

Abjection Questioned: Reterritorialized Self in I am Malala

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Abstract

This study examines the source of influence on the formation of Malala's self in her memoir I Am Malala, guided by the question: Why is Malala the way she is? We have employed Julia Kristeva's concept of the abjected self to analyze how experiences of discrimination and degradation shape individuality. This qualitative research design analyzes narrative pieces from the memoir to explore the concept of the abjected self. We used convenience sampling to select I Am Malala and employed textual analysis to examine its narrative events and themes related to the abjected self. The analysis was organized around the triangulated themes of paternal influence, challenging abjection, and firm convictions. To validate these themes, we incorporated the views of critics, which further emphasized the formation of individuality. The themed analysis revealed that an individual's behaviors are shaped by their surroundings, particularly by close relationships such as those with parents. Malala's father consistently emphasized the importance of education and declared that his daughter would be as free as a bird, significantly contributing to her convictions. This study concludes that without her father's involvement in shaping her beliefs, Malala may not have become the influential figure she is today and could have led an ordinary life as a Muslim girl. The insights from this analysis can serve as a valuable resource for researchers exploring the formation of self and the influences that shape individual identities.

Keywords: *Abjection, parenting, paternal influence, self, Talibans, young adult*

Introduction

Abjection is the state of being cast out, marginalized, repressed, and ignored. Kristeva (1941) elucidates this notion, "The abject has only the quality of the object- that of being opposed to I" (p. 2). Scott (2010) states that abjection emphasizes, "the processes of exclusion and boundary setting that are components of subject formation" (p.16). Abjection is the state of utter hopelessness, "Kristeva's privileged paradigm of abjection is the corpse confronted in the absence of God, science, or any other salvatory significance" (Keltner, 2011, p. 45). To be abjected is almost to face the death, "The abject represents the excluded and repugnant effects of the superego; physical effluences, decay and death" (Davis, 1995, p.8). Kristeva "from her examples of curdling milk, dung, vomit and corpses she places abjection as a process of jettisoning that is part of oneself" (Pournami, 2024, p. 37) and shows that abjection is the extreme degree of

domination and makes the subject look as the absent being, “Abjection can render visible an imaginary that remains for the most part invisible” “whose excluded status prevents them appearing as subjects” (Chanter, 2008, p. 2). In regards to the historical use of the term ever since Kristeva used the term first in 1941, Phillips (2014) traces the history of the term abjection, it “encompasses a kind of borderline uncertainty – ambiguous, horrifying and polluting” (p. 20) and adds, “Judith Butler employs Kristeva’s concept of abjection to discuss the often problematic embodiment of gender and sexuality” (2014, p. 20). This portrays the picture of the conceptual establishment: abjection is the most horrible situation a person is in, if a person is abjected, the identity is annihilated.

Malala was going to be the subject of abjection, nonetheless, her empowerment by her parent, brought to the reterritorealized self, ‘ reterritorealization refers to the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old’ (Smith & Hall, 2012, p. 209). Malala’s abjected self was deterritorialized and her parent’s influence on her supported her to remain reterritorealized. Reyes (2020) affirms the purpose of reterritorialization, stating, “Reterritorialization relocates the relations to private ownership” (p. 114). Evans (2008) also discusses the function of this phenomenon: “Reterritorialization could be said to redeem absolute deterritorialization” (p. 41). Hansen (2000) shows the need of reterritorealization, “disjunction testifies to the necessity for reterritorealization” (p. 293). Swirski (2013) joins Hansen (2000) in discussing why this phenomenon is required, “creative capacities of reterritorealization” are required for” new spaces and places” (p. 149) In addition, Thiel (2016) emphasizes the necessity of reterritorealization as it offers “new ways of being and knowing” (p. 101). Hence, reterritorealization is the necessity of a person to come out of deterritorialization. Malala’s deterritorialization was substituted by the reterritorealization because of her parent’s role.

Ever since its publication in 2013 A. D., the text *I am Malala* has drawn abundant scholarly attention. Undoubtedly, the scholarly pursuits revolve around the themes of her campaigns in favor of the educated mass. For instance, Quasim and Graham (2021) analyze the autobiographical narrative and find that “her identity is often fluid” (p. 597). “She has created manifold subject positions to arbitrate her national, gender, and racial identities” (p. 601). Jamil and Asif (2024) observe that the language in the narrative “has been appropriated” “to promote ... the specific political propaganda against Pakistan” (p. 982). In the similar vein, Khoja-Moolji (2015) argues that the memoir reveals “kinds of knowledges about Muslim girls, women, and men” (p. 539). In an article Sadaf (2017) “aims to highlight conflicting reader reactions in Pakistan and in the Western World” (p. 2). Jadoon and Zahra (2019) “point out ethnographic generalizations as testimonials to the propagation of Islamophobic myths” (p. 501). The criticisms around Malala’s text

emphasize either the Islamic situatedness or her campaign for the female's education. This article, thus, establishes the research niche- the self of Malala and its genesis.

This study covers the extraordinary parenting of Malala. The society in which Malala was born never encouraged girls to get the education, principally, the education to the girls and women. Her advocacy for the girl's education is exemplary. She shares her ideas that her beliefs and convictions on the significance of education are the direct result of her parents' investment on her. More than anything else, it is her father who instilled the love of education. Despite the physical attack on her by the terrorists, she is bolder to her great cause. Notwithstanding those hurdles in the way of Malala, she continues her campaign and turns out a victor. The sectional presentation of Malala in her autobiographical text shows her father's love of the education. This article, thus, attempts to prove the shaping influence of a parent on the overall character of the children.

Methods

This study focuses on analyzing the sources of individual behavior in response to the research question: *Why is Malala the way she is?* We collected specific narrative cases that highlight how Malala's father played a significant role in addressing the challenges faced by girls in the Islamic community. The selection of these narratives was based on a convenience sampling procedure. In addition, we reviewed critics' perspectives to support our understanding of the selected narratives. We also considered insights from these critics in relation to Malala's experiences and the broader context of Muslim epistemologies.

The theoretical concept of abjection, introduced by Julia Kristeva, was used to describe the experiences of Muslim girls. Upon analyzing the relevant narrative pieces, we developed coded themes, including parental influence and self-construction, challenging abjection, and the development of firm convictions. We developed codes, categories, and themes to establish a framework for our analysis. This coding effort guided us in interpreting the data and categorizing the themes. The triangulated themes were formulated to support our conclusions. The analytical framework discussed the themes and highlighted the underlying connections between the formation of individuality, the role of parents, and the sources of Malala's convictions.

In this study, we emphasized ethical considerations to ensure a respectful and responsible analysis of Malala's narrative. We acknowledge the cultural and contextual importance of her experiences and strive to accurately convey her voice and story throughout our analysis.

Results and Discussion

We analyze the shaping influences on the formation of Malala's extraordinary identity, prompting us to explore sections such as self-construction, parental influence, and the development of her convictions. The analysis is fundamentally informed by the question: Why is Malala the way she is?

Malala's Construction of Self and Parental Influence

Malala, a Pakistani Muslim who received the Nobel Prize at the age of seventeen, has been recognized for her courage and ability to endure hardships. For her, education is the top priority, and she wants to see children wearing school uniforms and having pens and books instead of being subjected to child labor. The sight of children laboring instead of holding books and pens troubles her the most. She finds the passion in her that education changes the people's life and the level of insights. For this, she is campaigning on children's education basically girls education. Her dedication to children's education has earned her significant global recognition. For Malala, a girl's education represents a dream come true. Malala gives prominence to the girls' education above anything else. Her staunch belief and passions in the girls' education have been prized and are worth the appreciation and reputation.

She was born in a beautiful valley of Pakistan known as Swat in a small family, poor economy but rich in values. The great thing for Malala is her father gave her education in society where girls were deprived of education. In her society, Talibans created a fearful condition and people dreaded their presence. They threatened and even kidnapped girls just for wanting to go to school. In chapter entitled "Who is Malala?" Malala situates the fear she faced mentioning that she would check the doors of her house before sleeping, not only that she would keep the curtains open so that she would be able to see everything (Yousafzai & Christina, 2013, p.199). The cases by Talibans tortured Malala so much that the activities of Taliban engraved the mission of her life.

Despite such a terrorizing situation Malala had spoken for a grave cause and it had an impact. She spoke in favor of compulsory education for all. How could she do so? The answer is her father empowered her and he always told her that she could get what she asked of her life. The father's bold answer that he did not clip her wings demonstrates that he inspired her free will and the thinking abilities for the humanity. This is all a father has to do and can do if he thinks of doing. Her father fostered the will to win, Malala became so. In fact, Malala was convinced in her indomitable self. Malala reveals her father's influence on the formation of her individuality: "My father always said, 'Malala will be free as a bird'" (Yousafzai & Christina, 2013, p. 19).

In terms of guardianship and construction of self, there seems harmony in I am Malala. In most of the adult literature, parents stood as hindrance, as overprotective, sometimes they play the role like repressive power, and they are abjected by their own parents. However, Malala's situation is different; she received full support and encouragement from her parents in shaping her spirit. In every step she took, she felt the presence of her father. In this sense, her parents were entirely supportive of Malala's mission.

Parenting and Malala

Parenting is a subject that one often does not fully understand until becoming a parent. After being the parent, one barely learns about it because there is very less time for learning. It is very complex issue because it is everyday issue that every parent needs to know. The problem with the parenting is that the concept and the role of parenting is constantly changing (Mariani, 2008, p. 23). Since the earlier knowledge does not help very sufficiently to the posterity, the parenting has been really challenging. The changes in the parenting styles are changing for various reasons. They range from the technological outburst to the modern approaches of living. The urbanization, the industrialization along with other changes taking places due to the globalization bring a lot of complication in the aspect of the parenting. However, the popularly known parenting styles are democratic parenting, autocratic parenting and child-centred parenting. The parenting styles are evolving daily because of the changes in the approaches. The parenting has been determined by various aspects as mentioned before. One of the factors is the economic sufficiency. The cost of parenting differs as per the economic status of the parents (Arendell, 1997, p. 23). How much does it cost for the parenting cannot be answered so straightforwardly because the economic status of a family determines it. However, the economic status does not always determine the values that some families teach. The case in point that this article discusses is that Malala's father taught his daughter the values that the well-to-do family would not have done. This is such a contradictory issue. What determines the high quality parenting is always a contentious issue. Sometimes, the poor family provides the high quality parenting while the rich parents may not provide the high quality parenting. The determination of the quality of the parenting is a difficult thing. Presumably, this is what the notion of resource paradox refers to.

Whatever, the child-centered parenting is the most respected and loved parenting (Burgio, 2014, p. 6). No matter what the economic status one's parents have, the child-centered parenting is considered effective. Even in the case of Malala, her father is committed to provide the freedom required to exercise her free will. Since her father helped her utmost in bringing the inner strength she had to the outer part, she has been able to be an example. Her personality type is the result of her parenting situation. Had

her father been autocratic not to let her exercise the free will, get her guts out and develop herself, expecting Malala to be the powerful one is simply a big lie. Malala's fondness of her father has been explicit in the text, "My father loved to write poetry... he read a poem about peace. It was mentioned as the most inspiring in the closing speech" (Yousafzai & Christina, 2013, p. 69). Malala's case of the influence clearly demonstrates that she had been tuned to her father.

Challenging Abjection: The Mission of Malala

Malala has a purpose of her life. She wants the end of the abjection. She could realize the ignorance that her society had suffered from. Apart from everybody's beliefs in her society, she could conceive the idea of the importance of education. The sense of being educated in the society was not acceptable. It was more like the cave of Plato. As Plato writes in his Allegory of the Cave, those who are accustomed to the darkness do not love the light. Same is true even with the people who are habituated to the light. If the people who are accustomed to the light are exposed to the dark, their eyes are dazzled. The society in which Malala grew up treated her in a similar way. When she campaigns for the education for the girls, she had to face the physical assault. Plato comes true here. Those in the dark cannot tolerate the rays of the light. However, Malala seems to be very bold to introduce the light to the society. She is committed to introduce the education to the people. The eradication of the abjection is her mission. The only mission of Malala: the end of abjection; the initiation of the educated life for the girls and women. Her mission is the articulation of her contribution to humanity at large. As her father declared that she would be free as a bird, she maintains, "I wondered how a free daughter could ever be" (Yousafzai & Christina, 2013, p. 19).

In addition, she needed education for her self- created "me" and "I". Whole book is about Malala's attitude in process of growing. She finds identity in two ways personal identity of Malala and girls identity. Kroger (1996) defines, "Identity formation is synthesizing process, synthesis between self and other balance between self and other" (p. 4). One's identity gets recognized when there is the connection between the self and the other. To be precise, the identity is all about the connection between the self and the other. One idea a person thinks does not contribute to the identity one owns to project until one is accepted by the public in the immediate surrounding and the acceptance by the self.

However, Malala is crossing the border to eradicate the abjection imposed in the field of education, to make her father's dream come true to develop her "self" and the "soul" of girls. Malala is crossing the taboo means she is crossing border. She had undergone various liminal phases in order to construct herself. Even she was attacked by bomb in her head. This event is symbolic because the attack on head means attacking her creative power, her creative guardian. This attack turns as the important step which helps in the



transformation of her identity. After attack she is more aware of educational identity, her awareness helped for the welfare of entire girl's education. Her desire for education didn't complicate but compliment her growth. This complication and the complementing of her desire brought her to the limelight. Her desire got more prominent.

Because of confidence enhancing parenthood, Malala seemed more mature than her age born in strictly patriarchal society but Malala was never "othered" from her parents. Terrorism worsened the state of girls but Malala was always given positive insight from her parents in this sense her parents way of guardianship can be called as "good guardianship". Like many young adults, Malala is filled with hopes and dreams. While relationships with friends often take precedence over those with parents during this period, Malala's relationship with her parents is exceptionally intimate, setting her apart from other young adults. The exceptional parenting even in the community that regarded the capability of the girls is truly exceptional for Malala. When her neighbouring condition did not value the education of the girls, her parents valuing it and promoting her education is really important.

As in the world of plays and dramas, the entry of the villains has been clear in the life of Malala. Good things in her life is that her parents were supportive enough for the life of her choice. The love of education has been very pivotal. But the entry of Talibans in her life has been the act of villains. They disturb her mission. This is a general fact that her campaign has been problematized. She seems more determined to her mission. The acts of the villains in one's mission are an ordeal for the test of one's efforts. The test by fire in the life of Malala is shown in the text. Malala has been a heroic figure. Her efforts to campaign the cause have been celebrated by the people around the world.

Now and Again: Malala's Family for her Firm Convictions

As has been argued, the family, particularly the parental influence is remarkable in the shaping of the personality traits of a person. The family, the parents of Malala had such an influence. Obviously, her own efforts must not be undermined. However, her unwavering convictions on the importance of education have the direct legacy from her parents, particularly father: "When my father tells me stories of his childhood, he always says that though Baba was a difficult man, he gave him the most important gift-the gift of education" (Yousafzai & Christina, 2013, p. 25). Time and again, Malala has the credit to her father who would often acknowledge his father for the gift of education that would set them free.

Malala's family remains closely bonded despite the terrible events occurring in their home. Her brothers provide a source of love, comfort, and familiarity. When she was taken abroad to recover, her family stood by her side, allowing her to experience a carefree childhood in a beautiful place, surrounded by people who love her. However, she

was forced to grow up quickly when the Taliban came to her valley. One of the most important lessons she learned from her parents was that honesty is the best policy, which she realized after feeling shame for stealing from a neighbor. Since then, Malala has made it a point to be honest, even when others are not. Her father constantly reminds her that she is as free as a bird, and Malala has been fortunate to receive an education. She consistently fights for freedom, both for young girls and for people as a whole.

Malala's love of free thinking and advocacy has the potential to make the world a better place. Her campaign for the spread of education demonstrates the significant impact of parental influence on one's ideals. What is even more remarkable is that, despite the circumstances into which one is born, one's life ideals are shaped by parental convictions and personal interests. This holds true in Malala's case as well.

Conclusion

The memoir by Malala intends to establish various nodes of reputation for Malala. This study has asserted that it is her father who has the prominent influence on her decisions against Talibans. Presumably, other girls in her community could not act the way Malala did only because their paternal influences were different. This study about the challenge to abjection with the indomitable nature of self demonstrates that the parenting efforts are worth the investment and the parenting styles need to be increasingly considered. This broader spectrum of influences on a person's individuality merits an exhaustive study. To iterate, individuality and its constitution are the consequences of the intimate influences of parents. Thus, these sources must be carefully framed so that a better society and community is born.

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