

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AFRICAN AND AMERICAN
HERITAGES IN ALICE WALKER'S NOVEL "POSSESSING THE
SECRET OF JOY" AND THE SHORT STORY "EVERYDAY USE"
MA thesis**

Anna Golubeva

SUPERVISOR: *Assoc. Prof.* Reet Sool

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PREFACE

The present Master's thesis focuses on the issues of heritage, in relation to the womanist view and writings of Alice Walker in particular. The work considers different aspects of "a woman of colour" notion which is central in the writing of Walker, who, being an African-American herself, has made a significant contribution to the development of the image of the Black woman both in literature and in the society.

The thesis is aimed at analysing the problematics of heritage resulting from the duality of identity and the origin of characters in Alice Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and the short story *Everyday Use*. The main problem to be solved lies, firstly, in defining heritage and understanding its importance for a person's development, both physical and emotional, and, secondly, in studying the possible relationships between the African and American heritages.

The thesis falls into the Introduction, two core chapters and the Conclusion. The Introduction provides an overview of some significant aspects of "a woman of colour" notion, specifying Alice Walker's contribution to the formation of the "womanist" view of African-American women and their uniqueness. It also defines the aim and hypothesis of the present research. Chapter I analyses different approaches to understanding the notion of "heritage", provides an overview of the origin and peculiarities of the African-American heritage in Alice Walker's writing. Chapter II studies the possible relationships between the African and American heritages on the example of Alice Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and the short story *Everyday Use*. The Conclusion sums up the results of the research and comments on the hypothesis.

The methodology of the present research within the feminist and postcolonial studies framework is the stylistic analysis of the compositional element of the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and the imagery of the short story *Everyday Use*.

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INTRODUCTION

“A WOMAN OF COLOUR”: ASPECTS OF THE NOTION

“A woman of colour” is a complicated notion which covers psychological, ethical, ethnical and cultural aspects and to a large extent refers to women representing various national groups: Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, American Indian women, etc. Although the groups are clearly distinguishable, the message they are sending to the society is the same: “women come in many shades, not just White, and the focus on ‘women’ should be suitably broadened” (Bowman, King 2003: 59).

One of the core issues in the psychology of “a woman of colour” is the duality and context of their identity. The duality of their identity lies in the two key words of the notion – “woman” and “colour” which means being a woman on the one hand and being attributed to a certain racial group on the other. The context is connected with a woman’s roles (a mother, a wife, etc.) and her experiences as a member of her ethnical group and a larger community.

The ethical aspects of the notion are extremely topical nowadays in the conditions of multiculturalism and need for multicultural tolerance, including refusing numerous stereotypes of non-White women and exercises of any oppression, be it racism, sexism, or the like. It may be stated that ethnical and ethic aspects of the notion are interwoven and inseparable from the above-mentioned level of identity and psychological self-assertion as all of these representations of the notion overlap in the area of racial and gender competences.

The cultural view of the notion includes not only physical artifacts and specific attributes of the group which were inherited from the ancestors and are maintained to be passed further on to future generations but also heritage in its broadest meaning - social

values and traditions, attitudes to one's own and other nations and cultures, artistic self-expression, spiritual values and beliefs.

Duality of Identity – Duality of Perception

Sharon L. Bowman together with Keisa D. King, as well as M. Canales, S.L. Bowman and other specialists in multicultural psychology have researched the peculiarities of identity formation of women of colour. Identity itself is a multilevel notion as any person has a number of identities bound to professional, personal and social aspects of his/her life. In this respect a lot of attention has been paid to analysing women of colour's identity as related to their gender and their race, considering that "for many ethnic women, it is impossible to think in terms of one or the other – they are shaped by both of these salient identities" (Bowman, King 2003: 65). Certainly the degree of identification with either "being a woman" or "being Black, Japanese or a woman of Hispanic origin" depends on a concrete person, however researches conducted by Bowman and King as well as by Martin and Hall "support the idea that ethnic minority women do think in terms of multiple identities" (Bowman, King 2003: 63).

The duality of identity of women representing ethnic minority is also the stumbling block which separates them from both the rest of women (that is white women) and men within their own group: "Women of color have two options: Join the struggle against racism and subordinate any feelings of discrimination by sex for the greater good of saving the race, or join the fight against sexism, meaning separation from the ethnic community" (Canales 1997 qtd. in Bowman, King 2003: 60). Joining either side automatically excludes the possibility to support the other.

The research conducted by Bowman and King among African American women and men college students in different universities of the USA clearly showed that in case of any gender-based conflicts or arguments within the community, racism prevails over sexism since "women started to shut down, as their male counterparts would dismiss any gender argument as irrelevant in light of the 'overall Black experience'" (Bowman, King

2003:62). African-American women are “pushed to support others’ needs over their own” (ibid.) and are used to acting according to the roles prescribed to them, as they reflect upon these roles even in the most ordinary aspects of their lives:

“When I get up in the morning I stare in the mirror and stick on my roles: I brush my teeth, as a responsibility to my community. I buff my nails, paving the way for my race. I comb my hair in the spirit of pulling myself up by the bootstraps. I dab astringent on my pores that I might be a role model upon whom all may gaze with pride. I mascara my eyelashes that I may be ‘different’ from all the rest. I glaze my lips with the commitment to deny pain and ‘rise above’ racism” (Williams 1991: 196).

Those African-American women who chose fighting against sexism had to face the fact that they were not able to become an equal part of the Feminist Movement as “all too often ‘woman’ was equated with white women” (But Some of Us Are Brave: A History of Black Feminism in the United States: para. 1) who in their representation of what they considered universal women’s needs and requirements encountered “problems in that who speaks and who is spoken about or for has depended largely on other categories, such as power, race, class and sexuality” (Nako 2001: 1). However, these aspects often remained unrecognised even despite the growing criticism of such shape of feminism:

“Most of criticism against mainstream feminism has pivoted on two claims. First of all, that when Western women speak simply as women, without specifying their location, (white middle class women) the meaning of what they say is often misunderstood and taken out of its context as representing all women. And second, that when Western feminists take up the cause of Third World women they reinforce the subjugation of Third World women by denying them the right to articulate their own problems” (Nako 2001: 2).

Thus African-American women’s striving for self-assertion within the “mainstream feminism” (ibid.), recognition and self-expression resulted in the foundation of the Black Feminist Movement which gained strength in the 1970s and 1980s. Alice Walker, being one of the most influential African-American feminist writers and a significant contributor to the Movement, went a step further on in emphasising the uniqueness of Black women by coining a new term “womanism”.

Womanism of and by Alice Walker

Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.
Alice Walker

As Loyalist King states in her article *African American womanism: from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker* “though Walker includes the straightforward statement that a womanist is a ‘black feminist, or feminist of color’, the qualities associated with the womanist are not confined to racial, gender, or other categories” (2004: 235). The main reason why womanism is a step forward from feminism is because while the latter is a movement/philosophy aimed at reaching equality in the recognition of rights of sexes, the former is about reaching “personal and communal wholeness” (King 2004: 239).

This striving for becoming a “whole” person embraces and unites all the aspects of Walker’s womanism that King analyzes in her research as mirrored in Walker’s six novels including *Possessing the Secret of Joy* which this thesis focuses on.

King defines four aspects of womanism coined by Walker: “direct and assertive behaviour”, “relationships”, “sensual pleasure”, and “connectedness” (2004: 247).

The first component is a means to reach self-assertion which requires both recognising of the foremothers of today’s African American women (it is also essential that the term “womanism” itself was first introduced in the preface to Walker’s essay *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* dedicated to the history of Black women’s spirit) and being “someone whose thoughts and actions place her ‘ahead of the game’, perhaps even in the position of visionary” (King 2004: 235).

The second aspect of Walker’s womanism “describes the womanist *vis-à-vis* her relationships with others and with herself, stresses connectedness over separatism, encourages an acceptance of a collective as it is exhibited in the many hues of the African

diaspora” (King 2004: 238). Although there is a negative stereotype of African American women being “sexually promiscuous and morally loose” (Bowman, King 2003:61), Walker “posits sexuality as *a good thing*” (King 2004: 239). Moreover, in her novels relationship between a woman and a man does not necessarily have to be sexual, for instance after Tashi, the main character of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* undergoes a circumcision, she is no longer able to enjoy sexual relationship with her husband, Adam, although she remains his wife and a dear and close person to him.

The third component is “sensual pleasure” which, as King states, is expressed most vividly in the novel *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*. Although this factor overlaps with the second component of Walker’s definition in the sexual side of relationships, it is beyond achieving harmony in between a man and a woman as it means “living in accordance with nature’s cycles” (King 2004: 246), striving for overall balance.

Connectedness of Walker’s womanism is expressed in a number of ways. As a literary device it can be followed first of all in a continuum of characters who are transferred from one novel to another. For example, Tashi who tells readers her story as an adult in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* appears as a child in *The Color Purple* where she is shown at the crucial moment of the death of her sister Dura because of bleeding after the act of circumcision performed by the same *tsunga* Tashi murders in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Walker also chooses similar names and situations for characters of different novels: her womanist spirit is expressed through Lissie of *The Temple of My Familiar* and Lisette in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The examples of mirroring scenes can be: “the letter Tashi composes to long-dead Lisette the night before her scheduled execution [which] is a preview of the story told by angels in *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*” and “Grange Copeland’s final acts serving a disruptive function that parallels Tashi’s killing M’Lissa in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*” (King 2004: 242-243). Another means of achieving

connectedness is the special spirit of sisterhood: Dura and Tashi in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Nettie and Celie of *the Color Purple*, which, however, is reverse in the case of the sisters Dee and Maggie of the story *Everyday Use*.

This last component of womanism which Walker herself expressed with the words of the epigraph “Womanist is to feminist as a purple to lavender” has been argued about by numerous critics. Dorothy Grimes believes the analogy is “apparently intended to capture the texture and intensity of *womanist* as opposed to *feminist*” (qtd. in King 2004: 247). Tuzyline Jita Allan suggests that “even with the filter of metaphor, the last statement fails to conceal the deep lines of division drawn here between black and white feminists. Walker sets up (black) womanism and (white) feminism in a binary from which the former emerges a privileged, original term and the latter, a devalued, pale replica” (qtd. in King 2004: 248). The choice of color used by Walker to compare the two notions, which is also the title of her best-known novel, *The Color Purple*, apparently symbolises a womanist spirit, dare, determined and whole.

The most important difference between a womanist and feminist is noted by L. King saying that “a womanist is pro-woman, not anti-man” (ibid.). In her novels Walker creates a “womanist cosmology” (ibid.) which is indifferent of time, place, race and gender.

Duality of the African American Heritage within the Framework of African-American Postcolonial Studies

Prior to defining the issue of African-American heritage it is necessary to consider the larger term of the African-American identity as well as the background and history of its emergence as it is believed that both the “competing pressures and duality of this identity” are historically-based (Hecht et al 1993: 3). The key notion in the history of formation of the identity is slavery which, considering the topic of the present research, is viewed upon not as a certain stage in historical development of the countries but rather as a

social and cultural phenomenon. Ron Eyerman (1997) determines this phenomenon as a “cultural trauma” which formed the African-American identity meaning “slavery as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded identity-formation of a people” (1997: 1). He believes that as a cultural process trauma is resolved through “various forms of representation” and is related to both reconstructing of collective identity and restoring of collective memory (ibid.). The remoteness of slavery in its direct meaning from the formation of the African-American identity and its little effect on the process are proven by the fact that, according to Eyerman, “the notion of an African American identity was articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of black intellectuals for whom slavery was a thing of the past, not the present. It was the memory of slavery and its representation through speech and art works that grounded African American identity...” (ibid.: 2). Slavery was now remembered and to some extent even appreciated for its reinforcement of the formation of a new collective “we-identity”; now in the centre there was “‘a more positive’ picture of the heritage of slavery, arguing that out of repression and subordination had grown a vibrant culture, a self-help work ethic, and a way to survive, which now in the face of a new wave of separation and marginalization could offer an alternative to the ‘vulgar materialism’ of modern American life” (Eyerman 1997: 61).

In this social background at the turn of the nineteenth century W.E.B. Du Bois introduced his own definition of the characteristic African-American identity which was based on the concept of race. He presented his vision of the concept first in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1897) and then in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (ibid.: 62). Within the framework of the African American identity Du Bois understood the function of race as “generalization of an ascribed commonality in a positive way, connecting the present to the past and a local group to a larger historical one...The African American was proposed as a

part of a larger collective, with African origins but now spread across the globe” (ibid.). Race in Du Bois’s interpretation is only externally dependent on common origin and physical characteristics, while the core of it is constituted by “common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and conscious striving together for certain ideals of life” (Bois qtd. in Eyerman 1997: 62). Collective memory which has been mentioned as one of dimensions of the concept of slavery in the cultural and social backdrop here is made the core point of the formation of race and understood as “embodied and expressed as common history and habits of thought” (Eyerman 1997: 62). Consequently, this overlap of the notions of slavery and race required considering the latter in the perspective of cultural trauma, which was done by Eyerman who came to the following conclusion about the function of race in the corresponding background: “race was a conceptual weapon, a trope and an instrument in the struggle to transform negative into positive, lifting a distinctiveness out of a distinction” (ibid.). In the process of re-evaluation of the past and formation of the new collective identity race was attributed a new status: it was “no mere victim however, because of a shared Africa past, it was a bearer of potential greatness. This greatness was now something that must be both recognized and realized” (ibid.: 63). In this way Du Bois forwarded racially based identification to a new level, which was national – that is referring to a local group of African American now joined by the new collective we-identity – and also universal – “to the abstract idea of cultural heritage, with links back to an imagined Africa and an abstract America, where the formal identity of citizenship and the romantic identity of cultural heritage were held in a tension filled unity” (ibid.).

In *Souls* Du Bois attempted to set borders to the American and African constituent parts of the dual identity and to attribute them certain functions. Thus, African-Americans in the United States were “American – by citizenship, political ideas, language and religion

– and African, as a member of a ‘vast historic race’ of separate origin from the rest of America” (qtd. in Eyerman 1997: 63). However, such distinction was not and could never have been a remedy which would equalise the significance of each of the identities and conciliate the conflict between them grounded in the “double consciousness” (the term was also coined by Du Bois), the “twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warning ideals in one dark body” (Strivings of the Negro People: para. 3). Du Bois believed that the conflict between “the two souls” is the cornerstone of the history and the future of Black Americans:

“The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American” (ibid.).

In the light of this struggle the aspect of the heritage is attributed a high, if not crucial importance as, in its very essence, the heritage is inseparable from the community:

“Heritage means intangible aspects of a particular culture, often maintained by social customs during a specific period in history. The ways and means of behavior in a society, and the often formal rules for operating in a particular cultural climate. These include social values and traditions, customs and practices, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs, artistic expression, language and other aspects of human activity” (Cultural heritage: para. 6).

Such of the above-mentioned heritage aspects as ways of social behaviour together with social values, traditions and especially artistic expression are the closest to the components of Walker’s womanism and her womanist spirit. That is why exactly these aspects are viewed as the heritage in the present research.

The heritage does not only set cultural and social boundaries which serve as indicators of a particular culture. It also provides a feeling of belonging to the culture that is crucial for the formation of a person’s identity. Thus the connection between the heritage and identity appears as an endless circle with the community in its centre. When a person is born to a community, his/her heritage is already pre-defined by the person’s ancestors;

the heritage is interwoven into various aspects of up-bringing and education so that it is cultivated at a subconscious level.

In case of African-Americans a person with the prehistory of and unconscious preparedness for one heritage is born into the community of another, with its own values, traditions and canons. Such person cannot ignore regulations of the latter outer heritage and thus he/she it to develop a new attitude to this duality of the inborn and outer heritage which can range from a complete antagonism against and aggression towards the latter heritage to a peaceful binary of the two. This is true in case of anyone with a double identity, be the person a Hispanic-American, Asian-American, etc. However, in case of African-Americans the phenomenon of this “twoness” is burdened by the painful history of slavery and humiliation of Blacks in the United States. Thus, “the internal conflict between being African and American simultaneously” (Double Consciousness 2007: para. 2) becomes not only personal but social, and even political.

This Master’s thesis aims at studying the possible relationship between the African and American heritages on the example of the characters of Alice Walker’s novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and the short story *Everyday Use*. The hypothesis the present research puts forward is that the relationship between the two heritages depends on a person’s sense of belonging to the outer heritage, i.e. to the American society.

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ALICE WALKER'S WRITING IN THE LIGHT OF THE PHENOMENON OF HERITAGE

Both Alice Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and short story *Everyday Use* have been much debated and written about. Critics focused on various issues reflected in the literary works: racism, women's social role and oppression, art, family relations and heritage (Whitsitt 2000, Baker 1993). For some reason heritage seems to have been paid less attention to as compared with the other burning issues of the African-American identity raised by Walker. Probably such imbalance can be explained by the fact that heritage, as such, a pure phenomenon, is rather difficult to research – being a multisided issue it requires the corresponding approach – by a particular aspect.

1.1 Views on the Issue of Heritage in Alice Walker's *Everyday Use*

1.1.1 The Analysis of the Notion of the African-American Heritage in David White's Article "Everyday Use': Defining African-American Heritage"

In his article David White divides the notion of the African-American heritage into its constitutive heritages, African and American, as well as between Mama's two daughters. Mama herself, "who has not spent a great deal of time contemplating abstract concepts such as heritage" (White 2001: para 3), nevertheless has "an inherent understanding of heritage based on her love and respect for those who came before her" (ibid.). In the course of the events of the story Mama is to choose which daughter, and, consequently, which actual heritage to support and stick to.

The elder daughter, Dee, is, as White characterizes her role, "a symbol of the Black Power movement, a bright and beautiful black who is vocal and aggressive in her demands" (2001: para.6). In the story Dee stands for the new type of an African-American

who, having deliberately discarded the painful American part of the double-sided history, has turned to exaggerated African characteristics (the name, dress and elements of household), seeking for new values and new understanding of the solely African heritage. White refers to this new heritage as “adopted” (2001: para. 12) which perfectly illustrates that it is strange and rootless. Besides, Dee’s attitude to this new self is shallow and it resembles a consumer’s approach to whatever is in fashion at the moment. In the early 1970s, being black became trendy, and thus Dee takes pictures of the house and demands the butter churn and quilts, the artifacts of her long-forgotten African history which she cannot find a proper application for. As David Cowart writes, “she wants to make the lid of the butter churn into a centerpiece for her table. She wants to hang quilts on the wall. She wants, in short, to do what white people do with the cunning and quaint implements and products of the past” (qtd. in White 2001: para. 10).

At the beginning of the story Mama inclines to being an African-American of the same, new and bold, type which is represented by her vivid dream about a popular show that is just one of hundreds of talk shows, alike and milk-and-water, produced by the same assembly line of the entertainment industry. All the characters there, including the imaginary Mama, are like two peas in a pod, and the action unfolds under one and the same scenario: first, “the child who has ‘made it’ is confronted by her mother, then mother and child embrace and smile into each other’s faces” (in *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing* 1991: 191). Mama secretly dreams of enacting this scenario in her real life; she needs acknowledgement as much as Dee is ashamed of both Mama and the humiliating “American” part of her heritage. But as the purpose of Dee’s visit becomes as obvious as her striving for the new African image, Mama’s attitude to her begins to change. White states that this shift is expressed through Mama’s perception of

Dee's new name. Although Mama's disappointed with Dee's decision to become Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo she starts referring to her as "Wangero".

"As Mama continues the narrative, she gradually changes "Wangero" to "Dee (Wangero)", and in her final reference she simple refers to her as "Dee". These transitions are indicative of Mama's change in attitude towards Dee. Mama does not immediately understand the serious implications of Dee's name change, and is able to make light of it. But as Dee's selfish and disrespectful actions clarify the significance of her choice, Mama loses her sense of humor and finally drops "Wangero" altogether. Just as "Wangero" had rejected Dee, Mama now rejects "Wangero" "(White 2001: para. 15).

Maggie, whose role in the story is symbolising, with her scars, looks and behaviour, this very humiliating history, and "the 'yes sir, no ma'am' Negro heritage from before, and well after the Civil War" (White 2001: para. 14), is a reproach to both her sister and Mama. The latter treats Maggie with a mixed feeling of pity and disappointment as Mama realizes that Maggie is to copy and continue the same way of life where she would not "look a strange white man in the eye" and nothing "will be reserved for her" (in *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing* 1991: 192). Dee has never considered Maggie worthy to count with or pay attention to, let alone have any feelings for but disdain. Wangero barely interacts with her younger sister which White sees as another reflection of Dee's "denial of American heritage" (ibid.).

The argument between the sisters over the quilts shows Mama the strength of her younger daughter and the core of her American heritage i.e. the people she loved, with all the sufferings they went through. As White states, looking at Maggie at the end of the story Mama sees "her mother and her sister – the two women whose name Dee has rejected. In Maggie's scarred hands she sees a heritage she should be proud of – not ashamed of" (White 2001: para. 15).

The separation of the double African-American heritage between Dee and Maggie which White makes at the beginning of his article clearly illustrates that through Mama's accepting of the latter Walker chooses to "challenge the Black Power movement, and black people in general, to acknowledge and respect their American heritage" (White 2001: para.

17). White compares the process of building up the new delusive African heritage with choosing the preferred or more attractive pieces of fabric for quilt making. Such heritage is much easier to be proud of than the painful, American part of the blacks' history. However, the important point White makes at the end of his article is that notwithstanding the political and social reasons for choosing oneself either heritage, the African heritage is the one which recognises real people and their feelings, as "it is a real heritage that is comprised of real people: people who are deserving of respect and admiration" (ibid). However, the protagonist, Dee, is more concerned with the explicit features of her inborn African heritage, thus being unable to appreciate her roots to the full as she withdraws herself from recognising her belonging to the American dimension of being an African-American.

1.1.2 The Problematics of Heritage in Everyday Use in Helga Hoel's Article *Personal Names and Heritage: Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"*

Helga Hoel also pays attention to the political background of Alice Walker's short story *Everyday Use* when she characterizes 1973 – the year of publication of the story at the opening of her *Personal Names and Heritage: Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"* "This was in the heyday of the Black Power ideologies when 'Black was beautiful', the Afro hairstyle was in fashion and Blacks were seeking their cultural roots in Africa, without knowing too much about the continent..." (2007: 1). Underlining the importance of the story for Walker's writing, Hoel refers to it as "central, particularly as it represents her [Walker's] response to the concept of heritage as expressed by the Black political movements of the 60s" (ibid.).

When placing one of the main characters of *Everyday Use*, Dee, into this background of interest towards and pride for the African heritage, Hoel refers to Clara and Inger Juncker:

“Dee has joined the movement of the Cultural Nationalism, whose major spokesman was the Black writer Le Roi Jones (Imamu Baraka). The Cultural Nationalists emphasised the development of black art and culture to further black liberation, but were not militantly political, like, for example, the Black Panthers. The ideas of the Cultural nationalists often resulted in the vulgarization of black culture, exemplified in the wearing of robes, sandals, hairspray ‘natural’ style, etc” (qtd. in Hoel, 2007: 1).

Thus, for many African Americans their rediscovery of the original African roots limited in, on the one hand, the complete denial of the American heritage and, on the other hand – the decoration of their lives with obvious attributes of the black culture. However, Walker’s *Everyday Use* discards the very idea of the choice between the two heritages, let alone the refusal from either of them, as “in *Everyday Use* Alice Walker argues that an African-American is both African and American, and to deny the American of one’s heritage is disrespectful of one’s ancestors and, consequently, harmful to one’s self. She uses the principal characters of Mama, Dee (Wangero) and Maggie to clarify this thought” (White qtd. in Hoel 2007: *ibid.*).

Although in her article Hoel applies “heritage” as one of the key words, she does not provide an exact definition of the notion. Still, the analysis of the personal names in Walker’s story as well as the clearly African origin of these names indicate that the critic focuses on the African heritage and its representation in *Everyday Use*. The main aim of the analysis is to illustrate the standpoint that the African heritage valued by Walker and her characters cannot be related to a certain African people, it is African in the very sense of the word, belonging to all the Black people whose story began on the continent. This idea is to some extent supported by the conclusion Hoel comes to, having conducted the research of the spelling and meaning of Dee’s new name which is “Dee has names

representing the whole East African region” (2007: 4) as Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo cannot be found in one certain African language:

“These important names Dee bases her new-found identity on resemble Kikuyu names, but they are all misspelt. Wangero is not a Kikuyu name, but Wanjiru is...The last of the three names is also distorted. The correct Kikuyu name is Kamenju. The middle name is not a Kikuyu name at all. One of my Kikuyu informants told me he knew a lady from Malawi who was called Le(e)wanika. Later (in January 2000) I found out that there was a king Lewanika in Barotseland in Zambia from 1842-1916” (ibid.).

On the other hand, Hoel strongly supports the idea that all these African attributes, such as the new ambiguous name, the inappropriate greeting “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o” (“a Luganda phrase showing how the Buganda people of Uganda say ‘Good morning’. It can be translated as something like ‘I hope you slept well (Hoel: ibid.) are like her long flowing dress which “has nothing to do with traditions, only with fashion” (ibid.).

1.1.3 The Interrelation between Deracination and Heritage in David Cowart’s Article “Heritage and Deracination in Walker’s “Everyday Use”

The main issue analysed by David Cowart in his article is deracination which he defines as “a sundering from all that has sustained and defined them [African Americans]” (in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 21). Having taken the dictionary definition of the term which is “isolation or alienation (of a person) from a native or customary culture or environment” (Dicionary.com) one can conclude that Cowart sees culture and environment as the decisive aspects of the formation of race and identity. In the article he analyses how the whole generation of Africa Americans, represented by the character of Wangero, deliberately discards its racial identity and thus betrays its heritage. The quilts which “represent the larger African American past” (ibid.) can be considered a symbol of the joint African American heritage. Thus, the argument between the sisters over the quilts is the struggle of the two generations: the one that has maintained this African American experience and the other which is ready to refuse this joint experience in favour of the newly African one.

When referring to the latter generation, Cowart introduces a special term, “a cultural Catch-22”: “an American who attempts to become an African succeeds only in becoming a phony” (in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 22). The Catch-22 in the situation is the inevitable fakeness of all the new African attributes Wangero demonstrates as she is unable to recognise their meaning to the same extent to which she is ignorant of her roots. As Cowart states (ibid.), “in her name, her clothes, her hair, her patronizing speech, and her black Muslim companion, Wangero proclaims a deplorable degree of alienation from her rural origins and family. The story’s irony is not subtle: the visitor who reproaches others for an ignorance of their own heritage is herself almost completely disconnected from a nurturing tradition”.

Although in the article Cowart does not provide an exact definition of what is understood by heritage, it is supposedly the African American past as a whole cultural phenomenon whose attributes are the artifacts which are the central point of the story: the photographs, the churn lid, the dasher, even the house, and, most importantly, the quilts.

The process of deracination Dee-Wangero is going through consists of “a series of attempts to achieve racial and cultural autonomy” (Cowart in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 22). Dee’s gradual rejection of her racial identity and her heritage started with her determination to be different from her mother and sister and to leave the ghetto. Although in the story Dee’s attitude to the fire in the house may invoke readers’ disapproval, Cowart seems not only to justify her joy at the destruction of the house but also to support her when he calls Dee a “survivor with scars of the soul” (in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 23).

Cowart emphasises the significance of the image of the house referring to a deeper psychological significance of the notion: “Freud associates houses with women, and this story of three women is also the story of three houses, one that burned, one that shelters

two of the fire's survivors, and one, never directly described, that is to be the repository of various articles of this family's past, its heritage" (ibid. - 24). What is surprising, however, is that Cowart sees Wangero as the owner of this last house, thus making her the symbol of the very heritage she lacks the proper understanding and valuation of. A possible explanation here is that there is another, superficial heritage which Wangero is to acquire and preserve in the third house. The most important question is "Can she embrace a grand heritage only by betraying the simpler heritage necessary to emotional and psychological wholeness?"(ibid.).

Wangero applies this "simpler heritage" (the artifacts that Dee longs to have and the photographs she takes), as long as she still needs it, as a means of distinction from her past: "Wnagero's desire is to have a record of how far she has come. She wants the photographs – and presently the churn lid, the dasher, and the quilts – for purposes of display, reminders that she no longer has to live in such a house, care for such a cow, have daily intercourse with such a mother and sister" (Cowart in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 24). Cowart also refers to the words of Donna Haisty Winchell, who states that Wangero "makes the mistake of believing that one's heritage is something that one puts on display if and when such a display is fashionable" (qtd. in Cowart in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* 1999: 24).

The following conclusions about the interrelation between the deracination and heritage in *Everyday Use* can be drawn on the basis of the article:

- In case of Dee-Wangero deracination is a means of escaping from African-American past.
- Heritage represented in the article is a joint two-sided phenomenon, which is the *African-American heritage*, and it consists of displayable artifacts.

- The displayable heritage serves as a marker in the process of Dee's deracination and it can be easily betrayed if another, more demonstrative and convincing, marker is needed.

1.1.4 Reconsideration of Dee's Role in the Story in Susan Farrell's Article *Fight vs. Flight: a re-valuation of Dee in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"*

As Susan Farrell states at the beginning of her critical essay *Fight vs. Flight: a re-valuation of Dee in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"* most readers and critics, such as, for example, the aforementioned White, see Dee as the "villain" of the story with her superficial attitude to her roots and shallow understanding of her heritage and they support Mama in her choice in favour of the younger daughter. However, Farrell argues that "while Dee is certainly insensitive and selfish to a certain degree, she nevertheless offers a view of heritage and a strategy for contemporary African Americans to cope with an oppressive society that is, in some ways, more valid than that offered by Mama and Maggie" (1998: para.1).

According to Farrell, the most important aspect of the narration that constructs readers' view of the events which unfold in the story and their attitude towards the characters is the fact that this is the first-person narration which presupposes its bias: "We must remember from the beginning that the story is told by Mama; the perceptions are filtered through her mind and her views of her two daughters are not to be accepted uncritically" (ibid. - para.2). Farrell believes that a critical and objective reader would see that the whole story can be interpreted if not in favour of Dee, then, at least, as her excuse.

The first vivid episode of the story is Mama's daydream about her reunion with her elder daughter. For some critics, including Nancy Tuten, the description of this making-up allows to conclude that Dee is ashamed of her mother's looks and that the former's values

“are equal to those of the white Johnny Carson society” (Tuten qtd. in Farrell 1998: para.5). However, Farrell argues that “we have to question whether Mama's vision of her light-skinned, slender, witty self is actually Dee's wish or only Mama's perception of what she imagines Dee would like her to be” (1998: para.5).

Farrell insists that “Mama is often wrong about her expectations of Dee and her readings of Dee’s emotions” (ibid. - para.6). For all the situations of the story which can be marked with the key words *house, name, education, heritage* (and *quilts* along with the other artifacts as its representation in the story) discussed by practically all the critics who have written about *Everyday Use*, Farrell represents a reading opposite to the one the reader sees through Mama’s eyes. She illustrates that while living with her mother and sister, Dee was trying “to extend her own education to them” (Farrell 1998: para. 9), as well as to teach them that there is another way of treating life circumstances – fighting for escaping the ghetto, instead of meekly accepting the absence of proper education, clothes and any perspectives as such.

Farrell states that Mama owes her final discovery of her younger daughter’s spirit partially to Dee, as “Mama's moment of triumph is achieved because she is able to attain a balance between the two types of her heritage represented by her very different daughters – at the end Mama combines Maggie's respect for tradition with Dee's pride and refusal to back down, the combination Walker seems to feel is necessary if true social change is to come about” (ibid.- para. 17).

1.1.5 The Outcomes of the Analysis of the Articles and Critical Essays by D. White, H. Hoel, D. Cowart and S. Farrell

All of the articles discuss the issue of heritage in respect of the political and social situation in the USA in the 1960s – 1970s, the cultural tradition and the author’s attitude to

her characters. The following conclusions can be drawn upon the analysis of the articles and essays by Cowart, Hoel, White and Farrell:

- The character of Dee-Wangero is considered the symbol of the generation of “new blacks” or the Black Power Movement.
- In the story Maggie represents the American component of the heritage while Dee-Wangero represents the new fashionable interpretation of the African roots.
- Dee’s shallow and consumer-like attitude to her distant African past is illustrated through her senseless decoration of herself with pseudo-African attributes (her name, which cannot be found in any African language, her dress, her companion).
- Dee sees heritage as displayable artifacts she can apply, on the one hand, to follow the cultural and aesthetic trends of the moment, and, on the other hand, to mark her superiority over and remoteness from the embarrassing household of her family.
- Some critics, such as Hoel and Farrell attempt to justify the choices of Dee considering her determination, the ability to fight back and the desire to escape the ghetto a necessary counterbalance of the meek acceptance of Maggie and Mama.

As it can be seen, the authors do divide the notion of the African-American heritage into its constituent parts and attribute them to the characters of the story. However, they do not study them as the outer and inborn heritages and focus on the political and social background of the phenomenon rather than analyse the characters’ feeling of belonging to the American society which in the present thesis is considered the outer heritage. In order to conduct the analysis of the relationship between the African and American heritages as

outer and inborn the author of the present thesis will study the compositional element of the novel and the character structure in particular.

1.2. Analysis of Criticism Dedicated to the Problematics of African and American Heritages in Alice Walker's Novel "Possessing the Secret of Joy"

The publication of the novel in 1992 was a bombshell both for the Western and African societies, literatures and cultures as the main topic of it – female circumcision – is one of the phenomena which are preferred to be dissembled despite their wide practice. As Alice Walker says in the novel "from ninety to one hundred million women and girls living today in African, Far Eastern and Middle Eastern countries have suffered some form of genital mutilation" (1992: 283). Although the ritual and its devastating effect on a woman's health and psychological condition is the central theme of *Possessing*, in it Walker also raises such questions as the wholeness of self, gender and racial dominance as well as the African and American identities.

The novel is a multidimensional and multilayered piece of writing which has been studied from various angles. However, most of the criticism written on "Possessing the Secret of Joy" has placed it and its characters within a social context and made generalisations about the latter depending on the former.

Such researches as Tobe Levin (1994) focused on the issue of "genital mutilation" (the euphemism for female circumcision introduced by Walker), arguing the relation of the contemporary practice to the traditional tribal culture of Africa while Alyson R. Buckman in her article "The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (1995) drew an interesting analogy between a body of a black African woman and the continent itself in the light of the colonisation of Africa.

Geneva Cobb Moore (2000) and George Olakunle (2001) study the psychological dimension of the problem: the former researcher conducting a thorough comparative analysis of the protagonist's seeking for her true self to the Jungian search for wholeness and the latter indentifying Jung's influence on Walker's shaping of her characters,

especially the psychotherapist Carl. Olakunle recognises the author's personal striving for completeness as an American of African origin in her protagonist's quest for her true identity and aims at illustrating the relationship in his research where he also analyses possible interpretations of female circumcision as a cultural practice both from the African and Western (American) points of representation.

All of the above-mentioned critics, although to various extents, addressed this issue of Walker's expression in the novel and African discourse. This question is studied in Nontsasa Nako's article *Possessing the Voice of the Other: African Women and the 'Crisis of Representation' in Alice Walker's "Possessing the Secret of Joy"*.

In her paper Nako argues whether Walker has the right to speak for the black women living in Africa stating that "the main charge against Walker [for *Possessing the Secret of Joy*] has been that of cultural imperialism. That her depiction of Africa and Africans is beholden to her Western hegemonic heritage as an American rather than the African self she claims in the novel" (2001:7). This issue is essential in the light of the present research as the authenticity of Walker's description of her characters and prescribed to them national as well as racial identities is significant to the study of the African and American heritages.

The starting point of Nako's analysis of Walker's representation of speaking "for the other" – the term used by Christopher Miller and Linda Alcoff – is the claims of "two mutually exclusive positions" (2001:3) Nako makes in relation to the above-mentioned accusation of cultural imperialism: Walker's African ancestry allows her to take the insider's position in judging about African culture the way she sees it and depicts it in her writing, although, on the other hand, Walker's American heritage casts her as an intervener (ibid.).

In her article Nako describes three strategies singled out from the novel which are applied by Walker in order to downplay the contradiction of her above-mentioned positions. The first strategy - “[Walker’s] displacing her imperialism reading onto another text, Mirellia Ricciardi’s autobiography, *The African Saga*” (Nako *ibid.*) – which refers to the white-black colonialist core of the novel seems to lack relevance to the duality of the issue of the black African-American heritage.

The core of the second strategy Walker exploits for fighting the opposition of her insider-intervener position is the duality of consciousness. While “Walker employs what seems to be one of the most democratic narrative strategies [polyphonic text] by incorporating as many voices in her text as she possibly can, where the narratives of the different characters are meant to complement, complete and sometimes contradict each other” (Nako 2001: 4), the duality of the voice, culturalness and consciousness still dominates in the novel “because the double voice of the text is structural rather than thematic, it does not disrupt or undermine the colonial stance of the text” (*ibid.*). Nako considers the double-consciousness to be not only the backbone of Walker’s writing but also her method of character analysis and build-up. However, the conclusion Nako makes is that Walker’s Western position outweighs the African worldviewer within her: “the two identities exist within the same text, but one is subjected to the worldview of the other. The Western worldview is the yardstick with which everything is measured... This is because she uses language, discourse and epistemic modes of Western culture to nullify even the possibility of such things in Africa” (2001: 4-5). Nako’s interpretation of Walker’s African discourse in the novel appears to be leading to the following conclusions: firstly, the critic is doubtful about the authenticity of the African dimension of the novel and, secondly, she states that the Western (which in the novel equals American) worldview dominates in the narration.

When analysing essentialism as the third of the above-investigated Walker's techniques, Nako points to the clear differentiation between Africans and African Americans which is accomplished through the division of the characters into Africans and African Americans. The only exception is the protagonist who acquires both of the identities, although she never belongs to either of them completely: "She becomes an outsider in Olinka after murdering M'lissa and she remains an outsider in America even after marrying Adam because of her remaining tie to Africa, symbolized by her 'mutilation'" (Nako 2001: 5). What Nako appears to condemn Walker the most for is that

"the two constructions of black womanhood are never reconciled in the novel. African American women and African women are represented as different and all the negative stereotypes of black womanhood are projected to African women. African American women like Raye, Olivia are portrayed as strong, assertive and independent. In contrast to African women like M'lissa, Nafa/Catherine who are either timid over-worked slaves in the latter case or witches who are nothing 'but tortures of children' in the former" (ibid.).

To sum up the main points of Nako's criticism of Walker's representation as African and American in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* it can be stated that firstly, the critic seems to be of the opinion that Walker, being strongly influenced by her outweighing Western worldview, failed to create the credibly authentic African dimension in the novel. Secondly, (which is even more essential for this research) Nako's view of the relationship between African and African American women which she expresses with the third of the defined strategies allows to conclude that she sees the relationship between African and American identities (and, consequently, the two heritages) of the black women of the novel as being strongly opposed to each other.

A solution to the problem of relationships between heritages and identities which can be called unusual and unconventional is illustrated by Lillian Temu Osaki in her article *Madness in Black Women's Writing. Reflections from four texts: a Question to Power, the Joys of Motherhood, Anowa and Possessing the Secret of Joy* published in *Afhad Journal* in 2002. The author provides possible understanding of the concept of madness (which "is a recurring theme in African women writing [and] it has also been addressed in a number

of African American women's writing") that explain it rather as an "evaluative concept" (Joan Bushfield, 1994) than a state of human psychic. Osaki's research is based on the following idea of Femi Ojo-Ade (1979):

"The African novel in dealing with the question of alienation has depicted two types of alienated heroes: the one who has managed, in spite of overwhelming pressures of his situation, to stay on what could be termed 'the right side of the fence'; that is, he does not belong to the mainstream of the social order, he is a 'stranger', albeit a 'sane' stranger. On the other hand, there is the hero who goes over board, so to speak. Finding it totally impossible to adjust to the inhuman situation existing in his society, not satisfied with mere utterances or with a fairly 'sane' life on the fringe of the society, he pushes himself mentally to the limit, and even beyond it, and finally reaches a point where society ostracises him and deems it fit to put him away in a madhouse" (qtd. in Osaki 2002: 1),

choosing the latter concept of a character mad by the society for analysing the heroines of the four texts, including "Possessing the Secret of Joy".

In the part of the article dedicated to Walker's novel Osaki proceeds from the point that Tashi goes insane "only after she leaves Africa and settles in the United States" (2002: 6). The researcher considers the protagonist's mental breakdown to be the effect of her inability to determine her identity: "Tashi is circumcised because she once identified herself with the people of Olinka. When she moves to the United States, Tashi becomes what Davies define as a migratory subject. She is neither Olinkan, nor American but something in between, something with multiple identities that do not always harmonize" (ibid.: 7).

However, Osaki does not apply Ojo-Ade's idea to the full as the researcher does not investigate which society (African or American) drove Tashi insane or whether her mental breakdown was caused by the shift of them. In case of Walker's novel Osaki diagnoses madness as a result of misbalance of the protagonist's selves although leaving the question of the prevailing society (which can be called equaled to the question of the prevailing heritage in the present research) open.

While the social and political issues of *Possessing* have been thoroughly analysed from various angles and points of view, the novel seems to lack purely literary analysis, i.e. of

its composition, lexis and characters. The authors of the above-considered articles do pay some attention to these aspects of the novel, but they mostly do so either fragmentarily or per aspect (for example, Nako pinpoints the polyphony of Walker's narration). Angeletta K.M Gourdine in her article *Postmodern Ethnography and the Womanist Mission: Postcolonial Sensibilities in 'Possessing the Secret of Joy'* makes conclusions which refer not only to the central theme of the novel and its significance, but also to the genre and peculiarities of "Possessing" as a piece of literary text.

Gourdine's essay proceeds on the idea of the ethnographic nature of the novel. Although her determination "to examine the narrative of Possessing the Secret of Joy as ethnographic, predicated upon and beholden to the legacy of Western anthropology's relationship to and conscription of Africa and blackwomen's bodies" (Gourdine 1996: 2) is not directly related to the present research, it is important as most of the critics of the novel emphasise its social and political framework. However, recognising "Possessing" as a piece of ethnographic writing allows to change the focus from political and feminist labeling towards appreciating the novel rather as cultural reading.

Gourdine pinpoints the "varying references" (ibid.: 1) to the protagonists such as "Tashi", renamed in America as "Evelyn", "Evelyn Johnson" and "Tashi-Evelyn" (ibid.) as ways of expressing her dual cultural background. The last of the names encourages the author of the essay to turn to the idea of Du Bois's "twoness" referred to in the introductory part of the present thesis. However, Gourdine does not analyse the relationship between the two cultural identities, nor does she investigate the exact moment of the shift of the identities.

Another significant point made by Gourdine in her article concerns the role of Walker not only as the author, but as a character of the novel: "Walker introduces herself as part of the narrative, and hence becomes vital to Tashi's story as she draws Tashi into her own"

(1996: 2). The author of the essay believes that such Walker's "intrusion into the fictional text of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* suggests that the novel is more than fiction" (1996: 5). In discovering her connection to Tashi as "blackwoman to blackwoman, Walker categorically castigates African women's histories and possesses their bodies in a bizarre struggle to free her own" (ibid.).

All in all, in her article Gourdine attempts to present the issues of colonisation and re-evaluation of the novelist's African origin and experience through methods and characteristics of an ethnographic text in order to intensify the novel's status as cultural reading.

The most literary analysis of "Possessing the Secret of Joy" the author of the present thesis has encountered is conducted by Gerri Bates and represented in her "Alice Walker. A Critical Companion" published in 2005. In the section dedicated to the novel Bates investigates it at different levels by studying its structure, socio-historical context, plot, genre and characters. The peculiarity of the analysis of the novel lies in its objectivity as Bates does not only avoid criticising Walker in the very essence of the word, but incorporates views of other critics and researchers in order to provide readers of her companion with the background information as versatile and multi-sided as the novel itself is.

Although in the article Bates refers to both Africa and America at all of the levels of her analysis to some extent, she barely touches the issue of their relationship and its significance for the characters of the novel. Only in her subchapter "Themes" the researcher addresses the concept of re-evaluation of Africa in the period of the Harlem Renaissance, saying that in the novel "Walker deconstructs the perception of idyllic Africa held by pro-Africa converts" (2005: 121). This reference to African-American's

idealisation of their African roots in the 1960s links *Possessing* with the short story *Everyday Use* that is the other object of the present research.

Considering the previous research conducted on the novel and its African-American dimension the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Most critics recognize the effect of the duality of Walker's representation in the novel caused by her African ancestry and her Westernised worldview on the authenticity of her African discourse;
- The protagonist's quest for wholeness of her identity is viewed upon as a means Walker applies for completing her own recognition of her roots;
- The protagonist's multiple identities are expressed through the polyphonic narration, although either the relationship between them, or the shifting from one identity to another have not been analysed yet.

In order to study the relationship between the African and American heritages in "Possessing the Secret of Joy" and prove the hypothesis of the present research the author of the thesis will focus on the compositional element of the novel by analysing the interconnection of the different "I-s" of the narrator-protagonists" and the shift between these points of view.

CHAPTER II

THE ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AFRICAN AND AMERICAN HERITAGES IN ALICE WALKER'S NOVEL "POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY" AND SHORT STORY "EVERYDAY USE"

2.1. The African and American Heritages in Possessing the Secret of Joy

2.1.1. The Overview of the Structure, Plot and Characters of Alice Walker's Novel "Possessing the Secret of Joy"

Structurally the novel represents a 21-part piece of writing where each of the parts includes several first-person narrations (72 narrations in total). 42 of the narrations are voiced by the protagonist Tashi and her multiple identities (Tashi-Evelyn, Evelyn, Evelyn-Tashi, and Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson), the rest of the narrations are voiced by Adam, Benny, Olivia, Lisette, Pierre, M'Lissa and Mzee. The afterword the novel includes provides the statistics of the number of girls and women in Africa, the Far East and the Middle East who have gone through the ritual of circumcision.

The protagonist of the novel is an Olinka woman called Tashi who, seeing the preservation of the culture of her tribe threatened by the outsiders (An English rubber manufacturer, missionaries), decides to undergo the tribal scarification and then, the female circumcision performed by the *tsunga* of the tribe, M'Lissa. However, the rituals do not provide her with the tribal unity she was seeking for, moreover, the latter drastically changes her not only her body, but her personal life and relationship with her husband, Adam (an African-American missionary). The understanding of the trauma the mutilation has caused her almost leads Tashi, now an American woman called Evelyn Johnson, to a mental breakdown and leaves her in need for therapy. After being healed through psychoanalysis Tashi makes a decision to return to Africa in order to murder M'Lissa. The

final parts of the novel describe the last days of Tashi's life which she spends imprisoned and her execution.

The dominance of Tashi's narrations is caused not only by her role in the novel but also her expression of herself through different identities: throughout *Possessing* she presents herself as Tashi, Tashi-Evelyn, Evelyn, Evelyn-Tashi, Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson and even Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul. The reason for the choice of the "self" as well as the relationship between the different "I's" of the protagonist are in the focus of the present research.

Adam, Tashi's husband, and his sister Olivia are the only characters of the novel who knew Tashi before she underwent circumcision; they went through her ordeal with her and also suffered the consequences of her decision. It is interesting that although both the brother and the sister saw Tashi for the first time together, their memories of her are the opposite: Olivia saw a crying little girl upset by her sister's death (p.6-9¹), while Adam says that "Tashi he remembers was always laughing, and making up stories" (p.14).

Adam is an African-American, a son of a Christian missionary who came to Tashi's village. On returning to the USA Adam followed in his father's footsteps and started his own ministry in San Francisco. Although he has been supporting his wife's searching for her personal and national wholeness – he even had his own face scarred the evening before the wedding -, Tashi's circumcision robbed him of the truly family-like relationship, intimacy with his wife, meaning not only sexual relationship with her, but also warm and loving friendship they used to have before the ritual has led Tashi to an emotional and mental breakdown. Adam finds the understanding and comfort of suffering-free relationship in his affair with a French woman Lisette, later on fathering a son Pierre. Although Tashi does see Adam's adultery as a betrayal, she is wounded more deeply with

¹ Here and further on citing from Walker, A. 1992. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Pocket Books.

his refusal to address the issue of female circumcision in his addressing of his congregation, as he feared the subject would be too conflictive and appalling to speak about. As Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson writes in her letter to Lisette, by then long dead:

“But do you know why my soul removed himself from Adam’s reach? It is because I helped him start his progressive ministry, and I sat there in our church every Sunday for five years...In my sixth year as a member of Adam’s congregation, I knew I wanted my own suffering, the suffering of women and little girls,.. to be the subject of a sermon...One sermon, I begged him. One discussion with your followers about what was done to me. He said the congregation would be embarrassed to discuss something so private and that, in any case, he would be ashamed to do so” (p.275-276).

Olivia’s role in the novel can be called motherly, she is the essence of care, love for Tashi and belief in her. The protagonist’s real mother, Nafa, is spoken about in the novel rather little. She is pictured as a hard-working typical Olinka woman, who did not dare not only to resist, but even mourn over her daughter’s death. The most vivid image of her mother that the protagonist has is her mother’s legs and the “white rinds of her heels” (p.16) which symbolise the suffering which Nafa carries and which “settles upon her spirit” – that of her own and her daughters’. Even though Tashi feels pity for her mother she cannot forgive Nafa either for her meek obedience to the tradition or for Dura’s death: “my mother was not equipped to think about me. Or about my sister Dura, who bled to death after a botched circumcision, or about any of her other children. She had just sunk into her role of ‘She Who Prepares the Lambs for Slaughter’” (p.275). Olivia, in contrast, is the one who “thought most about me”, says Tashi. Olivia’s importance is also emphasised by Tashi’s special attitude towards her – the former is the only person the protagonist is afraid to disappoint, fearing to betray Olivia’s trust: “Then there is Olivia. She has always thought so well of me. I find it impossible to disappoint her. I told her I did not kill the *tsunga* M’Lissa. [But] I killed her all right” (p.276). Olivia also plays another important role in the novel: although critics, such as Gourdine, claim that Walker’s ideas and attitudes are voiced by the protagonist, Olivia fulfills the author’s function of educator in the issues of women circumcision as she lectures on the subject.

The character of Lisette, Adam's mistress, is different from a typical image of "the other woman" seducing a man from his family. In Lisette Adam found the relief of being able to discuss what happened to his wife, the happiness of having a son to be proud of and the warm and normal communication. Seeing Adam's suffering, his mistress made numerous attempts to assist both him and Tashi: her uncle was the psychotherapist who healed Tashi's soul, Lisette was addressing the protagonist in letters, and finally, long after Lisette's death, her and Adam's son Pierre was indeed the person who explained to Tashi the root of her fears and unhappiness. To some extent, Lisette's compassion for all the women who suffered from circumcision binds the character rather with Tashi than with Adam.

M'Lissa, the *tsunga* of Olinka is the villain of the novel. She inherited her social role from her mother and she is the one who performed the circumcision both on Dura (Tashi's sister who died after the procedure) and on Tashi herself. By the end of her life M'Lissa "had been honored by the Olinka government for her role during the wars of liberation, when she'd acted as a nurse as devoted to her charges as Florence Nightingale and for her unflinching adherence to the ancient customs and traditions of the Olinka state" (p.149). Such recognition and appreciation of the merciless killer (who she is both literally and allegorically) of young girls,

Benny (Bentu Moraga) is the son of Tashi and Adam. He is another victim of Tashi's decision to be mutilated as he is mentally challenged (slightly retarded) due to the birth trauma. Benny is unable to remember or memorise anything, he needs to prepare lists and notes for every conversation he is to have, even with his family. In phrasing Benny's condition as "negatively unique" with "the attention span of the average American TV viewer" (p. 95) Walker's mocks at the tendency of positive labeling of the political correctness. Tashi does not show much affection to her son, neither does she have any

emotional connection with him; she would even box his ears. The only time when the protagonist acts motherly is during her imprisonment when “She was warm and comfortable, as if she were an entirely different person than the driven, frowning mother [Benny] had always known” (p.94).

Mzee, or “Uncle Carl” is the psychotherapist who heals Tashi by using the dream symbology of Jung. He assists Tashi in memorising the earliest effect of the ritual upon her life, the death of her sister and her later fear of blood. Carl (together with Pierre) represent “a figure of enlightenment” (Olakunle 2001:4), but that of different kinds. According to the critic “Carl emblemizes the novel’s yearning for universal fellow-feeling. Though white and privileged, he is admitted, so to speak, into the progressive camp in the novel because he uses his knowledge in good ways and transcends the limitations of his cultural formation” (ibid.).

Pierre is the symbol of universalism and wholeness, he is “the personification of the coming together of disenfranchised groups – black-white biracial and gay intellectual” (*Alice Walker: A Critical Companion* 2005:124). He is the son of Adam and Lisette and since his childhood he has been immersed into the mystery of Tashi’s suffering which he is able to explain to her as an adult and specialist in anthropology. As Geneva Cobb Moore states it, “initially rejected, like the biblical Christ, Pierre has become for Tashi the sacred “corner” stone that she once hurdled at him (in *Southern Literary Journal* 2000: 118).

After Mzee’s death Tashi continues her treatment with Raye, an African American female analyst, whom the protagonist needs for being healed completely, or, as Gerri Bates puts it, “to peel away the masked layers that prevent her from seeing herself completely” (ibid.). As Tashi herself says, “I believed she would be plucky enough to accompany me where he [Mzee] could not. And that she would” (p.134). Gerri Bates also sees Raye “symbolizing women helping women” (ibid.) which refers the reader to Walker’s

principles of womanism. Raye's role in the protagonist's revelation about her belonging to her African and American heritages will be discussed further.

In Mbatia, a young African girl, M'Lissa's assistant, the protagonist sees her unborn daughter she aborted due to the fear of Cesarean section. In the novel she serves as continuation of Tashi, she is an interlink between generations of African women, in a way that Tashi is connected to Nafa and M'Lissa. Tashi's murder of the *tsuga* was committed partly in the name of freeing future generations of African girls from suffering: "No, I say, I could never have that look of confidence. Of pride. Of peace. Neither of use can have it, because self-possession will always be impossible for us to claim. But perhaps your daughter..."(p. 273).

There are a few other characters who, despite their brief appearance in the novel, have an impact on the protagonist and/or act beyond the plot of the novel representing Walker's attitude towards Africa, America, genital mutilation and the issues connected with them. A character of the latter kind is Hartford, a dying AIDS victim, who is a symbol of the epidemic in Africa. As Bates writes, "Hartford articulates the troubling genesis of the epidemic in Africa, tracing it back to the conspiratorial Americans, Australians, Dutch, Germans and New Zealanders who, in their zeal to use the green monkeys to discover a cure for polio, disseminated contaminated vaccines to the African population, which was used as disposable test subjects" (*Alice Walker: A Critical Companion* 2005:123). In writing this part of the novel Walker used the research conducted by the investigative reporter Tom Curtis. The character of Amy Maxwell, a white American woman who underwent circumcision as a child at the discretion of her mother is the one who wakes the protagonist up to the reality of life in the United States: now it is not a just beautiful country as a symbol of the place where women do not suffer as they do in Africa, but it consists of people and their personal stories as well as their suffering and pain.

2.1.2 The Analysis of the Protagonist's Identities and the Relationship between Them

All of the 42 narratives voiced by the protagonist are scattered throughout the whole book, except for Chapter Five, in no particular order of events. The protagonist represents herself through 6 different identities: Tashi (13 narratives), Evelyn (11 narratives), Evelyn-Tashi (5 narratives), Tashi-Evelyn (10 narratives), Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson (2 narratives) and Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul (1 narrative).

Geneva Cobb Moore who studies the novel in the light of Jungian archetypes offers the following interpretation of the protagonist's identities:

“Tashi, the troubled African child who submits to the tribal rites of scarification and circumcision and upon whom silence is imposed; Evelyn, the scarred adult Tashi who becomes an American citizen; Tashi-Evelyn, the African-American whose cultural duality is dominated by the nightmarish remembrance of her African past; Evelyn-Tashi, the Americanized African whose cultural selves coalesce into a picture of herself as a Wounded American; and Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson, the aging matriarchal composite of selves...And, finally, there is Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul who achieves the Self upon her reconciliation of opposites...” (in *Southern Literary Journal* 2000: 114).

However, the subdivision of identities in this research is based on the psychological analysis (application of Jung's theories and methods of his therapy, such as dreams). It places the analysis of the protagonist's selves into the naturalistic context leaving out the literary and stylistic elements.

Tashi

The episodes where the main character of the novel sees and represents herself as Tashi are probably the emotionally strongest and pro-African narratives of the novel. Structurally they are concentrated at the beginning and the end of the novel with just a few of the episodes placed in the middle parts of *Possessing*. These narratives constitute the African discourse of the protagonist; they begin her story, as she was born in Africa, and they reveal the solutions to the questions she had been longing to see answered from after the ritual till killing M'Lissa and being executed.

Even within her African discourse Tashi's representation of herself can be divided into three stages or images. Tashi's narratives related to the sense of her circumcision begin and end with her image as a child: all her fears as well as her hidden interest towards the tabooed ritual, which is at that time misunderstood by the protagonist, are rooted in her sister's death that also coincides with the arrival of Adam and Olivia's family; and at the end of the novel when Pierre provides Tashi, by then imprisoned and to be executed, with the thorough explanation of the sense of her circumcision, she again visualises herself as a child who accidentally hears the elders of the village discussing the ritual in coded images.

Then there is Tashi who is proud of her roots and her tribal African heritage and who chooses to have her face scarred and her body mutilated. She is Tashi-the Warrior, representing the essence of the wild Africa struggling against its colonisation; in this narrative she speaks for all the people in Africa, replacing her "I" with the unifying "we": "I had in my mind some outlandish, outsized image of myself. I sat astride the donkey in the pose of a chief, a warrior. We who had once owned our village and hectares and hectares of land now owned nothing. We were reduced to the position of beggars – except that there was no one near enough to beg from, in the desert we were in" (p.22). This episode of the book when Tashi is having a verbal duel with Olivia begging the protagonist not to have the tribal marks scarred onto her cheeks, has been much referred to by critics, such as Nako, especially those researching Walker's representation of Africa and its colonisation. This narrative is rich with images of African heritage: a half-naked African warrior weaponed with a stick representing a spear, faces of Olinka people bearing tribal marks and the leopard. In the cosmology of many African tribes, such as Benin, Baule and Bamileke, the leopard symbolises royal power (Mills et al 2007: 316) and thus the choice of this particular image emphasises Tashi's feeling of superiority over Olivia and disdain to Olivia's being distanced from her African roots and heritage. Being carried away by her

anger, Tashi equals an African-American Olivia with white colonisers of Africa – “you and your family are the white people’s wedge” (p.22), verbally attacking the explicit features of the oppressors’ culture – “those two stupid braids, and that long hot dress with its stupid high collar” (ibid.). The blackness of one’s skin becomes another determinant of a person’s heritage, as Olivia’s mahogany skin is not black enough to allow Olivia to be accepted by Tashi and her people as equal: “You are black, but you are not like us, [Tashi] said. You barely have your own black skin and it is fading” (p.23). Here, in this narrative the protagonist does not even hesitate about her unshakable beliefs in “Our Leader”, the imprisoned leader of the people of Olinka, and the necessity of proudly illustrating her African tribal heritage through marks on her face and the mutilation of her body.

Stylistic devices Walker uses in the discourse of Tashi-the Warrior draw a strong line between the images of Olivia-the Coloniser and Tashi-Africa. The latter’s superiority over the former is expressed through diminishing Olivia. Walker uses numerous epithets and similes which describe both Olivia’s looks and actions as childish (p.21-24): she “hiccupped, like a child”, “cried”, “wept”, “pleaded” and she was wearing “two stupid plaits” and “long hot dress with its stupid high collar”. The epithets of Tashi’s image support and even exaggerate her feeling of contentment and superiority (ibid.): she had “some outlandish, outsized image of [herself]”, Tashi is speaking to Olivia from “[her] great height astride the donkey” and her spitting on the ground is used to its “full effect”. As Tashi rides her donkey to the Mbele camp through the encampment she travels through the history of her tribe. The succinct epithet describing the tribe in the past as “pregnant with life” (p.24) is opposed to a range of epithets, such as “dying eyes of children”, “barely moving old people” and “women making stew out of bones” all of which emphasise the poverty and decline of Olinka people.

Tashi's imaginary life which substitutes to her the disturbed reality where she cannot finally identify herself with any of her "I's – "My fantasy life. Without it I'm afraid to exist. Who am I, Tashi, renamed in America "Evelyn", Johnson" (p.36) - and especially Tashi's passion for making up and telling stories are also links of her African heritage and valuable constituents of the protagonist's African identity.

Tashi's transformation into the third image of her African self – the hopeless termite queen who has lost her wings – begins after she undergoes the rituals. The protagonist relied upon them as the means of strengthening her identity and unifying with her tribal heritage, but having given her body and spirit into the hands of M'Lissa, Tashi feels nothing but moral emptiness and physical discomfort: "And I can see as he [Adam] looks at me that he does not know whether to laugh or to cry. I feel the same. Nothing runs out of my eyes to greet him. It is as if my self is hiding behind an iron door. I am like a chicken bound for market. The scars on my face are nearly healed but I must still fan the flies away" (p.45).

Later on, already in Switzerland while being cured via psychoanalysis by Lisette's uncle Carl (or Mzee – the African name Tashi used to address him) the protagonist's search for the significance of her circumcision leads her to the terrifying knowledge that this very ritual was the root of her life-long suffering which began with her sister's death. When talking to Mzee after she visualised "the Beast" (the huge cock - the reflection of the cock she saw near M'Lissa's hut when Dura was being circumcised) Tashi verbalises the truth about what happened to Dura:

"By the time I finished painting it ["the Beast"] I remembered my sister Dura's...my sister Dura's...I could get no further. There was a boulder lodged in my throat...I knew what that boulder was; that it was a word; and that behind that word I would find my earliest emotions. Emotions that had frightened me insane. I had been going to say, before the boulder barred my throat: my sister's death; because that was how I had always thought of Dura's demise. She'd simply died. She'd bled and bled and bled and then there was death. No one was responsible. No one to blame. Instead, I took a deep breath and exhaled it against the boulder blocking my throat: I remembered my sister Dura's *murder*, I said, exploding the boulder" (p.83).

It is the truth Tashi as any African woman did not dare realise and was trying to suppress in her consciousness. However, there is no way back for the protagonist now, as she admits it: “No longer would my weeping be separate from what I *knew*” (ibid.). This awakening makes Tashi seek for the initial reason of practicing the ritual which is that much painful both to the body and soul. At the same time understanding that Dura’s death was, in fact, a *murder* now requires replacing the “No one was responsible. No one to blame” (ibid.) with the guilty someone. This is what brings Tashi to M’Lissa and predetermines the murder of the latter.

The image of the wingless termite queen bears two symbolic functions. On the one hand, it represents Tashi as a collective image of an African woman whose function in life is to give birth to children, being silent and obedient. On the other hand, it symbolises the protagonist at the end of her quest for honouring her African heritage when she is explained that the ritual she underwent because, “as everyone said it expressed her pride in her people” (p.233) is, in fact, the way to desex a woman and limit her life to the reproductive and housekeeping functions. The wings the termite queen loses are the symbol of the loss of faith in and pride of the inborn, African, heritage of the protagonist. The stylistic devices Walker applies in description of the queen evoke nothing but a feeling of pity and even disgust: the epithets defining the termite queen are “fat”, “greasy”, “the colour of tobacco spit”, “inert” and the metaphor the writer uses to symbolise the queen’s life mission is being “only a tube through which generations of visionless offspring pass” (ibid.).

The last narrative of Tashi mirrors the episode of her argument with Olivia before the protagonist is preparing to have the tribal rituals performed on her. If in the latter narrative Olivia attempts to avert what turned out to be Tashi’s spiritual death, then, in case of the former she tries to guard the protagonist from her physical execution. These mirroring

scenes form another circular composition within the African image of Tashi, thus concluding the debate of the symbols Olivia and Tashi represent in it: the coloniser and Africa. Tashi refuses to fight for her life as Olivia begs her to do, still defending her African heritage even despite being disillusioned and broken: “Because when I disobey you, the outsider, even if it is wrong, I am being what is left of myself. And the silver of myself is all I now have left” (p.254).

Stylistically the most vivid images of Tashi’s discourse are her mother, the female leopard and the above-discussed two images of Tashi herself which are opposed by each other: the African warrior and the wingless queen. The key image of the description of Tashi’ mother are her heels which is the picture the protagonist has in front of her eyes whenever she thinks about Nafa, her mother. These heels are “bark-hard, ashen” (p.19) with “white rinds” (p.16) and the backs of Nafa’s legs are “quivering” as she “staggers under her load” (ibid.). The metonymy and the epithets Walker uses constitute the image of an African woman feels and knows nothing but hard work: never in the novel Tashi mentions her mother’s facial features, she remembers only the hard dry skin of the heels bent by the physical and spiritual load: “I studied the white rinds of my mother’s heels, and felt in my heart the weight of Dura’s death settling upon her spirit, like the groundnuts that bent her back. As she staggered under her load, I half expected her footprints, into which I was careful to step, to stain my own feet with tears and blood” (p.16-17).

The image of a wild feline (a female leopard or panther) is another metaphorical reflection of the protagonist’s African image. At the beginning of the novel Tashi presents herself as Lara, a young panther whose inner voice drags her out of misery and jealousy and turns her into content, wholesome and beautiful animal with “delicate pointed ears, and sleek gleaming black fur” (p.4). Lara’s narcissism leads her to death; in parallel to that the protagonist begins her story of the panther with the statement “I did not realize for a

long time that I was dead". The protagonist was looking for wholeness being spiritually dead while Lara's acceptance of her full self was the reason why she drowned. The image of female leopard that scares pregnant Nafa is the hidden metaphor of the confrontation between the wild and the human which is later, having been transformed by Tashi's perception of the reality is applied by her image of Tashi-the Warrior as she sees herself as "the leopard in Olivia's path" (p.24). In the context of this argument Tashi equals "wild" with African and turns "human" into civilization, i.e. American missionaries thus creating another image of the Africa – colonisers opposition.

Evelyn

Evelyn is the protagonist's American name, the attribute of her outer heritage. The narratives spoken by the American "I" of the protagonist fulfill the following main functions: they tell about Evelyn's therapy with Raye, an African-American woman-psychotherapist, express the protagonist's attitude towards the USA (i.e. her outer, American heritage) and they also picture the protagonist's perception of Africa and the ritual through the standpoint of her as an American.

Raye who is a collective image of African-American women is pictured as self-confident and possessing the wholeness the protagonist is seeking, the fact which, at first, makes Evelyn dislike her: "I resented her. Because she was black. Because she was a woman. Because she was whole. She radiated a calm, cheerful competence that irritated me" (p.115). However, further on in the course of her therapy with Raye the protagonist finds a way to bind with her spiritually through Raye's African heritage, now remote, but still recognisable: "I realized that though Raye had left Africa hundreds of years before in the persons of her ancestors and studied at the best of the white man's schools, she was intuitively practicing an ageless magic, the foundation of which was the ritualization, or

the acting out, of empathy... Suddenly, in that guise, Raye became someone I felt I knew; someone with whom I could bond” (p.134).

During the sessions with Raye, the “Evelyn” identity of the protagonist enables her to be remote enough and protected by her American name as a shield so that she sounds objective and even indifferent when telling not only about the Leader of Olinka struggle against colonisers, her feelings for Adam, but even about the crucial for her issue – her circumcision. Evelyn describes the ritual with almost medical scrupulousness, covering all the anatomical details (p.120).

Evelyn’s vision about the United States seems to belong rather to the world of her fantasies than that of real people as the picture of the country that she has is so perfect it can be found only in children’s books or advertising booklets of travel agencies: “Sometimes I dream of the United States. I love it deeply and miss it terribly, much to the annoyance of some people I know. In all my dreams there is clear rushing river water and flouncy green trees, and where there are streets they are wide and paved and in the night of my dreams there are lighted windows way above the street; and behind these windows I know people are warm and squeaky clean and eating meat. Safe.” (p.55). The contrast with Africa as her American self sees it is drastic: “I awake here [in prison] to the odor of unwashed gear, and the traditional porridge and fruit breakfast that hasn’t changed since I left” (ibid.). The key word of the protagonist’s attitude to the United States is “safe”: this is the place where women dare “go to the heart of the matter even if it gave everyone concerned a heart attack” (p.119), where girls and women do not suffer from the ritual, the meaning of which they are unable to comprehend, as well as this is the place where the protagonist’s crime “would make no sense” (p.55). In her evaluation of the country where Evelyn receives a new life, and presumably a new self, the protagonist excludes the people which live in it, considering only the facade of the geographical name, but not live persons

behind it. The confrontation with the reality, which is painful, yet objective, happens when Raye introduces Evelyn to a white woman, Amy Maxwell, who was also circumcised, though in childhood and without any idea of what had been done to her. Having got to know that girls and women in the United States, including those who are rich and white, also suffer, Evelyn feels disillusioned, empty and deceived: “I saw the healthy green leaves of my America falling seared to the ground. Her sparkling rivers muddy with blood” (p.187).

On the whole, it can be said that while the protagonist made use of her American identity as means of distancing herself from her own suffering, she did not see her new outer heritage as live, belonging to real people with their own stories and suffering, even similar to the one she experienced, to the same extent to which she could not see any binding between herself and African-American women in the USA: “I did think I was the only African woman to come to America. Black American women seemed to me so different from Olinka women, I rarely thought of their African great-great-grandmothers” (p.188).

The dual and even triple narratives of the protagonist – Tashi-Evelyn, Evelyn-Tashi and Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson supposedly reflect the relationship between her identities and thus her inborn and outer heritages.

As Evelyn-Tashi the protagonist goes through the ordeal of delivering her son, Benny, she finally reaches the point when she is able to define herself as an American and survives the disillusionment of having got to know the truth behind her triumphal return (at least, that is what the protagonist considered it to be) to the Mbele camp, to the roots of her tribal heritage.

The moment of the birth of Benny, the protagonist’s only child, is described rather from the point of view of the doctor who delivered him, but not of the main character

herself: the only information about the moment which is supposedly touching and extremely important for a woman the reader is provided with is the list of medical instruments the obstetrician had to use during Evelyn-Tashi's labour. The protagonist herself is unable to express any feelings looking down at the baby in her arms, weak and already suffering from what the character had decided to do with her body: the baby's head is "yellow and blue and badly misshapen" (p.57) and, later on, Evelyn-Tashi is to find out that "Benny, [her] radiant brown baby, the image of Adam, was retarded. Some small but vital part of his brain crushed by [their] ordeal" (p.61). Neither is this moment the one of shared family joy as Adam is too nervous and embarrassed to provide his wife with support and encouragement this time: "With my free hand I reached for him. He moved closer, but did not touch me; the sound of his throat [he coughed whenever he was embarrassed or nervous] causing my own to close. After a moment, I withdrew my hand" (p.58).

The "Evelyn-Tashi" identity of the protagonist expresses her feelings towards her new country and its heritage in the background of her African self: she is in Africa, either as still a free person or already in prison before the trial and then, after it, prior to her execution. Her attitude towards the United States is hyper-emotional, which is also caused by her eternal resistance to somebody other – "They would all take America away from me if they could. But I won't let them" (p.168). Despite her pathetic love for the United States Evelyn-Tashi cannot describe an American when asked about it by M'Lissa. She encounters difficulty in searching for the typically American features and, at first, the protagonist's key argument for defining someone a citizen of the USA is his/her differences from Africans: Raye's hair and skin are "never seen in Africa" (p.211), as well as whites like Amy Maxwell, Indians or Native Americans. However, time and M'Lissa's teasing make the protagonist seek for the answer which is deeper and more significant than

the appearance description: “An American, I said, sighing, but understanding my love of my adopted country perhaps for the first time: an American looks like a wounded person whose wound is hidden from others, and sometimes from herself. An American looks like me” (p.213).

Walker returns Evelyn-Tashi to the moment of Tashi’s triumph over Olivia when she is sent for to come to the Mbele camp, although this time the scene is explained by M’Lissa with her inherent cynicism which turns the moment of celebration of Tashi’s African spirit into the one of complete disillusionment and betrayal: the protagonist was invited simply to give the *tsunga* “something to do” (p.244) to provide the camp with the authenticity it lacked. M’Lissa’s sarcasm is as bitter as the truth itself is; she is the only person of the tribe who does not only know the truth but is able to assess its cruelty and meaninglessness. That is why the *tsunga* does not need to believe in the Leader, she is the bearer of the truth herself.

However, Walker compensates Evelyn-Tashi for this disappointment by turning her into the new leader of African women who dare resist in the only silent way available and allowed to them: “The women bring [to the shrubbery just below and the corner from Evelyn-Tashi’s view] wildflowers, herbs, seeds, beads, ears of corn, anything they can claim as their own and that they can spare. They are mostly quiet. Sometimes they sing” (p.193). Women’s signing is characterised as “low and “mournful” and these epithets make it the ritual signing of a memorial service, women weep for still-alive Tashi whose death they already shed tears over and for themselves.

Evelyn-Tashi is a wounded American because she is unable to bind herself with the new adopted country and the corresponding heritage completely before she has found peace with her roots. She is catching at a straw of the image of Americans based on their difference from Africans in order to distance herself from them. Her love for the new

country is as strong as her pain is unbearable because the hidden wound became open in the peaceful and beautiful environment of the USA and Evelyn-Tashi finds it impossible to become just Evelyn until Tashi forgives herself for the love of people and their ideals that destructed her.

Tashi-Evelyn identity of the protagonist is the new Tashi at the moment of returning to Africa to settle her accounts with M'Lissa thus terminating the protagonist's African scary dreams and memories. In this double image her African roots prevail over her attributes of the newly adopted American heritage, for example her clothes, "The man who sold me the razors...admits [at the trial] he overcharged me because I was a foreigner. Although I spoke Olinka he could tell I was American by my dress" (p.105), or take advantage of it, as in the narrative dedicated to Tashi-Evelyn's writing of signs. This episode is a part of the scene taking place in court at the moment of questioning of witnesses of Tashi-Evelyn's journey from the moment of her arrival to Africa till getting to M'Lissa's house. The protagonist sees numerous billboards and advertising posters on arriving in Africa and decides to apply this tradition of her new home country where, as she explains to the owner of the stationery shop, "people make signs and buttons for everything they want to say, and no one arrests them for it" (p.109) in order to "write *something*"(ibid.), to make a statement. However, she adds African authenticity to the tradition by asking the owner for paper of the colours of the national flag of Olinka. Some people in the audience pay tribute to the colours and thus the nation by standing up "their hands over their hearts" (p.106) at seeing red, blue and yellow sheets of paper the attorney is showing to the witness – here Walker is being ironic and mocks the exaggerated displaying of affectation of patriotism especially in contrast to the fact that "half the people in prison in Olinka were there for expressing their discontent with the present government" (p.109). The protagonist is now in-between these two extremes, as she "now looks at the colors which made her weep with

pride as dispassionately as if they were Crayolas in a child's coloring box" (p.106). The description of the owner of the stationery shop, the young black woman, who gives testimony against the protagonist in the episode allows the reader to conclude that she is shallow and artificial: her lips are "light pink, almost white lipsticked" and she is careless with her language, "sprinkling a word or two of Olinka through her English" (p.106). She is unable to grasp the message the protagonist was trying to convey to her: "If you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it" (p.108).

This message is the idea with which Tashi-Evelyn, who no longer deceives herself about her suffering, returns to Africa. In fact, this statement could be called the unifying motto of Tashi-Evelyn narratives. This part of the book is dedicated to providing answers to the questions which Tashi's memory was hiding and which Evelyn was seeking for in the course of her therapy. That is why these episodes focus solely on the man-woman relationship within the protagonist's African heritage, the role of circumcision and the final point of the protagonist's quest for spiritual wholeness, as she believes it, – her killing of M'Lissa. The topic of the African-American relationship is reconsidered in one more of the narratives of Tashi-Evelyn's identity where the protagonist together with M'bati is reading a book (which is, in fact, Mirellia Ricciardi's autobiography, *"The African Saga"*) by a harshly defined "white colonialist author who has lived all her life among Africans and failed to see them as human beings who can be destroyed by suffering" (p.271-272). The quotation from the book which puzzles the characters is the origin of the title of the novel: "Black people are natural, they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them" (p.271). Here the issue of African-American heritage is presented rather from the angle of the racial black vs. white i.e. Africa vs. colonisers opposition. Even considering the significance of the episode from the

position of authenticity of Walker's African discourse and representation – which is the key reason why such researchers as Nako (2001) pay special attention to the narrative – it cannot be analysed in the context of the present research as it is related to the relationship between different races rather than different heritages within one mono-racial person.

The two narratives of Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson are confessions of an old tired woman who already knows what awaits her and is trying to summarise her life. Throughout the novel the protagonist has been showing her careless attitude to her trial, since she never needed it as such being convinced that the crime she is convicted for was actually her rescue, for example, she told stories she was making up as she spoke (p.35), fell into her memories (p.105-111) and finally confessed as she “grew weary of the trial” (p.267). This triple identity which is the collective of her three constitutives – an African Tashi, an American Evelyn and the identity symbolising the most significant role of her feminine side – Adam's wife, Mrs. Johnson enables her not only to accept her own execution (she is determined to “refuse the blindfold so that she can see far in all directions”) but also to find peace with her long-time rival – Lisette to whom she is writing a letter the night before her death. In her last narrative as a live person the protagonist is not represented through any of her selves, she is a whole person paying tribute to all the other characters of the novel. The signature the protagonists puts at the end of her letter “Tashi Evelyn Johnson. Reborn, soon to be Deceased” (p.279) may seem to be of a reversed order as rebirth is believed to begin after one's death. However, the complete Tashi-Evelyn-Johnson was killed at the moment of her circumcision and reborn the day when she completed her quest for finding peace with all of her selves through killing of M'Lissa.

The last narrative of the novel voiced by Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul is the celebration of the ultimate freedom the protagonist achieves. And this freedom is shared by many

women witnessing the execution who have come there with their naked-bottomed girls – this is a symbol of new life in which a woman has the right to possess her own body and mind and in which “resistance is the secret of joy” (p.281).

The mixture of narratives of different selves of the protagonist throughout the novel irrespectively of the time sequence of events serves as a stylistic device for emphasising the most significant episodes and happenings of this cause-and-effect plot line not only at the level of the whole novel but also at the one of a single episode. Thus, for example, “the instinct” which Americanised Evelyn-Tashi is hoping “would teach her how to shape her newborn baby’s head properly” (p.57) makes Tashi-Evelyn, who is more natural and feminine, look for a possibility to bind with her child as she “held Benny close, gently and surreptitiously stroking his head into more normal contours (work [she] instinctively felt should be done with [her] tongue)” (p.61). The same device of the intertwining of the identities and heritages can be seen in the episodes describing the protagonist’s killing of M’Lissa: it is Tashi-Evelyn, the person who has accumulated all her thoughts and will in her desire to terminate her suffering, who fingers the razors and “fantasises M’Lissa’s bloody demise” (p. 208), while Tashi swears to Olivia she is innocent (p.255) being convinced the crime she committed does not measure up against M’Lissa’s literate and spiritual killing of Dura, Tashi herself and other Olinka girls. And finally, it is Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson, the collective image of heritages who pleads herself guilty in court, according to the laws of society, being physically tired of resistance and indifferent (p.267) and then admits her guilt to herself in the letter to long-dead Lisette the night before her execution (p.274).

The novel is linked with almost two decades earlier written short story *Everyday Use* through the topics of a woman’s possession of her own selfhood, authenticity of one’s African roots and the relationship between the African and American heritages of a black

woman. The interconnection between these two pieces of Alice Walker's writing also appears in the mirroring images of characters or their features: thus, the character of Raye, an African-American psychotherapist from "Possessing the Secret of Joy", inherited distinctive features of Dee, the protagonist of *Everyday Use*: the former is a self-confident woman with flawless skin who "goes to the heart of the matter even if it gives everyone concerned a heart attack" ("Possessing the Secret a Joy", p.119) and her predecessor, Dee, "would always look anyone in the eye" and "stare down any disaster in her efforts" (*Everyday Use* in *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing* 1991: 192-193). The character of Mbatia is the "African sister" of Maggie from the short story: although coming from different national backgrounds – the former is African while the latter combines both the African and American identities – they are bound by a spiritual connection and likeness of their characters. The connection of their spirits is marked by the scars they both have which symbolise suffering they went through: Mbatia's circumcision and Maggie's physical suffering during the fire that destroyed their house and the spiritual misery she has drowned herself in feeling incomplete and unloved in contrast to her elder sister. The character of Mama in the novel is echoed in the unifying image of Tashi's identities – Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson: both are mothers, both are aging, tired African-American women longing for spiritual peace, wholeness and comfort.

2.2. The African and American Heritages in *Everyday Use*

The topic of heritage in the short story has been discussed by many researches, including White (2001), Hoel (2007) and Cowart (1999). The researches pay attention to the socio-political aspect of the short story and analyse the characters' representation of either African or American heritage in the corresponding context. The above-mentioned authors divide the heritages between the two daughters of Mama, the narrator of the story, and rest the responsibility for choosing either of the heritages upon her. Such distinct

division of the heritages in the light of the conflict between the daughters which is the central point of the plot seems to be leaving a reader no other option than to consider that the African and American heritages in the story are in the state of a fierce opposition. Besides, the researches do not analyse these heritages as being inborn i.e. inner and outer, neither do they provide an interpretation of other possible relations between them. The present analysis aims at singling out elements of the heritages viewed as inner and outer and interpreting ways of their interconnection as expressed through imagery of the story. *Everyday Use* is a first-person narration voiced by Mama who, together with her younger daughter, expects arrival of her elder daughter Dee.

Dee

The issue of which heritage to consider inborn and which outer in case of African-American characters of the story is complicated by the emerging of the so-called pseudo-African heritage that is the exaggerated features of the African identity Dee displays on coming to visit her mother and sister i.e. her looks (the hair, dress and jewelry) and her speech.

The image of an African goddess Dee is imitating as part of her neo-African self is artificial and false-through, even ridiculous. Even though Mama says she “likes the dress as Dee comes close” (p.194)², the epithets describing it signal bewilderment rather than admiration: the dress is “so loud it hurts Mama’s eyes” and it is too long “for such hot weather” (ibid.), and the simile characterising Dee’s hairstyle is not flattering her looks either – “it [Dee’s hair] stands up like the wool on a sheep” (ibid.). The pseudo-African appearance is complimented by the name and greeting in a non-existent African language which Helga Hoel has proven in her research of the personal names of the novel. In creating this looks Dee followed the pattern she has chosen for all of her life: she perceives

² Here and further on citing from Walker, A. 1973. *Everyday Use* in *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing*. 1991. USA: Viking Press Inc.

and acquires the most distinct, stereotypical features without going into the depth of the matter, i.e. the re-evaluation of the African heritage in the case.

In the novel Dee stands for, perhaps, the shallowest feature of the American identity, commercialisation, and she displays the worst of possible interpretations of the American dream – success at any cost. As Mama remembers, already at school “Dee wanted nice things. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts” (p.193). The only attitude Dee expected for herself was admiration as she was used to being distinct in the background of the people she deliberately chose as her company: “nervous girls who never laughed” and “furtive boys in pink shirts”. The story provides only these collective features of the character’s friends as she herself was never interested in them as personalities, they were only fulfilling their function of “worshipping her well-turned phrase, cute shape, scalding humour that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them” (p.194).

The first thing Dee does on arriving in her mother’s house which is much similar to the burned one she hated is taking numerous pictures each of those necessarily includes the house. Walker even applies graphic means i.e. italics to emphasise Dee’s persistence in capturing her “authentic” house: “When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house (p.195). The pictures the character takes are similar to posed photographs of African families she has probably seen in glossy magazines, and as the fashion requires having pictures of one’s African family in the authentic environment Dee is bound to conform to the rules.

In her consumer-like attitude to her true inborn African heritage which is symbolised by items of everyday household - quilts, the butter dish, the churn and the dasher – Dee denies the deep meaning of the things for recognition and value of her roots and sticks to the modern, as she defines it, “artistic” application of the African heritage: thus the churn top will be used as “a centerpiece for the alcove table” and quilts will be hung on a wall

(p.197-198). Walker mocks at Dee's admiration of the old benches her father made when she admits "she never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints" (p.196) as if she has forgotten they were hand-made only because the family could not afford to buy chairs. The author emphasises Dee's commercialised attitude to the artifacts of her African identity by the epithet "*priceless*" with which she describes the two quilts hand-made by Grandma Dee.

On denial of her inborn African heritage Dee forms a faulty, stereotypic American identity which is capable only of consuming and making use of other heritages. She, in fact, has no identity at all, as she is unable to recognise the true way to formation of a real, full American identity whose historical core is diversity which is through recognition and love to one's inborn self. Without having the African heritage serving as the basis for building of the new American identity Dee is unable to comprehend the significance of the American "topside".

Dee's boyfriend or perhaps husband, Hakim-a-barber, also possesses only the visually displayable features of Muslim, in his case, identity, such as not eating pork as it is unclean (p.196). By equipping Dee with such companion Walker illustrates that she is not alone in her ignorance of her inborn heritage and inability to bind with the outer American heritage in its fullness and richness, the author raises a question of the phenomenon of such lost people in the American culture – seeming Americans who are like empty inside shells.

Maggie

Maggie represents the other polar attitude to the inborn African heritage which is a strong connection with her roots and full acceptance and appreciation of her heritage. She is the core of the African identity in the story and the symbol of the connection between generations. However, from the beginning of the story the emotions her image evokes are pity and compassion rather than admiration and desire to take her as an example.

The core of Maggie's relationship with her sister is coded in the metaphor of "a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him" (p.192). That dog is Maggie whose spirit is broken by her sister's determination and straightforwardness, and this is the rude dominance of material over spiritual. It is also significant that Maggie suffered from the fire that burned the old house more than other characters of the story, at least much more than Dee did. Walker emphasises the contrasts of perception of the fire, the loss of the shelter both in the literal and metaphorical sense, not only through the sister's position during the fire – Maggie is supposedly inside the house as she is reaching for her mother's hand trying to get out and her hair and clothes are burning, while Dee is simply standing under a sweet gum tree in the yard merely doing anything – but also through the contrast of the emotion the sisters' faces express: Maggie's "eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them" while Dee's face has the same look of pleasant concentration she had when "digging the gum out of the sweet gum tree" (p.193).

Despite the importance of Maggie's role as the guardian of the African heritage – she can quilt and remembers her kin in detail – she is inert and unable to stand for her rights and, consequently, for the roots she cherishes: her hand is "limp and cold as a fish" and "sweaty" (p.195), she "cowers" behind Mama in the photographs Dee takes (p.195) and the only display of her emotions are dropping dishes and slamming the door (p.197). Maggie is stuck in the past, her memories and her roots are the values she holds on to too tightly thus being unable to move on. Mama's choice in favour of Maggie at the end of the story and her "real, not scared smile" is a flash of hope that the younger daughter's empowered belief in her African self will enable her to recognise true values of the outer American identity.

Mama

Mama is the narrator of the story and her role in *Everyday Use* is the most important. From the very beginning of the narration she is torn between the attitudes to her heritage symbolised by her daughters. On the one hand, Mama is influenced by the commercialisation when she dreams of her reunion with her elder daughter Dee during a talk show which is another popular image of mass American culture with all its compulsory features: “dark and soft-seated limousine” which takes the participants to the spot of their “unexpected” meeting, the classic image of a friendly and caring show host, and “embracing with tears of happiness” after the family reunion (p.192). Although Mama reasonably admits that the image of herself in the dream as well as the dream itself is a “mistake” (ibid.), the reader can sense Mama’s jealousy of Dee’s boldness and determination when she compares her communication with “a strange white man” as “with one foot raised in flight” being always prepared to escape from supposed humiliation while Dee “would always look anyone in the eye” as “hesitation was no part of her nature” (ibid.).

However, in reality Mama seems to be living with the motto that was 20 years later phrased by Nafa, mother of Tashi from “Possessing the Secret of Joy” as “it is only hard work that fills the emptiness (*Possessing the Secret of Joy* p.16). Mama does the hardest and dirtiest work imaginable as an everyday routine: she emotionlessly and monotonously enumerates her hardest duties as if speaking about ordinary household chores: “I can kill and clean a hog”, “I can work all day breaking ice to get water for washing”, “I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire the minutes it comes steaming from the hog” and she even “knocked a bull calf with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall” (p.192). Mrs. Johnson’s real looks has little in common with an image of a black woman from a glossy magazine or John Carson’s programme who is slim, has the skin “like an uncooked barley pancake” and “a quick tongue” (ibid.) as she is “a large, big-

boned woman with rough, man-working hands” whose “fat keeps [her] hot in zero weather” (ibid.). However, Mama does not feel her elder daughter can be proud or appreciative of the way Mama is because the real Black people and things they do “are not shown on television” (ibid.).

Mama’s attitude to Maggie, her younger daughter is mirroring of Dee’s feelings for Mama herself: Mrs. Johnson’s embarrassment for Maggie is hinted by the contrast between the daughters Mama herself emphasises: “Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure” (p.193), Dee’s feet “were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style” (p.194) while Maggie is described by Mama herself as “a lame animal, a run-over dog”, “chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle”. Nor does Mrs. Johnson admire Maggie’s abilities – “she knows she is not bright, like good looks and money quickness passed her by”- or sees a significant bright future awaiting for her - “ she will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face)” (p.193). Mama seems to be embarrassed of her own and Maggie’s look and humbleness as much as of the visual distinctive features of her African heritage the primary image of which is the house. Although Mrs. Johnson feels proud of its “yard which is like an extended living room” and windows which, although not real, are “not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up one the outside” (p.194) she keeps measuring up the house, as well as other characteristics of her inborn heritage, to the standards of commercialised popular American identity which is expressed through Dee’s opinion: “no doubt when Dee sees it [the house] she will want to tear it down” (ibid.).

Mama is first struck with realising that by letting Dee-Wangero possess the household items she chooses only for their no-in-fashion authenticity she actually betrays her true heritage in favour of husk the most stereotypic and shallowest features of the outer identity when she is touching the handle of the dasher which bears “a lot of small sinks made by

hands pushing the dasher up and down” (p.197) thus as if holding hands with her ancestors.

Maggie’s refusal from the two hand-made quilts explained with her belief that true acceptance and love of one’s heritage do not require visually displayed proofs makes the mother recognise the real meaning of belonging to her roots. There is no necessity in “making something of oneself” as Dee phrases her understanding of becoming an American, or hiding behind sunglasses or ridiculous clothes. Dee is mistaken not in choosing the collective unifying “we” in her last words “It’s a really new day for us. But from the way you and mother still live you’d never know it” (p.199) but in joining the wrong side in this distinction. There is future for those who are able to appreciate their heritage and roots as through respect of their own origin they can value that of others while fashionable features of the faulty identity will eventually be in rags as the old quilts put to everyday use. The metaphor of quilting reflects the ability to built new identity on the basis of the historical and national background a person has and Maggie who knows how to quilt is enabled to succeed.

In the story the sisters symbolise the two polar attitudes to the American identity and/or the outer American heritage: Maggie denies it as a possible part of her identity out of fear and dependence on her past while Dee is unable to form the true American identity as she perceives only the visual display of it, its stereotypical features. Mama is the golden middle who, while accepting Dee’s understanding of the American identity remains faithful to her inborn African heritage. Both Mama’s acceptance and refusal from the outer American heritage (simplified, commercialised and shell-like) raises the question of flexibility in everyday attitude to one’s dual identity and Mama, being in the middle of the conflict between the heritages, shows a possible interpretation of this flexibility.

CONCLUSION

The issue of the African-American heritage is a constituent part of the notion of the dual identity of African American as an ethnic group, as ethnicity itself is “shared heritage, a common set of traditions which distinguish a self-perceived community of people” (De Vos qtd. in Hecht et al 1993: 2). As scholars of the African American postcolonial studies and researches in the field of African American identity (Du Bois, Eyerman, Hecht) define it, the two core phenomena this dual heritage lies upon are slavery and race which are intertwined and both grounded in collective memory and we-identity.

Scholars’ attempts, first and foremost those of Du Bois, to demarcate the role and functions of each of the faces of the identity have not suggested a universal solution or succeeded in resolving conflicts arising from the reality clash which occurs in the process of “cultural affiliation, as there is no single and correct way to be ‘African American’. These identities are negotiated in context and situationally emergent” (Hecht et al 1993: 2).

The issue of self-determination in the backdrop of one’s cultural and social heritages is further complicated in the case of a woman of colour. Women coming from ethnic minorities face the choice not only between their double-sided ethnic identity but also between their social and gender roles. For many of them inclining to fulfillment of either of the roles automatically excludes these women from the corresponding community of the other. Alice Walker steps forward and finds a compromise between these counter-issues by creating a new ideology – womanism. In her works she produces an image of a hyper-woman – a womanist. A womanist is a whole complete personality who has established harmonious relationships with herself in every aspect of her self-expression (self-acceptance, sexual relationship, attitude to the community) as well as with others. A true womanist is connected to other women with bonds of universal sisterhood which cannot be restrained by race or nationality. Walker vividly conveys this message through the

following words of Tashi, the protagonist of her novel “Possessing the Secret of Joy”: “I am sick to death of black and white. Neither of those is first. Red, the color of woman’s blood, comes before them both” (1992: 203).

The topic of sisterhood is present in both the novel and the short story analysed within the frames of the present research. However, the relationship between these different sisters is absolutely polar: Tashi’s love for her dead sister Dura and her genuine feelings for Olivia, the protagonist’s sworn sister, are an antithesis of the conflict between sisters-characters of *Everyday Use*. Notwithstanding this apparent difference, there are certain similarities in the character build-up between the story and the novel which are separated by almost two decades: both of them portray emotionally strong African-American women, explore the topic of spiritual and ethnic wholeness and address the issue of the African-American heritage.

The present research aimed at analysing the possible relations between the American and African selves of the protagonist as expressed through the compositional element of the multivoiced narration of the novel and the imagery of the short story. These possible relations are analysed in the perspective of the main character’s feeling of belonging to one or the other heritage defined in the thesis as inborn/inner (African) and outer (American). The hypothesis the research put forward was that the relationship between the heritages depends on the characters’ feeling of belonging to the outer heritage, i.e. the American community.

The novel “Possessing the Secret of Joy” has not been studied much in the backdrop of the topic of the dual African-American heritage as researchers mainly explored the issues of women oppression, women circumcision as the social and cultural phenomena reflected by the author. Such critics as Nako (2000) and Gourdine (1996) who analysed the novel in

the background of literary studies focused on the authenticity of Walker's representation of the African and American selves of her protagonist.

The analysis of the six selves of the protagonist of the novel which are scattered throughout the text has shown that the protagonist's attitude to the heritage of the United States, her other home country varies depending on the identity she chooses. On the whole the protagonist expresses herself through six selves, where Tashi and Evelyn represent correspondingly the African and American identities of the protagonist and the rest of the four selves (Tashi-Evelyn, Evelyn-Tashi, Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson and Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul) reflect relations between the African and American heritages of the character. The most emotional and ethnicity-centred narratives of the protagonist in her African self, Tashi, are aggressive towards the outer heritage. However, in these episodes Walker does not antithesise the American and African as opposed notions, she makes another clear distinction of Self and Other – Africa and its colonisers. This contrast is race-grounded and it depersonalises the protagonist who blends into her tribal community, thus representing herself as a part of collective we-identity.

The newly gained American identity of the protagonist and the corresponding heritage are expressed through her new name and way of life. This heritage serves as a tool or a power, reinforcing her recognition of the physical and moral trauma caused by her circumcision. The realisation of the damage resulting from the ritual which was disguised with slogans of belonging to one's people and cherishing the tribal pride enables the protagonist to re-evaluate her initial feeling of self-determination within the African community she was born into.

On the whole, the analysis of the compositional element of the novel has allowed to draw the following conclusions:

- Feeling the need for self-determination as a part of the collective community the protagonist decides to undergo the tribal rituals – face scarring and genital mutilation. However, the physical and spiritual suffering, caused by the latter of the rituals, makes the character first question and then re-evaluate her African heritage.
- The protagonist becomes aware of the damage, both physical and spiritual, caused to her by the rituals only through the contrast of her inborn African heritage with the outer, American, heritage.
- The protagonist's image of her outer heritage (i.e. the American community) is unrealistic, it is picture-perfect and depersonalised. The core of her perception lies in the belief that women in the United States have the right for self-possession and they are free from suffering. However, through the story of a circumcised white American woman the protagonist realises that her newly gained heritage includes people and their lives and that it is not perfect either.

Proceeding from the above-listed conclusions, it can be stated that the hypothesis of the research can be considered proven partially, as first of all, it was not even the feeling of belonging to the outer community but rather the existence of this different environment which affected the protagonist. Secondly, the protagonist's acceptance of her American self did not establish a new relationship between her inner and outer heritages but transformed her attitude to the former, using the latter for the realisation and healing of her initial drama.

While in the novel the issue of one's heritage can be considered one of priorities, but not the major one, in the short story *Everyday Use* it is brought to the fore. The questions of belonging to one's ancestry along with the associated issues of race, ethnicity and kinship have been analysed by many critics, including David White (2001), Helga Hoel

(2007), Susan Farrell (1998) and David Cowart (1999). The critics focused on the social and political directions of the short story: they analysed its characters in the background of the Black Power Movement and also emphasised Walker's expression of her understanding of the notions of slavery and race as the shared past and memory about it. The researchers also studied the devices the author applied to mock at the exaggerated use of attributes of the black African heritage which were used for the needs of Black Power movement without the proper respect and recognition of their meaning and value.

The researchers divided the heritages in the story between the sisters as follows: Maggie – the painful history of slavery and oppression, i.e. the American heritage, and Dee – the neo-African heritage. In contrast to it, the analysis of the imagery of the short story conducted within the frames of the present research has attempted to illustrate the heritages in the opposite way: the inborn African heritage is represented through Maggie's connection with her ancestry while elements of the outer American's heritage are expressed through Dee's understanding of her belonging to the American community. In this perspective the analysis of the imagery of the story has allowed to make the following conclusions:

- Dee has acquired stereotypic and shallow features of the American community: she has a distorted understanding of the so-called American dream and has got used to treating everything, including her inborn African heritage, from a consumer's position.
- Maggie values her inborn African roots and acts as a connecting link between the generations of African-American women of her kin. However, she lacks strength and is held back by her dependence on her past.
- Neither of the sisters can be called an American to the full extent of the notion because they cannot recognise the true values of her American community,

such as diversity. Dee is unable to appreciate others' heritage as she cannot honour her own inborn African heritage, while Maggie fears accepting new values, being exaggeratedly attached to her old ones.

In this way it can be stated that in the case of the short story the hypothesis of the thesis has been proven, as the characters' degree of belonging to the community of their outer heritage affects their perception of the inborn African heritage and the relationship between the two of the heritages.

By including the third character of Mama into the story and laying the responsibility of making the choice between the heritages on her shoulders, Walker raises the question of seeking for the possibility of the right answer/choice/solution in determination of one's attitude to heritage and formation of his/her identity. Mama has lost another battle for her true mother-daughter relationship with her elder daughter Dee. However, she has apparently won the war in finding peace with herself the way she is, not the way she has pictured herself to be in order to please the shallow and consumer-like attitudes of Dee. Having allowed herself to display the pride for her ancestry, Mama is capable of letting Dee go the way she has constructed herself to be. As Alice Walker says in her essay *Reflections on Working toward Peace*, pain and disappointment are inseparable natural parts of one's life and they are to be accepted. The strength for finding peace with this evil is provided by the hope that the world is initially good and it can be better, because the only alternative is "not to act, and therefore to miss experiencing other people at their best, reaching toward their fullness" (para. 10). It is "futile" to expect anyone, including oneself, to be perfect" (Walker: para.11). Human's lives are like stones brought to the pile of universal life. "Sometimes our stones are, to us, misshapen, odd. Their color seems off. Their singing, like Paul's whistling, comical and strange. Presenting them, we perceive our own imperfect nakedness. But also, paradoxically, the wholeness, the rightness, of it. In the

collective vulnerability of presence, we learn not to be afraid” (Walker: para.12). The message conveyed by the writer emphasises that the completeness of a person can be achieved only through recognition and acceptance of his/her imperfection.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Anna Golubeva

The Relationship between African and American Heritages in Alice Walker's Novel

“Possessing the Secret of Joy” and the Short Story “Everyday Use”

Ameerika ja Aafrika pärandite omavahelised suhted Alice Walkeri romaanis

“Possessing the Secret of Joy” ja lühijutus “Everyday Use”

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Käesolevas magistritöös keskendutakse päritolu (pärandi) probleemidele, mida on käsitletud läbi naise silmade Alice Walkeri kirjutistes. Töös arutletakse mõiste „värviline naine“ eri aspekte, mis on kesksed Walkeri loomingus, kes ise on afroameeriklasena teinud olulise panuse Musta naise kujundi arengusse nii kirjanduses kui ühiskonnas.

Uurimuse eesmärk oli analüüsida peategelase Ameerika ja Aafrika “minade” vahelisi võimalikke suhteid, mida väljendatakse kompositsiooniliste elementide kaudu romaani mitmehäälses jutustuses ja lühijutu kujundites, mis on loodud peamise tegelaskuju vaatenurgast, kes tunneb, et kannab ühte või teist kuuluvuse pärandit. Magistritöös defineeritakse neid päritolusid (pärandeid) kui kaasasündinut/seesmist (Aafrika) ja välist (Ameerika). Uurimuse hüpotees on, et suhe päritolude vahel sõltub tegelaste tundest, et nad kannavad välist päritolu, st kuuluvad Ameerika kogukonda.

Töö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest peatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses tehakse ülevaade mõiste “värviline naine” olulistest aspektidest, määratletakse Alice Walkeri osa naise (*womanist*) vaatenurga kujundamisel afroameerika naistele ja nende unikaalsusele. Samuti esitatakse uurimuse eesmärk ja hüpotees. Esimene peatükk analüüsib eri lähenemisviise mõistele „päritolu/pärand“ ning annab ülevaate Aafrika-Ameerika pärandi eripärast Alice Walkeri loomingus. Teine peatükk uurib võimalikke suhteid Aafrika ja Ameerika pärandite vahel Alice Walkeri romaani *Possessing the Secret of Joy* ja lühijutu *Everyday Use* näitel. Kokkuvõttes esitatakse uurimuse tulemused ja kommentaarid hüpoteesist lähtudes.

Uurimus on läbi viidud kasutades stiilianalüüsi metodoloogiat feministlikus ja postkoloniaalses raamistikus. Analüüsitud on kompositsioonelemente romaanis *Possessing the Secret of Joy* ja kujundeid lühijutus *Everyday Use*.

Romaani *Possessing the Secret of Joy* ei ole palju uuritud Aafrika-Ameerika kaksikpäritolu teema foonil, sest peamiselt on tähelepanu pööratud naiste rõhumise ja ümberlõikamise kui sotsiaalse ja kultuurilise ilmingu peegeldusele autori poolt. Kirjandusuuringutes on kriitikud Nako (2000) ja Gourdine (1996) pööranud tähelepanu Walkeri esitatud peategelase Aafrika ja Ameerika “minade” ehtsusele.

Romaani peategelase teksti laiali pillutatud kuue “mina” analüüs näitab, et tema suhtumine Ameerika Ühendriikide, tema teise kodumaa päritolusse vaheldub sõltuvalt identiteedist, mille ta valib. Uue omandatud Ameerika päritolu peamine roll väljendub peategelase uues nimes ja elustiilis, mis on vahend või jõud, mille abil ta saab kindluse tunnistada ümberlõikamise põhjustatud füüsilist ja moraalset traumat. Arusaamine kahjust, mille on tekitanud rituaal, mis on sooritatud oma inimeste hulka kuulumise ja hõimu uhkuse ülistamise loosungite kättevarjus, võimaldab peategelasel ümber hinnata oma algse enesemääratluse Aafrika kogukonna suhtes, millesse ta sündinud oli. Seega on uurimuse

hüpotees osaliselt tõestatud: esiteks, peategelast ei mõjutanud mitte tunne kuulumisest välisesse kogukonda, vaid pigem selle teistsuguse keskkonna olemasolu, ja teiseks, peategelase leppimine oma Ameerika „minaga“ ei loonud uut suhet tema seesmise ja välise päritolu vahel, vaid kujundas ümber tema suhtumise esimese päritolu suhtes, kasutades hilisemat kuuluvust oma algse draama mõistmisel ja sellest paranemisel.

Kui romaanis võib päritolu/pärandi küsimust pidada üheks prioriteetseks, kuid mitte peamiseks probleemiks, siis lühijutus *Everyday Use* on see toodud esiplaanile. Ühtekuuluvus oma esivanematega koos kaasnevate rassi-, etnilisuse ja sugulusprobleemidega on olnud analüüsi teema paljudele kriitikutele, nagu David White (2001), Helga Hoel (2007), Susan Farrell (1998) ja David Cowart (1999). Kriitikud on rõhutanud lühijutu sotsiaalset ja poliitilist suundumust pidades silmas *Black Power* liikumisse kuuluvaid taustategelasi, ning samuti toonud esile Walkeri selle teose panust orjuse ja rassi kui ühise mineviku ja mälu mõtestamisse. Uurijad on samuti tegelenud vahenditega, mida autor on kasutanud selleks, et naeruvääristada musta Aafrika pärandi atribuutide liialdatud kasutamist *Black Power* liikumise huvides ilma kohase austuse ja õige arusaamiseta nende mõttest ja väärtusest.

Kontrastina eelnevate uurijate esitatud päritolude jaotusele õdede Maggie ja Dee vahel – esimene on esindanud orjuse ja rõhumise piinarikast ajalugu, st Ameerika pärandit, teine neo-Aafrika pärandit, - on lühijutu kujundite praeguse analüüsi abil illustreeritud Aafrika kaasasündinud pärandit läbi Maggie sideme tema esivanematega ja Ameerika välise päritolu elemente läbi Dee mõistmise, et ta kuulub Ameerika kogukonda. Dee ihkab saavutada edu iga hinna eest: tema jaoks tähendab see Ameerika unelma täitmist ja oma Aafrika juurte ära kasutamist. Lühijutu puhul leidis töö hüpotees kinnitust, kuna tegelaskujude kogukonda kuulumise määr mõjutab nende ettekujutust Aafrika kaasasündinud päritolust ja kahe pärandi vahelisest suhtest: kumbagi õde ei saa pidada

ameeriklaseks selle mõiste täistähenduses, sest Dee ei ole võimeline austama oma sünnipära ja selle tõttu ei tunnetata oma Ameerika kogukonna tõelist väärtust. Teda mõjutavad stereotüübid, mida ta tajub ja käsitleb ehtsatena. Maggie omakorda on takerdunud minevikku ja tal ei ole jõudu liikuda edasi, et tunnustada uut elu samaväärselt, nagu ta hindab minevikku. Mama tegelaskuju, kes peab valima oma kahe tütre vahel ja samal ajal eelistama ühte pärandit teisele, on kuldne keskmine: ta tunnustab Dee arusaamist ameerika identiteedist, kuid jääb truuks oma kaasasündinud Aafrika päritolule. Seoses sellega, et Mama samal ajal aktsepteerib välist Ameerika päritolu ja keeldub sellest (sest see on lihtsustatud, ärile taandunud ja kapseldunud), tõstatub küsimus igapäevase suhtumise paindlikkusest kaksikidentiteedi suhtes. Mama, kes on pärandite konflikti keskel, näitab selle paindlikkuse tõlgendamisevõimalusi.

Märksõnad: Ameerika ja Aafrika päritolu (pärand), must naine, kaksikidentiteet, feministlik ja postkoloniaalne raamistik, *womanism*.