change. Their arguments draw on the period of the revelation, synonymous with the advent of divine reign on Earth. From the colonial period onwards, Western responsibility for what one must term a regression (no doubt transitory but with unfortunate consequences) is undeniable. It is still the case that Muslim men most often refuse to relinquish the idea that their identity is dependent on the restriction of women’s liberty. As for increasing literacy levels and access to education of quality, it remains the privilege of the elite. Men from modest backgrounds tend to refuse that women from similar social groups take advantage of the new international agenda of female empowerment. In which position would men be left were women to suddenly acquire diplomas that their menfolk did not possess?

No doubt the West has been quick in exaggerating the role of Malala Yousafzai, while her young age has greatly accelerated her rise to fame. She looks to defend the Muslim culture to

56To fend off possible criticism of being Euro-centric, we will quote from the introduction of Mohja Kabf’s work (1999: 2): “Challenges to Western representations of the Muslim woman, from feminist as well as Islamic apologist starting points, have tended to ignore the ‘representation’ part and instead contest the realities of ‘the Muslim woman’... The actual condition of Muslim women is a serious and complex topic. Its study, however, does little to explain the development of the Western narrative. This narrative has a genealogy and logic of its own, emerging from developments in Western representations of gender, of the self, and the foreign or Other.”

57Mention might be made here to the case of the Somali-Dutch activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. We will not detail these here, since many Muslim readers would understandably find them offensive or blasphemous.

We would like to emphasize here (without in any way, I hasten to add, implying a parallel with the case of Malala Yousafzai) that it can in a sense be easy to become famous in the West: if one is a female Muslim who employs cheap, easy simplifications that reduce Islam to a few archaic customs (in fact pre-Islamic) that target women. Such a tactic opens the way to a conclusion the Western media are often all too happy to draw implicitly: Islam does not deserve its position at the top table of ‘noble’ religions such as Christianity. Those – especially females – who apply this ‘recipe’ may well achieve rapid fame, as well as the status of a quasi-
which she underlines her attachment, a dimension that North American and European media have tended to ignore. In addition, they make no mention of responsibility of Western powers in the rise of extremist currents that have in a sense appropriated much of the public discourse about Islam. For her part, the young woman:

“hasn’t rocked the boat – she has seldom spoken out against the consequences of the US War on Terror, even though the influx of the Taliban into Swat was a direct result. But when she did speak out, telling Barack Obama that drone strikes would cause terrorism to intensify – there was no mention of the 150 or so schoolchildren that drones have killed in Pakistan– that particular comment was completely ignored in the coverage given to her high-profile meeting” (Chakrabarti, 23 October 2013).

Moreover,

“The American media’s sense of righteousness also displays their Islamophobia – it is a politically correct form of racism that has characterised most of its engagement with this alien culture ever since 9/11. But the same anchors who laud Malala’s courage in standing up to the oppression of religion have for years given free publicity to fundamental Christians who fought to have the theory of evolution expunged from the school curriculum, and to ‘experts’ who deny that climate change is real. They also ignore that Malala and her family are practising Muslims, whose faith in Islam never wavered despite them having to engage in an ideological battle with the Taliban on a daily basis. That despite his bluster, even Ziauddin made a series of compromises with the Taliban in order to keep his school open” (ibid).

The journalist, Ajachi Chakrabarti, dares draw the following conclusion:

“Malala Yousafzai had greatness thrust upon her in the form of an assassin’s bullet. That one brutal, senseless act changed a precocious child with political ambitions into a cause célèbre. But in the reams that have been written about Malala ever since that act, not one concrete suggestion has emerged that will carry tangible benefits for girls, or boys, who are denied an education. Like with all icons, the medium has become more important than the message” (ibid).

One dimension to which little attention has been given is the role of elites in Muslim states. Pakistan, with its sought after strategic position, is a striking example of this. In restricting the population to a ‘traditional’ education, the privileged classes have tried to perpetuate their intellectual, thereby allowing them to demonstrate to those with the same religion of origin its ‘obscurantist’ roots.

Evoking briefly the age of Islam’s glory and its tradition of tolerance, the celebrated Lebanese Maronite French language writer, Amin Maalouf, underlines in his essay *Les identités meurtrières (Murderous Identities)* that he is in no way seeking to “conceal the atrocities that the news throw in our faces every day”, through “dispatches from Algiers, Kabul, Tehran, Upper Egypt or elsewhere’” (Maalouf 1998: 65). But he is at pains to emphasise that his objective is to oppose the idea that there is "on the one hand, a religion, Christianity, that is forever destined to promote modernity, liberty, tolerance and democracy, and one the other, a religion, Islam, bound from its origins to despotism and obscurantism” (ibid: 66). He concludes: “it is erroneous, dangerous and puts in jeopardy any hope in the future” (ibid). He writes: “No religion is without intolerance, but if one were to compare these two ‘rival’ religions [Christian and Muslim], Islam does not come out of it too badly (ibid: 67). Maalouf recalls the disappearance of Muslims from Spain or Sicily, "massacred, exiled or forced to convert". The author emphasises that: “There is, in the history of Islam, from its beginnings, a remarkable capacity to coexist with the Other” (ibid).
advantageous position. As the products typical of the consumer society arrive en masse in the country, the depth of poverty comes across all the more to this foreign (and western) observer, but somehow seems ‘normal’ to many amongst the upper- and middle-class in Pakistan, who remain seemingly indifferent to the level of social inequality. The message of the Taliban, at least for a time, was able to seduce a population disillusioned with political parties whose objective during electoral campaigns was simply to attract votes and which had few qualms as to how those votes might be obtained59. It is a paradox in this multi-faceted country that the courageous work of promoters of peace takes place within a social structure that few if any really question, however unjust it may be. We may perhaps leave the last word to Amin Maalouf, who writes:

“When Muslims of the Third World violently attack the West, it is not simply because they are Muslims and the West is Christian, it is also because they are poor, dominated, ridiculed, and the West is rich... in observing militant Islamist movements of today, I can clearly see the influence of 1960s Third World movements, both in their discourse and in their methods” (Maalouf, 1998: 88-89)

These movements, added Maalouf, grew out of “our era, its tensions, its distortions, its practices, and its lack of hope” (ibid: 89).

5. Bibliography

5.1 Books


Kabf, Mohja, Western Representation of the Muslim Women. From Termagant to Odalisque, University of Texas, Austin, 1999.


59 A social worker active in Mansehra (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) confided to the author that political parties approached family heads, who, after accepting ‘monetary encouragement’, pledged on the holy book that the entire family would vote for the party’s candidate.

It is, incidentally, surprising that western journalists who cover election meetings rarely mention a fact that is crucial for understanding Pakistan’s political life. Parties rent buses to allow participants to get to the rally. The latter generally receive something in the order of 100 rupees per day, as well as free meals, tea and samosas. An organiser with the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), whose identity we will not reveal, told the author that the ‘price’ for female participants was much lower since they invariably jump at the opportunity to undertake such an ‘excursion’.
5.2 United Nations Resolutions


5.3 Articles and reports


5.4 Press articles


### 5.5 Videos