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From Difference to Differences: Reviewing Theories of Women's Autobiography and Contextualizing the Concept of *Métissage*

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Abstract: As a self–referential genre, autobiography explores the relationship between the "self" of the narrator and the "self" in the world. Based on this explication of "self," theorists of autobiography differ. Autobiography flourished in the West from the Westerner's belief in the concept of the Renaissance individual that takes its inception in the Cartesian philosophy, which correlates "self" with "the thinking subject," capable of producing meaning, knowledge, and truth. From this humanist look, while the male critics like George Gusdorf, James Olney read autobiography as a journey towards a self-understanding of the subject as individual and unique, women critics find the "self" split and textually produced. The present paper focuses on how women started voicing the difference of female subjectivity in terms of gender experience and how considering the context of race, gender, class, sexuality, location, and many other hallmarks, postmodern critics advanced towards articulating the "poetics of differences". Moreover, reading Francois Lionnet's concept of métissage in relation to other postmodern theories of women's autobiography, the paper argues métissage as the culmination of theorizing differences regarding subjectivity and representation strategy.

Key Words: Renaissance Individual, Relational Subject, Poetics of Differences, *Métissage, Francois Lionnet*

Both men and women, since time immemorial, have been exploring and articulating their perception of "I" in different autobiographical narratives like diaries, notes, letters, poems, and memoirs. Although life writing as a mode of self-expression has been in practice since prehistoric times, the study of autobiographical genres is one of the recent events in academia. However, having its inception in the first half of the twentieth century with the publication of George Misch's *Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907), autobiography studies got an overwhelming upsurge during the nineteen-eighties. James Olney, in "Autobiography and the Humanities", accentuated the literary value of the autobiographical works authenticating that "autobiography is not so much a mode of literature as literature is a mode of autobiography" (in Smith, *Poetics* 3). George Gusdorf, regarded as "the dean of autobiographical studies" (Friedman 72), in his 1956 seminal essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," recognizing autobiography as a "solidly established genre" (28), has associated humanistic, psychological, philosophical, and literary importance to it. Although feminist critics unearthed the presence of female autobiographical voice even in the ancient period - exemplified with the lyric poems of Sappho of Lesbos (600 B.C.E.) - "female autobiographies, memoirs, letters and diaries [as] [...] body of writing about the self has remained invisible, systematically ignored in the studies on autobiography" (Stanton vii). Against women's invisibility in the field, female autobiography theorists started voicing female subjectivity in the 1990s. During this period, the theory of women's autobiography developed as a branch of feminist studies. Through extensive reading of female autobiographical narratives, the feminist critics endeavoured to formulate new propositions for classifying women's autobiography as a distinct genre. The present paper focuses on how female critics started voicing the difference of women, in terms of gender experience and how considering the context of race, gender, class, sexuality, location, and many other hallmarks postmodern critics have advanced towards articulating the poetics of differences. Moreover, reading Francois Lionnet's concept of *métissage* concerning other postmodern theories of female autobiography, I argue *métissage* as the culmination of theorizing differences in female life writing. By focusing on the influence of Lionnet on the later theorists, present analysis not only attempts a novel

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approach to Lionnet's concept but also reviews the earlier and later development of "theorizing difference" in women's autobiography.

In the theories of autobiography, "difference" lies in the concept of self, argued in men's and women's autobiographies. In fact, autobiography flourished in the West from the Westerner's belief in the concept of the Renaissance individual that takes its inception in the Cartesian philosophy, which correlates the "self" with "the thinking subject". Cartesian doctrines make the self such a separate entity that it stands beyond any embodiment. Remaining separate from the body, this "self" becomes the governing consciousness, which is "identified uniformly with the thinking subject" (Corngold 3). Such notions privilege the self with the power of producing meaning, knowledge, and truth as Iris Marion Young in "Impartiality and The Civil Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory" contends:

> The Cartesian Ego founding modern philosophy realizes the totalizing project. This *cogito* itself expresses the idea of true identity as the reflective self-presence of consciousness to itself. Launched from this point of transcendental subjectivity […] seeks to comprehend all entities in unity with itself and in a unified system with each other. (62)

This romantic notion of selfhood, associated with the Western men by the mid-nineteenth century, is conceptualized as a "fixed" entity which remains beyond even the bounds of language. About this concept of selfhood, J. H. Miller, in "Herself against Herself", comments that such selfhood "has its own sharp configuration, different from all others" (102). With the "sharp configuration", Miller suggested a uniform, isolated, and atomic core surrounded by some "impermeable boundaries" (Smith, *Subjectivity* 5), which separate the self from any influences of history or culture, or economic circumstances. Moreover, this essential self is conceived to be rational under any circumstances.

George Gusdorf emphasizes this kind of individual as the subject of autobiography. According to Gusdorf, autobiography is a "conscious awareness of each individual life" (29). The individual "oppose[s] himself to all others," he "exist[s] outside of others" in an independent existence (29). He claims that the subject of autobiography is "the man who takes delight in […] drawing his own image believes himself worthy of special interest" (29). Moreover, he argues that autobiography is quite impossible in a cultural landscape where "consciousness of self does not exist" (30). Gusdorf's idea of the "consciousness of self" resides only in the "isolated being" (30), where the self is a discrete and finite unit of society. By creating a model of autobiography based on the works of some notable male autobiographers like Saint Augustine, Benvenuto Cellini, Cardinal de Retz, Michel de Montaigne, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, John Henry Newman, and John Stuart Mill, Gusdorf in his earlier three-volume *History of Autobiography* (1980), classifies autobiography as white, male, and Western endeavours (Olney 8).

James Olney advocated for the same individualistic paradigms of autobiographical subjectivity in his *Metaphors of Self: The Meanings of Autobiography* (1972). Olney argues that the subject's sense of isolation comes from his "own consciousness […] of unique heredity and unique experience [where] separate selfhood is the very motive of creation" (22-3). He asserts that autobiography simultaneously paves the way to become both complete and separate, and individuality grows in the realization of separating oneself from others. Olney notes:

> What is of particular interest to us in consideration of the creative achievements of individual men and the relationship of those achievements to a life lived on the one hand, and an autobiography of that life on the other is … the isolate uniqueness that nearly everyone agrees to be the primary quality and condition of the individual and his experience. (20-1)

This Gusdorf-Olney tradition of individual and separate self remains seamlessly popular to many other male critics. In fact, Western culture's understanding of subjectivity, inspired by the Cartesian notion of the universal subject who is primarily male, influenced autobiography, where in most instances, male autobiographies

developed this essential notion of unique selfhood to "perceive a noble life task in cultivation of […] individuality, […] [and] ineffable self" (Weintraub xiii).

Thus, the traditional autobiographical subject bound up in a specific notion of the Renaissance selfhood is ontologically identical to other "I"s. It provides a purposeful narrative enshrining the "individual" and "his" uniqueness where irrespective of the myriad differences of history and culture, time and space the "I" remains "rational and agentary" (Smith and Watson, *Decolonizing* xvii). This "I", conceived to be a white man of special interest, wealth, and status, enables himself to "*make a meaning stick*" (Thompson 132) (emphasis original) in which meaning is always infused with power politics of "centripetal consolidation and centrifugal domination" (Smith and Watson, *Decolonizing* xvii). Such a concept of autobiographical subjectivity dispels woman as a writing subject as she harbours no "unified, atomic, Adamic core to be discovered and represented" (Smith, *Subjectivity* 15). A woman does not find herself similar to the universal man. Instead of attempting a romantic journey towards either the inner core or geographical discovery, she finds herself locked into specific spaces and social roles already defined for her.

In *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), Rowbotham, focusing on ideology and institutions and dismissing the idea of "isolated being" as an illusion, shows the role of cultural representation and material conditions in the construction of female self. Like Lacan, Rowbotham uses the metaphor of "mirror image" where the mirror, instead of reflecting the image of woman, becomes the reflecting surface of cultural presentations. She notes, "the prevailing social order stands as a great and splendid hall of mirrors. It owns and occupies the world as it is and the world as it is seen and heard" (27). For Rowbotham, instead of focusing on a woman as a unique entity, the mirror "projects an image of WOMAN" (Friedman 75). It is a category that defines and explains a woman's group identity. While Rowbotham focused on the social psychology of feminine personality, Nancy Chodorow described it from the ego-psychological point. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Chodorow writes that feminine identification is neither based on negative identification nor fantasized or externally defined characteristics. Rather, it is the continuous learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person "with whom she has been more involved. It is continuous with her early childhood identifications and attachments" (51). From this sense of connectedness, a girl child, instead of developing a sense of separation, promotes a sense of association that turns into fluidity in her smooth correlation between the self and others.

Feminist Autobiography critics, therefore, argue for the precise notion of the difference of the female self from the individualistic autobiographical self, as proposed by Gusdorf and followed by many other male critics. Instead of a separate "isolated being", female theorists focus on subjectivity as relational. In "Women's Autobiographical Selves", Susan Stanford Friedman locates the problems that Gusdorf's theory pervades. Friedman argues:

> [T]he self, self-creation, and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-western peoples. The model of separate and unique selfhood […] established a critical bias that leads to the misreading and marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities in the process of canon formation. (72)

Friedman identifies a twofold inapplicability of Gusdorf's model. First, she argues that while an emphasis on individualism takes no notice of the importance of group identity, in the case of minority people and women, the focus on the idea of "separate being" fails to consider "the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity" (72). Moreover, she states that the paradigms of individuality disregard the role of "collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities" (72) from both ideological and theoretical perspectives.

In "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?," Domna C. Stanton notes how the female "autograph" provides the women with space to create subjectivity, "by way of alterity", where the self is constructed "through the relation to mother and father, mate and child" (14). The need for the articulation of the individual and

relational "I" is accentuated in the note of Margaret–Duchess of Newcastle where she defends her cause of writing by saying:

> I write […] to tell the truth, lest after-ages should mistake, in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again. (in Stanton 14)

In this passage, the autobiographical "I" asserts that she writes "her own life" to posit herself in relation to her husband's other wives and demonstrates the self's dependence on others. Comparing it with Beatrice Webb's assertion of the female as subject and the recognition that one cannot exist without the other, Stanton argues that the female "'I' was […] not simply a texture woven of various selves; its threads, its life-lines, came from and extended to others. By that token, this 'I' represented a denial of a notion essential to the phallogocentric order: [T]he totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself" (15).

From the theories put forth by these critics, it becomes clear how the female self exhibits its specific notion of difference to the way male subjectivity is argued in autobiography criticism. In contrast to male subjectivity that delights in constructing a separate selfhood, the female selfhood celebrates inter-dependency and relationality. The arguing point of difference, thus, resonates with Friedman that female "autobiographical self often does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence" (79).

Mary. G. Mason, in her "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers", not only traces the beginning of female autobiography but also marks the difference in terms of self-discovery in men's and women's autobiographies. Analyzing Dame Julian's *Revelations*, Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margaret Cavendish's *True Relation*, and Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear Children", Mary Mason argues that in these works, "we can discover not only important beginnings in the history of women's autobiography in English as a distinct mode of interior disclosure but also something like a set of paradigms for life-writings by women right down to our time" (209-10). Contrasting the nature of self-discovery in the autobiographies of Augustine and Rousseau, Mason concludes that male autobiographies are inappropriate models for female life-writings. According to Mason, the self-discovery of female "I" in women's autobiographies, unlike "spirit defeating flesh" or "evolving consciousness", seems to acknowledge "the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (210). Thus, by identifying a distinct self, Mason theorizes "female difference", which lays down one of the significant columns of "difference theory" discussed and argued by the later critics of autobiography.

Estelle C. Jelinek's *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980*)* draws a stark line of difference, based on the explication of experience, between women's autobiographies and men's autobiographies. Jelinek puts forward that men, in their autobiographies, shed light on the professional aspects and write their "success stories and histories of their eras" (10). Instead of focusing on their inner, personal, and familial aspects, men "tend to idealize their lives or to cast them into heroic molds to project their universal import. They may exaggerate, mythologize, or monumentalize their boyhood and their entire lives" (Jelinek 14) in a linear, harmonious, and orderly narrative. Jelinek contends that, in contrast to men's heroism, women's autobiographies reveal a self-consciousness that arises from her personal and domestic affairs which they articulate in a disconnected and fragmentary narrative "analogous to the fragmentary, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives" (19). Jelinek's theorizing of women's autobiography instigated prolific interest among critics to delve deep into the new genre to find those female voices which, against all the odds, articulated their sense of self in a remarkably distinct way.

However, a good number of the early critics theorize women from a universal and essentialist point. Among the earliest feminist literary critics who consider female autobiographical texts as the basis of women's

image, Patricia A. Meyer Spacks is notable. In her *Female Imagination* (1975), Spacks reads female life writing analytically and explores the "characteristic patterns of self-perception" that "shape the creative expression of women" (1). Spacks, analyzing many autobiographical genres of four centuries, "emphasized women's struggle to assert a 'positive' identity and focused on self-mastery" (Smith and Watson, *Women* 7). Nonetheless, in her book, Spacks disregarding the differences considered women to be a generalized term and did not include the texts of the women of colour.

Moreover, focusing on women's experiences as the primary content of women's autobiography, Jelinek also essentialized women. Although in *Women's Autobiography,* Jelinek provided one of the earliest substantial literary criticisms on women's autobiography, she did not analyze women of colour from the viewpoint of their differences. Joanne M. Braxton identifies that "only one essay in her 1980 book pays even passing treatment to the autobiography of black American women" (8), let alone other marginalized women. In the 1986 book, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to Present*, Jelinek did not discuss any autobiography of women of colour in detail, the way she analyzed the autobiographies written by white women to establish a female autobiography tradition. For the twentieth-century American autobiographies, while Jelinek chose Gertrude Stein, Lillian Hellman, and Kate Millet to analyze in full-length discussion, she did not pick up any black American or Native American or immigrant American woman author.

If the basic postulations of subjectivity and identity, underlying autobiographical narratives, designate the difference between male and female autobiographies, rereading them in terms of the politics of "differences" develops a critique of Western individualism and challenges the generalization of female subjectivity as "a universal woman - implicitly white, bourgeois, and Western" (Smith and Watson, *Women* 26). It directly questions white feminists' construction of "We" which Du Plessis puts as "we thought all women were us and we were all women" (101). White feminists' paternalistic emphasis on gender-based difference narrows down the space to articulate the differences of non-white women since, for them, the relationality of subjectivity and identity is not only derived from the concept of women's split selves as "gendered being" but also originated from their relation to race, ethnicity, sex, and class.

For non-white American women, self-authored life writing is the mode to explore differences as racial, gendered, and sexual subjects. These women use their individual life stories as tools to integrate their multiple marginalities. Because when they appear as writers in public, they confront the familial, social, and political dimensions of their subjugation. Therefore, for black women, life writing is a means to deconstruct and reconstruct their image. In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* (1987), Hazel Carby shows the dichotomy of motherhood by contrasting the plantation mistress with the plantation slaves. According to Carby, while the white woman provides an heir to her husband and citizen to the nation, the slave woman is accepted to produce slaves. In *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* (1979), Frances Smith Foster explicated that black woman became closely identified with illicit sex: "If the 'negress' were not a hot-blooded, exotic whore, she was a cringing terrified victim. Either way, she was not pure and therefore, not a model of womanhood" (131). Against such degraded subjectivity, autobiography is "a discourse of black womanhood which would not only address their exclusion from the ideology of true womanhood but, as a consequence of this exclusion, would also rescue their bodies from a persistent association with illicit sexuality" (Carby 32).

Moreover, the black female subject investigates her triple marginalization for being a woman, being black, and being poor. She shares the racial and class oppression perpetrated by the male-dominated white society with black men and the gender oppression with white women. However, in her marginalization of male sexism (irrespective of black and white), white racism (irrespective of male and female), and white classism, the black female self is exposed to the difference of differences. Nellie Y. Mckay, in "The Narrative Self: Race, Politics, and Culture in Black American Women's Autobiography", notes:

> Thus, in the struggle against oppressive sexual and racial authority, the black female self stands at once alongside and apart from white women and black men, joined to the struggles of each but separated from both in a system that still privileges whiteness and maleness. From this complex angle of vision, the black female narrative self makes of black female identity an exploration of differences from—and limits of loyalty to—black men and all others. (99)

Thus, the black women autobiographers redefine "the black female self in black terms from a black perspective" (Blackburn 147).

In "My Statue My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women", Elizabeth Fox Genovese contrasts autobiographies written by white women and black women. Genovese writes, "for white American women, the self comes wrapped in gender, or rather, gender constitutes the invisible, seamless wrapping of the self" (73). According to Genovese, such a point of gender is possible in a stable society. On the other hand, for the African Americans who live in an unstable condition, "neither masculinity nor femininity exists as an absolute" (74). Earlier to Genovese, Sojourner Truth in her speech "Ain't I a Woman", expresses similarly and challenges the fixities of gender identity. Truth arguing that a black woman like any woman tolerates the pain of childbirth and like any man undergoes other physical labour for earning bread and butter, questions whether the black women are, indeed, women at all. Therefore, there is no such scope for gender oppositionality in black women's lived experiences and they do not experience gender as a seamless wrapping of their selves.

Like black women, other non-white women also question white feminists' generalized and "reductive oppositionality", as in men/women (Wong 168). In her "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography," Hertha Sweet Wong talks about North American indigenous women's double relationality. Wong notes that Native American women are "far less likely than European American women to define themselves in gender-based terms and are often suspicious of 'mainstream' feminisms that reflect neither their sociopolitical concerns nor their historical positions within their own nations" (170). Wong further argues that only "kaleidoscopic relation to multiple, simultaneously overlapping personalities" help the Native American women to define themselves "by tribal, national or cultural affiliation," whereas the homogenized concepts of gender identity fail to articulate their voice (170). David L. Moore expresses a similar view in "Myth, History, and Identity in Silko and Young Bear: Postcolonial Praxis". Moore argues that the indigenous female subjectivities neither conform to "tragic modern imperial self" nor to "the tragi-comic postmodern pawn", but instead, they offer "alternative choices" (371). By "alternative choices" he articulates the same meaning that Wong suggests as "nonoppositional relationality" (170). In fact, it is the relationality of the self that bell hooks suggests, not as a "signifier of one 'I' but the coming together of many 'I's, the Self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community" (30).

Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, in their *Life/Lines* (1988), a collection of essays on women's autobiography, have emphasized the importance of identifying these differences and the inclusion of non-white women's autobiographies in the mainstream studies of autobiography. Watson suggests that their argument presents how "exclusionary literary and cultural practices continue to hypostasize the subject as white and male because they cannot value this difference of women's self-presentation and, ultimately, self-experience" (69). Finding the subjects irreducibly multiple, Judith Butler posits that prioritizing gender disregarding the intersections of race, class, and sex, in which the identities of any non-white self are entangled, is a reductive and paralyzing process. The very notion reverberates in Liz Stanley's *Autobiographical I: Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography (1992)* where upon recognizing the plurality of women's experiences, she argues that female differences should not be read and challenged from "an assumed exemplary male life, but rather differences from each other" (120).

Indeed, in the twentieth century, female life writing has turned into the media of articulating differences and heterogeneity. Many African American, Asian American, Native American writers were found to be constantly struggling to construct subjectivities in the intersections of racial, gendered, and class identities. In the process of positing themselves, in history, the resistant or oppositional subjectivities arise. In their

autobiographies, the non-white women have broken away from any genre law or fixity of thought. They mixed literacy with orality and transparency with obscurity. In narratives, they preferred braids to carry on their braided stories as defined below. They used memory to access history for re-appropriating the past and rediscovering their lost selves. In their juxtaposition of traditions, circumvention of authoritarian narration, and ambiguous language, they explore differences in the narratives.

To articulate this construction, in *Autobiographical Voices*, Françoise Lionnet proposes *métissage* as a comprehensive understanding of women's autobiographical texts in terms of the differences of autobiographical "I" and representation strategy. Accentuating the influence of cultural specificities of ethnicity, class, time, and location, Lionnet claims autobiography as "the politics and aesthetics of *métissage*" (1), which braids "voices and textures" (95). While in French, Portuguese, and Spanish language the word *métis* is used "to define racial categories" (Lionnet 12), Lionnet in her book, is interested in its Latin and Greek homonyms. In Latin, *métis* means "mixed" that "refers to cloth made of two different fibres" (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).

According to Lionnet, marginalized women writers – especially African Americans, Francophone, the diasporas, the women of any geographically colonized location – "are cultural *métis*, *créoles* whose socioideological horizons are marked by the concrete layerings or stratifications of diverse language systems" (21). For these writers coming to voice is a complex process since the essentialist cultural constructedness binds them and limits their choices in "images and stereotypes" (94). For such voices, "the personal and the political, the text, its contexts, and its intertextual elements are always interrelated" (94). Therefore, instead of inventing an entirely new direction retracing the past and "weaving the threads of old stories into new images of their own, women make their texts into a *métissage* of voices and textures" (95).

Lionnet owes her concept of *métissage* to Edouard Glissant, a Martinique essayist, poet, and novelist who in his *Caribbean Discourses* (1989), first used *métissage* for "cultural creolization" (Glissant 249). Finding the anesthetized condition of the traditional Martinique culture under Francophone colonization, Glissant expresses his utter anxiety on the extinction of cultural fecundity of the colonized. He urges for a collective spirit by digging deep into the cultural persona of the creoles. Glissant posits the strategy:

> Over this collective failure constantly falls the shadow of the colonial strategy to reinforce the break with the past. The very nature of colonialism in Martinique (the insidious kind) requires, not that the Martinican or Caribbean originality should be clumsily crushed, but that it be submerged, that it should be watered down in a cleverly instituted 'natural' progression. (207-8)

He believes that to revitalize the collective culture of Caribbean peoples there is no alternative to a collective consciousness of the people. Therefore, he "outlines several methods to bring dynamism back to the Creoles; it is this set of conscious-making strategies that constitute *métissage*" (Pedersen 11). Hence, for Glissant, *métissage* asks for the naturalization of the racial and cultural hybridity of the Caribbean culture.

In *Autobiographical Voices*, Lionnet asserts her formulation *métissage* as such*:*

> [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, as Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out, identity is a strategy, then *métissage* is the fertile ground of our heterogeneous and heteronomous identities as postcolonial subjects. (8)

For Lionnet, it is both a writing strategy and a reading lens through which fluidity of meanings runs through the pages. According to Lionnet, there is no dead-end of meanings. Therefore, instead of emphasizing categorization based on oppositionality, *métissage* blends history with biology, philosophy with anthropology.

Lionnet critiques the Western tradition of writing for imprisoning meanings in "the cadaverous rigidity of the written sign" (3)**.** She argues that such specificity fails to portray the dynamism of women, postcolonial and nonwestern people. For a meaningful articulation of colonized people, either in gender condition or in any other form of marginalization, discourse should include the "constantly changing context of oral communication in which interlocutors influence each other" (3). Lionnet asserts:

> [W]e have to articulate new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow 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) (emphasis original)

In fact, hardly can we conceive *métissage* in a single or definite definition. While for Glissant, it refers to willing miscegenation of identity in the hope of preservation and emancipation of original genetic form, for Lionnet, it is the bricolage of autobiographical texts as an expression of the heterogeneity of identities and experiences. Therefore, *métissage* as a concept not only dismisses the singular notion of difference but also discards the possibility of a single and unitary way of expression. Throughout the book, Lionnet uses *métissage* for "braiding".

In "Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography," Julia Watson comments that the concept of *métissage* refers to how "women's differences cannot be essentialized as gynocriticism, but are inflected by cultural specificities of ethnicity, class, time and location" (75). In this purview, Lionnet's *métissage* resonates with Shirley Neuman's concept of the "poetics of differences", (Neuman 223) which 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" (224). According to Neuman, "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).

Lionnet conceives the female model of "self" as a *métissage* or braiding of multiple voices within the self. Therefore, she considers Augustine's concept of subjectivity or self-consciousness in *Confessions* inadequate or inappropriate model for female self-consciousness. Lionnet opines 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). She claims that "from autobiographical writings" of women we can learn "a new way of listening for the relational voice of the self" (248). She asserts, "if 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).

Challenging the possibilities of separate selfhood, Lionnet speaks in a similar vein with Susan Friedman, Cady Stanton, Sidonie Smith, and many other postmodern feminist autobiography critics. In its articulation of the construction of selfhood concerning others bears the hallmarks of Arnold Krupat's concept of "synecdochic self". In "Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self", Krupat contrasts the Native American autobiography with Western autobiography to argue that while Gusdorfian autobiographical subject is always a metonymic self, Native American autobiographies model for a synecdochic self. According to Krupat, the interwoven nature of the subject with its community ontologically and epistemologically binds its identity in a part and whole relationship, in which the "larger" is constructed with its history of colonization, language of economics, and body of resistance. Here, the "synecdochic" construction reverberates with *métissage*, which helps reading the text in its manifold contexts and the subject as a part of its racial, sexual, national, linguistic larger differences, where the subject and the text create a constant heteroglossia of meaning.

From this cognizance, we can read *métissage* as a representation strategy similar to what Mikhail Bakhtin argues as "dialogism" in a novel. According to Michael Holquist, the editor of *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin defines "novel" as "whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system" (xxxi). Instead of permitting a "generic monologue", the novel insists "on the dialogue between what a given system will admit as literature" (xxxi). Bakhtin writes that "the separation of style and language from the question of the genre has been largely responsible for a situation in which only individual and period-bound overtones of a style are the privileged subjects of study, while its basic social tone is ignored" (259). Bakhtin's thesis argues that viewing a text in the light of stylistics of dominant culture completely overshadows the unique social and historical setting from which a text emerges. Therefore, he proposes approaching a written text from historical, social, political, and cultural perspectives in which the voice is not restrained to a single or monologic utterance, but, rather a dialogism, in which meaning is understood, "as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin 426). *Métissage* allows the dialogism of autobiography by inspiring a reading of the autobiographical subjectivity in relation to biology, history, myth, and community. In the dialogic understanding of self and textuality, *métissage* breaks the boundaries of fact and fiction.

In this connection, *métissage* is the language of solidarity which can be achieved through non hierarchical modes of expression. As Lionnet contends:

> [I]t 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. (5)

Solidarity lies in breaking binaries. Instead of setting new dichotomy of prioritizing female over male, east over west, a dialogic coexistence of the opposites is preferred. This concept of solidarity dispels the "patriarchal law of exclusive categories of reality (male, female; white black; primitive civilized; autobiographical and fictional" (Lionnet 18).

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). For example, she comments on the textual bricolage of black American author Maya Angelou. In her *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* Angelou braids different African folkloric traditions with English literary tradition, combining Afro-American blues and spirituals with adventure stories, picaresque novels, utopia, fantasy, and science fiction. For Lionnet, the "biological miscegenation" (157) of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* prefigures its *métissage* or braiding of traditions. According to Lionnet, it is a double-voicing technique of the marginalized woman author to achieve narrative control on the one hand, and to resist the hegemony of white forms of writing on the other. Lionnet's concept of textual braiding as a strategy of resistance has been reflected in Sidonie Smith's concept of "autobiographical manifesto". In *Subjectivity, Identity, and Body*: *Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (1993), Smith focuses on the embodied subjectivity of women and celebrates them as "messy" and "colourful" in autobiographical acts. Linda H. Peterson suggests in her review of Smith's *Subjectivity* that by challenging the concept of a universal (male) subject, Smith provides strategies for using autobiography as a "manifesto" for "the staging of resistance", and for "restaging subjectivity (156-7)" (Peterson 405). According to Smith, the resisting subject of the manifesto "require and develop resisting forms" by mixing genres together (154).

Furthermore, Lionnet's concept of *métissage,* in terms of genre blend, again, resembles with Judy Long's concept of "messiness", what Long conceives as a weapon to contradict universality. In *Telling Woman's Lives: Subject/Narrator/ Reader/ Text* (1999), Long claims:

> Telling women's lives often involves new or mixed genres. Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Audre Lord, and Gwendolyn Brooks have pursued autobiographical projects in the form of fiction […] 'Messiness'

> is the shorthand for this content; it is also an element of style. 'Messy' accounts make no attempt to streamline the narrative, to corset the subject, to shear the web of connections. (55)

Referring to black, Chinese, and lesbian autobiographies as "Messy", Long argues that it is the style to combat the "leanness of generic autobiography", and counter "its claim of universality" (55). Thus, messiness resonates with *métissage* as the strategy of articulating differences.

To analyze individuals in relation to history, to challenge "sociocultural construction of race, gender and traditional genre theory", and to illustrate the relationship between the cross-cultural mechanisms to which a writer is exposed and the polysemic meanings the writer generates, *métissage* has been explained as a feminist practice of reading and writing differences (Lionnet 29). By pinpointing the reflection of *métissage* on Neuman's "poetics of differences", Smith's "manifesto", and Long's "messiness", this paper has read Lionnet's concept of *métissage* as the pinnacle of the development of female autobiography theory. While *métissage* lays the background for articulating the multiplicity of non-symmetrical differences, emphasizing on non-hierarchical modes of expression and genre blending, it introduces the deconstructionist politics of representing "I" in postmodern women's autobiographies.

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