

## Islamic Different Views as A Factor of Conflict in Malala Yousafzai's Autobiography

Wahdaniya Mustika Asmarabillah<sup>1✉</sup>, Ramadhina Ulfa Nuristama<sup>2</sup>

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

### Article Info

Article History:  
Received September 2025  
Accepted October 2025  
Published March 2026

#### Keywords:

Islamic views; Malala;  
Taliban; post-colonialism;  
marginalization

### Abstract

This research explores the different Islamic views as factors influencing the power dynamic in Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, *I Am Malala*. Drawing on a postcolonial theoretical framework, this study is grounded in Spivak's concept of marginalization. The researchers applied a qualitative method to examine how both conservative and progressive interpretations of Islam serve as tools of oppression and resistance. It is revealed that religious views have a role in framing the social conventions and controlling the dynamics of power and resistance, as shown in the book, that the Taliban's actions of ruling the Pakistanis were rooted in their conservative interpretation. At the same time, Malala appears as a symbol of empowerment by capitalizing on the progressive Islamic beliefs to challenge the conservative ideologies. Eventually, this research contributes to the study of postcolonial literature through autobiographical works, which implies the intersection of religion, culture, and resistance in South Asian.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion as a collection of beliefs serves as a basis for cultural and social conventions. Even so, its understanding varies greatly depending on a range of factors, including historical influences, socio-political contexts, and individual doctrinal or philosophical frameworks. A study by Iosif Rivis-Tipei (2023) highlights the diversity and evolution of these frameworks, revealing how religious ideals strongly influence ethical considerations and moral norms. Within this wide-ranging religious framework, Islam demonstrates principles of diversity anchored in the five pillars that underline justice, compassion, and social responsibility (Arianto et al., 2023). Muslims use these principles to make moral decisions, figure out what to do, and find spiritual fulfillment. Nonetheless, the application of its principles is frequently dependent on the various interpretative lenses molded by linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts. As noted by Mualim et al. (2024), Islamic interpretation is linked to political structures, as its religious values contribute to the lawmaking, governance, and public ethics in many Muslim-majority countries. Thus, the plurality of Islamic interpretations forms how its principles are manifested, ranging from inclusive and reformist to rigid and exclusionary.

In Pakistan, traditionalist Islamic interpretations have been used to justify the Taliban's actions in oppressing Pakistanis. Shakuntala (2014) elaborates on the abuse of power in conservative religious ideologies, such as those performed by the Taliban, to carry out oppressive policies. Religion acted as an instrument of political control under the Taliban's rule in Pakistan. Consequently, selective interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith were used to validate gender inequality, restrict education, and restrain freedom of speech. Such phenomena are vividly depicted in Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*. Other than a personal testimony, the book serves as a socio-political commentary on how extremist interpretations of Islam sustain oppression, primarily against women. As a young Pakistani woman growing up in the Swat Valley during the early 2000s, Malala provides firsthand insight into the intersection of religion, politics, and gender. Yousafzai's life experiences under the Taliban's repressive regime uncover the catastrophic consequences of an authoritarian form of Islam (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). Nevertheless, Yousafzai did reclaim Islam as a source of empowerment and resistance through her narrative. She consistently challenges the Taliban's interpretation by invoking Islamic principles that emphasize justice, knowledge, and equality.

Plenty of previous studies have examined Yousafzai's *I Am Malala* through various critical lenses. However, in terms of how religious interpretation itself functions as a field of power and resistance, it remains underexplored. Bibi et al. (2025), in their article entitled *From Silence to Speech, Disrupting Patriarchy and Extremism: Subaltern Resistance in I Am Malala*, examine Yousafzai's activism considering Gramsci's ideas about hegemony and counter-hegemony. Their analysis foregrounded ideological struggle but overlooked the role of religious discourse. Similarly, the thesis written by Bist (2015) titled *Subjugation of Muslim Women and Their Resistance to Patriarchal Structure in Malala Yousafzai's I am Malala: A Girl Stood for Education and Shot by Taliban* applies Islamic feminism to showcase Yousafzai's stance for gender equality while ignoring –the inherent conflict of religious interpretations. Meanwhile, Jadoon (2024) and Khan et al. (2023) have applied a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework to depict Yousafzai's resistance to patriarchal domination. However, rather than use it as an active discursive mechanism, they treat Islam merely as a cultural context. Lastly, Khurshid and Pitts (2017) titled their article *Malala: the story of a Muslim girl and a Muslim nation. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* explores the Western representations through orientalist and critical discourse frameworks, focusing on external perceptions of Islam rather than internal reinterpretation.

In contrast, the researchers situate Yousafzai's autobiography, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*, within a post-colonial theory of Spivak's Subaltern conceptual framework in this study. The aim is to investigate the impact of different Islamic interpretations, both conservative and progressive, on the construction of oppression and resistance. By emphasizing religion as a discursive field where power circulates and voice is contested, this study extends the discussion beyond feminist and ideological readings. Hence, this study offers a deeper examination of how faith operates simultaneously as an instrument of control and a means of liberation within postcolonial Muslim society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### *The Theory of Post-colonialism*

The researchers consider the conceptual framework of postcolonialism to apply to this study. Postcolonial theory explores the social, cultural, and political effects of colonialism on earlier colonized societies. Praveen (2016) explains that the primary aim of

post-colonialism is the cynical examination of the colonizer-colonized relationship that started on the earliest days of expansionism. Post-colonialism serves as a tool for a critical assessment of the inherited structure's role in shaping social orders by emphasizing power dynamics, marginalization, and resistance. Gayatri Spivak also offers a concept in postcolonial theory called the subaltern, which examines the voicelessness of marginalized groups. For that reason, this theoretical framework is typically relevant for analyzing the intersection of power dynamics stemming from diverse religious interpretations in Yousafzai's autobiography, *I Am Malala*.

### ***Marginalization***

Antonio Gramsci first introduced the Subaltern theory and was later adapted by Gayatri Spivak in her essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), under the post-colonial critique. However, Spivak's subaltern framework explores how marginalized groups and individuals are silenced within controlling systems of power and knowledge. The core irony, as Spivak argues, is that the subalterns' realization of their own rights was triggered by their very acts of objecting to unjust power and inequality (Praveen, 2016). Additionally, the term subaltern refers to those who are excluded from representation and unable to express themselves within the governing structure. Spivak (1988) argues that subaltern voices are not merely muted but thoroughly repressed by sociopolitical and ideological mechanisms that define what can be known and who can speak. In consequence, these theoretical lenses help the researchers analyze the contrast between religious views as both instruments of oppression and of resistance in Yousafzai's journey.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The researchers applied a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the contrast of Islamic interpretation in Yousafzai's autobiography; *I am Malala*. Accordingly, the primary data of the study is in the form of sentences and phrases from the autobiography. Whilst the secondary data includes scholarly studies on Malala's work, discourses on Taliban oppression, Islamic perspectives, and women's empowerment. Therefore, the data are arranged thematically and examined through narrative analysis to uncover patterns and meaning. In addition, the researchers act as the instrument, collecting data through close reading and identifying relevant secondary sources for the study's central issue. This method helps the researchers to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue under study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Postcolonial narratives are most likely to portray the dynamics of power and resistance, manifested through cultural and ideological struggles. Based on Ashcroft et al. (2007) The postcolonial literature is essentially about writing back against the dominant colonial authority, whether through social action or by celebrating the resilience of indigenous culture. In Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, the Taliban, representing conservative Islamic views, wield power through oppressive actions. In contrast, Malala's family and other women resisting such oppression embody resistance, particularly in advocating for education. The Taliban's interpretation of Islamic teachings is primarily depicted through their actions, yet Malala remains a fearless representative of Muslim women by challenging their dominance with unwavering courage.

### **Taliban's Islamic Views**

#### *Taliban's Power*

A community will most likely not do anything harmful if they do not have the right amount of power. So does the Taliban, a militant group operating in the northwestern region of Pakistan, particularly along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. As shown in Malala's autobiography, 90,000 people have been trained to become Taliban fighters by Pakistan's intelligence service and even hold the rights to be the “Pakistan’s consul general in Herat” (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 79). This alone indicates that the Taliban has power in several areas of Pakistan, along with their religious conservative teachings. Especially in the Swat Valley, the land Malala grew up on was more conservative than most areas of Pakistan. As evidenced during the Afghan jihad, many young men had received free education through the madrasas built by Saudi money (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). The matter marks the possibility as to why most Pakistanis, especially the Taliban, have conservative Islamic views. It is reflected in Mullah Ghulamullah's—Taliban and Ulema's representative—action while confronting Ziauddin Yousafzai. In Malala's autobiography, Ghulamullah claims himself as a representative of good Muslims and assumes that Yousafzai's girls' school is “haram and a blasphemy” (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p.86). Having this much power together with a conservative Islamic view has become a factor of not only women's oppression but also those with progressive Islamic views as well.

#### *Taliban's Views on Women and Progressive Islamic People*

Power can be harnessed for noble purposes or twisted for nefarious ends. The latter is what represents the Taliban since setting foot in Pakistan, especially the Swat Valley.

Throughout the years, they have spread their teachings of Islamic conservative views with rudeness and intimidation. As Malala has acknowledged, “*the women would not be attacked if they went to the markets, but the Taliban would shout at them and threaten them until they stayed at home*” (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 106). Additionally, during the battle of Swat—the war between Pakistani forces and Taliban, not only the police, MPs, and politicians were targeted, but also “*people who were not observing purdah, wearing the wrong length of beard or the wrong kind of shalwar kamiz*” as well (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 119). These emphasize the oppressive actions the Taliban has taken against the people of the same religion with different views. If their hatred towards Muslims with different perspectives is that much, the abomination they have for other religions would likely be much bigger than that. Malala stated in her autobiography that she had heard the Taliban destroyed girls’ schools and blew up giant Buddha statues—, as a cultural reference (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). In accordance, the Taliban’s Islamic views with the power they held set as a factor of the resistance, especially women, in Malala’s life journey.

## **Malala's Islamic Views**

### ***Malala's Background***

As iron sharpens iron, so does a good environment shape a good life. Malala Yousafzai is the daughter of Ziauddin Yousafzai, an educational activist who built a school for both girls and boys in Pakistan. Malala's birth was momentous for Ziauddin despite how Pakistanis perceived a newborn daughter (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). Malala later grew up with the knowledge her parents, mainly her father, had taught throughout her life. Once, Malala disagreed with her *Qari sahib's* opinion on Benazir Bhutto, and she told her father only to hear advice that she should “*only learn what God says as His words are divine messages, which she is free and independent to interpret*” (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 121). Another thing Malala’s familiar with, as the daughter of an activist, is attending some of her father's meetings. Malala loves being part of Ziauddin's encounter, for his bravery is something to admire. One time, Ziauddin writes, “*Please don't harm my children because the God you believe in is the same God they pray to every day. You can take my life, but please don't kill my schoolchildren,*” to the Daily Azadi newspaper is evidence of his mindfulness (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 110). These occurrences indicate that Ziauddin, as a father, has a significant influence on shaping Malala's personality and behavior.

### ***Malala's Response to the Taliban's Islamic Views***

Growing up as a girl faced with repressive women stereotypes in the early 2000s was not a pleasant memory. However, it is fortunate that Yousafzai remains broad-minded in their attempt to challenge such repressive measures. Being nurtured by that kind of family has shaped Malala into a good thinker and perhaps become one like his father. Malala has been involved in activism since she was a child, inspired by her revolutionary father. As she has been joining her father in the girls' educational campaign, she has been targeted by journalists seeking to interview her (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). This lasted until later; she was only eleven, but looked older, and a voice from a young girl is what the media has been searching for (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013). Her courage has emerged during this time as she has a belief:

‘In my heart was the belief that God would protect me. If I am speaking for my rights, for the rights of girls, I am not doing anything wrong. It is my duty to do so. God wants to see how we behave in such situations. There is a saying in the Quran, ‘The falsehood has to go and the truth will prevail.’ If one man, Fazlullah, can destroy everything, why can’t one girl change it? I wondered. I prayed to God every night to give me strength’ (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013, p. 127).

This passage shows how deeply Malala cares for her fellow women and their struggles. By doing activities such as interviews and writing, Malala contributes to the women's resistance movement in Pakistan. This is her response to the conservative Islamic teachings of the Taliban.

### **CONCLUSION(S)**

In conclusion, differences in how religious teachings are perceived can lead to outcomes as immense as oppression and resistance, as seen in Malala's life journey. As this study aimed to analyze how different Islamic views contribute to Malala's resistance, the researcher applied a postcolonial framework to interpret data from Malala's autobiography. It is found that the Taliban, as the parties with power and conservative Islamic views, have done oppressive actions towards Pakistani women, especially. On the other hand, Malala is the representative of Pakistani women, who are being oppressed, and choose to stand up for her people. These events are influenced by several factors, including the sources of power and a person's developmental background. In summary, the interplay between power, diverse religious interpretations, and cultural backgrounds

contributes to determining both the oppression performed by the Taliban and the resistance represented by Malala Yousafzai.

## REFERENCES

- Arianto, S. D. P., Nuristama, R. U., & Maretta, N. A.-Z. (2023). Exploring the Representation of Islamic Ideals in the Contemporary Digital Narrative: An Analysis on literacycloud.org. *ICONITIES (International Conference on Islamic Civilization and Humanities)*, 402–434.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: The Key Concepts*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003497561>
- Bibi, H., Khan, R., & Shehzin, N. (2025). From Silence to Speech, Disrupting Patriarchy and Extremism: Subaltern Resistance in I Am Malala. *Journal of Applied Linguistic and Tesol*, 8(3), 414–426.
- Bist, J. (2015). *Subjugation of Muslim Women and Their Resistance to Patriarchal Structure in Malala Yousafzai's I am Malala: A Girl Stood for Education and Shot by Taliban* [Tribhuvan University]. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14540/16370>
- Iosif Ravis-Tipei. (2023). The Role of Religion in Contemporary Society – Mapping a Research Itinerary. *Rais Journal for Social Sciences*, 7(2), 113–119.
- Jadoon, A. (2024). Questioning Freedom: A Transnational Feminist Critique of the Representation of Muslim Women in I am Malala? *World Journal of English Language*, 14(2), 418–426. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n2p418>
- Khan, H., Habib, M. A., & Bhatt, Z. I. (2023). The Problem of Asymmetric Representation: The Racialization, Marginalization And Deservedness in I Am Malala by Christina Lamb and Malala Yousafzai. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(3), 1388–1382. <http://www.webology.org>
- Khurshid, A., & Pitts, B. (2017). Malala: the story of a Muslim girl and a Muslim nation. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 40(3), 424–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1346587>
- Mualim, R., Zaman, B., & Kususiyanah, A. (2024). Islam, Democracy, and Human Rights: A Critical Approach. *Proceeding of ICCoLaSS: International Collaboration Conference on Law, Sharia and Society, June, 26–28*.
- Praveen, A. (2016). Postcolonialism: Edward Said & Gayatri Spivak. *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, 5(8), 47–50.
- Shakuntala. (2014). Religion and Society: Examining the influence of religious beliefs on social structures. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 2(1), 726–731.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak by Gayatri Spivak* (pp. 666–111).
- Yousafzai, M., & Lamb, C. (2013). *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.