The Washington Post

WorldViews • Analysis

She's a Nobel winner heading to Oxford. But 'Malala hate' is still real in Pakistan.

By Pamela Constable September 6 at 3:05 AM

ISLAMABAD — It's safe to say that most people in Pakistan were glad that Malala Yousafzai, then a 15-year-old student, did not die from the bullet wounds a squad of Taliban militants left in her face and neck when they ambushed her school bus in Pakistan's scenic Swat Valley in 2012.

It's probably also safe to say that two years later, most Pakistanis were proud — even if that pride was mingled with other, more complicated emotions — when Yousafzai, an activist for girls' education, became at 17 the youngest person ever to win a Nobel Prize and her country's second Nobelist since the Muslim-majority country was founded in 1947.

Beyond that, the young woman's story has become so distorted by a bewildering list of honors and accomplishments, and a parallel litany of accusations and suspicions, that it is almost impossible to generalize about how she is viewed by her fellow citizens — except that they seem exhausted of hearing about her.

Two weeks ago, Yousafzai, who now lives in England, announced that she

had been accepted to study at Oxford University (her tweet was politely couched in praise for her fellow winning candidates). The British press loved the story, but there were few mentions in Pakistan's media. Reaction from Pakistanis on social media ranged from sincere and congratulatory to snide and envious.

"Well done, Malala," one man posted on Facebook, praising her humanitarian efforts and success abroad but noting wistfully that many Pakistanis are unable to get ahead except by bribery and connections. "Time to shoot myself in the head for my next degree," sneered another on Twitter, using an expletive to suggest she had done little to deserve it. Some called her a hypocrite and a fake. Some said her father, a rural school principal, was an agent for Israel and the CIA.

On Tuesday, police officials in Karachi reported that they had killed several suspected Taliban and Islamic State militants in a raid and shootout, including one who they said had been involved in the attack on Yousafzai. The news made headlines but drew little public interest. News reports seemed skeptical of the police claims. They included scant detail of the long-ago incident and no photos of Yousafzai. The coverage had a perfunctory, "old news" tone.

In a way, it is understandable that this young woman — who appears to have remained a gracious and modest individual despite her global celebrity — has nevertheless become a permanent lightning rod for the muddled grievances, conspiracy theories and thwarted ambitions of a struggling society where many people look to "foreign hands" to blame for their problems and may resent the limelight that comes to some, but only a few, of those who have suffered.

By some estimates, more than 30,000 Pakistanis have been killed in a decade of terrorism and conflict. Yousafzai survived and then went on to become a best-selling author, a winner of numerous international prizes and a U.N. Messenger of Peace. Time magazine named her three years running

as one of the most influential people in the world, and in July she was listed as one of its most "influential teens" alongside Kylie and Kendall Jenner. She even had an asteroid named after her. Now she is going to Oxford to study philosophy and politics.

In an Aug. 18 essay in Pakistan Today, titled, "Why are Pakistanis upset at Malala getting into Oxford?" Syed M. Murtaza described an "umbrella" of "Malala hate," an emotional phenomenon in which the outspoken young crusader has become a stand-in for everything many Pakistanis fear and resent — from drone strikes to Western freedoms. "It is commonplace in Pakistan to attribute everything Malala has accomplished … to a grand scheme by international powers that only seek to defame the country," he wrote.

Actually, public opinion polls have shown that many Pakistanis admire and respect her, according to a 2014 report by Maham Javaid, a Pakistani-American journalist, published by Al Jazeera America. When Yousafzai was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, one poll showed 44 percent of people were pleased, 44 percent ambivalent, and 11 percent unhappy. But later, when her autobiography was published in 2013, some Pakistanis, especially religious clerics and conservative TV anchors, charged that she had defamed Pakistan and Islam. The book was banned in thousands of private schools.

The main problem, Javaid wrote, is that while many Pakistanis "stand behind her" and cheer her crusade, others "appear unable to distinguish between Malala's brave resolve to fight for what she believes in and the Western accolades she has received for displaying this courage." If Pakistan shuns Yousafzai, she added, "we Pakistanis will be the ones who lose yet another hero … Malala is a true champion, and Pakistan should hold on to her."

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