Review Article

(Re)Readings of Muslim Women's Life Narratives: A Review of Critical and Cultural Responses

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Abstract

This article examines how the voices of Muslim women are produced, framed and authorised in four internationally popular life narratives that were co-authored, ghostwritten or otherwise mediated by Western collaborators: *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013), *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia* (Sasson, 1992), *Daring to Drive* (al-Sharif, 2017) and *In the Name of Honor* (Mai & Cuny, 2006). It combines a critical reading of the books' paratexts, titles, structures and publication histories with a critical assessment of how scholars have received them. It argues that critics have mostly read these texts through humanitarian, feminist or Orientalist lenses that take the first-person "I" as given, and so treat collaboration, translation and publishing mediation as peripheral. Drawing on life-writing studies, paratext theory and postcolonial critique, the article proposes, as the author's own analytical contribution, a three-dimensional model of mediated life narrative (authorial mediation, discursive construction, and narrative authority) and applies it to the four texts read together. The comparison shows that mediation is not simply the presence or absence of a collaborator but a graded and layered process in which acknowledgment, translation and market framing operate independently of one another, and that scholarly attention to mediation has tended to follow paratextual visibility rather than actual intervention. The article concludes with recommendations for scholars, publishers and teachers.

Keywords: Muslim women's life writing, mediated autobiography, collaborative life writing, ghostwriting, paratext, autobiographical pact, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Is the narrative a product of more than one person? What kind of collaborative involvement has there been? Is this an "as-told-to" or ghostwritten narrative? Has there been an editor, a transcriber, an amanuensis, or an interviewer involved in the project? What role has each person played in the making of the narrative, and what are your sources for knowing this? Who is presented as speaking in the narrative?

To put it another way, who says "I", whose voice do you hear in the narrative? How has the editor or transcriber made her presence felt in the narrative, or, on the contrary, tried to efface her role in producing the narrative? Is there a preface, framing story, or notes that attend to the relationship between narrator/informant and editor/collaborator within the text? … Who has benefited socially or financially from the telling of the story? (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 178)

These questions frame the present article for two reasons. First, they remind us that the mediation of life narratives is a long-recognised concern in autobiography and life-writing studies (Couser, 2004; Smith & Watson, 2010; Whitlock, 2007). Second, despite this recognition, there is still no structured method for tracing how the agency of an autobiographical subject is curated, translated, reshaped or silenced by her collaborators. The gap is especially urgent for Muslim women's life narratives. In the global literary market, such narratives, mediated by Western collaborators, construct and circulate the archetype of "the Muslim woman" under the pretext of amplifying the voices of a silenced collectivity. They frame Muslim women as oppressed by their societies and the West as the space that offers them freedom and a platform from which to speak for other Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Kahf, 1999; Whitlock, 2007). Earlier work by the present author and her co-authors has examined related patterns of stereotyping and representation in Anglophone fiction and in *I Am Malala* (Jadoon, Anwar, et al., 2018; Jadoon & Zahra, 2019; Zahra & Jadoon, 2019), and the present article moves from the content of such representations to the conditions of their production.

This article studies four such narratives: *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013), *Princess: A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia* (Sasson, 1992), *Daring to Drive: A Saudi Woman's Awakening* (al-Sharif, 2017) and *In the Name of Honor: A Memoir* (Mai & Cuny, 2006). All four have been bestsellers and remain popular with Western readers, yet they differ markedly in how far they acknowledge the collaborators who helped to produce them. *I Am Malala* names the British journalist Christina Lamb on its cover ("with Christina Lamb") but gives no account of how the collaboration worked. *In the Name of Honor* is credited to Mukhtar Mai "with" the

French journalist Marie-Thérèse Cuny and was translated into English by Linda Coverdale (Nath, 2010), so that between Mai's spoken account and the English text lie at least one further language and several intermediaries. *Princess* is credited to Jean Sasson alone and presents the story of a pseudonymous Saudi princess, "Sultana", whose identity cannot be verified. In *Daring to Drive*, the cover names only Manal al-Sharif; the co-author, Lyric Winik, does not appear on the cover and is mentioned only in passing in the acknowledgements. Less often acknowledged is that these narratives are predominantly produced by Western interlocutors for Western audiences.

This is not a conventional literature review. The article does two things at once. It reads the four books themselves (their covers, titles, subtitles, acknowledgements, chapter titles, structure and publication histories) as evidence of how mediation is staged or concealed, and it assesses critically how scholars have read them. It argues that the critical reception has largely been confined to humanitarian, feminist and Orientalist readings that treat the first-person "I" as a given and treat collaboration, translation and publishing mediation as peripheral. On that basis it proposes a three-dimensional model of mediated life narrative, put forward here as the author's own analytical contribution, and applies the model to the four texts read together.

The politicisation of Muslim women's life writing is usually traced to 9/11, after which Muslim identities came under intense scrutiny and such narratives were read as first-hand testimony about societies imagined as oppressive and in need of Western rescue (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Whitlock, 2007). The corpus examined here suggests a longer arc. Political crises affecting the Muslim world have repeatedly prompted new waves of such texts: *Princess* (Sasson, 1992) appeared in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War; *In the Name of Honor* (Mai & Cuny, 2006) and *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013) were published as Pakistan was drawn into the global "war on terror"; and *Daring to Drive* (al-Sharif, 2017) appeared in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Fiction and psychological writing of the post-9/11 period have been read in the same context (Jadoon, Wasif, et al., 2018).

The article is guided by three research questions:

How do the paratexts, titles, structures and publication histories of the four texts acknowledge, conceal or stage the collaboration that produced them?

Through what discursive patterns do the texts position their Muslim women subjects in relation to Western readers, and how has scholarship accounted for those patterns?

What analytical model can make mediation a central and systematic object of analysis, and what does applying it to these four texts reveal?

The article makes three contributions. First, it offers a comparative reading of four texts that have usually been studied separately, showing that their differences in acknowledgment, translation and framing are connected. Second, it proposes a three-dimensional model that draws on existing concepts (the autobiographical pact, paratext, the ethics of collaboration, Orientalism and testimonio) but differs from each of them in three ways: it integrates three analytic operations that are usually performed separately; it specifies observable criteria for each; and it extends the analysis to translation, market framing and the subject's own retrospective testimony. Third, it offers a critical assessment of the scholarship on these texts that identifies what the dominant readings leave out. Section 2 explains the selection of the corpus and the method. Section 3 sets out the theoretical framework. Section 4 presents the model. Section 5 applies it to the four texts read together. Section 6 assesses critically how scholarship has read each text. Section 7 concludes with the author's own reflections, recommendations, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Corpus, Method and Positionality

2.1 Selection of the Corpus

"Muslim women" is not an essentialist category. Given the differences in their experiences by age, social status, profession and location, no study could claim to cover every published life narrative by a Muslim woman. The four texts were therefore selected on three criteria: (a) global circulation and bestseller status, which makes them influential in shaping Western images of Muslim women; (b) mediation by Western or Western-based collaborators, editors or translators; and (c) variation in how that mediation is acknowledged, from a named co-author on the cover to an unnamed collaborator to a pseudonymous subject. The corpus is balanced between two national contexts that carry particular weight in global discourse about Muslim women: two texts concern Pakistani women (*I Am Malala* and *In the Name of Honor*) and two concern Saudi women (*Princess* and *Daring to Drive*). Saudi Arabia is widely regarded as the religious centre of the Muslim world because it contains the two holy cities of Islam, and Pakistan, created in 1947 as a state for the Muslims of British India, is among the largest Muslim-majority countries and has figured prominently in the global politics of Muslim women's rights since 2001. All four texts fall within the category of mediated life writing, in which a Muslim woman's life story is shaped into narrative form with the participation of Western writers or translators.

The author's familiarity with the two contexts, as a Pakistani Muslim woman living in Saudi Arabia, informed the choice of corpus and the attention to cultural detail. It is not offered as a claim to unmediated authority: every interpretive claim below is meant to rest on evidence that readers can check, namely the published editions and the scholarship cited.

2.2 Data and Procedure

Two kinds of evidence were used. The first is the books themselves, read as material objects: covers and title pages, titles and subtitles, acknowledgements and prefatory matter, chapter titles, overall structure, and publication and translation histories. These features were

analysed following Genette's (1997) account of the paratext as a threshold that guides how readers receive a text. The analysis is limited to what the published editions and catalogue records document; it makes no claims about unpublished drafting processes, contracts or the actual division of labour between subject and collaborator.

The second kind of evidence is scholarly reception. Responses were drawn from peer-reviewed research indexed in JSTOR, Google Scholar, the Saudi Digital Library (SDL) and Scopus, using three thematic search strings: Muslim women's life narratives as collaborative, co-authored or ghostwritten life writing; critical and cultural responses to each of the four titles; and the framing of Muslim women in life writing. More frequently cited and more recent studies were given priority, and the selection includes both Western and indigenous scholars. The time frame runs from each text's publication to the present. This procedure is interpretive, not a systematic review: it does not claim to have captured all relevant scholarship, and where the article observes that a text has received little attention, that observation is limited to the material retrieved.

2.3 Analytical Approach

Each text was read against the three dimensions of the model set out in Section 4. Rather than treating the books one after another, the analysis in Section 5 takes the dimensions in turn and reads the four texts together within each, so that differences among the texts become visible as differences of degree and kind along shared axes.

3. Theoretical Framework: Mediation, Paratext and the Politics of Voice

The framework brings together concepts from life-writing studies, feminist autobiographical studies and postcolonial and testimonio studies. Each addresses one aspect of mediation; the section ends by identifying what none of them provides on its own.

3.1 The autobiographical Pact and the Paratext

Philippe Lejeune's (1989) concept of the autobiographical pact holds that in autobiography the author, narrator and protagonist are identical, and that the identity is guaranteed by the name on the cover. Readers who see the same name on the cover and in the narrative expect the "I" to be the authentic voice of the person who lived the life. Genette (1997) shows that this expectation is created by paratextual elements such as author names, titles, cover images, prefaces, acknowledgements and marketing material. Couser (2004) argues that when a text is mediated, the pact is put at risk: if the collaborator's role is hidden, the grammatical "I" becomes a rhetorical device that masks the mediation and invites readers to credit the subject with a voice that others have shaped.

3.2 Life narrative, Relationality and the Ethics of Collaboration

This article prefers the term "life narrative", as developed by Smith and Watson (2010), to "autobiography", which carries a narrower and more individualistic idea of selfhood. Life narrative treats self-representation as relational and dialogic, always produced in relation to others and to cultural constraints. The question then changes from whether a text is mediated to how, by whom and for what purposes it is mediated. Couser (2004, 2012) supplies a taxonomy of collaboration, from transparent co-authorship, in which both parties are named and credited, through as-told-to narration, in which the subject tells and the collaborator writes, to ghostwriting, in which the collaborator writes in the subject's voice with little or no acknowledgment. He argues that the ethical risk to the subject grows as the collaboration becomes less visible, because the collaborator's views can then shape the text without readers' knowledge. Lejeune (1989) had made a related point in his essay on "the autobiography of those who do not write". When one person supplies the life and another the writing, he argues, the single signature on the cover hides a division of labour, and the person who holds the pen usually belongs to a more powerful social world than the person whose life is told.

3.3 Gender, Testimony and the Limits of Autobiography

Gilmore (1994) argues that influential theories of autobiography, including Lejeune's, rest on a masculine norm that marginalises women's self-representation, and she proposes "autobiographics" to name the practices through which women write the self beyond the limits of that norm. This is useful for Muslim women's narratives, which are produced by women who are marginalised twice, by gender and by Orientalist expectation, in a market that demands their voices while placing them in fixed narratives of oppression and liberation. Gilmore's later work (2001) examines how trauma and testimony strain the limits of autobiography by moving from individual self-representation towards collective witness, a point that bears directly on the testimony-memoir hybrid of *In the Name of Honor*. Testimonio studies add that a first-person account of political violence is often offered as collective experience and is recorded and arranged by an interlocutor (Beverley, 1989), which makes the interlocutor's choices a central ethical question.

3.4 Orientalism, Rescue and Re-Orientalism

Said's (1978) account of Orientalism describes a discursive regime that represents "the East" as inferior and in need of rescue. Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013) shows how the rescue narrative about Muslim women can serve to naturalise cultural imperialism and military intervention. Lau (2009) uses the term re-Orientalism for the process by which writers from the Global South, or their Western collaborators, reproduce Orientalist images, whether knowingly or not, in order to satisfy Western readers. Two further studies sharpen this picture. Mohanty (1988) shows how Western feminist scholarship can produce a single, composite "Third World woman" who is defined above all by what is done to her, and Huggan (2001) describes a global market in which cultural difference and marginality are themselves turned into saleable goods. Kahf (1999) traces the long history of Western images of the Muslim woman. The veiled Muslim woman in particular has been examined in Anglophone fiction by a writer of Pakistani origin (Jadoon, 2015). Whitlock (2007) shows how

autobiographies circulate globally as "soft weapons", carrying political meanings through humanitarian and commercial channels. Debates about Western feminist discourse in postcolonial narratives (Jadoon, 2018) belong to the same field. Re-Orientalist readings have been applied to Pakistani Anglophone fiction (Jadoon & Noureen, 2024). Spivak's (1988) question, whether the subaltern can speak, has been asked of a veiled Muslim woman's memoir (Jadoon, 2021) and can be turned into a test for the texts examined here: can a subject's voice survive passage through the apparatus of Western publishing?

3.5 What the Existing Tools Leave Open

Each of these bodies of work addresses one aspect of mediation: the pact addresses the contract with the reader, paratext theory the thresholds of the book, collaboration ethics the relation between subject and collaborator, and postcolonial critique the political meaning of the whole. None offers a procedure for tracing how acknowledgment, discursive framing and claims to authority interact, especially when translation and market forces intervene between the subject and the reader. The model proposed in Section 4 is designed to supply such a procedure.

4. A Three-Dimensional Model of Mediated Life Narrative

The three-dimensional model is proposed by the author as an original analytical contribution. It builds on, and should not be confused with, the theories reviewed in Section 3; its novelty lies in combining three analytic operations into one procedure, in specifying observable criteria for each, and in extending the analysis to translation, publishing and the subject's own retrospective testimony. The model treats co-produced, Western-mediated life narratives as artefacts whose voice has to be reconstructed, not assumed. Table 1 summarises it.

Table 1. The three-dimensional model of mediated life narrative

Dimension	Guiding question	Principal evidence	Theoretical anchors
1. Authorial mediation and degree of intervention	Who helped to make this text, and how visibly?	Cover, title page, acknowledgements, prefaces and notes; translation history; stylistic traces; the subject's own testimony	Lejeune (1989); Genette (1997); Couser (2004)
2. Discursive construction and representational politics	What story about Muslim women does the text tell, for whom, and under what market conditions?	Titles, subtitles and chapter titles; narrative arc; rescue and victim–hero structures; publishing context; positioning of the subject towards her community	Said (1978); Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013); Lau (2009); Whitlock (2007)
3. Narrative authenticity and authority of the voice	On what grounds does the text claim to speak for the subject, and who is placed to judge the claim?	Claims to truth and testimony; points where subject and collaborator voices diverge; Western and indigenous receptions; the subject's retrospective comments	Smith & Watson (2010); Ricoeur (1992); Bamberg (1997); Spivak (1988)

4.1 Dimension 1: Authorial Mediation and Degree of Intervention

The first step maps authorial intervention along a continuum from minimal to maximal in order to determine the collaborator's contribution to the text's ideological orientation. It asks four questions:

(a) How far is the collaborator acknowledged in the paratextual apparatus?

(b) What traces of the collaborator's presence can be discerned in the text's vocabulary, style and structure?

(c) How does the collaborator's cultural background relate to the text's ideological framing?

(d) What does the subject herself say, where available, about how far the narrative reflects her self-understanding?

Because translation is itself a form of authorship (Venuti, 1995), the model treats each additional language or editor as a further layer of mediation to be mapped, not as a technical step outside the text.

4.2 Dimension 2: Discursive Construction and Representational Politics

The second step examines the text's discursive formations by drawing on life-writing studies, feminist autobiographical studies and postcolonial theory. It asks:

(a) What Orientalist master narratives (the oppressed Muslim woman, the liberating West, the dangerous Muslim man) are present, and what function do they serve in the narrative?

(b) How does the narrative framing relate to the commercial imperatives of the Western publishing market?

(c) Is the rescue narrative used as a structuring device, and how does it relate to the history of colonial discourse?

(d) How does the text position the Muslim female subject in relation to her own cultural and religious community?

4.3 Dimension 3: Narrative authenticity and authority of the voice

The third step addresses the epistemological question: the multiple and sometimes incompatible claims to authenticity made by and on behalf of the text. Drawing on Smith and Watson's performative model of autobiographical selfhood, Ricoeur's narrative identity and Bamberg's positioning theory, it asks:

(a) What explicit and implicit claims to referential and expressive authenticity does the text make?

(b) At which textual sites are the subject's voice and the collaborator's voice discernibly in tension?

(c) How is the text received by different readerships, Western and indigenous, and what do divergent receptions imply for its claims?

(d) What retrospective commentary has the subject offered on the text's authenticity, where documented?

4.4 How the Dimensions Work Together

The dimensions are not sequential stages. They interact, and the interaction is the point of the model. A text may score high on acknowledgment (Dimension 1) and still be heavily framed by market expectations (Dimension 2); a text with a conspicuous collaborator may make strong claims to authenticity (Dimension 3) on grounds that the collaborator's presence undermines. The model does not aim to rule on whether a text is "really" the subject's voice. It aims to make visible the conditions under which that voice becomes audible, to whom, and at what cost.

5. Reading the Four Texts Together

Table 2 summarises what the paratexts of the four books disclose. Table 3 then applies the model across the four texts. The discussion that follows takes the three dimensions in turn.

Table 2. Mediation profile of the four texts (from cover, title page and publication data)

Text	Credit on cover	Intermediaries and language path	Title and subtitle promise
I Am Malala (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013)	Malala Yousafzai "with Christina Lamb"	British journalist named on the cover; the process of collaboration is not described in the book	"The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban"
Princess (Sasson, 1992)	Jean Sasson	Sasson is author-narrator; the subject, "Sultana", is pseudonymous and cannot be verified	"A True Story of Life Behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia"
Daring to Drive (al-Sharif, 2017)	Manal al-Sharif	Co-author Lyric Winik not named on the cover; mentioned in passing in the acknowledgements; English edition first, Arabic edition announced afterwards (Hackel, 2017)	"A Saudi Woman's Awakening"
In the Name of Honor (Mai & Cuny, 2006)	Mukhtar Mai "with Marie-Thérèse Cuny"	Oral account in a Pakistani language, shaped in French by journalists, then translated into English by Linda Coverdale (Nath, 2010; Sadaf, 2020)	"A Memoir"; French original titled *Déshonorée*

Table 3. Application of the model to the four texts

Dimension	I Am Malala	Princess	Daring to Drive	In the Name of Honor
1. Mediation	Named co-author; process undisclosed	Western author-narrator; pseudonymous subject	Collaborator unnamed on cover; acknowledged in passing	Named co-author plus translator; oral to French to English
2. Discourse	Education versus Taliban; shift to a collective "we"; rescue frame	Exposé "behind the veil"; sequels turn it into a template	"Awakening" arc; American idioms in chapter titles	Vulnerability-to-empowerment arc; "honor" as explanation
3. Authority	Public record; subject distances herself from the icon	"True story" rests on the collaborator's word	Public campaign; no signal of collaboration	Oral testimony and legal case, twice translated

5.1 Dimension 1: Degrees and Layers of Mediation

Read together, the four books occupy distinct positions on a continuum of acknowledged mediation. At one end, *I Am Malala* and *In the Name of Honor* name a collaborator on the cover, but the preposition "with" signals assistance without saying what it consisted of. At the other end, *Daring to Drive* gives no cover cue at all, so that readers meet what looks like an unmediated first-person "I". *Princess* is a

different case again: the named author is the Western collaborator, and it is the subject who is hidden behind a pseudonym. In Couser's (2004, 2012) terms, the four books span transparent co-authorship, as-told-to narration and ghostwriting, and they show that these categories are less fixed properties of texts than effects of what the paratext chooses to disclose. Genette (1997) treats the author's name as part of the paratext, and here it does real work: the name on the cover decides whose book the reader believes she is holding. Lejeune's (1989) discussion of collaborative autobiography helps to explain why the "with" formula suits publishers so well. It keeps the autobiographical pact intact, since the subject's name still stands first, and at the same time moves the writer to the edge of the reader's attention.

Two observations follow. First, acknowledgment and intervention are separate variables. The books that name their collaborators tell readers nothing about the extent of the intervention, while the book that names none gives readers no reason to ask. Couser's argument that risk to the subject increases as collaboration becomes less visible therefore applies most directly to *Daring to Drive*, and in a different form to *Princess*, where the risk lies not in concealed intervention but in an unverifiable subject. Second, scholarly attention appears to follow paratextual visibility rather than actual intervention. The books whose covers or subtitles raise questions of authorship (*I Am Malala* and *Princess*) have generated the most debate about mediation, while *Daring to Drive*, whose cover raises none, has attracted comparatively little. If this is right, scholarship has to some extent accepted each paratext's own terms for deciding which texts count as mediated.

In the Name of Honor adds a further layer. According to Sadaf (2020), Mai narrated her story orally in a Pakistani language, her account was received and shaped in French by journalists, and the French text was then translated into English; Nath (2010) confirms the translator's role. Each step involves choices of vocabulary, register, selection and sequence that the published text attributes to no one. The change of title is revealing. The French edition appeared as Déshonorée ("Dishonoured"), a word that names the stigma her attackers imposed on Mai; the English title, *In the Name of Honor*, instead evokes the code in whose name the crime was committed, and so invites readers to explain the violence by reference to "honour culture". This reading of the two titles is the author's own and rests on the title pages of the French and English editions (Mai & Cuny, 2006). It shows how a translation decision can shift the explanatory frame before a single page is read.

Venuti's (1995) account of the translator's invisibility explains why this layer is so easily missed. A translation that reads fluently, he argues, gives the impression that it is not a translation at all, and the smoother the English, the less the reader thinks about who produced it. *In the Name of Honor* presents itself to the English reader as Mai's own speech, although what the reader meets is an English rendering of a French rendering of an oral account. In Beverley's (1989) terms the book is close to testimonio, in which a witness tells her story to an interlocutor who records and arranges it. Testimonio criticism, however, has usually had in mind one interlocutor and one language. Mai's book has several of each, and the published text gives the reader little means of telling their contributions apart. The first dimension of the model therefore asks for something that neither Couser's taxonomy nor testimonio criticism asks for on its own: a count of the hands and the languages through which the "I" has passed.

5.2 Dimension 2: Discursive Construction Across the Four Texts

Titles and subtitles offer the first evidence of a shared discursive repertoire. *Princess* promises "Life Behind the Veil"; *Daring to Drive* uses "Behind the Veil" as the title of one of its chapters, although its credited author is writing her own life; *I Am Malala* sets education against the Taliban in its subtitle and opens with a prologue about the day Malala was shot; and *Daring to Drive* announces an "awakening". Each of these invites the reader to expect disclosure of a hidden, oppressive world and the heroine's passage from silence to speech. This is the rescue narrative analysed by Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013), and it corresponds to the chain from vulnerability through suffering to empowerment that Khoja-Moolji (2017) identifies in the framing of Mai and Malala. The corpus suggests that the pattern recurs across all four texts and not only in the two she discusses.

Mohanty's (1988) critique helps to name what these titles do. Each book presents one woman, yet each title or subtitle reaches past her to a general condition: life "behind the veil", a "Saudi woman's" awakening, the girl who "stood up for education". The individual is offered as an instance of the composite figure Mohanty describes, and the reader is invited to pass from the one life to the many without noticing the step. This is also where the rescue narrative gets its force. A single story of suffering calls for sympathy; a story presented as typical calls for intervention.

The chapter titles of *Daring to Drive* also borrow idioms from American political culture. "Live Free or Die" is both a chapter title and the motto of a US state, and "Driving While Female" echoes the American phrase "driving while Black", which names racial profiling by police. Together with the fact that the memoir appeared first in English, with an Arabic edition announced only afterwards (Hackel, 2017), these choices point to an imagined reader who processes Saudi experience through an American civil-rights vocabulary. Lau's (2009) notion of re-Orientalism is useful here because it does not require a Western author. It describes how a writer from within a culture may come to present that culture in the terms her Western readers expect. This does not make al-Sharif's account inauthentic. It shows that her voice reaches readers in a register chosen by someone (author, collaborator, editor or publisher), and that who chose it cannot be determined from the text alone.

The commercial dimension is clearest in *Princess*, whose multiple editions and series of sequels over three decades turned a single narrator's story into a template (Whitlock, 2007). Whitlock's account of autobiography as a "soft weapon" that circulates through humanitarian and commercial channels explains how a text can be at once empathetic and commodified. Huggan (2001) makes the wider

point that the global book trade sells cultural difference as a commodity, and Schaffer and Smith (2004) show that human-rights stories reach large audiences only by taking forms those audiences already recognise, which leaves the teller with little control over how her story is packaged and received. Read with these studies, the sequels to *Princess* are more than a publishing curiosity. They are evidence that the story had become a formula that could be repeated. The template then shapes later texts: the victim-to-icon arc of *In the Name of Honor* and the survivor-as-global-activist arc of *I Am Malala* fit the same chain. The texts also differ in how they place the subject in relation to her community. Sadaf (2020) reports that the mediation of Malala's story has bred mistrust of her in Pakistan, and notes that the single-heroine narrative of Mai's case leaves other participants in the background, notably the woman whose alleged relationship with Mai's brother was used as the pretext for the punishment. In each case, the individual heroine is detached from the collective she is said to represent.

5.3 Dimension 3: Authenticity and Authority

The four books make quite different claims to authenticity. *Princess* stakes its authority on the subtitle's promise of a "true story", but because Sultana is pseudonymous, the only guarantee is the word of the collaborator who narrates; authority has been transferred from subject to mediator. *I Am Malala* draws on a public life that readers can follow elsewhere, in speeches and news coverage, and scholars have tested the book against that record. *In the Name of Honor* derives its authority from oral testimony and a documented legal case, but the testimony has been translated twice. *Daring to Drive* rests on the author's role in a public campaign, and its first-person voice carries no marker of collaboration.

Smith and Watson's (2010) performative view of life narrative suggests treating these claims as acts of self-presentation rather than as facts awaiting verification. Bamberg's (1997) positioning theory adds the question of who positions the narrator, and Ricoeur's (1992) narrative identity the question of how a self is configured by a plot she did not choose. On these terms the useful question is not whether a text is "real" but where the subject's voice and the collaborator's voice come into tension. The clearest sign in the corpus comes from Malala herself: according to Martínez García (2019), Malala has said that the story of the "girl shot by the Taliban" is not a story about her. A subject who distances herself from the figure her book creates exposes the gap between self and text that Dimension 3(d) asks readers to look for. Divergent receptions (3c) point the same way: the mistrust that Sadaf (2020) reports in Pakistan stands against the admiration the same text attracts in the West, and a framework that cannot register both misses part of what the text does.

Two further readings help to explain why these tensions matter. Beverley (1989) observes that the narrator of a testimonio speaks as a member of a community and that her account draws its force from that link. In the four books examined here the link is cut in the telling: the subject is singled out as exceptional, and her community appears mainly as the thing she had to overcome. Spivak's (1988) question can then be put more exactly. Malala, Mai and al-Sharif are not silent; each has spoken in public many times. What is in doubt is whether the speech that reaches the international reader is still hers once it has been selected, translated and fitted to a familiar plot. Gilmore (2001) notes that those who testify to trauma are exposed to the judgment of their audiences, who decide whether the account is believable, and the reception histories reported above suggest that Western and Pakistani audiences have applied different tests to the same book.

5.4 What the integrated reading shows

Reading the dimensions together yields four findings. First, mediation is graded and layered, not binary: the same text can combine a visible co-author, an invisible translator and a market-driven title. Second, acknowledgment, discursive framing and claims to authority vary independently, so that no single paratextual feature (such as a named co-author) can serve as a proxy for the others. Third, a shared rescue-narrative template runs across texts with very different degrees of acknowledged mediation, which suggests that the template is a property of the circulation system and not only of individual collaborations. Fourth, the "I" of these books is best understood as a negotiated position, produced by subject, collaborator, translator, editor and market together.

6. How Scholarship Has Read the Texts: A Critical Assessment

This section assesses the scholarship on each text critically, using the model's dimensions as the standard of evaluation.

6.1 I Am Malala

Scholarship on *I Am Malala* is divided between critics who treat mediation as an ethical necessity and those who see it as a neo-Orientalist imposition. Martínez García (2019) belongs to the first group. She analyses Malala's BBC blogs and her book alongside collective projects such as We Are Displaced, under the label "collaborative testimonial narrative", and acknowledges that the "activist I" is co-constructed with editors, translators, journalists and writers. She justifies this collaboration as necessary to the ethical urgency of the call for global justice, and she reads strategies such as the shift from the singular "I" to a collective "we", and the use of childhood photographs, as ways of turning readers into ethical witnesses. Her argument rests on Gilmore's idea of co-construction.

The present analysis finds the argument open to criticism at two points. First, it is not clear that Gilmore's concept, which concerns the intertwining of histories of harm with first-person witness, can be extended to justify professional editorial mediation; doing so appears to turn a critical concept into a legitimation, and the argument should be checked against Gilmore's own use of the term. Second, Martínez García (2019) herself reports Malala's alienation from the public figure of the book, yet draws from it no conclusion about the limits of mediation. In the terms of the model, this is exactly the kind of datum on which Dimension 3(d) insists, and a framework that treated it as central would have to confront it. Martínez García also acknowledges that the testimonial form aligns with Global North narrative templates, but does not follow this through to question how far the form compromises the cultural specificity of the life it records.

The author's own earlier studies of the book, two of them co-authored, belong to this critical strand. They examined the representation of religious belief in *I Am Malala* alongside Let Her Fly (Jadoon, Anwar, et al., 2018), the book's circulation of negative myths about Pakistan (Jadoon & Zahra, 2019), and the representation of Muslim women's freedom from a transnational feminist perspective (Jadoon, 2024b). Their focus was on what the book represents; the collaboration that produced the text was not their principal object, and the present article extends them by making that mediation the central question.

A more critical strand draws on Spivak (1988) and postcolonial theory. Sadaf (2020) argues that the question is not whether Lamb's role is neutral but whether her intervention serves Malala's cause or the interests of a Western publishing market that packages her story in ways that reinforce stereotypes about Muslim women, and that "Brand Malala" has cost Malala control over her public image. Unlike Martínez García, Sadaf treats the mediation as a source of mistrust in Pakistan. Sadaf's reading is more attentive to the conditions of production, although, like Mart ńez García's, it is conducted largely at the level of the public figure and does not examine how the book's own paratexts and structure stage the collaboration. Khoja-Moolji (2017) comes closest to a structural account when she shows how human-rights advocacy turns Mai and Malala into exemplary figures, but her interest lies in the advocacy campaigns and not in the books as made objects.

6.2 Princess

Princess differs from the other three texts in that its author is not its subject, and the subject's real name cannot be verified. Critics have therefore concentrated on the status of the book and of Sultana. Couser's (2004) framework identifies the ethical risk: the subject's anonymity makes it impossible for readers to assess the accuracy of Sasson's presentation of "a true story", while the text suspends the autobiographical pact. Whitlock (2007) discusses the book as a "soft weapon" whose commercial success and politicisation depend on the reader's acceptance of its documentary factuality in the absence of any means of testing it, and Kahf (1999) places it in a longer tradition of Western representations of the Muslim woman. The first-person narration, which claims to give the voice of a Saudi princess, represents that voice rather than constitutes it.

The limitation of this scholarship is that its attention to whether Sultana exists tends to displace the more productive question of how the text constructs her authority. The subtitle's promise of "Life Behind the Veil" and the later series of sequels show a text that is built as a product. To the extent that the retrieved scholarship shows, the Sasson series has not been systematically analysed as the template for later texts such as *I Am Malala*, which are often discussed as if they emerged without precedent from a politically innocent publishing landscape. That omission is itself a finding of some critical significance.

6.3 Daring to Drive

Daring to Drive recounts, in the first person, the arrest and detention of Manal al-Sharif, who has been active in international human-rights campaigns since 2011, when a video of her driving went viral despite the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia. The memoir is not limited to that incident: it opens with her birth, family life and upbringing, and follows her role in the campaign to lift the ban, which was lifted in 2018, the year after the memoir's publication. Its theme is embodied resistance and the reclaiming of mobility and public space. It has largely been classified as an activist memoir that moves between personal narrative and passages of advocacy aimed at Western readers.

The scholarship retrieved on the text is sparse. Pourya Asl's studies of Middle Eastern women's life writing address counter-conduct as a mode of resistance (Pourya Asl, 2018), leisure as a space of political practice (Pourya Asl, 2019) and the micro-physics of discipline and the spaces of the self (Pourya Asl, 2020a); the one devoted to *Daring to Drive* reads the memoir in terms of heterotopia (Pourya Asl, 2020b). Taken together, these studies read resistance through space, leisure and counter-conduct; the conditions of the memoir's production are not their object. No independent inquiry into authorial mediation in the memoir was retrieved. This neglect is partly explained by the paratext: because the cover names only al-Sharif, scholars have been slow to classify the book as collaborative at all. Re-Orientalism (Lau, 2009) and Abu-Lughod's critique of rescue narratives (2002, 2013) offer tools for a reading that asks whether the memoir's accessibility to Western readers, its adherence to liberal narrative conventions, its emphasis on individual autonomy and its wholesale critique of Saudi society are the product of mediation; Section 5.2 above applies them. The point is not that al-Sharif's account is false, but that the absence of structural analysis lets the scholarship reinforce the ideological formation it purports to examine.

6.4 In the Name of Honor

In the Name of Honor recounts the life of Mukhtar Mai, who in 2002 was gang-raped on the orders of a tribal council in the village of Meerwala in Pakistan, as punishment for an alleged offence by her brother. She did not accept the silence expected of her; she pursued legal action against the perpetrators and became an internationally recognised human-rights activist, and later founded a school for girls. The text is the clearest example of multilevel mediation in the corpus.

Critical readings of the text and of Mai's public image take a neo-colonial perspective. Sadaf (2020) argues that Western media transform the stories and traumas of Pakistani women into marketable commodities by fitting them into Eurocentric templates, and that Mai's story is sensationalised through the "victim story" or "escapee story" that casts the Western journalist as hero and local culture as essentially patriarchal. Khoja-Moolji (2017) argues that such mediation compels the Muslim woman into a chain of vulnerability, suffering and empowerment that depicts her agency as individual resistance against her society. Sadaf (2020) further argues that focusing on a single heroine silences other local perspectives, including that of the woman at the centre of the accusation against Mai's brother, and that

victims are often reduced to pawns of national and international agendas.

What this scholarship leaves underexamined is the translation chain itself. Sadaf (2020) describes the multilayered process of oral narration, French journalistic shaping and English translation, but the effects of that process on the voice of the first person remain largely unanalysed. Couser's (2004) argument that the erasure of the collaborator's effects raises serious ethical questions applies with particular force when the narrative is politicised by Western human-rights and anti-extremism discourses. Translation is treated as a technical step rather than a constitutive element, and the transformation of oral testimony into structured narrative, which involves consequential compositional choices, is rarely noticed. Dimension 1 of the model makes these layers an explicit object of analysis.

6.5 Patterns Across the Scholarship

Across the four texts the scholarship shows recurring limitations. Critics have tended to assume that the texts offer the "real" voice of Muslim women even while acknowledging the presence of writers, translators and editors, and so have left the question of authenticity undertheorised. Many readings rely on a reductive Western/non-Western binary that flattens the complexity of mediation. The role of the publishing market in shaping the genre, structure and expected readership of the texts has received little systematic attention. Translation and the oral-to-written transition are undertheorised, although translation studies has long had the means to describe them (Venuti, 1995). A continuing tension divides feminist readings that credit the narratives with breaking silence from postcolonial readings that treat them as instruments of the Western saviour paradigm, and each camp tends to treat the other's object as the whole text. Finally, as argued in Section 5.1, attention to mediation has followed paratextual visibility, so that the least visibly mediated text has been the least interrogated. These limitations are what the integrated model is designed to address.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The main argument of this article is that the question usually put to these four books, whether they offer the authentic voice of Muslim women or a Western construction, is wrongly framed. Read together, the texts show that the "I" is a negotiated position produced by subject, collaborator, translator, editor and market, and that the more useful questions concern how the voice is produced, by whom, in what language and for what audience. The lack of an adequate model for multi-authored, translated and globally circulating life writing has allowed critics to receive these texts as transparent and unmediated, while cultural interpretation has oscillated between the poles of authentic testimony and Orientalist construction without attending to the power relations involved in production and circulation. The three-dimensional model proposed here is offered as one way of making those relations analysable.

Four recommendations follow from the analysis.

For scholars: begin with the paratext and the publication history; treat translation and market framing as constitutive; read texts comparatively; and give weight to the subject's own later statements about the text, as Dimensions 1(d) and 3(d) require.

For publishers and collaborators: name collaborators and translators on the cover or title page; describe the process of collaboration in a preface or note; and state clearly when a subject's name has been changed and why. The "with" formula tells readers that someone helped but not how.

For teachers and readers: teach these books together with their paratexts, so that students learn to ask Smith and Watson's (2001) questions of every "I" they meet.

For critics: move beyond the choice between humanitarian celebration and Orientalist condemnation, and ask what the text does to the voice of the person it claims to represent.

The study has limitations. The corpus is small and purposive, and the findings should not be generalised to all Muslim women's life writing. The analysis of paratexts relies on published editions and catalogue records, and no archival material, drafts, contracts or interviews with collaborators were consulted, so claims about the extent of intervention remain inferential. The reception survey is interpretive and not exhaustive. The model has been applied here only to four texts and needs testing on other corpora. Finally, the author's own position, as a reader embedded in two of the contexts discussed, shapes the reading and is acknowledged as such.

Future research should extend the comparison to a larger corpus of mediated narratives in order to identify structural patterns; examine the role of translators and co-authors in linguistic transformation and its effect on the representation of selfhood, ideally using archival evidence; study how Western and indigenous readers receive the same texts; and develop non-Western critical and cultural frameworks, including Muslim women's own acts of writing back to Western canons (Jadoon, 2024a), that move beyond the dichotomy of colonial and postcolonial theorisation, so as to understand the cultural specifics of Muslim societies on their own terms.

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