

## Speaking Characters in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is a study of Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy in light of Julia Kristeva's speaking subject. This novel deals with the issue of circumcision and its negative psychological effects on a woman's mind. Moreover, it criticises female genital mutilation. In this novel, each character expresses his/her feelings, thoughts and emotions about female circumcision. In Julia Kristeva's view, the speaking subject does not have a fixed identity but is in the process of being. The speaking subject's identity is shaped through using language and interaction with other people. This article applies Kristeva's notion of the subject in process to Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy and primarily indicates Tashi's opinion of circumcision. The findings of this study demonstrate that, through sisterhood, women can achieve their goal which is to abolish female circumcision. It indicates that although women are oppressed in African patriarchal societies, they can improve their life through sisterhood. It advises future female generations to stand up for their rights and reject the circumcision which hurts women physically and psychologically.*

*Keywords: speaking subject; Julia Kristeva; self-expression; female circumcision; Possessing the Secret of Joy*

### INTRODUCTION

Female circumcision dates back some 2,500 years ago when it was practised in many countries, especially countries in Africa. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker sheds light on how female circumcision has influenced women physically and psychologically. Some women die during circumcision and some die afterwards as a result of excessive bleeding, while others face trauma.

In this novel, Walker explores a new kind of epistolary novel in which each individual character writes his or her story for an unknown reader. These letters, in which the characters address the unknown reader, are not ordered chronologically and so it is the reader's duty to arrange and decode them. Tashi, the African woman, moves to America and faces psychological problems as a result of repressed memories of her childhood. Through interaction with other people and the use of language she is empowered to challenge African tribal rites; this, however, leads to her death. Alice Walker informs women about the negative physical and psychological effects of circumcision through *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. She "strongly condemned the practice of female genital mutilation" (Walley 1997, p. 405). Besides, Walker emphasizes "circumcision violates the basic human rights of women" (Russell-Robinson 1997, p. 54). Now it is time for women to be aware of a tradition imposed on women by men for their own pleasure. In fact, "this is a novel by a woman, about women which argues for the rights of women" (Gourdine 1996, p. 237). Men believe that circumcised women give them more sexual pleasure, as their sexual organ is cut, sewn and

tightened (Walker 2009, pp. 207-208). This study focuses on *Possessing the Secret of Joy* in light of Julia Kristeva's speaking subject.

With Kristeva's speaking subject, the subject is an effect of a signifying process; therefore, language and subjectivity are in a mutual relationship. As language is part of the process, and the subject and language are interrelated, the subject is in the process too. In fact, both language and subject have their own processes, and through these processes, both of them are shaped. We call the subject the speaking subject because through language the speaking subject "makes and unmakes himself" (McAfee 2004, p. 14). In other words "we do not speak language, language speaks us" (Thomas 2008, p. 77).

In Lacan's theory, as soon as the child finds out that it is separate from its mother, s/he enters a symbolic realm. In the symbolic realm, the child learns language and expresses itself. Lacan's imaginary realm is the same as Kristeva's semiotic realm. In the semiotic chora, the child is unable to speak, but as soon as it enters the symbolic realm, it learns language. However, traces of the semiotic will remain even after entering the symbolic, for the semiotic can still be discerned a kind of pulsation pressure within language itself, in tone and rhythm (Kristeva 1984, p. 1). As semiotic impulses are unstable, the subject is not stable either. In Kristeva's terms, the subject is always in process. Thomas holds that language reveals our inner impulses (2008, p. 77). Moreover, Robbins adds that:

The speaking subject is always a split subject, divided between unconscious and conscious motivations, inhabiting both nature and culture since the physiological processes of speaking are derived from the body, but speech itself is also constrained by culture (2000, p. 127).

## DISCUSSION

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, characters do not have a fixed identity; rather they are in a process of becoming. The characters not only use language and perceive their subjectivity through it but also interact with other characters, and these conversations influence their subjectivity. The following discussion will focus on the characters' subjectivity and how women are oppressed and "attempt to subvert it" (Maleki & Lalbakhsh 2012, p. 65).

### FREE DIRECT DISCOURSE

The characters express themselves and their loss through language. Here, the characters recall poignant memories which crush them psychologically and physically throughout their life, so they express them as a way of psychological and emotional unburdening.

As the novel begins, Tashi tells a story about a male panther and his wife. The male panther has a co-wife. "There was once a beautiful young panther that had a co-wife and a husband" (Walker 2009, p. 3). The female panther is sick of her husband's relationship with his co-wife, and though she cries she says nothing. This life goes on until the female panther falls in love with her reflected image in the water. As she is indifferent to her husband and his co-wife, she kisses her reflection and dies. As the reader continues reading the story, they perceive that it is Tashi's own life that she narrates at first. She does not talk about her suffering explicitly but uses a fable, and through it she implicitly portrays her own life and suffering. She is not courageous enough to express her pain directly but suffers instead of unburdening herself through expression.

When Adam, Olivia, their parents and Nettie arrive at the village, Tashi is crying, and then Tashi and her mother hide, but when they are asked why she is crying, the chief of the tribe answers, "what little girl, Pastor? There is no little crying girl here" (Walker 2009, p. 8). The chief of the tribe denies the presence of the crying girl in his tribe as he is trying to hide

something. He is hiding the fact that women are supposed to be circumcised in his tribe, and as a result of that some of them die; among them is Tashi's sister.

As Tashi is forced to forget all about her sister's death, this memory is repressed but

years later, in the United States, she would begin to remember some of the things she told me over the years of our growing up. That Dura had been her favourite sister. That she had been headstrong and boisterous and liked honey in her porridge so much she'd sometimes stolen a portion of Tashi's share (Walker 2009, pp. 8-9).

After psychological treatment, she recalls this repressed memory and uses language to talk about it and rid herself of this bitter memory, and thus she is unburdened of her emotional baggage. Also, she remembers that the chief and other members of the tribe pretended to console Tashi and said, "you mustn't cry" (Walker 2009, p. 15). In fact, however, they sought to hide the death resulting from circumcision. She cannot express her grief and this denial of expression leads to her melancholy. Based on Kristeva's melancholic subject, "Tashi is a melancholic subject who loves the lost object; her sister" (Kristeva 1980, p.11). Years later, through treatment, she is able to use the same language that once she was obliged to deny. The men silenced her, but finally she expresses all her sad memories and is in a way freed.

Tashi remembers that she would remain silent and not talk about her sister's death. "It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister, or to cry for her" (Walker 2009, p. 15). She could not express herself. Now, in adulthood, she remembers the most important thing that she was obliged to deny: language. Not only could she not use language, but she should also not cry, as tears would reflect her inner trauma. Years later, she is able to use language and express her thoughts by blaming her mother. "It is quite a new thought. And, surprisingly, sets off a kind of explosion in the soft, dense cotton wool of my mind" (Walker 2009, p. 18). She should blame her mother and other women as it is their submission that permits men to exploit them physically and psychologically.

In Olinka culture, mothers tell their daughters that they should comply with traditions, that to be "bathed" –as the euphemism goes –will make them more valuable to their families, their future husbands, and their people. (Lauret 2011, p. 157)

If the women fought for their own sexual organ, which is treated as unclean, the next generation would not suffer so much. But they keep silent; and, moreover, they do not express their grief over another woman's dead body. This silence helps men to suppress women, more as the latter are unable to stand up for their own rights. The more women accept suppression, the bolder men become to belittle them. That is the main reason why she should blame her mother and other women.

Even Tashi remembers that when the whites arrived at Olinkan village and started to exploit black Africans, the blacks were unable to defend themselves. They have everything they want, but now they should supplicate in order to regain the privilege to have the things they once owned. In order to defend her tribe and its rituals, Tashi undergoes circumcision.

Women were obliged to forget about their own issues and put the needs of the nation ahead of theirs. It would have only been selfish of them to discuss their own rights while their continent was being ravaged and their traditions destroyed. Such messages were used by men to continue propagating female sexual mutilation (Vartolomei 2012, p. 68).

The women, like Tashi, forget that female circumcision causes them physical and psychological and they do not intend to oppose circumcision as it is a sign of their respect for their tribe, which is threatened by the whites now. As such, Tashi considers herself a warrior. "I sat astride the donkey in the pose of a chief, a warrior" (Walker 2009, p. 20-21). The use of such diction as 'chief' and 'warrior' indicates Tashi's love for her tribe. She is ready to

sacrifice herself, like a warrior, to defend her tribe. She ignores her own welfare for the sake of the tribe, in which men rule and women obey. Besides, she fights Olivia who opposes circumcision. “You want to change us, I said, so that we are like you. And who are you like? Do you even know?” (Walker 2009, p. 22). Olivia talks with her for her own good, but Tashi is blind. In fact she is ignorant, because the chief of the tribe treats circumcision as a natural process to be gone through. In addition she condemns Olivia, “you are black, but you are not like us. We look at you and your people with pity, I said. You barely have your own black skin, and it is fading” (Walker 2009, p. 22). She condemns them as she thinks that the way these missionaries think is like the white people. She does not think wisely, rather she seeks to belittle Olivia and her family.

Tashi questions herself as her psyche is divided into African and African-American identities. “Who am I, Tashi, renamed in America ‘Evelyn,’ Johnson?” (Walker 2009, p. 36). In fact, she lives in two cultures, African and American; on the one hand, she belongs to Olinkan society and sacrifices herself for her village, and on the other she belongs to American society (Gordon 1997, p. 26). She is not sure of her true identity. Besides, “Kristeva claims that melancholia is a disorder of self and self-identity and a condition of loss” (Sabo 2010, p. 49). As a melancholic subject, Tashi does not know to which culture she belongs, which causes her to sense a loss of identity.

In her Olinkan village, men impose circumcision on women without acknowledging its negative psychological and physical effects. Therefore, when Tashi goes to court, she asks, “can you bear to know what I have lost?” (Walker 2009, p. 35). Men force women to undergo circumcision, and now that Tashi has killed M’Lissa who is responsible for carrying out the procedure, they intend to execute her. Women suffer psychologically and physically but they are expected to bear it as men like a woman’s sexual organ to be tight. Men think about their own pleasure and ignore women’s health. In other words, men impose their ideas on women and women obey without resistance. In court, she tells the judge and jury that she bought three razors.

Why three? He asks.  
Because I wanted to be sure.  
Sure of what?  
To do the job properly.  
You mean to kill the old woman?  
Yes. (Walker 2009, p. 36)

She confesses to the murder because she has a goal. Her purpose in killing M’Lissa is to free women from pain and suffering. As women are not bold enough to resist there should be a hero, and the awakened Tashi is a heroine for women.

In Africa, women are supposed to be circumcised in order to have a clean body, and killing a tsunga is a crime; but in America, women are not circumcised. Therefore, Tashi claims that “the crime they say I committed would make no sense in America. It barely makes sense here” (Walker 2009, p. 54). In Africa, a jury considers that she has committed a crime and should be punished for it. But in Tashi’s mind killing a tsunga is not a crime, because it helps women to enjoy their life and avoid the pain of circumcision.

In African tribes in which circumcision is obligatory, men do not think about women’s suffering. Tashi admits that each time her husband has sexual intercourse with her, she bleeds. “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 2009, p. 57). Men think about their own sexual pleasure and do not consider the pressure they impose on women.

Circumcision hurts not only the woman but also the child she may carry. “Benny, my radiant baby, the image of Adam was retarded. Some small but vital part of his brain crushed by our ordeal” (Walker 2009, p. 58). Tashi’s son is retarded, as it was difficult for her to give

birth as a result of a hole in her sexual organ. “There was also the question of what to do with ‘the hole,’ as I overheard him call it, making no attempt to be euphemistic for my sake” (Walker 2009, p. 57). For American nurses and doctors circumcision is meaningless, and that is why they are shocked at seeing a hole in Tashi’s sexual organ. In Tashi’s case, it is not only mother but also the baby that suffers from the negative effects of circumcision, and both must suffer its effects until the end of their lives.

Tashi remembers that M’Lissa intended to persuade Tashi’s mother to circumcise her daughter sooner, but she did not accept.

She had argued with Catherine, Tashi’s mother, to have the operation done for Tashi when she too was at the proper age. But, because Catherine had gone Christian, she’d turned a deaf ear to her. Now, M’Lissa said, with a grimace of justification, it was the grownup daughter who had come to her, wanting the operation because she recognized it as the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition (Walker 2009, pp. 60-61).

As Tashi’s mother did not agree to her daughter being circumcised, years later, when the white people come to their village and exploit them, Tashi herself goes to M’Lissa and asks for the circumcision. She does not think about her health or her life, she just thinks about honouring her tribal rituals. She neglects the importance of female sexual pleasure for her subjectivity (Lauret 2011, p. 150); she just thinks about the tribal traditions and ignores everything about her future.

Adam is mad at Tashi’s stubbornness, as he knows the negative effects of circumcision on a woman’s body and psyche. He remembers when Tashi went to be circumcised. “The operation she’d had done to herself join her, she felt, to those women, whom she envisioned as strong, invincible. Completely woman. Completely African. Completely Olinka” (Walker 2009, p. 61). Besides, he is frightened as Tashi devoted herself to her cultural heritage irrationally (Vartolomei 2012, p. 70). Moreover, he notices that “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” (Walker 2009, p. 61). Circumcision makes too much trouble for women and bothers them a lot, but men, who consider it a ritual, are ignorant of women’s suffering.

At the beginning, Tashi is afraid of articulating her thoughts freely, but as soon as she undergoes psychological treatment she becomes able to express her thoughts and feelings through language. At this time, she remembers her sister, Dura, and her suffering during circumcision. Now she is supported by her husband, friends and psychoanalyst; therefore, she shares all her emotions. As she remembers her sister’s death, she

began to wail, there in Mzee’s old arms. After a long time, he dried my face, stroked my hair, and comforted me with a motherly squeeze that coincided with each of my hiccups, as my weeping subsided” (Walker 2009, p. 79).

The memory of her sister’s death was repressed and now she expresses it through her words. She remembers Dura’s circumcision in detail:

They did not know I was hiding in the grass, I said. They had taken her to the place of initiation; a secluded, lonely place that was taboo for the uninitiated. Not unlike the place you showed us in your film.  
Ah, said Mzee.  
She has been screaming in my ears since it happened (Walker 2009, p. 79).

She remembers her sister’s wailing, crying and suffering and uses words to utter this repressed memory. Tashi admits that as an African woman she was ignorant of her own body, and that is the main reason why men abuse women in African tribes. “My body was a mystery to me, as was the female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost

everyone I knew” (Walker 2009, p. 112). She did not have any information about her sexual organ; therefore, women are deceived by some foolish and fake stories.

Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they’d soon touch her thighs; she’d become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way (Walker 2009, pp. 112-113).

The abusers give a false explanation for circumcision and naive and ignorant women believe them. Men force women to undergo circumcision for their own sexual pleasure, but they do not have any idea of the pain women suffer. When Evelyn understands that her friend Rye underwent GUM surgery, she declares “you shouldn’t have done it, I said coldly. It was stupid of you.” (Walker 2009, p. 125). Whenever she observes a person suffering from surgery, she remembers her own circumcision and unconsciously blames that person as she blames herself for her inconsiderate action.

Pierre, Lisette’s son, recognizes that, through mutilation, a woman is like a slave in men’s hands as her own body is not her own possession. Women feel they should be circumcised as men believe that uncircumcised women are not clean. They believe that, after circumcision, “women have been purified and are no longer viewed as unclean and unfit to be wives” (Vartolomei 2012, p. 69). Pierre becomes aware of the “connection between mutilation and enslavement that is the root of the domination of women in the world” (Walker 2009, p. 131).

In court, Adam intends to defend Tashi. He addresses the people and mentions that:

if every man in this courtroom 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 2009, p. 156)

Men do not understand women’s condition as they have never undergone such an inhumane operation. If they were circumcised, they would perceive women’s discomfort and woes. That is the main reason why Adam put men in women’s shoes and asks them to imagine such a situation for themselves.

Besides, Adam believes those men are jealous of women, because they can masturbate themselves and have sexual pleasure. Therefore, men force women to be circumcised in order to deprive women of this kind of pleasure. They intend for women to be in need of men.

Man is jealous of a woman’s pleasure, Pierre says after a while, because she does not require him to achieve it. When her outer sex is cut off, and she’s left only the smallest, inelastic opening through which to receive pleasure, he can believe it is only his penis that can reach her inner parts and give her what she craves (Walker 2009, p. 172).

If women undergo circumcision, they will be dependent on men for their sexual pleasure– and men seek women’s dependence on them.

Tashi believes that God Himself prepares the situation for men to torture women. “Even so long ago God deserted woman, I thought, staying by her just long enough to illustrate to man the cutting to be done” (Walker 2009, p. 167). Here, God is portrayed as a male figure that helps men to bother women. He teaches them how a woman’s sexual organ should be removed.

Tashi admits that she is wounded as she faces two different cultures, African and American, and her subjectivity is shattered between these cultures. Besides, she is wounded as she is circumcised and experiences psychological traumas. That is the main reason why,

when Olinkan people ask Tashi about Americans, she believes that “an American looks like a wounded person whose wound is hidden from others, and sometimes from herself. An American looks like me” (Walker 2009, p. 200). Moreover, M’Lissa informs Tashi that, “the women, even today, after giving birth, they come back to the tsunga to be re sewn, tighter than before. Because if it is loose he won’t receive enough pleasure” (Walker 2009, p. 207). It is a great shock. Modern women in African tribes do not think about their pain, suffering and health, they always think about men’s pleasure. It indicates that patriarchal ideology has so dominated those tribes that future generations will follow it and the rituals, even if they are against their health and their will.

One can notice that, in the Olinkan tribe, women have no rights over their own body and should modify it for their husband’s sake. Tashi and M’Lissa’s conversation clarifies this point.

A proper woman must be cut and sewn to fit only her husband, whose pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, even years, to enlarge. Men love and enjoy the struggle, you said. For the woman ... but you never said anything about the woman, did you, M’Lissa? About the pleasure she might have. Or the suffering (Walker 2009, p. 208).

In a patriarchal society only men matter and Tashi transgresses this patriarchal ideology when she asks about women’s condition, pleasure and suffering. When Tashi and M’Lissa argue, M’Lissa accepts that circumcision is a foolish activity that only fools follow, and “do fools need encouragement?” (Walker 2009, p. 228). Moreover, she adds:

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 2009, p. 228).

Her speech indicates that men make rules for women only in order to enjoy themselves. In a patriarchal ideology it is a woman’s duty to modify her body to fit her husband. Besides, “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 2009, p. 229). Women need their husband’s love and support; therefore, they undergo repeated surgery to satisfy their husband.

In addition, M’Lissa informs Tashi that gender is the same and sex is made in society by men, “it is only because a woman is made into a woman that a man becomes a man” (Walker 2009, p. 230). Men define sex in order to rule over women. As long as women accept suppression, men will abuse them. In fact, women are manipulated by men in the Olinkan tribe.

Moreover, Pierre informed Tashi that when Africans intend to insult each other they use “son of an uncircumcised mother” rather than “son of a bitch” (Walker 2009, p. 261). To be uncircumcised is worse than to be a bitch in African countries. Besides, it reflects the effect of tradition on people’s minds, as they unconsciously follow patriarchal ideologies. On the other hand, one should notice that “the early African woman, the mother of womankind, was notoriously free” (Walker 2009, p. 261), she was not circumcised and enjoyed her body. When Tashi is in prison, she is supported by her husband, friends and other women. Adam comforts her by telling her she will not be alone, as all of them support her (Walker 2009, p. 214).

Different barriers have restricted women within Olinkan society. In prison, Tashi remembers when she was a child and overheard the old men in her tribe:

Woman is Queen. She is Queen, if left to herself, the Queen would fly.  
True.  
And then where would we be?  
But God is merciful.

He clips her wings.  
She is inert (Walker 2009, pp. 220-221).

Women are restricted by religion, the patriarchal system, their gender and many other barriers. They are not free to do whatever they like; rather their deeds are monitored by men. At the end of the novel, Tashi confesses to the murder and is executed. She is “no more and satisfied” (Walker 2009, p. 264). She has fulfilled her role of liberator, and that is important for her. Her attempt helps to raise women’s awareness and they become conscious of the negative effects of circumcision on their body and psyche. They learn to resist, as they intend to enjoy their life as a free woman with authority over her own body. As Lauret holds:

The novel tries to preserve a delicate balance between representing the sexually mutilated woman as a victim on the one hand, and as a survivor who decides to act in her own cause on the other (2011, p. 155).

Tashi is both victim and victor. She is a victim of circumcision but at the same time a victor, as she informs other women about the negative effects of circumcision on women’s psyche and body.

All in all, Tashi and other characters’ direct speech indicate that men manipulate women easily and their ideology is so dominant in a woman’s mind that women do whatever men say without questioning. Part of this ideology is circumcision, which hurts women psychologically and physically, but they undergo it in order to satisfy their husband. It is Tashi who raises women’s awareness of the negative effects of circumcision and dies for her cause.

#### MINOR CHARACTERS’ POINT OF VIEW

In addition to each character’s direct speech, which reveals their personality, other character’s viewpoints can help the reader to perceive the characters’ subjectivity. Other characters’ perspective gives them permeable subjectivity; they do not have a fixed identity, rather their identity is in process. In fact, “the text undoes the concept of subjectivity: there are no stable individuals but rather permeable beings, easily identified by the subjectivity of others and unsatisfactorily substitutable” (Iannetta 2002, p. 218).

When Olivia first met Tashi, she describes her as a shy girl who hides behind her mother.

Tashi was standing behind Catherine, her mother, a small, swaybacked woman with an obdurate expression on her dark, lined face, and at first there was only Tashi’s hand – a small dark hand and arm, like that of a monkey, reaching around her mother’s lower body and clutching at her long, hibiscus-colored skirts. Then, as we drew nearer, my father and mother and Adam and myself, more of her became visible as she peeked around her mother’s body to stare at us (Walker 2009, p. 7).

Although she wants to get to know newcomers, her shyness prevents her from talking to them. Besides, Adam does not remember that Tashi was crying when they first met her, as he always remembers her with a smile. In Adam’s eyes, Tashi is a cheerful girl who makes up stories and talks merrily, “the subject is always in process in that he/she is not fixed, but always developing” (Robbins 2000, p. 127).

As Tashi undergoes psychological treatment, to counter the negative effects of circumcision, her doctor says that “negro women ... are considered the most difficult of all people to be effectively analyzed” (Walker 2009, p. 17). Black women do not even trust their doctor. Moreover, by use of the word ‘negro’ the doctor belittles her. On learning that Tashi



has just one son, the doctor is astonished, because he believes that black people have many children, and he adds: “negro women, the doctor says into my silence, can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame their mothers” (Walker 2009, p. 17). Black women cannot blame their mothers and ancestors for accepting male dominance over their lives. They should be conscious of the fact that as a result of their ancestors’ submission to traditional rituals, they should remain silent and obey and follow those same rituals.

When Tashi first arrives in America, she observes the blacks’ harassment by whites. Adam, however, assures her that “they behave this way not because I’m black but because they are white” (Walker 2009, p. 38). In fact, such behaviour is important, and Adam intends to say that being black is not negative in America.

Adam remembers how circumcision changed Tashi from a lively woman into a depressed one. He observes that

She loses all her emotions and feelings as a result of surgery and becomes a robot, I could not tell if she was happy to see me. Her eyes no longer sparkled with anticipation. They were as flat as eyes that have been painted in, and with dull paint. There were five small cuts on each side of her face, like the marks one makes to keep score while playing tic-tac-toe. Her legs, ashen and wasted, were bound (Walker 2009, p. 43).

She has lost her energy and enthusiasm for life. As they bind her legs she looks like an animal. Besides, Olivia notices that Tashi is no longer lively. The sparkle in her eyes has vanished and she cannot walk as gracefully as before. Circumcision has had both psychological and physical effects on her, as she has lost both her spirit and her graceful walk. After circumcision, Tashi feels suicidal and suffers depression, psychosis, self-mutilation and spiritual death (Sample 2000, p. 170).

M’Lissa is praised by men for her time and effort during the wars of liberation. Men cherish her for following and spreading traditions and customs, but they never mention the negative effects of these traditions, one of which is female circumcision, on women’s psyche and body. They cherish her as she spreads the patriarchal ideology and ignores women’s pleasure and freedom to choose:

She has been honored by the Olinka government for her role as a nurse as devoted to her charges as Florence Nightingale, and for her unflinching adherence to the ancient customs and traditions of Olinka state (Walker 2009, p. 141).

The women too are so accustomed to these patriarchal ideologies that they consider M’Lissa to be a “national monument” (Walker 2009, p. 144). Those ideologies have penetrated women’s unconscious so deeply that even consciously they follow them. One of the victims of ideology is Tashi. As Adam mentions, she is “a tortured woman, someone whose whole life has been destroyed by the enactment of a ritual upon” her “body which I had not been equipped to understand” (Walker 2009, p. 152). In fact, Tashi is afflicted by tribal rituals. He adds, “My wife is hurt, I say; Wounded, Broken. Not mad” (Walker 2009, p. 157). In court he repeatedly emphasizes the negative effects of traditions, especially female circumcision, on women’s psyche and body so as to make men and women aware of these negative effects. In fact, men impose circumcision on women of their own volition (Hernton 1987, p. 7). They think that circumcised women give them more sexual pleasure than do uncircumcised ones. Tashi’s doctor, Raye, admits that the negative effects of circumcision are not only bodily but also psychological. Women do not just lose a part of their body but also part of their identity and self; therefore, it has not only physical but also harmful psychological effects.

When Tashi is imprisoned, her son meets her in prison; and he, although retarded, recognizes that her mother’s behaviour has changed. She is not the same sulky frowning

mother; she is warm and comfortable now. Tashi knows that she has completed her project and is satisfied. She intends to warn women and make them conscious of the fact that they should take care of their family by killing the effigy they have made in their mind. Now she succeeds and is happy. Now women are gathered together, in solidarity, in front of the court to fight against female circumcision; this therefore reassures Tashi, that she has achieved some success. Women's awareness "instils fear in men though it thrills women" and this awareness was Tashi's goal which she reached (Alkali et al., 2013, p. 239).

As Tashi enters the symbolic realm of language and expresses her lacks and losses and communicates with other people, her subjectivity is unified and she is not heterogeneous anymore. She creates solidarity among women. As Richards states,

The voice Walker creates is not, by the end of the novel, an individual African woman's voice, but a collective voice in "authentic solidarity" with African people against oppressive practices (2000, p. 145).

At the end of the novel, women gather together to sing the song of union with Tashi. They are awakened by Tashi, and informed about the negative effects of circumcision on their psyche and body.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, the patriarchal tradition of female circumcision influences women physically and psychologically. This tradition penetrates women's minds, as they follow it generation after generation, without questioning. Among these ignorant women, Tashi rises up to fight for women's rights. During the novel, Tashi is transformed from being a passive, fearful girl into an active woman who fights not only for herself but for all women, and through her struggle she shapes her subjectivity. In fact, "revolt becomes the essential gesture in the constitution of individuality" (Lechte & Margaroni 2004, p. 93). In the story, she gains courage and starts to express herself, and in the end she is sacrificed by the patriarchal system, but she makes women aware of their rights. Although finally she is executed, she is satisfied that she has carried out her mission, which is to raise women's consciousness.

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