In Other Words: Collaboration and Its (Dis)Contents in Elena Poniatowska's *Here's to You, Jesusa*

MUKUL CHATURVEDI

Abstract: Collaborative life writing presents a complex tale of interpersonal encounter and negotiation. Focussing on the multiple ethical challenges that inform collaboration, this essay examines Elena Poniatowska's testimonial novel *Here's to You Jesusa!* that makes explicit the issue of power, privilege and location in collaborative life writing and prefigures discussion on positionality and identity that have become central to feminist ethnography. While discussing the contributions and limitations of collaboration, this paper addresses the following questions: What is the ethical responsibility involved when we witness the lives of "vulnerable subjects"? How is the writer implicated in the suffering of the subject whom she seeks to represent? How does the actual encounter and dialogue function on the ground? More fundamentally, does the interactive space of witnessing enable mutual recognition of identity and an assertion of agency constituted relationally through dialogue?

Keywords: Ethics, collaboration, agency, identity, Elena Poniatowska

Introduction

Celebrated Mexican journalist and writer, Elena Poniatowska elaborates on the challenges that accompany the process of collaboration that involves the representation of 'vulnerable subjects'. (Couser 2004)[1] For a writer who is committed to giving voice to the marginalized, the concern is more ethical than methodological when it comes to the representation of disenfranchised and dispossessed, and she acknowledges the asymmetrical relationship of power that informs the production of testimonial novels and ethnographic representation.

> An ethical problem arises around the writing of testimonial novels. Are those who create them writers or not? Are they simply opportunists who…plunge into the manufacture of easily consumed works that will fill the void between the elite and the illiterate in the Latin American cultures? They confiscate a reality, present it as their own, steal their informant's words, plagiarize their colloquium's, tape their language and take possession of their souls. (60-61 cited in Jorgenson, 1994)

Poniatowska's concerns in the above quotation raise important questions about the form and function of the Latin American *testimonio,* one of the most well-known life writing forms recognized for giving voice to the oppressed and the marginalized people. Written in the context of war, violence and human rights violations, the hybrid genre of *testimonio* is firmly rooted in political and historical context and is aimed at raising awareness, soliciting support, solidarity, and denouncing violence. The *testimonio* narrative is a product of collaboration between an author/editor and her 'subject', or 'informant' who communicates the story to the writer, who then records the oral narrative, transcribes, edits and then textualizes it. Collaboration is central to testimonio and texts often include factual evidence in terms of maps, data, and other information to strengthen their claim to authenticity. While the term testimonial novel and *testimonio* are used interchangeably, its useful to draw the distinction, since *Here's to You Jesusa,* moves away from the documentary format

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of classic *testimonio* as defined by testimonio scholars like (Beverley 2004)[2] and presents the life story of Jesusa in fictionalized form. The testimonial novel departs from the conventional testimonio by drawing attention to its fictionality. The author is thus more of an 'intermediate' figure in the testimonial novel who controls the final production of the text but at the same time has to disguise the involvement in the text's creation. Unlike the traditional *testimonio,* which is documentary in nature, the testimonial novel because of its self-avowed claims to fictionality blurs the boundary between fact and fiction, history and literature, despite locating the text in a social and political context. Lucille Kerr argues that the testimonial novel is a "type of disguise" (382), but the authors of testimonial novels must provide some factual details to prove the 'truth' of the story that they are narrating. In a curious interplay of fact and fiction, Poniatowska's testimonial novel provides sufficient evidence that Jesusa is a 'real' woman and locates the text in a historical context, but the novelistic mode of narration complicates the 'truth' of the story. While *testimonio* is hailed for its coalitional politics, collaboration, and giving voice to the struggles of the marginalized, the anxieties outlined by Poniatowska in her introduction to the novel mirror ethical concerns of negotiating the difference between the 'subject' and the editor/writer and honouring Jesusa's life which also serves as a source of Mexican history. In fictionalizing Jeusas's life her concern is whether she would be able to do justice to Jesusa's character and give her the dignity denied to her in her life.

Published in 1969, as *Hasta no verte Jesus mio*, (*Till We Meet Again, Dear Jesus*) and in the English translation as *Here's to you Jesusa* (2000) Elena Poniatowska's '*novela testimonial,'* is based on the extensive interviews carried out between 1963 and 1964, with Josefina Bórquez, an old Mexican working-class woman. The narrative is in the form of a flashback, with Jesusa telling her story, spanning nearly seven decades of the twentieth century. Poniatowska met Jesusa every Wednesday afternoon from four to six in her tenement in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Mexico City. Set in the Mexico of the 1960s, the narrative recreates the history of post-revolutionary Mexico from the perspective of a working-class, poor Indian woman. Jesusa's performative storytelling takes us back into another world, different from the contemporary shantytown of Mexico City, where the story is being narrated. An Indian by birth, Jesusa was born in Oaxaca and suffered severe hardships all through her life. Having lost her mother when she was five, she faced childhood abuse and had to put up with her father's various lovers. Brutalized by grinding poverty, neglect and humiliation she suffers from her childhood, Jesusa grows up to be a violent street fighter who firmly believes in standing up for one's rights. Jesusa's fictionalized life story records a momentous period of Mexican history, and her memories offer a counternarrative to the official accounts of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and its aftermath. At the age of fifteen, Jesusa is forced to marry an abusive army officer who is part of the Mexican Revolution(1910-1920) and she becomes one of the *soldaderas*[3] (female soldier) who took also took part in the revolution. At the Revolution's end, finds herself in Mexico City,where she ends up doing a series of menial jobs; maid, barber, hog butcher, nanny, box maker, and whore house manager. Though ruined by poverty, loneliness and loveless life, she emerges as a brilliant performer of her story and a resilient survivor.

Ethical Dilemmas

The sentimental introduction to the novel reproduces the dialogic exchanges between Poniatowska and Jesusa and establishes the tension between the two voices. Ponitwoska's confessional style points to the limitations of telling Jeusua's story because of the differences that separate the two women. Weathered by age and misfortune, Jesusa's grind of daily living does not give enough time so that she can sit back and reflect upon her life. "What business do you have with me?" she asks Poniatowska. On being told that she wished to

talk, Jesusa snaps back: "To me? Listen, I work. If I don't work, I do not eat. I don't have time to hang around chatting." (viii) Jesusa's apparent distrust of Poniatowska and the purpose of meeting stems from the obvious difference that mark the two women. Acutely aware of the difference of race and class, Poniatowska feels that the gap between them can be bridged by empathy and understanding; but Jesusa stubbornly maintains a degree of distance despite sharing her life. She defies the stereotype of passive women of her class and makes the editor realize that she will benefit more from this encounter of storytelling. "She threw my absence in my face: You look out for your interests! You will come and see me as long as you can get what you want out of me, and then there will be neither hide nor hair of you. That's how it always is; everyone uses whomever they can." (xviii) Awed and confused by Jesusa's responses, the introduction highlights Poniatowska's anxiety and limitations as she struggles to give voice to Jesusa. Jesusa admonishes Poniatowska and chides her for her inexperience in the ways of the world. Commenting on Poniatowska's inability to handle the odd jobs like feeding the chickens, Jesusa remarks, "it's obvious that you are high class and useless."(x) Plagued by the difference that separates them, Poniatowska strives to balance the extreme poverty of Jesusa with the splendour of her own living. "My socialism was in name only. As I got into the tub of hot water, I'd remember the washbasin under the bed where Jesusa rinsed her overalls and bathed herself on Saturdays. I was ashamed: "I hope she never sees my house or how I live". Poniatowska guilt and shame over her own privileged life compared to the poverty of Jesusa makes her feel inadequate. "Watching her act out her story, able to make her own decisions, made my lack of character more obvious to me."(xiii). The challenge for Poniatowska is whether she would be able to honour the life and voice of Jesusa given her ' lack of character', compared to the strength and tenacity of Jesusa. To overcome the feeling of guilt and transcend the barrier poses both methodological and ethical challenges.

The introduction full of light-hearted banter and barbs in *Here's to You Jesusa* gives way to a seamless narrative told in the first person by Jesusa. The text is an extended monologue where Jesusa performs her story spanning nearly seven decades of Mexican history. The tension between the two voices disappears and the narrative captures Jesusa in all its complexity and presents an endearing portrait. Poniatowska seamless narrative simulates features of oral narration to give a sense of immediacy and authenticity to Jesusa's story. The narrative complicates the truth-telling project by confounding the binaries between fact and fiction and draws attention to its fictionality throughout the text. It is as if only by fictionalizing her life that Jesusa could live through it. Jesusa does not authorize the use of her photograph or the use of her real name in the novel. While the introduction locates the origin of the novel in biographical facts, in the novel, Jesusa's performative storytelling takes us back into another world, different from the contemporary shantytown of Mexico City, where the story is being narrated.

> On Wednesday afternoons, as the sunset and the blue sky changed to orange, in that semi-dark little room, in the midst of the shrieking of the children, the slamming doors, the shouting, and the radio going full blast, another life emerged – that of Jesusa Palancares, the one she relived as she retold it. Through a tiny crack, we watched the sky, its colours, blue, then orange, and finally black. I squinted so my gaze would fit through that crack, and we would enter the other life. (xii)

By taking the reader back in time, so that "we would enter another life", Jesusa becomes the protagonist of her own story and hints at the distance between her 'real' self and the 'narrative' self. "I never told you I was sad. I told you that the life I've led has been sad, but not me." (80) Poniatowska seamless narrative lets Jesusa tell her story in the first person effortlessly by creating a rhetorical effect of orality. The text simulates spoken discourse by incorporating features of oral narration like repetition, flashback, rhetorical questions,

digressions and moralistic conclusions that create a sense of veracity. While Jesusa's forceful presence dominates the narrative, the text presents a polyphony of voices "of other marginalized women" who "sang a chorus to Jesusa Palancares's melody." (xix)

Narrative Voice and Authority

One of the significant concerns of collaboration is the fictive nature of narrative voice since it is subject to several levels of mediation. The life history model that influenced the early writers of testimonio did not consider the tenuous relationship between the native 'informant' and the researcher/editor. The life history was an authentic reproduction of the informant's voice with the researcher acting more as a facilitator than as a joint producer of the text. Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave*[4] is one of the earliest examples of the Latin American testimonial novel, where Barnet strives to simulate the spoken discourse of the slave Esteban Montejo. For Barnet, the sound of orality is indicative of the 'pure' voice of the informant, creates verisimilitude and is intended to mask the manipulation and textualization of the narrative. Barnet's belief in the 'authentic' native voice is apparent when he says "the voice of the dispossessed …is purer and more spontaneous, because it is fresh, unrehearsed, unbound by the mantle of rhetoric." According to Barnet, retaining and reproducing the effect of orality in the testimonial not only creates a seemingly authentic linguistic reality but also bestows narrative authority to the speaker. The term "gestor" that Barnet uses implies neither author nor editor in the conventional sense. In allowing the oral narrative of the testimonial subject to gestate within herself the 'gestor', plays the role of a facilitator, who recreates the narrative in the process of textualization. However, understanding the intonations of the spoken language is also the key to a "real understanding of identity." Poniatowska's emphasis on orality is not to retrieve the original and authentic speech of Jesusa or to assert the truth of storytelling. Her concerns regarding stealing ' informants' words' and 'confiscating reality' as mentioned in the quotation at the beginning of the paper have been discussed by many life writing scholars. According to Thomas G. Couser (2004) collaborative life writing combines features of both biography and autobiography as in this case, the 'subject' and the editor/author are present simultaneously in one text. The result of this collaboration is a 'composite', voice a combination of the author and the subject. Ventriloquism, a term used for making others talk, is employed by Couser in the context of collaborative writing. For Couser "collaborative autobiography is inherently ventriloquistic…the danger tends to be that of attributing to the subject a voice and a narrative not originating with him or her" (1998, 344). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz also employs a similar terminology regarding several authorial strategies he identified in ethnographic writing. "There are a number of these pretensions," Geertz notes, "but they all tend to come down in one way or another to an attempt to get around the un-get roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer's descriptions, not those of the described" (1988, 144-145). The charge of ventriloquism is also echoed by theorist Paul John Eakin who says, "there is no getting around the fact that ventriloquism, making others talk, is by definition a central rhetorical phenomenon of these narratives." (1999, 181)

Theoretical interventions ethnography and have addressed concerns raised by Poniatowska as the issues of responsibility and commitment are inbuilt in the process of collaboration. Analysing the relationship of the editor/narrator with her 'subject' in the creation of feminist ethnographic autobiography, Anne E Goldman disagrees with critics like Couser who have used the metaphor of ventriloquism in the context of collaborative life writing. According to her, "collaboration does not mean capitulation" (184). She notes, "recognizing that an oral history is produced out of a context of political inequality does not mean that we should dismiss it, a priori, as a form of ventriloquism for the voice

of authority" (201). The self-reflexive turn in feminist ethnography has led to an emphasis on the position of the researcher, her location, identity and an understanding that ethnographic knowledge is a partial representation. For Judith Stacey and Daphne Patai doing ethical research poses a challenge as there are systemic inequalities between the first world researcher and non –elite third world subject. Stacey highlight's the contradictions inherent in positioning oneself as researcher and friend, observer and participant, ethnographer and feminist, authority and collaborator in other women's lives. The anxiety experienced in playing these contradictory roles is articulated by Poniatowska in the introduction as Jesusa does let her have any claim to sisterhood and keeps her distance from her collaborator. By not allowing the use of her name or photograph, limiting access to herself by allowing visits only once a week, not allowing the conversations to be tape-recorded, Jesusa attempts to negotiate the terms of representation despite her vulnerable position. Poniatowska's concerns elaborated in the introduction echo also Judith Stacey's argument that although "the ethnographic method appears ideally suited to feminist research as it draws on those concerns of empathy, connection and concern that many feminists consider being women's special strength", it is unclear "whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous forms of exploitation." (22:1988) Poniatowska grapples with similar dilemmas as outlined by Stacey and struggles with the issue of sameness and difference as the narrator and editor are acutely aware of the difference that separates them.

Life Story / Social History

The fictionalized storytelling in *Here's to You Jesusa* recreates the history of contemporary Mexico from the vantage point of a disenfranchised woman and serves as a counter-narrative to official versions of history. Jesusa's life story mirrors the momentous periods of Mexico's history and captures the indomitable spirit of the Mexican working class despite all its squalor and poverty The text presents a polyphony of voices of the multitude of poor Mexican peasantry from the violent countryside and to the shanty towns of Mexico City. Jesusa is critical of popular Mexican beliefs and institutions like the church, family and military. In her irreverent tone and cynical style, she debunks many myths of the Mexican Revolution[5] and its heroes who have acquired a legendary status in the national imaginary.

Her narrative echoes the disappointment and betrayal of the alienated individuals of the Revolution, mostly women and children, who flocked to the slums of Mexico City after the Revolution. Jesusa wants people to know her role in the revolutionary project and the sacrifices made by her family. She was one of the 'soldaderas' of the Mexican Revolution, first in the infantry unit with her father in the army of Jesus Carranza and later in the cavalry unit with her husband. After losing her brother, father and husband in the Revolution, Jesusa finds herself thoroughly disenchanted with the revolutionary project, for it just killed too many people and failed to address the problems of the poor. "I think it was a misunderstood war because people killed each other, father against sons, brother against brother; Carrancistas, Villistas, Zapatistas.[6] We were all the same ragged people, starving to death". However, that's something that, as they say, you keep to yourself." (93)

Jesusa's life story gives the perspective of the working classes who were inducted into the Revolution but now find themselves alienated. Referring to the movies that glorify the Revolution, she says. "I do not know how they can brag about the shit they came up with". (146) Highlighting the opportunism of political heroes she paints them as caricatures. Her complete distrust of political authority in Mexico stems from her belief that political leaders only have self-interest at heart and that poor people like her will be slaves all their lives to whoever came to power. "Everyone who comes takes a bite out of us, leaves us

maimed, toothless, crippled, and they make their homes out of the pieces of us that they bite off. And I don't go along with that, especially now that we're worse off than ever before." (80) Jesusa's distrust of authority, familial, religious and political is nowhere more apparent than her memory of the heroes of the Revolution. Of all the leaders, Emiliano Zapata scores the best as a leader, for he was interested in making people free and was not looking for any position of power. Pancho Villa fares the worst for the cruelty he inflicted on the civilians. Her encounter with Lazaro Cardenas reveals her utmost distrust of authority. She knew him as a soldier and then saw him again as the President of Mexico (1934–40):

> He had been a Zapatista just like Mariscal, but when the Carrancistas took the port, everyone became a Carrancista. That's was the Revolution was like, I'm with this group now, but tomorrow I'll be with the other one; they changed uniforms like it was nothing, the trick was to be with the strongest group, the one that had the most ammunition …It's like that now too. People court whoever has made it to the top. (69)

Jesusa's reflections on the Mexican Revolution and her criticism of all the factions and their opportunism shows the alienation of common people and the betrayal of the promises of the revolution. Her life story takes on a subversive dimension because in telling her story she recreates the history from the perspective of the marginalized and inscribes the view of those who had been written out of history. From a marginal figure, she becomes a figure of counter authority and the importance of her oral testimony is how she makes sense of the past and its impact on the present condition of her country. By encompassing such a slice of Mexican history, culture, and society Jesusa comes to embody the spirit of Mexico. Despite the disenchantment, she offers a perspective that does not allow any kind of sympathy and pity to be offered. Rather she takes the narrator by surprise by appearing to be on top of things. On one occasion, as Poniatowska points out in the introduction, Jesusa ripped up a photograph of herself because she did not like the image of herself that had been captured. She wanted a sepia-coloured photograph in a wooden frame, not the one that had been randomly taken. Jesusa "wanted to leave a serious image of herself, one of accomplishment."(xxiv). She did not want to be caught in a flippant mode, like laughing on a film. Poniatowska is right in admitting that "her reactions confused me." Despite suffering years of loneliness and neglect, Jesusa wants to have an image of her who is undaunted by her circumstances. Tough and cynical, she remains without any element of self-pity. On receiving the first draft of her life story from Poniatowska, Jesusa's snaps back, "What do I want this for? Get that piece of shit out of here." Jesusa is not moved by her story. However, she does take twenty copies of the book from Poniatowska and gives to the men at the shop where she worked so they'd know about her life and the "many precipices she had crossed, and so they'd have an idea of what the Revolution was like."(xiii)

Jesusa's picaresque life though makes for a great performance, masks her feelings and keeps the reader at a measured distance. Ruined by a lonely and loveless life, she pre-empts any efforts toward intimacy and her fierce guarding of privacy masks her vulnerability. Referring to Poniatowska's term 'hermetic,' for Jesusa, Doris Sommer quotes Mexican poet Octavio Paz, who has identified the quintessential Mexican trait of solitude and quiet defensiveness. Paz writes:

> The Mexican, whether young or old, criollo or mestizo, general labourer or lawyer, seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself; his face is a mask and so is his smile. In his harsh solitude, which is both barbed and courteous, everything serves him as a defence: silence and words, politeness and disdain, irony and resignation. He is jealous of his privacy and that of others, and he is afraid even to glance at his neighbour because a mere glance can trigger the rage of these electrically charged spirits. (cited in Sommer 149:1996)

Jesusa's enacts the anxieties as mentioned by Octavio Paz and Poniatowska admits that she never pried into Jesusa's privacy and never made her answer anything that she did not want to. Interestingly, Poniatowska herself feels the loss that she could not reveal the intensity of Jesusa's character. Doris Sommer raises an interesting question when she asks, "Does Jesusa want us to hear, or she wants us to keep at a safe distance? (ibid. 150) Perhaps Jesusa's reticence works to her advantage, and she manages to negotiate the terms of representation without ever saying so. Despite all efforts on the part of Poniatowska, Jesusa never lets her have the claim to sisterhood, for she felt that there was an unbridgeable gulf that separated the two women. The only way to have control over herself was to keep others out of her private domain. Jesusa is not looking for any sympathy or understanding. While her story is a record of complete brutalization and oppression, she narrates it in a manner that gives her a sense of power and asserts her agency and humanity. "Though living on the edge of starvation, Jesusa's sense of pride becomes her source of strength."(xx). Despite the difficult and disadvantaged life, Jesusa's tells her story with wry humour and a rare capacity to surprise the reader with her ready wit and intelligence. Jesusa believes that she is guided by the voices of the dead but expects when she dies either to be reincarnated or condemned to hell. Fond of drinking and dancing she lives every moment of her life, on her terms, and does not have the slaving and fatalistic attitude of fellow Mexican women. Her faith in survival remains despite loss, alienation, and hardships and Jesusa's innate vitality and unbounded energy permeate the narrative.

Poniatowska's predicament is quite similar to her character Jesusa since both feel in their unique way that their country is indifferent to them. For Poniatowska, writing about Mexico and its history is a way of claiming a sense of belonging to a place where she perceived herself as an outsider. Despite all the challenges, Poniatowska stands to gain immensely from this collaboration as Jesusa's story has given her a sense of her own Mexican identity. "Something is being born inside me, something new that wasn't there before. . . . What was growing, although it may have been there for years, was my Mexican being, my becoming Mexican, feeling Mexico inside me."(xiv) Born in Paris in the year 1932 to a Mexican mother and French father of Polish origin, Poniatowska came from an aristocratic background. Her mother's family was landed gentry who lost their lands after the Mexican Revolution and her father's family were descendants of the last king of Poland. Constantly on the move, "the daughter of transatlantic travellers, the daughter of trains" Poniatowska came to Mexico when she was an eight-year girl, and learned Spanish from housemaids and nannies. For someone who always heard from her grandparents, "I don't belong", her identification with Jesusa, who embodied the spirit of Mexico, helped her discover her Mexican identity. Gaining strength from Jesusa's story, she could feel Mexico growing inside her, the same that was inside Jesusa. Overawed by Jesusa's wisdom, tenacity and strength, Poniatwoska testimonial novel is a glowing tribute to a woman who is too large to be contained and defies the stereotype Mexican woman of her class. Plagued by the powers of her agency and the gulf that separated them, the storytelling encounter creates a bond that restores their Mexican selves through warmth and friendship that develops between the two women and the relationship they develop beyond the text. Poniatowska concerns about collaboration prefigure ethical dilemmas that are have become central to feminist ethnography. As Lila Abu-Lughod notes regarding the complexity of working with issues of sameness and difference that arise in feminist ethnography.

> By working with the assumptions of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an 'other' that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide that so disturbs the new ethnographers …The creation of a self through opposition to another is blocked. Therefore both the multiplicity of the self and the multiple, overlapping and interacting qualities of the other cannot be ignored. (1990: 25-26)

Abu-Lughod's observation is crucial to understanding the need to move beyond and bridge the self-other binary that characterises collaborative life writing amongst unequal relationship of power. Writing about lives that have been marginalized and forgotten is not just about honouring them but also a process of self-discovery, the possibility of a shared humanity. As Poniatowska remarks:

> We write in Latin America to reclaim a space to discover ourselves in the presence of others, of the human community so that they may see us, so that they may love us-to form a vision of the world, to acquire some dimension –so that they cannot erase us so quickly. We write so as not to disappear. (Cited in Winnsboro 158)

Poniatowska makes the above mentioned remark to express her anguish over the disappearances that occurred in the 1980s throughout Latin America but it points to ethical the responsibility and commitment that accompanies the act of writing. Known for her social and political commitment in all her journalistic and literary writings, making Jesusa's performatively bear witness to her life, is also a way of making her assert her agency and humanity was denied to her in her disadvantaged life. While ethical dilemmas are inbuilt in collaborative life writing, what is important is whether such writing can reconfigure power structures and destabilize the deeply engrained hierarchies and biases that inform such discourses. Collaboration highlights that there are limits to shared authority, as manifested in Poniatowska's narrative, but what is more significant is how are those limits negotiated and agreed upon.

Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi

Notes

[1] Thomas G. Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,2004). Couser categorizes a range of subjects as 'vulnerable', those who are writing about intimate relationships, celebrities, and ethnographic subjects who cannot represent themselves in writing.

[2] John Beverly is credited with the most widely used definition of testimonio. Beverley defines it as "a novel or novella-length narrative…told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. (The Margin at the Center 'in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press 2004)

[3] las soldaderas were female soldiers, 'fighters' who took part in the Mexican Revolution and their contribution to both the rebel and the federal armies was immense. While only a few took part in actual combat but their support to the male soldiers in terms of carrying goods, cooking meals, setting up campsites, carrying plants and animals made their contribution almost of a homemaker. Many wives also followed their husbands and did similar work. see Elizabeth Salas *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*

[4] Miguel Barnet, Biography of a Runaway Slave is considered as the first Latin American testimonial novel, which recorded the life of the Esteban Montejo, a runaway slave. The novel won the Cuban Casa de las Americas prize.

[5] Mexican Revolution is one of the momentous periods of Mexican history, which took off in 1910 as an armed uprising against the long-term dictatorial ruler, Porforio Diaz, became of the bloodiest struggles and caused immense destruction and changes the character of Mexican society. The revolution that lasted a decade (1910-1920), was not a unified struggle. It brought down the federal army and the rise of revolutionary leaders and their armies and almost created a situation of civil war.

[6] Carrancistas were one of the factions of the Mexican Revolution. Followers of Mexican President Venustiano Carranza (1913-14), this group comprised of urban intellectuals, middle-class liberals who wanted a constitutional form of government.
Villistas were the followers of Pancho Villa, (1878-1923) a Mexican revolutionary and guerrilla leader who was one of the many factions in the Revolution and fought against Porforio Diaz.
Zapatistas were the followers of Emiliano Zapatista (1879-1919) was a peasant leader who was, Mexican revolutionary, who fought guerilla wars in the Mexican revolution.

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