All autobiographies contain little lies, but Norma Khouri's may be one of the many that are one big lie. Khouri's best-seller Forbidden Love had the usual formula for success in a world starving for fashionable victims. It goes like this: trade as a woman, if possible, who is from some tribe or oppressed minority, and has survived the cruelty of whites/colonialists/right-wing thugs/rich guys. And if you aren't any of all of the above, then fake it. (Bolt)

A literary hoax is a definitive event; it brings to light the social, political and ethical investments of narrators, readers and publishers in life narrative. A hoax brings autobiography out of the shadows and into the editorials, columns and opinion pieces of the Sunday tabloid: write a book that tells of your woe, or trades on it. Garnish with New Age mysticism ... and showtime! Teary readers! Big sales! Forbidden Love tells how Khouri and her friend Dalia opened a unisex salon in Jordan in 1990. But Dalia, a Muslim, fell in love with a Christian, so shaming her father that he slit her throat. (1) Just perfect for readers looking for the latest victims to weep over. In one shop I found Forbidden Love next to four other books with near identical covers showing Muslim women peering sadly, but so fetchingly, from behind a veil. (Bolt)

And so Andrew Bolt stitches together an alternative 'tradition' of minority life narrative. Here is the dark side of autobiography: 'why not lie, when it works so well that Rigoberta Menchu won a Nobel peace prize through her even more faddish fibbing in her I, Rigoberta Menchu?' The Khouri hoax (2) becomes the latest episode in a history of fakes and fibbers which links together a series of recent testimonies and autoethnographies, by those who bear 'the most sacred marks of victimhood, and particularly that ethnic thing'. (3) Their fakery warn[s] us we're not only pandering to self-pitying rage against the System, but to a romanticisation of victimhood that keeps true victims in their place.

Bolt is a rogue critic. His tendentious canon of 'fake' lives includes My Place and I, Rigoberta Menchu, some of the most celebrated and influential literary testimonies of the recent past, which have been the subject of intensive critical debate, and are by no means generally labelled as hoax texts. But if Bolt's discussion of the marketing of Islamic life narratives is crude and cynical, it is also astute: this is how writers fake lives, trap publishers and find a gullible readership. He is right about the commodification of the veil and the vogueish ethnic autobiography: sad Muslim women peer fetchingly from behind the veil on numerous book jackets in these times. In his account the hoax is the latest move in the game of deceit played both by and on behalf of colonised women.

Bolt isn't the only journalist to make pertinent comments about these 'hot' stories and...
According to you, her testimony threatens to sink the President by contradicting his statements (editorial, July 29). Let's see: Ms. Lewinsky receives total immunity from prosecution if she tailors her testimony to align with what Mr. Starr wants to hear. Gee, I don't know how that could possibly compromise the truthfulness of her testimony. LOWELL ROSS. Redmond, Wash., July 29, 1998.

Khouri's book met a certain demand in the US and other Western societies, where the shortcomings and 'backwardness' of Arab and Muslim societies have become a focus of intense interest to which precious little genuine expertise is brought to bear. Indeed the desire to 'rescue' Muslim women has become a prominent theme in liberal justifications for US intervention in the region. This was most common at the beginning of the Afghanistan War." See further Ali Abunimah, "A Hoax and Honor Lost for Norma Khouri," The Daily Star (Beirut), 10 August 2004, sec. A.

Google Scholar. 4. McCalman, for Take Norma Khouri's Honor Lost: Love and Death in Modern-Day Jordan. It managed to make a farce not only of its own credibility, but also of the credibility of its countless admirers. View. In the wake of this revelation, important questions about how the monologue came to be verified as a witness testimony arise. For instance, how did Daisey create 'the aura of authenticity' that supported his work? Furthermore, what role did the audience and facilitating cultural institutions play in this authentication process?