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A politics of *métissage*: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*

Abstract. In her *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989), Françoise Lionnet identifies the life writing of women of color as the reflection of their heterogeneous differences and theorizes female autobiographical narratives as *métissage*. *Métissage*, nearly untranslatable, meaning “braiding,” views autobiography as an engagement of the author with history, myth, and cultures, and defines it as a braid of multiple voices and disparate forms. In *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), Maxine Hong Kingston combines numerous voices into the (auto)biographical “I” as well as various forms in the narrative to express her identity as comprising manifold, different elements. In her life writing, she neither follows the unique self-representation propagated by male writers nor validates the inner personal tradition of women. Instead, breaking the fixities of thought and expression, she juxtaposes the historical with the mythical, the biographical with the autobiographical to form a language of resistance and solidarity. The present paper argues that by articulating her identity as a braid of differences, constructing self as a braid of multiple voices, and making her narrative a braid of multiple genres and traditions Kingston enacts her life writing as a politics of *métissage*.

Keywords: differences, relational self, politics of *métissage*, Maxine Hong Kingston, blending traditions

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1976) is a collection of stories about growing up in an immigrant family in Stockton, California, in which Maxine Hong Kingston represents an adolescent narrator's difficult experience that is caused by the fact of being “other,” and also conveys her own understanding of what “self” is. In the narrative, Kingston constantly struggles to construct subjectivities at the intersections of racial, gender, and class identities. In the process of positing herself as a Chinese American voice, she creates the “self” as a braid of multiple voices and her writing as a braid of myriad traditions. By doing so, she breaks away from the traditional concept of a “unique” and “separate” self, as well as from the Western monologic concept of autobiography as a genre. Focusing on Kingston's reclamation of oral culture, her articulation of differences, her construction of a dialogical self, her denial of

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hierarchical dichotomy, and her blending of traditions, the present paper argues that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is informed by a politics of *métissage* or braiding.

Since its publication, *The Woman Warrior* has attracted a lot of critical attention. In many instances, the scholarship focuses on Kingston's exploitation of Chinese myths. While the critics like Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan accuse Kingston of distorting Chinese myths and stereotyping Asian American reality, David Li, for example, looks at it as a means of clashing dominant and minority cultures. Regarding Kingston's use of Chinese myths and legends, Sheryl Mylan notes that Kingston "unwittingly constructs an Orientalist framework in her book to differentiate herself from her mother and Chinese culture (Shu 2001: 200); quite to the contrary, Stella Bolaki argues that Kingston claims "a place in a maternal descent line and in Chinese folklores and legends" (Bolaki 2009: 39). Many critics highlight Kingston's boldness in creating feminist fiction. However, reading *The Woman Warrior* as an autobiography, Bonnie Melchior, and Bobby Fong tend to follow a generalized feminist perspective. In all these instances, Kingston's vision is essentialized in one way or another. The present study argues that Kingston mixes Chinese myths with American realities as an autobiographical strategy to articulate her multiple subject positions and heterogeneous strategies in the construction of a dialogical self. Applying Françoise Lionnet's theory of *métissage*, it argues that the construction of self is influenced by gender and other differences, and for such a construction, Kingston uses a dialogic language that is not discriminatory against Chinese or America. Thus, the present paper reads *The Woman Warrior* as a literary manifestation of a politics of braiding differences, voices, and forms, by means of which Kingston resists power structures and creates a bond of solidarity between oppositional hierarchies.

In *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989), accentuating the influence of cultural specificities of ethnicity, class, time, and location, Françoise Lionnet, a Mauritian critic, sees autobiography as "the politics and aesthetics of *métissage*" (1), which braids "voices and textures" (95). While in French, Portuguese, or Spanish the word *métis* is used "to define racial categories" (12), Lionnet is interested in its Latin and Greek homonyms. In Latin, *métis* means "mixed" that "refers to cloth made of two different fibers" (14). In Greek, "*mētis* is the allegorical 'figure of a function or a power,' a cunning intelligence like that of Odysseus, which opposes transparency and the metaphysics of identity" (14). Lionnet uses *métissage* as "braiding" of different voices and forms as a strategy of breaking the unitary concept of identity and expression. Therefore, *métissage* not only indicates the construction of an autobiographical "I" but also refers to the representational strategy. Lionnet explains her formulation of *métissage* in the following way:

[L]et me simply state that for me *métissage* is a praxis and cannot be subsumed under a fully elaborated theoretical system. *Métissage* is a form of *bricolage*, in the sense used by Claude Lévi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompasses far more: it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature. Above all, it is a reading practice that allows me to bring out the interreferential nature of particular texts, which I believe to be of fundamental importance for the understanding of many postcolonial cultures. If [...] identity is a strategy, then *métissage* is the fertile ground for our heterogeneous and heteronomous identities as postcolonial subjects. (8)

For Lionnet, the long Western tradition “conceives of writing as a system that rigidifies, stultifies and kills” its own meanings by denying fluidity of unwritten means of communication and by imprisoning thought in “the cadaverous rigidity of the written sign” (3). She believes that such fixity fails to articulate the voices of marginalized people. To give voice to the people who are pushed aside because of their differences—be it of gender, racial, national, or other differences—discourse should include the “constantly changing context of oral communication” (3) since in oral tradition interlocutors enjoy the freedom to influence each other. According to such a hypothesis, *métissage* is a language of novel vision. As Lionnet asserts,

we have to articulate new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow [us] to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of ‘clarity,’ in all of western philosophy. *Métissage* is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy. (6)

That is why *métissage* as a concept not only disregards the metaphysical notion of self but also dismisses the possibility of a single and unique way of expressing it. As a concept of solidarity, *métissage* “demystifies all essentialist glorifications of unitary origin” (9). Therefore, the interreferential nature of postmodern life writing can be read through the lens of *métissage*.

In *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times* (2009), Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, et al. take *métissage* as “a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages [...] a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis” (9). According to Lionnet and other theorists of the notion of life writing, *métissage* can be viewed as a research practice which braids binaries such as “colonized with colonizer, local with global, East with West, North with South, particular with universal, feminine with masculine, [...] and theory with practice,” language with literacy and, last but not least, familiar with strange (Hasebe-Ludt et al. 2009: 9).

In *Reading Autobiography* (2001), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson divide autobiography criticism as the perspective appearing in three waves, where the latest phase is influenced by the avant-garde experiments, as well as postmodern and postcolonial theories. Being inspired by Derridean deconstruction, Barthesian semiotics, and Foucauldian analysis of the discursive regimes of power, the third wave of autobiography criticism challenges and dismantles “metaphysical conceptions of self-presence, authority, authenticity, and truth” (132). Moreover, it replaces individuality with relationality, and unity with fragmentation and referentiality. At such a point, the definition and generic stability of autobiography collapse into a bricolage. Under such a construction, *métissage* as a theory draws on the postmodern strategies which deconstruct the boundaries of unitary origin in the postmodern autobiographical narratives. Lionnet’s concept is identified as “at once a kind of culmination of feminist positions on theorizing autobiography and a beginning gesture toward theorizing multiple, non-symmetrical differences that are inflected by both the texts under study and the critic’s own cultural location” (Watson 1993: 73).

Since Lionnet identifies *métissage* as the braiding of different cultural forms that revalorize oral traditions and reevaluate Western concepts of identity, the application of

this notion as an analytical tool to read *The Woman Warrior* draws attention to the book's mixture of oral with the literary. Kingston introduces a "talk-story" to ethnic American literature. It is basically a Chinese folk-art dating back to the Song Dynasty, and E.D. Huntley defines it as "community discourse, an inherited oral narrative tradition that incorporates family tales and genealogy, history, familiar adages, folklore, myth, heroic stories, even didactic and cautionary pronouncements that have been handed down—and embellished by successive generations within an extended clan" (66). In *The Woman Warrior*, the storytelling seems to be controlled by Kingston's mother, but in her second collection of short stories, *China Men* (1980), she implies that her mother's storytelling has in fact been inspired by her paternal grandfather, Ah Goong. The narrator claims, "MaMa was the only person to listen to him, and so he followed her everywhere and talked and talked. What he liked telling was his journeys to the Gold Mountain" (127). Therefore, storytelling is neither a masculine nor a feminine practice; instead, it is a Chinese tradition in which both men and women participate on equal terms. The stories are passed from one generation to another, one gender to another, creating a long gallery of mirrors, in which one individual is reflected in another. As Kingston says, "looking through me looking through my mom looking at my grandfather" is a constant possibility (qtd in Thompson 1983: 4). In the process of telling stories, the women prefer fairy tales, and the men share their "Gold Mountain" experiences.² In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston relates the former. Accentuating the fact that the stories are interlocked in gendered, cultural, and ethnic/racial features, Kingston in fact tells her own story of becoming a Chinese American writer. By introducing such a narrative mode, she valorizes oral tradition and challenges the leanness of the Western form of autobiography, as well as its concept of universality.

According to Julia Watson, the concept of *métissage* assumes that "women's differences cannot be essentialized as gynocriticism, but are inflected by cultural specificities of ethnicity, class, time and location" (Watson 1993: 75). In this purview, *métissage* resonates with Neuman's concept of the "poetics of differences" (223) that locates the autobiographical subjectivity at "particular and changing intersections of race, nationality, religion, education, profession, class, language, gender, sexuality, a specific historical moment, and a host of material conditions," and "such poetics would conceive the self not as the product of its different identity from others but as constituted by multiple differences within and from itself" (223-24).

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the interplay of differences has been attempted by the use of the metaphors of silence. The text exhibits the narrator's battle of overcoming several types of silence—imposed silence of her mother regarding her aunt's story, self-imposed silence for hiding her inability to acculturate with the American language and society, and her father's silence that kept her aloof from her ancestral history. The first story from the book starts with the imposed silence that her mother enforces as a parental warning saying, "you must not tell anyone" (3). Mother imposes silence on Kingston by telling her the story of the nameless aunt who killed herself jumping into the family well in China. "No Name Woman," as Kingston calls her, gets pregnant in the absence of her husband, who has gone to the Gold Mountain with other

² "Gold Mountain" is a calque nickname referring to a settlement with a surge of Chinese population caused by the California Gold Rush.

male members of the family in search of fortune. Since the child is illegitimate, the villagers violently react to the conception. Breaking into the doors, ripping off her clothes and shoes, tearing rice sacks, slaughtering livestock, they raid the aunt's home on the night when she is about to give birth to the child. Saving herself from this rampage that night, she gives a "silent birth" (13) in a pigsty and drowns herself and the baby in the family well. The family denies her existence, saying that Kingston's "father has all brothers because it is as if [the aunt] had never been born" (3). Since adultery is an outrage and shame, the family reacts to it by wiping out the woman from their memory. Anh Hua observes that the story is "a testimony to the power of patriarchal erasure in history—the denial of women's sexuality and [sometimes their] existence" (79). This testimony of male power is used as a morality tale on gender roles in Chinese society. Therefore, Kingston's mother uses it as a warning against any sexual promiscuity, saying, "now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born" (5). Thus, the adolescent narrator is condemned to fall into gendered silence.

As a child of immigrant parents, the narrator's silence is linguistic, too. In the American kindergarten, the obligation to speak only English imposes such stress on the narrator that the inability to meet the requirement makes her completely silent during her school years. In other words, the silence is a camouflage to hide her failure. When she understands that she needs to talk to pass an exam, she becomes more helpless. The act of speaking, says the narrator, "makes my throat bleed and takes up that day's courage" (195). Soon she realizes that her silence is the effect of her myriad experiences of racial, national, and gendered otherness. As she asserts: "[t]he other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (197).

Chinese girls' silence stemming from their linguistic differences is not different from Kingston's father's silence in *China Men*. The narrator notes that for BaBa (which is her father's proper name), language incompetence is a barrier to his success. He is hoaxed twice by gypsies, and then they accuse him of tearing new clothes. Before BaBa can defend himself that the clothes were already rags, the gypsies call a policeman and concoct "a big story in English" (13) against him. The narrator says, "you couldn't speak English well enough to counteract it. Fell for it twice. You fell for it twice" (13). The racial and linguistic differences merge with one another since BaBa not only falls prey to the gypsies' trick because of his language incompetence, but he has to hide his resistance out of the fear of deportation.

Kingston demonstrates that racial otherness, gender difference, and linguistic inability intersect with one another. The victimization of Moon Orchid—Kingston's maternal aunt—as a gendered, racial, and linguistic "other" by her husband, is a good case in point. Through Moon Orchid's story, Kingston brings to light how, being branded by multiple forms of otherness, the aunt marks out the "play of differences" to which Kingston is ultimately exposed. Moon has been alone in China for thirty years since her husband left her searching for a fortune in America. Although he sends money to support Moon and their daughter, he betrays Moon with a Chinese American wife. When confronting her husband, Moon cannot claim anything, "all she did was open and shut her mouth without any words coming out" (180). The "rude American Eyes" (181) make the woman feel "stiff and frozen" (179). It is not only the husband who denies her rightful claims, but also the Americanized husband, a successful brain surgeon, a self-made

Franklinian-American man, who disregards her as a Chinese “other.” Here the husband’s patriarchal authority is doubly empowered with his internalized American racism, which victimizes Moon for her gender and racial identity.

Becoming an American, the man identifies himself with supremacy and power, as a result of which the Chinese wife is treated as an exotic other, as “people in a book [he] had read a long time ago” (182). Thus, underscoring the points of intersectional differences, Kingston exemplifies *métissage* as a mutable term for “the racial and linguistic complexity of diasporic [...] peoples one that resonates with the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic superimposition of multiple identities” (Zuss 1999: 87). Depicting the aunts’ silence as well as her silence of early school years, Kingston, in *The Woman Warrior*, implies that women’s differences, which are braided with the ethnic, racial, and linguistic specificities cannot be essentialized in a monolithic notion of gynocriticism.

Like identity, the female model of self is a *métissage* or braiding of multiple voices. It is in this context that Lionnet critiques St. Augustine’s classic concept of subjectivity or self-consciousness exposed in his *Confessions*. She states that “Augustine’s search for plenitude and coherence leads him to emphasize wholeness and completeness, whereas for the women writers, it will become clear that the human individual is a fundamentally relational subject whose ‘autonomy’ can only be a myth” (27). “[F]rom autobiographical writings” of women we can learn “a new way of listening for the relational voice of the self” (248). As she further asserts that

[i]f the self must become other, must lose itself in the other’s essence, all possibilities of transformation into a third term—as happens in the *métissage* ... — are blocked. What we have instead is assimilation, incorporation, and identification with a mirror image. (67)

Reflecting on the validity of Lionnet’s claim, we need to remark that in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston challenges the egoist American “I” that, basically, tells men’s individual stories. Instead of defining herself “through individuation and separation from others” (Schweickart 1986: 54), Kingston has created a flexible ego boundary that defines herself in affiliation with other women. In “White Tigers,” for example, she tells the story of Fa Mu Lan—a mythical and legendary woman in Chinese culture—whose back is carved with the words of vengeance. Fa Mu Lan “took her father’s place in battle” (24). In men’s attire and haircut, she fights against the oppressive baron and returns victorious. The narrator identifies herself with Fa Mu Lan—the woman warrior—as she says “the swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar [...]. What we have in common are the words at our backs” (64). While Fa Mu Lan carried words in her body, the narrator carries them in her first-person narrative.

In “Shaman,” Kingston recalls her mother, Brave Orchid, a storyteller. She learns how, working as a doctor and exorcist, Brave Orchid served her people in China. By driving “the sitting ghost” out with the oil and alcohol, Brave Orchid relieved not only her roommates but also the entire medical school from the grip of ghost. Freeing babies and grown-ups from the torments of the apparition, Brave Orchid saves her people the way Fa Mu Lan has saved her village from the apparition of barons. Thus, she becomes a real-life warrior woman. The immigration to America robs off Brave Orchid’s potential and confines her to the enclaves of Chinatown. She is reduced to menial labor like her male counterparts. To earn extra income, she does her best to look young by dyeing her hair so that the “farmers would hire her” (123) and she can send money to her people

back in China. In fact, Kingston's growing up is intensely affected by her mother's stories of both victimized and victorious women. Mother creates "alternative text[s] of female vulnerability and victimization" (Smith 1987: 162). In many tales, she depicts victimized Chinese women in such a way that they make Kingston feel "lonely and afraid" of her own limitations. The young narrator denies the stories, claiming that they show no logic and "scramble [her] up" (240).

However, the "autobiographical" Kingston reconciles with the mother by internalizing the mother's power of telling stories. For the narrator, having a voice is synonymous with finding the ability to produce narratives. After many years of her early silence, when at last she gains the ability to resist verbally, she says, "I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story" (24). In her adult years, she finds herself diffused with her mother as she says, "I am really a Dragon, as she is a Dragon [...] working always and [...] dreaming the dreams about shrinking babies and the sky covered with airplanes and a Chinatown bigger than the ones here" (129-130). In Chinese culture, a dragon is a symbol of power and authority. By telling the stories of her people in her writing, Kingston exercises power by serving her people the way Brave Orchid and Fa Mu Lan did.

The story entitled "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" introduces Ts'ai Yen, a woman whose words reflect the racial and gendered milieu of her childhood and teenage years. Kingston adds the multivocality of "self," reflecting both the mother and Kingston herself. Ts'ai is captured by the chieftain of the barbarians when she is twenty years old. Making her sit behind, the barbarian chieftain "rode like the haunted from one oasis to the next" (247). Ts'ai Yen "fought desultorily" (247). Like other captive soldiers she, "cut down anyone in her path during the madness of combat" (247). During her twelve-year stay with the barbarians, "she had two children. Her children did not speak Chinese. She spoke it to them when their father was out of the tent, but they imitated her with senseless singsong words and laughed" (247). Then, out of Ts'ai Yen's tent

the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing [...] about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along. (248)

Ts'ai Yen is ingeniously projected in the last tale to serve Kingston's autobiographical purpose. After so many other stories and other characters, Kingston's endeavor to reconstruct her subjectivity achieves a meaningful mastery in the character of Ts'ai Yen—one, who speaks transculturally. When the poet is brought back to her people, she "brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is 'Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,' a song that the Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well" (248-49). While the poet is mythically and historically celebrated as a sign of Chinese ethnocentric and patriarchal supremacy, Kingston "dramatizes interethnic harmony through the integration of disparate art forms" (Cheung 1988: 172). Instead of her return, her return with the words—that can join "disparate art forms"—is significant to Kingston.

Unlike Ts'ai Yen, Kingston does not go back to China, but like Ts'ai Yen, Kingston creates a song that connects China with America. She believes that the material of her ancestral culture has been translated well into her present language. Instead of struggling against each culture's degenerative forces, Kingston celebrates the "poet who

sings to foreign music” (Cheung 1988: 172). Throughout the book, Kingston pieces “together cultural myths and personal experiences to develop her sense of self” (Patel 2019:1). It is an intersubjective self, which is dialogically related to many other women of her family, history, and myth. This dialogic engagement with her ancestry enables the author to materialize a complex, multi-layered “dynamic self-fashioning” (Lionnet 1989: 68) which is “not only constructed by differences but also capable of choosing, inscribing and making a difference” (Neuman 1992: 225).

The characters in all five narratives seek expression through words—Fa Mu Lan’s words of revenge, Ts’ai Yen’s words of anger and sadness, the mother’s words of her talk stories, and the aunt’s muffled words of denial, submerged in silence. Kingston shows that instead of merging with the “other,” the self accommodates, assimilates, and identifies numerous other voices in itself. Therefore, the self-consciousness she opts for is not isolated, fixed, and close-ended. Rather her self-consciousness is relational, fluid, and open-ended. Not only does it not break the concept of an isolated individual but also “asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community” (Friedman 1998: 79). Instead of asserting an autonomous individual, Kingston constructs a group identity, the idea which resonates with Hubert J. M. Hermans’ concept of the dialogical self since it is “populated by the voices of other people, decentralized with highly open boundaries, and historically and culturally contextualized” (90). By constructing such a self, Kingston posits that “subjectivity (and writing) is always already filled with the voices of others” (Lionnet 1989: 68).

By internalizing suppressed voices, Kingston indirectly formulates bitter comments on sexism, communism, capitalism, and racism, implying that “[it is] the reporting [that] is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words” (64). She retaliates against the misogynistic clichés such as “Girls are maggots in the rice. It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters” (52), which in the 1970s were still prevalent in immigrant communities. Her report attacks also the pervasive racism that would notoriously dehumanize the Chinese people in America. She deplores America that makes her mother dye her hair to look young so that she can be hired in the field to pick up tomatoes. She vents her anger about the hardships of her family, the loss of their laundry business in the process of “urban renewal” (58) She denounces her disappointment with the American lifestyle, its racism, and the sexism she is subjected to. Although she knows that the so-called normal “Chinese women’s voices are strong and bossy” (204), the narrator she creates needs to resort to whispering if she wants to live up to American cultural standards. But even the muffled voice cannot save her a job. By reporting on all sorts of anomalies of the power structure, *The Woman Warrior* gives voice to the self that simultaneously constructs and reconstructs itself from multiple marginalities and differences.

Returning again to the key term of reference in the present analysis, we need to note that *métissage* is the language of solidarity which can be achieved through non-hierarchical modes of expression, and

it is only by imagining nonhierarchical modes of relation among cultures that we can address the crucial issues of indeterminacy and solidarity. *Métissage* is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages. (Lionnet 1989: 5)

Kingston pitches on such a notion of alliance in her life writing. Instead of creating new modes of hierarchy, she gives equal importance to different senses of belonging and different cultures. Moreover, she challenges the monocultural discourse of civility and savagery by comparing the modes of oppression her family faced both in communist China and racist America. Against the violence of communist China, the narrator puts the slum violence of Stockton, California, as she says, “The corpses I’ve seen had been rolled and dumped, sad little dirty bodies covered with a police khaki blanket” (62).

The narrator’s adolescent adherence to American culture apparently exhibits her preference for the American promises of empowerment and freedom. However, the authorial Kingston asserts that while the Chinese female “I” turns the women crooked and subservient, the English “I,” considering women as “the second sex,” as Simone de Beauvoir famously puts it, keeps no room for her. In this connection, L.D. Li claims that the English “I” is divinely empowered, and “has an alien effect on the female bearers of the language” (504). Hence, the narrator of the text is silenced both by the Chinese and English tongue as a woman—one enslaving her, another keeping her just unacknowledged, respectively. Portraying the mother and the mythical foremothers as symbols of powerful women, Kingston demonstrates that if empowerment of women is possible in America, the possibility is not completely erased in China. Thus, Kingston denies the monocultural hierarchical dichotomy. Leaving home, the autobiographical narrator wants to embrace American individualism, dreaming the dreams of a bigger Chinatown. Thus, she neither places America over China nor creates a new hierarchy of China over America; rather, she forms a bond of solidarity between her different senses of belonging.

Finally, the strategy of braiding can be observed in the textuality of *The Woman Warrior*. Lionnet identifies female textuality as *métissage* “that is the weaving of different strands of raw material and threads of various colors into one piece of fabric” (213). Weaving different genres into a piece of life writing Kingston enacts *métissage* of such kind: the story of the nameless aunt reads like a cautionary message, and the account of Fa Mu Lan resembles an adventurous revenge story; the narrative of her mother brings to mind a ghost tale, and the last section of the book combines the autobiographical with the historical and mythical. Kingston’s story of Fa Mu Lan matches neither the popular culture nor her mother’s version. Sau-ling Wong pinpoints three major traditions on the basis of which Kingston conflates the story. Fa Mu Lan’s yarn mixes some elements of Chinese martial-arts novels and their contemporary equivalents in the Kung Fu cinema with the stories of peasant uprisings in classical novels and the well-known legend of general Yüeh Fei, a general in Song Dynasty whose back has been carved with the words of patriotism and loyalty by his parents. In “Maxine Hong Kingston’s Genre-Defying Life and Work,” Hua Hsu remarks that “bookstores labeled it [*The Woman Warrior*] fiction, nonfiction, sociology, anthropology, biography, women’s literature, Chinese literature, and Asian literature” (1). Indeed, it is a collage of genres, it defies rigid classifications, and it is “at once a novel, an autobiography, a series of essays and poems” (Blinde 1979: 52). Bobby Fong considers such a blend of folk legends, folk tales, essays, poems “wholly appropriate to the genre of autobiography” (123). Thus, the intertextuality and genre blend in the narrative, prefiguring bricolage, a female text, and a *métissage* of forms (Lionnet 1989: 214).

To sum up, the complex experiential history of race, gender, generation, and ethnicity anchors the autobiographical subject in multiple locations, from which Kingston “meanders along the streams of Chinese mythology and American culture” (Ludwig & Alexoae-Zagni 2014: 35) to formulate her individual and collective vision. From the ever-changing narrative of Chinese “talk-story,” Kingston creates autobiographical narrative, where the “self” constructs and reconstructs itself, simultaneously continuing with and discontinuing from the Chinese and American tradition. Believing, as Lionnet does, that the Western form of writing imprisons meanings in a set of signs which fail to articulate the voices of minorities, Kingston has made a conscious mutation of Chinese oral tradition with American writing form to liberate writing from a static condition. Kingston’s life writing has woven different strands into a new fabric—a postmodern autobiographical narrative—where revitalizing Chinese oral culture, rewriting history are instrumental in giving voice to the “silence” originating from differences. In other words, by embracing a politics of *métissage*, the narrative of *The Woman Warrior* constructs a dialogical self, privileges a non-hierarchical mode of expression, and fuses various genres together.

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