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Moving Beyond Controversy: A Cross-Cultural Genre and Gender Study of Rigoberta's *Testimonio I*, Rigoberta Menchú and Malala's Memoir *I Am Malala*

By Asmaa Mansour¹

Abstract

The two women Nobel Prize winners Rigoberta Menchú and Malala Yousafzai and their “bestselling” books have stirred numerous controversies over the past few years. The credibility of both writers is questioned and their books have not achieved much fame in their own countries (Guatemala and Pakistan, respectively) compared to Western countries. Rigoberta is blamed for representing “all” indigenous people, and Malala is accused of misrepresenting Islam and enhancing the West's stereotypical assumptions about Muslim women as oppressed. While Rigoberta is accused of attacking the Guatemalan government, Malala is accused of inviting the “Western saviors” to come to post-9/11 Pakistan and spare the world from the “evil” of Taliban. Although the accusations raised against the works of these writers are very similar, there is no cross-cultural study done on the controversial reception of these works and the implications surrounding this reception—including but not limited to the question of authorship, Western hegemony, and the complexities of *testimonios* and memoirs as genres. This paper aims at unveiling the controversy over *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, stirred by David Stoll, as well as the controversy over *I Am Malala*, perpetuated by Mirza Kashif Ali. In so doing, I take a cross-cultural, feminist approach to respond to these controversies and shed light on the implications of these controversies. Despite the different historical moment and the geopolitical context in which these two books were written and received, despite all the complexities and questions surrounding the genre (memoir and testimonios) and the co-authorship of these books, and despite questions about the Western appropriation of these two women, I argue that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *I Am Malala* are two books by women political activists who paid the price dearly for challenging patriarchy and dictatorship and helped shape the historical consciousness, and the renewed relevance of history writing for emerging nations and gender and political conflicts.

Keywords: Islamic feminism, Latina feminism, Testimonios, Women of color, Transnational, Resistance, Autobiographies/Memoirs,

Since they are very rarely referred to by their last names (either because their first names are easier than their last names or because of the political and ethnic divide evoked by their last names, Menchú is an Indian name not *ladino* and Yousafzai is a Pashtun which was a part of Afghanistan), I will follow the tradition of calling these two women by their first names. This is not because their first names are easier but because Rigoberta and Malala deserve recognition as

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women and feminists. Both Rigoberta's *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) and Malala's *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013) narrate the story of two young women who stood up for a cause, ending violence in Guatemala and standing up for girls' education in Pakistan, respectively. Yet, the reception of these two books was (and continues to be) subject to deconstructive criticisms. In his book *Rigoberta Menchú And The Story Of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), Stoll, an American anthropologist, does not only question Rigoberta's authority to speak for the entire community, but he also raises questions regarding *testimonio* as a genre and regarding the credibility of both the author, Rigoberta, and the editor, Elizabeth Burgos. Similarly, Ali, the head of the all Pakistan Private Schools Federation, publishes a book entitled *I Am Not Malala, I Am Muslim I Am Pakistani: A Story of a Proud Nation* (2015) condemning Malala's appropriation by Western powers that find a "fake" reason to further their colonial agendas in Pakistan. The accusations these two Nobel Prize winners faced and still facing seem so much similar, both are condemned for being "liars," "traitors," and victims of false memory. Malala, however, has to face one extra condemnation in terms of her understanding of Islam and feminism. Yet before studying the controversies over both women's books and their implications, I would like to present these controversies as they are to accentuate the commonalities that these two women share.

The reception of Rigoberta's book and the reaction to her Nobel Peace Prize award have raised unsettling controversies on a national and transnational level. On a national level, Isabel Dulfano tells us about the misogynist and racist reaction in Guatemala on the day Rigoberta was awarded the Nobel Prize. While interning for the Guatemalan newspaper *Prensa Libre*, Dulfano recalls when the newspaper director, Gustavo Berganza, said: "This day is a day of national shame. The committee committed an error when granting Rigoberta the Nobel Prize because as of this moment at an international level, Guatemala will be regarded as a country of Indians" (58). On a transnational level, the most prominent book written against Rigoberta is Stoll's book in which he defines *testimonio* as "a narrative ... told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (24). However, for Stoll, Rigoberta's book does not belong to this genre because Rigoberta claimed that she had witnessed the massacre of her brother, though she was never present when this massacre took place. Therefore, for Stoll, this "Latin American genre" is not and cannot be a reliable source of information. Moreover, instead of focusing on critiquing Rigoberta's book, Stoll attacks Rigoberta herself. For him, Rigoberta puts "a human face" and her memory "was anything but chronological" (7,185). He also suspects Rigoberta's memory that is too selective; Rigoberta focuses on her status as one of the poor Guatemalans when she herself attended a boarding school thanks to her wealthy father whose role in the revolutionary formation of CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina) party was equally exaggerated. Furthermore, Stoll quotes Rigoberta herself declaring that the book is not hers and that anyone who is skeptical about the events in this book should consult with Elizabeth Burgos. This statement, for Stoll, is nothing but a clear declaration that Rigoberta is illiterate enough to "produce a book on her own" (181). Moreover, the name of Elizabeth, according to Stoll, does not appear on the cover of the book. Her name appears only on the title page of the book as an "editor" rather than an "author" or even a co-author (182).

Similarly, Malala's works, more specifically her memoir published in 2013, have been subject to recurrent criticisms and have raised a wave of controversy both in Pakistani and non-Pakistani media. In Pakistan, Malala's book is condemned for enhancing the following binaries: true Islam vs. false Islam; men vs. women; good Muslims vs. bad Muslims; and a free, modern, educated West vs. a traditional, backward, ignorant East. For Pakistani scholars, Malala has

become a brand in the West, a victim in a hijab shot by Islamic extremists just because she wanted to get education. For these scholars, the victimization of brown women at the hands of brown men becomes recurrent in Malala's works. In his *Huffington Post* piece, Assed Baig, freelance print and broadcast journalist, questions Malala's motives after all Western politicians spoke on her behalf, though her case is similar to "hundreds and thousands of other Malalas" killed by the U.S. drone strikes. By the same token, in her review for *The Guardian*, Fatima Bhutto raises some questions regarding Malala's voice in *I am Malala*, and questions the authority of Christian Lamb, the British co-author whose name appears in small handwriting on the cover of the book—an accusation that clearly reminds us of Stoll's argument against Rigoberta.

More importantly, after Malala won the Nobel Prize in 2014, Ali banned Malala's book from his schools and called for an "I Am Not Malala" day of protest against Malala. Ali strongly disapproves the content of the book because it does not show respect either to Islam or to Pakistani politics and ideologies. In 2015, Ali published his book *I am Not Malala*, claiming that Malala is nothing but a persona created by the West to "save" Pakistanis, ironically, through carrying out more U.S. drone strikes against Pakistani army and innocent civilians. Ali opens his book with a quotation from Noam Chomsky's *Media Control-The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, "the general population doesn't know what happening, and it doesn't even know that it doesn't know" (qtd. in Ali 6). Thus, Ali makes it clear that his aim in his book is to educate the world about Malala's "constructed reality" that is nothing but, to borrow Chomsky's words, "lies upon lies" (qtd. in Ali 6). These lies, according to Ali, manifest themselves in twisting facts. For instance, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was claimed to be Shiite in *I am Malala*, though he in fact refused to label himself as Shiite, Sunni, or Sufi. Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's Former Prime Minister, was claimed to be tried for treason, though in fact she was tried for the murder case of Mohammad Ahmad Kasuri, a Pakistani lawyer and politician. Pakistani army and Pakistan ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) were claimed to be the creators of Taliban when in fact "Taliban was established under political government" (82). And Pakistani women were claimed to be unable to "open a bank account which is historically and factually wrong" (82). To defy Malala's lies about the oppression of Pakistani women, Ali devotes the last section of the book to Pakistani women's achievements that started with Women Relief Committee established in 1947 by Mohantarma Fatima Jinnah up until 2013 when the youngest Muslim and Pakistani woman, Samina Baig, climbed mount Everest.

Regardless of these "lies" that are never fully explained in Ali's book, Ali condemns Malala for several reasons: 1) her anti-Islamic preaching (manifested in endorsing Salman Rushdie's book, criticizing Islam's concept of Jihad and blasphemy law, and endorsing sectarianism between Sunnis, Shias, and Sufis); 2) her politics that encourages provincialism (Malala does not know if she is Swati, Pashtun, Pakistani, Indian, or Afghan); 3) her collaboration with Christina Lamb whose career and previous books can explain the "anti-Islamic" tone in *I am Malala*. Lamb, according to Ali, "reported on Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1987" which indicates her familiarity with the political situation in the region (234). Moreover, Lamb tried to "book an airline ticket in the name of Osama Bin Laden to defame Pakistan" (234). After this incident, she was banned from engaging in any activities in Pakistan. Not only that, Lamb, according to Ali, wrote against Islam, Pakistan's version of democracy, and Pak Army in her book *Waiting for Allah: Pakistan's Struggle for Democracy* (1991) and her article "Who murdered Benazir Bhutto?" For these reasons, Ali proposes that *I am Malala* should be named "I am Christina Lamb" because, for Ali, it is illogical for a 15-year old girl going through medical

recovery to write about such highly sensitive issues. Instead of winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Ali suggests that Malala should win the Oscar Prize for she knows how to “act” very well.

The accusations against these two women have ultimately led to a wave of defense. In her defense of Rigoberta’s trustworthiness, Dante Liano writes, “To say that [Rigoberta] lied means that no genocide ever occurred in Guatemala, troops never went into villages, gathering women in schools and men in churches and then systematically killing them to ‘raze the land’ around the guerrillas” (124). For John Beverley, Rigoberta does not lie and *testimonios* are not a “pack of lies” (4). They are not the truth nor a form of truth, but rather “the truth of the other,” meaning that “they originate from the other’s sense of what is true and what is false” (7). Artru Aries also contests Stoll, who personally targets Rigoberta, for denying Rigoberta’s history within the Guatemalan context and for chasing Rigoberta as a journalist rather than an anthropologist as Stoll claims. Moreover, Eduardo Galeano’s “Let’s Shoot Rigoberta” suggests that if anyone is to blame for any inaccuracy in the book, then we should blame the editor, the Nobel Prize committee, and “Powerful men in Guatemala and in the world”—not Rigoberta (101).

In a similar manner, the controversies over Malala’s memoir and her “intentions” have led some critics to write in her defense. No critic, however, up till this day replied to Ali’s *I am Not Malala* or even admitted the existence of this book—maybe because Ali’s book, just like Stoll’s book, seems to be written out of hate rather than out of “enlightening” the general population as he claims. Although his questions about Christina Lamb’s authority over *I am Malala* can be a substantial addition to the scholarly criticism of Malala’s memoir, Ali’s questions about Malala’s version of Islam, her loyalty to Pakistan, and her representation of Pakistani women as oppressed are extremely invalid. However, if ever Malala criticizes Islam in her book, then we should emphasize that she criticizes Taliban’s version of Islam. And if Malala criticizes the unfair treatment of Pakistani women, then we should pay attention to the context of the situation. Malala speaks mainly from what she has heard and seen in “Swat valley” where she grew up. Thus, we cannot say that Malala generalizes the “victimization” of all Pakistani women. Rosie Walters writes that Malala’s book—contrary to Ali’s claims—defies the discourse that dictates that “veiled Muslim women” are oppressed, a discourse that resonates with Laura Bush’s rally to support U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan (24). Malala, for Walters, offers a different discourse: Muslim women can save themselves, if they are given the chance to do so through education. In so doing, Malala, according to Walters, opens the door towards reconciling feminism with Islam. Therefore, Walters stresses that promoting the discourse of the West’s appropriation of Malala should come to an end because this discourse is no different than Taliban’s agenda of silencing Malala—both refuses to see Malala as a powerful young woman.

Again, in her response to the West’s appropriation discourse, Rafia Zakaria, in her article “Malala, the Muslim Feminist,” published in *Al Jazeera America*, strongly disagrees that Malala has been appropriated by the West. Instead, she commends Malala because “she not only embraces her faith and culture but also critiques them.” Malala, according to Zakaria, challenges Western feminists who oftentimes ask “Muslim women to leave their traditions at the door [which] is fundamentally disempowering.” Similarly, Shenila Khoja-Moologi elaborates on Malala’s awareness of the “political instrumentalization of her voice” (551). Thus, it would not be wrong to say that Malala resists this instrumentalization by speaking with the power and clarity of a prophet. Kate Douglass also asserts Malala’s authorship over the text which stems from the “collaborative narrative” technique; and by collaborative narrative Douglass means a narrative that is both personal and collective. Malala tells us about her childhood, but she also narrates the story of her friends and family that is contextualized within the larger history of Pakistan and its culture.

Moreover, Douglass disregards any influence or any Western hegemony in Malala's memoir. She writes, if ever Malala mentions in her memoir that she likes Justin Bieber's songs or *Twilight* movies, she mentions that because this experience is "what expected of auto/biographical texts in Western domains" (303).

Though different and predominantly similar, the accusations raised against Rigoberta Menchú and Malala Yousafzai center around this question: can *testimonios* and memoirs become a vehicle for the truth and a voice for the voiceless? John Beverly's *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* shines light on the meaning of the word *testimonio* in Spanish which carries the meaning of bearing witness or telling the truth in a "religious or legal sense" (3). However, Mary Pratt draws our attention to the problem of defining or theorizing *testimonio* as a genre. For her, *testimonio* writing cannot be considered legal writing nor autobiographical writing, but something "in-between." *Testimonio*, as a genre, extends to include all contradictions; it is both personal and collective, a Western and non-Western genre. For Pratt, it is a "transcultural communicative action" that ethically commits itself to "communicating the subaltern individual and collective reality to metropolitan audience who are ignorant of it, in a discourse those audiences can decipher and with which they will identify" (43). Similarly, Thomas Couser refuses to consider memoirs as fiction or novels because they can "do things fiction cannot" (176). Although memoir, for him, is "based on memory rather than research," it should not be equated with fiction because the fictionalization of the genre renders it as problematic on an ethical and professional level (19).

Based on Pratt's definition of *testimonio* and Couser's definition of memoirs, we can say that both genres have a communicative function. They are meant to circulate in the public sphere and to affect a change, regardless of how precisely truthful they are. Bearing these definitions in mind helps us move beyond the dichotomy between true vs. false story in favor of a constructive critique of Rigoberta's book as well as Malala's. Questioning the truthfulness of Rigoberta's story and Malala's should be replaced with questions around the similarities these "subaltern" women face every time they try to speak. In his essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak argues that if the subaltern speaks, and if he/she speaks to something that matters to "us," then the subaltern will not be subaltern anymore. However, both Rigoberta and Malala are repeatedly condemned by the same powers that try to mute their voices. The authorship and the trustworthiness of their books are questioned, the genre they choose to voice their story becomes unreliable, their right to speak for "all" their communities is denied, and their feminist aspirations are either disregarded or underestimated. Worse still, the controversy over these two women's books are not met with an equivalent wave of defense, especially a defense that takes a cross-cultural, feminist approach. No criticism seems to move beyond the binary of true story vs. false story and little attention is paid to the complexity of these women's backgrounds as "Third World" women or women of color who struggle to survive in male-dominated, postcolonial states. Rigoberta's *testimonio* is never considered "feminist" enough, and Malala's support for women's rights in her memoir is never considered "Islamic" enough.

A close reading of *testimonios*/memoirs by "Third World" women suggests a complete departure from autobiographies or memoirs by Western women. In her analysis of Rigoberta's *testimonio*, Harlow elaborates that *testimonios*/memoirs by Third world women—unlike autobiographies/memoirs by Western women—do not only focus on their personal lives but they extend to include their active participation in the liberation movements in their countries. By taking Harlow's words into consideration, it would not be wrong to say that Rigoberta's personal struggle is a political struggle—she mingles her story with the story of her people and establishes coalition between men and women. Though she never identifies herself as a feminist in her *testimonio*,

Rigoberta's feminism perfectly fits into Latina feminism or indigenous feminism. Latina feminism, according to Luz del Alba Acevedo, is defined by The Latina Feminist Group organized in 1993 as feminism that questions Eurocentric feminism, establishes "social and discursive spaces," and develops methods of "political praxis" (4-5). Shari M Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack define indigenous feminism as "an important site of gender struggle that engages the critical issues of cultural identity, nationalism, and decolonization particular to indigenous context" (1-2). In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, we learn that Rigoberta, joins the CUC organization to defend men, women, peasants, Indians, and *ladinos*. She also tells us that she taught herself Spanish because she learnt that Spanish is a language that can "unite" people in Guatemala. Rigoberta has to persuade *compañeros* to accept women's participation in the struggle, and she encourages women in the organization to have a clear "political vision" that stems from women's problems or causes of oppression (260). We also learn about "the exploitation and discrimination [Rigoberta has] felt in the flesh," a feeling that is no different from the "terrible things" other women (whether working class women, peasants, or teachers) experienced (289). However, Rigoberta tells us that these exploited women no longer accept the army brutality, and the misuse of the Bible to justify poverty and patriarchy. Thus, they "have played an incredible role in the revolutionary struggle ... Mothers with their children would be putting up barricades, and then placing 'propaganda bombs', or carrying documents ..." (274). Even Rigoberta's little sister who was only eight years old "joined the guerrilla... thought like an adult, ... felt like a woman, especially when it came to defending her people" (285). Moreover, Rigoberta highlights the bravery of her mother who was "capable of seeing her son even as he was dying and doing everything, she could to save him," and Rigoberta tells us about her mother's political activism that eventually led to her kidnap (258).

Narrating these positive stories about women in Guatemala, however, does not mean that Rigoberta is unaware of the *machismo* that exists within her community, yet she never encourages separatism between men and women. Unlike Western feminism, Rigoberta accepts the different roles of men and women because these roles are complementary rather than misogynistic. Pregnant women work as hard as men in the fields, and their mothering nature is fully respected because mothers are like earth; while "earth gives food ... the woman gives life"—and here lies her power (259). Yet Rigoberta finds it necessary to critique some aspects of her culture that dissuades women from knowing about the parts of their bodies and all other aspects like menstruation and having babies. She also breaks free from some of her community's traditions that are skeptical of young women who remain unmarried. Near the end of Rigoberta's *testimonio*, we learn that she decides to renounce marriage and dedicate herself to her people's struggle. She writes, "I have a responsibility, I am in charge, and they must accept me for what I am" (260). Therefore, we can say that Rigoberta is a perfect model of an indigenous woman whose struggle for bettering women's conditions in her society is not only social, but national and political.

Unlike Rigoberta's *testimonio*, Malala's memoir is oftentimes read through a feminist lens. However, Malala's version of feminism does not seem to satisfy Western feminists or traditional Muslim women scholars. According to *The New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, the term "Islamic feminism" was first used in 1990s; yet, it is not evident who coined or who first used the term (817). Mariam Cooke defines Islamic feminism as a new complex movement that does not isolate itself from the past, but rather seeks a new interpretation—*ijtihad* (a struggle to understand the Qur'anic verses and the Hadith that deals with women). In this sense, Islamic feminists, unlike Western feminists, do not reject religion as a whole or deem it as a misogynistic (Cooke 94). Although the term "Islamic feminism" seems oxymoronic to some Western women, and although the word feminist itself seems "tricky" as Malala declares in her interview with Emma Watson,

Malala is not reluctant to describe herself as both a Muslim and a feminist. In her memoir, Malala writes,

“In Pakistan when women say they want independence, people think this means we don't want to obey our fathers, brothers, or husbands. But it does not mean that. It means that we want to make decisions for ourselves. We want to be free to go to school or go to work” (219).

Here Malala's concept of independence, however, seems partially Islamic and partially Western, which makes the concept problematic, if not contradictory, to both Western feminists and traditional Muslim women. Western feminists do not consider this version of feminism empowering; and, traditional Muslim women accuse Malala for not explaining what a Muslim women should do if “fathers, brothers, or husbands” say no. Malala then continues, “The word has not come down from the heavens to tell us that every woman should listen to a man” (219). This is again a problematic statement for traditional Muslim women who accuse Malala for not paying attention to the verse in the Qur'an that says that men are the “Keepers/protectors/in charge of women...” (4:34). Moreover, Malala writes that she is thankful for the Taliban because at least they do not mandate that women wear burqa, “wearing burqa is like walking inside big fabric shuttlecock with only a grille to see through and on hot days it's like an oven” (67). Accordingly, Malala is accused of enhancing the stereotypical representation of “covered” Muslim women as oppressed, no matter how many times these women state that they chose to wear this type of clothes as an act of devotion to God.

Despite all these criticisms raised against Malala's version of feminism, one cannot deny that Malala's feminism is not religious alone—Malala's feminism takes a political and coalition-building framework. From the very beginning of her memoir, we learn that Malala was named after Malalai of Maiwand, a girl who inspired the Afghan army to defeat the British in 1880, which prepares the readers to Malala's “political struggle” that starts with blogging against Taliban. In her memoir, Malala tells us that she speaks to the world about the brutality of Taliban who took over Swat valley, destroyed Buddhist statues, kidnapped women, flogged those who wear fancy clothes, and banned girls from going to school. We learn that Malala is fully aware of politics, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States, as well as the conspiracy theories concerning the Pakistani government and Taliban in Swat Valley. Not only that, Malala takes former, woman, Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto as a role model. For her, Bhutto “symbolized the end of dictatorship and the beginning of democracy as well as sending the message of hope and strength to the rest of the world” (129). Following Bhutto's legacy, Malala tells us about seeing a young girl selling oranges and scratching marks on a piece of paper because she cannot read or write. This is the moment when Malala vows to “do everything in [her] power to help educate girls like her. [Because] This was the war [she] was going to fight” (217). Malala then tells us in her memoir that:

“[she] wrote [her UN speech] for every person around the world who could make a difference. [She] wanted to reach all people living in poverty, those children forced to work and those who suffer from terrorism or lack of education” (309).

Moreover, just like Rigoberta, Malala comes to the realization that religion is used to maintain patriarchy. She writes, “In the Holy Quran it is not written that men should go outside

and women should work all day in the home” (116). In so doing, Malala uses the same tool used by the Taliban to limit Muslim women’s mobility in public spaces, the Qur’an.

Those who claim that Rigoberta and Malala’s voice has been appropriated by the co-author, and those who underestimate Rigoberta and Malala’s feminism need to closely read their works and speeches that followed the publication of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *I Am Malala*. If we compare Rigoberta’s voice in her Nobel Prize speech to her voice in her *testimonio*, we find that she speaks with the same power we see in her *testimonio*. She gives voice to:

“all those whose voice cannot be heard or who have been repressed for having spoken their opinions, ...all those who have been marginalized, who have been discriminated, who live in poverty, in need, ... those who are the victims of repression and violation of human rights.”

Her voice speaks for herself and for everyone else. Her cause is both national and transnational, personal and political. Rigoberta speaks to racism and poverty in Guatemala and elsewhere namely the Middle East, South Africa, Southeast Asia, Haiti, El Salvador, and Panama. And just like the feminism we see in her *testimonio*, Rigoberta’s Nobel Prize speech sheds light on the discrimination against indigenous women that is deeply rooted in social, sexual, racial, and political injustices. For Rigoberta, the very existence of Indian women is “a clear testimony” of the discrimination and injustices committed against them. Thus, the female emancipation in Guatemala and anywhere else cannot be achieved amidst these injustices that include but not limited to the lack of education, poverty, and malnutrition. Therefore, Rigoberta offers what she calls “Guatemality,” a coalition-building strategy or a “Guatemalan ethnic mosaic” that aims at uniting *ladinos*, blacks, and Indians.

Few years after the publication of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and her Nobel Prize award, Rigoberta publishes a second instalment of her life, *Crossing Borders* (1998). In this book, we learn that Rigoberta is fully aware of the media’s negative reactions to her international recognition as a Nobel Peace prize winner. She writes, “A lot of hate and racism had been poured out on me, and my people saw it as an attack on their own integrity” (11). However, Rigoberta accepts the controversy over her credibility because, for her, it seems that controversy will always be the case of people who try to “cross borders” to understand more about feminism, Islam, and homosexuality, to put an end to injustices, and to build relations between men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, *ladino* government and multi-ethnic people not only in Latin America but also in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

Crossing Borders is mainly significant because it helps us understand Rigoberta’s feminism in theory and practice as well as *testimonio* as a genre. For Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Rigoberta’s feminism is “born of revolutionary struggle” and is translated into “a political philosophy that centers on social justice for men and women” (165-167). Rigoberta theorizes about mothers, Muslim women, women raped in wars and denied their right to abortion, and women who are marginalized because of their gender and race—let alone Rigoberta’s mother. Yet, Rigoberta practices what she preaches; she fights for women’s rights since the establishment of CUC, and she and other women are taken to political prisons in Guatemala because “[they] were considered subversives, communists, feminists or *indigenistas*. [They] were considered to be rebels who, by some mistake, were still alive” (49). Also, we learn that Rigoberta’s feminism does not only mean gender equality but also means women’s access to “political participation, to science, technology, knowledge, development and the legal system” (180).

Crossing Borders teaches us that *testimonios* are like identities, they are in a continuous state of becoming. Rigoberta tells us that when she first published *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, she knew nothing about commercial rules and the author's copyrights; thus, her "dream is to recover the rights to *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and to expand it" (114). She tells us that she has censured some parts of her story and she has kept some parts a secret. And if she could go back in time, Rigoberta would have given her mother the attention she deserves in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* because "when they killed her, they didn't just murder a woman, a mother; they also murdered a healer, a midwife, a woman of great knowledge, a career" (86). Surprisingly, we learn that Rigoberta was named after her grandmother, M'in—an indigenous name changed by the officials into Rigoberta, a name of a saint. More importantly, we learn that Rigoberta is married and has a son, "a breach of revolutionary feminism" as it might seem to Rigoberta's critics. But in fact, it is more revolutionary to be a mother, a wife, and a political activist than to be an unmarried political activist. All the above changes in Rigoberta's second *testimonio* are not "lies" but rather changes in awareness, a process of becoming.

In a similar vein, Malala's Nobel Prize speech bears witness to the injustices committed against children and her voice rings throughout her speech, reminding us of the voice we hear in her memoir. Malala makes it clear to her audience that her voice is not "alone voice" but many; and this voice speaks "for those voiceless children who want change." Similar to her voice, Malala's feminism in her speech echoes the feminism we read in her memoir. In her Nobel Prize speech, we learn that Malala's feminism means solidarity with all 66 million girls around the world who are deprived of education, whether they are located in Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, or elsewhere. Moreover, Malala tells her audience that the problem of keeping girls uneducated or forcing them into early marriage does not stem from sexual or gender inequality alone, but from poverty, war, injustice, and the manipulation of religion. In her response to Islamic fundamentalists who justify keeping girls uneducated, Malala cites the Qu'ran itself: "And do you not know that the very first word of the Holy Quran is the word *Iqra*, which means read?" Finally, she likens her hope for change to Martin Luther King's, Nelson Mandela's, Mother Teresa's, and Aung San Suu Kyi's.

Most recently, Malala publishes a young reader's edition of her memoir (coauthored with Patricia McCormick, an American author and journalist) entitled *I am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World* (2016). An average reader can tell the difference between this book and Malala's initial memoir, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013). Malala's voice here is more prominent and her resistance rings both in the title and throughout the book. Malala in her recent memoir is no longer a girl who was shot by the Taliban but an empowered and empowering girl who fought and still fighting for education.

It is hard to disregard the fact that Malala writes the second memoir from the view point of a feminist and education activist. From the very beginning of this memoir, Malala questions the poor treatment of women in Pakistan. She tells us that she never loved to gather with her mother and other women who spend the entire time talking about cooking and new clothes. Instead, Malala goes to join and listen to men's political debates. She tells us more clearly about gender discrimination in Pakistan embodied in the sympathy a mother receives if she delivers a baby girl compared to the festive atmosphere in a family when a baby boy is born. She tells us about boys who cut the flying-kites of girls, "their dreams," and about men who keep their young girls behind the veils and see no value in sending them to schools. We learn about her journey from the private sphere, to the public sphere, to the global sphere. She tells us how she stood up for education when she first appeared in Pashto TV. She writes, "I had talked to only local TV stations and newspapers,

but, still I felt the wind would carry my words, the same way it scatters flower pollen in the spring, planting seeds all over the earth” (71). Malala felt that she can change the world, and this belief transforms her from a girl who strives to go to school in Swat Valley to a girl who fights for children education worldwide. The story is the same in both memoirs, yet the second memoir’s goal is different—resistance and the empowerment for “all” children, women, and young girls. Although it seems more personal (Malala gives us more details about her favorite food, her private talks with God, and the story of her mother, father, and two brothers), and although Malala still draws our attention to the injustices of the Taliban in Pakistan, Malala’s second memoir is meant to resist oppressive politics and religious ideologies, and to empower those who might have been in her position or maybe in a better position.

The overarching thread that ties Rigoberta Menchú’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) and Malala Yousafzai’s *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013) together is Chandra Talpade Mohanty theory of “feminism without borders.” This theory calls for a cross-cultural understanding of Third World feminism and postcolonial people, not because they are linked to one another historically or geographically but because they share similar political struggles, decolonial strategies, and national resistance (46). Moving beyond destructive criticisms and “hidden agenda” thought helps us understand the struggles and the sufferings lived by “colonized people.” The act of telling the story is a decolonial strategy in itself. Whether this story is partially fictionalized, translated, edited, or coauthored, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that Rigoberta saw her parents die and chose to serve her people at the expense of her own safety, and that Malala risked her life for going to school despite the Taliban’s threats. The early international recognition of Rigoberta (at the age of twenty-three) and Malala (at the age of fifteen) is inevitable in the age of globalization. This recognition does not and cannot deny their efforts to serve all people, both nationally and transnationally. Rigoberta’s legacy is evident in her works, her *testimonios*, The Nobel Women Initiative established in 2006 to spread peace, justice, and equality across the globe, and in her advocacy of “Indian rights and ethno-cultural reconciliation, not only in Guatemala but in the Western Hemisphere generally.” Also, Malala’s legacy is evident in her prolific works ranging from documentaries, children books, and adult young books. The more Malala is attacked, the more she publishes and voices her story. “Malala Fund” stands as a witness to her dedication to her cause of educating children and girls all over the globe.

To move beyond the “true vs. false story” controversies, conspiracy theories, and “bad” or “invisible” feminism(s), we need to acknowledge the strong relationship between feminism, *testimonies*, and memoirs. While Latina feminism as a theory aims at building a cross-cultural coalition between all women of color (an intersectional theory that touches on issues related to gender, sexuality, spirituality, race, class, and age), Latina *testimonios* function as “a practice” that bears witness to these issues. And if we dig into the history of memoirs, autobiographies, or diaries, we find that their emergence as a genre were mainly associated with women writers or feminism. To put it in Thomas Couser’s words, “feminism has been one force behind this trend [of memoirs]” (42). Thus, a feminist reading of Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio* is “legitimate” because the *testimonio* not all about atrocities of the government soldiers and guerilla fighters. Even if it is, feminism is strongly intertwined with Rigoberta’s political struggle. And although Malala seems to be influenced by the West, one cannot fit her into one mold—meaning that she can be both Western and Islamic. We learn that she has been inspired and encouraged by Emma Watson to call herself a feminist, and we also know from Malala’s book that she reads Anna Karenina and Jane Austen. Yet her “role model” is Khadija, the businesswoman and the wife of Prophet Muhammad.

Contrary to traditional Islamic beliefs, Malala tells us that she sees no problem with going by her first name since "Maryam is mentioned everywhere in the Qur'an" (94).

If it is necessary to "define" *testimonios* and memoirs, then we need to consider them as resistance narratives. Barbra Harlow writes, "resistance narratives go further still in analyzing the relations of power which sustain the system of domination and exploitation" (85). These narratives challenge and expose the systems of oppressions, the abuses of authority, and they lay bare issues of gender, race, and class. These resistance narratives combine "fiction with documentary" and they defy literary conventions—*I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *I am Malala* are no exceptions (86). Both works are feminist resistance narratives written by, to borrow Harlow's words, "resistance writers" who are like the "guerilla of the armed liberation struggle" (122). These narratives shape history and memory, lest we forget.

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