

## WHISPERS THROUGH THE WARRIOR'S THREAD: COGNITIVE DISSONANCE, MAGICAL REALISM, AND THE POWER OF HEALING SELF IN KINGSTON'S THE WOMAN WARRIOR: MEMOIRS OF A GIRLHOOD AMONG GHOSTS

 Mohamed Elamine Rabia<sup>1</sup>  Mohammed Gouffi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila, (Algeria)  
[mohamedelamine.rabia@univ-msila.dz](mailto:mohamedelamine.rabia@univ-msila.dz)

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila, (Algeria)  
[mohammed.gouffi@univ-msila.dz](mailto:mohammed.gouffi@univ-msila.dz)

**Abstract:** The present research probes into the way magical realism constitutes a therapeutic paradigm from cognitive dissonance in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. In this creative nonfiction, Kingston opens a narrative window into her readers evoking the Chinese myths, family stories and events of her California childhood that have shaped her identity as the inbetweener. While other studies have done much to examine this work from feminist, postcolonial, or cultural identity perspectives, almost no research has gone far to put under a literary microscope the intersection of magical realism with cognitive dissonance symptom. Through a reference to Cognitive Dissonance Theory, the research explores the protagonist's psychological journey and identity malaise as she endures to resist the conflicting demands for maintaining the traits of her Chinese sense of belonging as met by a demanding quest for asserting an American identity. Methodologically, the study undertakes a literary scrutiny that is succinctly backed up by a psychological framework. Precisely, it serves the textual analysis of Kingston's narrative, reading the protagonist demeanor through the lens of psychological theory and narrative strategies. This narrative therapy, infused with narrative strategies borrowed from magical realism, blurs the lines between reality and imagination in such a way that enables the reader to explore the protagonist's cultural and personal identities. Categorized under literary psychology, the research aims to bring to view the vitality of narrative techniques: myth writing and storytelling, as therapeutic potential for individuals who have to grapple with the syndromes of cognitive dissonance. The study comes to a conclusion that myth and storytelling serve as a compelling mode of psychological therapy from personal and cultural dissonance.

**Keywords:** Cognitive dissonance; healing self; hyphenated-identities; inbetweenness; magical realism; myth

### How to cite the article:

Rabia, M. E., & Gouffi, M. (2026). Whispers through the warrior's thread: Cognitive dissonance, magical realism, and the power of healing self in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)*, 9(1), 208-218.

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author : Mohamed Elamine Rabia Authors' ORCID ID : <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9845-3018>

## 1. Introduction

Definitely, literature of minorities continues to feed scholarly focus, for number of academics as it is site of the creation of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ and their tragic, dramatic or romantic encounter on space of blank sheets. It is the location where the ordinary meets extraordinary and where reality encounters imagination, offering readers a unique keyhole through which to view and understand the intricacies and interactions of human experience. More precisely, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* [henceforth *The Woman Warrior*] is among the literary works that stand as an excellent example of this encounter through its masterful juxtaposition of autobiography with myth to explore its author psychological world.

Following the path of her Asian-American precursors, who focused on survival, transformation, and contradiction (Zhang, 2012, p. 26), the Chinese-American novelist Kingston emerged as one of the American promising pens in the American minority literature tradition. Her work *The Woman Warrior* is certainly a seminal work that sheds lights on the marginalization of hyphenated identities contributing a great deal to both Asian-American and feminist literatures. Through an artistic blending of autobiography with storytelling and myth, the novel challenges the traditional genre, crafting a rich space that subverts and redefines conventional storytelling. Through fresh eyes, the work does not merely provide thought-provoking discussion on cultural identity, but it also delves into the female experience, exploring identity construction as regards psychological conflict.

At the theoretical level, cognitive dissonance— introduced by Leo Festinger is a psychological phenomenon that occurs when an individual experiences mental discomfort once embracing two or more contradictory beliefs, principles, or conducts often leading to an alteration in one of the conflicting cognitions or the adoption of new beliefs to reduce the inconsistency (Festinger, 1957, p.3). In a similar vein, Festinger argues that “the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance” (p.3). In so doing, to reduce cognitive discomfort, individuals tend to modify their beliefs or rationalize their behavior so as to maintain consistency between thoughts and actions. (McLeod, 2025)

As central to the understanding cognitive dissonance as a phenomenon that infiltrates the field of literature, one has to bear in mind that this phenomenon is frequently employed to fathom characters' internal conflicts. Cognitive dissonance in literature captures the internal tension arising from inconsistency between conflicting cognitive elements such as beliefs, ideals, or perceptions. Authors use this concept to dramatize the characters' struggle that arise when their actions do not align with their creeds or values. George Orwell's *1984* protagonist, for instance, experiences it as he struggles between two contradictory beliefs: embracing the oppressive ideology of the Party on the one hand and secretly holding rebellious thoughts on the other.

In weaving a story where a girl is required to dwell in two confounding worlds: The Californian setting to which her parents have immigrated and the Chinese world of her mother's talk stories, Kingston judged the wisdom of using the power of literature in order to create an alternative world that lends her a voice. In conjunction with Kingston's memoir, Bootheina Majoul powerfully avers that

Literature has been the finest means of human expression. Its tool is the language through which it creates alternative universes representing facts or fiction. Whether imagined or real, narratives have the power to voice silence, unveil verity and become thus receptacles of an ever present past. Indeed, Literature empowers; it acts as memory preserved within closed pages,

forgotten then remembered every time a book is read. It survives time and revives reminiscences (2024, p.159).

Notwithstanding the previous claims, it is tempting to underscore that literature also functions as a laboratory for physical diseases and their impact on identity. In *Falling into the Nowhere: Losing Identity with Alzheimer's in Lisa Genova's Still Alice*, Senoussi (2024) shows how Alzheimer's destabilizes selfhood, examining narrative, chronotopic, and psycho-existential perspectives. His study highlights how literature renders identity loss visible—an approach that aligns with the present research, which views *The Woman Warrior* as a site where cultural dissonance and hybridity are likewise narrated and therapeutically mediated. (Senoussi, p. 432)

In another dimension, magical realism is a literary genre that incorporates magical elements into a realistic setting presenting a realistic view of the world. The reader's perception of reality is, therefore, challenged in a world where supernatural elements coexist with the mundane in a coherent and believable manner (Faris, 2004, p. 01). In this tradition, the lines between speculation and reality are often blurred as the magical realist writers, particularly among a wave of Latin-American writers in the 20th Century who “weave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales” (Abrams, 1999, p 196). The result is that magical realism has made a long and rich history of bending genres, decoding metaphors, and inspiring authors.

Certainly, individuals who are born to immigrant-parents and live in the US more often find themselves struggling with two conflicting cultures and identities, the thing, which causes them to construct imbalanced identities whose most remarkable feature is cognitive dissonance that grows to affect the personal and cultural identities. Kingston's story is to a larger extent similar to Updike's protagonist Ahmed in his novel *Terrorist* (2006) as both can be seen as “an allegory of unwilling compromise between two opposite and conflicting worlds, the West vs. the Orient” (Meziani ,2024, p. 113). In context as such, Kingston is said to have a hyphenated identity, frequently finding herself trapped in a state of in-betweenness; a space where she is neither fully embraced by the host culture nor entirely connected to her culture of origin. In fact, “[the in-between space] demonstrates how human interactions and familiarity are pivotal in reviving the sense of belonging to socially unidentified individuals. Eventually, this leads to the positioning of individuals in a new space; a micro-community”. (Zaidi and Salama, 2025, p. 454). As a creative author, ergo, Kingston tries to tackle this cultural duality that often leads to psychological crisis, attempting to reconcile the conflicting beliefs or values simultaneously. Therefore, this research takes the following questions as a point of departure: How does Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, engage with the protagonist's cognitive dissonance especially when personal and cultural identity come to the fore? How do folklore and myth function as therapeutic tools in the protagonist's journey towards self-healing and cultural integration?

Numerous scholars have dealt with the use of magical realism in *The Woman Warrior*. In his essay *Challenging the Canon: How Maxine Hong Kingston Narrates Nonfiction with Ghosts and Talk-Story*, Patel (2019), drawing on Jenkins, discusses how Kingston uses this narrative style to subvert the Anglo-androcentric canon that valorises realism and dismisses non-realistic forms of storytelling. (Patel, 2019, para. 4). The psychological advantages of folklore and myth in literature, on the other hand, have been approached in various studies. In her work *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim discusses how fairy tales help children process complex emotions and situations, providing a framework for an adequate understanding their world (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 55). Similarly, Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde* examines the enduring power of myths and fairy tales in shaping cultural

and personal identities (Warner, 1994). However, we have never come across a study which ponders directly or indirectly the concept of cognitive dissonance in the novel in question. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to explore the psychological impact of magical realism in *The Woman Warrior*. More specifically, it seeks to expound how this magical realism style helps resolve cognitive dissonance and promote healing. By analysing the protagonist's engagement with folklore and myth, this study attempts to uncover the therapeutic potential of these narrative strategies in addressing cultural and personal conflicts.

The motivation that pushed us forward to conducting this study lies in the need to identify the psychological impact of Kingston's use of unique narrative techniques in delineating characters that grapple with dissonance. While much has been written about the thematic and feminist aspects of *The Woman Warrior*, there is a notable gap in the literature *via à vis* the specific psychological processes that are translated in Kingston's use of folklore and myth. Understanding these processes can offer valuable insights into the broader field of literary psychology and the therapeutic applications of narrative. The essay, in other words, is meant for achieving a set of objectives. Firstly, it tries to employ Cognitive Dissonance Theory as an analytical framework to ponder the psychological impact of folklore and myth in *The Woman Warrior*. More precisely, it endeavours to examine the protagonist's internal conflicts and the resolution of these conflicts through magical realism, that is why the research provides insights into how folklore and myth function as healing tools. Secondly, the article seeks to analyse the clash between the protagonist's cultural heritage and American societal expectations and examines the way the blend of magical realism within the story provides the protagonist with a metaphorical landscape in which she can work through and resolve these cultural contradictions. In anchoring the study in a psychological approach, it is meant for contributing a fresh perspective into literary psychology through the examination of the personal culture trauma and social dualistic dissonance and advances the argument that the use of myths and magical realism increases recovery pace from cultural dissonance.

## **2. Between the Rock of Cognitive Dissonance and the Magic Healing of Magical Realism**

### *2.1. Silence, Dissonance, and Cultural Conflict*

Premised on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, this research article is a psychological journey into Kingston's protagonist and hence endeavours to demonstrate how this theory specifically describes the psychological discomfort that arises from holding two or more contradictory cognitions that may encompass beliefs, attitudes, or items of knowledge. Correspondingly, the cognitive consistency motivates individuals to reduce the dissonance. Nevertheless, in order to understand the protagonist's internal psychological state of and the strategies to reduce the discomfort caused by their own conflicting beliefs, the study elaborates the way these conflicts emerge from the individual's malaise with other individuals or groups.

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the reader finds that her first years were characterized by a deep silence imposed by cultural expectations and parental authority. This silence became a symbol for her as she sets to compromise two conflicting worlds. Perhaps the most striking moment occurs when Kingston's mother recounts a buried memory from infancy when "[she caught the protagonist's tongue] so that [she] would not be tongue-tied. [Her] tongue would be able to move in any language" (Kingston, p. 164). While the act was meant to empower her daughter, it ironically contributes to Kingston's speech anxiety and deepens her alienation. In this regard, Kingston comments that at that moment she realized that "[she] had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery" (p. 165); but this silence is not just personal, it becomes the result of dissonance as she tries to resolve two cultures fighting for supremacy.

Psychological research confirms that emotionally suppressive family environments—where caregivers downplay or inhibit emotional expression—are associated with elevated risk of anxiety, internalizing behaviors, and emotional dysregulation in children. For instance, a study on adolescents found that greater use of expressive suppression significantly predicted more internalizing problems, especially when emotional self-efficacy was low (Lonigro et al. 2023). This aligns with Kingston’s experience: an imposed silence intended as protection inadvertently deprives her of emotional agency and contributes to diasporic dissonance.

In literary studies, cognitive dissonance theory, as previously mentioned, offers a crucial lens for understanding the psychological clashes individuals usually experience. Throughout *The Woman Warrior*, the protagonist finds herself obliged to reconcile the contrasting demands of her Chinese heritage and the ideals of American society. In other words, the protagonist has to entertain a space that balances the contrasting demands of her Chinese values of silence, modesty, and obedience taught at home, and the American ideals of self-expression and assertiveness that she needed to assume at school. Such a conflict puts her in a liminal space—neither fully Chinese nor entirely American. A tension that Li (1998), citing Diane Johnson’s review in *The New York Review of Books*, links to the way *The Woman Warrior* was celebrated for transcending “class, age, race or ethnicity” and achieving “the universal qualities of female condition” (p. 11). This duality creates a profound psychological conflict which, together with the borderline diasporic identity, sustains the narrative. As Festinger (1957) states:

If a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with each other, he will try to make them consistent. When this cannot be done, he may try to reduce the importance of one of the inconsistent elements or add new elements to outweigh the dissonant ones.” (p. 3)

Pursuing this argument further within Kingston’s narrative, what deepens the psychological limbo is the internalization of another contradictory belief: her mother “feared [her daughter would] be a slave wife, [yet she taught her] the song of the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan, [insisting that she] would have to grow up a warrior woman” (Kingston, 1976, p. 20). As the reader scrutinizes the last quote, it becomes clear that the protagonist is caught between an inherited legacy of silence and the mythical ideal of resistance. In other words, the protagonist’s identity is shaped by conflicting expectations that are both oppressive and empowering. In this regard, Lim notes how the paradox of maternal instruction mirrors the dissonance inherent in language socialization and identity formation as “language difference becomes racialized” (Lim, 2006, p. 51- 62). For the protagonist, this warped yet powerful subservient conditioning dichotomy serves as a deep psychological dissonance.

## 2.2. *Myth and Magical Realism as Healing Strategies*

Intriguingly, however, the character’s fantasy training with legendary figures as a swordswoman resonates with her internal conflict, blurring the boundary between myth and self. The narrator reflects that she and the swordswoman “are not so dissimilar,” and she hopes that her “people understand the resemblance soon so that [she] can return to them” (Kingston, 1976, p. 58). This self-identification adds an additional layer to the internal conflict. By invoking this mythical figure, she constructs a self-image of an assertive woman as opposed to the quiet girl shaped by the patriarchy. As Direnç notes,

The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar ... Similar to Fa Mu Lan's experience ... those troubled years give her what she needs ... to fight against injustice ... 'What we have in common are the words at our backs (2006, para. 10).

Within the framework of cultural dislocation, magical realism serves as a literary mode through which Kingston, as many other writers, resolves psychological and social conflicts. Described as a mode of writing characterized by the inclusion of supernatural elements into a mundane realistic setting, magical realism provides an opportunity to portray the essence of reality, particularly for those whose realities are multifaceted due to cultural dislocation. In this sense, Zamora and Faris (1995) remark that "Magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic" (p. 5). By using magical realism, Kingston constructs a narrative space in which the heroine's suffering is palpable.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the protagonist's magical reverie brings forth a semblance of integration amid conflicting elements, providing an illustration on how can the power of magical realism be employed as a narrative tool to resolve discord. Maxine Hong Kingston's blending of autobiography with folklore and myth not only creates a rich text but also provides both symbolic and therapeutic relief for the protagonist's internal struggles. In the second chapter, Kingston demonstrates this struggle through the myth of Fa Mu Lan, as she reimagines her identity: "When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen. Even if she had to rage across all China, a swordswoman got even with anybody who hurt her family" (Kingston, 1976, p.24).

While Warner and Campbell have addressed symbols in more appropriate depth, myth that serves human society still requires emphasis as it provides societies and groups with anxiety-relieving mechanisms. This idea is present in the protagonist's imaginative voyage that initiates with a symbolic call to adventure, which "would come from a bird that flew over [her] roof. In the brush drawings it looks like the ideograph for 'human,' two black wings" (Kingston, 1976, p. 20). Joseph Campbell, on the other hand, is known for his idea of "monomyth", or "hero's journey," constituting a morphing tale observed in the history of life. In his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell states that the "monomyth" contains the crucial components of an adventuring call, crossing multiple boundaries, overcoming various challenges, changing oneself, and returning with new directions for the world (Campbell, 2004, p. 22). Warner noted without providing deeper analysis that fairy tales and myths serve for partly containing language of symbolic character that articulates core movements of society's psyche (1994, p. 8). Campbell recognized ever existent pattern in myth of multitude of diverse civilizations.

The story of Fa Mu Lan serves as life-sustaining archetype *par excellence*, by which the narrator constructs her understanding of fortitude and endurance. The narrator's declaration that "[she] would have to grow up as a warrior woman" (Kingston, 1976, p. 20) captures this metamorphosis process. This self-perception, moreover, enables her to adopt an inner model of a self-sufficient woman without further strain deriving from her inherited culture. By embodying the Fa Mu Lan persona of, Kingston seamlessly blends the cultural expectations of her identity with her wish to be free. In doing so, she softens the tension caused by having two competing conflicting ideas simultaneously. In this regard, Joseph Campbell sheds light on the significance of myth within this process. According to Campbell, a hero's journey consists of repeated series basic psychological elements of human life (Campbell, 2004, P. xxv). This idea is present in *The Woman Warrior* where the protagonist's journey encompasses these stages, more so the more prominent the call to adventure and the crossing of the thresholds. Engaging with supernatural elements and myth, these stories set off

an introspective journey through the difficult landscapes of dual culture identity. Moreover, they provide the means for Kingston to confront the complexities of her psychological integration.

### **3. Going beyond Identity Duality: The Supernatural and the Power of Healing**

#### *3.1. Trauma, Stigma, and the Erasure of Women*

In scrutinizing the novel, Kingston seems to build a liminal narrative space where trauma, culture, identity, and the imaginary collide within the diasporic experience. This space could be described as a psychic geography of exile, where the use of fantastical elements is not an act of escapism *per se*, but rather a deliberate strategy that juxtaposes postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities in an attempt to reconcile fractured selves. The novel's first chapter, for instance, already sets the stage for this tension, as Kingston this imaginative struggle through the lens of recurring nightmare. A repetitive one where she sees herself " [curling her fingers] to make a cradle for the baby... it spouts hot water... scalding the baby until its skin tautens and its face becomes nothing but a red hole of a scream" (Kingston, 1976, p. 62). These visions serve as a metaphor for traumatic history, for they depict how young girls are being of tormented repeatedly. As though they were a haunting metaphor for a history of pain that refuses to fade.

Refusing the refuge of fantasy, Kingston instead weaponizes magical realism as a deliberate narrative choice to hold opposing forces in tension: reality and fiction, East and West, the submissive wife and the silent slave, the self and the other. A mode of flight that not only narrates the psychological splintering of diasporic existence, but also attempts to reconcile the dissonance. Razmi & Jamali (2012, p. 111), in this regard, present postcolonial magical realism as another mode of narration that centres on marginalized voices to unsettle Eurocentric historiography, with the legend of Fa Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior* serving as a prime example of this literary device *par excellence*.

Critic Maggie Ann Bowers, in this light, points out the use of magical realism in reframing non-Western experiences. According to her, magical realism opens "a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality... to that of Western philosophy" (Bowers, 2004, p 1). From the positions of diaspora and feminism, the myth is reimagined as Kingston defies Chinese folklore's rigid female roles as a swordswoman historiographic avatar. A chant of a girl who replaced her father in battle and decided to grow up a wife and a slave. This legend "taught [Kinston] the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan," and she "would have to grow up a warrior woman" (Kingston, 1976, p. 20). In other words, the myth becomes the syntax of survival.

In this context, language becomes excavation: Kingston digs beneath dominant myths to recover a usable past. She, in other words, transforms myth into a framework for self-creation that is both cultural and gendered in nature. Simone de Beauvoir (2011), in this vein, emphasizes that identity can be created through specific actions, for, according to her, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 283). In *The Woman Warrior*, the protagonist is an embodiment of this idea, as she does not simple inherit identity, but instead she builds it. In other words, rather than being simply an American or Chinese woman, Kingston becomes a warrior woman through myth and language. The fantastical, here, serves not to obscure reality but to render its psychological contradictions narratively and emotionally legible. In this regard, Lyotard's postmodern concept of "incredulity toward metanarratives" explains how Kingston uses myth to question rigid identity constructs, where each sentence bears the echo of unsaid histories (1984, p. 2).

In an attempt to remodel inherited stories to accommodate new diasporic subjectivities, the writer invokes the mythic not to flee from the real but to rewrite it. Myth, therefore, becomes the medium through which cultural dissonance is symbolically negotiated. A medium that enables the narrator to preserve ancestral traditions while simultaneously resisting their oppressive elements. As Kingston herself reflects, “I continue to sort out what’s just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living” (Kingston, 1976, p. 205). What cannot be spoken is encoded in gesture, symbol, and ghost.

There is no doubt that *The Woman Warrior* occupies a privileged place in resilience literature. From its very first breath, the narrative hums with the phantasmic labour of memory. In the opening chapter, “No Name Woman,” the supernatural becomes a medium through which Kingston grapples with the unspeakable. Her mother tells her the story of a forgotten aunt who gives birth to an illegitimate girl alone in a pigsty. By the end, the No Name Aunt commits a suicide by drowning herself and her child in the family’s well after being attacked by the villagers and banished from her family. After that incident, her family effaced her name and existence from the recorders of their memories, while Kingston learned that she had an aunt from her mother who warns her to not, “tell anyone what [she is] about to tell [her]” (Kingston, 1976, p. 3) moment initiates a haunting tale of familial shame and erasure. In doing so, she not only resurrects her aunt’s memory but also reclaims narrative. This agency, performing what might be called an insurgent cartography of voice transforming silence into resistance. She speaks in shadows, in myths, in murmurs that resist erasure. According to Michelle Balaev, “silence is a rhetorical strategy, rather than evidence for the epistemological void created by the experience of trauma.” (Balaev, p. 162). In order to resurrect the narrator’s fragmented past into a cohesive story, the author silences the shame-bound women, which creates a tension between self-loathing ingrained shame and emerging feminist self-regard.

It is very tempting to highlight that in many Eastern cultures, women are punished far more severely than men for the same offence. Kingston’s metaphor of the “No Name Woman” can interestingly be paralleled in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In this work, Hosseini begins his novel with Nana, an Afghan woman who commits adultery and therefore finds herself living alone with her illegitimate daughter in the Kolba, a humble mud hut built with walls made of mud bricks and mortar. For Nana, this was nothing but “his idea of penance” (Hosseini, p. 08), for she lives in a society where women always bear alone the weight of adultery. In the end, Nana commits suicide, just as the No Name Woman does—who chooses to drown herself and her child in the family’s well after being attacked by the villagers and banished from her family. Nana’s name, on the other hand, in Hosseini’s narrative is never revealed. Her daughter, Mariam, calls her by the name “Nana”, which supports the hypothesis that Mariam invented it as a baby—most babies use an easy utterance such as the repetition of the sound “na” when addressing someone. The narrative reads as if the author wants to say that Nana’s real name and identity is erased definitely from her society the day she committed adultery. She becomes not just a woman, but a wound written in silence. Both ‘Linguistic Development’ and ‘Child Language Acquisition’ place a time frame between six and eight months for the production of canonical babbling, which includes the two syllable routized patterns “nana” (University of Pennsylvania Department of Linguistics, n. d), which this supports the hypothesis that Mariam is likely the creator of the name “Nana,” employing early speech patterns rather than an adult-designated name.

In placing the novel in conversation with stigma theory, which is, according to Erving Goffman, a socially constructed process in which individuals are reduced to a "spoiled identity" when an attribute is perceived as discrediting because it contradicts socially expected identities within a given context (Goffman 1986, p 3). In relation to Kingston and Hosseini's texts, *No Name Woman* and *Nana* are labeled as an "adulteress" by their eastern communities. A guilt that leads to erase their personal identities within their communities. According to Goffman (1986), stigmatized individuals are either "discredited", those whose stigma is visible, and "discreditable", whose stigma is hidden, depending on whether their stigma is visible or hidden (p.4). *Nana* and the *No Name Woman*, as discredited individuals, bear the full weight of societal judgment.

Kingston's encounter with stigma unfurls not through overt punishment, but through a slow erosion. In an interview entitled *Maxine Hong Kingston: Talking Story* Kingston talks about how she experiences identity erasure through cultural labeling when she sees a portrayed Chinese man labeled as "little Chinaman". At that moment, Kingston tells us how she "felt really like [she] was pushed out of literature" ... as though she was that "little Chinaman." The excerpt reveals the impact of racism on Kingston's childhood—being referred to as "the Chinaman" in books made her feel erased and alienated from a dominant narrative. (American Archive of Public Broadcasting, 1990, 23:28)

### 3.2. *Hybridity and Identity's Liminal Space*

Undeniably, however, that the work mirrors what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as "reterritorialization"; i.e., the process by which deterritorialized elements are re-established or reorganized within new configurations of relations (Deleuze & Guattari, p.55). Kingston's hyphenated identity as both Chinese and American is symbolically mapped onto her encounters with myths and supernatural elements that externalize her inner conflict and make it narratable. The nonlinear genre-defying narrative structure mirrors this internal conflict. This hybrid form where she blends autobiography, folktale, and fiction undermines realist conventions that favour coherence and closure. Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes this kind of inner conflict as a liminal space, explaining that it is an "in between the designations of identity... prevents identities ... from settling into primordial polarities" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). The sense of "in-betweenness" is similar to W.E.B. Dubois' notion of double consciousness. It is the condition of "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (Du Bois, 2007, p 9) within a single body. Kingston lives this tension. She feels the weight of the Chinese tradition and the American culture at the same time. Like Dubois's subject, there is an overwhelming sense of being "two-ness" neither fully Chinese nor American. At home, the silence is enforced as a means of control while in school the expectation is to talk. In this way, *The Woman Warrior* illustrates how hyphenated identity subjects are not at peace, but constantly trying to adapt to competing cultural worlds. This is Kingston's genius: to render the in-between not as confusion, but as creative terrain. Furthermore, Arteaga (1997) goes further by defining hybridity as not merely cultural or psychological, but "a fundamental physical reality". In other words, it is an embodied condition grounded in lived experience, ancestry, and material existence (p. 11).

Kingston uses this simultaneity to legitimize dissonance, allowing her narrator to inhabit cultural contradiction without psychological collapse. The identity contradictions Kingston faces are vividly manifest in her internal linguistic conflict. As she decides, as an American-Chinese girl to "make [herself] American-feminine" not like normal Chinese women who have "strong and bossy" voices. This sharp juxtaposition encapsulates the interplay of the conflicting forces she undergoes, a life between a syntax of contradiction, where each word negotiates belonging. Within this framework, language functions as both a tool of self-expression and a by-product of educational conditioning. Much like the colonial

classroom, which sought to reprogram colonized subjects into imperial interpreters, Kingston's American schooling reinforces the internalization of Western femininity and the Americanization of her identity. Kingston's case is pretty much the same as the Algerian novelist Ar'Ar's protagonist in *Mā lā Tadhruhū al-Riyāh* as "the colonial schools brought up generations of Algerians non-white in skin but French in taste." (Gouffi, 2024, p. 98)

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, what stands out most in *The Woman Warrior* is that it is not just a recounting of diasporic wounds, but a rewriting of silenced voices. Trauma here is not only remembered, but also transformed into something that resists forgetting and insists on being heard. In this space, myth and memory come together, blurring the fragile line between what is real and what is imagined.

Magical realism, ergo, is more than a style; it is both a way of telling and a way of healing. This research argues, then, that the blending of myth, memory, and autobiography constitutes a cognitive strategy for survival. In centring narrative as a form of postcolonial agency, Kingston articulates a mode of healing that is rooted in the persistent return to the site of injury, where storytelling becomes the terrain upon which cultural injury is both witnessed and reimagined.

Seen this way, the novel stages a psychic reterritorialization in which the wound is neither hidden nor revealed, neither silenced nor voiced, neither forgotten nor remembered. And yet, Kingston's fractured narrative becomes an aesthetic enactment of cultural injury, using dissonance not as a weakness but as a source of creative power, for giving that trauma is a wound and "literature is only born from wounds" (qtd. in Gouffi & Berrahal, 2020, p. 18)

#### References

- Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A glossary of literary terms* (7th ed.). Thomson Learning.
- American Archive of Public Broadcasting. (1990, March 20). *Maxine Hong Kingston: Talking story* [Video]. <https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-55-2r3nv99g58>
- Arteaga, A. (1997). *Chicano poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Balaev, M. (2008). *Trends in literary trauma theory. Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 41(2), 149–166. University of Manitoba. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>
- Beauvoir, S. de. (2011). *The second sex* (C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Bettelheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Vintage Books.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Bowers, M. A. (2004). *Magic(al) realism*. Psychology Press. <https://books.google.dz/books?id=dv8-YL5SKEYC>
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Books.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Direnç, D. (2006, May). Restored identities in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Trans – Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, 16. [http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/06\\_1/direnc16.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/06_1/direnc16.htm)
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (2007). *The souls of black folk* (B. H. Edwards, Ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1903)
- Faris, W. B. (2004). *Ordinary enchantments: Magical realism and the remystification of narrative*. Vanderbilt University Press.

- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon & Schuster.
- Gouffi, M. (2024). Writing against the currents of cultural deracination: colonial mimicry and postcolonial representation in Mohamed Al 'Ali 'Ar'Ar's *Mā lā Tadhruhū al-Riyāh* (What the Winds Cannot Wipe Off). *Research in African Literatures*, 54(3), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.2979/ral.00018>
- Gouffi, M., & Kaïd Berrahal, F. (2020). Neocolonial burdens and unhomely selves in the metropole in Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constantine*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 61(5), 554–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1756205>
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A thousand splendid suns*. Riverhead Books.
- Kingston, M. H. (1976). *The woman warrior: Memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts*. Vintage Books.
- Li, D. L. (1998). *Imagining the nation: Asian American literature and cultural consent*. Stanford University Press.
- Lim, J. (2006). Cutting the tongue: Language and the body in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. *MELUS*, 31(3), 49–65.
- Lonigro, A., Longobardi, E., & Laghi, F. (2023). The interplay between expressive suppression, emotional self-efficacy, and internalizing behavior in middle adolescence. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 52, 253–265.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Majoul, B. (2024). The power of literature: Can the dead speak? *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)*, 7(1), 159–167.
- McLeod, S. (2025, June 20). *What is cognitive dissonance theory?* Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>
- Meziani, M. (2024). The alchemy of violence in John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006): A story of a boy in between, and a terrorist at last. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society (JSLCS)*, 7(3), 113–126.
- Patel, N. (2019, Spring). Challenging the canon: How Maxine Hong Kingston narrates nonfiction with ghosts and talk-story. *Paper Shell Review*. <https://english.umd.edu/research-innovation/journals/paper-shell-review/paper-shell-review-spring-2019/challenging-canon>
- Razmi, M., & Jamali, L. (2012). *Magic(al) realism as postcolonial device in Toni Morrison's Beloved*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(5), 111–118.
- Senoussi, M. (2024). Falling into the nowhere: Losing identity with Alzheimer's in Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 26(3), 432–457. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/939662>
- University of Pennsylvania Department of Linguistics. (n.d.). *Language acquisition*. [https://www.ling.upenn.edu/courses/Fall\\_2001/ling001/acquisition.html](https://www.ling.upenn.edu/courses/Fall_2001/ling001/acquisition.html)
- Warner, M. (1994). *From the beast to the blonde: On fairy tales and their tellers*. Chatto & Windus.
- Zaidi, M., & Salama, R. (2025). Refugees' spatial identity and the reconceptualization of home in Christy Lefteri's *The beekeeper of Aleppo*. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 8(2), 456–467.
- Zamora, L. P., & Faris, W. B. (Eds.). (1995). *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*. Duke University Press.
- Zhang, Y. (2012). *Asian American forms: From realism to modernism*. University of Washington Press.