

Volume 2, Issue 2

Décembre 2024

e-ISSN: 2959-9407 (online)
p-ISSN: 3006-4392 (printed)



SINZANG

SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, LANGUAGE,
COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

Peleforo GON COULIBALY University

Côte d'Ivoire

www.revue-sinzang.net



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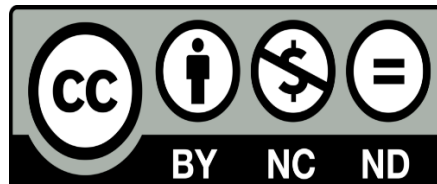
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SJIF 2024: 3.696



e-ISSN: 2959-9407 (online version)

P-ISSN: 3006-4392 (printed version)

EDITORIAL

Among the Senufos from the north of Côte d'Ivoire, the sacred grove is called "Sinzang". The first of these would date from the time of the patriarch and leader of Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). It is the tutelary space of the initiatory institute of the secret society: the Poro. These sacred forests exist in all the villages of the region and are highly protected and managed. The proof is that in their midst, adolescents perform the rite of passage leading them to the age of maturity. The "Sinzang" is also the centre of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Thus, the teaching of ancestral knowledge, ontology and cosmogony-contributing to the future spiritual, moral and social formation of the Senufo elite-is associated with this pantheon.

In line with this pedagogical and academic logic, the SINZANG Journal aims to promote African and Western humanities in Literature, Language, Communication and Education Sciences. To do this, it is part of a process of promoting the reflections and studies conducted by Teachers-Researchers and Researchers for the sustainable development of society.

As distinctive signs of "Sinzang", Jacqueline DELANGE, in *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifies among others the huts, earth cones and statues (masks). The visual identity of this magazine presents two masks, one symbolizing ancestral knowledge and the other Western science. The two facing the entrance of a sacred hut express the encounter of diverse knowledge put at the service of humanity. *In fine*, they export to other horizons, hence the idea of huts in perspective.

SINZANG is a pluridisciplinary and biannual peer-reviewed scientific journal. It is published in English and French but also accepts work written in German and Spanish. Moreover, depending on the requests made at the discretion of its review committee, it may issue special thematic publications and conference proceedings.

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ÉDITORIAL

Chez les Sénoufos du nord de la Côte d'Ivoire, le bosquet sacré est communément appelé « Sinzang ». Les premiers du genre dateraient de l'époque du patriarche et chef de Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). C'est l'espace tutélaire de l'institut initiatique de la société secrète : le Poro. Lieux fortement protégés et aménagés à l'envi, ces forêts sacrées existent dans tous les villages de la région. La preuve en est qu'en leur sein, les adolescents effectuent le rite de passage les amenant à l'âge de la maturité. Le « Sinzang » est aussi le haut lieu de la transmission de la connaissance intergénérationnelle. Ainsi, l'enseignement du savoir ancestral, de l'ontologie et la cosmogonie- contribuant à la formation spirituelle, morale et sociale de l'élite Sénoufo de demain-est associé à ce panthéon.

S'inscrivant dans cette logique pédagogique et académique, la Revue SINZANG ambitionne de faire la promotion des humanités tant africaine qu'occidentale dans le domaine de la Littérature, des Sciences du Langage, de la Communication et de l'Éducation. Pour ce faire, elle s'inscrit dans une démarche de vulgarisation des réflexions et des études menées par les Enseignants-Chercheurs et des Chercheurs pour le développement durable de la société.

Comme signes distinctifs du « Sinzang », Jacqueline DELANGE, dans *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifie entre autres les cases, les cônes en terre et les statues (masques). L'identité visuelle de cette revue présentant deux masques, l'un symbolisant le savoir ancestral et l'autre la science occidentale. Les deux se faisant face à l'entrée d'une case sacrée expriment la rencontre de connaissances diverses mis au service de l'humanité. In fine, elles s'exportent vers d'autres horizons ; d'où l'idée des cases en perspective.

SINZANG est une revue pluridisciplinaire à comité de lecture et scientifique. Elle est bilingue : éditée en anglais et en français. Mais elle accepte également les travaux écrits en allemand et en espagnol. C'est une revue semestrielle, tenant deux parutions l'an. Au demeurant, elle peut procéder, selon les demandes ou les sollicitations formulées à l'appréciation de son comité de lecture, à des parutions spéciales thématiques et à la diffusion d'actes de colloque.

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**HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY CHALLENGE IN REBECCA
WALKER'S *BLACK WHITE AND JEWISH:
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A
SHIFTING SELF***

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Abstract

This article explores the theme of hybridity and the identity challenges Rebecca Walker faces in *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2001). By analyzing Walker's negotiation of her biracial and bicultural identity, the study examines how she navigates the tensions between societal expectations and personal identity. Drawing on postcolonial theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Stuart Hall's notion of identity as an evolving process, this article highlights the transformative potential of cultural in-betweenness. Walker's memoir serves as a critical lens through which to understand the fluidity of identity in a multicultural context, challenging rigid racial and cultural binaries. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical foundation of hybridity and identity through postcolonial perspectives; Chapter 2 examines Walker's lived experience as a biracial and bicultural individual negotiating social expectations; and Chapter 3 explores Embracing Hybridity, toward a New Racial Identity Paradigm

Keywords: bicultural, biracial, hybridity, identity, postcolonial.

**L'HYBRIDITE ET LES CHALLENGES DE L'IDENTITE DANS *BLACK
WHITE AND JEWISH: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A
SHIFTING SELF* DE REBECCA WALKER**

Résumé

Cet article explore le thème de l'hybridité et les défis identitaires auxquels Rebecca Walker est confrontée dans *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2001). En analysant la manière dont Walker négocie son identité biraciale et biculturelle, l'étude examine comment elle navigue entre les attentes sociétales et son

identité personnelle. S'appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale, notamment le concept d'hybridité de Homi Bhabha et la notion d'identité en tant que processus évolutif de Stuart Hall, cet article met en lumière le potentiel transformateur de l'entre-deux culturel. Le mémoire de Walker sert de prisme critique pour comprendre la fluidité identitaire dans un contexte multiculturel, remettant en question les binarités raciales et culturelles rigides. Le premier chapitre établit le cadre théorique de l'hybridité et de l'identité à travers une perspective postcoloniale ; le deuxième chapitre analyse l'expérience vécue de Walker en tant qu'individu biracial et biculturel face aux attentes sociales et le troisième chapitre explore l'acceptation de l'hybridité, vers un nouveau paradigme de l'identité raciale.

Mots-clés : biculturel, biracial, hybridité, identité, postcoloniale.

Introduction

The assertion of identity among mixed-race individuals is a complex and multifaceted process, often marked by negotiation, resistance, and adaptation. In societies where rigid racial categorizations persist, those of biracial or bicultural backgrounds frequently navigate a liminal space, oscillating between multiple cultural influences while grasping external perceptions and self-definition. This dynamic is particularly evident in literature that explores the lived experiences of mixed-race individuals, highlighting how they reconcile their hybrid heritage with social expectations. Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2001) is a seminal work that exposes this negotiation, offering a deeply personal account of the challenges and possibilities of inhabiting multiple racial and cultural identities. Through her memoir, Walker presents a fluid and evolving sense of self, questioning the binaries imposed by society and embracing the contradictions inherent in her mixed-race experience.

Scholarly discussions on *Black White and Jewish* have often examined Walker's exploration of hybridity and identity formation, focusing on the tensions between her racial and cultural affiliations. For instance, A. Smith (2010) analyzes Walker's memoir through the lens of racial liminality, arguing that her fluctuating sense of belonging reflects the broader societal struggle to accommodate biracial identities. According to Smith, Walker's swing between Black and white spaces highlights the instability of racial categories and the limitations of binary identity constructs.

As for D. Johnson (2015), he applies Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity to Walker's narrative, emphasizing how she constructs her identity within the "third space"—a realm where cultural meanings are constantly negotiated (H. Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). Johnson posits that Walker's memoir serves as a testament to the transformative potential of hybridity, as it enables her to redefine belonging on her own terms rather than conforming to externally imposed racial classifications.

M. Anderson (2018) explores the intersection of race, gender, and family dynamics in *Black White and Jewish*, contending that Walker's identity crisis is deeply intertwined with her experiences as a biracial woman navigating gendered expectations within both Black and white communities. Anderson highlights how Walker's interactions with her parents and extended family shape her evolving self-perception, reinforcing the idea that identity is relational rather than fixed.

While these studies offer valuable perspectives on Walker's negotiation of racial identity, they leave certain aspects underexplored. Smith and Johnson, for example, focus primarily on race and hybridity but do not fully address the influence of gender and personal agency in shaping Walker's identity. Anderson, on the other hand, brings in the gendered dimension but does not examine the sociopolitical implications of Walker's hybridity deeply. This article seeks to demonstrate how Walker's memoir challenges conventional understandings of identity through a multidimensional lens.

This study argues that *Black White and Jewish* challenges fixed racial and cultural identities by presenting hybridity as an ongoing process rather than a resolved state. Walker's memoir not only critiques the rigid binaries that define race in American society but also reveals the fluid, evolving nature of identity, which is shaped by personal experiences, family influences, and broader sociopolitical forces.

This analysis is grounded in postcolonial theory, drawing particularly on Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identity as a process rather than a fixed essence. Bhabha's theory of the "third space" provides a framework for understanding how Walker negotiates her biracial identity by creating new meanings and forms of belonging outside rigid racial categorizations. Additionally, Hall's view of identity as a constantly evolving construct helps illuminate

how Walker's shifting self-perception reflects broader societal tensions regarding race, culture, and self-definition.

This article is organized into three chapters. The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation of hybridity and identity through postcolonial perspectives; The second chapter examines Walker's lived experience as a biracial and bicultural individual negotiating social expectations; and the third chapter explores embracing hybridity, toward a new racial identity paradigm.

1- THEORIZING HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY

The construction of identity for biracial individuals exists at the crossroads of personal experience, societal expectations, and cultural heritage. Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* exemplifies this complex interplay, presenting hybridity as both a challenge and a transformative potential. To fully grasp the intricacies of Walker's identity negotiation, it is essential to examine the theoretical foundations that inform discussions of race, hybridity, and self-definition. This chapter provides a critical framework for analyzing Walker's memoir through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a continuous process. Additionally, it explores the historical and sociocultural context of biracial identity in the United States, situating Walker's experiences within a broader racial discourse.

1.1. Hybridity and the 'Third Space'

H. Bhabha's concept of hybridity challenges fixed notions of identity by emphasizing the fluid and negotiated nature of cultural belonging. According to H. Bhabha (1994, p. 37), hybridity emerges in the «Third Space of enunciation», an in-between realm where cultural meanings are reinterpreted, contested, and transformed. Rather than existing as a fusion of two distinct identities, hybridity is a dynamic process that resists rigid categorizations.

Walker's memoir exemplifies this third space as she moves between the Black and white communities, struggling to find a singular sense of belonging. Throughout *Black White and Jewish*, she describes moments of alienation when she is perceived as «not Black enough» or «not white enough» (R. Walker, 2001, p. 52). Her identity is

neither fully aligned with one racial category nor the other, but instead exists in a liminal space where she constantly negotiates her sense of self. By applying Bhabha's theory, we can understand Walker's experience not as a deficiency but as a mode of resistance against essentialist racial constructs.

Furthermore, Bhabha's idea of hybridity as a site of meaning-making is reflected in Walker's reclamation of her identity. While she initially struggles with the pressure to conform to either of her racial heritages, her narrative ultimately embraces the possibility of existing between these spaces. In this way, *Black White and Jewish* aligns with Bhabha's assertion that hybridity is not merely a space of fragmentation but also a space of potential cultural rearticulating.

1.2. Perception of the Fluidity of Identity

Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identity as an evolving and unfixed construct provides another critical framework for examining Walker's memoir. Hall argues that identity is not an inherent or stable essence but rather a continuous process shaped by historical and cultural contexts. He distinguishes between two approaches to identity: one that sees identity as a collective, shared experience rooted in history, and another that views identity as a constantly shifting and discursively constructed phenomenon.

Walker's memoir aligns with S. Hall's second approach, as she presents identity as something that is never fully resolved. Rather than arriving at a singular, definitive self-definition, Walker's narrative reflects the ongoing process of self-construction. For example, she recalls moments in which her racial identity shifts depending on context—her sense of Blackness is heightened in predominantly white spaces, while her whiteness becomes more pronounced when she is among Black individuals R. Walker (2001, p. 79). This oscillation underscores Hall's argument that identity is not a fixed entity but a fluid and relational process.

Moreover, Walker's refusal to adopt a singular racial identity challenges the essentialist notions of race that Hall critiques. By embracing the multiplicity of her background, she resists the dominant discourse that seeks to categorize individuals within rigid racial boundaries. Her memoir thus, serves as a case study in identity as an open-ended and evolving phenomenon, reinforcing Hall's perspective that identity is always in flux, shaped by experience, cultural memory, and self-perception.

1.3. The Sociohistorical Context of Biracial Identity in America

Understanding Walker's narrative also requires situating her experiences within the broader historical and sociocultural context of biracial identity in the United States. Throughout American history, mixed-race individuals have been subjected to the one-drop rule, a racial classification system that dictated that any person with African ancestry was legally and socially considered Black. This binary racial system left little room for biracial individuals to claim an identity that fully acknowledged both aspects of their heritage.

Walker's experiences reflect this legacy, as she often finds herself forced to choose between her Black and white heritage rather than being allowed to exist as both. In several instances, she recounts feeling pressure from Black communities to reject her whiteness as a way of asserting racial solidarity. For instance, as biracial people are considered as non-Blacks, Walker recalls the complaint of black girls about the whiteness of her skin in these terms: «Sixth-grade black girls tell me I'm too white» (R. Walker, 2001, p. 95). In the same token, white communities often marginalize her due to her Black heritage. As such, R. Walker (2001) is completely ignored by her white great-grandmother Jennie. She asserts:

At Grandma's house she won't look at me when I ask her this question, but I know she hears me because her face looks tight, like someone is pulling her ears back behind her head. [...] I nod my head but still don't understand why Great-grandma Jennie is always so angry, why she hardly ever looks at or talks to me. I feel invisible, present but also not, like I am floating (p. 35).

These situations reveal the enduring impact of historical racial binaries on contemporary identity formation.

However, Walker's narrative also represents a shift in biracial discourse. Unlike earlier accounts of mixed-race identity that often emphasized passing or assimilation into one racial group, *Black White and Jewish* presents a model of identity that embraces multiplicity rather than singularity. Walker's willingness to claim both aspects of her heritage, despite external pressures, reflects broader cultural changes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, where discussions on race have increasingly acknowledged the complexities of multiracial identity.

2-NEGOTIATING RACIAL AND CULTURAL BELONGING

R. Walker presents a nuanced exploration of how biracial individuals navigate the complexities of racial and cultural belonging. While the first section provides a theoretical foundation for understanding hybridity and identity formation, this chapter focuses on Walker's lived experiences and her struggle for acceptance within both Black and white communities. By examining her encounters with racial stereotyping, familial tensions, and shifting self-perception, this chapter highlights the fluid and often contested nature of biracial identity.

2.1. Racial Ambiguity and the Struggle for Acceptance

One of the themes in Walker's autobiographical book is the challenge of racial ambiguity and the difficulty of finding acceptance in either racial community. As a biracial individual, Walker frequently finds herself questioned, categorized, or rejected based on her physical appearance and cultural affiliations. Scholars such as Angela Smith (2010, p. 114) argue that biracial individuals often experience «double displacement», where they are simultaneously included and excluded from both racial groups.

Walker's experiences reflect this phenomenon, particularly in her childhood and adolescence. In predominantly white settings, she encounters macroaggressions and exoticization, as people attempt to define her racial identity on their own terms. She recounts moments when white peers would comment on her curly hair or skin tone, reinforcing her sense of difference (R. Walker, 2001, p. 47). Meanwhile, in Black spaces, she sometimes faces skepticism regarding her authenticity, as she is perceived as «not Black enough» due to her mixed heritage and upbringing (R. Walker, 2001, p. 89). This push-and-pull dynamic illustrates the broader societal struggle to accommodate racial hybridity within rigid racial categories.

Michelle Anderson, in her study of racial identity in Walker's work, suggests that «the inability to fit neatly into one racial category forces biracial individuals to forge their own definitions of self, outside of societal expectations» (M. Anderson, 2013, p. 202). Walker's memoir is a testament to this process, as she ultimately carves out a space where she can embrace both her Black and white heritage on her own terms.

2.2. Family, Identity, and Conflicting Cultural Expectations

Walker's identity struggle is further complicated by the contrasting cultural expectations placed upon her by her parents. As the daughter of a Black mother (Alice Walker) and a white Jewish father (Mel Leventhal), she grows up oscillating between two distinct cultural traditions, each with its own racial and historical significance. Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a «production» rather than a fixed essence (S. Hall, 1996, p. 225) is evident in Walker's narrative, particularly in her descriptions of her parents' differing approaches to race. While her mother instills in her a strong sense of Black pride and resilience, her father emphasizes Jewish heritage and intellectualism. These competing influences create tension in Walker's self-perception, as she struggles to reconcile both aspects of her background. D. Johnson (2015, p. 146), argues that “parental influence often serves as the primary site of racial socialization for biracial individuals, but when parental identities diverge, the individual is left in a liminal position.” Walker's memoir vividly illustrates this tension, as she navigates the expectations of both parents while forging her own racial identity.

2.3. Performing Race: Adapting Identity Based on Context

Another significant aspect of Walker's racial identity formation is the way she adapts or «performs» race depending on social context. Drawing from E. Goffman's theory of identity as performance (1959, p. 78), Walker describes how her racial presentation shifts based on her environment. In predominantly black spaces, she leans into expressions of Black identity, emphasizing her connection to Black culture and heritage. However, in white spaces, she sometimes downplays her blackness to fit in or avoid discrimination. This adaptability is both a survival strategy and a reflection of the fluidity of racial identity. Walker's narrative aligns with Hall's argument that identity is not fixed but rather constructed through interaction (S. Hall, 1996, p. 229). By acknowledging her own shifting self-presentation, Walker challenges the notion of a singular, static racial identity and embraces the complexity of being biracial.

3-EMBRACING HYBRIDITY: TOWARD A NEW RACIAL IDENTITY PARADIGM

While much of *Black White and Jewish* explores the struggles of biracial identity, the memoir ultimately moves toward a resolution in which Walker embraces hybridity as a source of strength rather than fragmentation. This chapter examines the ways in which Walker reclaims her identity, redefines belonging, and contributes to a broader discourse on racial hybridity.

3.1. Self-Acceptance and Reconciliation

Throughout the memoir, Walker's journey is marked by internal conflict and external pressures, but, by the later chapters, she begins to move toward self-acceptance. This shift aligns with bell hooks' concept of "radical self-love" as a means of resisting racial essentialism (hooks, 2000, p. 39). Walker's acceptance of her dual heritage is not a rejection of either racial identity but rather an affirmation of both. She acknowledges the pain of being caught between two worlds but, ultimately finds power in her ability to navigate both. As she writes, "I am neither one nor the other. I am both" (Walker, 2001, p. 242). This declaration represents a departure from the binary racial frameworks imposed upon her and signals a new, self-defined mode of identity.

3.2. Hybridity as Resistance: Challenging Racial Binaries

Walker's memoir challenges the traditional racial binaries that have historically governed American identity. By refusing to adhere to a singular racial categorization, she disrupts the binary logic that demands individuals fit neatly into one racial category. H. Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a site of resistance (1994, p. 112) is particularly relevant here. Walker's insistence on claiming both her Black and Jewish identities serves as a challenge to the rigid structures of racial classification. In doing so, she opens up possibilities for new ways of understanding racial identity that move beyond fixed categories. A. Smith (2010, p. 203) notes that «by embracing a mixed-race identity, Walker articulates a form of racial consciousness that transcends traditional notions of race, offering a vision of identity that is fluid, contextual, and self-defined». This perspective underscores the transformative potential of Walker's narrative.

3.3. A New Paradigm for Mixed-Race Identity

Walker's memoir is part of a broader conversation about the evolving nature of racial identity in the 21st century. As scholars such as M. Elam (2011, p. 57) argue, the increasing visibility of biracial narratives signals a shift toward a more inclusive and flexible understanding of race. Walker's personal journey reflects this shift, as she moves from confusion and fragmentation to confidence and self-definition. Her story contributes to a growing discourse on multiracial identity that challenges rigid racial hierarchies and embraces complexity. David Johnson (2015, p. 164) asserts that «Walker's memoir serves as a touchstone for discussions on biracial identity, illustrating both the challenges and the potential for a new, hybrid form of selfhood». As such, *Black White and Jewish* stands as both a deeply personal narrative and a broader cultural intervention.

Conclusion

Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* offers a profound exploration of the complexities inherent in biracial and bicultural identity, drawing attention to the multifaceted nature of racial and cultural belonging. Through a careful examination of Walker's journey, this article has shown that the theoretical underpinnings of hybridity and identity negotiation were established, providing a lens through which to examine Walker's memoir on a first instance. It also emphasized Walker's experiences with racial ambiguity, social expectations, and the performance of race, illustrating how societal pressures and cultural influences shaped her self-understanding. In a last instance, the work revealed the transformation in Walker's narrative, where she moves from fragmentation toward self-acceptance, embracing hybridity as both a personal and political stance that resists conventional racial binaries.

This insight contributes to the existing scholarship on biracial identity by offering a nuanced reading of Walker's memoir and by addressing gaps in previous studies. Interestingly enough, the paper extends the intersectional nature of mixed-race identity, highlighting how it experiences, with racial and cultural hybridity, ultimate challenges and redefines conventional ideas of race and belonging. By continuing to engage with these narratives, we open the door to new perspectives on

identity, one that transcends the confines of traditional racial boundaries and celebrates the richness of cultural multiplicity.

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