Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 50/2-3, 2015
doi: 10.1515/stap-2015-0026

THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE OF THE OTHER

DOROTA OWCZAREK

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

ABSTRACT

The following paper deals with the problem of the transformation of the female self from the ethnocentric stage to the ethnorelative stage, as portrayed in Osa Johnson's "autobiographical" account of her trips in the book *I married adventure*. The author attempts to show the metamorphosis of the protagonist by relating her experiences to the developmental model of cultural sensitivity, as proposed by M.J. Bennett. It is argued that the protagonist assumes the role of the Other in relation to her husband in the same way that indigenous people appear as the Other in relation to the protagonist. The slight yet detectable change in her perception of the Other constitutes an attempt to liberate herself from the position of the subordinate white female.

Keywords: autobiography, self, intercultural experience, ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism

Introduction

In American popular history, Osa Johnson is best known as the one who, together with her husband, contributed to the popularity of Safari themes in entertainment culture in the pre-war period. The couple achieved this by travelling round the country and showing their films to the American public. Together with her husband, in the years 1917-1935, she visited the South Seas Islands twice (in 1917 and in 1918), Borneo and the Borneo jungle, Africa (in 1921 and 1924 and on an air safari in 1933), and Borneo again on a flying trip in 1935.

Osa Johnson was born in 1894 and died in 1953. She wrote books for children: *Jungle Babies*, *Jungle Friends* and *Jungle Pets* and in 1940 she had *I married adventure* published. The book has been categorised in various ways: as a memoir, an oral history, a travelogue, a biography, while in the foreword it is described as a "saga in the full meaning of it" (Johnson 1940: 15). Each of

these categories reflects the popular character of the book. Though neither a great piece of writing nor a literary masterpiece, it became a real bestseller at the beginning of the twentieth century as an account of Osa's travels to remote parts of the world.

Defining the genre of the book is a little problematic. It appears to be an example of autobiographical narrative, though some reservations should be expressed with respect to this label. The book was ghost-written and is regarded by some as inauthentic (Marcus 1995: 13ff), and by others it is perceived as a collaborative autobiography. It is termed thus because, as Couser (2004: 35) argues, "the writer is one person and the narrator and the subject are someone else". This genre, popular among celebrities who may lack good writing skills but have stories to tell, raises controversies. Couser (2004: 39) questions the literary value of such autobiographies and their veracity, since celebrities like to "put on a façade," while Lejeune (2001: 159) defends this kind of writing by arguing that it corresponds to people's interests. They both, however, point to the fact that the nature of the mediation between the author and the model is vital in making the story being told accurate (Couser 2004: 36, Lejeune 2001: 209). Interestingly, a collaborative autobiography needs both the subject and the writer, as the former owns the story and the latter has the skills to tell it. As Lejeune explains, there is no interesting autobiography without an interesting life. Osa Johnson's book, ghost-written by the scenarist Winifred Dunn, tells the success story of an American woman (Imperato 1992: 249), a story that the public wants to read. If we accept that the stories we produce about ourselves are creations, Osa Johnson's story is no exception. It is a portrayal of a successful woman of her times, easily consumed by the readers. The protagonist's story is not so much a story of a solitary traveler, but what Eakin (1998: 63ff) describes as *the story of the story* where Osa pays tribute to her late husband. It portrays a white woman who earned a strong position among female travelers venturing into the world of the Other (Czech 2002, Enright 2012), and shares this kind of experience with the reader. In this regard her book has a double role to play: it is a source of identification for a potential reader, and secondly, through that identification, as with any travel writing, according to Fox (2003), it is also a means of raising awareness of the complexities and possible transformations occurring in an encounter with the Other.

The focal point of the discussion of Osa Johnson's biography is how her identity is constructed through the lived and recorded patterns of her relationship with the Other. This is undertaken from the perspectives of three different reading approaches, namely: postcolonial, feminist and developmental. In all three readings, the founding principles and concepts of discourse analysis (Butler 1997) serve as the underlying mode of inquiry. The postcolonial theory of the white female self and feminist theory (Ashcroft et al. 2002, Barry 2002, Said 1993, Tyson 2001)

have been applied to scrutinize Osa's role in her marriage and the construction of Osa's bonds with the community of the Other, respectively, to signal her opposition to the patriarchy. In order to explicate the protagonist's response to the culture of the Other in her travel experiences, and its effects on the protagonist, the intercultural development model has also been employed (Bennett 1993).

Critical discourse analysis

The words and phrases used when referring to the Other constitute the basis for describing the nature of the relationship between the subject and the Other. Following Butler's line of reasoning, implied in her analysis of the power of speech acts, the way Osa, the subject, judges the Other reveals her position regarding the judged entity. Namely, what counts in this relationship is the process of naming. The process is pertinent to the present discussion in the sense that the act of naming positions the subject, Osa, against the named 'object', her husband, or the indigenous people of the worlds she visits, thus revealing the relationship that exists between the subject and the Other, who is being named by that subject. Osa, by naming the tribes and their leaders encountered during her travels, not only recognizes their being but also, as Butler (1997) shows, "makes" their existence. Even though the named people may not be aware of their naming, the very act of naming is still effective as the linguistic power of the name itself is revealed in the discourse and is not contingent on the subject. By naming the indigenous people, Osa establishes her position as a representative of the dominant white culture. That naming, tinted with the prejudice which Osa applies in addressing the Other, has an effect that goes beyond Osa's recognition and constitutes the discourse of travel writing which Pratt (2008: 9) describes as "anti-conquest". Yet, to some extent, Osa is inconsistent in her naming choices. As her story develops, by changing the mode of addressing the Other , Osa redefines her position towards the Other. Besides, Osa Johnson's narrative shows that travel writing can have a causative force in transforming the image of the Other. All in all, the performativity of naming employed in the text of the novel reveals her treatment of the Other as either equal or unequal.

The white female self as a colonial subject in her home culture

The postcolonial reading offers two perspectives. The first one, which rests on the division of race, sees Osa as a member of the group of white colonizers, who speak the voice of authority. That voice presents Osa as a Westerner, a person who sees the distant corners of the earth as populated by people who are either evil and barbaric, brutal, dangerous, almost animal- like (the demonic other) and

equipped with all those attributes that Whites refuse to see in themselves, or possess primitive beauty (the exotic other) (Tyson 2001: 193). Her comments on indigenous people and their culture reveal the desire of an American to reclaim the past, to create a pre-colonial version of America in which the indigenous people of the land lived their lives in their due ways (Barry 2002: 194): "Theirs, it might be said, was a utopian existence, for they showed neither hate, greed, vanity, envy nor any other of the dominatingly unpleasant emotions of the so called civilized world" (Johnson 1940: 330). Osa, together with her husband, uses the Other to make money by showing films presenting that exotic or demonic world to her native audience. From this perspective she appears as the oppressor, incapable of recognizing the value and meaningfulness of the Other's world and culture. At some points her perception of the Other's world is simplistic. All indigenous people are the same, perceived as masses, not individuals. In this treatment of the Other she refers to the Other in a very ethnocentric way.

On the other hand, in the same Western world she herself is the Other, a female subordinate to the man's world. She, like the indigenous people of the countries visited by her, is ascribed a subsidiary, marginalized role. She, like them, is a colonial subject. As Tyson (2001: 194) remarks, "American citizens, too, can be colonial subjects. Examples include women who believe they are by nature less intelligent or capable than men; (…)" When travelling with her husband in foreign worlds, she adopts his cultural habits and the values of a traveler, which show both her desire to belong to that culture and her colonized mind. It is Martin who chooses the right clothes for Osa before going on an expedition. Osa responds to this in the following manner: "I tried to picture myself dressed that way, and wondered whether I ought to cut my hair. Martin was against it so emphatically, however, that I decided to wear it long and heavy as it was" (Johnson 1940: 103). She is also tested to see if she is the right companion for a traveler when the Johnsons paid a visit to Charmian and Jack London: "And I was miserable. And I continued to be miserable until the day we left. I was on probation, and I knew it" (Johnson 1940: 106). Feeling marginalized and responding only to her husband's needs, ironically, she appears to be dominant in the eyes of the natives: "Nagapate's men laid the offerings of their chief at my feet" (Johnson 1940: 135). In return, Osa and the natives earn undeserved mockery: "Martin laughed: 'The old boy can see that Osa's the boss of the expedition, and this is the way of opening diplomatic relations'" (Johnson 1940: 134).

As a colonial subject she does not escape mimicry (Tyson 2001: 194). She adopts her husbands' values and assumptions about the way of life and succumbs to her husband's ideas of a globetrotting lifestyle. Becoming a globetrotter she rejects her womanly dreams of having a traditional home. During Johnsons' tour around Western Canada, Osa recounts: "There was a sudden sharp hunger in me

for a place I could call home, for security and permanence. I thought of the furniture and wedding presents I had given up, (…) and I began to cry" (Johnson 1940: 99).

It may be speculated that her subordinate identity enables her to see beyond the Western world and with time recognize the human existence of the Other who deserves to be viewed as different but existing in his or her own right, the way she wishes to be viewed. She does it in a very tacit and anti-revolutionary way towards the end of the book as she proceeds to enter the ethnorelative stage and becomes more objective: "I have seen him scent, or perhaps "sense" game with the sureness of a bloodhound, (…), we waited breathless on his decision and accepted it as absolute" (Johnson 1940: 283). The way she speaks about Boculy, an African elephant tracker, shows a mixture of some prejudices and her admiration for his talents. According to Barry (2002: 195), the use of the colonisers' language means acquiescence to the colonial order. Osa's language, to some extent at least, is undoubtedly tainted by her ethnocentric perspective. The first part of the sentence is full of propaganda speech aimed at the Other. But in the second part we can notice a departure from this kind of language towards a more amiable and respectful description of the Other. The language used resembles the way one refers to an esteemed person.

In summary, in the view of the postcolonial theory, Osa Johnson is a white female writer from America, a Westerner, speaking from an ethnocentric position, but at the same time a female, made powerless by the patriarchy, subjugated to her husband's choices. Her liberation (even if partial) from the ethnocentric perspective is also her liberation from patriarchy. As Millet (1970) terms it, it is her liberation from male dominated politics. This emancipation enables her to judge and speak about the world of the Other in a more objective way. As Said (1991 [1978]: 259) says, "the more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance." Although at the beginning Osa is entangled in the patriarchal ideology to fulfill the desires of her husband while she accompanies him on his travels, later she becomes an independent traveler, not in physical terms, but more in terms of her observations and attitudes towards the Other. Her story is deprived of open discussions or comments on matters connected with colonization or imperialism. But as Laura Marcus (1995: 13ff) observes, intercultural experiences of the female self are expressed through cultural meaning contained in the description of food, clothes and emotions and not through generic meaning resting upon geo-political implications. It is hard to notice any "vigorous cultural effort made" by Osa Johnson "to resist the imperial values by ever using the techniques and discourse reserved for Westerners" (Said 1993: 293). We observe a slow but

steady liberation of the subject from the colonial perspective towards the neutral position marked by the non-aggressive attitude towards the Other.[1]

Johnson's book as a feminist Bildungsroman and feminist autobiography

The subjugated nature of her identity compels the protagonist to look for the means of expression that will appeal to her nature, so she chooses the form of an autobiography. She adapts the form to her needs, such as the need to eliminate the fear of loneliness caused by her husband's death and to share with the reader their lived experiences.

Her autobiography is written in a manner which could be categorized as feminist Bildungsroman or feminist autobiography. The story leads us through the teenage years of Osa Johnson, to her acquaintance with Martin Johnson, then to their trips to Asia and then to Africa, finishing with a very short newspaper note about Martin's tragic death. As in the Bildungsroman, Osa's marriage is a precondition for the experience beyond which comes the development and discovery of the self (Felski 1989:138). The protagonist's journey to the world of the Other creates a precondition for oppositional activity and engagement in, for example, the rituals of the Other (Felski 1989:137). The community of the Other plays here the same role as the female community in a typical feminist Bildungsroman. The protagonist establishes good bonds with the Other, being at the same time drawn out of androgenic bourgeois society, if only temporarily (Felski 1989:138): "I strummed the ukulele a minute, tuning it, then began to sing, (…). Then to my astonishment Nagapate's mouth opened and out came a tribal chant timed perfectly to the song I was singing" (Johnson 1940: 133f). After that event, Nagapate sends Osa some gifts. The protagonist's longing to be recognized as a fully legitimate member of the expedition is realized in this very moment. The location of the subject in reference to the Other indicates the subject's uniqueness and difference despite the benevolent treatment she receives from her male travel companions. In consequence of this communal bonding, no meetings with Nagapate, the chief of the tribe, could happen without Osa's attendance: "When they [Martin and Paul – her travel companions] returned to the ship they said my [Osa's] presence was required" (Johnson 1940: 134).

The narrative does not aim to preach or present any moral opinion but serves as a description of the subject's attitude towards her experiences of the Other. Knowledge of the Other is contingent throughout the book and derives from the actual viewpoint of the protagonist. Her accounts constitute a way of constructing a particular view of a female traveler engaged in crossing the border from the white woman's world to the world of the Other.

---

[1] My research on ICC showed that in our own attitude towards other nations the desirable outcome is the same attitude we reveal towards our friends. (Unpublished PhD dissertation)

Osa Johnson's transformation through contacts with the Other

The transformation of Osa Johnson's attitude towards the Other is analysed against the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. The developmental model, as proposed by Bennett in the field of intercultural communication, describes the experience of cultural differences.

In the context of Osa's narrative, the protagonist's ethnocentric perspective assumes Western norms and categories to be central to the view of reality and may be termed as West-centred universalism. The Western perspective becomes privileged and the only one possible. Through a series of cognitive and emotional processes during an encounter with the Other, her perspective evolves into a universal stance from which the Other is seen as a meaningful subject since, according to Waldenfels (2002: 134), the dimensions of otherness open up the dimensions that apply to all people, where one's own culture and the culture of the Other become subordinate to the universal point of view. Bennett himself categorizes forms of this stage under the rubric of universalism. But universality does not exist without particularity, as Butler, Żiżek and Laclau (2011) argue. While the three look at the problem of hegemony in the relationships between particular cultures, Bennett focuses on culture pluralism and culture comparison. In the stage that ensues, the protagonist attempts to regard a foreign culture as variable and viable. Bennett refers to this as the ethnorelative stage, where one becomes aware of one's own culture and is prepared to accept cultural difference. Here, one can see that many views of the world are possible and that they are equal. This ethnorelative stage appears to be in opposition to ethnocentrism. On the affective level, the developmental model describes a change in one's response to cultural difference through a growing intercultural sensitivity along the ethnocentric-ethnorelative line. In Bennett's model, the ethnocentric phase is subdivided into denial, defence and minimisation stages and the ethnorelative phase begins with acceptance of adaptation and ends with integration.

Osa, by virtue of her intercultural experience, moves from the ethnocentric to the early stage of the ethnorelative position, where she reveals her respect for behavioral difference and empathy towards other cultures (Bennett 1993). Ming Xie (2011: 157) notes that "the chief value of comparative intercultural inquiry lies in the fact that it promotes a willingness to recognize contingency, hence the possibility of change and transformation in one's own cultural views, attitudes, and even values."

Osa's first encounter with the foreign culture which she mentions in the book is when she looks at this culture from her own perspective as a white American born in Chanute, Kansas during a lecture organised by Martin. At the same time, this is rather simplistic and naive: "This [slide show] went on for quite a while. I began to think about ice cream. Then the lecturer [Martin] said something about cannibals, and on came a reel of film showing people of such horribleness I

couldn't look at them. I sent a whisper along the line that I had had enough, and we left" (Johnson 1940: 69f). This short account shows her position of denial and intentional separation from cultural difference and isolation in her home culture which is believed to be the only real one (Bennett 1993).

Sometime later, when she remembers her visit to Martin's house, Osa seems to accept the existence of other cultures in the world, but occupies the defence position, where her culture is obviously the best to her: "The trophies which Martin had brought home from his trip with Jack London were all over the house, and I was polite and said I thought they were very nice. As a matter of fact I didn't think so at all; I thought they were horrid" (Johnson 1940: 84). A strong emotional attitude on coming into contact with foreign cultures is revealed here as well.

Osa's description of her first face to face meeting with the tribe living on the Solomon Islands, the natives of Malekula, has the same tone: "Black faces were so seamed and hideous, it was hard to believe they were men at all" (Johnson 1940: 115). And then after a very close encounter she remembers: "he [Nagapate] was the most horrible looking creature I had ever laid eyes on. Coal black and incredibly filthy, his shock of greasy hair and heavy wool beard were probably the nesting place of every sort of vermin" (Johnson 1940: 117). Osa's comments are devoid of any rationality. It is all veiled in strong emotions and affectation, which come to the fore in the intercultural interaction. And if the natives show that they can communicate in broken English, it astonishes her:

> The black spoke in a guttural beche-de-mer that astonished me with its scattering of English words.
> "My word! Master! Belly belong me walk about too much!" He pressed his hands dramatically to his stomach.
> I looked at Martin incredulously. We had come to Malekula warned and forewarned of natives who dealt swift and savage death to intruders, to be met by a whining black with a stomach ache!
> We rocked with laughter—which doubtless was part relief—when I opened our kit and poured out a small handful of cascara tablets. Martin explained carefully to the gaping savage that he was to take part of them when the sun went down and the other part when the sun came up. The black listened with apparent intentness to the end of the instructions, then opened his slobbery mouth and downed all the tablets in one gulp.
> During this little comedy, several more savages had slipped quietly out of the bush. (Johnson 1940: 117)

The pain and vulnerability of the black person does not lead Osa to be sympathetic. Rather, she is overcome with the fear of the Other, seizing the opportunity to heave a sigh of relief in order to restore her dominant position. Typically for the defence stage, Osa exposes her superiority as well as denigration of the Other.

In these accounts, Osa's persona exemplifies West-centred universalism. The Other is treated as an object and its meaningfulness is reduced (Ono 2010). Osa's response to the Other is entrenched in her belief that the Western perspective of the world is the central and correct one, a dominant view in most travel writing (Pratt 2008: 4).

But Osa slowly comes to realize that her world and the world of the natives have something in common. This attitude heralds the advent of the minimisation stage. At this stage one's own cultural worldview is experienced as universal, i.e. the threat associated with cultural differences is neutralized by incorporating cultural differences into familiar categories (Bennett 1993: 66). On seeing the chief of the tribe, Osa describes him in the following way: "A figure so frightful as to be magnificent. His face, like those of the rest of the savages, was framed in a mass of greasy black hair and beard. (...) There was power in his eyes (...) and his eyes showed intelligence" (Johnson 1940: 120). Osa's recognition of the characteristics attributable to whites and natives alike indicate that her frame of mind is streaked with elements that imply universalism. Also, her attempt to learn pidgin English which she calls beche-de-mer (in fact it is called Beach-la-Mar) suggests her shift to this minimisation stage. During her second trip to the South Seas she observes that "[t]here is something fascinating about this queer, garbled English; so much so that Martin and I often spoke it even when no natives were around. I discovered, too, that it was habit-forming, for I found myself actually thinking in this peculiar patois of the tropics" (Johnson 1940: 130).

Although she accepted and even found some pleasure in using the language of the South Seas, on other occasions she still experiences her own culture as central to reality. The natives' ignorance of her own culture made her feel either helpless or angry: "My efforts at training this young heathen [Atree] had its ludicrous as well as maddening moments. I asked him on one occasion to heat an iron for me, and, after waiting for a greater part of the morning, I found he had put it in a pot and was gravely watching it boil" (Johnson 1940: 130). The obvious difference in their cultural background escapes her attention.

Gradually, Osa becomes capable of getting rid of her irrational fears of the savage and on her second visit to Nagapate she writes:

> Oddly enough, Nagapate was now a screen personality to me rather than a savage, and somehow I had lost my terror of him. Martin told me afterwards that he felt exactly as I did, and we both dashed forward to shake hands. This cannibal chief seemed puzzled at first, but he could see we had no grudge for his apparent culinary intentions on our first visit, and became almost genial. (Johnson 1940: 132)

Furthermore, she recollects the moment when they sang a song together. In this unusual act of communication they both manage to overcome language and cultural barriers, again more on the affective than cognitive level, as when the music

stops Nagapate feels embarrassed about the communal singing, which in his eyes was almost tantamount to losing his dignity. At this point, Osa still treats Nagapate and his tribe with some amusement. In this minimisation stage, where cultural differences seem less distressing, she adopts a universal perspective, which allows her to adopt a romanticised vision of the indigenous culture intertwined with some denigration of it. "It wasn't until after we'd been in the village for hours that I saw first one and then another woman peering at us (…) They were the most miserable creatures I have ever seen. (…) the wretched creatures themselves were unspeakably filthy. It wasn't their fault, however; bathing for women was taboo" (Johnson 1940: 140). As Ming Xie (2011: 107, 117) observes, "the interactions of diverse points of view constitute a more complex view of reality where the so-called relative worlds of different cultures encounter each other only in the context of the world as a whole."

At times, Osa approximates the acceptance of cultural difference where she is capable of showing respect for behavioural and value dissimilarities. She is also capable of producing some simple remarks which nevertheless show her anthropological interest in the natives' habits and customs. She observes: "the number of pigs he has killed (...) is the measure of his prowess and pigs' tusks are money" (Johnson 1940: 145). Other remarks concern the relations between the sexes in the tribe, especially the position of women:

> [W]e came upon a scene which for sheer horror I have never seen duplicated.
>
> A young native girl lay writhing on the ground in an agony of pain. Two great holes had been burned in the fleshy parts of her right leg, just above and below the knee
>
> "One fellow man, his name belong Nowdi, he ketchum plenty coconuts, he ketchum plenty pigs, he ketchum plenty Mary (woman)," Atree explained, completely unmoved.
>
> It seemed that Nowdi had paid a top price of twenty pigs for this girl, but she would not live with him, and four times had run away. Each time she was caught and brought back. The last time she eluded her captor for nearly six months, but was caught hiding in the jungle. The chief of the village then had passed sentence, and what we had come upon was the result. (Johnson 1940: 145f)

She provides a description of what she encounters and simultaneously exhibits her shock and confusion.

Such records of her confrontation with the Other prove that she balances herself on the border between the ethnocentric and ethnorelative zones. Sometimes, the choice of words in her descriptions of the appearance of the indigenous tribes reflects her appreciation, for example when she describes them as "negroes decorated with the most fantastic ornaments" (Johnson 1940: 197). On another occasion she seems puzzled by the clean and modern atmosphere of Nairobi, as if only American or European cities could look modern, thus admitting to the kind

of narrow-mindedness with which she still perceives foreign lands: ”For no reason I can think of I had expected to see a somewhat squalid tropical village such as we found in the South Seas, and I was totally unprepared for the clean modern city it proved to be” (Johnson 1940: 198) Ming Xie (2011: 164) observes that “it is not just a confrontation with the other, but simultaneously a self-confrontation. While they are in this sense challenged by each other and tested against each other, cultures also test themselves vis-à-vis the real.”

Occasionally, she manages to overcome the social distance felt between her world and the world of the Other, for example by trying to understand the rules of the other world, as in the case of the undeclared code of work division that pushed her to employing ten servants instead of two or three. At the same time, however, she immediately calculates that the cost of ten is equal to one at home as though she is not ready yet to acknowledge the full legitimacy of a foreign culture:

> I discovered a score of blacks squatting outside our hotel and watching our windows. By this time I was ready to leave for the bungalow and thought that if their intentions were similar to Aloni’s, I would simply ignore them. No sooner had I set foot outside the door of the hotel, however, than they swarmed about me, each thrusting anywhere from six to fifty letters of recommendation under my nose. (…) Bewildered by all this ambiguity, I shook my head and ran for a rickshaw but wound up (…) with ten servants. Two or three would have done very nicely, but I found that they had an undeclared code of division of work, as effective as any trade-union and that the cost of ten was less than the wage of one servant at home. (Johnson 1940: 200)

However, Osa’s cognitive knowledge of the world is increasing. The cultural chasm seems to be bridged when Osa shows that she is interculturally literate. She is capable of experiencing her own culture in the context of other cultures. She delights in common meals with potters on her African safari trip and she makes comparisons between her home culture and African culture. The act of chewing the firm dried flesh of buffalo makes her think of liquorice sticks which children chew in America. Though relying on home recipes while preparing food or planting known vegetables in her garden, she is also capable of relishing wild delicacies:

> Much as I enjoyed the vegetables and fruits out of our garden, I think I relished even more the wild delicacies I found in the forest. Often I’ve returned home with armfuls of wild asparagus and spinach. There was a black cranberry, very sweet and good; a native coffee, abundant mushrooms, a fruit that seemed a cross between an apricot and an apple, a bitter wild plum that made fine jam and a wonderful honey. Darkest Africa! (Johnson 1940: 280)

On the occasion of endowing her potters with blankets, Osa begins to realise that foreign cultures are not to be judged by American standards:

> As a matter of fact, there wasn't so much as a sniffle among them. For my own peace of mind, however, I persuaded Martin to go to the store in Meru and buy them a blanket apiece. He did so; they cost a dollar a piece and the colour he had chosen, unfortunately, was bright red. The hill men were delighted, not because the blankets represented protection against the elements, but because of their garishness, and our seventy good dollars, we soon found out, had gone to ornament our black boys and not to keep them warm. (Johnson 1940: 243f)

She displays some forbearance when her black potters use their bright-coloured blankets not for keeping themselves warm, but as ornaments, and proudly show their delight about it. Her tolerance of differences in behaviour contrasts acutely with Father Johnson's indignation at the roles ascribed to men and women in African society. He comments on this in the following way: "I thought it was only Indians made their women do all the work, like I saw when I was a young man back in the States. Why, these fellows (African men) are lazier than they were" (Johnson 1940: 239).

On her safari trip, not only Osa but all the other members of the expedition appreciate a plurality of opinions and are prepared to take into account and follow the advice of their black leader: "Our many encounters with elephants (…) endeared the splendid creature to us and helped us, I think, to understand Boculy's [an elephant tracker] reverence for them" Johnson 1940: 284). Osa's change in attitude towards the foreign and unknown is also seen through her ability to endure difficult moments and even remember some of them as fantastic experiences. Some foreign words also start creeping into the descriptions of her travels at this stage: "On our sixth morning in the Ithangas we were in a little donga (valley) that opened out of the bowl, when we sighted a large herd of buffalo" (Johnson 1940: 230)

On her trip to the African jungle her descriptions of the local tribes take on a new style. Despite a continuous double categorisation of herself and the natives, Osa hints at the possibility of further integration with the natives, explaining that "the pygmies were a happy lot and fun to work with." While in the earlier accounts her fear and near resentment is tangible, now she displays mainly amusement and benevolence: "Presently the little people in my car began to sing - a sort of high, piping squeak. 'Happy?' I queried lightly, feeling quite flattered. But by their expression I knew they were singing to keep up their courage" (Johnson 1940: 329). At times she even marvels at the appearance of the pygmies, describing them as "beautifully formed little people" (Johnson 1940: 329). That her intercultural sensitivity has grown is also visible in her comparisons of the tribes: "Biologically and psychologically, these pygmies of the Ituri Forest are very like those we found on the Island of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides Group. They are shy and elusive and are constantly on the move (...). The domestic life of these people is clean, wholesome, admirable" (Johnson 1940: 329f). Her fears of "the

Other" give way to more conscious observations, in which she recognizes her limitations in interpreting the foreign behaviour: "A man with neither standing nor influence among his own people he had, for some unknown reason, made himself power among the pygmies" (Johnson 1940: 327). On the affective level, aversion to the natives is superseded by understanding and humour. Her cultural lens, through which she has started to look at the world of "the Other", begins to change colour. She still maintains a commitment to her values, but a shift in her perspective is discernible. Her description of an encounter with the Turkanas at Lake Rudolph is the epitome of her metamorphosis and signals the adaptation stage, where the observer is able to shift into another cultural frame of reference (Bennet 1993). She looks at herself through the eyes of The Turkanas: "They paid no attention whatever to our plane, but seemed to find us very amusing; our white faces and hands in particular, though our clothes, too, seemed to strike them as being pretty silly" (Johnson 1940: 352). This particular observation reveals Osa's capacity to alter her perspective in order to effectively understand the demands of the representatives of the host culture. With this statement she uncovers her transformation from an etic to an emic observer. In stark contrast to her earlier accounts of the natives is her description of the appearance of the Turkanas, which she portrays as fantastic: "We had seen other Turkanas, but none quite as fantastic as these. Their long, kinky hair was plastered with mud and tallow and moulded into the most ingenious forms" (Johnson 1940: 352).

On her way back home, in the so-called re-entry phase, after her unconscious identity change, Osa shows glimpses of a reverse culture shock when she complains of the tiresome maze of red tape and inspections at the border: "Here [in Cairo] we were forced to remain a week to obtain the necessary permits to fly over the Italian and French colonies in North Africa. Wherever we stopped we were required to go through the same tiresome maze of red tape, answer the same questions and submit to the same inspection by officials" (Johnson 1940: 360). An encounter with two school reporters only exacerbates this feeling since the schoolgirls are more interested in the celebrities Osa and her husband have met than the foreign lands and cultures they have seen and experienced (Johnson 1940: 368).

Finally, the leit motif of the book is the smile, either Osa's smile or her husband's. This smile in the encounters with the natives seems to be the key which opens all the gates into foreign worlds. In her intercultural relations, the smile is perhaps the most important thing that creates the background for good communication and is a part of the adventure that entices Osa away from home and conditions the ground for her transition from the ethnocentric to the ethnoralative stage. As Ming Xie (2011: 166) observes:

> Fundamentally, cultural confrontations are not just agonistic; they also compel and enable cultures (and individuals) to confront their own radical freedom and creative capacity. Comparative intercultural thinking enables us to see any actual or possible universal modes and values as no longer just ethno-cultural or particularistic in application (for example, as "Western" or "Chinese"), but as modes of being that enable us to become aware of the actual relations in which things have been contingently inserted and which could thus prompt us to rethink and re-actualize things differently, by putting them into new and different relations and contexts.

Perhaps more on an affective than a cognitive level, Osa comes to realise that there might be a possibility to bridge cultures in a natural, humane way. If we assume that the particularism of any culture and universality are interrelated, then Osa, who is venturing into a foreign culture, also attempts to reach a universality which combines these particular cultures. As Ming Xie (2011: 165) explains, dichotomies like universalism and relativism are "opposed without excluding each other. They are deeply imbricated."

Conclusion

Osa Johnson may not be a distinguished writer, but nevertheless her story is a square peg in the round whole of popular travel accounts of the Far East and Africa produced from the Westerner's point of view. The writing of an autobiography is a process of self-discovery and self-creation, as Duccio Demetrio writes. Autobiography teaches us to eliminate the fear of loneliness and the autobiography that is created becomes the writer's amulet and gives him/her strength (Demetrio 2000: 167). Osa's autobiography, which was compiled after her husband's tragic death, seems to fill the void she was left with and reminds her of the past. The three perspectives adopted in the analysis of her travel writing allow one to detect different levels at which the protagonist constructs her relationship with the Other. First, in the manner of her naming of the Other, Osa reveals her changing attitude towards the indigenous people. Second, she herself occupies the position of the Other in relation to her husband. Finally, it is possible to observe her growing sensitivity to cultural difference over the years spent travelling to remote foreign lands. Socialized into the Western ideology of the hegemony of the white man over the black man and raised in a patriarchal society, Osa first appears as the victim of these two ideologies. Through her narrative one can observe Osa's growing awareness of the world she lives in and her struggle with the values and norms imposed on her. In a subtle and womanly way she constructs her identity as a female traveler maneuvering through the intricacies of the white, male patriarchal world to find her own place in the intercultural zone.

REFERENCES

Ashcroft, Bill – Gareth Griffith – Helen Tiffin. 2002 [1989]. *The Empire writes back. Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.

Barry, Peter. 2002. *Beginning theory. An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bennett, Milton J. 1993. Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. Michael Paige (ed.) *Education for the intercultural experience*, 21-71. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Butler, Judith, Slavoj Żiżek and Ernesto Laclau. 2011. *Contingency, hegemony, universality: Contemporary dialogues on the left*. London: Verso.

Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. London: Routledge.

Couser, Thomas G. 2004. *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and life writing*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Czech, Kenneth P. 2002. *With rifle and petticoat: Women as big game hunters 1880-1940*. New York: The Derrydale Press.

Demetrio, Duccio. 2000. *Autobiografia. Terapeutyczny wymiar pisania o sobie*. [Autobiography. A therapeutical dimension of writing about oneself]. Trans. Anna Skolimowska. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.

Eakin, Paul John. 1998. Relational selves, relational lives: The story of the story. In Thomas G. Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg (eds.), *True relations: Essays on autobiography and the postmodern*, 63-82. London: Greenwood Press.

Enright, Kelly. 2012. *The maximum of wilderness: The jungle in the American imagination*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Felski, Rita. 1989. *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Fox, F.F. 2003. Reducing intercultural friction through fiction: virtual cultural learning. In *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 27:1. http://www.sciencedirect.com.elseviersdfreedomcollection-internationaljournalofi.bu-169.bu.amu.edu.pl/science/article/pii/S0147176702000640 (accessed 22 Nov 2015.)

Imperato, Pascal James. 1992. *They married adventure: The wandering lives of Martin and Osa Johnson*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Johnson, Osa. 1940. *I married adventure. The lives and adventures of Martin and Osa Johnson*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company.

Lejeune, Philippe. 2001. *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu.* [*Variations on a certain pact: On autobiography.*] Trans. by Wincenty Grajewski et. al. Ed. Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska. Kraków: Universitas.

Marcus, Laura. 1995. The face of autobiography. In Julia Swindells (ed.), *The uses of autobiography*, 13-23. London: Routledge.

Millett, Kate. 1970. *Sexual politics*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Ono Kent A. 2010. Reflections on problematizing nation in ICC research. In Thomas K. Nakayama and Rona Tamiko Halualani (eds.), *The handbook of critical intercultural communication*, 84-97. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Pratt, Mary Louise. 2008. *Imperial eyes and transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge.

Said, Edward. 1991 [1978]. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Tyson, Lois. 2001. *Learning for a diverse world. Using critical theory to read and write about literature*. London: Routledge.

Waldenfels, Bernhard. 2002. *Topografia obcego. Studia z fenomenologii obcego*. [A Topography of the Other – Studies for a phenomenology of the Other.] Trans. Janusz Sidorek. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.

Xie, Ming. 2011. *Conditions of comparison: Reflections on comparative intercultural inquiry*. London: Continuum, 2011.