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## “Mestiza” Daughters and Cultural Electras: Transborder Matrilineage in Rebecca Walker’s *Black, White and Jewish* (2000)

### Abstract

*This paper is a qualitative analysis of the cultural notion of the “mestiza” daughter and of the way the lines of transborder matrilineage spread through Rebecca Walker’s *Black, White and Jewish*. The cultural ‘Mestizas’ try to strike a balance in between their insider and outsider status in the society for then coming to terms with their multiple identities and adopting the role of cultural ambassadors. In this autobiography Rebecca Walker is revealed transforming herself from a rebellious black adolescent living with her mother in the bohemia of San Francisco to an upper middle class Jewish girl living with her father and her stepmother in the suburbs of Manhattan. Shuttling between coasts and cultures makes Walker feel a “movement child” psychologically, physically and politically. At times feeling completely at home in her mother’s world, other times going through disruption from the mother as a way of waging war on her search for identity, Rebecca maps up her identity through the “Mestiza Daughter” and the “Cultural Electra” trope.*

*Literally traveling between two or more worlds and developing a tolerance for contradictions and plurality, the “Mestiza” is involved in self-negotiations and mediations that make her side with the dominant culture instead of identifying with the matrilineal heritage or becoming a cultural replica of the Electra complex. Typical of the matrilineal relationship in Rebecca Walker’s *Black, White and Jewish* is the matrophobic rejection of the mother’s peculiarities and the desire to become purged once and for all from the remnants of her culture. Considering her mother as the inner scapegoat and the inherent blemish, Rebecca recognizes failure to live up to the societal standards of good mothering and turns to her father as a point of reference for her life. Nevertheless, there seems to be no place for a biracial, multiethnic daughter in the xenophobic society of the father, and this makes Rebecca decide to discharge the father’s surname and highlight the mother’s one as a sign of privileging blackness and downplaying whiteness. Walker’s perpetually shifting locations create a narrative that partakes of fact and fiction, fantasy and experience, storytelling and collective unconscious, and present the protagonist as a compulsory amnesiac absorbed in the shapelessness of identity, time and location.*

*Absorbed in an existence which is void of daily routines, and finding permanence*

*only in the transitional accommodation of airports, Rebecca will claim and disclaim separate parts of her character in every new location periodically moving from the East Coast to the West Coast, from the white Jewish suburbia to the black artist bohemia, from the white outsiderhood to the black insiderhood. Stylistically speaking the author has intentionally capitalized Home because no conventionality of space or attitude can deserve that name. She feels content with an off the map position and as a mediator.*

*Rejecting the existence of a stabilized and unified identity and considering herself the tragic mulatta caught between both worlds like a proverbial deer in the headlights, Walker grows aware of her binary marginality and asserts that identity emerges not when identification is made, but when it fails to be made. The sense of multiplicity conferred by Jewishness refers to the potential to transcend dichotomies such as black and white and leave other facets unarticulated.*

**Keywords:** *Black Female Autobiography; Cultural Mestizas; Matrilineal Heritage; Cross Cultural Mediator; Multiple Identities.*

## 1-Introduction

Subtitled her book *Autobiography of a Shifting Self*, Walker describes how she developed from a rebellious black adolescent living with her mother in the bohemia of San Francisco, to an upper middle class Jewish girl living with her father and her stepmother in the suburbs of Manhattan. The unusual custody arrangement, the daughter having to spend two years with each parent, poses her shuttling between coasts and cultures and made her feel a movement child psychologically as well as politically. Placed on the mainstream's margins, and born biracial, comes to her as a conditioned invitation to view the world from the perspective of both an insider and an outsider. Adding a third dimension to the typically black and white dyad of U.S. race relations, her book deploys Jewishness to unfold the plurality of whiteness and challenge the dichotomies of race and identity. Nevertheless, Walker's ultimate conclusion is that we must strive to come to terms with our ethnic identities in order to be able to assume the role of cultural ambassadors.

Besides reflecting the experience of growing up biracial, Walker's narrative is also about the way parental neglect forced her to become prematurely independent, and extravagantly indulging in drug and sex attitudes. The author's depiction of a tangled upbringing comes out as frank to the point of lacking insight. Along the memoir Rebecca absorbs the very stereotypes she claims to recycle. The memory selectivity questions the reliability of every statement she makes, and the ancestral origins and matrilineal relationship serve as guidelines and route digressers at the same time, letting the work hover between the status of memoir and fiction. When asked about her writing style, her life and activism, Walker considers her work as one fighting against the media distorted characterizations of feminism, trying to remove the rigid societal frameworks, and voicing the needs of the oppressed and the afflicted.

### **1.1. "Mestiza" Daughters and Cultural Electras: Transborder Matrilienage in Rebecca Walker's *Black, White and Jewish* (2000)**

Just as autobiographical writing rises up beyond the individual accounts of a specific person, woman-of-color mother-daughter writing raises beyond the constraints of double marginality, promoting gender and ethnic consciousness and turning mothers into the political fronts against racism and sexism. As Wendy Ho observes:

As much as there were intense conflicts with mothers, many women writers of color emphasized the mother's powerful social and emotional presence in nurturing their creativity and in establishing the home place as a political space for survival and resistance for their subordinated racial-ethnic families. (qtd. in Schultersmandl 2005,p. 7).

The mother-daughter relationship in Rebecca Walker's autobiography wavers from closeness and association to disruption and separation as a way of seeking identification, and at the same time waging war on one's search for identity. In her *Of Woman Born*(1986), Adrienne Rich considers the mother-daughter relationship as one of inherent symbiosis and reciprocal identification, life shaping since its pre-natal existence. It is likely that there is nothing in nature more resonant and more tuned than the flow of appreciation and mutual recognition between a mother and her daughter. In Rich's words, "this cathexis between mother and daughter-

essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story.”(226), but like every intense feeling and relationship it may sound threatening to men and this leads the daughter into a disruption from her mother, as a form of claiming acceptance in the white framework. The emotional and spiritual attachment is described even through a scene of bodily symbiosis:

Night after night Mama and I are tucked into our king-size bed on the warm side of the blood-red velvet curtains, and night after night I fall asleep with my pudgy copper arms wrapped around her neck. As we drift out of consciousness, I feel the ether of my spirit meet the ether of hers and become all tangled up. As I fall asleep I do not know where she starts and I begin. (Walker Black, White and Jewish ,p.56).

Another episode in which Walker feels completely at home in her mother's world is the one in which her mother takes her along to the Library of Congress, thereby opening up a new world of writing and escapism in verse, and making Rebecca feel proud of being identified as Alice's daughter. The Library of Congress is a niche where neither her father, nor her stepmother, nor anybody else may dare to stamp on:

At the Library of Congress I become the daughter of my mother. That is how people know me. This is the speaker's daughter. You know the woman who read the poetry? [...]. It is easy to be my mama's daughter, all I have to do is stand next to her and smile at all the people who come over to talk and shake her hand. (102).

Nevertheless, as the rest of the work will reveal, this easy ready-made identification will not be long-lasting and the mother-daughter relationship will end up oscillating between reconciliations and separations. As feminist criticism reads it, Rebecca Walker's autobiography orients the protagonist's struggle for self-assertion and identity-mapping toward two tropes: the trope of Anzaldua's, "The Mestiza Daughter"; and of Jung's "Cultural Electra". The new "Mestiza", a hybrid identity, a cross-border, a mediator of different realities or cultures, literally travels between two worlds, developing a tolerance for contradictions and plurality and feeling, overwhelmed by a sensation of belonging to two localities and to neither of them at the same time.

Finding herself immersed in a quest that opens up further ambivalences and ambiguities about her mixed ethnic identity and heritage, the "Mestiza" needs to claim her matrilineal relations rather than let herself be claimed by them and this entails self-negotiations and mediations of her multiple ethnic heritages. It is this dilemma which leads to question , "which collectivity does the daughter of a dark-skinned mother listen to?"(Anzaldua 1987,p.100), and it is the same dilemma that leads Walker into wondering whether she is possible, whether there exists anybody able to reconcile cultures and ethnicities without suffocating or misrepresenting one or the other.

Nowadays, the concept of the "Cultural Electra" reaches as an extension of the impact the Jungian psychoanalytical feminism has on the readings of contemporary ethnic texts. The sexually charged distortion of the mother-son relationship, coined as the "Oedipus Complex" by Sigmund Freud, has got as its counterpart the "Electra Complex", the identification of the daughter with the father figure, as an

act of individuation. As Silvia Schultermandl states in her dissertation *Unlinear Matrilineage, Mother-Daughter Conflicts and the Politics of Location in Contemporary Asian American and Caribbean American Women Writers*(2004), when a daughter “sides with the dominant culture instead of identifying with the matrilineal heritage her mother embodies, she replicates the dynamics of the ‘Electra Complex’ on a cultural level.”(Schultermandl 2004, p.50). Feeling that the matrilineal heritage is not strong enough to speak up for her in the world, the “Cultural Electra” targets and blames her non-American mother for the oppression and frustration she experiences and sticks to her father’s supremacy for identification:

“But when I see them in my mind’s eye, gray-haired Grandma Jennie, staring squarely into the lens and Grandmother Poole looking out, exhausted, over the hill, I can not help but wonder if either of them ever would have fully claimed and embraced me.” (Walker Black, White and Jewish,p.151).

Adaptation to the father’s cultural world and absorption of his suburban supremacy requires jeopardizing her African American heritage and her matrilineal bond. The context-boundedness of the “Cultural Electra”, suggests a cultural and emotional alienation from the mother as a mode of societal affirmation. The process of disassociation from one’s mother also takes up other different names: to Adrienne Rich it is a “radical surgery” from the mother (Rich 1986,p.78), to Hirsch it is an illustration of the daughter’s Othering (Hirsch 1989, p.136-137). In Chodorow’s terms, on the other hand, girls always have more flexible ego boundaries and need for the presence of an “Other” to succeed in their self-assertion, while boys have more rigid ego boundaries and come to define themselves as separate: “From the retention of the Oedipal attachments to their mothers, growing girls come to define themselves as continuous with others.”(Chodorow 1978, p. 169). The motherly consideration of daughters as extensions of themselves lays the grounds for identification with the father as a foil for her separation from the mother.

In Walker’s autobiography, as well as in many autobiographies of second generation women of color, the collective matrilineal heritage also inadvertently absorbs the patriarchal societal expectations that it attempts to eliminate. In postmodern society, as Adrienne Rich claims, woman is principally viewed through the lens of motherhood, and the complexity of her being is dismantled by the absorption of such generalizations and stereotypes as “childbearer, and the center of life’s creation.”(Rich 1986, p.11). The disconnection with the mother, and the attempted assimilation with the father, is rooted in what Adrienne Rich calls “matrophobia”--“a womanly splitting of the Self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free.”(Rich 1986,p. 236). The matrophobic rejection in Black, White and Jewish primarily originates in Rebecca’s awareness that what she hates most are remnants of the mother’s culture that make her unacceptable in the eyes of the society.

To Rebecca, the mother stands for the victim, the scapegoat inside of her, the convex mirror of her innermost reality, a blemish which she would wish to hide or to ignore at every exposure to the critical eye of the white society. It is the rejection of her pre-teenage crush in the third grade that makes her aware of the fact that white well-to-do guys would never date a black girl, and leads her to think that she will have to show off in the company of not black people like her stepmother

and her paternal grandmother, thereby considering her mother as a “clandestine Other.”(Schultermandl 2005,p. 9). Her Othering of the mother continues with her feeling reluctant to be seen accompanied by her in school plays, and her consideration of blackness as an uncherished dimension of her multiple identities and Selves.

Bryan Katon, her teenage crush, voices his dislike for black girls and immerses Rebecca into the existential dilemma of trying to uncover the innermost depths of her being: “Bryan Katon tells me that he doesn’t like black girls [...]. And that is when all the trouble starts, because suddenly I don t know how to be not what he thinks I am. I don t know how to be a not black girl. “(Walker Black, White and Jewish, p. 69). It is this episode with Bryan that will deepen the breach between her and her mother and cause in her mixed feelings of longing and relief, frustration and contentment.

I don t tell my mother too much about the play, and she doesn t ask. It isn t a big deal I say, hoping she won’t see through my mask of nonchalance; I don’t want to hurt her but I don t want to lie either, but how else am I going to convince her not to come to see me on play night [...]. Even though everyone says I was good, my mamma, the one with the most important voice, can never say this to me. Shame sticks to me like sweat. (71-72).

Rebecca’s alienation from her mother also stems from her recognition of the mother’s failure to live up to the standards of good mothering. An eight year old cannot understand that a mother has to neglect her children in order to be devoted to public engagement and activism, she cannot comprehend how a mother can chose books, poetry and writing to having walks and going shopping with her daughter. In the episodes to follow, Rebecca reveals of her mother being too busy working on a screenplay and so hiring someone to do the paperwork and act as a liaison between her and the school. The whole situation is awaited with confusion and revolt by the daughter, but it does not cause any kind of reaction or empathy in the mother who quite cynically complies with Rebecca’s hidden agreement not to rely on her mother anymore, and not to ask for her assistance:

I miss my mother walking up the speckled smooth cement stairs with me on the first days of school, but I am so excited about being an Urban student. I don’t dwell on it until the school has an open house for new students and their parents and my mother sends the woman she hired [...]. And then on a meaningful, comic but cynical postcard with a mother gorilla and her child on the front she writes to her daughter that ,”She is proud of me for being independent and being able to do well without her. She writes that I will have to continue to do what I always say I can: take care of myself. “ (p.263-264).

Alice even sometimes seems to Rebecca like a nasty sister with whom she will have to quarrel over many possessions, but who will never provide her with the care and tenderness typical of a mother. Tired of life and of the many challenges being a single mother poses to her, Alice becomes blind to the behavior of Rebecca. Whenever her daughter acts in a vicious way, slamming doors, talking back and shouting, she thinks it is all part of her being spoilt in the urban environment of the father. Whenever she plays the perfect child, doing the household chores and

toiling to look ideal, her mother declares that she finds a sister in Rebecca and makes her just part of the plot of looking good in front of the others.

In interviews my mother talks about how she and I are more like sisters than mother and daughter. I am game, letting her sit in my lap for a photo for the New York Times, playing the grown-up to my mother's child for the camera. I feel strong when she says those things, like I am much older and wiser than I really am. It is just that the strength does not allow for weakness. Being my mother's sister doesn't allow me to be her daughter (231).

Nevertheless, the mothers always remain reference points for daughters. In the case of *Black, White and Jewish*, Rebecca turns to another female figure, the stepmother, for support. The stepmother seems to be there even when her mother is absent and teaches her things about life. This middle class suburban housewife, her father prefers to his artist ex-wife, becomes the norm of motherhood Rebecca measures her mother with:

While my father is upstairs sleeping and she is sewing name tags for summer camp on all of my jeans, hooded red sweatshirts, and underwear, it is she, my stepmother, who tells me about penises and vaginas and about how babies are made [...]. One day I have some kind of rash and I itch. I call out to her. She is downstairs in the kitchen. Before I can stop myself, I yell out, "Mom, where is the calamine lotion? And then I stop, resting my hand on the wooden banister, waiting to see if she will answer me, if she will accept this new name." (91).

But mid-way through the memoir, the meanwhile teenaged narrator gives a more critical account of her attempted assimilation and views even the stepmother under a new light. Once her father and stepmother move to Larchmont, the Jewish dream in the suburbs, Rebecca becomes more aware of the race tensions and the class discrimination:

The move is some kind of plot my stepmother has concocted to kill me, to wipe away all traces of my blackness or to make me so uncomfortable with it that I myself will it away [...]. I think that she and I are doing battle for my father's soul, me with my brown body pulling him down memory lane to a past more sensual and righteous, she scratching the dirt off place Jewish roots I didn't know she had. (206-207).

By the end of her orientationlessness, Walker comes to the conclusion that she feels more closely connected with the African American heritage and entertains the notion that her black collective past and present are more representative of her personal experiences within the dominant white society. While feeling disparate from her father's extravagant, xenophobic attitudes and lifestyle and compelled to abide to the rules of the white suburban city, Rebecca chooses ethnic marginalization to being scapegoated as her father's au-pair or baby-sitter. Her awareness grows as she realizes that the white culture is leaving no room for her multiple, fragmentary Selves, and that in a seemingly perfect urban landscape she is just an aberration of her father's life, just a "dark spot in an otherwise picture-perfect suburban family." (230). Rebecca engages in a quest for self-creation and self-assertion

based on her mother's black culture and heritage. Feeling at the peak of her achievements and excelling in everything makes her draw closer to her mother by having something undeniable like naming run between them. As Schultermandl states in her book *Transnational Matrilineage* (2009), what can be more "undeniable than discharging oneself of the father's surname and highlighting the mother's one as a sign of privileging blackness and downplaying whiteness." (Schultermandl 2009, p.56).

Why should that line, that clan of people who have been so resistant to my birth, claim the woman I have become? [...]. I want to be closer to my mother, to have something run between us that cannot be denied. I want a marker that links us tangibly and forever as mother and daughter (Walker, *Black, White and Jewish*, p.312).

By moving Leventhal to a more obscure middle position and placing Walker at the end, she emphasizes her link to the minority culture and claims her identity as a non-white woman rather than as a merciless Semitic. Faced with identity mapping problems and having secured a stable position of outstanding existence in the dominant culture, Rebecca comes to realize that articulating empathy for the marginalized and paying respect to one's roots is the best way to finding a belonging. After some remarks her father had said on the trial scene she begins to react defensively and bringing out all the buried hatred toward the Jewish inheritance:

I react defensively, asking why I should want the name of the man who disowned my father when he was only eight years old. Why I should carry the name of the man who beat my grandmother and has refused to this day to see me or any other of his son's children. (313).

The answer to all the whys lies in the realization that she mostly identifies with the underdog rather than with the supremacy of the white Jewish society. She finds herself in the legacy of slavery and the black struggle against brutality and prejudice:

Do I feel I have to choose one of these allegiances in order to know who I am or in order to pay proper respect to my ancestors? No. Do I hope that what my ancestors love in me is my ability to master compassion for those who suffer, including myself? Yes. (307).

Walker's new home is in tolerance and in human compassion, and her new role is that of a cross-borderer, an ambassador of two or more cultures. This ambassador role of hers provides her with an epiphany about what is more important to one's identification and she concludes that identity goes beyond genetic make-up. It is only the liberal transnational and trans-cultural consciousness which provides the individual with the utmost freedom for the expression of one's true Self.

One of the most influential and widely recognized formulations of the women-of-color politics of location is Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderland concept". In her experimental autobiography *Borderlands La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa challenges the displacement of the "mestiza", whose multiple, cultural

and gender placements go beyond conventional boundaries of identity. According to her, searching for home also means searching for one's real Self but, as far as quest for one's Self faces recognition of an inherent Other, women come to see the alien within them, internalize the sense of exile and end up split up within themselves and between one another. This is the criteria upon which Rebecca Walker has built the multivocal account of growing from childhood into adulthood:

We return in widening spirals and never to the same childhood place where it happened; first in our families; with our mothers; our fathers. The writing is a tool for piercing that mystery, but it also shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive. (Anzaldúa 1987, p.25).

A self-described movement child, Walker moves literally and metaphorically. She alternates every two years between her parent s homes, thus growing up in Jackson Mississippi, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and the suburbs of the New York City. Shuttling back and forth across the country, Walker moves among binary identifications such as white or black, Puerto Rican or Jew, heterosexual or bisexual, suburb child or an inner-city girl, middle class or radical bohemian artist.

### **1.2. *Shifting in between locations and cultures***

The racial and ethnic duality becomes even more difficult to manage as she shifts between cultures and worlds. This is regarded by Rebecca as coming of age and journeying "from planet to planet between universes that never overlap." (Walker Black, White and Jewish, p.117). Rebecca s dislocation and subsequent victimization starts with her parent s divorce and their joint custody agreement. As Rebecca periodically moves from the East Coast to the West Coast, from her "father's white Jewish suburbia to her mother s black artist bohemia, from being an outsider among the white people, to being an outsider among the black community. " (Schultermandl 2004, p. 60), the divorce decision is the one to open up new required spaces for both her parents and eventually set her on a mobile transitional existence that distorts her character, and urges her to claim and disclaim separate facets of her character in every new location.

What their decision means is that every year of my life, I have to move, change schools, shift. My father returns to the life that was expected of him, marrying a nice Jewish girl he met as a kid in a summer camp, and my mother falls for a Morehouse man, an old sweetheart from her Spellman days. For them there is a return to what is familiar, safe and expected. For me there is a turning away from all of those things. (Walker Black, White and Jewish, p.117).

Moving from household to household sounds to Rebecca like switching between radio stations and listening to a music whose beat she finds it difficult to follow: "Doing the switching is easy, its figuring out how one relates to the Other (dancer) that is hard." (39). Absorption in the spiritual, character and cultural displacement sounds home-like to Rebecca to the point that no other ritual of life sounds as natural. Her existence is void of the daily routines that may sound trite to any other girl of her age like waking to an alarm clock, thumbing magazines, drifting off to slumber according to some pre-set schedule, or finding oneself in some unchanging workplace. Her body seems to be made up of ether, there is an internal

mercurial drive of forever being in motion rather than recognizing one's origins as deeply rooted in ancestry.

I can never release myself from the mercurial aspects, can't allow myself to stand on some kind of ground. Instead I tend toward that which destabilizes and feels most like home: change, impermanence, a pattern of in and out, here and there, city to city, place to place [...]. I unpack and pack my belongings, shedding some and picking up others with ease and economy. (167).

The ether-like quality of her life, is reflected even in the fragmentary and shifting multiplicity of her selves and identities, and determines the flow of her narrative. As the entitling of the subchapter *Self and Memory* reveals, she has to make thousands of choices a day, and is never completely free to opt for any of them, her life always seeming to have a direction, but never reaching a dead end (228).

The locations she memorizes best are airports, opened doors that never take much time to close behind her, windows whose landscapes she never takes the time to enjoy, an exteriority that never remains such because of her willingly or reluctantly melting into the borders and the frontiers of her existence. Her appearance adopts the form of a chameleon, a malleable substance to be molded after every encounter, a missing core never to be found. The other reason why she prefers airports is because they are neutral spaces, not demanding much identity mapping, and disclaiming the luxury of stability and coherence in the name of fragmentation and bordering. In the passages to follow the author has intentionally capitalized *Home*, because no conventionality of space or of attitude can deserve that name. Refusing to stay somewhere long enough to develop a ritual of familiarity, coziness or safety, Walker prefers lingering in the in-betweenness rather than on the act of performance:

I remember airports [...]. I am more comfortable in airports than I am in either of the houses I call, with undeserved nostalgia, *Home* [...]. Airports are limbo spaces-blank, undemanding, neutral. Expectations are clear. I am the passenger. I am coming or going [...]. I do not have to belong to one camp, school, or race, one fixed set of qualifiers, adjectives based on someone else's experience [...]. I am a transitional space, form-shifting space, place of a thousand hellos and a million goodbyes (4).

Regardless of the tragicalness with which she asserts the already imposed life pattern, Rebecca considers moving as an "alchemical reaction that happens when the seasons change." (63). Rebecca's recognition of her off-map position and her outings into each parent's world constitute a challenge to her cultural and ethnic adaptation. When her mother picks her up for poetry reading, she is happy about being initiated into a world of "poetry, Indian restaurants and curvy brown women" (101), for after some time going back to the rituality of having lunches prepared by the stepmother, "going to ballet classes, and walking with Marc home from school." (103).

Rebecca nevertheless somehow seems to crave for some sense of belonging, either in Bali or Jamaica, or to the Jewish heritage of her father or the black ancestral wealth of her mother. This creates in us an illusion of stability, a fake

sense of permanence and belonging, which will be undermined within a few lines. On her journey to Bali she states: "In these places where many of the people have skin the same color as mine, and where I am not embroiled in the indigenous racial politics of the day, I get a glimpse of a kind of freedom I have not experienced at home." (304). Considering food as a manifestation of cultural heritage as much as homeplace is, Walker's description of Riverdale and other Jewish lieu sharpens her dislike for the bourgeois lifestyle of her father and highlights her sense of displacement.

My father and stepmother live just in Riverdale, but I live in Riverdale and Bronx. Riverdale to me means Nanny and the Liebermans and shopping down on Johnson Avenue for challah for Friday-night dinner [...]. It means a little store that sells Oshkosh overalls for my stepmother [...]. It means walking around with my stepmother, this Sephardic looking Jew who calls me her daughter around people who never question (199).

Ultimately she confesses feeling more at home in the modest household of Theresa, among the uneven set of concrete chairs, the mess and the dramatic darkness of her house. She feels most welcome by the lower class modesty and simplicity rather than by the luxurious premises of her father's house which seem to provide room for everybody and everything but her: "there [in Theresa's house], I find a corner to fit into, walls that contain me." (205).

Rebecca is not alone, she is not the only one required to act as a bridge, a mediator of two cultures. Jessie, a gay man, is also a human bridge that "seems to do all this moving up and down and in and out more seamlessly than she herself can." (244). This is an open invitation of hers to probe within ourselves only to recognize that within every Self there is an exiled Other, in every seemingly well-situated identity, there is a Rebecca-like shifter that stitches and unstitches the patchwork of our identity.

## 2-Conclusions

Concluding we may state that Rebecca Walker's autobiography builds up on the consideration that deconstruction is the best response to the relativism and multidimensionality of the American experience. In the mother-daughter relationship the focus shifts from the features of the bond in itself to the bond of mothers to society as a whole. The conflict between a mother and her culturally alienated daughter arises due to the daughter's recognition of a need for a break in the matrilineal legacy and the mother's growing awareness of her failure in social reproduction. While waging a war in her search for identity, considering herself as disparate from the mother and avoiding standing on the borderland, the ethnic daughter negates even an integral part of herself without which she can never be whole.

In conclusion, we might say that in her *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2002), Rebecca Walker challenges the notion of a home-place as a site of belonging. Acting as a catalyst of the difference between white and women-of-color feminism, and making the protagonist intentionally disassociate from the ancestral and matrilineal culture, she converts the supposedly self-asserting homecomings into geo-politically and socio-culturally insecure locations. The

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ether-like rhythm of her life breaks any possibility for a uni-linear traditional narrative and contributes to the sketch -like organization of chapters. Involved in the mad wandering through a multitude of spaces, locations and identities, Rebecca reaches the conclusion that the best way out is attempting to become mediators rather than claim for clear-cut identities never to be reached. Lacking the black contours, and the permanence of a unified gestalt, the body ends up being just a remnant of the past, a painful reminder of the happy days.

Whenever Rebecca chooses not to remember, memory is converted into some sort of parasite that creeps into the tissues of her body, and makes itself evident in any confrontation with different people, cultures or realities. but then she is reminded that the truth does not lie in what her parents told her about the infinite opportunities. She must once again wear a mask of calmness and tranquility and alignment with the reality.

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