Cultural and Political Paradigms of FGM: An Intersection of Race and Sex in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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Abstract: The study attempts to explore the intersections of race and sex in connection with the cultural and political paradigms of female genital mutilation (FGM) in African American novelist Alice Walker's 1992 novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. FGM involves inter-relatedness of race and sex in its implementation and sustenance in the name of cultural relativism and political freedom. Tashi's genital mutilation, her life-long physical and psychological complications, her murder of the circumciser M'Lissa and her execution in the novel question the pervasive influence of both gender and racial specifications. The culturally motivated specifications are essentially political as they control the lives of women or more specifically black women in society. Great liberators and political leaders use FGM as a political tool to advance black community's cause for political freedom from the Europeans/whites. Liberation is only meant for the black men, not black women. Black women are merely used as cultural defenders. It indicates historical and political exclusion of black women like Tashi from the dominant male culture.
Keywords: *female genital mutilation, intersectionality, diasporic migration, hybridity, racial otherness.*

1. Introduction

Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* has been explored from multiple perspectives such as feminism, patriarchy, archetypal symbolism. The attempt to locate intersections of sexual and racial inequalities in reference to cultural and political interference to female genital mutilation (FGM) is the point of departure of the study. This qualitative research based on content analysis method within the theoretical framework of intersectionality aims to show how racism intersects with sexism and how these two weapons are used to impose FGM on black women.

The study is significant as there remains a lack of considerable research work being conducted to make people aware of the ritualized violence against women or particularly women of color or to eradicate the harmful culture/imposition of FGM. FGM culture has its pervasive influences on physical and mental health of black women. It leads many of them bleeding to death in various regions of the world. The practice reveals that cultural rights outweigh women's basic rights. Hence, such an oppressive cultural norm is reconceptualized as a human rights issue. As McGowan says, FGM is considered a human rights issue because the practice violates internationally recognized rights to integrity of a

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woman's body and basic health (2003, 59). Conducting research on FGM with a committed openness about the horrors and hazards of the ritual violence and with a humanitarian attitude is a pressing concern. The study uses intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how socio-cultural categorizations of race and sex interact with one another and how the intersections are connected with the cultural and political paradigms of FGM. As such in the findings of this study, a new knowledge will be explored and our current understanding about FGM will be enriched.

1.1 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The term 'female genital mutilation' was first coined by Fran P. Hosken and put the issue on United Nations agenda. Her 1979 report "The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females" plays a significant role in persuading international community including the WHO to take steps to eradicate the practice. The term, however, has become more widely accepted since the 1990s. Circumcision is a euphemistic term of FGM whereas mutilation implies intentional harm. FGM is more clinical-sounding and is widely used. This study interchangeably uses the terms FGM, female genital cutting (FGC), cut, circumcision, mutilation as well as infibulation. Taubia [1999] says, it is a deeply rooted cultural practice and is a form of violence against girls and women. It has serious physical and psychosocial consequences which adversely affect health [1999: 15]. As Kandala and Komba in *Female Genital Mutilation around The World: Analysis of Medical Aspects, Law and Practice* say, FGM/FGC is predominantly practised in Northern sub-Saharan African countries; in the Sahel region, the horn of Africa and Egypt, but it is also found outside Africa e.g. amongst women and families migrating to European countries and the US from these African locations. It is estimated that 100–140 million women are thought to have undergone FGM worldwide and three million girls annually are thought to be at risk [2018: 27-28].

Wardere in her memoir *Cut: One Woman's Fight against FGM in Britain Today* recalls her own infibulation. She is a Somalian refugee whose infibulations is carried at the age of six. Later, she becomes an activist and a regular FGM educator to eradicate FGM. Wardere says that FGM is a nonsensical cultural tradition to control women. It is not a religious practice as there is nothing about FGM in the Bible or the Koran. The WHO has declared FGM a global epidemic. Due to migration, there is not one country in the world where girls are not at risk of FGM. The WHO has declared a list of twenty-nine countries – across western, eastern and north-eastern Africa, and in parts of the Middle East and Asia –in which FGM is prevalent. It defines FGM as 'procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons' [2016: 16-18] and lists four different types. The types are as follows:

> Type 1- Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce.
>
> Type 2- Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora.
>
> Type 3- Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.
>
> Type 4- Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area. [Wardere, 2016: 16-18]

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Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, 1989 novel *The Temple of My Familiar* briefly depict the story of Tashi's FGM. Walker thinks that Tashi deserves a book of her own as the novelist mentions it in "To the Reader" section of her 1992 novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Apart from Walker, Raqiya Dualeh Abdalla's 1982 fiction *Sisters in Affliction: Circumcision and Infibulation of Women in Africa* and Nawal El Saadawi's 1975 novel *Woman at Point Zero* explore horrifying health risks and psychological perils caused by FGM. The commonalities among the works lie in women's subjugation and the threat to sexual freedom. Their writings aim to create worldwide awareness to eradicate FGM/FGC. There are some other important books on genital mutilation such as Asma el Dareer's 1982 book *Woman Why Do You Weep?*, Hanny Lightfoot-Klein's 1989 *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* and more importantly G. J. Barker-Benfield's 2005 book *The Horrors of the Half Known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century America. The Horrors* reveals the extremity of the division between the sexes and shows how genital mutilation has been practiced in the nineteenth-century United States. It uncovers male domination as the chief cause behind the loss of women's thread of identity, freedom and refinement.

In the novel, Tashi represents millions of infibulated women who undergo such horrific practice. It appears that infibulation (type-3) is carried out on her as per Tashi's description of her genital and medical consequences. Infibulation (type-3) is the most brutal of all [Wardere, 1916: 80]. The infibulation leaves a tiny hole to urinate and menstruate. It causes urinary tract problems, bleeding during intercourse, complicated pregnancy and lots of other problems. Tashi recalls her complicated sex life and pregnancy with traumatic flashback as follows: 'After three months of trying, he [Tashi's husband Adam] had failed to penetrate me. Each time he touched me I bled. Each time he moved against me I winced. There was nothing he could do to me that did not hurt' [Walker, 1992: 61]. She gets terrorized for the impending birth of her baby. Despite greater health risks, the baby is born alive but retarded as vital parts of the boy's brain are crushed. Walker makes the contrast vivid by portraying another pair of mother and son (Lisette and Pierre) who are whole and healthy. Unlike Tashi and Adam's abnormal and painful sex life, Lisette and Adam lead a delicate and normal sex life.

1.2 An Overview of Intersectionality

The study uses Bell Hooks' theory of intersectionality which serves as a theoretical tool to interpret different categorizations such as race and sex. Hooks in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* explains the way sexism independently and simultaneously operates with racism to oppress black women. She criticizes the way sexual and racial differentiation together make for the exclusion of the black women. She insists that race and sex are not dissociated and that intersection of race and sex determines black women's social status and destiny. Hooks argues, the black female experience can thoroughly be understood 'only by examining both the politics of racism and sexism from a feminist perspective' [Hooks, 1982: 13].

Hooks in *Where We Stand: Class Matters* says that black women are clearly "at the bottom of this society's economic totem pole" [2000: 103-104]. This is because of the intersectional relations of race and sex which the black women experience in their lives. Feminist theorists acknowledge the overwhelming significance of the interlocking systems of race, gender, and class long before men decided to talk more about these issues together. Yet mainstream culture, particularly mass media, was not willing to tune into a radical political

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discourse that was not privileging one issue over the other. Class is still often kept separate from race. And while race is often linked with gender, we still lack an ongoing collective public discourse that puts the three together in ways that illuminate for everyone how our nation is organized and what our class politics really are [Hooks, 2000: 8].

Hooks in *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center* maintains that privileged feminists have largely been unable to fully understand the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression. They refuse to take the inter-relatedness seriously. Feminist analyses of woman's lot tend to focus exclusively on gender and do not provide a solid foundation on which to construct feminist theory. Hooks says that the feminists reflect the dominant tendency in Western patriarchal minds to mystify woman's reality by insisting that gender is the sole determinant of woman's fate. Certainly it has been easier for women who do not experience race or class oppression to focus exclusively on gender. As Hooks maintains, although socialist feminists focus on class and gender, they tend to dismiss race or they make a point of acknowledging that race is important and then proceed to offer an analysis in which race is not considered [1984: 14].

As Hooks in *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center* asserts, feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression [1984: 31]. Racism is fundamentally a feminist issue because it is closely inter-connected with sexist oppression. She says that the philosophical foundations of racist and sexist ideology are similar in the West. Although ethnocentric white values have led feminist theorists to argue the priority of sexism over racism, they do so in the context of attempting to create an evolutionary notion of culture, which in no way corresponds to our lived experience [Hooks, 1984: 51-52].

1.3 Walker's Political Critique against FGM: an Interlocking System of Women Oppression

Walker's *Possessing* is an instance of her political critique against the socio-cultural practice of FGM/FGC occurring in different parts of the world particularly in African countries. It is a global cultural and discursive practice. In the novel, Walker criticizes the African nationalist and anti-colonialist 'Jomo Kenyatta' who would not even think of marrying an uncut woman. Kenyatta in his book *Facing Mount Kenya: the Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* defends FGM on cultural and political grounds. Walker sketches and attacks the historical and political figures like 'Leader' and 'president'. This is because they carry out intersectional oppressions on Tashi (a representative of all the blameless vulva).The novel is a part of Walker's political campaign and human rights discourse to eradicate FGM. After writing the novel, she has written the book *Warrior Marks* with Pratibha Parmar and together they also have made a documentary on FGM. Walker in her letter to Pratibha Parmar in *Warrior Marks* shows her concern about female genital mutilation and says that she wants to make a documentary on the ritualized violence of FGM. Walker writes, FGM 'endangers women and children wherever they live and impacts negatively on people's lives and health around the world' [Walker and Parmar, 1993: 9].

In *Warrior Marks,* Walker says, 'Their genitalia are unclean, it is said. Monstrous. The activity of the unmutilated female vulva frightens men and destroys crops. When erect, the clitoris challenges male authority. It must be destroyed' [Walker and Parmar, 1993: 18]. Walker justifies her writing of the novel *Possessing* as a duty to her conscience as an educated African-American woman. "To write a book such as this, about a woman such as Tashi, about a subject such as genital mutilation, is in fact, as far as I am concerned, the reason for my education […] I know only one thing about the 'success' of my effort. I

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believe with all my heart that there is at least one little baby girl born somewhere on the planet today who will not know the pain of genital mutilation because of my work. And that in this one instance, at least, the pen will prove mightier than the circumciser's knife. Her little beloved face will be the light that shines on me [Walker and Parmar, 1993: 25].

In *Possessing*, Tashi's genital circumcision as well as 'psychological circumcision' [Walker, 1992: 137] as Tashi's psychiatrist Raye calls it uncovers FGM as a detrimental practice to physical and mental health of black women. Walker with tenderness and respect has dedicated the novel to the blameless vulva which undergoes the gender-specific cultural violence of FGM. As such Walker's characterization of Tashi with her life-long trauma has its universal significance. As Kanneh maintains, the repeated use of 'Evelyn' and 'Mrs Johnson' as substitute names for Tashi and, in the final section, as progressive points on the road to salvation—'Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul'—works to obliterate Tashi's allegiance to Africa and, indeed, the validity or value of her African identity [2002: 114].

Tashi's trauma is an indictment of a whole women culture. Tashi's trauma is originated from her own genital mutilation and her sister Dura's death due to a botched circumcision during their adolescent days. As Kanneh maintains, Tashi's names, oscillating between, or being hyphenated by, European alternatives—Evelyn and Mrs Johnson—are clearly intended to allow her to represent—and be represented by—women of different cultures. She becomes the voice of Everywoman [2002: 113]. Tashi's communion between African, American or European cultures and her intersectional experiences essentially show Walker's political critique against intersections of race and sex in particular reference to FGM.

2. Mutilation of Body and Sexuality to Defy Cultural Imperialism

Tashi's black mutilated body and soul can be viewed as a hysterical/aggressive expression of colonial legacy and cultural imperialism. Tashi's psychiatrist Mzee (the old man as she calls him) is a white who uses a racist epithet 'NEGRO WOMEN' [Walker, 1993: 28] while addressing Tashi in one of his psychiatric sessions may be called free association. By this, he labels her as a racialized subject or a racialized female body which has much to say about the novel's central concern of the intersections of race and sex. In *Possessing*, Walker shows how the racialized body becomes a politicized object. To the doctor, all black people are Negroes. Thousands of Olinkan people are displaced by the white owners of tea plantation and were oppressed and killed by the white government's troops. As a result, Olinkans are reduced to the position of beggars. When the culture of racial inequality and oppression reigns supreme, sexual oppression for the black women becomes the regularity. "Gender is about race is about class is about sexuality is about age is about nationality is about an entire range of social relations" [Weston, 2010: 15]. This complex intersectional relation is essentially political as it controls the lives of black women. Cultural and political specifications of black women deprive them of the privilege and power of the dominant white group and black men group.

Tashi is circumcised because of her gender (female) and racial (black) identities. In an attempt to sustain the indigenous culture, cultural autonomy and national sovereignty the sexual politics of patriarchy imposes FGM on Tashi. As such the cultural practice of FGM gets a political dimension. Female circumcision involves both sexism and racism. The essence of being a woman after performing the cultural practice of FGM marks patriarchal dominion and racial oppression on black women. This gender identity practice intersects with racialized subject. The idea is that black female bodies cannot be separated

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from their cultural contexts. To avoid the cultural assimilation with the white and to assert the cultural identity of the black and to get rid of slavery and colonial power of whites, the black women (not men) undergo FGM. The Olinkan local circumciser M'Lissa says that the Africans' adherence to their cultural practice creates/sustains their cultural and racial identities and in so doing they torture their black girls. 'In service to tradition, to what makes us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. But who are we but torturers of children' [Walker, 1992: 178]. To Tashi, the word "razor" is associated with men [Walker, 1992: 41]. It's a weapon of sexism. M'Lissa says to Tashi about the use of women as cultural defenders. 'Did Our Leader not keep his penis? Is there evidence that even one testicle was removed? The man had eleven children by three different wives. I think this means the fellow's private parts were intact' [Walker, 1992: 188].

3. Diasporic Migration, Hybridity, and Racial Otherness

Diasporic migration of the spouse Tashi-Adam and hybridity of Tashi or more specifically Tashi Evelyn lead them to experience racial otherness. Tashi's mutilated body and its harrowing effect on her soul can be understood in the context of diasporic migration and racial otherness. The attorney in Tashi's trial only focuses on her murder of M'Lissa and refuses to correlate the murder in the context of her cultural and racial background and identity. According to the attorney, the crime Tashi 'committed would make no sense in America' [Walker, 1992: 57] and her '[c]hildhood memories are quite irrelevant to this court' [Walker, 1992: 129]. Though Tashi has been an American citizen for years, it has been emphasized that her crime only makes sense in Africa where it has literally occurred. The statement makes Tashi's racially 'other' identity quite obvious. She is denied of her American identity altogether when she has been charged for a murder. The attorney's statement also denies the inter-connectedness of race and sex of Tashi.

Sewed-up women like Tashi fascinate the American doctors because they are used by the physicians to find 'a cure for the white woman's hysteria' [Walker, 1992: 150]. In the name of science, they experiment on the black female sewed-up bodies or racialized subjects or in other words medical human subjects. Tashi's psychiatrist Mzee does not seem to be interested in her neurotic illness. As Tashi realizes, there are two reasons behind her access to the white doctor. Since Tashi is an African woman and is recommended by Mzee's niece (Lisette, lover of Adam), the doctor only sees her instead of sincerely investigating her case. Tashi says, 'He is no longer actively practicing his profession as doctor of the soul. He is seeing me only because I am an African woman and my case was recommended to him by his niece' [Walker, 1992: 51]. Being racially biased, Mzee instead of using the word African uses the word 'Negro women' who 'can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame their mothers' [Walker, 1992: 28].

Since Tashi is not a Negro woman, she feels racially 'other'/inferior in America when her psychiatrist calls her a Negro woman. Moreover, he fails to delve into her psyche. He wants to say that the black race is racially too prejudiced to realize the faults of their mothers even when the mothers are responsible for the traumatic circumcision in the name of cultural conformity and racial specificity. She experiences racial otherness even in her own race as she crosses between the black and white races. Her hybridity leading to colonial anxiety, loss of cultural values and racial degeneration is what the 'president' might have taken into consideration in his sticking to her death penalty. The president's extreme insistence to give her capital punishment exemplifies the intersecting nature of racist and sexist oppression on her. This complementary nature is completely political. Tashi's

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murder of M'Lissa, the national monument of the black race, reflects the invisibility of the blackness and the visibility of whiteness in the former. During her trial in the court, Adam argues that 'the enactment of a ritual' [Walker, 1992: 131] upon Tashi's genital makes her wounded and disturbed to an extent that she has committed the murder. As soon as he stands in favor of Tashi and articulates the word 'ritual', it raises an outbreak of public anger and resentment. Both black male and female with their shrieking voices call for Adam's silence and also call him 'disgraceful American' [Walker, 1992: 131].

4. Intersections of Race and Sex in Connection with FGM

Racism relies upon the indices of difference and as such racism is the structure of culture. Walker's *Possessing* brings together the complex issues of sexual and racial differences. The novel gives impression on racial hierarchy which affects gender hierarchy. FGM survivor, campaigner and former model Waris Dirie has told the *Sunday Times* as follows: 'If a white girl is abused, the police come and break the door down. If a black girl is mutilated, nobody takes care of her. This is what I call racism' [qtd. in Wardere, 2016: 150]. Wardere criticizes the doctors who cut the girls even after knowing that FGM is illegal and that medicalisation of FGM does not ensure the safety of girls. They are inspired by financial gain and racism. She says: 'These men are willing to cut girls in this country [Britain] but they are never prosecuted for this' [2016: 150].

Tashi's harrowing tale of her mutilated genital and her tortured soul are originated from her Black/African race as integral to her sexist culture of Olinka. As Walker in *Warrior Marks* argues, female genital mutilation is a painful, complex, and difficult issue, which involves questions of cultural and national identities, sexuality, human rights, and the rights of women and girls to live safe and healthy lives. […] Who cares if African women and children are subjected to violence? […] If one hundred million white women and children were being mutilated as a matter of course in the name of tradition, the earth would by now be shaking with the tremors caused by voices of protest and righteous anger [Walker and Parmar, 1993: 94-95].

During Tashi's trial, her husband Adam sympathizes with her and justifies that she is deeply wounded because of her intersectional experiences both in Africa and America. Adam argues, 'If every man in this courtroom had had his penis removed, what then? Would they understand better that that condition is similar to that of all the women in this room? That, even as we sit here, the women are suffering from the unnatural constrictions of flesh their bodies have been whittled and refashioned into' [Walker 1992: 134]? The intersection of race and sex is perpetuated through racial difference and cultural practice of which Tashi remains a part. As Mohanty says, physical violence against women (such as excision, infibulations) is carried out with an astonishing consensus among men in the world [1991: 58]. Drawing on Hosken, Mohanty maintains that male sexual politics in Africa and around the world share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means [Mohanty, 1991: 58].

Walker criticizes Mzee Jomo Kenyatta for defending the barbaric practice. Tashi says, 'Our Leader, our Jesus Christ, said we must keep all our old ways and that no Olinka man—in this he [Adam] echoed the great liberator Kenyatta—would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised' [1992: 103]. Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya* calls *irua* (FGM) a mere bodily mutilation [1961: 133] and also defends it on the political ground. As Joshua maintains, Kenyatta turns FGM into a political tool and uses it to advance Kikuyu community's cause for political freedom [2009: 7]. Kenyatta justifies the

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custom/cultural institution as a form of nationalist resistance to colonial domination and condemns the missionaries who campaign against the practice. He says that the European agencies/missionaries (agent of the settlers) lack in-depth knowledge of the socio-cultural and political contexts of FGM. They are "so obsessed with prejudice against the custom that their objectivity is blurred in trying to unravel the mystery of the *irua* [1961: 154].

Kenyatta in chapter six of the aforementioned book gives a detailed description of the cultural ceremony as well as the ceremonial joy of the practice. He, however, ceases to realize or focus on the trauma which the circumcised girls undergo. The chapter entitled "Initiation of Boys and Girls" and the unpitying discussion that follows reveal that he does not differentiate between the initiation of boys and girls as well as the degree of pain. His attempt to equate female circumcision with the male pattern is to falsify the custom's inherently sexist and racist aspects. The attempt is thoroughly political as in so doing he denies the torment of the females and the wholeness of female bodies. In contrast, Walker's spokesperson Adam sympathetically relates his wife Tashi's life-long pain due to her infibulation. It is medically undesirable as it involves long-term health risks as follows:

> It now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods lasted ten days. She was incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month. There were premenstrual cramps: cramps caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an aperture as M'Lissa had left, after fastening together the raw sides of Tashi's vagina with a couple of thorns and inserting a straw so that in healing, the traumatized flesh might not grow together, shutting the opening completely; cramps caused by the residual flow that could not find its way out, was not reabsorbed into her body, and had nowhere to go. There was the odor, too, of soured blood. [Walker, 1992: 65]

Tashi has been under the impression that M'Lissa brutally mutilates the girls until the former has meet the circumciser in her hut at Olinka. Tashi comes to know that the circumciser herself feels the pain when she circumcises girls. M'Lissa feels indignant at the socio-cultural and political paradigms of womanhood and says to Tashi, 'You had been made into a woman! says M'Lissa. It is only because a woman is made into a woman that a man becomes a man' [Walker, 1992: 189]. Since gender intersects with race and class, it is quite impossible to separate gender from the cultural and political intersections. She condemns the women who go to her to be sewed tight after each birth of a child. She calls them 'bitches' who pay 'the tsungas to make them tighter than that! After each birth of a child they do it. More than once, more than twice, more than three times, they've had it done. Each time tighter than before' [Walker, 1992: 189]. Universal racial hierarchy and sexist structure of society make black women incapable of asserting their basic rights to health and living. As such they are reduced to racialized subjects and sex objects. The intersections of race and sex and several other axes of power relations are so overpowering that the black women become subjected to barbarism like FGM. FGM remains the source of conflict between African and American values and the implementation of it differentiates between the races. Tashi realizes as follows:

> Even from prison we received our instructions, I said. Good instructions. Sensible; correct. From Our Leader. That we must remember who we were. That we must fight the white oppressors without ceasing; without, even, the contemplation of ceasing; for they would surely still be around during our children's and our children's children's time. That we must take back our land. That we must reclaim the descendants of those of our people sold into slavery throughout the world (Our Leader was particularly strong on this issue, almost

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> alone among African leaders); that we must return to the purity of our own culture and traditions. That we must not neglect our ancient customs. [Walker, 1992: 99]

Tashi says, 'Our Leader had died for us. For our independence. For our freedom' [Walker, 1992: 99]. At this, Tashi appears to be ignorant of the fact that "our independence/freedom" is not directed to black women's liberation. This 'our' indicates black men not black women. It is to be noted that this historical exclusion of black women is utterly political. As Adam utters, the president's exploits against white colonialists and neo-imperialists have highly been appreciated by Olinkans but the president remains rabid in his insistence on the death penalty for Tashi. Though born in Africa, Tashi is migrated to America and she assumes a new identity as Evelyn Johnson. She is now an American citizen married to a Christian missionary who stands against the ill-practice of FGM.

In addition to that, Tashi has killed the grandmother of the African race. An American citizen's ill-motive to abolish the FGM tradition or sexist culturalism definitely poses a threat to the definitive stamps of Olinka tradition. The president appears to be a racist and a sexist at the same time. All of his wives, except the one from Romania, are circumcised by M'Lissa. Several professional women who beg for Tashi's life are fired from their respective jobs. Fear of a movement to abolish FGM by the tortured women might have driven him to take sternest decision to suppress them again. At the end of life, Tashi realizes the intricate politicized concept of the traditional tribal society which, she thinks, 'dealt so cleverly with its appreciation of the tsunga and its hatred of her' [Walker, 1992: 212]. The *tsunga* has merely been a witch whose destiny is controlled by the society. It indicates the manipulation of the society's power dynamics. Tashi says that she has carried out the murder of the *tsunga* because it has been expected from her. Walker's presentation of the political figures 'Leader' and 'president' with historical significance uncovers their sexist and racist tyrannies responsible for Tashi's intersectional experiences.

M'Lissa, the *tsunga*, serves as an interlinking point to Tashi's past and present. The intersectional experiences which Tashi undergoes during her trial are closely connected with the national cause. She murders M'Lissa who is honored by Olinka government, recognized as a national heroine by every faction of the government including National Liberation Front (NLF). The black woman is regarded as a national monument because of her 'unfailing adherence to the ancient customs and traditions of the Olinka state' and 'for her role during the wars of liberation' [Walker, 1992: 122]. She serves as a local circumciser of girls and women and she like Florence Nightingale nurses injured freedom fighters and revolutionaries of her state. In the Mbele camp, she nurses her people who fight against the white colonists. In conversation with Tashi, M'Lissa shows her indignation at the sexual oppression of black women in the name of FGM tradition. M'Lissa recalls her own painful circumcision and uses third person narration. It indicates a universality of the voice of all the women who undergo FGM. She expresses that she has painfully fulfilled her obligation to circumcise the adolescent girls. She could not save many of them (like Tashi's sister Dura) from death due to heavy loss of blood and other medical consequences. At this, Tashi identifies herself with M'Lissa or more specifically her pain to that of her mutilator. Tashi admits to her sister-in-law Olivia that the former has not killed her mutilator in the name of the suffering she caused. She invariably and dearly cherishes her own freedom from her mutilated and agonizing life and also intends to free others from the ritualized violence.

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5. Resistance to FGM

Walker in *Warrior Marks* asserts that being a woman she is concerned about eradicating cultural violence irrespective of races. She believes that 'Torture is not culture' and that ritualized violence on women as an intrinsic part of any culture cannot be accepted [Walker and Parmar, 1993: 95]. Before facing the firing squad, Tashi Evelyn Mrs. Johnson in her letter to Lisette refers to her realization as follows: 'But if heaven is like Olinka, or even like America, there is much to be anxious about' [Walker, 1992: 211]. She realizes that neither culture would be kind enough to understand her pain in specific cultural contexts. She is only free, safe and sound after she gets rid of the intersectional power relations. The reasons behind Tashi's murder of her circumciser are complex and debatable.

Walker uses the word 'resistance' twice in the novel: firstly, 'Red for the blood of the people [Olinkan] spilled in resistance to the white supremacist regime' [Walker, 1992: 96] and secondly, 'RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY' [Walker, 1992: 216]! It is made explicit that Tashi has been executed because she undermines socio-cultural norms. Yet, the central point remains, resistance is the secret of joy found at the cost of her life. Since Tashi represents the voice of Everywoman and the growing strength of resistance to FGM, her resistance to the eradication of culturally and racially determined practice of FGM could spark revolutionary awakening in women. As such possessing the power of resistance is joy. Walker's inclusion of Raye, Lisette, Beatrice, Pierre and importantly Carl Jung as a psychiatrist (Mzee) appears to be instrumental. Mzee and Raye try to heal Tashi's psychological wounds. Lisette being highly influenced by her grandmother Beartice sympathizes with Tashi. Beatrice is one who spends her life fighting for the right of French women. Pierre is a hybrid who is simultaneously a black and a white. On the eve of Tashi's execution, Pierre along with others carries a banner which shows the word 'RESISTANCE' underlined and also written in block letters. Irrespective of race and sex, they stand together as part of their protest against the execution of Tashi. It effectively communicates the novelist's attempt to promote worldwide fellow feeling in favor of the human rights of the women and to stand against FGM.

6. Conclusion

FGM encompasses an inherently and overwhelmingly sexist and racialized discourse with its historical and legitimized exclusion of black women from the center to periphery. FGM stamped on the black women to control female sexuality and bodies can be termed as third world differences based on intersectional nature of race and sex. Inter-relatedness of power relations makes Tashi a sexual-political subject in her own culture. She experiences the crises of racial otherness in Africa as well as America. Though Olinkan political leaders struggle for achieving cultural and political liberation from the dominant whites, they do not attribute the freedom to black women. They use FGM culture to dominate the black women of their society and also use it to advance their political freedom. The sexual politics of the racist culture ceases to bring the women from periphery to center and to respect/recognize their cultural sacrifices. This is made explicit through the society's incongruous appreciation of the *tsunga* as a cultural defender and the hatred of her as a witch at the same time. The murder of the *tsunga* (as M'Lissa) by one of those (as Tashi) whom the former has circumcised proves the *tsunga*'s value to her tribe.

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