

**University of Bouzaréah  
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**ALICE WALKER'S FORBIDDEN TRUTHS IN  
*POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY,*  
*IN LOVE AND TROUBLE: STORIES OF BLACK WOMEN AND*  
*YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD WOMAN DOWN: STORIES BY ALICE WALKER***

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Magister in English (option literature/civilization)**

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## **Declaration**

**I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers**

**Date: 16/12/2012**

**Signature:.....**

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## Abstract

The present research work examines how women are made able to overcome society's forbidden truths — and the state of self-hatred engendered by these latter — to attain the state of wholeness or spiritual maturity.

To fulfill such examination, Alice Walker's taboo-breaking writing in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* is analyzed.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker's desacralization of the forbidden goes to the extreme. In this novel, the forbidden truth disclosed is female genital mutilation.

In the study at hand, the disclosure of the forbidden is related to a process of maturation, marked by a move from self-hatred to wholeness. To account for this move in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, recourse is made to a Jungian perspective. Carl Jung's conception of this move, or what he referred to as the individuation process, lends to the female protagonist's path to wholeness, in this novel, a progressive aspect. Yet, despite the fruitfulness that can ensue from this aspect and from the adoption of a Jungian perspective to analyze a novel whose author clearly recognized the healing impact Jung's psychology had upon her, it appears impossible to apply the Jungian perspective, as it is, on the inner journey of the female protagonist of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, known as Tashi. What seems to pose a problem in Carl Jung's theorization of "psychic growth" is the presence of some allusions to women's innate inferiority. It is more specifically in his theorization of the complementarity notion, or

what he called “the anima-animus archetype”, that these allusions are apparent. This archetype represents one of the steps in the process of individuation, or “psychic growth”, the novel’s protagonist goes through. According to Carl Jung, it is during this phase that the individual discovers and faces her masculine side, or animus, if it is a woman or his feminine side, or anima, if it is a man. It has been observed by many feminist critics, like Susan Rowland, Verena Kast and Naomi Goldenberg that the Jungian theorization of duality is sexist and fell into the trap of easy stereotyping based on conventional gender roles. For them, what is specifically sexist in the Jungian theorization of duality is Jung’s consideration of women’s rationality, logic and spiritual strength as specific to what he deems their masculine side, or animus. So, whenever a woman is strong enough and escapes society’s patriarchal socialization, for the Jungians this is due to her masculine side.

In *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, the forbidden analyzed is more complex and less striking, but equally dangerous and harmful. In the two short stories entitled “Roselily” and ““Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?””, it is identified with the degenerating effects of wifedom and motherhood in a woman’s life — especially when they are imposed as women’s only spheres of activity. In these short stories, it is not certain whether the state of wholeness is attained, but the process of maturation the female protagonists go through is itself revelatory of the different workings responsible for women’s oppression by society and its forbidden truths.

In *You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down*, the female protagonists are equally oppressed by the forbidden, even though they are more assertive and self-confident. In



“Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells”, the confrontation with the forbidden truth of interracial rape is lived by a woman writer activist. Even though this short story does not seem to have a definite end, its protagonist is nonetheless able to reach the point of condemning rape (interracial or not) and matures into a more committed writer. In “Coming Apart,” the forbidden issue treated by the writer is identified in the present research as pornography and its debasing power. What is particular about this short story is that the confrontation with the forbidden and the ensuing attainment of a certain maturity is lived by a man. Even though in some of her works, like *The color Purple* or *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker seems to be always willing to give men the role of the villains, this does not mean she is a separatist defending the rights of only women and blaming men for all the ills of the world. In this short story, she proves her interest in also men’s spiritual ascension towards the state of wholeness.

Alice Walker instigates universal solidarity between people of all races, social backgrounds and of both sexes.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout her literary career, Alice Walker has always proved to be an audacious writer. Her readiness to go against the stream, Barbara Christian observes,<sup>1</sup> was already manifest at the beginning of her literary career when she produced *Once*, her first volume of poetry, in the late sixties. When *Once* appeared, while African American writers were characterized by their “...romanticizing of their motherland [or Africa]...”<sup>2</sup> at the expense of any realism, in Alice Walker’s eyes that realism and communicating a truthful vision of what she sees was, and is still, more important than her black counterparts’ racial pride. Alice Walker always prioritized accounting for the truth as it is, even if sometimes this costs the black community to be portrayed in her writing as sexist and sinking under the load of both patriarchy and racism. So, instead of proudly idealizing the image of black people, she focuses on the truth with its blemished nature to get at the right remedies to the flaws this truth conveys — such as forbidden truths. Rudolph P. Byrd observes that:

[t]he difficulty, and even the pain that we as readers initially avoid and then, perforce, face stems from Walker’s capacity to make us, in the spirit of Joseph Conrad, see the good and the evil in ourselves. Plainly, Walker believes that truth is the best medicine for an ailing spirit, but the truth is sometimes, since confabulations are often more appealing than facts, hard to bear.<sup>3</sup>

In her subsequent works, her “unwavering honesty about what she sees”<sup>4</sup> becomes an omnipresent characteristic. This can be noticed in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* for instance. In

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara, Christian. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rudolph P., Byrd. “Spirituality in the Novels of Alice Walker: Models, Healing, and Transformation, or When the Spirit Moves so Do We” in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (1990), p. 365.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara, Christian. Op.cit., p. 83.

these works, Alice Walker employs this honesty to confront her readership with the different forms the forbidden can take. However, in spite of its various forms, in Alice Walker's fiction its devastating impact remains the same. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the sacralization of the forbidden truth of excision and its destructiveness leads to the legitimization and perpetuation of a very dangerous practice and condemns the novel's protagonist to a lifelong depression. In *In Love and Trouble*, the enforced centrality of wifedom and motherhood in the southern African American woman's life precipitates her degeneration. In this collection, any questioning of gender roles' legitimacy and any attempt at self-assertion is completely forbidden. In *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, women are equally tortured by society's stereotypes and conventions — the questioning of which is of course forbidden. On the whole, it is evident that in Alice Walker's eyes, society's forbidden truths or taboos are extremely harmful since they can destroy people's life force.

Irvin M. Rosen states that “[s]ocial taboos are a part of the large and still mysterious field of the folkways. Since they surround us, we are usually as little aware of them as fish presumably are of the water in which they swim.”<sup>5</sup> According to him, social taboos are part of the folkways “...which is the inclusive term covering social taboos, customs, social rituals, mores, fashions, codes, manners, and usages.”<sup>6</sup>

He also observes that folkways comprise “...no less than the ways we work and worship, assume male and female roles, dress, carry on courtship and marriage and kinship relations, what and how we eat, how we deal with transgressors and the

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<sup>5</sup> Irvin M., Rosen. “Social Taboos and Emotional Problems” (1970), p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

dead, and the manners in which we gesture and speak and interact.”<sup>7</sup> He remarks that even though their source is often lost, they have probably started “...through superstition; accident, or the opinion or whim of an authority figure.”<sup>8</sup> Then, he adds that such folkways were created with the end of helping people guide their lives. That is why they are considered as really important and “powerful”<sup>9</sup> in societies’ regulation and that influence shows whenever someone breaks one of the folkways’ components, such as taboos. Indeed, folkways are so powerful that their transgression can create shock. Such a shock, it may be argued, comes from people’s feeling of insecurity at the sight of the symbols of their unity and identity being violated. This explains, for example, why Tashi’s community in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was so shocked when she dared attack M’Lissa, the community’s circumciser and the emblem of their cultural identity and community cohesion in face of colonial menace.

Besides, probably crucial to one’s understanding of Alice Walker’s defying attitude towards society’s taboos, or forbidden truths, is Rosen’s division of these latter into two categories, namely defensible and indefensible taboos:

Certain taboos, such as those against incest and dirt, are reasonably valid and defensible. Parenthetically, I must point out that even cleanliness, like red tape, can loom so large that it takes precedence over person acceptance and psychological health. This happens in many homes and mental hospitals.

Other taboos are indefensible. For one, the taboo against showing and expressing feelings. Certainly, grief is better expressed than kept behind a stiff upper lip. And the option to express affection or hostility should be kept open.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Irvin M., Rosen. Op.cit., p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

It goes without saying that the category targeted by Alice Walker is the second one.

Given the massive destructiveness they can bring about, indefensible taboos seem, in Alice Walker's fiction, to be an unbeatable evil and any achievement of wholeness appears to be impossible. However, Alice Hall Petry remarks that Alice Walker, in spite of this seeming invincibility, "... manages to... [maintain] the undercurrent of hope..."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, she mentions that "[f]or Walker...opposition [to society's forbidden truths] is not necessarily insurmountable: struggles and crises can lead to growth, to the nurturing of the self..."<sup>12</sup> So, there is a possibility of growth. Yet, how does the author make this growth possible? In simpler terms, how does Alice Walker transform the forbidden into the gateway to wholeness in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*? These questions constitute the problematics of this dissertation.

The resolution of this problematics is sought after in the second part of this dissertation, entitled "Appraisal of Alice Walker's Commitment to the Desacralization of the Forbidden in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*". In this part, what is attempted is an evaluation of Alice Walker's literary audacity in three works by her. Furthermore, this part is aimed at reflecting Alice Walker's attainment of a full maturity as a woman and as a writer — contrarily to how she appears in the first part. Indeed, the latter is marked out with the

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<sup>11</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" (1989), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



early stages of Walker's life as a mutilated, traumatized child and then as a young woman and aspiring writer. What is meant by full maturity is not the state of absolute understanding of life and wisdom of course. When Alice Walker wrote the works studied here, she was still in quest of a certain peace she declares she is now in. Indeed, she lately pointed out that she finally arrived at this peace when she reached sixty. She states that:

A few years ago, when I turned Sixty[sic], I visited the country of South Korea. There, I heard for the first time that turning Sixty[sic] is an extremely auspicious occasion: one becomes "eggy", which means one becomes like a baby, or child, again. And, returning to a child-like state, one must use the remainder of one's life as an exploration of joy. The odd thing was, this is exactly how I had been feeling. That I did not need to make any more working trips, as I had to South Korea, selling books and lecturing about war and peace. I did not need to purchase or own any more of anything than I already had. I did not need to look further than my door for the miracles of life that I so cherish. That in fact, whatever or whoever was to come into my life would find me, not on the road looking for it or them, but in my own house. That illumination occurred four years ago; it has taken these years to unburden my life of many of the things I used to worry about: my papers, my bills, my persona, the writer's life. The process of clearing is on-going, as I now enter a period, perhaps the last phase of my life, which will be fundamentally dedicated to Wandering and Meditation. I feel in my bones the connection to the Ancients who have, through the ages, spontaneously shed as much as possible of their worldly concerns and have taken to the road, the hillside, the kitchen or hammock, or to meditating alone or with others as they move slowly about the earth, identifying only the present moment as home.<sup>13</sup>

Contrariwise, in the first part the Alice Walker described is still very far from how she depicts herself today. In addition to charting the reviews of the three works and presenting the approaches<sup>14</sup> that have been used to analyze them, this part is also reflective of the first stages of Alice Walker's life. It reveals the initial triggers for the development of her literary audacity and for her creation of a new "social-change

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<sup>13</sup> [www.alicewalkersgarden.com](http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com).

<sup>14</sup> That is to say, the Jungian approach as far as *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is concerned and the womanist approach as far as *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep Good Woman Down* are concerned.

perspective”<sup>15</sup> she coined womanism. In simpler terms, the first part offers a biographical perspective on the theme of the forbidden. Such a preliminary biographical investigation could not be complete without an immersion into her audacious art — which is performed in the second part and can be considered as a literary perspective on the theme of the forbidden. So, the organization of this dissertation is modelled after the chronology of the author’s life. From the author’s childhood mutilation — the first trigger — to her exclusion from both the feminist and the civil rights movements — the second trigger — to her creation of womanism and production of an audacious writing. The forbidden constitutes the leitmotif around which this chronological organization is articulated.

Furthermore, what motivated the choice of the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was the very forbidden nature of the subject it accounts for and the possibility of spiritual growth the author makes the readership glimpse at the end of the story. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* offers the best example of the dual, almost paradoxical, nature of Alice Walker’s art: it is audaciously, and sometimes shockingly, pessimistic and redemptive at the same time.

As for the two collections of short stories, their choice was mainly motivated by the desire to explore Alice Walker’s literary audacity under a form which is different from that of the novel. The form of the short story constituted a source of interest, because of its condensed and concentrated form. Thanks to this form, it is possible to obtain a unity of effect during the reading experience. Indeed, since the short story is

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<sup>15</sup> Layli, Phillips. *The Womanist Reader* (2006), p.xx.

shorter than the novel, it is possible for the reader to read it all without interruption. This uninterrupted reading helps to keep the effect of the short story in its unity. It is the search for an appreciation of the forbidden through the unity of effect that led to the selection of *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* as part of the corpus of this research.

Another question might come to the fore as to the choice of two collections and not one. In relation to this, it is mainly the critics' observations about these two collections that encouraged such a decision. Indeed, many critics like Barbara Christian and Alice Hall Petry tend to compare the two collections. While Barbara Christian considers the self-assertiveness of the protagonists of *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* as a progression, in comparison to the silence of the protagonists of *In Love and Trouble*, for Alice Hall Petry it is the contrary. She rather sees in this self-assertiveness a regression. For her, the protagonists' self-absorption in this collection is boring and connotes no need to fight anymore. But, whether there is a progression or not, it can be sensed in these critics' discourse that there is a relationship holding between the two collections. Consequently, analyzing one collection by dismissing the other seems to end in an amputated critical enterprise.

**PART I: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ALICE WALKER'S AUDACIOUS  
AUTHORSHIP**

**CHAPTER I: ALICE WALKER'S AUDACIOUS AUTHORSHIP AS  
PERCEIVED IN THE WORLDS OF LITERARY CRITICISM AND LITERARY  
THEORIES: REVIEW AND APPROACH**

## **Review of Literature**

In quest of an answer to the problematics, a number of critical articles and books examining the three works were consulted. As far as *In Love and Trouble* is concerned, it has been reviewed by Barbara Christian in an essay entitled “The Contrary Women of Alice Walker: A Study of Female Protagonists in *In Love and Trouble*” (1980). In this essay, Barbara Christian hints at Alice Walker’s use of a technique she refers to as the first person point of view. Barbara Christian observes that Alice Walker’s recourse to such a technique can be explained by her desire to portray the experiences of her Southern African American female protagonists by using their own vantage point. Barbara Christian also maintains that thanks to this technique Alice Walker makes possible the understanding of her black female protagonists’ contrariness. This trait is intensely palpable in the stories studied in the present research. The black female protagonists, in the stories selected, seem to be torn between their own internal pressures urging them to be themselves and society’s external pressures exhorting them to identify with specific stereotypes. As Barbara Christian observes, it is this dilemma that leads on to the female protagonists’ contrariness. For instance, one of these protagonists, Roselily, gets married to escape the conventions of the South only to find herself entrapped by other conventions, by marrying a black Muslim. The same happens to the female protagonist of the other short story analyzed in the current research. She is called Myrna, she is a gifted writer, but due to society’s pressure on her, she is confused and does not recognize her endowment. Instead of taking a firm stand against her intellectual death, she stays with her husband and feigns her love and devotion to him and, most important, her satisfaction with the life she is living with him. Such an attitude is incorrect because it

is unhealthy, not honest and detrimental especially to the person displaying it. By playing the role of someone she is not and repressing her real needs, Myrna runs the risk of losing her identity. Her sense of alienation and estrangement from her real self will only immortalize in her a feeling of unquenchable thirst for that self. From this state generally results a lifelong bitterness or suicide.

Appraising the forbidden as it is portrayed in *In Love and Trouble*, by using the technique accounted for by Barbara Christian lends immediacy to one's analysis since it uses the vantage point of the individuals directly suffering from this powerful component of the folkways.

*In Love and Trouble* was also reviewed by Alice Hall Petry in an article entitled "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" (1989). In this review, Alice Hall Petry reviews *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* as well and compares the two collections. For her, *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* is not as satisfying as *In Love and Trouble* in relation to the characterization. As to *In Love and Trouble*, she mentions that it is a collection where the main focus is on the troubles African American women daily face and on the struggles they must lead in order to grow and ascend to the state of wholeness. This explains why the female protagonists' attainment of wholeness in "Roselily" and "'Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?'" — the two short stories studied in this dissertation — is not certain. Indeed, Alice Hall Petry mentions in her review that in *In Love and Trouble* it is not the attainment of wholeness that interests the author most, it is rather the movement towards wholeness that seems to be given most consideration. Alice Hall Petry observes that contrarily to *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, in *In Love and Trouble* the emphasis is on the

process, not the product. This is why, for her *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* is not up to the standards of *In Love and Trouble*. Similarly to Barbara Christian, she also indicates that institutions such as that of marriage or that of religion bring women nothing positive. This is true especially when a marriage is celebrated and a religion embraced under the pressure of social conventions, not out of personal conviction. Yet, as it is pointed out in the present research, it is so forbidden to question the legitimacy of wifehood and motherhood, as the central spheres of women's activity, that women such as Roselily in the story of the same name and Myrna in "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" seem to be completely overwhelmed by the patriarchal order and not able to affirm their real needs anymore. This does not mean that the author has let the forbidden triumph. It only means that the protagonists should keep on struggling. It is only through identifying the forbidden and fighting against it that any state of wholeness can be reached.

The short story "Roselily" was also reviewed by Mary Donnelly in *Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works* (2010). In her analysis, Donnelly refers to Barbara Christian's first person point of view as a stream of consciousness. Contrarily to Barbara Christian, Donnelly thinks that there is the protagonist's stream of consciousness and there is a third person narrator communicating it to the readership. For her, the protagonist is not manifesting her point of view and it is a third person narrator that is doing it for her. Yet, in the present analysis the protagonist's confused testimony, taking the form of a stream of consciousness is considered as her actual point of view. It is the elusiveness and indirectness of the protagonist's intervention in her story, provoked by the fear of directly confronting the forbidden, that gives the



impression of her absence and passivity and her need for a third-person narrator to convey her thoughts in her place. So, it is the apprehension of the forbidden that led Roselily's intervention to take an equivocating aspect, to the point of seeming to appear almost in duplicate. So, what has been gleaned from Donnelly's analysis is the expression of stream of consciousness. This expression has been judged as quite useful in naming the female protagonist's presence or intervention in "Roselily". Yet, the fact that Mary Donnelly draws a line between the protagonist's actual testimony and what she imagines to be an omniscient narrator indicates that the rather confused and spasmodic testimonial dimension of "Roselily" seems to elude her. In the present research, it is supposed that attention to the forbidden, as an extremely restraining force, reveals the reason underlying this confusion. It is fear. It is thought, in the current research, that the protagonist of "Roselily" is just under the effect of her own fear of directly confronting the forbidden. This leads her to produce a discourse reticent to the point that a duplicate version of this discourse surfaces and seems expressive<sup>16</sup> of either a stream of consciousness or of an omniscient narrator — depending on which point of view Donnelly detected first .

As to Alice Walker's second collection of short stories, *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, it has also been analyzed by Barbara Christian in an essay entitled "Alice Walker: the Black Woman Artist as Wayward" (1981). In this essay, Barbara Christian states that Alice Walker uses in some of the collection's short stories a womanist process to account for her female protagonists' quest for wholeness. She

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<sup>16</sup> For Mary Donnelly.

also mentions that such a process is marked by phases of “...confusion, resistance to the established order, and the discovery of a freeing order...”<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, when employed for the analysis of the forbidden as it is presented in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, it provides insights into how the female protagonists mature into whole persons out of a direct confrontation with the forbidden in an almost sequential way.

Some of the short stories in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* were also reviewed by Keith Byerman. He, too, points to Alice Walker's use of the technique of the womanist process in his article entitled “Desire and Alice Walker: The Quest for a Womanist Narrative” (1989). He illustrates his point by giving the examples of “Coming Apart”, “Porn” and “Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells”. According to Keith Byerman, these short stories in particular do display the characteristics of a womanist process narrative thematically and formally.

In his review, Keith Byerman refers to Jacques Lacan's observations about language. He mentions that according to Lacan, “...language...is one manifestation of patriarchal law.”<sup>18</sup> He remarks that what transpires from Jacques Lacan's work is that “[l]anguage substitutes the symbolic for the physical; in this sense it defers and renders alien the body and thus desire. Thus meaning exists only within such an order.”<sup>19</sup> Earlier in the article, he mentions that the order he is speaking about is of a phallogocentric nature. So, according to what Keith Byerman deduced from Lacan's

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<sup>17</sup> Barbara, Christian. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> Keith, Byerman. “Desire and Alice Walker: The Quest for a Womanist Narrative” (1989), p. 321.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

analysis, a language that neutralizes and mitigates desire perpetuates patriarchal law, because according to this law desire is the source of evil.

Since in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* there are short stories where desire is portrayed by Alice Walker as the instigating force behind the most important events and, above all, taboo situations at the origin of the protagonists' sufferings, Keith Byerman wonders if "...Walker escapes complicity in the perpetuation of patriarchal narrative."<sup>20</sup> According to him, "Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells" and "Coming Apart" illustrate Alice Walker's quest for a womanist narrative. He explains this quest by defining it as "...the search for a method that can render character and plot in such a way as to demonstrate the moral superiority of women and the inadequacy of a masculine perspective on the world."<sup>21</sup> However, he also remarks that:

...the very insistence on this pattern means that the power of desire as motivating force must be neutralized since desire and the body make any moral order problematic. The effect of such neutralization within narrative is to rewrite the Name of the Father. Thus, in these narratives, at least, Alice Walker paradoxically reinstates patriarchy in the process of deconstructing it.<sup>22</sup>

Such deduction is possible, but in the present dissertation Alice Walker's neutralization of desire through employing the womanist process and theme is perceived as beneficial to her female protagonists. "Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells" and "Coming Apart" are deemed womanist process narratives whereby Alice Walker attempts to replace the patriarchal order with the womanist order. Even though both orders seem to privilege the neutralization and mitigation of desire, in the

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<sup>20</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op.cit.,p. 322.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

womanist order this neutralization is effected to grant the integrity of the (wo)man's<sup>23</sup> body and the treatment of (wo)men as subjects rather than objects. In addition to this, in the present analysis of *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, the focus is not on whether Alice Walker reinstates the patriarchal order in trying to deconstruct it. It is rather on the investigation of how this deconstruction is made possible. The desacralization of the forbidden is certainly considered as the principal trigger for this deconstruction.

*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* was also reviewed by Alice Hall Petry in an article entitled "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" (1989). In this article, she gives a rather negative criticism of this collection. She observes that "[p]erhaps these 'stories' have some impact when read in isolation, months apart, in a magazine such as *Ms.*; but when packaged as a collection of short stories they are predictable and pedantic."<sup>24</sup> She maintains that a comparison between *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* reveals a progression from "...an emphasis on 'trouble' to an emphasis on self-assertiveness."<sup>25</sup> However, what bothers Alice Hall Petry is that the female protagonists of *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* seem not needing to fight anymore. They even appear to her as "superficial [and] static."<sup>26</sup> She remarks that "Walker apparently [does not realize] that in fiction (as in life) the journey, not the arrival, is what interests."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In "Coming Apart", both women and men are exploited by the pornographic industry.

<sup>24</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" (1989), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Even though Alice Hall Petry does not recognize the existence of this journey in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, hence her omission of mentioning Alice Walker's use of a womanist process, in the present analysis Walker's shift of tone,<sup>28</sup> in *You Can't Keep A good Woman Down*, is perceived as an indication of the contrary. Although the female protagonists of this collection seem to be more self-assertive, they still have to fight and their journey has not yet attained its end. In stories such as "Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells" and "Coming Apart", the forbidden accounted for is extremely controversial and necessitates that self-absorbed and self-assertive women keep on fighting and maturing.

Almost the same process, discussed by Barbara Christian and Keith Byerman, is used in the analysis of Tashi's contest with the forbidden in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. This process is accounted for by Geneva Cobb Moore in an article entitled "Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (2000). In her article, Geneva Cobb Moore applies Carl Jung's archetypal symbolism to the analysis of Tashi's face-to-face with the forbidden truth of female genital mutilation and ensuing attainment of wholeness. But the difference between Geneva Cobb Moore's analysis and the one carried out in the present analysis resides in the introduction of the element of the forbidden into Carl Jung's archetypal description of the psychic journey or ascension. It is also the consideration of the archetype of the shadow, the second phase of the journey, as the most intense or culminating point of Tashi's confrontation with the forbidden. In the current research and similarly to Geneva Cobb

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<sup>28</sup> That is to say, Alice Walker's shift from the depiction of confused female protagonists still trying to retrieve their voices in *In Love and Trouble* to the portrayal of their antithesis, namely very self-assertive and daring women in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*.

Moore's analysis, Tashi's inner journey is perceived as a move from self-hatred to self-love, made possible thanks to Carl Jung's archetypes. Yet, if Geneva Cobb Moore considers the archetypes as only collective unconscious psychic steps that lead Tashi to her reconciliation with herself and the world, in the analysis at hand the archetypes are regarded as the different degrees defining the intensity of Tashi's confrontation with the forbidden. The shadow is perceived as the highest degree.

## Approach

Recourse to Carl Jung's archetypes or to a Jungian approach can seem paradoxical. Some might say that probably a feminist approach is more appropriate for the analysis of works produced by a woman. This is true especially if one pays attention to feminist critics' disagreement with Jung's theories. For instance, Susan Rowland maintains that "Jungian writings exhibit...misogyny..."<sup>29</sup> However, on the same line she also recognizes that in addition to the misogyny they display, Jung's writings also leave room for "...significant opportunities for feminist theoretical developments."<sup>30</sup> The latter have been performed especially in Jung's theory about duality, or what he called the anima-animus archetype. In line with this, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan state that "[t]he encounter with psychoanalysis has been crucial to the development of contemporary feminist thinking about literature and culture."<sup>31</sup> Besides all this, the particular interest in a Jungian approach resides first in its embedment in a theory of psychology conceived by Carl Jung — one of Alice Walker's admitted healers and one of the novel's characters — and second, in its entrenchment in one of the theoretical tools Jung used; in order to emit his postulations about consciousness. Geneva Cobb Moore refers to this tool as Carl Jung's archetypal symbolism. Such a tool provides insights into how the different convulsions of the psyche (Tashi's psyche) lead on, gradually and sequentially, to a state of complete relief.

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<sup>29</sup> Susan, Rowland. *Carl Gustav Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction* (1999), p.190.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Julie, Rivkin and Michael, Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2004), p. 768.

J.A. Cudden mentions that Jungian criticism is one of the offshoots of psychoanalytic criticism. About the latter he observes that:

[b]roadly speaking, so-called Freudian criticism or classical psychoanalytic criticism — which is often speculative — is concerned with the quest for the discovery of (and the subsequent analysis of) connections between the artists (creators, artificers) themselves and what they actually create (novels, poems, paintings, sculpture, buildings, music, etc.)...Thus, in the Freudian method a literary character is treated as if a living human being...<sup>32</sup>

He cites the different developments that resulted from psychoanalytic criticism. He mentions, for instance, the “psychobiographical approach”<sup>33</sup> which, he remarks, is concerned with the search for the writer’s intentions behind the production of a work of art. He also indicates the approach based on the Oedipus Complex and created by Harold Bloom,<sup>34</sup> J.A. Cudden holds that in this approach interest is mainly focused on analyzing the relationship holding between the artist and his precursors and how he feels oppressed by them. Another development of psychoanalytic criticism referred to by J.A. Cudden is “ego-psychology.” He holds that this “...theory is concerned with the reader-text psychology and thus concentrates on the relationship between reader and text.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, in his enumeration of the different developments that sprang from psychoanalytic criticism, he points to the development resorted to in the present research. He maintains that “Jungian psychology and Jung’s theories about the collective unconscious and the archetype (*q.v.*) have also provided a fruitful but less

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<sup>32</sup> J.A., Cuddon. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1999), p. 332. All the brackets in this quotation are the author’s.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 333.

<sup>34</sup> American literary critic known for his innovative interpretations of literary history and of the creation of literature. It is in two of his books, entitled respectively *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (1975), that he developed his Oedipus Complex theory.

<sup>35</sup> J.A., Cuddon. Op.cit.,p 334.



influential development in psychoanalytical criticism.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, the Jungian theory of literary criticism sprang from psychoanalytic criticism. In other words, it is one of the developments of the latter. Terence Dawson observes that “Jungian criticism emerged in the 1920s and has enjoyed a somewhat unsteady history.”<sup>37</sup> He also adds that:

Jungian criticism is *not*<sup>38</sup> based on dogma; its purpose is not to forward a Jungian mission or agenda...It is a loose kind of method, perhaps better defined only as an “approach,” an approach that respects the *facts* whether dream or text...And because every text is different, every text must be approached differently. *Jungian criticism begins not with theory, but with the “facts” of the text.*<sup>39</sup>

In Jungian criticism what is pivotal is the object of criticism, as Terence Dawson indicates, be this object a text or a dream. In this criticism there is no tendency to impose a theoretical frame that circumscribes the interpretation of a text. Jungian criticism is “loose” in the sense that it is adaptable to the distinctiveness of each text it analyzes. Terence Dawson also affirms that:

What concerns Jung is the possibility that some texts (visionary works) harbor a resonance that comes from deeper than the personal unconscious of the author. In the best of his work, Jung does not try to “reduce” a complex work to one or more reductive claims... whenever he was free to set his own agenda, he delighted in every detail of the whole work. When he decided to analyze the few pages of Miss Frank Miller’s fantasies, he found that he needed two thick volumes to do them justice. The transcription of his seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra required two even longer volumes. Jung is interested in how every piece contributes to the nature of the puzzle he has set himself to solve. As a result, Jungian criticism requires space; that is, a very generous word limit...When he has time and/or space at his disposal, Jung does not indulge in “instant Jung.” He is interested in the complexity of the complex. And his investigation both respects and takes on the structure of the work he is investigating. Ideally, Jungian criticism should take account of every possible detail.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>37</sup> Polly, Young-Eisendrath and Terence, Dawson. *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* (2008), p.271.

<sup>38</sup> All italics in this quotation are the author’s.

<sup>39</sup> Polly, Young-Eisendrath and Terence, Dawson. Op.cit p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp.275-76.

Carl Jung's agenda is that he has no agenda. This explains why he is interested in what Terence Dawson refers to as "visionary works" or texts "...that are not under the author's conscious control..."<sup>41</sup>

When he used to speak about his patients,<sup>42</sup> Jung made it clear that there was no agenda he was following and furthering. For him, what was important was the development of a study flexible and adjustable to its object and not the contrary. In consonance with this, he observed that:

I am often asked about my psychotherapeutic or analytic method. I cannot reply unequivocally to the question. Therapy is different in every case. When a doctor tells me that he adheres strictly to this or that method, I have my doubts about his therapeutic effects. So much is said in the literature about the resistance of the patient that it would almost seem as if the doctor were trying to put something over him, whereas the cure ought to grow naturally out of the patient himself. Psychotherapy and analysis are as varied as are human individuals. I treat every patient as individually as possible, because the solution of the problem is always an individual one...A psychological truth is valid only if it can be reversed. A solution which would be out of the question for me maybe just the right one for someone else.<sup>43</sup>

It can be imagined that he used to adopt the same attitude when literary texts were concerned.

The flexibility characterizing Carl Jung's theories transpires, for instance, in one of the concepts he has developed to describe (wo)men's "psychic existence",<sup>44</sup> namely the collective unconscious. In the adjective "collective" resides a great flexibility, because it underlines the universal character of Jung's perception of human nature. Of course, this did not prevent him from developing other concepts designating

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<sup>41</sup> Polly, Young-Eisendrath and Terence, Dawson. Op.cit p. p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, in his autobiography entitled *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1989).

<sup>43</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1989), p. 131.

<sup>44</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" in *The Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung* (1966), p. 4.

“[t]he contents of the *personal* unconscious...”<sup>45</sup> For example, when an attempt is made to describe the collective unconscious of the female protagonist of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, recourse is made to universal, or collective, images. The image of Tashi as an exaggaratingly proud African woman, boasting of the cultural superiority of her tribe, is common to all human beings. The fact that this image, or archetype, called by Jung as the persona, is a psychic trait that anyone can display means that Jung’s theories and concepts emanate from a purely human universal potential for producing psychic definitions of reality. Still, it is essential to indicate here the “archaic” and “mythological” anchorage of this potential.

That is why, in addition to the fact that psychotherapy is based on no specific method, Carl Jung pointed to the fact that the psychotherapist should be familiar with other disciplines like mythology. He states that:

I myself had to work for a very long time before I possessed the equipment for psychotherapy. As early as 1909 I realized that I could not treat latent psychoses if I did not understand their symbolism. It was then that I began to study mythology. With cultivated and intelligent patients the psychiatrist needs more than merely professional knowledge. He must understand, aside from all theoretical assumptions, what really motivates the patient...mere medical training does not suffice, for the horizon of the human psyche embraces infinitely more than the limited purview of the doctor’s consulting room. The psyche is definitely more complicated and inaccessible than the body.<sup>46</sup>

Added to its flexibility, the agenda of the Jungian theory is identified with the limitlessness and multidimensionality of its critical approach.

The Jungian critical inquiry is limitless because it derives from a theory of psychology grounded in an entity equally boundless in nature: the human psyche, or more particularly consciousness. When Carl Jung was designating the different

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<sup>45</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1966) Op.cit., p 4. In this quotation, italics are mine.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pp. 131-132.

building blocks of his theory of analytical psychology, he indicated the existence of what Geneva Cobb Moore refers to as a “widened consciousness.”<sup>47</sup> For him, this consciousness is composed of the conscious or the ego, the personal unconscious where the individual’s repressed disagreeable memories and complexes are hidden and the collective unconscious where exist what he called the archetypes. About the collective unconscious, Anthony Stevens says that:

[w]hereas Freud insisted that the unconscious mind was entirely personal and peculiar to the individual and made up of repressed wishes and traumatic memories, Jung maintained that there existed an additional phylogenetic layer (‘the collective

unconscious’)<sup>48</sup>, which incorporated the entire psychic potential of humankind.<sup>49</sup>

As to Carl Jung, he noted that:

[a]t first the concept of the unconscious was limited to denoting the state of [personal] repressed or forgotten contents...A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience...but it is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term ‘collective’ because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal...<sup>50</sup>

The limitlessness above-mentioned is more markedly present in the collective unconscious. It is impossible to measure “...the inner unconscious drama [,]”<sup>51</sup> or content of this part of consciousness because it comprises an unlimited number of archetypes.

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<sup>47</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. “Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*” (2000), p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> Brackets are the author’s here.

<sup>49</sup> Renos K., Papadopoulos. *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications* (2006), p.75.

<sup>50</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1966). Op.cit., p. 3. Square brackets are mine. Ellipses in the quotation are mine. Italics in this quotation are the author’s.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

For Carl Jung, the collective unconscious was a proof that there are common denominators between human beings. This part of the psyche stands for another facet of consciousness that indicates the presence of a universal connectedness holding between human beings. In simpler terms, there are states, individual realities, or what can also be qualified as ubiquitous leitmotifs, that any person may experience and use to attain wholeness. The state of being a mother, a hero, a villain...etc. are archetypes and they are situated in the collective unconscious.

In his analysis of dream symbolism, Carl Jung had noticed the existence of certain dreams that cannot be satisfactorily interpreted, even with the help of the dreamer's personal associations. He qualified such dreams as "obsessive" or "highly emotional."<sup>52</sup> He observes that:

[i]n such cases, we have to take into consideration the fact (first observed and commented on by Freud) that elements often occur in a dream that cannot be derived from the dreamer's personal experience. These elements...are what Freud called 'archaic remnants'— mental forms whose presence cannot be explained by anything in the individual's own life and which seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind.<sup>53</sup>

What Freud refers to as "archaic remnants" has been identified by Carl Jung as archetypes. According to Carl Jung, these latter originate in humanity's above-mentioned collective unconscious.

Murray Stein holds that an archetype is "...an innate formal element that structures the psyche at its most basic levels...the archetype is responsible for

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<sup>52</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. "Approaching the Unconscious" in *Man and His Symbols* (1964), p. 56

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

coordinating and organizing the psyche's homeostatic balance and its programs for development and maturation."<sup>54</sup>

As to Carl Jung, he refers to archetypes as "...an instinctive trend, as marked as the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form organized colonies."<sup>55</sup> But, as far as archetypes are concerned, Carl Jung also remarks that they are an instinctive trend which is not the result of physiological urges. Indeed, he states that:

[h]ere I must clarify the relation between instincts and archetypes: what we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world...<sup>56</sup>

In line with Carl Jung's comparison of archetypes to "an instinctive trend", Naomi Goldenberg observes that:

[i]t is important not to be misled by the frequent use of scientific analogies to explain the notion of archetypes. Science proceeds from the assumption that the composition of matter and energy can be known by means of careful observation and precise measurement. Jungian psychology starts from the premise that the physical universe is controlled by unseen, irrepresentable, and ultimately unknowable forces which are transcendent to the world itself. Although Jung sometimes refers to archetypes as within the stuff of matter, he quickly returns to the idea of the "content" of the archetype as something separate from people and physicality; archetypes are thus far removed from the sphere of science.<sup>57</sup>

She also remarks that "Jungian archetypes, like platonic forms, influence the physical world but are not of the physical world. They are understood as transcending

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<sup>54</sup> Alain, De Mijolla. *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (2005), p.115.

<sup>55</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1964). *Op.cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg. "Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud?" (1985), p.58.

material reality...”<sup>58</sup> Susan Rowland also mentions that archetypes are the “structuring powers”<sup>59</sup> of the unconscious.

Thus, for Carl Jung, our collective unconscious is composed of a kind of instinctive trend which emanates from what Naomi Goldenberg calls the “World Beyond.”<sup>60</sup> In its turn, this instinctive trend is composed of “[i]mmaterial forces” or “transcendent entities”<sup>61</sup> that Carl Jung termed archetypes and held responsible for people’s thought and behavior.

Goldenberg also affirms that:

...there are many ways of naming the higher parts [, or what has already been referred to in the article as immaterial forces and transcendent entities. Indeed,]<sup>62</sup> Plato generally employed the term forms. Jung used the word archetypes. Religions use the word God in singular or plural form. Although minds, souls, forms, archetypes, and gods are all conceived as interacting with the physical world in various ways and various degrees, they are all said to be things apart...which exist independently of this...physical [world].<sup>63</sup>

Carl Jung admitted that archetypes appeared in his life for the first time at an early age. On the other hand, he also recognized that his realization of their existence, in his unconscious, did not take place until he attained the age of thirty-five.

During his childhood, Carl Jung suffered from being the unique child for nine years. It is only after nine years that his parents had their second child, his sister. Carl Jung considered his early loneliness as the principal reason behind his fondness for school. He declared that “[o]ne of [his] reasons for liking school was that there [he]

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<sup>58</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg (1985). Op.cit., p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Susan, Rowland. Op.cit., p.10.

<sup>49</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg. Op.cit., p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>63</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg. Op.cit., p. 59.

found at last the playmates [he] had lacked for so long.”<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, he also indicated that once he stepped out of his loneliness and ventured into the “wider world...which contained others besides [his] parents...”<sup>65</sup> he started to feel alienated from himself due, in his eyes, to the influence his schoolmates exerted upon him. He felt that even the games he was playing with them were not of the type he would have chosen. However, he was playing them and changed his attitude because he was with other children, in the wider world and had to fit in with them. This encounter with the external world, beyond the boundaries of his parental home, led Carl Jung to feel suspicious of the world in general. In his autobiography<sup>66</sup> he notes that “[t]he influence of this wider world...seemed to me dubious if not altogether suspect and, in some obscure way, hostile.”<sup>67</sup> This feeling of insecurity the world infused him with led him, at the age of ten, to craft a kind of ritualistic object which he later identified, at the age of thirty-five, as the product of “archaic psychic components which have entered the individual psyche without any direct line of tradition.”<sup>68</sup> The ritualistic object in question was a kind of manikin he carved in and sawed off his ruler. He mentioned in his autobiography that he painted it with black ink and placed it in his pencil case. Inside, with his manikin he intimates that he also put a smooth stone that he colored “...to look as though it were divided into an upper and lower half...”<sup>69</sup>

He hid the pencil case in what he wanted to be a secret place because the existence of the manikin was itself a secret. It was for him the object of a ritual he

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<sup>64</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1989). Op.cit., p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Entitled *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

<sup>67</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1989). Op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.,p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1989). Op.cit., p. 21.



performed from time to time. Without being aware of it, that ritual was for Carl Jung a way to get back the feeling of security he lost at his contact with the external world. Jung holds that at that time whenever he felt hurt or was in a difficult situation, he used to remember the manikin and the stone, in order to be relieved. Carl Jung indicated<sup>70</sup> that it is only at the age of thirty-five, when he was performing a research to write *Symbols of Transformation* (1926) that he discovered the existence of manikins and stones, similar to the ones he made, in ancient civilizations. For instance, he found out that in the Australian aboriginal religion they used a ritual in which a manikin was considered by the aboriginal people of Australia as a “mythical being”<sup>71</sup>. They also referred to their manikins and stones as “secret-sacred things”<sup>72</sup> or “tjurunga”<sup>73</sup>. Consequently to this discovery, Carl Jung came to the realization that there exist in the human psyche psychic contents that are not related to the personal part of consciousness. Thus, this is how he became aware of the existence of archetypes for the first time.

Despite the limitless number of archetypes proposed by Jung and similarly to him, Geneva Cobb Moore argues that five archetypes in particular are necessary to achieve wholeness. She enumerates these archetypes as follows:

...the persona or mask, or the false wrappings of the society acquired by the individual; the shadow, or the dark side of the duality, like a Mr Hyde within Dr. Jekyll; the anima/animus, or maternal Eros, or feminine spirit, in the man, and the paternal Logos, or masculine soul, in the woman, and finally, the Self, or the essence of human wholeness, the individual par excellence.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Always in the same autobiography.

<sup>71</sup> “tjurunga.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 112.

As far as he is concerned, Carl Jung mentions that the meeting with the self is necessary. A person has to meet her/his self and experience it with all its facets to achieve the state of self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-love. This meeting, unfortunately for many people who are prone to maintain a brand image in society, requires first a surrender of this image or what Geneva Cobb Moore refers to in her study as the mask or what Carl Jung named the persona. For Carl Jung, even though man has strived, throughout history, to consolidate his consciousness, or his persona, for fear that he might be gripped by “[a] wave of the unconscious [,]”<sup>75</sup> personified in an uncontrolled behaviour, this consciousness has to break down. Jung remarks that the individual should stop hiding behind the persona and projecting what lies in its rear (or the shadow, or even the anima-animus) onto the external environment. In consonance with this, Jung adds that “...if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious.”<sup>76</sup> So, if people succeed in coming to terms with their shadow, this at least reconciles them with their personal unconscious. Hence, the shadow is one archetype of the collective unconscious that unravels the contents of the personal unconscious. Thus, the personal unconscious is part of the wider collective unconscious. In simpler terms, it is one of its segments.

Interestingly, when he speaks about the shadow Carl Jung refers to it as a “narrow door” and a “tight passage”<sup>77</sup> that is very painful and represents the entrance to the world of the collective unconscious. He notes that in this world the normalizing

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<sup>75</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1966). Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>77</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung (1966). Op. cit., p. 22.

faculties of consciousness have no power, uncertainty is ever-present and the usual landmarks one situates oneself with are completely distorted. He remarks that there is no above and no below, no left and no right. In the collective unconscious there are no such categorizations of space.

After these two archetypes, and similarly to Geneva Cobb Moore, Carl Jung pointed to the necessity of experiencing the archetypes of the anima-animus and, after it, that of the self. These different archetypes and their quasi-sequential aspect seem to offer a perspective whereby it is possible to follow Tashi's healing process, in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, step by step.

Nevertheless, before undergoing them Jungians remark that the initial trigger for the individuation process should be "a wounding of the personality." Indeed, Von Franz mentions that "[t]he actual processes of personality — the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self — generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it."<sup>78</sup> Such is the case of Tashi in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

In their appreciation of the sequentiality of Carl Jung's individuation process, many intellectual figures considered that the archetype of the anima-animus is the one that seems to give away Carl Jung's trivialization of the woman's and even the man's psyche.

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<sup>78</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. "The Process of Individuation" in *Man and His Symbols* (1964), p. 169.

Despite Alice Walker's recognition of the benefits she drew from Jungian psychology, in her version of Carl Jung's "pattern of psychic growth",<sup>79</sup> even Geneva Cobb Moore seems to have incorporated some alterations specific to a feminist vantage point for the sake of analyzing Walker's novel. It appears that such alterations proved to be necessary in Geneva Cobb Moore's eyes since the individuation process she borrowed from Carl Jung is applied, in her analysis, to a woman's experience.

Many intellectuals criticized Carl Jung on the basis of his theorization of duality. They claim that Jungians should rework one of the archetypes that Carl Jung proposed to chart what he coined the individuation process or the journey to wholeness. This archetype is known as the anima-animus archetype. About this archetype, Carl Jung mentions that:

[a] man has a minority of feminine or female genes...and it works as a female in the man. The same is the case with the animus, that is...a masculine image in the woman's mind which is...sometimes quite conscious, sometimes it is not conscious, but it is called into life the moment that [sic] woman meets a man who says the right things and then [she considers that]<sup>80</sup> he is the fellow...no matter what he is.<sup>81</sup>

In Carl Jung's view, the anima, or men's feminine side, embodies all the qualities specific to a state of intellectual passivity and lack of personhood. Whenever inaction or ineffectiveness, "...irritab[ility]"<sup>82</sup>, depressed moods, uncertainty, insecurity and touchiness..."<sup>83</sup> become apparent in a man's behavior, it should be ascribed to his feminine side. As to the animus, Carl Jung identifies it with all the masculine

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<sup>79</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>80</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>81</sup> "Animus/Anima archetypes in Jungian psychology", excerpt from "A World of Dreams", a three-part series of films produced by PBS, on the life and works of the great thinker and psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, accessed on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN47s0mPfRU&feature=related>.

<sup>82</sup> In *Man and His Symbols*, the word is used as an adjective. For the needs of the present enumeration, it has been transformed into a noun.

<sup>83</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 186.

qualities of boldness, courage, spiritual strength and rationality, accidentally located in women's psyche. He states that:

...just as a woman is often clearly conscious of things which a man is still groping for in the dark, so there are naturally fields of experience in a man, which for woman, are still wrapped in the shadows of non-differentiation, chiefly things in which she has little interest. Personal relations are as a rule more important and interesting to her than objective facts and their interconnections. The wide fields of commerce, politics, technology, and science, the whole realm of the applied masculine mind, she relegates to the penumbra of consciousness; while, on the other hand, she develops a minute consciousness of personal relationships, the infinite nuances of which usually escape the man entirely.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly to the anima, whenever animus qualities, or the aforementioned so-called masculine qualities, appear in a woman's behavior they should be considered as only a manifestation of the man in her, or her animus. Speaking about the above-mentioned intellectuals who disapprove of Carl Jung's theory of the anima-animus, Naomi Goldenberg deems that the anima-animus model puts women at a great disadvantage in comparison to men. She holds that Carl Jung confines the woman to a gender stereotype, by considering qualities such as "...vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational capacity for personal love, feeling for nature..."<sup>85</sup> as inherent to her only. This, for her, does not encourage any change in society and contributes only to limit the spectrum of activities women can carry out. In other words, for Naomi Goldenberg Carl Jung's notion of duality supports women's prevention from evolving outside their traditional spheres of activity, or rather passivity.

Jane Wheelwright maintains that:

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<sup>84</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. "Two Essays on Psychotherapy" in *The Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung*, p. 206.

<sup>85</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 186.

...the whole point is that the female Ego has to be in charge of the animus...now, that's not a generally accepted idea, because the old hangover of you<sup>86</sup> lean on men and men somehow make your life more interesting or something and you just lose all your own ideas or innovations or creativity. I think a lot of women are scared out of being who they are and doing whatever is important to them...still...<sup>87</sup>

For Jane Wheelwright, it is absolutely not acceptable to consider that the existence of women's ego depends on the presence of the animus in their psyche. It is comparable to perceive the woman as an inert entity as long as she has not met the man upon whom she can finally project her animus and live a more exciting and interesting life. This meeting is made by society as a vital prerequisite to women's existence and visibility in society, because this society has convinced her that her animus is a psychic facet that is alien to her deepest nature and should be identified with, or projected on, a man of her choice "who says the right things."<sup>88</sup>

Verena Kast observes that "[i]t seems undeniable that Jung conflated the gender stereotypes of his time with the notion of anima and animus as archetypes."<sup>89</sup>

Susan Rowland maintains that it is possible to consider that it is Jung's shadow that led him to convey a distorted conception of the anima-animus archetype. She remarks that the shadow:

...forms the inferior complement of conscious personality and may be imaged as darkness, evil or chaos. Individuation demands a coming to terms with the shadow lest the ego's complete 'unconsciousness' of it lead to an inflation of the shadow's destructive and psychotic powers...If this is true of the individual then what about a theory or the psychic processes of writing itself? Might it be possible that Jung's own theories...are haunted by a shadow? <sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Here, Jane Wheelwright is addressing women.

<sup>87</sup> "Animus/Anima archetypes in Jungian psychology". Op.cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Renos K, Papadopoulos. Op.cit., p. 116.

<sup>90</sup> Susan, Rowland. Op.cit., p. 14.

Robert Johnson notes that:

[m]an insists upon making some outer figure...generally a flesh-and-blood woman bears his anima for him, that is he mediates the outer world by way of his anima instead of using her inside, where she belongs...this produces more suffering and more upsets and more pain than in any other single thing that [he]<sup>91</sup> know[s] about.<sup>92</sup>

As to Demaris Wehr, she warns about the misleading potential of "...socially constructed roles [ ' reification]."<sup>93</sup> Indeed, a certain danger lies in attempting to stereotype the psyche.

These correctives seem to be efficient in deconstructing the Jungian notion of duality. Nevertheless, since Alice Walker is a womanist writer one can be tempted to consider them as womanist correctives — even though their authors are not specifically womanists. Indeed, since Alice Walker considers herself a womanist and since the work studied here is her achievement, the second option would seem more appropriate, namely the application of womanist correctives. However, this would mean considering womanism as better than feminism. What is wrong in the latter assumption is that it is extremely misleading and it blurs any true understanding of either feminism or womanism. The fact that Alice Walker is a womanist does not mean that using a feminist theory is unsuitable for analyzing her works. By creating womanism, she did not intend to invalidate feminism, she just wanted to point to its complexity and to the diversity of its horizons. Feminism constituted a basis upon which female writers and critics relied to give a fairer interpretation and evaluation to texts produced by both women and men. Womanism did not come out of the blue and

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<sup>91</sup> This personal pronoun refers to Robert Johnson. In the film, he naturally uses the pronoun "I".

<sup>92</sup> "Animus/Anima archetypes in Jungian psychology". Op.cit.

<sup>93</sup> Demaris Wehr is the author of *Carl Gustav Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (1989). Due to the impossibility of having the book, the interview was realized in June 2011.

feminism certainly acted as a springboard for many other “critical theories and social-justice movements”<sup>94</sup> like womanism. So, feminism and womanism are just two different appellations of the same phenomenon — with womanism adding more complexity to it. The womanist correctives intervene in the analysis when it is made evident that both women and men have been conditioned in a way that led them to have a fragmented psychic vision of their consciousness. This fragmented vision estranged both women and men to their respective inherent alterities — real sources of psychic richness and maturity or, in one word, wholeness.

In sum, the archetypal symbolism proposed by Geneva Cobb Moore to account for Tashi’s journey to wholeness, is adjusted to a woman’s experience and deprived of its masculinist bias. This deprivation can be sensed on a level with the anima-animus stage of Tashi’s individuation process. It is at this stage, Geneva Cobb Moore maintains, that Alice Walker makes her protagonist use her animus, or what feminists like Naomi Goldenberg and even Simone de Beauvoir consider as the qualities women gave up in the process of their socialization, to avenge female suffering in general. It is also at the stage of the anima/animus that the protagonist’s retrieval of her agency is made possible. However, what Geneva Cobb Moore omits to mention, at least directly, is that in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* it is Tashi’s direct confrontation with the forbidden and her relinquishing her mask that give a real boost to her individuation process. This happens on a level with the shadow phase of Tashi’s journey to wholeness. Indeed, in the present research work, the shadow phase is considered as the culminating point of Tashi’s confrontation with the forbidden. It is the phase of the

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<sup>94</sup> Layli, Phillips. *The Womanist Reader* (2006), p.xx.



shadow that provides the energy necessary to the animus stage. All the rage the protagonist repressed for years emerges at this stage (the shadow) and brings about Tashi's killer instinct which manifests itself on a level with the animus stage. Of course, all this will be studied in detail in the chapter devoted to the appraisal of Alice Walker's commitment to the forbidden in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

In addition to the Jungian approach, a womanist approach is employed for the analysis of the forbidden as the gateway to wholeness in *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*. This approach can also be termed a feminist approach with widened horizons and characterized by a greater inclusiveness. Such attributes as openness to different horizons and a greater inclusiveness send one back to the womanist philosophy that Alice Walker conceived. This means that the womanist approach is in the image of the philosophy from which it derives. Womanism as a philosophy, and even praxis, has been created by Alice Walker to make room, in the world of activism, for not only an African American feminist activism but for a universalist activism. By creating womanism, her main aim was to remind the world that activism for human rights should not be concentrated on just gender oppression for instance, but on all oppressions. The concentration on the oppression of just one group and the ignorance of all the others is called separatism. Since Alice Walker is not a conventional feminist, taking into consideration the needs of only women, or of only American women of African descent or of only middle-class American women of African descent, it seems not possible at all to adopt an approach which springs from a conventional feminism that alienated her, at one moment of her life. In other words, since Alice Walker is a black woman writer who

devoted her literary career to end separatism and all favouritisms, adopting an approach which derives from an “undertheorized”<sup>95</sup> philosophy and movement does not seem appropriate.

The recollection of Alice Walker’s account of her sense of alienation within the feminist movement, at one moment of her life, certifies the appropriateness of an approach that derives from a philosophy Alice Walker created, in part, to cure this sense of alienation the feminist movement infused her with.

It is possible to add here that since Alice Walker perceives the feminist movement as a kind of sub-movement that can be absorbed by her womanism, this can also be considered to hold for the kind of criticism to be adopted for the analysis of her works. So, the approach relied on for the analysis of Alice Walker’s two collections of short stories is a radicalized form of feminist literary criticism. This means that it is an approach that analyzes how “...entire people, male *and* female”<sup>96</sup> ascend to the state of wholeness out of their confrontation with the forbidden.

In relation to the inappropriateness of a feminist approach<sup>97</sup> to study the works of black women of the diaspora, Karla F.C. Holloway remarks that “[black women writers] and their work have been disassembled and reassembled as the representative point of view in critical anthologies of feminist criticism...”<sup>98</sup> Here, it is made clear by Holloway that feminist critics, deriving from the mainstream feminist movement

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<sup>95</sup> Susan, Arndt. “African Gender Trouble and African Womanism: An Interview with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni” (2000), p. 720.

<sup>96</sup> Alice, Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), p. xi.

<sup>97</sup> Deriving from the philosophy of some white feminists who did not accept the presence of women of other races or of less privileged social backgrounds in their movement.

<sup>98</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women’s Literature* (1992), p. 05.

“disassembled and reassembled” the political dimension of black women’s texts, in order to transform them (such texts) into expressions of a purely feminist point of view. In other words, for Holloway, in their “...battle for space...”<sup>99</sup> in the world of criticism, such critics focused their critical lens on only one element or one issue among the other issues developed by black women writers. This issue is that of gender oppression. Of course, there is nothing wrong in concentrating on this latter issue, but, as Karla Holloway observes, when priority is placed exclusively on this issue to the detriment of analyzing other issues or oppressions, here separatism transpires in criticism and spoils both the critical interpretation and the text interpreted. In another passage, Holloway also adds that:

[i]t is my sense that the subject of the critical enterprise, the black woman’s text and its language, has been shortchanged by this highly charged battle for space. Both object and subject are politically enmeshed and victimized by the divisive dialectic about race, class, culture and gender.<sup>100</sup>

Devoting one’s criticism to only one of these elements contributes to the fragmentation of criticism and reduces the inclusiveness and, at the same time, insight of any approach. This is what happened with the criticism of some feminists. A womanist approach helps the avoidance of what Holloway calls a “...divisive dialectic...”<sup>101</sup> which tends to fragment what the same author terms “...the critical enterprise...”<sup>102</sup>

Thus, in their struggle to make space for themselves, the feminist critics mentioned by Holloway tend to “shortchange” the subjects of their “critical

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<sup>99</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. *Op.cit.*, p. 05.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

enterprise”, or the black woman’s text and its language. In simpler terms, they tend to deprive black women’s texts and language of their multidimensionality, by taking into consideration only the gender issue developed in such texts.

Even if Holloway does not mention the womanist approach in her research, at least directly, she, nonetheless, seems to point to it when she maintains that:

[a]n Afrocentric critical posture, whether a discussion of the African writer who writes in English or of the African-American author, replaces the European center of ideology and metaphor as it affirms the multicultural implications of the chosen language of the text. It is this (perhaps) curious complicity between the vocabulary of the West and the visions within this literature that underscores the unique task of definition that the theorist of black literature must accomplish.<sup>103</sup>

Here, there is no doubt about the importance of replacing the Euro-centric monopoly of criticism. On the other hand, there is less conviction as to the appropriateness of an Afro-centric monopoly, because naming another center of ideological power would be a replication of the West’s cultural elitism and, if not ignorance, denigration of all the other cultures not only in the field of criticism, but in all the fields.

In addition to Karla Holloway, Elsa Barkley Brown also points to feminist studies’ undertheorization when it comes to analyze black women’s texts. She remarks that:

...most black and other women of color have been virtually invisible in women’s history and women’s studies...Although recent books and articles have begun to redress this, the years of exclusion have had an impact more significant than just the invisibility of black women, for the exclusion of black women has meant that the concepts, perspectives, methods, pedagogies of women’s history and women’s studies have been developed without consideration of the experiences of black women. As a result, many of the recent explorations in black women’s

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<sup>103</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. *Op.cit.*, p. 12.

history have attempted to place black women inside feminist perspectives which, by design, have omitted their experiences...Because they have been created outside the experiences of black women, the definitions used in women's history and women's studies assume the separability of women's struggle and race struggle.<sup>104</sup>

So, the criticism that has been developed by the majority of white Western feminists is ill-equipped, so to speak, to offer a good analysis of the experiences of women of other races.<sup>105</sup> A good analysis, here, means one which explores the experiences and the oppressions of women of other races without any prejudice, or without trying to cast such women and their experiences into the mould of a white Western womanhood. It is also one that is not separatist and recognizes the significance of connectedness, or solidarity between "entire people", of all races, of both sexes and of all social backgrounds.

With the womanist approach, there is neither an Afro-centric, nor a Euro-centric, nor even a woman-centric posture, but a universalist posture, free from any elitism or separatism. It is also important to note here that the womanist approach is not exclusive to texts produced by black women of the diaspora. The womanist approach helps the development of a perspective of analysis which does not look at women as a "generic group"<sup>106</sup> and takes into consideration the fact that "gender is always racialized."<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, such a perspective does not ignore or belittle the

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<sup>104</sup> Elsa, Barkley Brown. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke" (1989), pp. 610-11.

<sup>105</sup> Even the authentic feminists, whose aim behind joining the feminist movement was to achieve justice for everybody, are ill-equipped in their analyses of texts produced by women of other races, because such texts deal with experiences alien to them. Despite their later attempts to develop a deeper critical insight, the best interpreter and theorizer of a given literary tradition remains the one seriously immersed in the actual experience that fuels this tradition.

<sup>106</sup> Reina, Lewis and Sarah Mills. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003), p. 04.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

masculine presence in literary works. It recognizes humanity's duality and the complementary nature of this duality.

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan observe that:

[a]n analysis of gender that 'ignores' race, class, nationality, and sexuality is one that assumes a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman inclined toward motherhood as the subject of feminism; only by questioning the status of the subject of feminism — 'woman' — does a feminist criticism avoid replicating the masculinist cultural error of taking the dominant for the universal.<sup>108</sup>

So, only an analysis attentive to the multifacetedness of the "subject of feminism" can avoid essentializing women's experiences around the world. Moreover, what can be deduced from Julie Rivkin's and Michael Ryan's observation is that using gender- and Western-centered feminist "modes of critical inquiry,"<sup>109</sup> by ignoring the racial dimension of gender oppression and the dual nature of humanity, would inexorably end in a replication of some male critics' universalization of the dominant, in other words of the masculine model.

Simone de Beauvoir denounces this universalization of the dominant when she states that "[l]e rapport des deux sexes n'est pas celui de deux électricités, de deux pôles: l'homme représente à la fois le positif et le neutre au point qu'on dit en français 'les hommes' pour désigner les êtres humains, le sens singulier du mot 'vir' s'étant assimilé au sens général du mot 'homo'."<sup>110</sup> Whereas in French we refer to humanity by using the appellation "les hommes", in English there is a parallel appellation, which reinforces any conviction as to the existence of a tendency to universalize the

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<sup>108</sup> Julie, Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Op. cit., p. 765.

<sup>109</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> Simone, de Beauvoir. *Le Deuxième Sexe I : Les Faits et les Mythes*, p.16.

(masculine) dominant. This expression is of course “mankind”. Even though it is not certain whether such essentializing expressions are still in use, the fact that they exist in human languages certifies the predominance of an undercurrent of masculinist oppression regulating the world.

For critics, such as Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, white Western feminist critics run the risk of reproducing the same oppression they have been the victims of, by universalizing the subject of feminism, or the subject of their critical enterprise. Indeed, by speaking for other women, “...even if it is to take up their cause and stand in for them at the podium of history...”<sup>111</sup> white Western feminist critics will let their sisters of other races endure what the patriarchate did to them. Audre Lorde also warned against the racial, social and even sexual politics of some white Western feminists and underlined the importance of interdependency between different women. In relation to this interdependency, Toinette M. Eugene observes that “[i]nterdependency between women is necessary if we are to make ourselves into active, creative selves.”<sup>112</sup>

For Alice Walker, white Western feminists should recognize the oppressions endured by women (and men) of all races and social backgrounds, to reinforce their solidarity with them. For her, such a solidarity should also be expressed in the world of criticism — hence the suitability of a womanist approach to give voice to such a solidarity in any critical enterprise. Hence, recognition of difference, be it racial,

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<sup>111</sup> Julie, Rivkin and Michael Ryan. *Op. cit.*, p. 769.

<sup>112</sup> Toinette M, Eugene. “On ‘Difference’ and the Dream of Pluralist Feminism” (1992), p. 92.

sexual or social, and interdependency — given the name of connectedness in the womanist terminology — constitute the building blocks of the womanist approach.

For Elsa Barkley Brown, womanism is a consciousness “...that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations.”<sup>113</sup> In the world of criticism, an approach that springs from such a consciousness, namely the womanist approach, instigates the integration of all these elements in its critical enterprise.

Contrarily to Karla F.C. Holloway, Shirley Anne Williams unambiguously pointed at the existence of a womanist theory. Like Holloway, she does not shy from indicating the feminist theory’s weaknesses. She states that “[f]eminist readings can lead to mis-apprehensions of particular texts or even of a whole tradition, [like African/African-American literary tradition(s)]...”<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, she also mentions that “...certain of its formulation[sic] offer[sic] us a vocabulary that can be made meaningful in terms of our own experience. Feminist theory, like black aesthetics, offers us not only the possibility of changing one’s reading of the world, but of changing the world itself.”<sup>115</sup> What is interesting in Williams’s observations is that after criticizing some aspects of the feminist theory, she recognizes that it provided a kind of mentoring and guidance to other “social-change perspectives.”<sup>116</sup>

By criticizing feminism, as a theory and activism, Shirley Anne Williams does not intend to demonstrate that womanism is better than feminism, neither is it the

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<sup>113</sup> Elsa, Barkley Brown. *Op. cit.*, p. 613.

<sup>114</sup> Shirley Ann, Williams in Layli, Phillips. *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.



intention of the present research work. Both feminism and womanism are part of the same process some people got involved in in the hope of improving the world. So, trying to understand and analyze each activism and theory by itself will only bring on more divisiveness. Layli Phillips observes that only by avoiding a taxonomic line of thought can one grasp the full meaning of how different concepts, such as feminism, black feminism or womanism, interact. She remarks that:

[t]he Western academic emphasis on classification and taxonomy obscures the relationship between womanism and other perspectives, especially feminism and Black feminism. These relationships cannot be understood within the frame of taxonomic classification, which relies on lines of demarcation that separate and differentiate. The goal of any taxonomic system is to establish discrete and nonoverlapping categories...Taxonomic systems rely on 'either/or' logic. While familial organization systems rest on 'both/and' logic. Even traditional feminist histories of consciousness are animated by the urge to demonstrate difference between perspectives, and thus isolate and oppose groups of thinkers and actors whose best interest lie in working together – that is, harmonizing and coordinating all while permitting difference and its proliferations. Womanism is a harmonizing and coordinating project, not an isolating and separating project. It seeks to promote relations of interconnectedness and cooperation all while blurring, dissolving, dismantling ideological lines of demarcation.<sup>117</sup>

The principal idea conveyed by Sherley Anne Williams and Layli Phillips is that feminism, black feminism, womanism...etc. are just various facets of the same struggle. They are just different perspectives of one, unique and central activism. Nevertheless, the other idea to remember is that womanism is the only perspective that made visible this connectedness holding between the above-listed perspectives.

This being said, the main tools employed to carry out a womanist analysis of *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, in the present research, have been identified by Barbara Christian as the first-person point of view and the womanist process. She indicates the centrality of the first tool in Alice Walker's

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<sup>117</sup> Shirley Ann, Williams in Layli, Phillips. Op. cit., p. xxxii.

presentation of women's predicament in *In Love and Trouble*. According to Barbara Christian, such a tool provides immediacy to the analysis of how African American women live in the American South. Thanks to the first-person point of view, black women are allowed, in the short stories' narrative space-time, to make their voice heard. There is no intermediary between these women and the readership. There is no mediating voice speaking on behalf of them or perverting the essence of their experiences as black women. About the technique of the first-person point of view, Karla Holloway remarks that "[t]he first-person point of view...intensifies the visceral nature of the (re)memory that the protagonist Dana experiences."<sup>118</sup> Of course, here Holloway is speaking about another work, but her observations as to this technique can also be considered to hold for Alice Walker's use of it in *In Love and Trouble*. Indeed, Alice Walker's preference for her protagonists' own voice as a vehicle for expression lends intensity to the collection's narratives and authenticates the experiences accounted for in these short, condensed fictional spaces.

In addition to the immediacy it can endow one's analysis of the forbidden with, what makes of this technique a tool deriving from, or typical of, a womanist approach is the fact that it authenticates the point of view of women who do not identify exclusively with the standard model of the white, middle-class Western woman. Alice Walker employed this technique to account for the experiences of American women of African descent. These women are far from the Western feminine stereotype. Physically, they are black. Socially and economically, most of them are underprivileged. Ultimately, to crown it all, they have to face the racism of white

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<sup>118</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. Op. cit., p. 113.

people (of both sexes), the class consciousness of people of all races and of both sexes and the sexism of all men, including that of black men. It goes without saying here that the combination of oppressions a person undergoes is variable and dependent on the situation of the oppressed person and on the environment and political atmosphere against which s/he evolves. A black woman enjoying a privileged social status may not experience an oppression resulting from some people's social consciousness. Or, maybe she can. The affliction of racism can rub off on all the other afflictions after all.

As to the second tool, namely the womanist process, Barbara Christian maintains that it is after the model of this process that Alice Walker constructed some of her narratives in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*. Two of these narratives are analyzed in the present research work. Barbara Christian mentions that Alice Walker's womanist process is explained in the title essay of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984). She observes that the three emotional states known to intersperse Alice Walker's womanist process are clearly represented in this essay. She remarks that in this latter Alice Walker "...speaks about three types of black women: the physically and psychologically abused black woman...the black woman who is torn by contrary instincts...and the new black woman, who recreates herself out of the creative legacy of her maternal ancestors."<sup>119</sup> These three different black women represent the three different, above-mentioned, phases or emotional states which the womanist process is known to be interspersed with.

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<sup>119</sup> Barbara, Christian. Op.cit., p. 94.

Similarly to the first-person point of view, the womanist process can also be considered as a tool typical of a womanist approach, because it is a technique that reveals how not only black women, but all people of both sexes and all colours ascend to the state of wholeness in a sequential way. In this research, the forbidden and the suffering it generates in society are considered as the trigger for the initiation of this process — as it is the case with the Jungian individuation process that, it is imagined by Geneva Cobb Moore, Tashi is going through in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. It is a tool typical of a womanist approach, because, as Keith Byerman remarks, it helps the demonstration of how Alice Walker's fe/male protagonists mature into whole persons believing in the absolute righteousness of an egalitarian humanity, based on what Byerman terms a womanist order susceptible of restoring all oppressed people's subject position — whatever the sex, the race, the social standing, or the geographical location.

In addition to the fact that these two techniques are typical of a womanist approach, each one is used for a specific objective in the present research — that is why, the two techniques are not interchangeable. This means that the womanist process cannot be used for the analysis of *In Love and Trouble* and the first-person point of view cannot be employed for the analysis of *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*. This would spoil the analysis of these two collections, as it is imagined in the present research. Indeed, in this dissertation, the principal objective is to show how the confrontation with and subsequent desacralization of the forbidden leads to wholeness. This main objective is sought after by targeting a secondary objective for each collection of short stories. Whereas for *In Love and Trouble* it is immediacy, for *You*

*Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* it is sequentiality. Of course, the choice of these two secondary objectives is not done at random. It is rather dependent on the nature of each collection.

In *In Love and Trouble*, the protagonists' confrontation with the forbidden is still in its incipient stages. This transpires in the attitude displayed by the female protagonists. The women of this collection seem so overwhelmed and silenced by the patriarchal order that their liberation appears to be still a long way to go. It can be sensed that they still have to fight, to retrieve their voices.

So, it is the women's silence and momentary defeat by the patriarchal order in *In Love and Trouble* that requires the use of a technique<sup>120</sup> whereby their voices can be heard in a first-hand or immediate way.

As to *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, since the female protagonists are more self-assertive and not as overwhelmed and silenced by the patriarchal order, a different objective is pursued. In other words, it is the sequentiality of the protagonists' ascension from a state of silence and temporary defeat, to a state of confusion about their situation and then to a state of wholeness. The womanist process indicated by Barbara Christian offers an analytical perspective whereby such sequentiality, or womanist ascension, can be studied step by step.

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<sup>120</sup> Namely, the first-person point of view.

**CHAPTER II: EXAMINATION OF ALICE WALKER'S AUDACIOUS  
AUTHORSHIP FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF SOME BIOGRAPHICAL  
ELEMENTS**

There is no doubt about the fact that before its appearance in Alice Walker's literary works, as almost a unifying theme, a literary proclivity so to speak, the forbidden was an ever-present component of Alice Walker's life, existing beyond the boundaries of her characters' fictional life. The title of Murray Leinster's<sup>121</sup> science-fiction novel perfectly describes Alice Walker's actual and fictional relationship with the forbidden: *Sidewise in Time* (1934). The world of literature provided Alice Walker with the chance of being "sidewise in time", constantly leaving the dimension of her concrete life and crossing over into that of her fictional life — one other way of existing for her and of exorcising her life from the demons haunting it, like the forbidden.

Indeed, it sounds right to consider that in Alice Walker's literary universe there seems to be two parallel histories clustering around the forbidden. It would be almost unfair, regarding Alice Walker, to detach her protagonists' sufferings from hers. Her own pains and scars provided the perfect bridgehead for her audacious works. To quote Louise Mina and Alison Sampson<sup>122</sup> again, with some modifications, so much of what is within Alice Walker's fiction has its roots in her actual life. In the following passages, the roots of Alice Walker's audacious fiction are referred to as springboards. Afterwards is described the outcome that resulted from these springboards.

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<sup>121</sup> Bruce, Sterlin. "science fiction." Encyclopædia Britannica. *Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Authors of "Feminist Psychotherapy: Challenging the Inner and the Outer" (1992), p. 49.

## 2.1. The Springboards of Alice Walker's Literary Audacity

### a. Alice Walker's Visual Mutilation While Still a Child

Alice Walker's dedication to question the status quo through producing an audacious literature was shaped by her personal history, on the one hand, and by the political history of her country on the other hand. What happened to her in these two histories provided springboards for the development of her literary audacity and her universalist activism.

On the personal level, Alice Walker's history is quite uncommon. When she was only eight years old, she was accidentally shot at by her brother, in her right eye. This constituted the first trigger or springboard for her above-mentioned literary audacity. Subsequently to this incident, she loses the sight of her eye. When she describes this traumatic moment, she uses an "...enduring present tense...", "...as if [it is] still occurring in her vivid memory."<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Alice Walker writes:

I feel an incredible blow in my right eye. I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun...[my parents]<sup>124</sup> place me on a bench on the porch and I close my left eye while they examine the right. There is a tree growing from underneath the porch that climbs past the railing to the roof. It is the last thing my right eye sees. I watch as its trunk, its branches, and then its leaves are blotted out by the rising blood.<sup>125</sup>

From the moment of the incident, Alice Walker changes from an outgoing self-confident girl into an extremely shy and self-conscious hermit. At that moment, Alice

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<sup>123</sup> Nagueyalti, Warren and Sally, Wolff. "'Like the Pupil of an Eye': Sexual Blinding of Women in Alice Walker's Works" (1998), p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>125</sup> Alice, Walker. "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" (1983) in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), pp. 386-387.



Walker lost what is qualified in Jungian terminology as animus traits: her outgoingness and self-confidence. She accounts for this shift herself:

[w]here the BB pellet struck there is a glob of whitish scar tissue, a hideous cataract, on my eye. Now when I stare at people — a favorite pastime, up to now — they will stare back. Not at the “cute” little girl, but at her scar. For six years I do not stare at anyone, because I do not raise my head.<sup>126</sup>

At the loss of these qualities, Alice Walker was quite young and not yet aware of the complex workings underlying her physical and psychic mutilation — the forbidden was one of them. Alice Walker’s attitude at that moment is reminiscent of one of the phases characterizing both the Jungian individuation process and the womanist process. Whereas in Jungian terminology it is referred to as the archetype of the mask, in the womanist terminology it is known as the step of confusion. Nevertheless, contrarily to her excised female protagonist, Tashi, or to her fe/male protagonists in the short stories she wrote, Alice Walker does not manifest her mask in the same way. As there are common denominators between human beings, there are intimate and exclusive characteristics. Carl Jung specified that “[p]sychotherapy and analysis are as varied as are human individuals.”<sup>127</sup> The same can be said of the different steps people go through in their existential evolution. After the mutilation, Alice Walker’s mask seems to be on the defensive and suspicious of the “wider world”<sup>128</sup>. She retreats more and more into the world of literature where she finds a kind of refuge from this “wider world”. From this retreat resulted a gradual and growing understanding of her trauma. Indeed, after years of pain and confusion, she understood that what had happened to

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<sup>126</sup> Alice, Walker (1983). Opt. cit., p. 387.

<sup>127</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1989), p. 131.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

her was not an incident but, as Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff affirm, "...her first true encounter with violent manifestations of sexism..."<sup>129</sup> Indeed, because she was a girl, instead of offering her a gun, her parents gave her a bow and arrows to play with. Moreover, she remembers her brother lowering his gun after shooting her. This means, in Alice Walker's eyes, that he was aiming at her, not at her other brothers before shooting. Furthermore, it was absolutely forbidden to point to her brother's responsibility, let alone to blame or punish him. As a mutilated child, Alice Walker was left with the same blurred vision<sup>130</sup> of what happened to her as Tashi in the novel. The forbidden pierced and lessened considerably both the visual and the perceptive capacities of Alice Walker, as a child.

The incident also opened her eyes to the impact of racism on her family. In line with this, Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff observe that:

...she simultaneously became aware of her father's retreat from responsibility, her mother's subservience to him and to the culture around her generally, the incomprehensible absolving of the brother's responsibility in Walker's blindness and the parents' joint role in making their daughter feel responsible for her own injury. Although she does not exonerate her parents, she is eventually able to understand their behavior only as a consequence of racism and "growing up in the fifties in the segregated South."<sup>131</sup>

All these realizations were a sign that Alice Walker's confrontation with her own shadow had taken place. Of course, she came to these conclusions once an adult and once she started her involvement in activism, through writing and joining movements — a manifestation of the animus qualities she lost right after the mutilation. In consonance with this, Janet Gray states that "Walker's involvement in

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<sup>129</sup> Nagueyalti, Warren and Sally, Wolff. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Here, the term vision is used in the figurative sense. It does not refer to Alice Walker's eyes.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the black and women's movements gave her the ideological tools to understand her father's colorism and sexism as his absorption of the dominant white culture's values and to forgive him for his failures as an adult model.”<sup>132</sup>

Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff also point to the fact that Alice Walker's partial blindness triggered off her “...militant feminism and activism for human rights, from which issue the central concerns of her writing.”<sup>133</sup> It is at this point that the personal, political and literary, in Alice Walker's life, intermingle. Alice Walker's traumatic experience of a visual mutilation, a personal experience, developed her insight into people and their lives and problems. This early insight she acquired during childhood and gained in exchange of one of her eyes, prepared her to her future political and literary activism for human rights on a universal scale. Philip M. Royster remarks that “[Alice Walker's] confidence in her insight undoubtedly helped to prepare her for the role of rescuer...”<sup>134</sup> — in real life as in a fiction of a very provocative type.

#### **b. Alice Walker's Sense of Alienation Within Both the Feminist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement**

Yet, Alice Walker's “militant feminism and activism for human rights” resulted in successive disillusionments, either because of what Ajuan Maria Mance qualifies as “inter-ethnic difference”<sup>135</sup> or “intra-ethnic difference.”<sup>136</sup> In other words, either

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<sup>132</sup> Janet Gray in Lea, Baechler and Litz A. Walton. *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies* (1991), P. 522.

<sup>133</sup> Nagueyalti Warren and Sally, Wolff. Op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Philip M, Royster. “In Search of our Fathers' Arms: Alice Walker's Persona of the Alienated Darling” (1986), p. 349.

<sup>135</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. “‘The Same Old Danger/But a Brand New Pleasure’: The Black Arts Movement in the 21st Century” (2004), p. 90.

because of the racism of the Feminist Movement or because of the sexism of the Civil Rights Movement.

On the other hand, these disillusionments, in addition to her mutilation, provided the seeds of her audacious writing. In other words, they constituted the springboards for her taboo-breaking attitude in writing as in life. Her rejection from the Feminist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, made her aware, more than did her mutilation, of the reality of marginalization and nurtured in her an unfaltering preparedness to challenge society's established order — especially when this order oppresses a group of people for the benefit of another group.

Alice Walker's discontent with the Feminist movement sprang from white feminists' definition of gender oppression as the principal source of their exclusion from full participation in American public life. White Western feminists focused their activism only on ending the social discrimination and gender-specific roles oppressing white women, to the detriment of women of other races or from less privileged social backgrounds. From this resulted Alice Walker's disbelief in this movement. This disbelief, that many non-white<sup>137</sup> relatively poor women shared widened the divide between feminists and the masses of American women who lived in slums or spoke with foreign accents. Even though it is not certain whether Alice Walker is still feeling hostile towards this movement nowadays, what is sure is that her rejection by white feminists constituted, during the beginnings of her activism, one of the triggers for her

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<sup>136</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. Op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>137</sup> Here, the adjective "non-white" refers to women of different races apart from the white race, not especially to the black race.

search of a more inclusive movement and for her production of a very provocative writing.

Some efforts have gone into trying to explain the racism and social elitism of some feminists. For instance, Alice Walker herself attempted to elucidate some white feminists' reluctance to integrate into their activism the component of anti-racism by using her personal experience of motherhood. Indeed, she saw in this experience a possible explanation to the Feminist Movement's chauvinism. She remarks that some white feminists completely ignored African American women's double oppression, because this would mean that they were admitting the existence of a black womanhood and if they accept the existence of a black womanhood this would imply the existence of a black motherhood. Alice Walker notes that if white women recognize that black women can be mothers, this would send them back to their maternal guilt. Indeed, for her, their refusal to see black women as their equals and potential mothers stems from their guilty knowledge that it is at the expense of black children that their own children enjoy the best. So according to Alice Walker's analysis, they considered it better not to see that black women can be women and mothers. They preferred "...to deny that the black woman has a vagina. Is capable of motherhood. Is a woman."<sup>138</sup>

On the other hand, Alice Walker has also pointed<sup>139</sup> to the existence of white women who are truly feminists and for whom racism should be eradicated. She also indicates that these authentic feminists are, unfortunately, largely outnumbered by average American women whose only motivation in joining the feminist ranks is to

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<sup>138</sup> Alice, Walker. "One Child of One's Own: A Meaningful Digression Within the Work(s)" (1979) in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), p. 374.

<sup>139</sup> In "One Child of One's Own".

look up-to-the-minute. She describes these women as imposters who are ready to “...leap to the feminist banner because it is now the place to be seen”<sup>140</sup> and who are responsible for the divisions present within the feminist movement. That is why, Alice Walker requires from African American women to clearly distinguish between who is the real feminist and who is not and “...to exert energy in feminist collaborations only when there is little risk of wasting it.”<sup>141</sup>

For her part, Eva Lennox Birch imputes African American women’s rejection from the Feminist Movement to what she qualifies as “negative socialization.”<sup>142</sup> She states that:

[o]ne has only to read bell hook’s impassioned account of racism and feminism in American society in *Ain’t I a Woman* to have any idealistic notion of automatic sisterhood between black and white women dismissed. She reminds us that “sisterhood cannot be forged by the mere saying of words” (p.157) and stresses that the onus for real change lies with the individual whose self-examination will reveal that “labeling ourselves feminists does not change the fact that we must consciously work to rid ourselves of the legacy of negative socialization”<sup>143</sup>

Negative socialization can be identified with the negative stereotypes with which individuals are imbued and which condition them into adopting specific attitudes. For instance, men are generally conditioned into looking down upon women and into considering them as their social enablers. Negative socialization also accustoms women to believe they are inferior to men and that they cannot extend their roles beyond the spheres of wifehood or motherhood. But, beyond its impact on

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<sup>140</sup> Alice, Walker. (1979) Op. cit., p. 374.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>142</sup> This expression has been coined by bell hooks in her book entitled *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, 1982). Some passages of this book have been consulted in *Black American Women’s Writing: A Quilt of Many Colours* (1994), p.6.

<sup>143</sup> Bell hooks in *Black American Women’s Writing: A Quilt of Many Colours* (1994). pp. 4-5.

gender roles, negative socialization also conditions people into being racially-prejudiced or socially-elitist.

According to Eva Lennox Birch, this negative socialization is the result of what she terms gender ideology. Indeed, because of this latter, each individual in society has been attributed a specific role, judged proper to his or her nature (his or her sex, social class and race) with the end of keeping safe "...the convenient operation of social institutions."<sup>144</sup>

For Eva Lennox Birch, negative socialization and the racism that resulted from it, in addition to other factors, led African American women to feel out of place within the feminist movement.

In addition to what Alice Walker and Eva Lennox Birch stated, to explain African American women's exclusion from the Feminist Movement, Pamela Trotman Reid posits four hypotheses "...that have been adopted by researchers investigating black women and their relationships."<sup>145</sup> According to her, such hypotheses can elucidate African American women's "double jeopardy"<sup>146</sup> or double oppression. The hypotheses have been identified respectively as: the "weakening", the "double whammy", the "black matriarchy" and the "black sexism" hypothesis.

However, in the present account of the reasons for African American women's exclusion from the feminist movement, only the first two hypotheses will be discussed. Indeed, since it is the affliction of racism that African American women faced within

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<sup>24</sup> Eva, Lennox Birch. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. "Feminism Versus Minority Group Identity: Not for Black Woman Only" (1984). p. 247.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

the feminist movement, only the first two hypotheses can be helpful because they have been proposed by researchers to explain the antagonism holding between African American women and the majority of the white community in the United States. As to the other two hypotheses, they have been posited by researchers to elucidate the origins of the sexism some black men manifested against black women. This of course does not concern the feminist movement.

The first hypothesis specifies that “...Black women will weaken the feminist movement because of their concern with racism.”<sup>147</sup> In fact, Trotman Reid maintains that:

... many White feminists still argue, as did suffragists of the nineteenth century, that to make racism a concern is divisive to the women’s movement. Some white women fear that concerns with racism will spread the interests of women’s rights too thin, thereby weakening the total effect of their efforts.<sup>148</sup>

According to the second hypothesis, referred to as the “double whammy” hypothesis, African American women’s exclusion from the feminist movement is due to the fact that because of their dual identity, black women have been perceived by some feminists as their competitors. Indeed, because of this dual identity some white feminists thought “...they should be doubly influential.”<sup>149</sup> In sum, according to the “double whammy” hypothesis “Black<sup>150</sup> women have more status given them [sic] because of their dual identity.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. *Opt. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> A capital letter is used at the beginning of this word, because it is probably used as a proper noun by the author.

<sup>151</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. *Op. cit.*, p. 249.



However, even though it seems right to believe that black women's dual identity and, by extension, dual alliance could have been beneficial to them, Trotman Reid maintains that "...data show little support for this belief in that no excessive interest in hiring Black<sup>152</sup> or other minority women has been demonstrated."<sup>153</sup> Indeed, she mentions that analyses carried out during the seventies indicate "...that minority women represented fewer than 3% of the total population of nontenured faculty in 1973, 1974, as reported by graduate departments of psychology."<sup>154</sup> Yet, she also states that "[w]hen compared only to the population of female nontenured faculty, minority women were fairly represented at approximately 11%..."<sup>155</sup> Then, she points out to the fact that "[a]cross all levels of income, Black women are reaching towards parity with White women, but they are not exceeding White women's economic levels."<sup>156</sup>

All in all, she observes that "[t]here is a tendency for observers of Black society to overestimate the economic and professional opportunities for black women [in the U.S.]. Social scientists have also tended to exaggerate the social impact of Black women in their community."<sup>157</sup>

Even though these two hypotheses can give some insights into African American women's conflictual relationships with some white feminists, Trotman Reid mentions the necessity of raising some questions as to each hypothesis. In the "weakening" hypothesis, Trotman Reid wonders "[w]hat purpose is served by trying to

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<sup>152</sup> The same capitalization as in footnote 26 is performed here.

<sup>153</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

determine who suffers most?”<sup>158</sup> Indeed, in Trotman Reid’s eyes as long as activists, on both sides of the activist spectrum, limit their fight to either ending racism or sexism this will result in dismissing humanity’s true liberation. Black activists of renown such as Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, or Shirley Chisholm<sup>159</sup> agreed with this and always instigated collective action towards the end of both racism and sexism.

As to the second hypothesis, Trotman Reid maintains that black people’s moderate success within the American society should not overshadow the real conditions under which the majority of black people are forced to evolve and affirm themselves. The majority of people who made it in the U.S. started their social ascension in very difficult conditions.

All in all, Trotman Reid points to the obligation researchers have to “...abandon not only the practice of assuming that ‘male = human,’...but also the standard that ‘white = the world,’...” In this way, she adds, “...perhaps more meaningful hypotheses will be developed and an increased understanding of the Black community will result.”<sup>160</sup>

Be it because of white feminists’ maternal guilt or because of their “negative socialization” or because of the other hypotheses developed by Pamela Trotman Reid, women have not always been on the same wavelength and black women felt out of place within the Feminist Movement. African American women, like Alice Walker, had to surrender to the fact that their own claims would have no echo, as long as they

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<sup>158</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. *Op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>159</sup> Shirley Chisholm, née Shirley Anita St. Hill (1924-2005). She was an American politician and the first African American woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. In Congress she quickly became known as a strong liberal who opposed weapons development and the war in Vietnam.

<sup>160</sup> Pamela, Trotman Reid. *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

limit their fight to the confines of a movement partially reluctant to comprehend blackness and feminism within the same body. After having been brought from Africa to America as slaves, they found themselves in a kind of intersectional position and gripped by a double oppression which made their fight against social conventionalism and “negative socialization” far more difficult than that of white women. In addition to the fact that they were/are black, they were/are also women. These are the two states at the origin of their double oppression and which Alice Walker qualified as black women’s “twin afflictions.”<sup>161</sup>

Simultaneously and sideways to the progression of these down-to-earth events in Alice Walker’s “actual” life, other events were taking shape and developing in her fictional life. The pulse of Alice Walker’s reality was feeding her imaginary reality and the forbidden always stood for a communicating channel holding both realities in a permanent synchronicity.

What happened to Alice Walker in the Feminist Movement was, of course, not the only event at the origin of her disillusionment and resulting passion for desacralizing the forbidden. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s also displayed the same exclusionary attitude towards black women, for sexist reasons.

In Alice Walker’s rejection from these two movements can be located an example of a situation belonging to her actual life and resulting from the forbidden. It is Alice Walker’s actual access to these movements, with her multidimensional identity, that constituted a completely forbidden perspective for some activists of both

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<sup>161</sup> This expression was first used by Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), more precisely in the essay entitled “One Child of One’s Own: A Meaningful Digression Within the Work(s)” (1978), p. 377.

organizations. She is an American of African origin, she is a woman and she is a writer who undauntedly and crudely verbalizes all that she sees.

For Ajuan Maria Mance, African American women's exclusion from even the movements that burgeoned within blackness indicates that the "color line"<sup>162</sup> is not the only source of African American women's oppression. She states that:

[a]lthough race is likely to continue in its prominent role as the primary basis for the construction of identities and the drawing of socio-economic and political alliances, the texture and substance of these formulations is already beginning to shift.<sup>163</sup>

When it emerged, the Civil Rights Movement's main aim was to achieve black people's freedom and to eradicate the "color line" through the practice of nonviolence. Indeed, according to the Movement's activists, using violence was only susceptible of making them lose their soul. Alice Walker was one of the most notable black women revolutionary artists of the Civil Rights Movement. About her experience in the movement, she declared that "[i]f the Civil Rights Movement...gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever."<sup>164</sup> Indeed, the Movement reinforced African Americans' connection to each other as a people and to their history of struggle against oppression. It also helped Alice Walker to claim herself. Indeed, she has described herself as called to life by the Movement.

However, similarly to the Feminist Movement, the Civil Rights Movement was also characterized by its heedlessness of black women's concerns. The movement

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<sup>162</sup> W.E.B., Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), p. 1.

<sup>163</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. Op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>164</sup> Alice, Walker. "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" (1967), in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), p. 128

tended to “... [put the]<sup>165</sup> emphasis on the Black male experience of racism...”<sup>166</sup> only. As a result, the black female activists who tried to make their own claims visible within the Civil Rights Movement were faced with the Movement’s “androcentric focus”.<sup>167</sup>

After Alice Walker declared that the African American women who joined the Civil Rights Movement felt, at last, called to life by this movement, she was, later, disappointed by reality. Indeed, within the Civil Rights Movement, priorities were arranged according to the hierarchical order of race, class and finally gender and African American women’s concerns as women were considered as secondary.

Ajuan Maria Mance affirms that the “[the Civil Rights Movement]<sup>168</sup> inherited its male-centred aesthetic from the poets and theorists of the Harlem Renaissance who, in turn, inherited their masculinist bias from the artists and intellectuals of the post-Reconstruction era.”<sup>169</sup> From Ajuan Maria Mance’s analysis, it transpires that the sexism of African American men is a kind of heritage passed on from one generation of black activists to the other.

The situation of the Civil Rights Movement’s women can be said to mirror perfectly that of the women of the Harlem Renaissance Movement or even that of women modernists. Indeed, Shari Benstock, Suzanne Ferriss and Susanne Woods

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<sup>165</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>166</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>169</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

affirm that when Modernism<sup>170</sup> appeared, women modernists were considered by their male counterparts as “the handmaidens of modernism.”<sup>171</sup> Women were supposed to be there only to further the careers of male geniuses. The same can also be said of African American women contributors to the Harlem Renaissance — with the example of Zora Neale Hurston.

Even though Alice Walker did not experience sexist oppression by the men of the Harlem Renaissance Movement, Zora Neale Hurston, her inspirational literary foremother, did. Like the Civil Rights Movement, the Harlem Renaissance Movement was characterized by a common racial affiliation weakened by a gender division. This movement tended to perceive its female activists as artistic enablers, or as “helpmates” or as “lover object[s]” of “...the Black male...redeemer-liberator.”<sup>172</sup>

Amidst all this male-centred activism, there was no place for representations of black womanhood or of African American women’s experience of racism or of sexism — it was almost forbidden. This is what led the movement to fail “...in its mission of human liberation”<sup>173</sup> and encouraged Alice Walker to look for a freeing order away from such separatist movements as the Feminist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement.

So, from the suffering engendered by a childhood mutilation and an aborted admittance to emblematic human rights movements resulted Alice Walker’s

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<sup>170</sup> Modernism (1895-1945) was an international, multidisciplinary movement that challenged realist modes of artistic representation. Prizing artistic innovation, Modernism developed out of a reaction against middle-class conventionality that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>171</sup> Shari, Benstock; Suzanne, Ferriss and Susanne, Woods. *A Handbook of Literary Feminisms* (2002), p. 90.

<sup>172</sup> Ajuan Maria, Mance. Op. cit., p. 97, p.99.

<sup>173</sup> Karen F., Stein. “Meridian: Alice Walker’s Critique of the Revolution” (1986), p. 129.

unconditional preparedness to challenge and question all that seems to her abnormal, harmful and threatening humanity's well-being — such as forbidden truths.

## **2.2. The Outcome or Alice Walker's Creation of Womanism**

The different wounds Alice Walker experienced, while life was giving her a rough ride, inspired her to found a new philosophy and praxis she coined womanism. By establishing womanism, however, Alice Walker was not planning to initiate an activism specific to African American women. Indeed, she did not believe in the efficiency of African American feminism to fend off black women's double oppression of racism and sexism. For her, the creation of another movement for American women of African descent only, merely reinforced the white imperialist and the black androcentric logics of division. In relation to this, Audre Lorde states that “[t]he failure of the academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. Divide and conquer, in our world, must become define and empower.”<sup>174</sup>

Even though Audre Lorde is referring, here, to some white feminists' exclusionary and chauvinistic tendencies, this also applies to black feminists who might have granted the perpetuation of the divisive philosophy of the patriarchal project in their attempt to inscribe the self of the black woman. Without even an investigation into the definite names of such feminists, it is almost certain that they endeavoured to affirm the humanhood and rights of black women so hard, especially in white societies, that they became separatists and chauvinistic. Separatism and

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<sup>174</sup> Audre, Lorde. “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House” (1983) in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003), p. 27.

chauvinism are beneficial to the patriarchy, because this latter would not survive in a world where solidarity and tolerance reign — the antithetical values of separatism and chauvinism. In a world where people respect each other and where no specific group oppresses all the others, the patriarchal vision of society cannot survive. Audre Lorde also affirms that:

[w]omen of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now, we hear that it is the task of black and third-world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existences, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.<sup>175</sup>

Similarly to Audre Lorde, Alice Walker understood that as long as women, as well as men, hang on to an individualistic and divisive activism, prioritizing either race or discrimination based on gender roles, this would mean fighting a losing battle.

As a result, she imagined a new concept to overcome racial and sexual politics, transcend “...Western dualism and [its] binary oppositions...”<sup>176</sup> and achieve a universalist activism not restricted by racial, sexual, social or geographical considerations. Alice Walker did not initiate a new movement she labelled womanism. She unwittingly spurred on a new current of reflexion, or as Layli Phillips named it a new “social change perspective”<sup>177</sup>, that began to shape up and gain momentum until it started to be compared to other “critical theories and social-justice movements”,<sup>178</sup> like feminism or black feminism.

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<sup>175</sup> Audre, Lorde. Op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>176</sup> Lovalerie, King. “African American Womanism: From Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* (2004), p. 247.

<sup>177</sup> Layli, Phillips. *The Womanist Reader* (2006), p.xx.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



### **a. Womanism as a Philosophy**

Lovalerie King maintains that womanism as a philosophy is defined by Alice Walker in four points. First, she attributes the word's origin to the black folk expression mothers used to employ to refer to little girls by saying: "[y]ou acting womanish."<sup>179</sup> Alice Walker explains this expression by stating that it means "...outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour..."<sup>179</sup> Her addition of all these epithets to explain the word "womanish" also gives insights into the womanist attitude. Indeed, a woman qualified as "womanish" displays all the above-mentioned traits. She is outrageous, audacious, and courageous and manifests a wilful behaviour. However, even though, in this opening definition of womanism, Alice Walker also mentions that a womanist is "a black feminist or feminist of color,"<sup>180</sup> Lovalerie King indicates that "...the qualities Walker delineates for the womanist are qualities that anyone might exhibit."<sup>181</sup> Indeed, she states that "...the qualities associated with the womanist are not confined to racial, gender, or other categories."<sup>182</sup> Lovalerie King observes that "Walker's definition of the attitude exhibited by the womanist subject is broad enough and flexible enough, to invoke Maria Stewart's boldness in making political speeches to men and women long before society deemed it proper for a woman (let alone a black woman) to do so."<sup>183</sup> It is also evocative of Alice Walker's and her female protagonists' bold questioning of the status quo.

In the second point, Alice Walker mentions that a womanist is:

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<sup>179</sup> Alice, Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), p.xi.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Lovalerie, King. Op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>183</sup> Lovalerie, King. Op. cit., p. 235.

... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually...Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist...<sup>184</sup>

For Alice Walker, a womanist does not have a partial or separatist vision of the world. Through her womanist philosophy, she encourages ignoring all existent barriers and instigates a permanent connectedness between people. This connectedness, Alice Walker specifies, can be of an emotional or sexual nature and can take place between persons of the same sex, especially women. At this point, Alice Walker goes to great lengths in her effort to demonstrate her liberal views concerning women's sexuality. Certainly, solidarity between women of all races is very important for Alice Walker, however she also warns against the danger of radical feminism. This is what happened to the Western Feminist Movement. By dismissing the possibility that Feminism can be heterogeneous, white Western feminists became completely alienated from other women and even men sensitive to the question of humanity's ascension towards a more egalitarian and complementary state of mind. Susan Arndt maintains that Western Feminism became "undertheorized."<sup>185</sup>

Some critics tried to trace back the origins of the gender separatism Alice Walker is opposing in this second point. In the following passages, account of these critics' ideas and theories is going to require "a very generous word limit."<sup>186</sup> What is to develop next is quite comparable to a chain reaction of criticism, where one critical observation provokes the next and the whole critical movement of these conflicting

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<sup>184</sup> Alice, Walker. Op. cit., p. xi.

<sup>185</sup> Susan, Arndt. "African Gender Trouble and African Womanism: An Interview with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni." p. 720.

<sup>186</sup> Polly, Young-Eisendrath and Terence, Dawson. *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* (2008), pp.275-76.

ideas leads on to a conclusion that makes all points of view converge towards a resolution of a womanist nature. For instance, Nah Dove proposed “an Afro-centric perspective”<sup>187</sup> to find the origins of gender separatism. She observes that “[s]ome Black women writers, such as Alice Walker, Masani Alexis Deveauz, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and others highlight the complicity of African men and women in our own demise [by remaining antagonistic to each other.]”<sup>188</sup> In this passage, Nah Dove suggests a list of names of famous black women writers who used an Afro-centric vantage point in their respective discourses to demonstrate the noxious effects of gender separatism on African people. Since she does not mention where exactly these writers manifested their analyses of African gender separatism, it is not possible to check if they share with Nah Dove her belief in the European origins of gender separatism.<sup>189</sup> Indeed, in her analysis Nah Dove goes farther than these black women writers. She imputes the conflictual nature of the relationship holding between African women and men to European colonialism. She supports the idea that patriarchy originated in Europe. What is more, she also notes that the antagonism existing between African women and men only supports and promotes the Western imperialist project, because for this latter division among people to be colonized is the best gateway to achieve dominance over the southern hemisphere. This dominance, in its turn, ensures the possibility for the West, or the northern hemisphere, to drain the southern hemisphere dry of its resources. In this way, the West preserves its economic superiority.

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<sup>187</sup> Nah, Dove. “African Womanism: An Afrocentric Theory” (1998), p. 518.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 534. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>189</sup> Or what can be more extremely expressed as patriarchy.

To support her analysis and prove that Europe is the civilizational “outgrowth”<sup>190</sup> of Africa and, at the same time, the epicentre of patriarchy, Nah Dove relies on Cheikh Anta Diop’s cradle theory. She remarks that:

As Cheikh Anta Diop...and others have shown, Africa is the cradle of human civilization and therefore culture...as recently as 1995, bonetools dating 90,000 years old, found in Zaire (The Democratic Republic of the Congo), challenge the belief that Europe was the home of modern humans. These data show that Africa was the home of people whose tools were advanced some 50,000 years before those of Europe.<sup>191</sup>

Then, she adds that:

Africa, where humanity began, produced matriarchal societies. Over time, the migration of peoples to the northern clime produced patriarchal male-centered societies...The concept of matriarchy highlights the complementarity aspect of the female-male relationship or the nature of the feminine and masculine in all forms of life, which is understood as non-hierarchical. Both the woman and the man work together in all areas of social organization.<sup>192</sup>

Cheikh Anta Diop developed the cradle theory not only to prove that matriarchy originated in Africa, but to demonstrate that the ubiquity of this system of social organization in Africa, throughout the continent’s history, is ample proof that a cultural unity characterizes the black continent.

Ifi Amadiume states that Cheikh Anta Diop was a strong believer in the existence of this African cultural unity. She explains that this strong belief he had appeared “...during the fifties nationalist struggles and general debate for African

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<sup>190</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 518.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., pp. 517-518.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 520.

independence.”<sup>193</sup> She also observes that this belief came from his desire to see Africa become an independent federation.

Thus, according to Cheikh Anta Diop, the common denominator existing between the different African countries which he used to prove his theory is the matriarchal basis upon which African families are based. Even though it is not certain whether this matriarchal basis is still as present in Africa as it used to be in the past, Diop ascertained that throughout his research on the history of African matriarchy, he has been met with recurrent allusions to the existence of matriarchy in different locations of what he calls the southern cradle. Ifi Amadiume affirms that “[w]hat Diop took firm grip on and used to argue the ‘profound cultural unity’ of Africa is the history of African matriarchy.”<sup>194</sup>

One of the examples Diop uses to refer to the southern cradle is Ethiopia. The women he mentions to illustrate their important position in that region of Africa are the Queen of Sheba and Queen Candace. About them, he writes that:

Ethiopia is the first country in the world to have been ruled by a queen...There was first the semi-legendary Queen of Sheba, contemporary of Solomon, the King of the Hebrews, about the year 1000 B.C....However that maybe it is worthy of note that during the first thousand years before our time, that is to say at a time situated between the Trojan War and Homer, the Southern lands could still be ruled by women.<sup>195</sup>

[t]he reign of Queen Candace was really historic. She was a contemporary of Augustus Caesar when he was at the height of his power. The latter, after having conquered Egypt, drove his armies across the Nubian desert to the frontiers of Ethiopia...The Queen herself took command of her army; at the head of her troops she charged the Roman soldiers, as Joan of

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<sup>193</sup> Cheikh Anta, Diop. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (1989), p.x.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

Arc was later to do against the English army. The loss of any eye in battle only had the effect of increasing her bravery.<sup>196</sup>

These are some of the many examples cited by Cheikh Anta Diop to refer to the matriarchal/egalitarian nature of this part of the world. In addition to Ethiopia, he also includes Egypt, Libya and Black Africa. In all these examples, Diop always underlines the complete freedom women used to enjoy in these different civilizations of the southern cradle. At the end of his enumeration of the different examples of a matriarchal society, supposed to be situated in the southern cradle, Diop does not fail to mention that in these societies men's role was not at all diminished. He states that men's presence and position were respected. For him, matriarchy is "...a dualist conception of social life."<sup>197</sup> This means that it is not a system where women have the absolute power. It is a system where egalitarianism is respected.

Unfortunately for the believers in Cheikh Diop's ideas, some scholars tended to discredit his theories by considering them as only the manifestation of his Afrocentric tendencies — in other words, of his belief in the African origin of human civilization.

Gerald Early remarks that:

[since its appearance]...Afrocentrism has encountered significant opposition from mainstream scholars who charge it with historical inaccuracy, scholarly ineptitude, and racism. In her book, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1996), the American classicist Mary Lefkowitz attempted to refute most of the assertions made by Bernal, Diop, and others.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-9.

<sup>197</sup> Diop, Cheikh Anta. Op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>198</sup> Early, Gerald. "Afrocentrism." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011. P. 2. Square brackets are mine.

In the book mentioned by Early, Mary Lefkowitz explains that most, if not all, of the affirmations emitted by what she calls “Afrocentric writers”<sup>199</sup> are based on myths, not on actual historical facts that can be used as reliable pieces of evidence in these writers’ Afrocentric historical accounts. For instance, she mentions a work produced by Diop — one of the Afrocentric writers she criticizes. The work in question is entitled *Civilization or Barbarism* (1981). Lefkowitz maintains that:

[in this book,]...Cheikh Anta Diop undertook to construct a usable past for African people. He regarded Egypt as the source of much of what is called Western Civilization. He suggested that according to Greek mythology, the Egyptians brought their civilization to Greece during the time of XVIII Dynasty in Egypt (1544-1293 B.C.)...Later in the book Diop reiterates his claim that Cecrops, Aegyptus, Danaus, and Erechtheus were all ‘Egyptian Blacks,’ and that Cadmus was a ‘Negroid’ who came from Canaan.<sup>200</sup>

Then, she adds that:

...it easily can be shown that Diop’s research is not so thorough as it might appear. Rather than follow the ordinary stories about the origins of the Greek heroes, he relies on one extraordinary account, and has uncritically repeated an ancient assertion of dubious accuracy. Diop’s source for his claims that the Greek heroes came from Egypt is Diodorus of Sicily, who wrote in the first century B.C. And what were Diodorus’s sources? Diop does not say, but Diodorus himself tells us. He is simply reporting what Egyptian priests told him when he visited that country during the 180<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (60-56 B.C.). Diodorus does not imply that he believed them. The priests also told him that Egypt in early times colonized the whole of the Mediterranean world: Babylon, Colchis, and even the nation of the Jews. But this account of the origins of civilization is, to put it mildly, highly idiosyncratic, and almost certainly wrong.<sup>201</sup>

Here, Lefkowitz does not shy from clearly manifesting her refusal to acknowledge Diop’s tracing of the origins of some known Greek heroes to Africa.

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<sup>199</sup> Lefkowitz, Mary. *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1996), p.14.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

To go back to the personage of Cecrops, one of these Greek heroes, about him Diop not only maintains that he was of an Egyptian origin, he also holds that he “...is said to have introduced into Greece the practices of the South — agriculture — and even, it seems, the custom of marriage. Matriarchy of the primitive peoples of the peninsula bears his name.”<sup>202</sup> In this passage, Diop clearly asserts that it is Cecrops who introduced matriarchy into Greece. As a King of Egyptian origin<sup>203</sup>, he brought with him the influences of the south to Greece, namely agriculture and what Diop called its “corollary”<sup>204</sup>, or matriarchy.

As previously mentioned, Lefkowitz ascertains that Cecrops was “...autochthonous, that is, he sprang from the soil of Attica,”<sup>205</sup> and not from the soil of Africa. In addition to the origin of this Greek hero, Lefkowitz also manifested her scepticism as to Diop’s assertion that an Egyptian invasion of Greece took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> C. B.C. This particular point is of interest here because it is this date that Diop used to indicate the communication of matriarchy from the south to the north, from Egypt to Greece, through an invasion led by Cecrops. Concerning this, Lefkowitz holds that:

...archaeology does not provide any support for an invasion of Greece by Egyptians in the second millennium. Such information as we have suggests instead that settlers came to Egypt from Greece. A thousand fragments of frescoes in the Minoan Greek style have been found in the last several years at Avaris in the Nile Delta, dating from the seventeenth century, during the period when the Semitic (probably Canaanite) people as the Hyksos ruled Egypt (1674-1566 B.C.). In 1991, a fragment of a painted Minoan floor, dating from the sixteenth century, was discovered in Tell Kabri in Israel. These findings seem to suggest that an ‘invasion,’

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<sup>202</sup> Cheikh Anta, Diop. Op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>203</sup> According to Diop of course.

<sup>204</sup> Cheikh Anta, Diop. Op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>205</sup> Mary, Lefkowitz. Op. cit., p. 18.



whatever form it may have taken, went from Greece to Egypt, rather than in the other direction.<sup>206</sup>

Lefkowitz also denies the existence of any cultural dependency between Egypt and Greece. In relation to this, she is not specifically speaking about matriarchy or refuting Diop's affirmation that Egypt communicated matriarchy to Greece through the invasion led by Cecrops. She did not get to these details. She only spoke about cultural dependency between Egypt and Greece in general, by refusing any possibility that the latter was dependent on the former. In this respect, she holds that:

[In Europe, people]<sup>207</sup> ceased to emphasize the cultural debt of Greece to Egypt because it was no longer apparent...two major discoveries changed [their]<sup>208</sup> view. The first concerned a group of ancient philosophical treatises [that] had throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance been thought of as Egyptian...But in 1614 the French scholar Isaac Casaubon demonstrated that the treatises were actually late and basically Greek. The second discovery was the decipherment of hieroglyphics...which [revealed]<sup>209</sup> that the relation of Egyptian to Greek culture was less close than they had imagined.<sup>210</sup>

All in all, to consider the world as a dual whole constituted of two distinct civilizational cradles and to consider one cradle the “outgrowth” of the other seems to be an oversimplification of humanity's history. Have there never been interferences between the two cradles at the same historical moments? Is the assumption that the southern cradle developed in complete isolation from what Nah Dove says Cheikh Anta Diop referred to as “the third cradle”<sup>211</sup> or the Middle East credible? From this very schematic exposition of two divergent points of view about the possibility of an African origin of civilization transpires an intellectual relentlessness expressed by both

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<sup>206</sup> Mary, Lefkowitz. Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>207</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>208</sup> Mary, Lefkowitz. Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>211</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 521.

Lefkowitz and Diop — who are, in fact, only the representative figures of two opposing poles of the debate about the origins of civilization. An intellectual relentlessness such as the one exhibited by Diop and Lefkowitz enriches the debate indeed, but it also seems to lead to a dead end since it focuses on just who was at the origin of the good institutions and who was at the origin of the bad ones. Who brought on matriarchy and who generated patriarchy? It also perpetuates the idea of taxonomy<sup>212</sup> even in the historical analysis of human civilization. The point is not to prove whether Europe is the northern cradle where appeared patriarchy and Africa the southern cradle where surfaced matriarchy, or vice versa. What seems vital and necessary is to underline the necessity to return to the matriarchal/egalitarian model of social organization, as Nah Dove, Alice Walker and others urged to do. This is the womanist resolution mentioned earlier, in this sub-chapter. Even though there is still debate about the correctness of Diop's cradle theory, it is this idea that matters most and that Alice Walker instigates in the second cornerstone of her womanist philosophy as she explained it in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1984).

However that maybe, after hypothesizing about the world's division into two antithetical cradles and how one insidiously debased the other, Nah Dove does not forget to point to this last idea. Indeed, she mentions that it represents a great damage for African people "...to assist in the process of deculturalization as agents of oppression, either willingly or unknowingly."<sup>213</sup> She states that "...it is apparent that the physical and mental abuse of African women is condoned not only by European

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<sup>212</sup> Already referred to in the first chapter of this research work, p.40.

<sup>213</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 534.

women and men, but also by African women and men.”<sup>214</sup> Even though Nah Dove perceives the antagonism holding between African women and men as the result of a process of deculturalization initiated and introduced into Africa by the European colonialists<sup>215</sup>, ultimately and similarly to Audre Lorde, she points to the necessity for African women and men to “...recover, herstorically and culturally, the complementary relationship of the woman and the man as the basis for ‘ourstory’ and self-determination.”<sup>216</sup> Guerrero<sup>217</sup> also encourages the same return to this pre-patriarchal and pre-colonial model of social organization. To support this view, he refers himself to Alice Walker’s call for women to love other women — the second cornerstone of her womanist philosophy. In line with this, Guerrero mentions that “[he] interprets this in both literal and figurative ways, in terms of restoring the female principle to challenge the prevailing colonialist and patriarchal denigration of women...”<sup>218</sup> He observes that to get oppressed people rid of “patriarchal colonialism,”<sup>219</sup> it is important to retrieve what he terms “the gender role dynamics of an egalitarian[or matriarchal] society that valued both women and men.”<sup>220</sup>

The acceptance and implementation of this complementarity represents one of the major points Alice Walker developed in her womanist philosophy. However, whereas Nah Dove limits her analysis to how the southern cradle can liberate itself from the oppression of the northern cradle, hence the importance for her to resort to

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<sup>214</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 534.

<sup>215</sup> An affirmation one may or may not agree with.

<sup>216</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 535.

<sup>217</sup> Another critic who shares the same views with Nah Dove.

<sup>218</sup> M. A. Jaimes, Guerrero. “‘Patriarchal Colonialism’ and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism” (2003), p. 67.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> M. A. Jaimes, Guerrero. Op. cit., p. 67.

“African womanism as Afrocentric theory,”<sup>221</sup> and while Jaimes Guerrero restricts his study to how Native Americans can get back their pre-colonial egalitarianism, Alice Walker does not limit the scope of her activism to a specific race or cradle.

On the other hand, even though she perceives the world as a dual whole where the female and the male principles should be complementary, she also advocates an occasional, temporary separatism for the sake of healing. In consonance with this, Loyalie King states that “[w]omanist wisdom suggests healing the self before attempting to heal others.”<sup>222</sup> She gives the example of “Meridian”, the title character of Alice Walker’s novel about her experience within the Civil Rights Movement, by stating that “Meridian Hill’s frequent retreats give her the space for rejuvenation so that she is able to carry on her activist work.”<sup>223</sup> Here, Alice Walker is encouraging the womanist to alienate her/himself from the outer world and from usual relationships temporarily. For Alice Walker, this break or what can also be qualified as a sort of recreation is an occasion where one can retreat into her/himself, without external distractions, and heal. In relation to this, M.L. Von Franz observed that it is easier for an individual to find her/his real Self, or what she also refers to as the “inner centre” or “nuclear atom” or “inventor” or “organizer,”<sup>224</sup> away from civilization. In her discussion of the positive effects a certain isolation or alienation from the external world can have on the individual, she mentions the example of Indians called “the Naskapi.” But, before citing the example of these Indians, she first remarks that

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<sup>221</sup> Nah, Dove. Op. cit., p. 535.

<sup>222</sup> Loyalie, King. Op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. “The Process of Individuation” in *Man and His Symbols* (1964), p. 161.

reference to the existence of this inner centre or what Carl Jung called the Self, has been made by different civilizations throughout history. She states that:

[t]hroughout the ages men have been intuitively aware of the existence of such an inner centre. The Greeks called it man's inner daimon; in Egypt it was expressed by the concept of the Ba-soul; and the Romans worshiped it as the "genius" native to each individual. In more primitive societies it was often thought of as a protective spirit embodied within an animal or fetish.

The inner centre is realized in exceptionally pure, unspoiled form by the Naskapi Indians, who still exist in the forests of the Labrador peninsula. These simple people are hunters who live in isolated family groups, so far from one another that they have not been able to evolve tribal customs or collective religious beliefs and ceremonies. In his lifelong solitude the Naskapi hunter has to rely on his own inner voices and unconscious revelations; he has no religious teachers who tell him what he should believe, no rituals, festivals, or customs to help him along. In his basic view of life, the soul of man is simply an "inner companion," whom he calls "my friend" or Mista'peo, meaning "Great Man." Mista'peo dwells in the heart and is immortal...Those Naskapi...can enter into a deeper connection with the Great Man.<sup>225</sup>

For Alice Walker, occasional and temporary retreats into the self have a healing potential since they facilitate the reunion with one's Self or "Great [(Wo)] Man."<sup>226</sup> In the third point, Alice Walker underlines the womanist's capacity for unconditional love. In this point, she also emphasizes the womanist's liking for sensual pleasure.

Lastly, Alice Walker expresses the fourth point through one single and straightforward statement when she declares that "[w]omanist is to feminist as purple to lavender."<sup>227</sup> Lovalerie King remarks that:

[p]urple, a more intense color than lavender, is not merely the result of adding black to lavender. It also symbolizes the place of those black women in American society who, like Celie, must find a way to resist multiple oppressions related to race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to survive whole.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz (1964). *Op.cit.*, p.162.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* Square brackets are mine.

<sup>227</sup> Alice, Walker. *Op. cit.*, p. xii.

<sup>228</sup> Lovalerie, King. *Op. cit.*, p. 248.

Even though, in this statement, Alice Walker seems to perpetuate “...Western dualism and the binary oppositions that undergird it...,”<sup>229</sup> it is not really her intention to do so. Indeed, by creating womanism she intended to achieve the contrary. Womanism with its focus on the complexity of black women’s experience, only contributed to expand the Feminist Movement’s horizons by introducing new perspectives and new demands in it. By inventing womanism, it can be said that Alice Walker not only highlighted the diversity of womanhood and multifacetedness of the oppression endured by non-white Western women, she also simply reminded Western feminists that Feminism, as a movement, is very heterogeneous.

Loverie King observes that Alice Walker’s addition of this last point to her definition is equivalent to an absorption of the feminist into the womanist and its radicalization “...to the point of no return.”<sup>230</sup> Womanist activism is larger in scope than Feminist activism since it focuses not only on the oppression endured by women due to the gender roles imposed upon them by society, but it deals also with other facets of oppression unknown to white Western women. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi describes effectively these different facets. She remarks that:

Black women are disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks, they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimized by black men; and as black women they are also victimized on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Loverie, King. *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>231</sup> Chikwenye Okonjo, Ogunyemi. “Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English” (1985), p. 67.

This explains Loyalerie King's use of the term "absorption." The Feminist is absorbed into the womanist, because the former, with its "gender- and Western-centeredness"<sup>232</sup> represents only one segment of the latter with its universal focus.

### **b. Womanism as a Praxis**

As a praxis, Alice Walker's womanism is apparent in her audacious but redemptive art — for her, a practical and concrete way of facing the forbidden. Philip M. Royster explains that Alice Walker has always perceived herself as someone who saves other people through writing about what seems to her to be wrong. He states that "[i]n a 1984 interview, Walker revealed that, since childhood, she has seen herself as a writer who rescues: 'I was brought up to try to see what was wrong and right. Since I am a writer, writing is how I right it.'"<sup>233</sup> It is possible to imagine, here, Walker adding that writing in a way that desacralizes the forbidden is how she rights the wrong.

As to Alice Walker's literary audacity, it is redolent of the first component of her definition of womanism. In addition to the fact that she personally demonstrated this audacity or boldness throughout her literary career, she also made her female characters display this "...outrageous, audacious, courageous [and] wilful..."<sup>234</sup> attitude. For Loyalerie King, such is the case of Shug Avery in *The Color Purple*, Lisette in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Tashi in the same novel. Concerning Shug Avery, she mentions that "[s]he embodies the womanist attitude as a result of having acquired the wisdom that comes with experiencing life from a variety of perspectives

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<sup>232</sup> Susan, Arndt. Op. cit., p.720.

<sup>233</sup> Philip M., Royster. "In Search of our Fathers' Arms: Alice Walker's Persona of the Alienated Darling" (1986), p. 348.

<sup>234</sup> Alice, Walker. Op. cit., p. xi.

through multiple incarnations through time.”<sup>235</sup> As to Lisette, she observes that “[e]verything about Lisette’s association with Adam — the fact that he is married, black, and American, the fact of her intentional out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the way she raises their son, and even her attempts to reach out to Adam’s wife, Tashi — suggests that she is audacious, wilful, and courageous.”<sup>236</sup> As to Tashi, she remarks that:

[p]rior to volunteering for what Walker refers to as female genital mutilation, Tashi had exhibited similar proclivities in her relationship to Adam and, generally, by daring to operate outside the narrow constraints of societal conventions. Tashi experiences a rebirth of her womanist spirit after she kills M’Lissa, her village tsunga.<sup>237</sup>

In line with Alice Walker’s literary boldness, more precisely with her predilection for dealing with all that is deemed forbidden or taboo, Barbara Christian remarks that “[t]here is a sense in which the forbidden is consistently approached by Walker as a possible route to truth.”<sup>238</sup> It is possible, here, to use Barbara Christian’s observation as a springboard to reach a further conclusion. Indeed, Alice Walker’s commitment to the desacralization of the forbidden emanates from her desire to achieve a truthful vision of society and of its problems to, ultimately, get at what Felipe Smith qualifies as “[m]utual redemption...”<sup>239</sup> This mutual redemption, in its turn, is evocative of the second component of Alice Walker’s definition of womanism. This component is identified with connectedness. Alice Walker has always stressed the importance of connectedness between the individual and her/his community or between her/him and her/his ancestors or even between the writer and the readership.

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<sup>235</sup> L’Ovalerie, King. Op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Barbara, Christian. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 83.

<sup>239</sup> Felipe, Smith. “Alice Walker’s Redemptive Art” (1992), p. 437.



In consonance with this, Felipe Smith points out that “[t]he urgency to ‘save lives’ thus stems from Walker’s acknowledgement of a spiritual bond connecting the writer to the lives she depicts. Artistic redemption ‘saves’ the artist as well.”<sup>240</sup>

For Alice Walker, personal wholeness is related to communal wholeness. In relation to this idea, Lovalerie King observes that:

[a]t issue is the condition of the soul, and it is not simply a matter of the individual soul. She or he who achieves wholeness, or who aspires to achieve wholeness, bears the responsibility for showing others the way, for lifting as they climb. One imagines a chain, or a continuum of humanity with each leading the next.<sup>241</sup>

This connectedness, for instance, can be sensed in *The Color Purple* between Celie and Shug Avery. In the novel, Shug Avery becomes a kind of mentor to Celie. She inspires Celie with confidence and helps her in her quest for wholeness. Lovalerie King states that the connectedness or, as she qualifies it, the reciprocity holding between Celie and Shug “...radiates outward to form an ever-widening cooperative community that includes...”<sup>242</sup> other characters in the novel.

Underlining the redemptive quality of art in general, Alice Walker mentions that “[i]t is, in the end, the saving of lives that we writers are about...[w]e do it because we care...We care because we know this: the life we save is our own.”<sup>243</sup>

Alice Walker’s history of strife with herself and with society nurtured the womanist in her and shaped her audacious authorship. The latter, however, has never

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<sup>240</sup> Felipe, Smith. Op. cit., p. 437.

<sup>241</sup> Lovalerie, King. Op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>243</sup> Alice, Walker. Op. cit., p. 14.

been an attempt, from her part, to sensationalize her art. In reality, the audacity and courage she demonstrated in her literary works, as well as in her life, in addition to her prioritization of “universal relatedness”<sup>244</sup> represent for her a kind of gateway to not only individual, but also universal redemption. A redemption that concerns all people with their differences.

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<sup>244</sup> Lovalerie, King. *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

**PART II: APPRAISAL OF ALICE WALKER'S COMMITMENT TO THE  
FORBIDDEN IN *POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY, IN LOVE AND  
TROUBLE* AND *YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD WOMAN DOWN***

**CHAPTER III: *POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY* AND THE  
DESTRUCTIVENESS OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

### 3.1. Situating Tashi as Neither an “Archetypal Victim” Nor a “Sovereign Agent”<sup>245</sup>

According to many critics, among whom Olakunle George, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is the work which raised Alice Walker’s status as a taboo-breaker even higher. In this audacious work, Alice Walker desacralizes and attacks a forbidden truth of an intense gravity, namely female genital mutilation.

Identifying Tashi’s status, as neither an archetypal victim nor a sovereign agent, leads up to a rather enhanced understanding of the seeming destructive and contradictory attitude she displays throughout the progression of the novel. For instance, in “Part I” of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Tashi describes the moment when she firmly decides to undergo the “...wound tradition [is about to give her,]”<sup>246</sup> even though she was the direct witness of what that wound caused to her sister — that is to say death. At this stage of Tashi’s journey to wholeness, she appears to be what Ania Loomba refers to as a “sovereign agent”<sup>247</sup> displaying an unaware self-destructiveness and a blatant psychic and behavioural contradiction.

An initial close-up<sup>248</sup> with Tashi’s psychic hubbubs develops a discriminating vision of her personage and, possibly, humanizes her more by liberating her conceptualization from two unrealistic, oversimplifying and counterfeited representations. A consciousness of the forbidden’s central role in the confusion

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<sup>245</sup> Ania, Loomba. “Dead Women Tell no Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Postcolonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India” (1993), in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003), p. 243.

<sup>246</sup> Alice, Walker. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), p. 122. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>247</sup> Ania, Loomba. Op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>248</sup> There is an attempt at carrying out this close-up in the current sub-chapter, entitled “Situating Tashi as Neither an ‘Archetypal Victim’ Nor a ‘Sovereign Agent’ ”.

gravitating around and prowling about Tashi, especially at the beginning of her story, heightens the discriminating vision above-mentioned.

Against the backdrop of a traditional African tribe utterly inhibited by the forbidden, Tashi undergoes the ritual of genital mutilation. Depending on the reading one carries out, sometimes she appears as a victim — the way Third-World women are generally perceived by the West — and sometimes she seems to be completely responsible and “sovereign.”<sup>249</sup> This latter representation is instigated by the colonized traditionalists. For postcolonial feminists, the problem with these two readings is that in both the woman seems to be nonexistent.

According to Olakunle George, a reader can adopt either of these two positions if s/he evaluates *Possessing the Secret of Joy* through an elementary reading. He adds that a more attentive reading, however, offers a different and richer perception of Alice Walker’s narrative and avoids categorizing Tashi as either an “archetypal victim” or as a “sovereign agent”. Such a reading, he considers, reveals the existence of “compositional pressures...which account for certain aspects of the novel that complicate the terms of the novelist’s straightforward demonization of the perpetrators of genital mutilation.”<sup>250</sup> Due to this quoted affirmation, by Olakunle George, and before moving further in the analysis of Tashi’s representation and the compositional pressures he accounts for in his article, a slack in the textual flow of the present analysis seems necessary here. Indeed, in Olakunle George’s view, Alice Walker seems to have adopted the Western position by victimizing Tashi and demonizing her culture. On the other hand, he also mentions that the novel’s aforementioned compositional

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<sup>249</sup> Ania, Loomba. (2003), Op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>250</sup> Olakunle, George. “Alice Walker’s Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction” (2001), p. 357.

pressures disturb the author's overt moral conviction and the position she seems to have adopted. He thinks that even though Alice Walker seems to be driven by a desire to fulfill female emancipation through the exposition of the predicament of women who are mutilated in the name of tradition, such an attitude is dismissive of the African woman's "irreducible humanity"<sup>251</sup>, of her culture's "inner-logic" and "self-understanding."<sup>252</sup> Ultimately, he deduces that such a one-dimensional authorial intention in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* can be said to have cost Alice Walker "...the evacuation of the African woman's agency."<sup>253</sup> In other words, it leads to the complete victimization of the novel's protagonist and at the same time her silencing. On the other hand, it seems right to assume here that it is also a purely Western one-dimensional reading, an elementary reading in other words, of Alice Walker's authorial intentions this time, which can lead one to qualify Alice Walker's authorial intention as victimizing African women and demonizing African culture.

The problem with Olakunle George's interpretation is that in trying to delve deep into the complexities of Alice Walker's novel, it seems that he reduced the author's intention to its most simplistic dimension. It appears that in Olakunle George's analysis, the depth and complexity he is prone to attribute to the narrative itself have nothing to do with the author's own vision and are completely independent of her will.

Even though Alice Walker is a Westerner who grew up and matured as a writer in the West, she is a Westerner of African origin and she is completely conscious of

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<sup>251</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

this. Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff mention that “[w]hen asked what right she has as a Westerner to ‘intervene’ in African traditions, Walker remarks, ‘Slavery intervened. As far as I am concerned, I am speaking for my great-great-great-great-grandmother who came here [to America] with all this pain in her body.’”<sup>254</sup> Alice Walker does not perceive herself as an outsider to Africa looking down upon African women’s afflictions from her pedestal as an American woman writer. For her, a historical and genetic bond holds between Africa and her and she celebrates this bond by writing about the sufferings of Tashi, her African heroine.

Even though Alice Walker makes possible her female protagonist’s retrieval of her agency at the end of the novel,<sup>255</sup> before this and all along the progression of Tashi’s story, her representation seems to be perpetually wavering between archetypal victimhood and sovereign agency. This representational dilemma is probably what Olakunle George is speaking about when he refers to the novel’s compositional pressures. In fact, when one reads Alice Walker’s novel, two opposing reactions are immediately elicited by one’s reading. When Tashi firmly decides to undergo the ritual of excision, her best friends Olivia and Adam Johnson, both children of an African American missionary family, advise her against going through the ritual. Nevertheless, Tashi remains heedless of their warnings. She justifies her act by her desire to show her allegiance to the political cause of national liberation and cultural self-determination. Seen from this vantage point, Tashi’s act of self-mutilation seems to emanate from a deep sense of female attachment to her native culture. From this angle,

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<sup>254</sup> Nagueyaltiand, Warren and Sally, Wolff. “‘Like the Pupil of an Eye’: Sexual Blinding of Women in Alice Walker’s Works” (1998), p. 12.

<sup>255</sup> By making her kill M’Lissa the tribe’s circumciser.



which is usually foregrounded by the anti-colonial traditionalist discourse, Tashi seems to have freely decided her mutilation.

However after the operation, complications resulting from her excision turn her life into a living hell. Later, after she married her childhood friend, Adam, she finds that she is no more able to enjoy sexual intercourse and childbearing becomes a real ordeal. The aftereffects of her own traumatic experience of genital cutting and the earlier trauma of her sister's murder after a failed excision, all cause her to sink in the depths of depression. From this perspective, contrarily to the first one, Tashi turns up as a victim. A one dimensional reading of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* can lead one to adopt either the first or the second stance. What is particularly sensible in Olakunle George's analysis, apart from his perception of Alice Walker's authorial intentions as purely victimizing, is the perception of these two possible ways of representing Tashi's subalternity<sup>256</sup> as an obstacle to her liberation from silence. Ironically, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the postcolonial feminist critic who introduced the concept of subalternity into the world of criticism, indicates that any attempt at retrieving subaltern consciousness should start by accepting the impossibility of the subaltern's liberation from silence. For her, the subaltern cannot speak, it is the task of the postcolonial critic to locate her/his presence in historical narratives. She states that the postcolonial critic should abandon any positivistic view of this project. She explains that positivism here means the assumption that investigation into subaltern

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<sup>256</sup> In British military terminology, the term refers to those holding rank below that of captain. The term was adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to groups subject to the hegemony of the ruling class, such as peasants and workers, and adapted to by postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Spivak and the members of the Subaltern Studies Group, to identify the oppressed subject of imperialism.

consciousness “...will lead to firm ground, to something that can be disclosed.”<sup>257</sup> She remarks that the double oppression of native and colonial patriarchies leaves no visibility and no voice to the woman as a subaltern. She maintains that whenever a positivistic project is initiated, “...there is always a counterpointing suggestion...that subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the élite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive.”<sup>258</sup> For Spivak, a positivistic view of consciousness should be replaced by an intellectual pessimism as to the recovery of the female subaltern’s consciousness. She observes that “...there is no logical reason why ...[the] ‘negative’ rather than the grounding positive view of consciousness, should not be generalized as the [Subaltern Studies Group’s] methodological presupposition.”<sup>259</sup> Spivak’s insistence on the subaltern’s silence has been disapproved by Ania Loomba for instance. She states that “...[Spivak’s] insistence on subaltern ‘silence’ is problematic if adopted as the definitive statement about colonial relations.”<sup>260</sup> She observes that “...too inflexible a theory of subaltern silence, even if offered in a cautionary spirit, can be detrimental to research on colonial cultures by closing off options even before they have been explored.”<sup>261</sup> She also points to the fact that even when the postcolonial critic adopts what Spivak refers to as a positivistic attitude, namely an attitude which “...takes anti-colonial nationalism as emblematic of the native ability to question and counter colonial discourses,”<sup>262</sup> it is too simplistic a perception of the problem. In line with this, Ania Loomba mentions that “...anti-

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<sup>257</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty, Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1998), p. 278.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ania, Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: Second Edition* (2005), p. 195.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

colonial nationalism can only be taken as representative of the subaltern voice if we homogenize the category ‘subaltern’ and simplify enormously our notion of ‘speaking.’”<sup>263</sup>

For Ania Loomba, to remain in a state of oscillation between these two positions will only lead to a dead end. For her, Spivak’s query “Can the subaltern speak?” should be rephrased and transformed into a series of questions. Such questions would run as follows: who are the subalterns in a given text, for example *Possessing the Secret of Joy*? What is their relationship to each other? How have they been silenced? What Olakunle George referred to as a “nuanced”<sup>264</sup> reading of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is susceptible of providing answers to these questions.

First, attention to the novel’s complexities and seeming contradictions reveals that subalternity is not uniform. It reveals that Tashi is not any subaltern. She is “...quite situated and particular.”<sup>265</sup> In consonance with this, Ania Loomba states that “...natives [or subalterns], are divided by differences of gender...and by those of class, caste and other hierarchies.”<sup>266</sup> She also adds that “...we should keep in mind that those who...revived the term ‘subaltern’ in historical studies, did so in order to draw distinctions within colonized peoples, between the elite and the non-elite...This suggests that any instance of agency, or act of rebellion, can be assessed from divergent perspectives.”<sup>267</sup> So, the concept of subalternity is not neutral or homogeneous. There are different parameters that come into play and define the

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<sup>263</sup> Ania, Loomba. (2005) Op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>264</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>266</sup> Ania, Loomba. (2005). Op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

profile of the subaltern. There is the subaltern's sex, social class, country, political context against which s/he is evolving...and so on. All these parameters should be taken into consideration if a personalized analysis of a person's development, or regression, into subalternity is to be done. For example, Tashi's subalternity cannot be equated with M'Lissa's or the Leader's subalternity for instance. Each one of them has a specific history which ended in making each an oppressed subaltern.

Second, a complicated reading also indicates that in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi's subjectivity and even her culture's "inner logic"<sup>268</sup> are shaped by what Olakunle George refers to as "textualizations of reality and experience."<sup>269</sup> Thanks to these latter, the novel discloses the different social forces or, as Ania Loomba qualified them, hierarchies which had a certain ascendant on Tashi's subjectivity and whose interplay ended in conceptualizing her as either an "archetypal victim" or as a "sovereign agent."

According to Ania Loomba, analyzing these different influences or social forces<sup>270</sup> is redolent of post-modern notions of fragmentation and multiplicity. She states that one useful way of making visible the histories of marginalized subjects, or subalterns, is to adopt the above-mentioned notions. In other words, to move away from the grand narratives which once dominated the writing of history, like the grand narrative of class struggle, and to focus on the particular histories of oppressed subalterns and on how the grand narratives led oppressed people to be historically silent subalterns. Ania Loomba observes that "...whoever our subalterns are, they are

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<sup>268</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 356.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>270</sup> Or hierarchies.

positioned simultaneously within several different discourses of power and of resistance. The relations between colonizer and colonized were, after all, constantly spliced by many other social hierarchies.”<sup>271</sup>

In addition to this, namely to “[s]ituating the subaltern within a multiplicity of hierarchies...[.]”<sup>272</sup> Ania Loomba also points to the importance of taking into consideration the crucial relationships between these hierarchies or forces of society. She observes that:

...gender and class should not be thought of as different elements, a multiplicity of narratives that we can choose between. Their full force is uncovered only by locating their articulation with each other and with other social forces. In fact, if we really believe that human subjects are constituted by several different discourses then we are obliged to consider these articulations. Thus, in order to listen for subaltern voices we need to uncover the multiplicity of narratives that were hidden by the grand narratives...[without forgetting to]...think about how the former are woven together.<sup>273</sup>

So, it is important to focus on the specific histories of oppressed people, to discover the different social forces that shaped their subalternity, in particular, and erased their presence from historical records. It is also vital to see these personal narratives, which have been placed on the margins of history, as themselves an immense discontinuous network of interrelated strands.

In his rather complex and nuanced analysis of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Olakunle George seems to point to the existence of these hierarchies within the novel’s narrative space. Indeed, he refers to them as ongoing and prior textualizations of reality and experience. He observes that the former can be identified with the inner thoughts and private letters of the main characters. He remarks that the ongoing

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<sup>271</sup> Ania, Loomba. (2005). Op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

textualizations constitute a kind of web of the different consciousnesses which came into contact with that of Tashi and had variable impacts on her consciousness.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, among the consciousnesses which had a certain impact on that of Tashi are the ones emanating from the village elders and the Leader. In the novel, after these male subalterns have been oppressed by the white colonizer, they start to oppress the female subalterns to restore a certain dignity, personal and national. Their attempt at “colonial disenfranchisement” “...led to a situation whereby women became the grounds and signs of the colonial struggle.”<sup>274</sup>

Even if these aforementioned male subalterns are not allowed direct intervention into the novel’s different narrative frames, their impact on the central female subaltern is certain. For instance, in Tashi’s eyes the Leader was almost a divinity. Tashi compares him to Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta.

Even from prison we received our instructions, I said. Good instructions. Sensible; correct. From Our Leader. That we must remember who we were. That we must fight the white oppressors without ceasing; without, even, the contemplation of ceasing; for they would surely still be around during our children’s and our children’s children’s time. That we must take back our land...that we must return to the purity of our own cultures and traditions. That we must not neglect our ancient customs. (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 117)

In sum, with Tashi’s inner thoughts about the Leader, it becomes evident that the colonial struggle the Olinkans were leading only reinforced gender oppression within their community. So Western colonization only led to the calcification of cruel patriarchal practices.

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<sup>274</sup> Ania, Loomba. (2003). Op. cit., p. 246.

But, contrarily to certain female subalterns, Tashi was not really forced to undergo the ritual of excision. It is rather her community's behavior towards her, following her sister's murder, which prevented her from correctly evaluating the impact of her decision. Indeed, when her sister is murdered, the community members<sup>275</sup> shroud this murder in mystery and lie their way into making Tashi believe that it is an accident. It is important to note here that even the adults who failed to repair the little Tashi were themselves conditioned by a context of cultural regression as a response to colonial domination.

Also indicative of the multidimensionality of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is the existence of what Olakunle George refers to as prior textualizations of reality and experience. Among the prior texts mentioned by Olakunle George, is Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (1938). About Jomo Kenyatta, Olakunle George mentions that "Kenyatta insist[ed] that only a detribalized African will marry an uncircumcised woman, and his account of the ritual [of female genital mutilation] stresses its high cultural valence in traditional Gikuyu culture."<sup>276</sup> The introduction of such a text into the novel indicates the presence of another hierarchy in the web of hierarchies which influenced Tashi's subjectivity. Olakunle George refers to it as "cultural nationalism."<sup>277</sup> However, at the end of her journey to wholeness, Tashi rejects this cultural nationalism and regains her agency, by killing M'Lissa, the community's circumciser. Olakunle George maintains that "...Tashi's rejection of cultural-nationalism is a rejection of a masculinist ethnography that enlists her body in

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<sup>275</sup> Women and men.

<sup>276</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

the service of a cause that is male defined.”<sup>278</sup> It is only at the end of the novel that Tashi translates this rejection into action when she murders M’ Lissa, the executing instrument of this ethnography. Tashi rejects it, because she finally realizes that all the women of her tribe have been lured, by their male counterparts, into believing that by mutilating their bodies they are fighting back European colonialism, when, in fact, it is their own “subject-deprivation”<sup>279</sup> they are perpetuating.

In closing, if to some readers and critics such as Olakunle George, Alice Walker’s moral position towards the practice of female genital mutilation seems to emanate from a Western-centered imperialist vision, this position is made more complex by a nuanced reading of both the novel and its creator’s intentions. As to the reading of the novel, it should be attentive to the different consciousnesses and social forces which shaped Tashi’s consciousness and conditioned her into believing, at a given moment in her life, that excision is the best means to affirm her cultural identity and to be accepted by her community. In the novel, when Tashi explains her fears as to her state of being uncircumcised, her discourse makes this conditioning or socialization palpable:

...From prison Our Leader said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial — by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies. Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they’d soon touch her thighs; she’d become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way...Everyone believed it, even though no one had ever seen it. No one living in our village anyway. And yet the elders, particularly, acted as if everyone had witnessed this evil... (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 121)

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<sup>278</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>279</sup> Chakravorty Gayatri, Spivak. Op. cit., p. 299.



Concerning the reading of the author's intentions, this latter should be heedful of the author's background. In Alice Walker's case, this background proved to be, sometimes, quite brutal. Her childhood mutilation provides a telling example of this brutality.

Accordingly, only a personalized analysis, attentive to the immediate as well as the wider circumstances, which silenced Tashi in particular, can illuminate her position as neither an archetypal victim nor a sovereign agent. Indeed, this analysis reveals that Tashi is a doubly-oppressed tribal African woman subaltern, taken hostage by two kinds of patriarchies, a native one and a colonial one, but whose refusal of her tribe's masculinist ethnography — and the aura of the forbidden surrounding it — is voiced at the end. This is indicative of Alice Walker's perception of oppression, or subalternity, as a reversible state. It is also revelatory of her conviction that silence can/should be broken.

#### **4.2. Effects of Tashi's Face to Face with the Forbidden**

Such a personalized analysis can also be applied on Alice Walker's own life and own subalternity. Indeed, Alice Walker has been a subaltern herself. She was born in the American South during the forties. She was part of an agrarian family of subalterns oppressed by the white master's racism. When she was visually mutilated by one of her brothers, she became aware of the depth of the impact of racism on her family. Indeed, she faced the same indifference Tashi faced when her sister was murdered.

Many critics cannot help establishing a parallel between the novel's heroine and Alice Walker. Olakunle George maintains that "...the protagonist of the novel is as much Alice Walker as it is Tashi, and...the quest for wholeness explored in the novel is at once Tashi's and that of her creator."<sup>280</sup> Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff also remark that the theme of blindness is an autobiographical element in Alice Walker's writing. They state that in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker "...magnifies the significance of the eye image by injecting into her metaphor of sight and damage the psychological and sexual blinding of women and girls in Africa and throughout the world."<sup>281</sup>

Similarly to her creator, Tashi's childhood is marked by a trauma. This trauma is due to her sister's murder by a circumciser who mutilated her genitally. According to Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff, the Olinkan community's abandonment of Tashi with only lies as a source of consolation, in addition to their sacralization of the practice of female genital mutilation brought on her psychological blindness. It was so taboo for them to denounce the destructiveness of female genital mutilation that Dura's death was completely ignored and Tashi's pain dangerously repressed. From what happened to her sister, Geneva Cobb Moore states that Tashi "...retains only a phobia of blood."<sup>282</sup> But, the fact that the Olinkan villagers are themselves unable to face the truth means that they are themselves psychologically blind.

Later on in the novel and years after her sister hemorrhaged to death, in front of an ever-expanding colonial power which was threatening to wipe the Olinkan presence

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<sup>280</sup> Olakunle, George. Op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>281</sup> Nagueyalti, Warren and Sally, Wolff. Op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>282</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. "Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (2000), p. 114.

off the face of the earth, Tashi's desire to repel the colonial menace and to manifest her resistance to it led her to the startling decision to be excised. However, she did not know that by fighting back colonial oppression through her own excision she was only undergoing and perpetuating her tribe's patriarchal oppression of women like her. Tashi's ignorance of this simple implication is imputable to her psychological blindness — due in its turn to her socialization by a community which lapsed into patriarchy to fend off the invader.<sup>283</sup>

Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff remark that Tashi's's psychological blindness and her inability to foresee the outcome of her actions paves the way to her sexual blindness. According to them, that blindness "...permanently dissolves the bond with Adam, her former lover, now husband. The excision almost completely precludes sexual relations with Adam."<sup>284</sup> Tashi remembers that "each time he touched [her she] bled... There was nothing he could do to [her] that did not hurt" (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 60).

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker endows her metaphor of sight and damage with new dimensions to account for the psychological and sexual blinding of women and girls in Africa and around the world who are mutilated in the name of tradition. In this novel, the silence and lies which have been used to conceal the truth — namely, the disastrous effects an excision can bring about — in order to keep safe the Olinkan community's identity contributed towards the legitimization of this practice, even in the blinded eyes of one of its victims: Tashi. Her psychological

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<sup>283</sup> Foreign invasion led the Olinkan colonized people to consider some rituals, even if they were the tools of a patriarchal logic, as the safeguards of their identity which they were afraid to lose under the colonial influence.

<sup>284</sup> Warren, Nagueyalti and Wolff, Sally. Op. cit., p. 12.

blindness to the harm of female genital mutilation or, in simpler terms, her perception of the practice as the safeguard of her cultural identity led her to voluntarily undergo the ritual and to become sexually blinded.

Tashi's psychological blindness, however, does not constitute, in the novel, an irreversible fatality. As already mentioned in the introduction, in Alice Walker's works there is always room for hope. Alice Hall Petry maintains, "[f]or Walker...opposition [to society's forbidden truths] is not necessarily insurmountable..."<sup>285</sup> There is a possibility of reversibility especially as far as Tashi's psychological blindness is concerned. As to her sexual blindness, it seems to be beyond retrieval. Indeed, after her operation, Tashi's state gets even worse because she now lost fragments of herself she won't ever get back. She realizes that she will never again enjoy her physical well-being, her grace and the sexual complicity she used to have with Adam, her childhood friend and husband. But, since in Alice Walker's works there is always room for hope, there is a possibility of reversibility as far as Tashi's psychological blindness is concerned. According to Geneva Cobb Moore, Tashi's psychological blindness is healed thanks to an unconscious process interspersed with different stages leading to wholeness.

#### **43. Tashi's Move from Psychological Blindness to Wholeness**

In her analysis of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Geneva Cobb Moore proposes a Jungian approach as a possible way to analyze Tashi's painful confrontation with the forbidden and ensuing attainment of the above-mentioned wholeness.

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<sup>285</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" (1989), p. 13.

In an attempt to trace a possible link between the Jungian approach she is proposing and Alice Walker, Geneva Cobb Moore states that “*Possessing the Secret of Joy* is most clearly Jungian, for even in the afterword of the book, Walker acknowledges reading Carl Jung in her own ‘self-therapy.’”<sup>286</sup> Indeed, Carl Jung played an important role in Alice Walker’s personal healing and she seems to make him do the same for Tashi, by incorporating him in the novel as a character.

Even though it is not certain whether Alice Walker applied Jungian psychology on her protagonist’s journey to wholeness intentionally, Geneva Cobb Moore ascertains that “[Alice Walker’s] reliance on Jungian archetypes is obvious throughout the novel.”<sup>287</sup>

In her analysis of Tashi’s journey to wholeness, Geneva Cobb Moore transposes the Jungian pattern of psychic growth to that journey. She observes that a focus on Tashi’s narratives in particular can bring up “...the archetypal symbolism and the Jungian patterns of the individuation process.”<sup>288</sup> This “archetypal symbolism”, or what Geneva Cobb Moore also refers to as “the Jungian patterns of the individuation process”, or what can even be called Jung’s archetypal model of psychic growth seems to discreetly waymark Tashi’s progression without altering its Walkerian conception — without even changing the analytic orientation of the current research. It heightens the itinerant quality of the forbidden’s motion in Tashi’s psyche. It gives the impression that the forbidden appears through a series of ever-amplifying (archetypal) pictures or identities, produced by Tashi’s collective unconscious. In other words, it is

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<sup>286</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

revelatory of the different successive facets the forbidden takes in the novel — and more particularly in Tashi's psyche.

According to Geneva Cobb Moore, Tashi's constitution of her first archetypal symbol, known as the mask and referred to by Carl Jung as the persona, starts with the first trauma of her life, when her older sister, Dura, dies after a failed excision.

They were always saying *You mustn't cry!*

These are new people coming to live among us, and to meet them in tears is to bring bad luck to us. They'll think we beat you! Yes, we understand your sister is dead, but...time now to put on a [mask]<sup>289</sup> and make the foreigners welcome...

How could I believe these were the same women I'd known all my life? The same women who'd known Dura? And whom Dura had known? She'd gone to buy matches or snuff for them nearly everyday. She'd carried their water jugs on her head.

It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister. Or to cry for her. (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 15)

In this passage, Tashi is stealing a backward glance at her childhood's remote souvenirs. Her description of adult Olinkans' reactions, as to what happened to her sister, gives insights into how Tashi was caught in the spiral of her mask and, by extension, of her individuation process. It is clear in this passage that adult Olinkans prevented Tashi from manifesting any signs of grief as to the death of her sister, because it would reveal the deadliness of excision — and that was extremely taboo or forbidden for the Olinka. It is in this way that Tashi starts to harden and transforms into a false-pride-ridden Tashi, blindly believing in the righteousness of her tribal lore.

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<sup>289</sup> Square brackets and the word inside are mine.

In other words, it is in this way that Tashi begins to wear the mask her proud and flawless ego generously obtained for her.

Even though Tashi witnessed Dura's bloody demise, the silence with which her tribe faced this tragic event and their withdrawal from her with only lies as a source of consolation, blinds her to the destructiveness of excision. Geneva Cobb Moore remarks that "...the false pride of African tribalism..." completely deafened her to her "...unique inner voice..."<sup>290</sup> Concerning this, Marie Louise Von Franz<sup>291</sup> maintains that "[h]ow far [the Self or that unique inner voice] develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of [that] Self."<sup>292</sup> At this stage of the story, namely right after her sister's murder, Tashi is very far from being ready to listen to these precious messages. Her ego is in a state of denial, or in what Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff refer to as a state of psychological blindness — the symptom of the mask. This state leads her to repress all memories related to her sister in her personal unconscious and to submit herself to the ritual of excision. Geneva Cobb Moore maintains that when Olivia, her childhood friend, tries to persuade her not to undergo genital mutilation, "[w]ith an inflated ego, she informs [her], 'All I care about now is the struggle for our people... You are black, but you are not like us. We look at you and your people with pity [for] you barely [possess] your own black skin.'"<sup>293</sup> With the benefit of some hindsight and years after she underwent the ritual of excision, Tashi admits that at that particular moment<sup>294</sup> she had a rather distorted vision of herself. She maintains that "[she] had in [her] mind some outlandish, outsized image

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<sup>290</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>291</sup> One of Jung's followers.

<sup>292</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. "The Process of Individuation" in *Man and His Symbols* (1964), p. 163.

<sup>293</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>294</sup> Namely, in the feverish midst of her ego's fit of delirium.

of [herself]...” (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 22). She carries on her description of this facet of her collective unconscious by saying:

I sat astride the donkey in the pose of a chief, warrior. We who had once owned our village and hectares and hectares of land now owned nothing. We were reduced to the position of beggar — except that there was no one near enough to beg from, in the desert we were in. (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, P. 22)

Quite revelatory of the deep anger lying at the root of Tashi’s mask is this second passage. Here, the anger Tashi is expressing is not the one characterizing the archetypal phase coming after the mask. It is a counterfeited anger Tashi was conditioned into feeling and expressing, by scarring her face and mutilating her body. Admittedly, at one moment of Tashi’s individuation process, her counterfeited anger reinforces her persona even more than did the Olinka adults’ lies to her. Nevertheless, the onward overpowering movement of the individuation process soon turns this anger against Tashi, by abandoning her to the fate the tenebrae of her shadow have kept for her. On the other hand, before this happens, a kind of psychic bufferzone seizes Tashi’s consciousness after the fever, of the persona, melts away. It is the calm before the storm. During the period when Tashi is treated by doctor Carl she seems to be in a kind of psychic slack period, or what is above-referred to as a psychic bufferzone. During this period, Tashi is not yet displaying the rather mad and uncontrollable reactions specific to the shadow. However, at this moment of her individuation process Tashi does not look as a masked woman either. So, she is in a midway psychic position, between two steps of the individuation process — between the archetypes of the mask and the shadow. The intervention of this psychic bufferzone momentarily prevents the meeting between the mask and the shadow, two different psychic contacts



with the forbidden. It is not certain whether it is Tashi who has chosen to pause her inner journey. For lack of certainty, it can be imagined that Tashi's unconscious fear of confronting her shadow, the psychic personification of what is most scarring especially of the devastations caused by the forbidden, is at the origin of this temporary standstill of the individuation process.

What is particular about the archetype of the mask is that it comes into existence in the individual's eyes only when s/he throws it off and, on leaving, this mask instills in one a bitter sense of betrayal by one's own psyche and by the external socio-political conditioning of it. Geneva Cobb Moore observes that Tashi is forced to see the falseness of her masked self as "...completely woman[,] completely African[,] completely Olinka" (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 64), only when she gives it up with the help of two therapists, Carl Jung and Raye. After abandoning the identity of the mask and after the limits of the psychic bufferzone are attained, Tashi goes through what Carl Jung calls the "narrow door"<sup>295</sup> of the collective unconscious — an image redolent of Alice's access to wonderland<sup>296</sup> after her spiral-like fall/plunge into "the deep well".<sup>297</sup>

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, it seems easily imaginable that the archetype of the mask represents one<sup>298</sup> phase of the confrontation with the forbidden when this latter is at its strongest. In Tashi's case, if the forbidden is scrutinized through the lens

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<sup>295</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" in *The Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung* (1966), p.20.

<sup>296</sup> In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

<sup>297</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. Op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>298</sup> More precisely, the first phase.

of her “inflated ego”<sup>299</sup> or persona, it seems to be in quite a victorious position. The forbidden’s momentary triumph here is ascribable to Tashi’s temporary psychic anesthesia.<sup>300</sup> At this stage, Tashi’s psychic ascension is in a standstill. Tashi seems to be locked up inside the mask. As Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff affirm in their analysis, this is apparent in her psychological blindness — to the destructiveness of female genital mutilation and her glorification of it at one moment of her life.

Even if the inner journey, or the individuation process, should be an in-motion psychic operation, a psychic block seems to be required at the beginning. It can be supposed that this block is the result of the ego’s stubbornness, due to the desire to preserve a certain psychic security.

After the mask, the second archetype indicated by Geneva Cobb Moore, in her appropriation of Jungian archetypal symbolism, is known as the shadow. According to Carl Jung, leaving the safety of the mask is indicative of the journeyer’s helplessness. He maintains that:

[i]n the end one has to admit that there are problems which one simply cannot solve on one’s own resources. Such an admission has the advantage of being honest, truthful, and in accord with reality, and this prepares the ground for a compensatory reaction from the collective unconscious: you are now more inclined to give heed to a helpful idea or intuition...Perhaps you will pay attention to the dreams that visit you at such moments...If you have an attitude of this kind, then the helpful powers slumbering in the deeper strata of man’s nature can come awake and intervene, for helplessness and weakness are the eternal experience and the eternal problem of mankind. To this problem there is also an eternal answer, otherwise it would have been all up with humanity long ago...

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<sup>299</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>300</sup> To be differentiated from the psychic bufferzone.

The necessary and needful reaction from the collective unconscious expresses itself in archetypally formed ideas. The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow [, the second archetypally formed idea after the mask].<sup>301</sup>

Marie Louise Von Franz states that the process of individuation "...first offers a series of painful realizations of what is wrong with oneself and one's conscious attitudes [,]"<sup>302</sup> in other words, with one's shadow. The shadow brings on the real chink in Tashi's psychic armor.

Von Franz mentions that the shadow "...personifies poisonous judgments and negative thoughts that have been held back. So, whatever form it takes, the function of the shadow is to represent the opposite side of the ego and to embody just those qualities that one dislikes most in other people."<sup>303</sup>

As indicated in the approach, on Tashi's journey to wholeness the shadow phase can be considered as the culminating point of her confrontation with the forbidden. It is the most intense and most violent moment in Tashi's inner journey. Indeed, as soon as she is able to perceive the falseness of her masked self, or ego, it is too late. This masked self, or what Geneva Cobb Moore refers to as Tashi's "inflated ego"<sup>304</sup> has already led her to incline her head to the forbidden and to undergo genital mutilation. After this, as Von Franz observes, the only thing that remains to do "... is to turn directly toward the approaching darkness without prejudice and totally naively, and to try and find out what its secret aim is and what it wants from you."<sup>305</sup> This is what Tashi does. She confronts her shadow and rides the storm of her collective

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<sup>301</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. Op. cit., p.21.

<sup>302</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p.182.

<sup>304</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>305</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 170.

unconscious. Similarly to the panther she is describing at the beginning of the novel, she decides to be no more helpless and “...lean[s] over and kisse[s] her own serene reflection in the water, and [holds] the kiss all the way to the bottom of the stream.”

(*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 05). Carl Jung remarks that:

[t]rue, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the *persona*, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.<sup>306</sup>

Within the dimension of her shadow, Tashi confronts the fact that it is her and her community's “cultural arrogance” which are at the origin of “...the pain inflicted on women...”<sup>307</sup> in her tribe. Of course, Tashi's realization of all these bitter truths, or confrontation with her shadow, does not take place without damages. Geneva Cobb Moore remarks that the “[t]he victims of [Tashi's] shadowy self are Benny, her son, and Pierre, Adam's son by Lisette.”<sup>308</sup> Geneva Cobb Moore gives two examples of Tashi's shadowy behaviour. She mentions, for example how “[Tashi] ‘frequently and with little cause, no cause, boxed Benny's ears,’ making him ‘squeal and cringe’; and she hurls stones at Pierre when he comes to visit Adam, while the ‘cabby ran up to Pierre, grabbed him under the arms and dragged him out of sight.’”<sup>309</sup> Of course, the psychic workings responsible for the violent eruption of Tashi's pent-up shadow were already operative before this eruption takes place. Prior to transforming into workings regulating Tashi's different psychic facets and the moments when these facets were supposed to intervene in her consciousness and life, they were what has already been

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<sup>306</sup> Car Gustav, Jung. Op. cit., p.20.

<sup>307</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>309</sup> Alice, Walker. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), pp. 144-45 in Geneva Cobb Moore's “Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (2000), p. 117.

referred to in this chapter as prior and ongoing textualizations of reality. Among the ongoing textualizations, there were traumatic or very disturbing events in Tashi's life. These traumatic or disturbing events were naturally the product of other consciousnesses surrounding Tashi and affecting her. The principal traumatic event Tashi dangerously held back was without doubt the murder of her sister. Dura's mutilated, traumatized and murdered consciousness had a disastrous impact on Tashi's. Besides this major trauma, other minor traumas<sup>310</sup> happened to Tashi and made her prey to an ineluctable meeting with her shadow. Her own facial and genital mutilation, the harmful colonial interference with the Olinka identity and Adam's affair with Lisette and the child they had together. The constellation of these different events/consciousnesses resulted in an ever-strengthening of Tashi's shadow. There is even a moment in the novel's space-time when Alice Walker makes the shadow eclipse Tashi, not only psychically but also physically:

It was during a period when I could not eat and was emaciated as a scarecrow; my clothes hung on me, and I wore nothing that wasn't black. The week before, someone introduced to me by Adam said, with a snigger: 'Ah, Adam and Evelyn. How cute!'

And I slapped him. (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 144)

After the flames of the shadow phase subside, Geneva Cobb Moore describes a Tashi ready to go through the third stage of Jung's archetypal symbolism. This stage is identified with the anima/animus archetype. However, before Tashi encounters her animus, she goes through another psychic bufferzone. As already mentioned, whenever Tashi comes out from an experience of one archetype, a kind of standstill is required before another archetypal encounter with the forbidden takes place. After she hurls stones at Pierre, she meets him again and lets him help her interpret her obsessive

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<sup>310</sup> Resulting from Tashi's contact with other consciousnesses, besides Dura's.

dream of the dark tower. Admittedly, she is under the effect of "...a new, mild and quite pleasant drug." (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 174) On the other hand, she emits a remark clearly indicative of the change that happened in her after the crisis of the shadow — a change at which she is astonished herself. She intimates that "I have not grasped the meaning of the passage, which Pierre has read to me so earnestly; nor do I completely comprehend how it is he is sitting in my living room reading to me from this strange book. Have I stopped hating him?" (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 174).

In a rather poetic vein and seeming to provide a sequel to what he mentioned about the shadow, concerning the anima/animus archetype, Carl Jung notes that:

[w]hoever looks into the water sees his own image, but behind it living creatures soon loom up; fishes, presumably, harmless dwellers of the deep-harmless, if only the lake were not haunted. They are water-beings of a peculiar sort. Sometimes a nixie gets into the fisherman's net, a female, half-human fish...

The nixie is an even more instinctive version of a magical feminine being whom I call the *anima*. She can also be a siren, melusina...wood-nymph, Grace, or Erlking's daughter, or a lamia or succubus, who infatuates young men and sucks the life out of them.<sup>311</sup>

In this passage, even though Carl Jung is speaking about man's meeting with his Other, the general idea implied here can also be applied on the woman's experience of her animus.

Right after the terrifying and painful experience of the "mirror", there seems to be still room for another type of confrontation in the world of the collective unconscious — of "the deep-harmless". Tashi's archaic psychic instinct leads her to feel her way through the psychic fog of her consciousness, in quest of another

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<sup>311</sup> Car Gustav. Jung. Op. cit., pp. 24-5.

archetypal handling of the forbidden — a handling made possible this time through the anima/animus.

Marie Louise Von Franz states that “[o]ften this...symbolic figure [that is the anima/animus] turns behind the shadow, bringing up new and different problems.” She mentions that “[t]he anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in man’s psyche, such as vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and — last but not least — his relation to the unconscious.”<sup>312</sup> Carl Jung maintains that “[i]f the encounter with the shadow is the ‘apprentice-piece’ in the individual’s development, then that with the anima is the ‘master-piece.’ The relation with the anima is again a test of courage, an ordeal by fire for the spiritual and moral forces of man.”<sup>313</sup> The anima/the animus is more testing than the shadow, because it revives the pain of what defeats (wo)men within the confines of their own psyche. In Tashi’s case, this phase is a real ordeal for it awakens in her the pain of what the forbidden had done to her, namely the loss of her courage and risk-taking spirit. After the revelations provided by the archetype of the shadow, Tashi realizes that she had been lied to all the time by the people she trusted the most, especially the Leader. She realizes that the man she used to admire as a semi-god, to consider as “the man who says the right things [, as] the fellow...no matter what he is”,<sup>314</sup> upon whom she even projected her animus, namely all that is deeply her, is just one of the tools of Olinka patriarchy. Concerning the Leader, Tashi holds that:

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<sup>312</sup>Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 186. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>313</sup> Car Gustav, Jung. Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>314</sup> “Animus/Anima archetypes in Jungian psychology”, excerpt from “A World of Dreams”, a three-part series of films produced by PBS, on the life and works of the great thinker and psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, accessed on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN47s0mPfRU&feature=related>.

[I]like every Olinka maiden...I was in love with the perfect lover who already had three wives. The perfect lover and father and brother who had been so cruelly taken from us, but whose laughing eyes we saw in the photograph he'd left us, and whose sweetly tempting voice we heard on cassette in the night. Poor Adam! He couldn't hold a candle to Our Leader, the real — to us — Jesus Christ. (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, p. 123)

Jung remarks that “[w]e should never forget that in dealing with the anima [or animus]<sup>315</sup> we are dealing with psychic facts which have never been in [(wo)]man’s possession before, since they were always found ‘outside’ [her/]his psychic territory, so to speak, in the form of projections.”<sup>316</sup> These projections, like the one Tashi performs upon the Leader, are a psychic mechanism (wo)men perform when they are unable to come to terms with a psychic function that eludes them, due to a misleading socialization. This is what happened to Tashi, she has been socialized by way of lies, of fear of the forbidden and submission to male enforced superiority to the point that her psyche rejected, in a way, her so-called masculine qualities through projection. However, with the shadow’s intervention in her psyche Tashi discovers what underlies her projection and even unmask the object of this projection. Ultimately as Marie Louise Von Franz ascertained about men’s coming to terms with the anima, instead of projecting what is her own “inner power”<sup>317</sup>, she has to listen to her inner voice<sup>318</sup> and “...to develop and to bring [her] *own* being to maturity by integrating more of [her] unconscious personality and bringing it into [her] real life.”<sup>319</sup>

In Geneva Cobb Moore’s analysis, it seems that the archetype of the anima/animus is responsible for the killing of the novel’s circumciser, M’Lissa. After

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<sup>315</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>316</sup> Carl Gustav, Jung. “Op. cit., p. 29. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>317</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>318</sup> Or what Von Franz calls in the original passage the unconscious.

<sup>319</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. Op. cit., p. 191.



going through the shadow phase, Tashi translates the anger she experienced during this phase into action, in the animus stage of her development. For Geneva Cobb Moore, the reader of Tashi's story cannot remain oblivious to Alice Walker's ironical handling of this archetype. Indeed, Tashi's animus represents her masculine side, or the side to which Jung and his followers attributed a masculine identity, yet it is this side of Tashi's personality that is responsible for M'Lissa's murder and, by extension, for the patriarchal order. Geneva Cobb Moore maintains that "Tashi has, in fact, the killer instinct of the mythological murderer of women, Bluebeard: she willfully kills the tsunga who has called herself and others like her 'torturers of children.'"<sup>320</sup> However, for Geneva Cobb Moore the irony resides in the fact that Bluebeard's legendary masculine killer instinct is used to "...avenge female suffering and to affirm female sexuality."<sup>321</sup> Yet, it is also sensible to observe that since it is an instinct which is considered as purely masculine, there is no feminist irony in the fact that the female protagonists' defeat of the patriarchal order in traditional Africa is carried out thanks to a force which is male-defined. Instead of seeming to be an irony, it rather appears to be a masculine condescending assistance manifesting itself in helpless women's collective unconscious. Indeed, an act as violent as that of killing is generally perceived as specific to men. This is especially the opinion of people who analyze life and human nature by using the lens of gender stereotypes. It would be unfair to consider that only men can be killers<sup>322</sup>, as it is equally unfair to think that women are

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<sup>320</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>322</sup> Of course, in the present research work there is no intention to make of killing a positive action, in the absolute, that would make women retrieve a more respectable status in society. Here, the act of killing is considered against a specific backdrop, where the "killer" is under the effect of a very painful history — a history which prevented her from evolving more or less normally in her life. So, the act of killing in the novel is given an intensely symbolic significance, rather than a purely sadistic one.

capable of no important actions at all. These are superficial generalizations that end in establishing an unjust social order in many societies, as it happened in Tashi's tribe.

As mentioned in chapter one of this research, more precisely in the approach, many intellectual figures, interested in helping women to become psychologically empowered, such as Naomi Goldenberg, Jane Wheelwright, Verena Kast, Susan Rowland, Robert Johnson or Demaris Wehr, disapproved of Carl Jung's theorization of duality. For Naomi Goldenberg, "[i]t is true that Jung genuinely values woman for her remarkable and all too often overlooked Eros [or anima], but it is equally true that he confines her to this sphere. Once she moves into a Logos [or animus] arena, she is not only at a great disadvantage but is behaving unnaturally as well."<sup>323</sup> For these thinkers, what is most deplorable in Carl Jung's view of duality, is the fact of considering women's rationality, logic, "...initiative, courage, objectivity and spiritual wisdom"<sup>324</sup> as the result of a masculine ventriloquism manipulating a dummy called the woman.

Naomi Goldenberg also argues that:

[t]he anima-animus model is clearly more beneficial to men than to women...For women, Jung's particular model militates against change in the social sphere. While men can keep control of all Logos activities and appropriate just whatever Eros they need as a kind of psychological hobby, women are by no means encouraged to develop Logos, since they are thought of as handicapped by nature in all Logos arenas. Thus, the anima-animus theory does not lead to the integration of the sexes but, rather, to more separatism.<sup>325</sup>

In an online interview, Demaris Wehr also affirmed that, "[she] think[s] it is a good idea to introduce some modifications into this archetypal image (anima/animus)..." She added that "...[b]asically...we have to take social factors into

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<sup>323</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg. "A Feminist Critique of Jung" (1976), p. 445.

<sup>324</sup> Marie Louise, Von Franz. *Op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>325</sup> Naomi, Goldenberg. *Op. cit.* (1976), p. 447.

consideration, social location, etc., and not just reify socially constructed roles.”<sup>326</sup> In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi is a fictionally-living example of how dangerous the psyche’s reification proves to be. She has not felt alive until on the eve of her physical death.

In addition to the fact that Jung’s vision of duality limits the woman to a stereotypical image, it freezes gender roles and reduces humanity’s potential for developing into a genuinely complementary and egalitarian civilization.

Thus, in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi’s violent defiance of the forbidden is the result of a risk-taking spirit and a steadfastness she already possessed as a little girl. It is patriarchy’s abrupt intrusion into her childhood, personified in the hands of the tribe’s circumciser and in the retrograde discourse of a sexist leader, which deprived her of her innate qualities.

As Louise Mina and Alison Sampson argue “[s]o much of what [is] within us (the ‘inner’) [has] its roots in the social world around us (the ‘outer’); more particularly in the social organization of women’s lives by a male-dominated society.”<sup>327</sup>

The fact that the animus<sup>328</sup> is less developed in women does not mean that it is not reflective of their true “inner”. It rather signifies that there should be a better and more egalitarian conditioning which would put an end to the prescription of gender roles.

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<sup>326</sup> Demaris Wehr is the author of *Carl Gustav Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (1989). Due to the impossibility of having the book, the interview was realized in June 2011.

<sup>327</sup> Louise, Mina and Alison, Sampson. “Feminist Psychotherapy: Challenging the Inner and the Outer” (1992), p. 49.

<sup>328</sup> Or what is normally the part of women that patriarchal socialization deprived them of

Throughout history, many feminists of renown have pointed to the dangers of ascribing predetermined roles to individuals, especially women — always confined to the spheres of wifedom and motherhood. Already in the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft for instance argued that the educational system of her time deliberately trained women to be incapable or logos-deficient. Indeed, she attributes the woman's

...barren blooming...to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men, who, considering females rather as women than human creatures have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses...and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtue extract respect.<sup>329</sup>

Another example of such feminists is also Simone de Beauvoir. Similarly to Mary Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir believes that it is the education received by the little girl that condemns her to be what she calls the inferior Other. Indeed, her statement that the woman is not born but becomes a woman is indicative, for her, of the fact that there is no natural weakness which forces the woman into what she calls immanence, or passivity and absence of any transcendence or action.

All these feminist views lead to one conclusion, namely Carl Jung's notion of duality, as he theorized it, only reinforces the perception of humanity through the lens of gender stereotypes.

Thanks to Alice Walker's deconstructivist spirit, a fictional reconciliation between Carl Jung's theorization of the human nature and the feminist vision is made possible through the character of Tashi. Alice Walker makes this subversion possible by way of presenting her female protagonist through a gradual portrayal. This means

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<sup>329</sup> Mary, Wollstonecraft. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), pp. 1-2.

that she does not depict one particular stage of Tashi's life and ascension towards wholeness. This is, initially, what encouraged the adoption of Carl Jung's archetypal symbolism to analyze this ascension.<sup>330</sup> Alice Walker describes different Tashis and each Tashi corresponds to a given phase. This explains Tashi's shifting names throughout the progression of the novel. From this developmental account of Tashi's inner journey, more specifically from the stage corresponding to her childhood, it can be observed and deduced that what is considered by Jungians as women's animus, or "...suppressed 'masculine' mental qualities..."<sup>331</sup> was inherent in Tashi, as a little girl. It is her subsequent patriarchal socialization, which started with the first trauma or wounding of her personality, that took those qualities away from her. The following stages delineated by Alice Walker lead to this observation.

In their analysis, Lynn Pifer and Tricia Slusser<sup>332</sup> consider what Jungians term duality as rather a fragmentation. It is considered as a fragmentation especially when the qualities each side of the duality is said to contain are deemed as the possession of one sex or the other. They observe that because her community hid from her the real circumstances of her sister's death, which represents the wounding already referred to, Tashi became completely fragmented. Lynn Pifer and Tricia Slusser indicate that even though Tashi's body, at that moment, was not yet damaged, this does not prevent her psychological fragmentation from happening. They observe that one of the fragments Tashi loses is her risk-taking spirit — a trait generally considered as exclusive to men.

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<sup>330</sup> Initially, it was Alice Walker's recognition of Carl Jung's positive impact on her own self-therapy and his presence in her novel about female genital mutilation as a character that constituted a source of encouragement. Later on, added to the above-mentioned criteria, the sequential aspect of Carl Jung's pattern of psychic growth also led to the adoption of a Jungian approach for analyzing a woman's fictional inner journey which is equally of a chronological aspect.

<sup>331</sup> Barbara, Chesser. "Comment on Naomi Goldenberg's 'A Feminist Critique of Jung'" (1978), p. 723.

<sup>332</sup> In their article entitled "'Looking at the Back of Your Head': Mirroring Scenes in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (1998).

If Tashi received the “appropriate” socialization — one based on equality between the sexes and the consideration of women as human beings — her fragmentation could have been avoided. This could have happened if only the Olinka adults, like Tashi’s mother, had explained to her what really happened to her sister and who were the people to blame. This could have allowed her to express her anger. Instead of this and because of her patriarchal conditioning, she internalized this anger. This repressed anger produced in her feelings of guilt and self-hatred, because she was still alive. Because her sister died, she felt she did not deserve to live anymore, especially when she realized that her mother spared her the terrible fate Dura was forced to go through. These negative feelings were exacerbated by the fact that she herself was not circumcised. Indeed, her mother refused to circumcise her out of fear of losing another one of her daughters. Resulting from this was her continual denigration by the other Olikan girls who were circumcised and who survived.

So Tashi’s progressive confrontation with the forbidden reveals that duality exists, admittedly, but not as Jung and Jungians posited it. There is no facet of this duality that necessarily relates to men, while the other concerns women only. The anima is not exclusive to women and the animus is not inherent only in men. All kinds of qualities are present in all kinds of individuals and each individual is capable of either the best or the worst.

After going through these different archetypes, Geneva Cobb Moore finally refers to Tashi’s attainment of the Self, the last archetype. She observes that:

Tashi achieves the Self, Jung’s union of opposites par excellence, at the end of the book after she has reconciled the personal and collective unconscious contents of the Self and her relationships with others, particularly Pierre and Lisette. Most notably, Tashi has accepted the

truth of her experiences as opposed to the lies of the social order. Resistance to the lies of female suffering [and to society's forbidden truths] brings her the secret of joy.<sup>333</sup>

The confrontation with the forbidden, in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, seems to end with the female protagonist's triumph over this so sacralized component of the folkways. In this work, Alice Walker is sparing her readers no detail about the operation of female genital mutilation, how it is practiced and its psychological and physical destructiveness. However, despite the oppressiveness of this book, the fact that Alice Walker's main aim behind writing about such a heavy subject is to open the world's eyes to women's oppression everywhere to achieve their global liberation makes the reading tolerable. It is the sensing of this undercurrent of hope Alice Hall Petry referred to that seems to counterbalance the oppressiveness of the subject and makes the literary confrontation with the forbidden bearable. For Alice Walker, as far as resistance is employed as a weapon, there will always be room for positive change and this makes of Alice Walker a rescuer and of her art a kind of redemption.

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<sup>333</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 121.

**CHAPTER IV: ALICE WALKER'S FORBIDDEN TRUTHS IN *IN LOVE AND  
TROUBLE: STORIES OF BLACK WOMEN AND YOU CAN'T  
KEEP A GOOD WOMAN DOWN: STORIES BY ALICE  
WALKER***



#### 4.1. *In Love and Trouble*:

##### **“Roselily,” “‘Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?’” and the Degenerating Power of Wifehood and Motherhood When Confused with Personhood**

*In Love and Trouble* is Alice Walker’s first collection of short stories. Similarly to what she achieved in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, in this collection she seems to be dealing with all that disturbs. In simpler terms, this collection can be considered as another illustration of Alice Walker’s literary audacity.

A simple attention to the meanings of the epigraphs reveals the spirit of this collection as one marked by the troubles resulting from the female protagonists’ conflicts with the South’s conventions and forbidden truths. Barbara Christian mentions that the two epigraphs whereby *In Love and Trouble* is introduced seem, at first sight, to be completely “...unrelated excerpts.”<sup>334</sup> She notes that one is from *The Concubine*<sup>335</sup> by the contemporary West African writer, Elechi Amadi. The other, Barbara Christian remarks, is from *Letters to a Young Poet* by the early twentieth-century German poet Rainer Maria Rilke. In the first epigraph, Elechi Amadi accounts for the story of a girl, known as Ahurole, who is the victim of a “...frequent unprovoked sobbing...” and “...alarmingly irrational lines of argument...” Of course, “[f]rom all this her parents easily guessed that she was being unduly influenced by

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<sup>334</sup> Barbara, Christian. “The Contrary Women of Alice Walker: A Study of Female Protagonists in *In Love and Trouble*” (1980), in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 32.

<sup>335</sup> Amadi’s novel is consulted in the present research as a secondary source. It is referred to by both Barbara Christian in her article, above-mentioned in the previous footnote, or by Alice Walker herself in *In Love and Trouble*.

agwu, her personal spirit.” It is only at the end of the extract that Amadi mentions casually that “Ahurole was engaged to Ekweme when she was eight days old.”<sup>336</sup>

Alice Hall Petry observes that an immersion into the collection’s different narratives only reinforces the conviction that Amadi’s excerpt is “...a most suitable epigraph [because] the women in this early volume truly are ‘in love and trouble’ due in large measure to the roles, relationships, and self-images imposed upon them by a society which knows little and cares less about them as individuals.” She also mentions that “[a] marriage arranged in infancy, perfectly embodies this situation.”<sup>337</sup> Indeed, in Amadi’s excerpt, Ahurole’s entourage is heedless of her own desires. This is clear in the fact that they engaged her to Ekweme when she was only eight days old. Growing up amidst people insensitive to one’s out-of-conventions’ lock ambitions can lead one to crises such as those of Ahurole.

As to Maria Rilke’s excerpt, Barbara Christian states that in this latter the author “...beautifully summarizes a view of the living, setting up a dichotomy between the natural and the social order.”<sup>338</sup> Rilke’s passage runs as follows:

[p]eople have, with the help of conventions, oriented all their solutions towards the easy and the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must hold to what is difficult; everything in nature grows and defends itself in its own way, and is characteristically and spontaneously itself; seeks at all costs to be so against all opposition.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Elechi, Amadi. *The Concubine in In Love and Trouble* (1973), the epigraph.

<sup>337</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. “Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction,” (1989), p. 13.

<sup>338</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>339</sup> Rainer Maria, Rilke. *Letters to a Young Poet in In Love and Trouble* (1973), the epigraph.

Barbara Christian maintains that “[t]hrough act, word, or dream, [the female protagonists]<sup>340</sup> seek to be ‘characteristically and spontaneously’ themselves.” She holds that “[i]n order to defend the selves they know they are...”<sup>341</sup> and with the end of attaining the state of fulfillment any individual aspires to, they “must hold to what is difficult[,]”<sup>342</sup> namely, be themselves regardless of any conventions or forbidden truths.

However, as Rilke points out in her excerpt, women must accept that this kind of devotion to one’s real self and defiance of the forbidden can cost a woman to be perpetually torn between internal pressures urging her to be true to herself and external pressures exhorting her to acquiesce in society’s demands. In case she resists these external pressures and struggles against society’s restraints, she runs the risk of being diagnosed as either mentally ill or as haunted by a troublesome agwu.

In *In Love and Trouble*, more specifically in “Roselily” and “Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?”, the woman accused of being inhabited by a troublesome agwu is a southern black woman. Barbara Christian observes that “[t]he words, southern black woman, as if they were a sort of verbal enchantment, evoke clusters of contradictory myths, images, stories, meanings, according to different points of view.”<sup>343</sup> In her analysis, Barbara Christian mentions the different points of view of the white man, the white woman and the black man. To each of them, this combination of words connotes a given perception. But according to Barbara Christian, the perception or point of view given most importance in *In Love and Trouble*, more specifically in “Roselily” and

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<sup>340</sup> Square brackets are mine.

<sup>341</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>342</sup> Rainer Maria, Rilke. Op. cit., the epigraph.

<sup>343</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 33.

“Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?”, is that of the southern black woman herself. She states that “[f]ocal to Walker’s presentation is the point of view of individual black southern girls or women...”<sup>344</sup> Such first-hand presentation and the reliance on the vantage point of these southern black women’s experiences represent the first analytical facet of the womanist approach relied on in this chapter.

When Barbara Christian wonders and says “...what does being a southern black woman mean to her...”<sup>345</sup>, another formulation comes immediately to mind and translates as follows: how is the contest with the forbidden perceived by the black woman suffering from it in the American South? Interestingly, in their analysis of *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* Judith K. Taylor, Timothy Dow Adams, Mary A. Blackmon, Rebecca R. Butler, and Theodore C. Humphrey remark that Alice Walker is portraying “...all the political, sexual, racial, countercultural issues of the 1970’s...from what Walker calls the “womanist” point of view.”<sup>346</sup> This can also be considered to hold for the point of view used in *In Love and Trouble*. In other words, it is possible to name the protagonists’ point of view in the latter collection as a womanist one since it is expressed by women who do not conform to the stereotype of white Western womanhood. Nevertheless, in this collection the female protagonists are not yet as conscious of their womanist identity as is their creator<sup>347</sup>. They are just starting to display the traits of a womanist womanhood through questioning the legitimacy of their conventional roles as wives or mothers — such questioning is of course very forbidden. Similarly to the female protagonists of *You Can’t Keep A Good*

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<sup>344</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> The Editors of Salem Press. *American Ethnic Writers* (2000), p. 1077.

<sup>347</sup> Alice Walker.

*Woman Down*, those of *In Love and Trouble* are endowed by Alice Walker with what is above-called the womanist point of view. Yet, the fact that the protagonists of the former are more self-assertive than the women of the latter what seems to be urgent, concerning the female protagonists of *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, is the tracing of their progression to wholeness, not the retrieval of voices they already manifest with courage. In simpler terms, in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman down* there is no need for a technique to locate the female protagonists' voices. They are "champions"<sup>348</sup> and not as confused as Roselily or Myrna.

"Roselily" and "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" seem to offer two different versions of Alice Walker's use of the first person, or womanist, point of view and two different ways of studying the forbidden. Whereas in "Roselily" the protagonist expresses her point of view in her imagination only, in "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" the protagonist does not satisfy herself with only manifesting her point of view within her imagination. She translates it into the written words of her notebook — which are more palpable than Roselily's thoughts or imagination.

As to "Roselily", it is the opening short story of *In Love and Trouble*. Its title character is a poor black southern woman with three children. In the story, she is evolving against the backdrop of a black southern community which is "...poor, Christian [and] rural..."<sup>349</sup> In this community, conventions decree that she can no longer evolve within the confines of celibacy, but, as Barbara Christian maintains, "preferably within the confines of marriage..."<sup>350</sup> Her economic vulnerability, in

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<sup>348</sup> The Editors of Salem Press. Op. cit., p.1077.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.p. 35.

addition to society's pressure on her, lead her to conform to different conventions, by marrying a Black Muslim.

Barbara Christian states that because of her condition "...her wedding day, attended as it is by satin voile and lily of the valley, is from any number of viewpoints a day of triumph[,]"<sup>351</sup> but in the story, from Roselily's pent-up womanist point of view it does not seem so.

Alice Walker uses Roselily's imagination to make her protagonist's position, as to what is happening, known. Throughout the progression of this short story, which is given the form of a marriage ceremony, the protagonist's thoughts incessantly interrupt the words of the ceremony and reveal her real point of view. She feels there is "[s]omething strained upward behind her eyes. She thinks of the something as a rat trapped, cornered, scurrying to and fro in her head peering through the window of her eyes." (*In Love and Trouble*, p.8) The fact that the words of the ceremony inspire Roselily with a feeling of entrapment indicates her deep unease at the direction her life is taking.

Despite this unease, however, Roselily remains silent because she is too confused, she does not really know what she wants. She sees herself as almost a specter "dragging herself across the world." (*In Love and Trouble*, p.3) In other words, she feels divided between her deep urges and what society orders her to do. Barbara Christian maintains that this division is especially apparent in Alice Walker's use of

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<sup>351</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 34.

the pronoun “she” instead of the pronoun “I” to make her protagonist express her thoughts.<sup>352</sup>

In an attempt to escape from the conventions and poverty of the South, Roselily found herself entrapped by other conventions. These latter will only reproduce what the conventions of her South did to her, namely modeling her according to parameters dissonant with her own desires. Barbara Christian remarks that in “Roselily” “[t]radition is undergoing change, affecting the society’s definition of her role as a woman, intensifying the conflict within herself.”<sup>353</sup> The internal conflict intensifies, because whether under the dominance of the South’s conventions or of the conventions of Islam, Roselily “...is left with the same vision of confinement.”<sup>354</sup> Her agwu is even more troubled by this conventional shift, for she keeps on feeling hemmed in.

Even though in “Roselily” the protagonist’s agwu is never allowed to trespass on the actual world, she knows deep down that her new life and the new conventions she is about to accept do not represent, as Barbara Christian remarks, “...the attainment of her fulfillment.”<sup>355</sup>

In her analysis, Mary Donnelly refers to the first-person point of view, indicated by Barbara Christian, as stream of consciousness. In relation to this concept, J.A. Cuddon remarks that it is “[a] term coined by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the flow of inner experiences. Now an almost

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<sup>352</sup> Barbara, Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

indispensible term in literary criticism, it refers to that technique which seeks to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind.”<sup>356</sup> Donnelly observes that “[t]he spare short story “Roselily” is less plot-driven than many of Walker’s works: It [sic] is composed of a stream-of-consciousness response to the traditional marriage ceremony...”<sup>357</sup> As Donnelly notes, it is because the short story is the reflection of its title character’s confused inner thoughts that it seems to lack linearity. It is Roselily’s confusion and lack of discernment<sup>358</sup> that lend to the plot its fragmented and chaotic aspect. Yet, for Donnelly the above-mentioned stream of consciousness is conveyed by a third-person narrator. Indeed, she observes that the short story “...features a third-person narrator who shares with the reader the thoughts, reflections, and responses of the title character, a bride, during her wedding ceremony.”<sup>359</sup> In her analysis, Donnelly differentiates between the stream of consciousness and its vehicle, namely the narrator. On top of this, in her eyes the latter is of a third-person type. In relation to this, it seems to make sense to assume that in “Roselily” there is no demarcation between what Donnelly calls stream of consciousness and what Christian names the first person point of view. Besides, what Donnelly considers as the story’s third person narrator is Roselily’s point of view, or stream of consciousness. So, stream of consciousness, first or third person point of view are all terms reflective of what Roselily thinks. Yet, it is communicated in such a way that it seems not to belong to its generator, Roselily. Most important of all is that the puzzlement and evasiveness of Roselily’s testimony is provoked by her fear of

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<sup>356</sup> J.A., Cuddon. Op.cit., p. 866.

<sup>357</sup> Mary, Donnelly. *Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works* (2010), p. 121.

<sup>358</sup> Brought on by a patriarchal conditioning making her fear the forbidden.

<sup>359</sup> Mary, Donnelly. Op.cit., p. 121.



confronting the forbidden frontally. In the short story, the forbidden seems to stem from the untouchability of social stereotypes. If Roselily dared to directly face the almost sacredness of wifehood and motherhood, she would have to refuse to get married to a black muslim, because he does not really correspond to what she is expecting from a man. She would have, in the meantime, to work very hard to survive with her children — a work she is no more able to carry on. Lastly, she would have to daily confront (Southern) society's accusatory looks and vindictiveness.

Despite the universal character of Roselily's rather elusive, shrinking and even fearful testimony,<sup>360</sup> her womanist point of view is susceptible of indicating specificities only a womanist perception of her story can bring to light and pin down. Indeed, appropriating Roselily's womanist point of view reveals the multifacetedness of her identity and experience at the same time and demonstrates how the forbidden is handled by such an identity and experience. One of the specificities proper to Roselily's identity and which lends to her point of view a womanist quality is the colour of her skin. Roselily's blackness racializes<sup>361</sup> the gender issue accounted for in the short story. It racializes how Roselily is facing society's imposition of definite roles to her — roles that are in complete dissonance with what she yearns for deep down. Another specificity of importance is her geographical location, namely the American South — a place deeply marked by tense racial relationships. It is imaginable that confronting the forbidden against the backdrop of such an oppressive environment, especially when one is black, leads one to act in a very cautious and even

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<sup>360</sup> Such elusiveness and fear is a common denominator shared by all people, women or man.

<sup>361</sup> A term borrowed from Lewis, Reina and Mills Sarah who mention it in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (2003), p. 04.

fearful way. This is what Roselily does to the point of seeming absent in her own discourse. Moreover, she is a woman, uneducated, very poor, and divorced with children. Attention to all these particularities profile and affirm Roselily's womanist point of view. In other words, it emancipates one's reading of Roselily's confrontation with the forbidden from what Karla F.C. Holloway terms "the European center of ideology"<sup>362</sup> or "...the divisive dialectic about race, class, culture and gender."<sup>363</sup> It also seems to be restoring visibility to a particular history marked by a conflict with the forbidden and where the protagonist is generally part of the people already referred to, in this research, as oppressed subalterns<sup>364</sup>. Ania Loomba maintains that:

...gender and class should not be thought of as different elements, a multiplicity of narratives that we can choose between. Their full force is uncovered only by locating their articulation with each other and with other social forces [, like race, geographical location, and local folkways such as those of the American South.]<sup>365</sup>

Roselily's point of view, in all its womanist authenticity, seems to offer this articulation, which is very necessary. As Karla F.C. Holloway maintains, it avoids "shortchanging"<sup>366</sup> both the text and its language. In simpler terms, it avoids perceiving an experience of the forbidden from an analytical vantage point that is estranged to this experience. In line with the notion of experience and how it is vital to authenticate it, Elsa Barkley Brown mentions that:

...the exclusion of black women has meant that the concepts, perspectives, methods, pedagogies of women's history and women's studies have been developed without consideration of the experiences of black women. As a result, many of the recent explorations

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<sup>362</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (1992), p. 12.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., p. 05.

<sup>364</sup> On page 92.

<sup>365</sup> Ania, Loomba. Op. cit., p. 199. Square brackets are mine.

<sup>366</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. Op.cit., p. 05.

in black women's history have attempted to place black women inside feminist perspectives which, by design, have omitted their experiences...Because they have been created outside the experiences of black women, the definitions used in women's history and women's studies assume the separability of women's struggle and race struggle.<sup>367</sup>

Alice Hall Petry observes that a focus on Roselily's point of view, with all the "social forces" constituting it and the "...racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations..."<sup>368</sup> underlying it, reveals a universal truth: marriage and religion offer women nothing but troubles, especially when a man is imposed on a woman and not chosen by her. Especially also when a religion is not embraced out of a deep meditation, followed by an unwavering conviction. Yet, it is so taboo to recognize such a truth that many women are overwhelmed to the point of remaining silent and confused. Indeed, she mentions that "...marriage offers [women] nothing, and neither does religion, be it Christianity, the Black Muslim Faith or voodoo."<sup>369</sup> Women like Roselily, who still do not know what they want, are in a way temporarily defeated by their patriarchal societies and by their socialization. Most of the time, this patriarchal socialization encourages silence and the avoidance of questioning the legitimacy of any of patriarchy's pillars, such as the primary position of wifhood and motherhood in women's lives. However, as it is clearly suggested by Alice Walker's works, it depends on women themselves to overthrow the established order and to liberate themselves from it.

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<sup>367</sup> Elsa, Barkley Brown. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke" (1989), pp. 610-11.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 613.

<sup>369</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. Op. cit., p. 13.

In sum, in relation to the possibility for the forbidden to transform into the gateway to wholeness, Alice Walker's reliance on the womanist point of view opens up a multi-dimensional space where all the components of Roselily's consciousness are taken into account, in their harmonized articulation not in their "taxonomic"<sup>370</sup> representation. Layli Phillips observes that "[t]he goal of any taxonomic system is to establish discrete and nonoverlapping categories...Taxonomic systems rely on 'either/or' logic."<sup>371</sup> When she emitted this observation, Layli Phillips was referring to some white feminists'<sup>372</sup> vision of human rights movement in general. The same holds for the depiction of any human experience in a literary text. In other words, the same holds for Roselily's experience of the forbidden in the short story of the same name. If Roselily's experience is studied in a taxonomic style, this will result in what Shirley Anne Williams terms "...mis-apprehensions of particular texts or even of a whole tradition..."<sup>373</sup> As womanism is a "...harmonizing and coordinating project, not an isolating and separating project..."<sup>374</sup>, so is the womanist point of view a harmonizing and coordinating tool.

As to the protagonist of "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?", Myrna, she adopts another attitude even though she is similarly stifled by the South's folkways. She also seems to convey her womanist point of view differently.

After Alice Walker constructed *In Love and Trouble*'s opening short story under a form which is a replica of the convention — a marriage ceremony — Myrna's

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<sup>370</sup> Layli, Phillips. *The Womanist Reader* (2006), p. xxxii.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> She does not specify the definite names of such feminists.

<sup>373</sup> Layli, Phillips. Op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. xxxii.

story is presented under the form of a written notebook. At the beginning of “Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?” the date indicated in Myrna’s notebook is “September, 1961.” This date extends from page 118 to page 120. In these first pages, Myrna is expressing her point of view as it is in the present,<sup>375</sup> namely after her aborted attempt to become a writer and after she has been completely defeated by society’s conventions, her own doubts and by Mordecai Rich, an opportunist who “...has about as much heart as a dirt-eating toad.” (*In Love and Trouble*, p. 14).

From this part, we get the information that Myrna is still with her husband, that he bought her a new house and that she decided to be completely passive and receptive to her husband and, by extension, to society as a whole. However, she also mentions that she does not intend to forget the past, identified for her with “...Mordecai Rich, the man who, Reul claims, caused [her] breakdown” and with “...the night [she] tried to murder Reul with one of his chain saws.” (*In Love and Trouble*, p.12).

After this, the narrative suddenly shifts to the past, more precisely to “May, 1958.” It is in this entry that Alice Walker really immerses her readership into Myrna’s story and traces back the origins of Myrna’s anger and rage. From this entry, what can be deduced is that because she was completely misunderstood by her community as a whole and because society’s ascendant upon her was strong, to the point of making her doubt her own literary abilities, she easily fell prey to Mordecai Rich’s opportunism and deceitfulness. Indeed, Mordecai Rich, a “skinny black tramp,” (*In Love and Trouble*, p.14) as Reul qualified him, is portrayed as a literary swindler who ripped Myrna off both literarily and sexually.

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<sup>375</sup> According to the short story’s space-time.

After this immersion into Myrna's story, the narrative goes beyond what was supposed to be the present at the beginning of the short story to page 218 of the entry "September 1961." In this entry, Myrna's depiction is once again similar to the one given by the writer at the beginning, in the first entry. Indeed, Myrna is completely passive and exhaustingly affirmative, but on the brink of implosion and escape from these southern oppressive surroundings. At this stage of the story, Myrna does not want to play the role of the "...delicate, decorative southern belle"<sup>24</sup> who prepares supper for her husband "...as if [her] life depend[s] on it" (*In Love and Trouble*, p. 22) anymore. She would rather like to become a writer, contrarily to Roselily who, temporarily, does not know what she wants. In spite of this however, it is so taboo to sand up to society's expectations that Myrna becomes a frustrated woman whose literary ambitions are deadened by what Barbara Christian qualifies as "...the South's mystique..."<sup>376</sup> This expression can be identified with specific qualities and a particular external aspect both the Southern woman and man have to vehicle. It is a kind of brand image, a prestige that conventions of the South perpetuate. The South's mystique imposes on the woman to be an ornament that embellishes the man's life. In simpler terms, it literally forces women to surrender their real nature in the name of a perfect southern "ladyhood"<sup>377</sup>.

In its deep structure, Myrna's womanist point of view is identical to that of Roselily. This identicalness is apparent in the point of view's communication of emotions experienced by both of them. Both feel threatened by society's invisible, yet

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<sup>376</sup> Barbara Christian (1980). Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>377</sup> Patricia, Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), P. 87.

so palpable, forces.<sup>378</sup> Nevertheless, there are specificities that make Roselily's womanist testimony quite unique. This is the particularity of the womanist point of view. It is universal and personal at the same time. In Myrna's case, it is also reflective of the fact that she is educated, a repressed writer, a black woman, her financial situation is quite good in comparison to that of Roselily, she tries to discover her literary identity in the American South and, most important of all, she knows what she wants. Thanks to this last quality, Myrna's womanist point of view is more coherent and more present. In other words, Myrna seems to be more in possession of her womanist point of view and she leaves no room for any equivocation of this point of view. Again, a perfect immediacy characterizes Myrna's womanist point of view, because it conveys the vision of a woman's experience that is far from homogenized. In "Roselily" and "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?", a respect is paid to the specificity of the woman on her way to wholeness. As Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan affirm "only by questioning the status of the subject of feminism — 'woman' — does a feminist criticism avoid replicating the masculinist cultural error of taking the dominant for the universal."<sup>379</sup> In these two examples of *In Love and Trouble*, by prioritizing the protagonists' own points of view, the woman is described in her multidimensionality and the fictional account of her experience of the forbidden is, consequently, more authentic, immediate and even "visceral".<sup>380</sup>

In "Roselily" and "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?", even though women's attainment of wholeness is still hypothetical, it is also implied by Alice Walker that

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<sup>378</sup> Like forbidden truths.

<sup>379</sup> Julie, Rivkin and Michael, Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2004), p. 765.

<sup>380</sup> Karla F.C., Holloway. Op. cit., p. 113.

there is a possibility of reversibility. Alice Hall Petry maintains that “Walker manages to counterbalance the oppressive subject matter of [*In Love and Trouble*] by maintaining the undercurrent of hope first introduced in the volume’s second epigraph, a passage from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*...” Alice Hall Petry adds that “[f]or Walker as for Rilke, opposition [to society’s forbidden truths] is not necessarily insurmountable: struggles and crises can lead to growth, to the nurturing of the self...”<sup>381</sup> This explains Alice Walker’s focus on the female protagonists’ struggle rather than its resulting attainment of wholeness. In the short stories of *In Love and trouble*, what seems to be primordial for Alice Walker is the demonstration of the extent to which struggle against the forbidden and for wholeness can be an enriching process. It only leads to more resilience and helps the individual, woman or man, to attain higher levels of consciousness — namely the state of wholeness. Hence, the main idea to retain, as far as this collection is concerned, is that the struggle must go on and hope is maintained by this kind of stubbornness<sup>382</sup>. Alice Hall Petry mentions that “...most of the women of *In Love and Trouble*, sensing this, do try desperately to face their situations and deal with them — even if to do so may make them seem insane, or ignorant, or anti-social.”<sup>383</sup>

Finally, what seems to be the principal idea of these short stories is that the biggest mistake one can make is to try to change their deepest nature because an unfair and taboo-ridden social order requires it. It is not that there should not be room for compromises, but not to the point of completely forgetting who one really is, woman

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<sup>381</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. “Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction” (1989), p. 13.

<sup>382</sup> Here, stubbornness is used in the positive sense of determination.

<sup>383</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. Op. cit., p. pp. 13-14



or man. There are areas in the individual's<sup>384</sup> life where alterations are absolutely useless. For instance if Myrna's case is taken as an example, intellectual ambitions represent one of these areas.

As Alice Walker makes it clear in this collection and in all her works in general, it is very difficult to keep one's real nature alive. However, as Walker also indicates with the sufficient strength and will everything is possible, especially when it is a question as legitimate as to try to preserve oneself from being completely eroded by the corrosive forces of society.

#### **4.2. *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down***

##### **“Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells” and Interracial Rape**

Eight years after *In Love and Trouble* appeared, Alice Walker published a second collection of short stories, entitled *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down: Stories by Alice Walker*.

As far as this second collection of short stories is concerned, it is interesting to note that the title chosen by Alice Walker is originally the title of a blues song. Alice Walker's choice of this title is not trivial. Beyond the fact that it reflects very well the collection's unifying theme, it is also indicative of the author's predilection for blues music. Maria V. Johnson states that

Alice Walker has been profoundly inspired by both African American music and musicians and by writers whose work is grounded in music and in the expressive folk traditions of

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<sup>384</sup> Woman or man.

African Americans. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the black women like Bessie Smith rank among Walker's most significant musical/literary influences.<sup>385</sup>

Furthermore, it has been observed by many critics, among whom Barbara Christian and Alice Hall Petry, that in this collection the author is not addressing her readership in the same tone as in *In Love and Trouble*. Barbara Christian maintains that the black female protagonists created by Alice Walker, seem to be overwhelmed by their troubled lives. According to her, they "...are in love and trouble as they strain against the restrictions placed upon them by white people, black men, even other black women."<sup>386</sup> As it has previously been demonstrated, the black female protagonists of *In*

*Love and Trouble* are pictured by Alice Walker as confused, waging a struggle to assert themselves within black American society "...in spite of themselves, consciously understanding their 'contrariness', since it brings bewilderment, anguish, even death."<sup>387</sup>

Contrariwise, in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, the tone employed by Alice Walker is that of conviction and self-assertiveness. Concerning *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, Barbara Christian remarks that "...the black women protagonists of these stories, who also challenge the restrictions imposed upon them, are much more in control of their own actions and conscious of their right to oppose all attacks on their selfhood."<sup>388</sup> Judith K. Taylor, Timothy Dow Adams, Mary A.

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<sup>385</sup> Maria V., Johnson. "You Just Can't Keep a Good Woman Down': Alice Walker Sings the Blues" (1992), p. 221.

<sup>386</sup> Christian, Barbara. "The Short Story in Process" (1982), p. 195.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid..

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

Blackmon, Rebecca R. Butler, and Theodore C. Humphrey observe that “*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* is Walker’s salute to black women who are pushing ahead, those who have crossed some barriers and are in some sense champions.”<sup>389</sup> Such is the case of the nameless narrator of “Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells”. She is a writer/activist and a politically-aware woman. She has developed a critical eye through which to analyze the socio-political context of her country during the sixties. Even though, at the beginning of the short story, she seems to be a self-absorbed and self-centered person who has fixed stereotypes in her head — to the point of becoming racially-prejudiced against white people — she gradually matures into transcending her received ideas about racial relations in the U.S. She also succeeds in abandoning her black-or-white vision of the world. All this happens through a process of maturation she is in control of.

To make the difference holding between the two collections even more evident, Barbara Christian adds that “the titles of the two collections succinctly indicate the shift in tone, the first emphasizing trouble; the second, the triumphant assertiveness of the black woman.”<sup>390</sup>

In addition to the collection’s title, its epigraph is also reflective of its unifying theme. Barbara Christian remarks that the epigraph chosen by Alice Walker to inaugurate her second collection of short stories is a passage from Hermann Hess:

It is harder to kill something  
that is spiritually alive

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<sup>389</sup> The Editors of Salem Press. Op. cit., p. 1077.

<sup>390</sup> Barbara, Christian (1982). Op. cit., p. 195.

than it is to bring the dead  
back to life

It is made evident by this epigraph that Alice Walker's main focus in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* is underlining and celebrating black American women's thirst for the achievement of their spiritual survival. In Barbara Christian's words, "Walker's intention in this volume is clearly a celebration of black women's insistence on living."<sup>391</sup> However, similarly to *In Love and Trouble*, in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, Alice Walker is also focusing on black American women's path to wholeness and spiritual growth, through dealing with the forbidden.

In "Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells", the short story which ranks tenth in *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, Alice Walker's tendency to crack the shell of the forbidden is at its utmost. According to Barbara Christian it is one of the most provocative stories of the collection. In this short story, Alice Walker traces a young southern black woman's growing understanding of the complexity of the forbidden issue of interracial rape. Barbara Christian mentions that to trace this growing understanding, Alice Walker uses a specific technique. She observes that in addition to the fact that Alice Walker deals with what she terms "unconventional" or "womanist" issues, that is issues linked to women's retrieval of their subject position through the affirmation of their female identity, she also remarks that "...the forms Walker invents to illuminate these issues are as unconventional as her subject matter." Barbara Christian holds that one of these unconventional forms is identified with what she calls

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<sup>391</sup> Barbara, Christian (1982). Op. cit., p. 196.

the technique of the womanist process and she considers that Alice Walker is using it in this short story. She defines this process as one marked by steps identified with “confusion, resistance to the established order, and the discovery of a freeing order...” According to Barbara Christian, these steps represent for women “...a prerequisite for growth.”<sup>392</sup> Whereas with the womanist point of view it is mainly the authenticity and immediacy of wo/men’s experience that is prioritized<sup>393</sup>, with the womanist process it is these wo/men’s onward movement towards the womanist wisdom, by using the forbidden as the ultimate gateway, that is given importance. However, beyond the difference holding between their respective analytical effects<sup>394</sup>, they share in common their multifaceted reflection of all the components<sup>395</sup> characterizing a consciousness. It is from this multifacetedness that their authenticity results. Thus, whereas with the womanist point of view the contest with the forbidden is approached through both the multifacetedness and immediacy of the woman’s experience, with the womanist process the same is done but not through immediacy this time. It is rather through the sequentiality the different phases of the womanist process offer. In a short story like “Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells”, interest is focused on how an authentic, multidimensional contest with the forbidden is experienced in an in-motion process.

About Alice Walker’s treatment of womanist issues and use of a womanist process, Keith Byerman remarks that:

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<sup>392</sup> Barbara, Christian. “Alice Walker: the Black Woman Artist as Wayward” (1981), in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 92.

<sup>393</sup> Whatever their race, class, economic situation or even political stance.

<sup>394</sup> Whereas the womanist point of view endows the critical analysis with immediacy, the womanist process offers sequentiality as an analytical effect.

<sup>395</sup> Racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political. As mentioned by Elsa Barkley Brown in “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke” (1989), p. 613.

Walker is engaged, as a number of feminist critics have noted, in something like the deconstruction of patriarchal order, not only thematically, but also, according to Barbara Christian, formally. In terms of theme, we have the articulation of womanism, the primacy of the female in moral and social systems. We also have the revaluation of the female body as the site of self-awareness and self-esteem...Formally, womanism manifests itself in what Christian calls 'process narratives', those stories which do not seek closure, but rather reveal an ongoing creativity.<sup>396</sup>

What is interesting in this observation is the idea that in some of the short stories of *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, Alice Walker is attempting to deconstruct the patriarchal order both thematically and formally and to replace it with the womanist order. Of course, she makes this possible by desacralizing the forbidden. For Keith Byerman, the thematic presence of the womanist order is manifest, in the fictional space-time, in the consideration of women as subjects and in the purge of their image from any potential for sexual incitement. In other words, Keith Byerman maintains that in Alice Walker's womanist narratives the woman's body is no more the site of sexual desire, but that of self-respect. However, a permanent and exclusive focus on the desire that only the woman's body provokes transforms her into an object and pictures the man as a sexual predator, whereas it is unfortunately known that men's and even children's bodies can be under the threat of sexual predations — depending on the kind of sexual predator. This perverts a bit the real nature of the womanist theme Alice Walker is employing, in other words its dual and egalitarian nature. "Coming Apart" for instance perfectly illustrates this nature. It is accounted for in this story that both women and men are exploited by pornography. In this short story, both the female and male bodies are portrayed as the sites of sexual desire and incitement. Even though this is less evident in "Advancing Luna — and Ida B.

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<sup>396</sup> Keith, Byerman. "Desire and Alice Walker: The Quest for a Womanist Narrative" (1989), p.321.

Wells”, there are implications as to the victimization of both (black) men and women in this short story. Speaking about “African American men’s experiences with the criminal justice system...”<sup>397</sup> Patricia Hill Collins contends that it is not always the woman’s body that is the target of sexual aggressions and she gives as an example the context of a prison. She holds that “[b]ecause rape is typically conceptualized within a frame of heterosexuality and with women as rape victims, most of the attention has gone to female inmates assaulted by male guards.”<sup>398</sup> She adds that “[w]hereas women fear being disbelieved, being abandoned, and losing the love of their families, friends, and communities, men fear loss of manhood. Male rape in the context of prison signals an emasculation that exposes male rape victims to further abuse.”<sup>399</sup> Therefore, it would be too simplistic to consider that only women are under the threat of being raped, or that black men are not rapists.

At the beginning of “Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells”, Alice Walker’s nameless southern black female narrator seems to have this rather too simplistic, almost naïve perception of reality. She thinks black people are incapable of any harm and that only white people are prone to spread horror. Sometimes, she even conveys the impression that she is too self-absorbed and narcissistic. This self-absorption and narcissism characterizes the first phase of the womanist process experienced by the short story’s Jane Doe<sup>400</sup>. Alice Hall Petry even states that the narrator’s “...palpable self-absorption and self-congratulation draws the story’s focus away from its titular

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<sup>397</sup> Patricia, Hill Collins. Op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> The story’s narrator and the one supposed to achieve the wisdom of womanism is nameless.

heroine...<sup>401</sup> Admittedly, at first sight it seems that the titular heroine, “Luna”, is the short story’s central character. But, in truth, as one reads the short story, it becomes evident that the real heroine for Alice Walker is her nameless mouthpiece character. This latter seems to be in the limelight, more than Luna, because it is she who achieves “the wisdom of womanism.”<sup>402</sup> Even though it is Luna who is raped by a black man in the short story, it is the story’s black “Jane Doe” who is striving to find the right way to confront this forbidden truth. She wavers between either condemning it or denouncing it or keeping it secret out of solidarity with black men. It is through the different phases of the womanist process that she will find this right way.

According to Keith Byerman, the narrator’s “...indifference to Luna’s feelings and her condescending tone in describing her patience connote a rejection of difference...”<sup>403</sup>. In simpler terms, it might connote what Eva Lennox Birch refers to as “[t]he fragility of interracial co-operation...”<sup>404</sup> during the sixties. It was a period where racial hatred was at its utmost in the U.S. and there was little hope that interracial acceptance and co-operation would be possible one day. From the hostility black people experienced in the U.S. resulted a kind of “false pride”<sup>405</sup> as Geneva Cobb Moore called it. Hence, the narrator’s narcissism seems to be the result of a socially-acquired attitude that is this false pride.

On the other hand, this self-absorption and self-centeredness can also be interpreted as the writer’s attempt to give visibility to the black woman in a forbidden

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<sup>401</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. Op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>402</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>404</sup> Eva, Lennox Birch. “Alice Walker: The Spiritual Inheritance” in *Black American Women’s Writing: A Quilt of Many Colours* (1994), p. 218.

<sup>405</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. “Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (2000), p. 113.



situation where the object of a sexual threat is the white woman's body and the object of the womanist process is a black woman. Indeed, when Luna informs the narrator of her rape by a black man, she immediately thinks "[w]ho knows what the black woman thinks of rape?" (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 93). At this moment, what Alice Hall Petry refers to as Alice Walker's "mouthpiece character"<sup>406</sup> is completely shorn of her conviction that black people are above any evil. At the same time, this self-absorption and self-centeredness seem to be necessary if the story's nameless narrator is to go through a womanist process allowing her to ascend from one state of consciousness to another. She is going through a process of maturation, very similar to Carl Jung's individuation process. The egocentrism she demonstrates at the beginning represents the first stage or the first emotional state of the process above-mentioned. It is just indicative of the fact that this character is in need of maturing her perception of racial relations in the U.S. and abandon her simplistic and naïve evaluation of the context against which she is evolving — a context fraught with racial tensions.

When Luna informs the story's narrator of her rape by a black man, confusion starts to creep over Alice Walker's chronicler. This confusion represents the second emotional state she goes through in her womanist process. She is no more able to take things for granted. In her eyes, reality has taken up a complexity which was, till then, imperceptible to her. Now that she knows that some black men are potential rapists, she feels outraged by the action itself. At the same time, she feels fearful at the realization of what Luna's denunciation could cost black people at that moment. She remembers what happened to Emmett Till and says: "I had seen photographs of white

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<sup>406</sup> Alice, Hall Petry. Op. cit., p. 23.

folks standing in a circle roasting something that had talked to them in their own language before they tore out its tongue.” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p.93). She also remembers the continuous exhortations of Ida B. Wells, the anti-lynching campaigner against denouncing the rape of white women, because it used to lead to the indiscriminate lynching of black men.

The narrator’s confusion is worsened by the fact that she is a writer. As a writer, she feels that she has the duty to tell the truth. In the story, she conveys this to Ida B. Wells in an imagined dialogue. Keith Byerman remarks that this confusion or this “...conflict is clearly resolved since the narrative exists.”<sup>407</sup> He states that “...the evidence of the story suggests that the conflict was never fundamental for the narrator; instead, the problem for her is how to resolve the story in a manner consistent with her moral perspective.”<sup>408</sup> But, her “...tangled emotions about interracial rape” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 93), complicate this perspective and make any neat resolution difficult to achieve.

This is true at least during the phase where she is confused and in a state of denial of black people’s inability to harm other people. Nevertheless, the womanist process she goes through in the story relieves her of any brakes to her condemnation of rape, whoever the authors are, black or white men. Once she feels this relief, this means that the story’s nameless narrator has attained the third and last phase of her womanist process.

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<sup>407</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op. cit., p. 327.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

Before getting at this resolution, and after the confusion she goes through, she realizes that sexism and racism, rape and lynching, are critically related in America. She realizes that some black male revolutionaries resorted to raping white women to fight against white racism in a sadistic way. In this racial conflict, misogyny is at its utmost and endured by women of all races and some black men are the victims of arbitrary lynchings.

At the end of the short story, the narrator and, by extension, Alice Walker seems not to be unwilling to end the narrative conclusively. According to Keith Byerman, the end of this short story reveals Alice Walker's "ongoing creativity,"<sup>409</sup> reflecting an ongoing meditation about the forbidden truth of interracial rape. It is probable that Alice Walker lent an ongoing aspect to the end to demonstrate that the narrator is still thinking about the issue and that this meditation can extend over a life span.

Barbara Christian remarks that "[t]here are three endings...as the narrator and the writer mesh. According to her, through imagining such an end, "...Walker shows us her writing process, which cannot be neatly resolved, since the questions she posed cannot be satisfactorily answered. The many endings prod the reader, insisting on the complexity of the issue and the characters."<sup>410</sup>

"Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells" is a process narrative in which its black female narrator ascends from a state of self-absorption and arrogant racial pride, to a state of confusion and conflict with herself, to a state of discernment. However, this

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<sup>409</sup> Keith, Byerman. *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>410</sup> Barbara, Christian. (1981). *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

discernment does not mean that the story has reached its end. The narrator's understanding of interracial rape leads on to three different conclusions. The first two ones seem to be unresolved conclusions and the third one, Keith Byerman observes, "...assigns conscious motives to the actors."<sup>411</sup>

The first one, Keith Byerman observes, "...represents the historical end of the experience of Luna..."<sup>412</sup> The narrator and Luna never talk about Luna's second encounter with Freddie Pye and they go their separate ways. For the story's narrator, with hindsight, it even seems weird that they did not talk about the fact that one morning Freddie Pye suddenly gets out of Luna's bedroom. The narrator mentions that

One night, the last month we lived together, I noticed a man's blue denim jacket across the church pew. The next morning, out of Luna's bedroom walked Freddie Pye. He barely spoke to me—possibly because as a black woman I was expected to be hostile toward his presence in a white woman's bedroom. I was too surprised to exhibit hostility, however, which was only a part of what I felt, after all. He left. Luna and I did not discuss this. It is odd, I think now, that we didn't. It was as if he was never there, as if he and Luna had not shared the bedroom that night. (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 97).

As far as the second one is concerned, Byerman holds that it is entitled "Imaginary Knowledge". In this conclusion, the narrator/author imagines a dialogue between Luna and Freddie Pye. The dialogue is not about the rape. According to Keith Byerman, "[t]heir dialogue, as indirectly presented and as projected, is a conscious and rational discussion of history and sexual politics..."<sup>413</sup> However, it is also unresolved, since it leaves the two characters talking without reaching a conclusion.

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<sup>411</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

As to the third conclusion, it is entitled “Postscript: Havana, Cuba, November 1976.” Keith Byerman remarks that this conclusion is based on “...a conspiracy theory which by definition assigns conscious motives to the actors. It is presented as a debate between the narrator and a politically active friend over the meaning of Freddie Pye’s behavior.”<sup>414</sup> He informs her that the perpetuation of interracial rapes is the result of a governmental conspiracy. He contends that “[e]nough blacks raping or accused of raping white women and any political movement that cuts across racial lines is doomed.” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 103). According to him, she has to accept the fact that some black men, like Freddie Pye, have no conscience and are ready to do any atrocity for money. He mentions that “...blacks could be hired to blow up other blacks, and could be hired by someone to shoot down Brother Malcolm, and hired to provide a diagram of Fred Hampton’s bedroom so the pigs could shoot him easily while he slept...” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 103). He affirms that he knows all this “...because when [he] was broke and hungry and selling [his] blood to buy the food and the paint that allowed [him] to work; [he] was offered such ‘other work.’” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 104).

Even though the womanist process Alice Walker employs in this short story ends with “an ongoing creativity,”<sup>415</sup> Eva Lennox Birch observes that “[n]o matter how, in the various endings, explanations and postscripts she gives to this story, she concludes that rape is never to be condoned.”<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Eva, Lennox Birch, h. Op. cit., p. 219.

In sum, the story's unresolution does not prevent the narrator from confronting the truth and maturing into a writer/activist who considers rape as an inexcusable act. In this short story, the womanist process the nameless narrator goes through is still ongoing. The writer demonstrates that the fight is not yet over and ideal racial relations where difference is accepted and women are not held hostages in racial confrontations are still a long way to go.

The womanist process sets the multidimensional identity of the short story's self-absorbed anonymous narrator in motion. In addition to underlining the authenticity of her testimony, the womanist process lends dynamism to this testimony. In other words, in addition to the fact that it brings into relief the different components that constitute the narrator's identity, it also favours an onward maturing movement that liberates her from her "false pride" and develops her womanist insight. Even though Alice Walker endows her with the "womanish"<sup>417</sup> attitude right from the beginning<sup>418</sup>, nonetheless there are other womanist qualities she does not seem to possess yet. For instance, at the beginning she has a rather "taxonomic"<sup>419</sup> vision of the society where she lives, especially of racial relationships. As already mentioned, she has definite representations of the races in her mind. For her, the white race is evil and the black race is good. Yet, through the womanist lens reality takes on a complex and relative appearance. Curiously, it is this complexity and relativity that clarifies the situation to the narrator and relieves her from the prejudices that poisoned her relationship with the world in its diversity, racial or otherwise.

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<sup>417</sup> Alice, Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), p.xi.

<sup>418</sup> That is to say, she displays a courageous attitude.

<sup>419</sup> Layli, Phillips. *Op. cit.*, p. xxxii.

## **“Coming Apart” and the Debasing Power of Pornography**

Similarly to “Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells, in “Coming Apart”, the confrontation with the forbidden is given the form of a womanist process. According to Barbara Christian and Keith Byerman, “Coming Apart” is another short story which can be considered as a womanist process narrative. Barbara Christian mentions that in this story “...Walker focuses on societal attitudes and mores that women have challenged in the last decade [, namely] pornography and male sexual fantasies.”<sup>420</sup>

According to Keith Byerman, thematically it is a womanist narrative because “... [it] put[s] forward an argument for the integrity of the female body and the treatment of woman as subject rather than object.”<sup>421</sup> It defends even the integrity of the male body. This of course is only revelatory of the womanist thematic basis of the story. Formally, it is a process narrative because awareness of the forbidden truth of the debasing power of pornography, in this short story, is made possible through a gradual process marked by different phases or emotional states. With each emotional state, the individual gains more understanding of the forbidden issue s/he is confronted with and ends with a womanist vision of the world.

However, what is interesting about “Coming Apart” is that in this short story, the confrontation with the forbidden — taking the form of the womanist process — is lived by a man and is initiated by a woman, his wife — both are black. Keith Byerman

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<sup>420</sup> Barbara, Christian. (1981). Op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>421</sup> Byerman, Keith. Op. cit., p. 322.

remarks that in “Coming Apart”, it is the man who achieves “...the wisdom of womanism.”<sup>422</sup>

Throughout the progression of this short story, the wife reads anti-pornography essays by Audre Lord; Luisah Teish and Tracey A. Gardner to her husband. She reads these essays to him in an effort to, in a way, educate him and make him realize the debasing power of pornography and that “...pornography and racism [have] the same root...”<sup>423</sup> Eva Lennox Birch maintains that “...both are a violent expression of assumed power.”<sup>424</sup> In other words, both racism and pornography are phenomena which emanate from human beings’ violation of other human beings’ vital rights on the grounds of their supposed superiority.

At the beginning of the short story, the narrator’s husband is convinced that deriving sexual pleasure from pornographic material is completely “harmless and meaningless.”<sup>425</sup> Yet, when she starts reading to him essays denouncing the exploitation of women, he feels, first, “...oppressed by her incipient struggle, and feels somehow as if her struggle to change the pleasure he has enjoyed is a violation of his rights.” (*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 46). This first emotional reaction the husband is manifesting can be considered as the first phase of his womanist process.

One passage from Audre Lorde’s essay is read aloud by the wife. The passage runs as follows:

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<sup>422</sup>Byerman, Keith. Op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>423</sup>Eva, Lennox Birch. Op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Keith, Byerman. Op. cit., p. 322.



This brings me to the last consideration of the erotic. To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use Kleenex. And when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse. (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 46)

The second passage she reads to him is extracted from an essay by Luisah Teish and runs as follows:

During the "Black Power Movement" much cultural education was focused on the black physique. One of the accomplishments of that period was the popularization of African hairstyles and the Natural. Along with this new hair-do came a new self-image and way of relating. Then the movie industry put out "Superfly," and the Lord Jesus Look, the Konked head, and an accompanying attitude, ran rampant in the black community. Films like "Shaft" and "Lady Sings the Blues" portray black heroes as cocaine-snorting, fast-life fools. In these movies a black woman is always caught in a web of violence...A popular Berkeley theater featured a porno movie titled "Slaves of Love." Its advertisement portrayed black women, naked, in chains, and a white man standing over them with a whip. How such racist pornographic material escaped the eye of black activists presents a problem...(*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 47)

At this moment in the story, this second passage provokes the husband's anger. Eva Lennox Birch explains that at this instant, the wife faces her husband's "...accusations of her own sexual and racial betrayal in her perceived alliance with whites and lesbians — Lorde, Teish and Gardner."<sup>426</sup> This second reaction on the part of the husband can be considered as the second phase of his womanist process. At this stage of the process of womanist maturation he is experiencing, he seems to manifest a certain resistance to the painful realizations the womanist process inflicts upon him — painful realizations that are, nonetheless, necessary if he is to grow.

After that, she reads to him passages from an essay by Tracey A. Gardner. In the first passage, Tracey A. Gardner reveals the bases upon which American slavery was grounded. She mentions that:

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<sup>426</sup> Eva, Lennox Birch. Op. cit., p. 218.

American slavery relied on the denial of the humanity of black folks, and the undermining of our sense of nationhood and family, on the stripping away of the Black man's role as protector and provider, and on the structuring of Black women into the American system of white male domination..." (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 49).

Then, another passage by Tracey A. Gardner also indicates that even after the Civil War, black people were still oppressed by a predominantly white racist society, reluctant to give the black man the opportunity to prove his worth or support his family.

In another passage, the narrator reads that "After the Civil War, popular justice, which meant there usually was no trial and no proof needed, began its reign in the form of the castration, burning at the stake, beheading, and lynching of Black men." (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 50). In this passage, the wife also reads, at her husband's great astonishment, that there were even some black women who were lynched.

At this moment, the anger he felt at the beginning is replaced by a feeling of shame "...and [he] sense[s] his wife's wounded embarrassment, for him and for herself. For their history together." (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 50). This shame represents the following phase of the womanist process the husband is experiencing. Alice Walker mentions that "[h]e cannot imagine a woman being lynched. He has never even considered the possibility. Perhaps this is why the image of a black woman chained and bruised excites rather than horrifies him..." On her side, "[i]t is the fact that the lynching of her body has never stopped that forces [her]...to blot out the historical record. She is not prepared to connect her own husband with the continuation of that past." (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*,

p. 50). She knows that the pornographic exploitation of the black woman's or man's body is a kind of lynching and a common humiliation of the black woman and man at the same time. It is still another way whereby the black person's body is used to deprive her/him of her/his dignity. As the lynchings were used by white people to back up their view that they are genetically superior to black people, so is pornography used for the same ends.

In another passage by Tracey A. Gardner, the wife also reads that:

Some Black men, full of the white man's perspective and values, see the white woman or Blond Goddess as part of the American winning image. Sometimes when he is with the Black woman, he is ashamed of how she has been treated and how he has been powerless, and that they have always had to work together and protect each other...Frantz Fanon said about white women, "By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. I marry the culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization..."(*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, pp. 51-52)

At this stage of his confrontation with the forbidden or womanist process, the husband identifies the origin of his desire to humiliate the white woman by resorting to pornography. In addition to this, he also understands that even in pornography "...[the exploitation] of the black woman's body is qualitatively different from that of the white woman..."(*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 52). He realizes what he has always tried to ignore when he thinks that "...where white women are depicted in pornography as 'objects,' black women are depicted as animals. Where white women are depicted at least as human bodies if not beings, black women are depicted as shit." (*You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down*, p. 52). Alice Walker mentions that this represents "...another area in which he is unable to protect or defend black women..." (*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, p. 52)

At this stage, the husband is sickened by all these realizations and by the fact that he has bought himself all the advertisements which debasingly represented black and white women and even black men.

Eva Lennox Birch argues that at the end, the wife “...manages to persuade her husband that he colludes in his own degradation by the reading of pornography in which ‘black women are depicted as shits’ ”<sup>427</sup>

Furthermore, Eva Lennox Birch remarks that the husband also realizes that “[t]he sexual abuse of black women, perpetuated in pornography, is not diminished in any way by the black man’s freedom to ogle pornographic representations of white women.”<sup>428</sup> This is very much similar to the forbidden issue of interracial rape. Eva Lennox Birch observes that “[r]ape, whatever the colour of the raped or rapist, is violation.”<sup>429</sup> Whoever derives sexual pleasure from pornographic material, and whoever is exploited by this industry, the fact remains that it is a violation.

In “Coming Apart”, the womanist dimension of *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* is further reinforced. In this short story, in addition to the fact that the experience with the forbidden is authenticated, it is also dynamized thanks to the womanist process. It is authenticated because respect is paid to the different components constituting the consciousness of the object of the womanist process, who is a man at that. It is dynamized because the consciousness of this man is in a state comparable to a Chinese puzzle, where the psyche’s facets are constantly changing

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<sup>427</sup> Eva, Lennox Birch. Op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

and not programmed to stop until they attain the womanist wisdom, or the state of wholeness.

In “Coming Apart”, the confrontation with the forbidden issue of pornography and its degrading potential, is lived by a man and orchestrated by a woman. This short story is clear proof of Alice Walker’s commitment not only to desacralizing the forbidden as the gateway to wholeness, but also “...to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.”<sup>430</sup> Indeed, this time, the journey to wholeness is a man’s experience. This is revelatory of the author’s instigation of a vision of the world based not on separatism, but on connectedness between all human beings.

Again, in *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, Alice Walker persists in her search for the truth through dealing with all that disturbs or shocks. The presence of the forbidden in this collection seems to indicate that a triumph over it is expected. It also suggests that the women confronted with it must fight to achieve this triumph.

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<sup>430</sup> Alice, Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, p. xi.

## **CONCLUSION**

Barbara Christian mentions that “[t]here is a sense in which the ‘forbidden’ in society is consistently approached by Walker as a possible route to truth.”<sup>431</sup> This is true especially when the indefensible forbidden is concerned. Alice Walker has demonstrated in provocative works such as *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* that only truth matters, whatever the intensity of its bitterness is. Indeed, even though her commitment to crack the shell of the forbidden has cost her the antipathy of African Americans, especially during what Christian calls “...the heyday of Afro-Americans’ romanticizing of their motherland...in their pursuit of racial pride[,]”<sup>432</sup> she never changed her attitude. For her, getting society rid of what Geneva Cobb Moore terms “false wrappings”<sup>433</sup> has always been more important than being accepted by a hostile portion of the readership.

From her retreat into the world of literature, where she found a kind of refuge after she was visually mutilated, she emerged as an audacious writer who learnt from her own mutilation that resilience and struggle pave the way to change — on the individual and collective levels.

From this retreat, she also gained an extremely valuable weapon to denounce and counter the forbidden, namely the mastery of writing — an art black people, especially black women and women in general, have been denied access to for centuries. In line with this, Mariama Bâ observes that “[w]e cannot go forward without culture, without communicating with others, without making people think

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<sup>431</sup> Barbara, Christian. “Alice Walker: The Black Woman Artist as Wayward” (1981), in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997), p. 84.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>433</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. “Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*” (2000), p. 112.

about things. Books are a weapon, a peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon.”<sup>434</sup> Understanding this, Alice Walker uses the heaviest caliber. She unravels the most shocking and the most forbidden in her works and forces the readership’s confrontation with what they want to silence the most. Female genital mutilation, interracial rape, the exploitative and debasing nature of pornography, the degenerating potential of wifehood and motherhood,<sup>435</sup> etc., represent the kind of heavy-caliber forbidden truths Alice Walker tries to desacralize in her works.

The oppressiveness of these issues gives the impression that in Alice Walker’s works there seems to be no gateway to a better life or to the state of wholeness. Yet, the sensing of her characters’ ascension towards a better state in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down* for instance, all along their confrontation with and fight against the forbidden, conveys that it is this forbidden itself that can constitute the gateway to what it seems to obstruct, that is to say the state of self-knowledge and self-love, or wholeness.

While some critics, like Barbara Christian and Keith Byerman, identify this ascension as a womanist process, some others like Geneva Cobb Moore compare it to Carl Jung’s individuation process. However that may be, whatever name it is given Alice Hall Petry holds that it represents a vital counterbalance to the above-mentioned oppressiveness in Alice Walker’s works.

Thus, thanks to writers like Alice Walker, the desacralization of the forbidden is no more deemed an offence, but an obligation and a possible gateway to wholeness.

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<sup>434</sup> Juliana, Makuchi and Nfah, Abbeyni. *Gender in African Women’s Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference* (1997), p. 148.

<sup>435</sup> especially when they are women’s only spheres of activity.



Braving the forbidden and transforming it into “...a source of power, agency, and creativity”<sup>436</sup> is performed by the different protagonists animating *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*.

In these three works one senses the existence of an ascending movement that starts from awful conditions and ends up more positively. This is certainly what Mary Donnelly means when she speaks about Walker’s symbolism and how it points to “...the importance of finding beauty in damage...”<sup>437</sup> It is exactly what this ascending movement makes the protagonists do: finding beauty in damage, finding wholeness in the forbidden and metamorphosing from chrysalises to butterflies.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi goes through a very painful journey that takes the appearance of a process marked out with different phases. From a Jungian perspective, these phases represent the diverse facets of the individual’s collective unconscious. At the outset, Tashi is completely overwhelmed and is incapable of controlling the progression of her journey, even though the latter already started when she was only eight years old, namely the day she witnessed her sister’s murder. After years of confusion and gradual deterioration of her psychological state and after she relinquishes what is known in the Jungian terminology as her mask, she spirals down to the depths of her shadow. This phase is the most painful and most intense in Tashi’s ascension. After the mask has been thrown off, there is no more protection the ego/mask can provide. Tashi finds no escape from her authentic, flawed, traumatized and angry self. This angry shadow represents the most intense moment in Tashi’s confrontation with the forbidden. This anger stems from her realization of the

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<sup>436</sup> Amy K., Levin. *Africanism and Authenticity in African-American Women’s Novels* (2003), p. 159.

<sup>437</sup> Mary, Donnelly. *Alice Walker : The Color Purple and Other Works* (2010), p. 133.

falseness of her Olinkan/African self. It was a facet of herself she constructed on the basis of the lies her tribe infused her with when she was a child. Added to these reasons, or lies, it was in the name of affirming the tribe's cultural identity and under the banner of fending off the colonial ascendant that Olinkan girls, like Tashi, had to be genitally mutilated. All the anger that surfaced during the shadowy phase of Tashi's individuation process brought on what Geneva Cobb Moore called Tashi's "killer instinct."<sup>438</sup> One of the benefits that Tashi derived from her shadow is the recovery of her risk-taking, bold or, in simpler terms "womanist" spirit which has been eroded by her patriarchal socialization. Carl Jung called this part of women's collective unconscious the animus. This animus, or the part of herself she was forced to forget, helps her to directly face the origin of her lifelong ache and destroy it. She does this by killing what the Olinkans considered as the living essence of their identity, the tribe's circumciser.

In prison, she finally reconciles herself with her tamed demons and gains a hindsight that leads her to understand that even the persons she considered her enemies<sup>439</sup> were all conditioned by the same context and socialized in the same way.

As Amy Levin observes, in this situation the forbidden only "...maintains and reinforces [patriarchal socialization.]"<sup>440</sup> This means that the forbidden acts like a mechanism that strengthens and legitimizes the oppressiveness of the patriarchal system, by infusing people, women and men, with the fear that they are almost committing a sacrilege if they attempt to forestall this mechanism. Nevertheless, it is this so feared sacrilege that Alice Walker is instigating in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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<sup>438</sup> Geneva, Cobb Moore. Op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>439</sup> M'Lissa, the Leader and all the members of her village.

<sup>440</sup> Amy K., Levin. Op. cit., p. 159.

and in many of her other works, like her two collections of short stories. The sacrilegists Alice Walker is portraying in her works seem to do this,<sup>441</sup> but in different degrees. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* the highest degree is attained because the forbidden truth confronted is appalling. Whereas Tashi has reached the sphere of martyrdom, the protagonists of the short stories seem to be fighting in a more timorous way. However, as Tashi, the (wo)men of *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* undergo a maturing, and painful, process that reconciles them with what disturbs and hurts the most in life. Instead of being facets of the collective unconscious, the different phases Roselily, Myrna and the two Jane Does of “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” and “Coming Apart” go through stand for emotional states interlarding not an individuation process but a womanist process. There is no difference between the two except their conceptualization; the common denominators between the two reside respectively in their ascending movement, an intense presence of pain in the middle of each and their culmination in a superior and extremely relieved state of mind. Once the individual arrives at this culminating point this means that the forbidden has been triumphed over.

How does Alice Walker make this triumph possible in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep A Good woman Down*? She seems to make this by inserting a lot of pain in her protagonists' stories, by extending this pain over the span of a long process that can last for a whole life and by favouring a face-to-face at one moment during this process. This moment is a kind of epiphany that

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<sup>441</sup> The sacrilege of desacralizing the forbidden.

relieves the individual from all that used to obscure their<sup>442</sup> perception of themselves and of the background against which they have been evolving during their whole life.

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<sup>442</sup> This possessive pronoun indicates both women and men.

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## أحرام ألس وولكر في امتلاك سرّ السّعادة، في حالة حبّ و اضطراب و لا يمكن الجور على المرأة

### ملخص

يتطرق هذا البحث إلى كيفية تجاوز المرأة لسيطرة أحرام المجتمع على تفكيرها و بلوغها حالة التقبّل الشامل لنفسها.

لتحقيق هذا البحث، تم تحليل كتابة ألس وولكر اللامبالية بأحرام المجتمع و ذلك في ثلاثة من مؤلفاتها أي في *إمتلاك سرّ السّعادة*، في حالة حبّ و اضطراب و لا يمكن الجور على المرأة.

في *إمتلاك سرّ السّعادة*، بلغت ألس وولكر أقصى الحدود في كتابتها ضدّ أحرام المجتمع. يتعلّق الحرم الذي قامت بكشفه في هذه الرواية بخطر تشويه الأعضاء التناسلية الأنثوية.

في البحث التّالي، يرتبط كشف الحرم بعملية نضج تتميز بالانتقال من حالة الكراهية للنفس إلى حالة الكمال الذاتي. لوصف و تحليل هذه الحركة الانتقالية في *إمتلاك سرّ السّعادة*، تمّ اللجوء إلى منظور يونغي. تصوّر كارل يونغ لهذه الحركة الإنتقالية، أو ما يشار إليه على أنه عملية التميّز، يضيفي إلى مسار بطة الرواية إلى الكمال الذاتي جانب تدريجي. في بناءه اليونغي، هذا الجانب التدريجي ليس فقط إنتقالي، بل تطوري أيضا. هذا يعني تباين مراحل الوصول إلى حالة الكمال الذاتي في قوتها. إذا عملية التميّز، مثلما تصورها كارل يونغ، تدرجية انتقالية و تطويرية في نفس الوقت. جعل كارل يونغ خاصيّة عملية التميز التطورية ممكنة بفضل ما أسماه بالصور الأصليّة. يمكن لهذه الصور الأصليّة، أو هذه الصور الأبديّة، المتواجدة باللاوعي الجماعي للبشرية أن تقدّم درجات مختلفة الشدة لرحلة

تمّ الاعتماد في هذه الأطروحة على الصور الأصليّة في تنظيمها الكلاسيكي. تم اكتشاف تعامل تاشي الأوّلي مع الحرم بفضل الصورة الأصليّة التي أسماها كارل يونغ بالقناع. بعد صورة القناع تأتي بالتسلسل صور الظل، الأنيميا/أنيموس و أخيرا النفس. تمثل صورة القناع الجزء الأكثر اصطناعا من عملية التميّز. يمثل القناع المرحلة أين الجزء الواعي من الوعي، أي الأنا، يكذب على نفسه. يمكن الاعتراف بقدرة هذه الأكاذيب على ضمان أمن معين للفرد ولكن هذا الأمن مؤقت و كما سبق ذكره مزوّر.

بما أن وعي الإنسان يتوق بالغريزة إلى وجود واقعيّ و صحيّ، بعد اكتشافه لطابع القناع المزوّر، يلجأ على الفور إلى صور أصليّة أخرى. تسمى الصورة الأصليّة التي تلي صورة القناع بصورة الظلام. في هذه المرحلة من عملية التميّز، لا يمكن لأكاذيب الأنا تهدئة الآلام النّابعة عن طبقات الوعي الحاوية على كل مل هو مخفيّ و مزعج للإنسان. تمكث في طبقات الوعي هذه الصور الأصليّة للظلام و الأنيميا/أنيموس. تقوم صورة الظلام بتذكير الإنسان بكلّ ما هو مؤثر للقلق و مؤلم. بدورها، تقوم صورة الأنيميا/أنيموس بتقوية و إبراز الألم أكثر فأكثر. تقوم هذه

بعد إتمام المواجهة مع الصورة الأصلية المسمّاة بالأنيميا/أنيموس، أخيراً تتمّ المواجهة مع الصورة الأصلية للنفس. في هذه المرحلة، تبلغ عملية التميّز عادة ذروتها.

بالرّغم من الأثمار التي يمكن أن تترتب عن الجانب التدريجي و التطوري لعملية التميّز و عن تبني منظور يونغي لتحليل رواية اعترفت مؤلّفها بتأثير يونغ الإيجابي و الشفائيّ عليها، يبدو من المستحيل تطبيق نظرية يونغ حول الصور الأصلية كما هي على دراسة الرحلة الداخلية لبطلة *إمتلاك سرّ السعادة* و التي تحمل اسم تاشي. ما يمكن أن يشكّل مشكلة في تنظير كارل يونغ "النمو النفسي" هو وجود بعض التلميحات لوجود نقائص فطرية في المرأة. تظهر هذه التلميحات بوضوح أكثر في تنظير كارل يونغ لمفهوم التّكامل أو ما أسماه بالنموذج الأصلي "أنيميا/أنيموس". يمثّل هذا النموذج الأصلي إحدى الخطوات في عملية التميّز، أو "النمو النفسي" الذي تمرّ به بطلة الرواية. وفقاً لنظرية كارل يونغ حول الصور الأصلية، خلال هذه المرحلة تكتشف المرأة جانبها المذكر و الرجل يكتشف جانبه المؤنث. في هذا السياق، لوحظ من طرف نقاد عدّة، مثل سوزان رولاند، ناومي غولدنبيرغ و فيرينا كاست، أن التّنظير اليونغي حول مفهوم التّكامل متحيّز ضدّ المرأة و سقط في فخ التّنميط السهل المعتمد على تصور أدوار تقليدية للجنسين.

في حالة حبّ و اضطراب ولا يمكن الجور على المرأة، تمّ تحليل حرم أكثر تعقيدا و أقل لفتا، إلا أنه متساو تماما في خطورته مع حرم تدميريّة تشويه الأعضاء التناسلية الأنثوية. في الأقصوصتين بعنواني "روزليلي" و "أحقّا القتل لا يجدي؟"، يتعلّق الحرم الذي تمّ تحليله بخطر الانحطاط الفكري الذي يمكن أن يلحق بالمرأة عندما تفرض عليها مجالات الزواج و الأمومة من غير إمكانية اللّجوء و استكشاف مجالات أخرى. في هاتين الأقصوصتين، ليس من المؤكّد ما إذا كان تحقيق حالة الكمال مؤكّدا، إلّا أنّ عملية النّضج التي يمرّ منها أبطال الأقصوصتين هي في حد ذاتها تكشف عن كل ما وراء اضطهاد المرأة من طرف المجتمع و أحراره.

مثل ما هو الحال بالنسبة لبطلات في حالة حبّ و اضطراب، في لا يمكن الجور على المرأة، يعانون البطلات من اضطهاد المجتمع البطريرقي و أحراره و هذا على الرغم من أنّهن أكثر حزما و ثقة بالنفس. في "ترقيّ لونا و إيدا بي ولس"، تقوم كاتبة ناشطة في جنوب أمريكا بمواجهة حرم الاغتصاب العرقي. على الرغم من أنه لا يبدو أن لهذه الأقصوصة نهاية محدّدة، إلّا أنّ بطلة الأقصوصة تصبح في النهاية قادرة على الوصول إلى نقطة شجب الاغتصاب عرقي أم لا. بالإضافة إلى هذا تصبح البطلة كاتبة أكثر التزاما. في "إنشقاق"، يتعلّق الحرم الذي يتمّ التعرف إليه بآثار البورنوغرافيا أو الإباحية المذلّة. ما يبدو خاص في هذه



لتحليل القصص القصيرة الأربعة التي تم اختيارها لهذا البحث، تمّ الإعتماد على النهج الوومنست. هو نهج مستوحى من الفلسفة ووجهة النظر الاجتماعية التغيرية التي اخترعتها ألس وولكر.

أستمدّت آدتين من نهج الوومنست لتحليل أقصوصات في حالة حبّ و اضطراب و لا يمكن الجور على المرأة. في مجموعة الأقصوصات الأولى، تمّ الإعتماد على أداة وجهة النظر الوومنست. أمّا في المجموعة الثانية، تمّ الاعتماد على الأداة المسماة بعملية النمو الوومنست. تمكن الأداة الأولى من التقرب أكثر من البطلات لأنها تركّز على آراءهنّ. أما الأداة الثانية فهي تؤمّن التتابعية وإمكانية المرور من مرحلة إلى أخرى. ففي حالة حبّ و اضطراب يبدو أنّه من الضروري التركيز على تعزيز جلاء و حضور البطلات في الفضاء الخيالي للأقصوصات و ذلك لأنّه يبدو أنّ شهادات نساء "روزليلي" و "أحقّا القتل لا يجدي" لا تزال تفتقد الجراءة.

أمّا فيما يخصّ نساء لا يمكن الجور على المرأة، بما أنهن أكثر حزما لم تعطى الأولوية التحليلية إلى استرجاع أصوات يتم إظهارها بكلّ شجاعة. تمّ الاهتمام بنموهن الروحي ووصولهن إلى حالة الكمال الذي تمّ تسميته بحالة الكمال الوومنست.