



HE NAMED ME MALALA

Malala's Voice, Vision, and Leadership

— CARLA PENHA VASCONCELOS

One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change
the world.

— Malala Yousafzai

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that “Everyone has the right to education” (United Nations, 1948, art. 26). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2016) education is “a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits” (p. 1). Girls’ education is part of the second and third millennium goals of achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowering women that are being revised in the frame of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ Even though education is a human right, the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund estimated that more than 60

¹ For information about the Millennium Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development see: United Nations web available on: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>



millions of girls are out of school (UNICEF, 2015). Most of these girls are denied this basic human right to education for the simple fact that they were born women.

Even though we identify progress towards the achievement of universal girls' education, today millions of girls still experience exclusion and discrimination from the educational system, especially in developing countries. Many organizations and governments are creating and implementing policies, programs and practices towards reducing the number of girls who are not in school. They know that girls' education is a powerful means that will permit the achievements of other goals, such as the combat of poverty around the world. The UNICEF (2015) affirms that "Providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty. . . . When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come" (p. 1).

Millions of girls do not have the opportunity to attend school because of different barriers that derive from culture, religion, political and economic reasons. Many communities believe that a girl is less valued in society and must be responsible for the household and families (some prioritizing marriage and pregnancy in early ages). Also, because of poverty, many families do not have access to enough food or water giving priority to nourish exclusively boys instead of both boys and girls. And, many communities around the world are suffering multiple oppressions by abusive regimes and terrorist groups.



When girls have access to education, they have a remarkably positive effect on their own lives, their families and their communities. They acquire the ability of removing multiple barriers and pursuing other rights that will help society towards the achievement of social, cultural, political and economic development. One example of a girl who discovered the beauty, magic and importance of learning and developing knowledge, is Malala Yousafzai. Malala is a girl that since her childhood has valued education, but when the Taliban started closing and bombing schools in the Pakistan's Swat Valley, she experienced the real oppression of being threatened by a patriarchal and terroristic system that denies millions of girls access to education.

The objective of this paper is to dive into Malala Yousafzai's life while analyzing her film *He Named Me Malala* from a film technique perspective. Moreover, we will look towards her story identifying how she finds her voice and creates her vision while giving leadership lessons during her tireless fight for the education rights of the millions of girls, first in Pakistan and later all around the world.

FILM ANALYSIS

When I was little, many people would say, “Change Malala's name. It's a bad name. It means sad.” But my father would always say, “No, it has another meaning—bravery.”

— Malala Yousafzai

He Named Me Malala by David Guggenheim is a



persuasive documentary with the purpose of addressing an extremely important social justice issue (Barsam & Monahan, 2016, p. 74) as it is about the girls' right to education. The film depicts Malala Yousafzai's life story before and after she was attacked by a Taliban insurgent on her way to school. At the beginning of the film we are immersed in the story of Ziauddin's decision to name his daughter Malala after a Malalai of Maiwand, a female warrior from Afghanistan that encouraged her people to fight in a war in the 19th century. The story of this great female warrior is illustrated by the technique of animation, which is a type of motion picture that will make the audience dive into the story of Malala's family and her magic childhood (p. 111). The narrative of the film is composed by a storytelling technique that contrasts images of animation, life action, old videos and photographs that explains and delineates Malala's life. While using hand-drawn animation, the movie presents beautiful *mise-en-scènes* of the Swat Valley with its rivers, mountains, and the city that ends by influencing the audience's emotional response to Malala's life in Pakistan (p. 165). The multiple colorful scenes show the happiness of Malala's birth, as a baby living at her father's school, and later as a child that discovers her love for education. It creates a magical environment around Malala's life, as if she was born with a special objective and destiny around education.

The director David Guggenheim opts to present a story that is mainly focused on the relationship of daughter and father, and how this relationship creates a powerful value system in their family. In order to explain how Malala found her voice,



the documentary starts illustrating how her father was capable of finding his voice first as a child and later as teacher, and finally as an educational activist. In Ziauddin's words, "If you keep silent, you lose the right to exist" (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 2015). Mr. Ziauddin discovered himself as an educator that believed and practiced equality. He explains that, "education is power. It is just a light in complete darkness" (Daily Mail, 2014). Malala's father truly believed that girls had the right to education and he raised his daughter Malala according to this value.

To illustrate how Malala finds her voice, the film gracefully illustrates the environment and the family culture where she was raised. Her father's school is the place where she discovered her love for education, even before being able to say her first words. A dynamic narrative in flashback, with cuts from the present to a past event (Barsam & Monahan, 2016, p. 497). It presents her story as a child and a teenager that becomes an educational activist that denounces the Taliban terrorism in Pakistan. In consistently contrasting of timelines, the film uses parallel techniques that encourages the audience to consider the similarities and the differences of the narrative and the scenes in different times of Malala's life (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, p. 16). Through these techniques, her past and present lives are constantly merging throughout the whole documentary.

During the present narrative of the film we identify two parts of Malala's life. In one part, at home, we see Malala as a teenager living a happy life with her family, playing with her



brothers, and studying for her tests. In other part, we see the public figure of Malala as an international activist that visits girls all around the world with the objective of inspiring them to study and raising their voice against injustice. She uses her powerful image to call the attention of the international community and the global leaders to the reality of millions of children around the world. Her image helps to fundraise to the Malala Fund, an organization that works for girls' education, to empower and unlock their potential, while raising their voice (Malala Fund, 2016).

The editing is the basic creative force in the film (Barsam & Monahan, 2016, p. 496). It gives the possibility of illustrating her past and present lives in a very emotional way. Among the images of Malala's different realities we find the scenarios of warfare illustrated by the editing of multiple videos, photos and audios from that time. One of the most emotional parts of the film is presented when her father is narrating the time when Malala was shot. The director decides to use photos of the actual bus where Malala was attacked, followed by images of a flashback reconstruction when Malala was taken to the hospital, first in Pakistan, and later in England. The scenes are presented with short shots that show close-ups and extreme close-ups of the hospital equipment, and the intravenous tubes, followed by images in fast motion that accelerate the actions during the scenes (p. 497). The fast motion also caused blurs in some frame transitions scenes at the hospital room, expressing the confusion and uncertainty of that moment and time when Malala was in coma (p. 505).



Finally, during the film we can see how, from the beginning to the end, the director decides to show images of Malala's present life expressing the idea of her constant movement around the world. During many times when she is traveling by car, we identify multiple close-up shots of Malala looking out of the window. These scenes are constantly communicating her pure and true emotions and feelings while creating proximity and connection with the audience.

MALALA'S LEADERSHIP LESSONS

This is where I will begin, but it is not where I will stop. I will continue this fight until I see every child in school.

— Malala Yousafzai

Looking towards Malala's story we identify how at the age of only 11 she was able to find her voice while identifying the injustice of an oppressive terrorist system. Following her love for education and her truly belief that inequality should not be acceptable, and with the support of her father, Malala decided to denounce the Taliban organization. Burns (2003) explains that "the key distinctive role of leadership at the outset is that leaders take the initiative" (p. 172). Initiative and the willingness to speak when others were afraid was what both Ziauddin and Malala decided to do, following their beliefs of freedom and human rights.

In Malala's practice of supporting girl's rights she said "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's my duty to do so . . . ” (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2006, p. 141). Doing this, she showed bravery, commitment, and a great spirit of sacrifice. She knew that people were listening and she decided to reprehend and challenge oppression. She questioned on a national Pakistani radio “How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?” (p. 142). She knew that she was a target, but she also knew that showing her face and voice would inspire others to follow the path of denouncing the Taliban terror. Malala said “I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly. Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is our basic right” (Peer, 2012). Malala had fear but she refused to accept it as a condition for her life. She embraced her call to leadership and decided to lead not from fear but from hope, faith, and love (Palmer, 2000).

Malala was exercising a real leadership practice. Amanda Sinclair (2007) once said “Leadership should be aimed at helping to free people from oppressive structures, practices and habits encountered in societies and institutions, as well as within the shady recess of ourselves.” (as cited in Jackson & Parry, 2008, p. xv). She recognized that she had a voice and a duty in society, and that she did not have to accept tradition or misuse of religion that justified an unjust system. She was already practicing a critical consciousness, and a revolutionary leadership (Freire, 2000). Thus, she decided to use her words to remind others that they could and should also stand up in order to change things. About this idea Malala later says:



We should not wait for someone else to come and raise our voice. We should do it by ourselves. We should believe in ourselves. Yes, we can do it. One day you will see that all the girls will be powerful; All the girls will be going to school. And it is possible only by our struggle; only when we raise our voice. (Nelson, 2013)

When in 2011 Malala was awarded with Pakistan's First National Youth Peace Prize in recognition for her peaceful activist work, the death threats increased, but even then she refused to keep silent. Malala said "My feeling was nobody can stop death. . . So I should do whatever I want to do" (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2006, p. 224). On the 9th of October 2012, Malala was shot on her way to school. She fought to survive and again she was showing her determination and persistence, now to be alive, and to continue to speak out for girl's right to education. Once Malala was recovered she said, "It feels like this life is a second life. People prayed to God to spare me, and I was spared for a reason- to use my life for helping people" (p. 301). Her image as a miraculous survivor and a young hero who faced death in order to keep following her values and sense of justice, travelled around the world. At the United Nations (2013) Malala said:

So here I stand.... one girl among many. I speak – not for myself, but for all girls and boys. I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. . . They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And then, out of that silence came, thousands of voices. The terrorists thought that they



would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same. . . (pp. 1-2)

Malala's dedication and devotion to other's needs shows that she is truly a servant leader. Greenleaf (1977) says "The servant leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first..." (p. 13). When she took the initiative to fight for the rights of the millions of girls, she was not only leading the way but also creating a vision, compelling millions of people to listen her message of a world without war, poverty, and injustice, where people will be "more wise, more free, more autonomous, more healthy, and better able themselves to become servants" (Ferch, Spears, McFarland, & Carey, 2015, p. 15).

Malala's international advocacy creates a network that works in cooperation with local communities and activists. She uses her image to communicate different realities and needs such as raising money to build schools, to pay teachers, and to create educational opportunities to girls around the world. Malala is creating a global movement to empower girls. Her leadership is based on her vision of empowering girls so they can stand up and speak for themselves, demanding their rights and not accepting oppression and violence. During her work visiting girls, especially in developing countries, she talks and listens to their dreams and needs, always directly from the



girls themselves. She does not assume she knows what they need rather she respects differences and perspectives. Her relation with people communicates empathy, simplicity, humility and the recognition of her and others multiple vulnerabilities. Malala's practice of leadership is in dynamics of listening, dialoguing and guiding. A dialogue that "does not impose [and] does not manipulate" (Freire, 2000, p. 168).

CONCLUSION

Malala shows ideals and practices that reminds me of circular power dynamics in leadership relations. She knows that she represents the voice and the power of millions of people around the world. People that also risk their lives in the fight for human rights. This is what the social justice movement is about. About a recognition that we, together, in communion of values, can unite our power in this fight against oppression. Her love for education and people shows a unique authenticity that in today's world it is not easy to find while looking to a single image. Watching the movie I felt touched, not only by her story, but also by her incredible personality and the peaceful emotions that she is capable of communicating. For me, Malala is a genuine powerful and transversal example to us all. She is the one inspiring, from girls in developing countries, through citizens that are listening her speech, to all the political leadership power that set the global goals and define our destinies.

In my experience working with women and for women, the most powerful leadership process in the fight for social justice



is the one based on the idea of the collective way of leading in community. This is what I see in her practice. Malala proposes an educational empowering process where everybody is included, especially the ones that have always been excluded and oppressed. A collective work that looks to balance different perceptions and needs in leadership that facilitates and coordinates, together, not only with one voice but with many; in cooperation and dialogue. As Malala said, “It is so hard to get things done in this world. You try and too often it doesn’t work. But you have to continue. And you never give up” (as cited in Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 2015). This is what Malala is inspiring us to do, to never give up.

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