

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INITIATION AND IDENTITY OF THE
AFRICAN WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O AND
ALICE WALKER**

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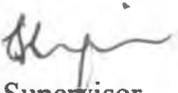
DECLARATION

This project paper is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

Beatrice Malesi Masibo



This Project Paper has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.



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DEDICATION

TO JESICAH KHAVULANI MASIBO, deceased.

As my mother, you taught me to appreciate God in all my endeavours. As a person you taught me to appreciate the sound of my own voice within the chorus.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a comparative analysis of initiation and the identity of the African woman as portrayed in the two novels, The River Between and Possessing the Secret of Joy by Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Alice Walker respectively. These two authors play out clitoridectomy as a rite of transition and incorporation of the African woman in African society. However, the contextual backgrounds that inform the setting upon which Ngugi and Walker narrate on circumcision of women leads to different conclusions about the practice.

Ngugi, writes from the Kikuyu community in Kenya depicts the initiation of women through clitoridectomy as the defining moment of an African woman's identity. Kikuyu society is in the midst of colonial transition Christian Missionaries in their proselytizing activities are dead set against the practice of circumcision of women as barbaric and inhuman.

Ngugi creates paradoxical character, Muthoni, a female Christian convertee who insists on being circumcised. She viewed clitoridectomy as a key instance that defined the identity of her womanhood. Unfortunately, she dies shortly from complications which arose while undergoing her initiation. But prior to passing on, Muthoni was a proud woman who felt she had made a transitional mark into womanhood of her society.

Walker on the other hand is an African-American who explores into the phenomenon of clitoridectomy as the height of male inhumanity and cruelty towards women. Its *raison de tre* is the control of women's sexuality by men.

Tashi, the heroine in Possessing the Secret of Joy undergoes initiation in order to gain her identity as an African woman. But the course of events results in a series of bodily and mental discomforts thereafter. She encounters menstrual difficulties, sexual penetration problems by her husband and pain in the process. Life simply becomes unbearable for Tashi until she relocates to America.

In America, Tashi undergoes sexual therapy, rediscovers herself and looks back to clitoridectomy as a male practice meant to control women's sexuality. This moment of revelation engages Tashi mentally to a level where she becomes a new woman in search of sexual liberation. Towards this end she kills her initiator as a symbol of the death of those who cruelly mutilate and enslave women's sexuality to men. Simultaneously however she feels freed as a born again woman able to appreciate and enjoy her sexuality.

In a comparative sense, this study discerns the nuances of gender in the discourse in clitoridectomy and the identity of the African Woman. For Ngugi, an outsider so to speak to women's inner consciousness, the death of Muthoni does not mean much as long as she having undergone initiation left the solidarity of the community intact. Her individuality as a woman and her sexuality could be

sacrificed at the alter of maintenance of the male centric Kikuyu community.

Walker to the contrary, an African American woman and an insider to woman's inner feelings, brings out the excruciating pain and discomfort a woman undergoes after clitoridectomy. She narrates in detail the bodily and mental agonies of Tashi to the level where one has no choice but to condemn the practice that wrecks havoc to women's sexuality.

This study is guided by feminist literary theory and it is based on library research.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This project examines the treatment of initiation by which we mean clitoridectomy and the identity of the African woman. The study compares a Kenyan male writer with an African American female writer. In particular the study focuses on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's The River Between and Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy. Although the two texts are set in different historical periods and respond to different socio cultural settings they both address the same subject. That is clitoridectomy and how it informs the identity of an African woman.

Ngugi who writes in the 1960s is taken to be more categorical. He responds to the issue of clitoridectomy as a matter of culture within the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic community in Kenya, East Africa. Walker, on the other hand, writes in the 1990s, and represents the African diaspora. She portrays clitoridectomy as a process of violence on the woman. She regards it as a form of mutilation of the body.

The study delves into a comparative study of Ngugi's and Walker's texts from a gendered perspective and seeks to respond for instance to the two questions: How for instance, do the two authors who are male and female, respond to the issue of clitoridectomy in their works? Does the fact that one is male and the other female affect the way they handle this item in their works.?

Statement of the problem

As observed in our introduction, the two novels of this study, The River Between and Possessing the Secret of Joy respond to two different historical and social cultural aspects of the initiation and the identity of the African woman. The study interrogates Ngugi, an African male's presentation of initiation and how it contributes to the identity of the African woman. Ngugi fundamentally, considers the practice as necessary for the preservation of tribal group identity. In contrast, the study then considers the Afro-American woman, Alice Walker and her treatment of African woman initiation as a process of violence.

The two standpoints invite certain concerns that call for investigation and our proposed study therefore aims to answer the following pertinent questions among others. Are there any positive values either at present or in the past in clitoridectomy? Is it totally evil as Walker seems to suggest? Last but not least, what differences or similarities emerge from the two view points as identified?

Hypothesis

This study has the following governing hypotheses.

That Ngugi wa Thiongo in The River Between portrays clitoridectomy as a traditional practice that is crucial to the maintenance of cultural identity.

That Alice Walker in Possessing the Secret of Joy characterizes clitoridectomy as a process of violence on the woman.

That the two authors above take gendered perspectives with regard to the way they treat clitoridectomy.

Objectives

This research intends to accomplish the following.

- a) To interrogate the view of the African male Ngugi as the African perspective of the presentation of initiation and how it contributes to the identity of the African woman in comparison with the view of the African-American woman towards the same.
- b) To demonstrate that Ngugi and Walker take gendered positions with regard to their presentation of the theme of initiation and how it informs the identity of an African woman.

Rationale of the study

Human rights advocates on the subject of clitoridectomy have agreed that the practice simply is one method by which men control women's sexuality. Consequently the practice ensures women's subordination to men to perpetuate a male dominant society. This in turn creates oppressive gender relations and hierarchies in a society that believes in female circumcision. Such statements have rarely been derived from analysts of texts.

There is need therefore for these kind of statements to be analysed from a female and male perspective in fiction writing. This study attempts to fill in this gap.

It carries out a comparative treatment of clitoridectomy in the fictional works by Ngugi wa Thiongo The River Between and Alice Walker Possessing the Secret of Joy. These two authors have very interesting contrasting features: one is African American while the other is African, one is man, the other a woman. They write in different socio-cultural and historical contexts. Walker is a feminist while Ngugi is a traditionalist yet they both present the circumcision of the African woman. It would therefore be very interesting to interrogate their respective perspective and how they present the responses of the victims of clitoridectomy in the fictional writings.

There is also a need to study the treatment of clitoridectomy in fictional writings

from a gender perspective. This study will look at those aspects of female-female / female-male relationships as treated by Alice Walker and Ngugi wa Thiongo.

Literature Review

This section reviews three categories of literature, namely: Literature on gender writing, critical literature on Ngugi's The River Between and the culture of the Gikuyu. Literature on Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy and how she treats women in her writing.

Robyn Cerny Smith in her Female circumcision: Bringing Women's Perspectives into the International Debate discusses the current debate surrounding female circumcision. She criticises the definition of female circumcision as "the woman's individual right to be free of female circumcision to maintain its tribal identity through the practice of female circumcision free from state interference" (1 of 60).

She further presents the arguments in defence of female circumcision and also presents arguments against clitoridectomy. She presents the western feminist argument that female circumcision is set up to maintain male control of women's sexuality and labour. Smith gives a general picture of clitoridectomy as practised in Africa. Our study is interested in finding out through close analysis of the texts how this ritual was practised and thereafter the gender disparities within their writing.

In "Gender, genre and writing style in formal written texts"; Mashe Koppel explores the difference between male and female writing in a large subset of the British national corpus covering a range of genres. Several classes of simple lexical and syntactic features that differ substantially according to author gender are identified both in fiction and in non-fiction documents. Koppel finds significant differences between male and female authored documents in the use of pronouns and certain types of noun modifiers. For instance, one main locus of difference between men's and women's writing is the way people, objects, collectives and institutions are presented.

Evan Mwangi in his unpublished PhD thesis "Artistic choices and Gender Placement in the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot" discusses the stylistic investigation of the intersection between gender and artistic choices. His purpose is to establish a position of gender as a discursive presence upon which writing is contingent. He emphasizes that gender is a social construct and demonstrate the centrality of gender in determining the content and form of a work of art. We are interested in this kind of approach as we demonstrate that the two authors take gendered positions with regard to their presentation of the theme of initiation and how it informs the identity of the African woman.

In his novel Facing Mount Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta discusses the Gikuyu culture. He looks at initiation of Boys and Girls. Kenyatta describes in detail the custom of clitoridectomy of girls. He says that "The real argument lies not in the defence of

the surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu – namely that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications, quite from the operation itself” (135). Kenyatta discusses the rite of passage, and the name given to it. Rites of passage are ceremonies that enable an individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well-defined. This particular rite of passage is called ‘Irua’. But in order to understand the rite of passage associated with female circumcision, it is necessary to describe briefly the Kikuyu religion.

The Kikuyu offer sacrifices to their god, called Ngai, and to the spirits of their ancestors. Ngai dwells on certain mounts in the sacred trees, and his power is manifested in the moon, sun, stars, rain, rainbows, lightning and thunder. He is the creator of the world and is approached at every major crisis in an individual's life. When clearing a field, one tree is left standing in order to collect the spirits from all other trees that have been cut in the vicinity. This tree the Mugumo fig tree is the sacred shrine to Ngai. The Kikuyu also believe in the “continuity of life, in life after death and a community of interest between the living, the dead and the generations yet unborn – They believe that their ancestors established the pattern of life for all time, and if altered the ancestors would become offended. Thus the Kikuyu recognize both Ngai and the spirits of their ancestors in their rite of passage ceremonies.

Kenyatta in Facing Mount Kenya has indicated that, Among the Kikuyu,

clitoridectomy is accompanied by an elaborate ritual ceremony, called the Irua ceremony, representing a change of social position for the initiates within the tribal organisation. Initiation transforms the initiates in the eyes of the tribe from children into young adults—full members of the tribe and of the clan with full responsibilities as well as benefits. The clitoridectomy and ritual ceremony are performed annually on uncircumcised girls between the ages of 10 and 15. Circumcision admits a girl to the full membership of the community. The difference in standing of the circumcised and the uncircumcised is tremendous. After the ritual has been performed the initiates have new salutations, may eat only certain goods, perform specific tasks in the home, adopt different habits of dress and demeanor in the community, have different rights in exercising authority in the clan or family, and take part in certain ceremonial and religious proceedings. In addition they also possess the duty to marry and to procreate.

Kenyatta's book is important here because Ngugi has often expressed his indebtedness to Kenyatta's book and its influence is obvious in his writing. In our analysis of The River Between we shall constantly refer to Kenyatta's Facing Mount Kenya. It will act as our silent text. Ngugi has argued in Homecoming that Kenyatta's Facing Mount Kenya is more than an anthropological study – it is a creative work.

“Jomo Kenyatta’s book *Facing Mount Kenya* is a living example of an integrative function of culture. To read it is to witness a world with an inner dynamic spirit, it is also an authentic refutation of the Missionary condemnation of what they, the semi-gods, thought was savage and dark”.(66)

Again in one of his essays, in *Homecoming*, ‘church culture and politics’. Ngugi argues that “the coming of christianity set in motion a process of social change, involving rapid disintegration of tribal set up and the frame work of social norms and values by which people had formerly ordered their lives and their relationship to other! (31). Among the Kikuyu it is a bit dangerous to use these divisions. The Church of Scotland mission was of a highly strict puritan tradition. The acceptance of the Christian church meant the outright rejection of the African customs. The new converts were forced to reject values and rituals that held them together including clitoridectomy

In his *For Home and Freedom* Chris Wanjala looks at “Problems of Cultural Synthesis: Alienation as an identity crisis in *The River Between*”. Wanjala discusses Waiyaki’s critical awareness and his final reconciliation with the problems of his ethnic group that come when he recognise the transcendental position which Muthoni carves for herself. According to Wanjala, Muthoni is the figure, which reveals the depths of Ngugi’s insight into the cultural crisis. Wanjala shows that the heroine dies because of the conflict between the two cultures, which are at bay. Wanjala views Muthoni as a victim of cultural conflict.

Wanjala is silent on the role clitoridectomy impacts on the identity of an African woman. Muthoni's image is the very embodiment of contradiction and alienation in the novel.

Micere Githae Mugo's Visions of African deals with the fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o among others. The essay devotes space on the traditional setting of The River Between, and the Messianic symbol. She argues that the story of Muthoni, Joshua's daughter in The River Between is to be read against the background of the bitter tensions in the Kikuyu country that led to the explosions of the "Mau Mau" war. The essay does not pay attention to the role clitoridectomy plays as regards the identity of a woman. Neither does it look at the gender insensitivities in Ngugi's The River Between.

CB Robson's Ngugi wa Thiongo appropriately notes that in The River Between Ngugi wa Thiongo succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of the ridges and chronicling the traditions and customs they embrace. He establishes the fact that "The clash between the old order and the new, represented geographically by Kamenno and Kamuyu is brought out at a symbolic level by the custom of circumcision. The amount given to circumcision in the novel reflects its status (8). The critic goes further and narrates the ceremony of circumcision. He links the ritual to the idea of a life giving force in the traditional place of the ceremony, is the Honia river- the river of life. Robson further argues that, blood from the initiates sinks into the banks of the river in the cycle of birth and rebirth.

He notes farther that the use of circumcision to focus the conflict between Makuyu and Kameno starts in the book not with Waiyaki but with Muthoni who earlier on expresses a desire to be circumcised to be 'a woman made beautiful in the tribe.

From whatever angle one investigates the works of Alice Walker as a poet, short story writer, critic and essayist one prominent identifying mark of her writing is her concern for the black woman. Walker is pre-occupied with the souls of black women. Walker's women characters display strength, endurance and resourcefulness in confronting and overcoming oppression in their lives. Walker is frank in depicting the often devastating circumstances of racism and sexism. A review of The Colour Purple will help our understanding of how Walker treats the issue of women in her works.

Alice Walker's The Colour Purple gives us insight into her view of the woman position. Through The Colour Purple published in 1982, Walker desires to liberate women from the injustices of racism and patriarchy, which they have experienced for generations on end. Celie the protagonist in the novel, is a reincarnation of Walker's step-grandmother, Rachel who was raped by a white landowner at the age of twelve, and who never knew her husband's name except Mr. -- Therefore called him "Sir". In return her husband called her 'Oman' because he could not pronounce 'woman'. By revealing, the painful past of her ancestors, Walker hopes to revive them in better liberated lives.

The Colour Purple is thus concerned with the emancipation of self, gender, race, culture and eventually nation.

The text is a collection of letters most of them written by Celie, the protagonist, to God, a few to her sister, Nettie and a few others from Nettie to Celie. In this epistolary novel which depicts a black woman who is sexually abused, verbally dominated and physically beaten for almost thirty years. As an adolescent, Celie is repeatedly raped and twice impregnated by the man she believes to be her father. The step father sells her children, destroys her reputation, while keeping his own image-positive. He then barter her off to an older man who uses her as a surrogate mother for his four children. After twenty years of enduring abuse in marriage, Celie finds strength to engage in a lesbian relationship with her husband's former lover, to leave church and her home and to start a part making business. The novel traces a remarkable transformation of its main character who changes from a victimised character to an entrepreneurial individual. The Colour Purple lays the background upon which women as victims of clitoridectomy for instance can nonetheless rise up and free themselves.

Lale Demirturk in The Black Woman's selfhood in Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy, notes that Alice Walker in her fiction examines the black women's search for selfhood through an analysis of the individual's relationship to the community. She continues to argue that "in Walker's novels, the black women's struggle to claim their selves, in order to change their lives and secure a rightful place within the social network of relationship they themselves constitute, usually

absorbs the psychic pain involved in such a struggle and shatters the iron bars of gender which limit self-empowerment” (of 5). The author herself explains “I believe in a willing acceptance of responsibility for one’s thoughts, behaviours and actions, that makes it powerful. The whiteman’s oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you, whether you are man, woman, child. Because the self I prize refuses to be owned by him or anyone (1 of 5). In our study we shall be examining clitoridectomy as a process of violence and proceed to evaluate the gender disparities in the text.

In his article “Alice Walker’s colonial mind” Pierre – Damien Mvuyekure argues that the analysis of the female circumcision and its origin is put forth amid colonialist and neo-colonialist discourses that permeate the novel. He further argues that Alice Walker has colonised an African female body and endowed the African American characters with new colonial attitudes towards Africa and Africans. Mvuyekure’s argument parallels Angeletta K Gourdine’s assertion that Possessing the Secret Joy is “a dual exercise in reading culture. She argues that the novels actions focus on the cultural rite of female circumcision. And that the creation of fictional world within which the novel’s African protagonist is an African recently emigrated to the United States with her black American husband. Gourdine is however silent on the role that clitoridectomy plays in impacting the identity of woman.

In the article Alice Walker's Africa Globalization and the Province of fiction Olakunle George demonstrates that Walker's novel Possessing the Secret of Joy is an uncompromising attack on both the practice and the tendency rooted sometimes in weak relativism, and other times in plain sexist culturalism – to justify the oppression of women by resolving to the alibi of tradition. He further argues that:-

The novel stakes out a universality position that vocalise a basic, transcultural category of the female body, especially as and when that body is subjected to disfigurement on account of a patriarchal ideologies. For her the practice of genital mutilation serves to contain women sexually and socially: above all it is a violation of each woman's right to the integrity of her body (1 of 3). It is in this light that the present analysis takes its argument.

From the reviewed literature, it can be ~~see~~ that there is a fair amount of commentaries on the works of Ngugi and Walker. There is much analysis on clitoridectomy, its physical and psychological impact and how it informs the identity of an African woman and as a process of mutilation of the African woman's body. But comparisons of the two are very minimal. Particularly there is very little attention paid on the gender based disparities in the two authors presentation of issues. Above all, the review clearly demonstrates that there is a gap in a comparative study of initiation and identity of the two texts.

Theoretical Framework

This study will proceed from a feminist literary criticism framework. Feminist literary criticism is the study of literature with particular attention to the women question. The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the woman's movement of the 1960's. This movement was in important ways literary in the sense that it realised the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence. The representation of women in literature, then was felt to be one of the most important forms of socialisation since it provided the role models which indicated to women and men what constituted acceptable versions of the feminine and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations.

Feminist criticism in the 1970s main concern was to expose the mechanism of patriarchy that is the cultural mind in men and women, which encouraged sexual inequality. The feminists critically looked at books written by male writers in which stereotype images of women were employed.

In the 1980's the mood in feminist criticism changed. Feminist criticism began to draw on other kinds of criticisms – like Marxism, Structuralism and so on. Secondly, feminists began to explore the nature of female world and outlook and in restructuring the records of female experience. Thirdly, there was need to construct women's writing by re-writing the history of the novel and poetry in such a way as to give neglected women writers new identity.

Elain Showalter described the change in the 1970s as a shift from books by men to books by women which she termed gynocritics – study of gyno texts books of women. The subjects of gynocriticism are, the history, styles, themes, genres and structuring of writing by women. Showalter also detects a form of writing in which women writers imitated dominant male artist norms in which radical and often separatist positions are maintained.

Radical feminism forms the core around which this research proposes to revolve. Adriene Rich (1970) sets three basic tenets of radical feminist belief. That traditionally accepted truths are simply myths based on codified expeditions. That established political and social hierarchies do not exist as some platonic idea but are a creation of a male centred culture and that individual experience, emotional and perceptual is a legitimate means of achieving broader understanding.

Radical feminists argue that male-dominant society ensures woman's subordination by retaining complete control of women's sexuality. They argue that female circumcision is one method by which the male – dominant tribal group controls women's sexuality thereby ensuring women's subordination to men. Adriene Rich argues that "violent strictures such as female circumcision are necessary to enforce women's total emotional, erotic loyalty, and subservience to men --- by denying women control of their sexuality, tribal groups have convinced women that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable, even if they oppress their lives. In this way, the male dominant tribal groups ensure

female virginity before marriage, female fidelity throughout marriage and heterosexuality. For example, in the two novels under discussion, female sexuality is considered a lustful instinct which must be controlled.

Rich argues that “it seems more probable that men really fear, not that they will have women’s sexual appetites forced on them or that women want to smother and devour them, but that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional – therefore economic access to women only on women’s terms otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix”.

Therefore radical feminists would argue that female circumcision was created to force women to submit to males and accept their socially prescribed gender roles. They further argue that gender inequality between women and men is maintained by controlling women’s sexuality through and through.

Scope and Limitations

This study addresses the theme of initiation and identity of an African Woman in the literary works of Ngugi, namely, The River Between and Alice Walkers' Possessing the Secret of Joy.

The Focus will be the authors comparative treatment of the practice of clitoridectomy and whether or not their position(s) is or are informed by their respective genders.

This project was very specific and such as was limited to Ngugi's The River Between and Walker's Possessing the Secret Joy. Although the researcher was aware that the two authors are prolific writes who have other texts to their credit, the nature and scope of the study gave no room to venture into their other works.

Methodology

This study employs textual analysis to examine the treatment of the theme of initiation and identity of the African women. This is supplemented with articles on clitoridectomy otherwise known as Female Genital Multination. Before conducting a critical analysis of how the above theme is portrayed, we carried out a thorough reading of journals, and seminar papers on female genital mutilation.

In our textual analysis we employed the “ABC of Gender Analysis” framework as proposed by Kabira and Masinjila (1997:11) as our tool of data analysis. The framework operates on the premises that reducing a text to its smaller component and systematically analysing it, enables one to understand the inter-relations within the text and the underlying implications”. Under this framework a narratological analysis involving quantitative and qualitative data is carried out through answering set out questions as explained below. While quantitative data seeks to answer the question “what gender gaps exist and to what extent? Qualitative analysis examines the possible implications of the gender gaps to the reader.

In order to carry out a comprehensive reading and a critical analysis of the texts we are guided by the questions in Appendix 1, constructed in line with the ABC of Gender Analysis Module. We shall assume that the selected texts will be able to answer all or some of the listed questions. So during the reading process of each text there will be continued reference to the questions and we shall see if the texts respond to any of the questions.

Apart from reading the selected texts, we will also examine the available literature on Female Genital Mutilation. This will serve as background information in our appreciation of the said texts.

Material on literary criticism will be drawn from Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library of the University of Nairobi, the American Cultural Centre, Kennedy Beam

Memorial Library at USIU, the United State Information Service Library (USIS). All these libraries in Nairobi –CD-Rom facilitates at the USIS Library and Email services will be utilized.

Chapter breakdown

This project consists of four chapters.

In chapter one, we give a brief introduction on why we are under taking this type of study, for what purpose and how we intend to go about.

In chapter II, we will examine Ngugi's perspective in The River between. His work is grounded in the Kikuyu culture and tradition. We shall examine how he portrays clitoridectomy among the Kikuyu and how it informs the identity of the African woman.

Chapter III we will look at how Alice Walker in Possessing the Secret of Joy treats the theme of initiation and how it contributes to the identity of the African Woman. How clitoridectomy is performed among the Olinka to control women's sexuality. Violence is recommended as a way to control women. Clitoridectomy as one form of violent oppression. We shall examine the physical and psychological effects of clitoridectomy on the women.

We shall then look at initiation and the woman's identity in chapter four. It will be a comparative study of The River Between and Possessing the Secret of Joy. We shall analyse the gendered perspective in the presentation of the above theme.

In conclusion, therefore we shall see how the treatment of this theme has to a large extent been determined by gender. That gender interventions insert themselves into the subject under discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: NGUGI WA THIONG'O's *The River Between*

INITIATION: A MARK OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Introduction

In this introductory chapter, the study will be analyzing the male African perspective of Clitoridectomy as represented by Ngugi wa Thiongo in *The River Between*. This chapter serves two purposes. One, to look at the physical impact of clitoridectomy on women and then dwell on the psychological effect. Two, the chapter will show that clitoridectomy was viewed as a mark of identity for an African woman.

The River Between is set in the 1920's against the background of Christian campaign against clitoridectomy. Christian Missionaries and other Westerners have invariably looked down on circumcision of both men and women but especially of women as being repugnant. Given the Christian belief that the body is the temple of God, this apparent act of mutilation was seen and still is seen as sacrilege and thus they considered the ceremonies that surrounded clitoridectomy as antichristian. It was not so much the cutting of the clitoris that outraged them but the excision of the labia and other parts which were prevalent before colonization and which were viewed as being abhorrent and barbaric in the extreme.

Kenyatta in his Facing Mount Kenya tells us that circumcision especially the clitoridectomy has been contentious since the onset of colonialism. It was attacked by the Government, Missionary and Education authorities. As early as “1929 the church of Scotland prohibited their schools from being attended by circumcised women” (Kenyatta 134.....) He, however noted that no matter how barbaric the custom was it could not be stopped because initiation rite was the only passage to marriage. It was also a taboo to have sexual relations with uncircumcised person. As Jens Finke notes:

The Protestant Missionaries who first settled in Kikuyu terrain were very much against female circumcision and by the late 1920s and 1930s many missionary organisations notably the Presbyterian Church of Scotland were actively trying to suppress it. This was done by insisting that converts to christianity had to denounce the practice by signing or thumb printing a written declaration, otherwise they were told they could not become Christians. This raised a great controversy between the missionaries and the Gikuyu. They believed that the practice had nothing to do with being Christian and that it was suppressing their culture and tradition. (4 of 6) .

The River Between opens with this kind of antagonism as symbolised by the two ridges that lay side by side. One was Kameno the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. These ridges are a pervasive feature of the novel.

They (the two ridges) become antagonists. You could tell this not by anything tangible but by the way they faced each other. Like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region (1).

The geographical description represented by Kameno and Makuyu shows the clash between the culture and tradition versus christianity. This is brought out symbolically by a Gikuyu traditional ceremony – Circumcision. Ngugi is concerned in The River Between with the Gikuyu people of Kenya and with Christianity. Ngugi succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of the ridges and chronicling the traditions and customs they embrace. As Lloyd Williams has argued

Ngugi is very consciously aware of how meaningful the christian faith can be for the Gikuyu people, but he knows that it can be so only as it grows out of their own life situation, not as imposed upon them from above by the whiteman as law. (118)

In The River Between, Honia river is described as flowing between the two opposing ridges, Makuyu and Kameno. On one side of the river, the Christians of Makuyu and on the other side, the tribe for Kameno as symbolised by circumcision. And it is here on the banks of Honia, that Muthoni a Christian from Makuyu is made a woman of the tribe, through circumcision. Honia river is therefore the site of the symbolic act of the coming together of the tribe and

Christian religion, and itself a symbol of that unity.

The River was called Honia, which meant cure or bringing back to life and symbolically the river Honia means healing. Honia river never dried. It seemed to possess a strong will to live, scorning droughts and weather changes. And it went on in the same way, never hurrying, never hesitatingly. People saw this and were happy. (1)

A sexual as well as a social act though done in private, clitoridectomy marks a woman's identity, allowing her both to procreate and to take part in traditional rituals and traditional governing councils. It is also the time when initiates are instructed in the rules and regulations of their society and their responsibilities within it.

Among the Kikuyu, clitoridectomy is accompanied by an elaborate ritual ceremony called the irua ceremony which represents a change of social position for the initiates within the tribal organization. Kenyatta describes in detail how initiation rites transform the initiates in the eyes of the tribe, from children into young adults. They become full members of the tribe and of the clan with full responsibilities as well as benefits.

The circumcision ceremony begins before the initiation and ends after the seclusion. The clitoridectomy and ritual ceremony are held annually on

uncircumcised girls aged between 10 – 15. At the age of 8 or 9 the girls begin their education in preparation for the circumcision and entrance into adulthood. They accompany their mothers on the daily round of household and agricultural duties on codes of behaviour, tribal tradition and folklore. According to Jomo Kenyatta, “circumcision admits a girl in the full membership of the community”. The difference in standing of the circumcised and uncircumcised is tremendous”. (136)

After the ritual has been performed, the initiates have new salutations, may eat only certain foods, perform certain tasks in the homes, adopt different habits of dress and demeanour in the community, have different rights in exercising authority in the clan or family and take part in certain ceremonial and religious proceedings. In addition, they possess the duty to marry and procreate.

The Irua ceremony has a separation phase, liminal phase and the recuperation phase. The preliminary ceremonies, which constitute the separation phase, symbolise the casting off of childhood values, thus signifying detachment from an earlier position. In the liminal phase, the ritual subject submits to the authority of the entire community, which “is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture’s values, norms, attitudes, sentiments, and relationships.

The main purpose of the Irua ceremony is to persuade the initiates that they must give up their duty free childhood individuality and become members of the community, where collective needs come first.

Childhood ties the young or locality, adulthood on the other hand “flings the adolescents into the willing arms of the community as a whole”, once an initiate becomes an adult member of the tribe, any conflict between the individuals own and family needs and the community’s need should be reconciled for the general good of society overall, the Irua ceremony symbolises the unification of the whole tribe. (135)

The ceremony surrounding clitoridectomy shows that the ancestors created a social organization of the Kikuyu set forth in the irua ceremony. “A rejection of clitoridectomy would be tantamount to rejecting the tribe’s cultural tradition or charter of life handed down from the ancestor’s throughout the generations” (135). No Kikuyu man would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised. A girl who has not undergone clitoridectomy would lose their value in the eyes of the tribe as they would not produce children. Therefore, the irua ceremony and clitoridectomy were meant to positively maintain the tribal identity of a woman. The ceremony enables them to give up their individual needs for the needs of the community and the initiates are taught that a Kikuyu woman must bear many children.

Circumcision is not simply a physiological surgery of the penis or the clitoris. It is a more ritualised and institutionalised ceremony that all the legible youths must embrace. In a traditional set up it is the psychological, educational and social implications that count. Indeed it is an important milestone in the development of

the individual. This, however, does not mean that incision is of no consequence. The shedding of blood through the use of the knife has been used for generations and symbolically ties the initiates to the land and is a way of perpetuating the traditions inherited from our ancestors.

According to Kenyatta in Facing Mount Kenya, circumcision symbolizes a person's assumption of adult responsibilities both social and cultural and individuals acceptance as full member of the tribe. Among the kikuyu, uncircumcised person, no matter how old he or she might be will generally be regarded as a child, or else will be seen as inferior or lacking. If a person who is not circumcised has children, the act is believed to anger both God and the spirits of the ancestors and the whole community will suffer in consequence.

In The River Between clitoridectomy involves a physical link between the life giving process of rebirth and the force of life flowing through the land. The traditional place of the ceremony is the Honia River - The River of life. Blood from the initiates sinks into the banks of the river in the cycle of birth and rebirth. Nyambura's reflection on Honia indicates this. Ngugi and Kenyatta both emphasize the psychological rather than the physical significance of this socially binding rite, though their methods of doing so are dissimilar. Kenyatta indicates that clitoridectomy marks a woman's assumption to her female identity allowing her both to procreate and to take part in traditional rituals and traditional governing councils." It is also the time when initiates are instructed in the rules and

regulations of their society and their responsibility within it”(136). The real argument lies not in the defence of the surgical operation or its details but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu – namely that this operation is still regarded as the essence of an institution which has enormous educational social, moral and religious implications.

Its against this background that we are presented with Muthoni’s story. She decides to undergo clitoridectomy because she wants to be a woman beautiful in the tribe. That is why when she dies she’s not sad, because right from the start, she knows why she wants clitoridectomy and is prepared to pay any price to reach her goal. Micere Mugo in her book **Visions** has articulated very clearly Muthoni’s feelings are more of a spiritual need than a mark of physical glory. She undergoes a fierce spiritual battle before taking this step and that is why she can triumphantly pronounce amidst agony... “Tell Nyambura I see Jesus and I’m a woman beautiful in the clan” (61).

In The River Between, Muthoni has experienced a revelation through the act of clitoridectomy. Though this is a common place event in the tribes, yet to Muthoni, it is of crucial importance. Revelation came to her as she took part in the event – she has seen Jesus. Nyambura realizes this, and through her reflections on Muthoni we see the understanding reached. Muthoni said she has seen Jesus. She has done so by going back to the tribe and marrying the rituals of the tribe with Christianity.

From this discussion, we can therefore, argue that this ritual brings along with it psychological satisfaction. That is why Muthoni as she dies she has experienced through the operation a deeply meaningful and satisfying encounter which has evoked emotions and feelings that do not exist in her daily life.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in The River Between portrays clitoridectomy as a rebellion against Christian imposition and western imperialism. Ngugi seems to refute Joshua's fanatical Christianity and Kabonyi's diehard traditionalism and welcomes Christianity that has roots in the traditions of the people. Ngugi shows that Christianity is an extraneous reality being imposed on the people. Muthoni is symbolic of the unity between Christianity and traditional culture. Through Muthoni, Ngugi has argued that traditionalism can benefit from certain aspects of Christianity. Ngugi believes that the practice of clitoridectomy has nothing to do with being Christian and that its suppression was an affront to their culture and traditions.

Through Muthoni, Ngugi indicates that one could practice Christianity with the liberty of their traditional practices. In other words, clitoridectomy should not stop one from being a Christian. To Muthoni, Christianity should find fulfillment in the ways of the tribe. The only way to unite the two is to rebel against one. This is the step she takes but unfortunately does not win.

Again through Muthoni, Ngugi is aware that Christianity must encounter man where he is and lives and that it can be a meaningful faith only as it comes to man within the context of his life in the world. Muthoni has just made clear to her sister Nyambura her wish to be circumcised against their father's will. To Nyambura's shock and surprise Muthoni replies:

Why! Are we fools. Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white's man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes the whiteman's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills that you and I know. (The River Between. (26)

Muthoni knows that christianity in itself can offer her nothing. She insists she is a Christian and does not want to leave her faith. But she has come to a realisation that her life is the life of the tribe and therefore christianity is not very meaningful to her without the tribe. She indicates to Waiyaki that he cannot really understand. No one will understand. I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But also I want to be initiated into the way of the tribe How could I be without the tribe, when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me (50 – 51).

What Muthoni wants is both Christianity and the tribe and her tribe means female circumcision. To her circumcision is what makes a woman complete. It is a ritual

that binds her to the tribe. As Wanjala in *(Far Home and Freedom (115)* has argued. This makes circumcision all the more important in the novel. It is an event through which society's values are revealed to the individual. Even if Muthoni dies as a result of the wound inflicted on her as a result of the initiation she goes through. Muthoni is happy for this is something she sincerely believes in. As Waiyaki reflects regarding Muthoni's last moments:

She did not last many hours after they arrived in Siriana. Waiyaki could still remember her last words as they approached the hospital. Waiyaki, she turned to him tell Nyamabura I see Jesus, and I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe (61).

Muthoni had seen Jesus, she had experienced a revelation through the act of the circumcision a commonplace event in the life of the tribe, yet one which is of crucial importance to Muthoni as an individual. Revelation came to her as she took part in an event which was important to her. This is reinforced in Waiyaki's reflections:

No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is a taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation. (135)

Ngugi in *The River Between* tries to show the Christian missionaries who looked down on female circumcision as being repugnant that it served a very important

role in the tribal identity and that is why Waiyaki thinking aloud suggests that circumcision was important for :

It kept the people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of social structure and something that gave meaning to a man's life and the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more.(66)

Muthoni's death sparks off in the ridges a sort of conflict. The event of her death is interpreted differently by the different sides in The River Between .Medically, Muthoni dies as a result of the wound inflicted on her after clitoridectomy. However, Muthoni's death is much more than just the wound. It is very symbolic. Muthoni takes on an individual decision to try and unite the tribe with christianity through circumcision and in the process she dies. Muthoni tries to resolve a contradiction that is apparent in the novel and which is symbolically represented by the opposition of the two ridges.

Muthoni is therefore, the sacrificial lamb. As Micere Mugo has argued "For this reason, Muthoni is not raving as she does for she knows from the start why she wants to be circumcised and is prepared to pay any price to reach her goal"(61). Circumcision is to her, more of a spiritual need than a mark of physical glory. She undergoes a fierce spiritual battle before taking this step, That is why she can triumphantly pronounce a midst agony Tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman beautiful in the tribe"(50). The argument Ngugi is putting forward is

that Muthoni dies for something she believes in and hence very fulfilled.

Muthoni's revelations on her death bed – spark off several thoughts in Nyambura her sister.

Muthoni said she had seen Jesus. She had done so by going back to the tribe by marrying the rituals of the tribe with Christ . Nyambura's torn between the allegiance to the father and her allegiance to Waiyaki..(117 – 118)

These revelations have made her very irritable; “At home she did small jobs as usual. But she was becoming more irritable and often resented her father's commands”. (116)

Nyambura now seeks for a new love in Waiyaki, who will serve as her escape from Christianity.

Nyambura was not happy. Each day she spent in her father's home seemed greater weight added to her. Her heart was restless and she knew that nothing at home would satisfy her. Everyday, she thought more and more of Waiyaki, her happy moments being those when she was with him. (116)

Nyambura has realised that she cannot find spiritual fulfilment in Christ but in Waiyaki.

She could only be soared through Waiyaki.. Waiyaki then was her saviour, her black messiah, the promised one who could come and lead her to the light.

She went back to the opposite bank and sat in her favourite spot. To ^{the} left was open ground where the candidates for circumcision want to shed their blood. Muthoni too had come here on the morning of her sacrifice. Nyambura did not at peace. The river no longer soothed her. (103)

Muthoni's decision to get circumcised and eventual death and particularly her last words on her death bed. "I am still a Christian, see a Christian in the tribe, look I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe" (46). These words leave a lasting image on Waiyaki's mind and it helps to create a critical self awareness in him. Waiyaki by the end of the novel realises like Muthoni that the idea of sacrifice for liberation is highly individualised. Like Muthoni he realises that one must first seek tribal acceptance before moving beyond. To Waiyaki therefore the value of circumcision is clear. It kept the tribe in unity.

At the Siriana Mission, the reaction to Muthoni's death was regarded as a punishment for the continued encouragement of such a brutal ritual. Livingston tells himself, "The death of Muthoni forever confirmed the barbarity of Gikuyu custom" To Livingston, circumcision had to be rooted out of there was to be any hope of salvation for the Gikuyu people. Livingstone feels cheated by fate as is reported," he felt that circumstances were laughing at his old age. But he would show them that the spirit of the Lord still burnt in him. He would fight on".(55)

We are told in The River Between that “Joshua heard of the death of Muthoni without a sign of emotion on the face”. (53) Joshua’s reserved but arrogant attitude towards his daughter’s death helps to confirm the fear that he has contributed to his daughter’s death because he failed to raise her in the light of his own convictions. He goes further to confirm that his hardened attitude towards his daughter indicates that he might have indeed planted a curse on his own daughter’ Chege wonders if Muthoni’s death is Joshua’s punishment for dabbling in whitemen’s ways. One of the elders sums up this feeling among the people.

You see what discord in the family does. If Joshua had not sold his hear to this people, it would have been a simple case. Why? A black ram without blemish under the Mugumo tree – simple sacrifice and all would have ended well. (46)

Joshua however, becomes more jealous and adamant in his doctrine and preaching. The burning of the hut belong to one of his newest followers, which has helped to create the mood of bitterness and revenge.

Joshua their leader was inspired. He now preached with vigour and a strange holiness danced in his eye”. Joshua come with a new message, circumcision was wholly evil.

Muthoni’s death also has an effect which carries over the remainder of the novel as Robson has argued “she plays the role of the martyr of the tribe”. (Robson)

Ngugi's treatment of these events powerfully conveys the intensity of feelings aroused during the circumcision crisis of 1928 – 1929, a line of thought which is dealt with in depth by Kenyatta in Facing Mount Kenya. The Kikuyu society is patrilineal, and the father is the supreme rule of the homestead owner of practically everything. The tribe lays down the rules that is why Muthoni wants to be circumcised to be beautiful in the tribe. The tribe is defined by men. That is why the girls who do not want to be circumcised may be characterized by the tribe as rejecting the tribe's cultural tradition. No Kikuyu man would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised. Nyambura is rejected by the tribe on this ground. Waiyaki's mother tells him that if he marries Nyambura an uncircumcised girl it will be over her dead body.

The point in The River Between is that society informs who a woman is. It has laid down rules and regulations as pertains to who a child is and how they graduate into adulthood. This Kikuyu society, for example a child can only be a woman by undergoing the ritual of cliteridectomy.

Ngugi's argument is summed up in Waiyaki's thoughts. That not only did circumcision keep the people together but it formed the core of social structure and gave meaning to a person's life. It also kept the tribe as one. For in a traditional set up it is not simply the physiological surgery of the penis or the clitoris. But the psychological, educational and social implications that count. Indeed it is an important milestone in the development of an individual.

The River Between is a story of conflicts as reflected in the simple description of the antagonism that existed in the ridges. Initiation of the woman is a major conflict in the book. Ngugi has succeeded in romanticising this ritual. The essence of initiation is not therefore circumcision but the ritual of being circumcised. The cutting of the foreskin is not “the thing”. The psychological transformation is the essence of circumcision. The whole process of initiation is a creative encounter which stretches the imagination and which through “make believe” and role play enhance entry into manhood or womanhood. That is why in The River Between Wa Thiongo recognises this and uses Muthoni to underscore the centrality of initiation to the traditional life.

“ I want to be a woman – a real woman knowing all the way of hills and ridges.... I know it is so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. The whitemans God does not satisfy me.” (Wa Thiongo 19 26)

Muthoni confirms to us that incision is the be all. It is a symbolic means to mark the entry into womanhood.

The next chapter, focuses on Walker’s novel Possessing the secret of Joy. This novel is by an Afro-American female. We shall interrogate her perspective of initiation and how it informs the identity of an African woman.

CHAPTER THREE: ALICE WALKER'S *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

INITIATION: A PROCESS OF VIOLENCE

Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that initiation of the woman as seen by Ngugi in The River Between is important for the maintenance of cultural identity. The essence of initiation is not clitoridectomy but its ritual aspects. The cutting is important but not the main "thing" per se. The psychological transformation is the essence of clitoridectomy. This chapter will examine the African American female view of initiation and how it informs the identity of an African woman.

This chapter also discusses violence in relation to women as victims of male violence, the myth of clitoral erection and masculinity, control of women's sexuality, mutilation and enslavement. Women's identity, subservience and violation of the women's privacy, decency, self esteem and negation of moral values. This chapter further discusses the psychological impact of the ritual of clitoridectomy on the victim and the struggle against a tradition that cripples women. Alice Walker examines the African soul of her protagonist and ritual female circumcision is the vehicle for this examination

Alice Walker in her novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy expresses her views concerning the inhumanity in female genital mutilation practices in Africa

commonly known as clitoridectomy. She theorizes about what she thinks has been making African men to circumcise young African girls. Regarding the practice of female genital mutilation Alice Walker wrote recently in Issues in Feminism – An Introduction to Women’s Studies that;

Mutilated women, in Africa and elsewhere, are increasingly mirroring a mutilated world. For the earth to know health and happiness, this violence against women must stop. We cannot care for the environment around us, our self-designated role from the beginning, if we are in excruciating pain (312).

The novel represents in fiction, a cultural practice that is portrayed as simply cruel and misogynistic. She attempts to explore the myth surrounding, clitoridectomy. Raye the therapist question Tashi’s belief in this myth which she has embraced even though she has not witnessed its manifestations. Tashi responds that her parts may have grown as the myth suggests because her friends “jeered at (her) for having a tail. I think they meant my labia majora” (120) . This reveals not only the power of myth, but an individual’s potential to rewrite the myths that control and define a culture. “Though African women have described other versions of this myth, Robyn Smith defines Tashi’s descriptions as an “experience-distant” one because it embodies the “Hottentot” stereotype of the late nineteenth century (4 of 6). Basically, Alice Walker discusses clitoridectomy as a process of violence against women. These include physical and spiritual violence. Physical violence refers to the mutilation of the geography of a woman while spiritual violence

comes in given the Christian belief that the body is the temple of God. Therefore this apparent act of mutilation is seen as sacrilege.

First and foremost we shall discuss the ritual of clitoridectomy as a form of physical violence by first looking at what prompts the main character Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy to undergo clitoridectomy.

In the second epigraph which is from The Color Purple – a nine paragraph passage describes a wedding ceremony that takes place in London in which Olivia is angry with Tashi because when they left for London, Tashi was preparing to scar her face.

Through scarification, Olivia contends that the Olinka people hope to return to their own ways even though the white man has taken everything else. Then Nettie, her stepmother vows to bring civilization to the Olinka people by helping to stop the scarring or cutting of tribal marks on the faces of young women.(1)

Olivia informs us here that Tashi is going to undergo clitoridectomy though she has told her that nobody in America or Europe cuts off pieces of themselves.

The epigraph sets the background against which Tashi, the main protagonist in Possessing the Secret of Joy, decides to undergo the ritual of clitoridectomy. She rebels against the so called civilization and decides to retain her African identity

by undergoing clitoridectomy. Tashi recalls how the Olinkan leader “our Jesus Christ” had implored them to resist European ways and stay clean – especially uncircumcised girls, they were to retain female initiation into womanhood.

We are further informed that when the white missionaries left Tashi’s mother, Catherine Nafa feared that the village would return to all its former ways and that uncircumcised girls would be punished. The argument we are putting forward is that it was as a result of rebellion against Christianity that Tashi decided to get initiated into her Olinkan traditions.

In America as Adam’s wife, Tashi reminisces on her life. Even though Olivia had told her not to undergo the ritual, Tashi undergoes the ritual of clitoridectomy and has a scar marked on her face. It is through her discussions with the therapist Raye that we get to know the details of the ritual. She says that some culture demand excision of only the clitoris, other insisted on a thorough scrapping away of the entire genital area.

Tashi undergoes excision or clitoridectomy which consists of the partial or total removal of the clitoris together with the adjacent tissues of the labia minora. After the operation, the two sides of the vulva are sutured together with catgut or thorns, leaving a tiny opening about the size of a matchstick or finger tip for the passage of menstrual blood and urine. After the operation, the woman’s or girls’ legs are often tied together for an extended period to allow the wound to heal. Tashi

describes her thoughts about her body

It was only after I came to America, I said, that I ever knew what was supposed to be down there.

Down there?

Yes. My own body was a mystery to me, as was the female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost everyone I knew. From prison our leader said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial – by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies. 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.

You believed this?

Everyone believed it, even though no one had ever seen it. No one living in our village anyway. And yet the elders, particularly, acted as if everyone had witnessed this evil, and not nearly a long enough time ago (119).

Tashi comes to learn of how clitoridectomy came into existence from a book she is given by her stepson Pierre. An anthropological book written by a French anthropologist Marcel Griaule's Conversation with Ogotemmali. The explanation reads like a story of creation from the Dogon People. God Amma created the earth and a female body. The book goes on to explain that:

This body flat face upwards in a line from north to south is feminine. Its sexual

organ is anthill and its clitoris a termite hill. Amma being lonely and desirous of intercourse with this creature approached it. That was the occasion of the first breach of the order of the universe. Because the termite hill rose up baning the passage and displaying its masculinity. God cut down the termite hill and had intercourse with the excised earth. But the original incident was destined to affect the course of thing.(169)

There is also an illustration about how

The spirit drew two outlines on the ground one on top of the other, one male and the other female. The man stretched himself out on these two shadows of himself and took both of them for his own. The same thing was done for the woman. In the man the female soul was located in the prepuce; in the woman the male soul was in the clitoris. Therefore men are circumcised to rid of their femininity while women are excised to rid them of their masculinity (170)

Pierre concludes that it is men's fault that people have been permanently locked "in the category of their obvious sex." Also we learn that clitoridectomy is not only pharaonic – Cleopatra and Nefertiti were circumcised but it is also a very old civilization that spread northward from Central Africa up toward ancient Egypt and the Mediterranean and that it predates all the major religions (172). Tashi lauds Pierre as the one who "continues to untangle the threads of mystery that kept her enmeshed. Pierre tells her that European anthropologists describe early

circumcised women as “bushmen, “small” gentlemen people completely one with the environment. Who liked elongated genitals. By the time they reached puberty, well they had acquired what was to become known as the Hottentots apron 275-70.

Walker fails to question Marcel Griaule’s anthropological book, with its “I know my natives” assumptions. Instead of questioning what Pierre is reading or what she is reading herself, Tashi identifies with the first Dogon woman for whom during birth “the pain of parturition was concentrated in the woman’s clitoris, which was exercised by an invisible hand, detached itself and left her, and was changed into the form of a scorpion” whose “pouch” and “sting symbolized the organ: the venom was the water and the blood of the pain.” What is more, Tashi tells us that she read over and over the passage about “an invisible hand” and the pain was what she felt “at the moment of parturition,” because pain was not only what she felt giving birth, but she lacked “a clitoris to be concentrated in.” (173)

It is clear that Possessing the Secret of Joy blames God for__ female genital mutilation and infibulation. Early in the novel Tashi calls their Olinka Leader “our Jesus Christ” who implores his people, especially uncircumcised women, to resist European ways and stay clean. (120) Man , however justifies the ritual by giving it divine dimensions. That is why when Adam in the courtroom feels that every man should have his penis cut off. Then he would understand that his “condition is similar to that of all the women” who have been circumcised” (162).

To Pierre, a man wants a woman to be circumcised because he is “jealous of woman’s pleasure” insofar as the woman “ does not require him to achieve it. Thus, when “the 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. But it is only his lust for her conquest that makes the effort worthwhile. And then it is literally a battle, with blood flowing on both sides” (178). To M’Lissa a man excises the woman to make “her into a woman,” because it “only because a woman is made into a woman that a man becomes a man” (241).

Walker looks at female genital mutilation as arising from gender differences. That is male’s desire to dominate women through clitoridectomy. This kind of position prevents Alice Walker from discussing the fact that in Africa “the actual cutting is only part of a rite that young people undergo as an initiation rite to adulthood. And that during these rites of passage ceremonies young children learn about “the secrets of their society” as well as “acceptable social and sexual behaviours,” thus “ protecting society from pre and extra marital sex, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases.” We theorizes that Alice Walker was probably afraid of “lending a degree of respectability to the abhorrent practice of female genital mutilation.” Her silence on these issues as well as discussing female circumcision “out of its cultural context” results in an “ethnocentric view of an outsider “as will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter.

Tashi undergoes clitoridectomy and now feels completely African and Olinkan. Tashi is convicted that ritual female circumcision defines her as an Olinkan woman. Tashi explains here reason behind going to M'lissa to get circumcised. She says she wanted to make her people better and this was to show that the Olinka still have their own ways. The fact that the initiation ceremony is not done in Europe or America makes it more valuable to Tashi. Walker, however, argues that Tashi's attempt to preserve through the ritual what is African in her ends up destroying her sexuality. This argument is in line with the physical effects that the operation has on Tashi who thereafter suffers from sterility, menstruation difficulty, difficult urination, urine retention due to occlusion pain from reopening the infibulations with a knife on the wedding night and difficult penetration by her sexual partner. Walker is so negative that she overloads the effects of clitoridectomy on the victim.

We are told Tashi had become passive, no longer cheerful – according to Olivia, Her movements which had always been graceful and quick with the liveness of her personality had changed. She is unable to enjoy her womanhood without physical and emotional pain. She is unable to have any fulfilled relationship with Adam, her husband because he is unable to penetrate her for three months because of the effect of clitoridectomy. She says “each time he touched me I bled – there is nothing he could do to me that did not hurt” (60). This is the extension of the pain alluded to. Tashi ends up experiencing a very difficult pregnancy and having an equally difficult delivery.

Tashi had acquired the Olinkan woman's walk in which the feet appear to slide forward and are rarely raised above the ground. Tashi, now Evelyn in the U.S.A re-discovers herself. The point to mention here is that this relocation helps to redefine Tashi. For example Tashi's odour which no amount of scrubbing could help was only washed off while in America.

In the last section of the novel Tashi is allowed to question the truth about the African in Mirella Ricciardi's African Saga. When Mbatia fails to explain to her what the Italian woman meant by African women "Possessing the secret of Joy" Tashi becomes anti-colonial: "oh, I say. These settler cannibals. Why don't they just steal our land, mine our gold, chop down our forests, pollute our rivers, enslave us to work n their farms, fuck us, devour our flesh and leave us alone? Why must they also write about how much joy we possess?" (270).

Tashi is presented as a representative of the mutilated woman who can never enjoy her womanhood. According to Walker then, it is through the violence of female circumcision that men are able to control woman's sexuality and hence make them subservient to men. As Walker says "I recognized the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of the women in the world" (137). Evelyn's therapy session with Raye suggests that not only are African women ignorant of their own female bodies and sexuality, but they lack control over them. Tashi says that she discovered what was supposed to be down there only after she came to America. Tashi – Evelyn says "beyond the

function of the breasts her own body as the female body was a mystery to her (119).

To borrow from Chandra Talpade Mohanty's post colonial theoretical concept, Evelyn is presented as an average third world woman who leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender and being third world ignorant, poor un-educated tradition – bound. Tashi – Evelyn is contrasted to Raye, Lisette and Olivia – Western women are educated and modern, and are shown as having control over their own bodies and their sexuality and the freedom to make their own decisions.

In particular, Lisette, Adam's friend and mistress seem to have kept what Tashi has lost in pain, since she enjoys her womanhood without physical/emotional pain. May be this is why Tashi stones Pierre, Lisette's son from Adam, born out of wedlock in France in order to prevent his entrance into their house. Tashi's jealousy makes her open with her duplicate key Adam's hidden drawer and read Lisette's letters. The letters reveal Lisette's joy of womanhood and motherhood which Tashi was unable to experience with Adam. Who in the past, Adam was unable to penetrate her for three months because of her circumcision. This could explain why a day before her execution, Tashi needs to write to Lisette, now dead, "to communicate with Adam through her to reach out to the woman she herself could have been if not for the ritual." Unfortunately, for Walker, a true African Woman's fulfilment is not in her sexuality. And she greatly errors by

universalising her American culture.

Probably aware of the negative image of the African woman as ignorant of her sexuality Walker patronizingly uses Tashi – Evelyn – Mrs. Johnson's image by universalizing her suffering across continents, class, and ethnicity. During Evelyn – Mrs. Johnson's therapy sessions with Raye, she is introduced to Amy Maxwell by Raye, she learns that even a white girl from a rich white American family from New Orleans can be mutilated. Amy like Tashi used to touch herself sexually. When Amy was four years old her mother put pepper sauce on her fingers. At six years of age the family doctor was asked to excise her clitoris.

Through Amy Maxwell, Tashi learns that there are other African women in America who had run away from being circumcised. Equally painful is that these African women had to endure from the American doctors who invaded the slave auction blocks to examine – these sewed up “naked and defenceless woman in order to learn to do the procedure on other enslaved women in the name of science. Also the American doctors wrote in their medical journals that they'd found a cure for the white women's hysteria (186). Evelyn reacts distressfully towards the conversation and leaves Raye's office in anger slamming the door behind her. Evelyn does not believe that even white girls can be circumcised. Evelyn rationalizes that because Louisiana was once ruled by France Amy Maxwell's mother may have had “trouble communicating with her doctor, who was perhaps like me a stranger from another tribe. “But this rationalization, which

should be understood as Evelyn's reluctance to believe that a white girl could be circumcised, does not last very long as Amy Maxwell's mother gradually becomes another M'Lissa. That is, perhaps "Amy's mother had meant her daughter's tonsils after all" (188)

Tashi has undergone psychological trauma from the memories of the painful operation and the fear of sexual intercourse. According to Demirturk "Tashi's psychological tension along with her failure to forget 'Dura's scream and death, led her to thinking of murdering M'lissa the aged circumcised of the Olinkan villagers.

Tashi's desire to kill M'lissa the circumciser is as a result of her wish to destroy the ritual. But M'lissa explains before Tashi kills her that she herself was destroyed by the ritual and limped throughout her life. She is not the only person guilty of causing young girls' pain and death, she says because Tashi's mother also held Dura down as she circumcised her and M'lissa's own mother a circumciser as well used to hide a black clay smiling female doll in the forest and used it in touching her genitals, which shows an image of a woman who enjoys sex, in the back of a tree in the forest.

Walker's point is that M'lissa has been victimized by a ritual and she in turn used the ritual to victimize others – for she believes that it is. "In service to the country and what makes us who are" (226). She tells Tashi that "if Dura is not bathed no one will marry her" (257). Tashi who earlier on believed this to be true, now gets

agitated and kills M'lissa. The trans-location has had a great impact on Tashi. She now has a different perception of herself. She has realized that a woman does not need to be defined from the point of view of the ritual of clitoridectomy. M'lissa's conception that the pain a woman feels in preserving and transmitting the tradition is now insignificant to Tashi and her personal experience. She remembers that M'lissa had sewn her so tightly that intercourse had proved to be very difficult for Adam and herself. That is when she then decides to murder M'lissa.

In contrast to M'lissa's approval of the ritual, Tashi resists the ritual, struggles against the oppression by killing the executor of the ritual. According to Demirturk "Tashi shows her courage to change a situation that prevents the African female self from blossoming into wholeness", and fumes her, "destruction of M'lissa presents the case that women should not continue "destroying" the joy and pride of womanhood in attempt to serve the masculinist myth sanctioning the lack of female self empowerment" (4 of 5).

Since Tashi does not have the powers to kill the ritual, she kills the agent M'lissa. Tashi with her family re-define and celebrate the true secret of black people's joy with the words written on the banner "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY" (281).

Tashi's resistance is a resistance symbolic of the women's struggle against a ritual that has served no purpose other than encourage violence against women. We argue that Tashi's exclusion is mythical in the sense that her act of resistance to a tradition that stifles her wholeness, creates the true freedom of the self. Tashi dies in peace with no M'lissa left behind to kill another Dura. "Screaming her terror eternally into her own ear" The cycle is therefore destroyed .

Therefore, Walker in Possessing the Secret of Joy has put her point across that there is a conflict between enabling the women to be mature and be respectable with the ritual of female circumcision and the inhumanity of violation done to their body – i.e. mutilating the geography of the woman's body. Bearing in mind that many cultures including the one Tashi grows up in define the woman from the point of view of her body, mutilating it then negates her identity and undermines the very foundation of her being.

In the next chapter, the study will discuss the gender disparities in the way Ngugi and Walker treat clitoridectomy and identity of an African woman.

CHAPTER FOUR: Comparative Study of the two texts

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDERED PERSPECTIVES IN NGUGI'S THE RIVER BETWEEN AND ALICE WALKER'S POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY

This chapter explores how the ^{two} authors Ngugi wa Thiong'o in The River Between and Alice Walker's in Possessing the Secret of Joy, respond to the issue of initiation and identity of the African woman from a gendered perspective. Ngugi wa Thiongo in The River Between gives us the view of an African male which we consider as the view of the insider. Ngugi responds to the issue of initiation as a necessity for the African woman. To Ngugi the whole process of initiation is a creative encounter which stretches the imagination and which through make believe and role play enhance entry into manhood or womanhood. Ngugi confirms this by saying that initiation rites modifies the personality of the individual in a manner visible to all.

Alice Walker in turn in Possessing the Secret of Joy gives us the perspective of an African female from the diaspora, which we shall consider as the view of an outsider. She looks at clitoridectomy as a violent stricture which is used to enforce women's total emotional loyalty and subservience to men. Her argument being that clitoridectomy does not contribute to the identity of an African woman. To the contrary, it is the inhumanity of violating the woman's body – mutilating

the geography of the woman's body – which in fact negates her identity and undermines the very foundation of her being.

We shall further examine the differences in the voices they employ to speak in the text and relay information to the reader. This involves in the story elements of structure, characterization and the narrative voices through strategy of focalization the writers deploy in their texts. This study will proceed from the theoretical position that literature encounters the social entanglements and limitations that define all writing and that these textual intricacies are mediated through language.

As Evan Mwangi has argued,

Literary practitioners be authors or readers are 'constituted by their cultural placement... defined within systems of gender, class and race. They operate inside specific institutions that shape their practice (59)

The chapter will also focus on gender in order to investigate how the narrative choices the writers use are dialectically determined by their gender placement. We shall seek to demonstrate, that gender as one of the elements of social placement, determines the narrative voice, focalization and language use in the texts under study.

The two authors, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Alice Walker, have interesting constructive features: one is African while the other is African American. One is

man, the other is woman. They write in different social-cultural and historical contexts. However, they both present the issue of initiation of the African woman and how it informs her identity. We shall therefore interrogate their respective perspectives and how they present the responses of the victims or heroines of clitoridectomy.

In discussing narration in the texts under study we shall note that in a narrative, events are told from certain perspectives. The agency to tell the story is located within certain characters so that one can say that the other characters are acted upon... The narrative voice guides the reader or audience and ties the story together

The authors under study are aware of the importance of the narrative voice and the role it plays in the story. Walker is aware of the power of narrative voice. Her choice of female voice is consciously done and indeed helps in strengthening the issue at hand. Similarly, Ngugi is certainly conscious of the choice of his narrator's voice. Ngugi says in his collection of essays, Barrel of a Pen,

That the perspective from which a story is told affects its meaning. This is because the perspectives are not innocent. They are tainted with ideological positions from which the subject is viewed. (6)

The argument that the novelist's sense of perspective is dictated by the class and

racial position from which the author is operating affect the meaning of the narrative. The same can be said of the gender of the characters and narrators through which the events of a narrative are related.

In their fiction works, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Alice Walker employ protest as a structural strategy. They hence have structural similarities. The heroines, that is Muthoni and Tashi, get initiated as a protest against christian influence. As a matter of fact, Muthoni and Tashi's desire to get circumcised are driven by a will to defy Christianity by maintaining their tribal customs. Muthoni in The River Between who dies from the circumcision wound runs away from her father's house and goes to her aunt's place so as to be able to undergo the operation.

While at her aunt's place, Muthoni realizes that people are shocked to see her at the circumcision ceremony, because she is the daughter of Joshua who has converted to Christianity and preached against the initiation of women. Muthoni explains that she has not run away from the new faith but that she wants to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. "How can I possibly remain as I am now? I knew my father would not let me and so I came" (43). These are the same reasons that Tashi gives for going to M'lissa to get circumcised. She says that circumcision and the scarring of the face was the only remaining mark of being African and Olinkan since Christianity had washed away everything else.

It is worthy noting here that Tashi and Dura, the latter's sister, echo Muthoni in

The River Between. One could therefore safely argue that Walker might have been aware of Ngugi's character in The River Between given the different historical settings of the two texts.

In terms of background context, Ngugi's The River Between was set in Kikuyu land in the early 60's. It was written during the colonial times when there was strong Christian campaigns against female circumcision. As Finkes observes, "The protestant missionaries who first settled in Kikuyu terrain were generally very much against female circumcision and by the late 1920s- 1930s many missionary organizations were trying to suppress it" (4 of 5)

And Walker's Possessing The Secret Of Joy at the other level was written in the 1990s amidst the campaign against female circumcision which is now commonly referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (F.G.M). Walker is a western feminist who is informed by the current debate surrounding clitoridectomy. She writes from this position her fiction work. For subject matter, the two texts deal with the same theme of initiation of the African woman. Both texts contain strongly presented central characters whose actions, words and attitudes are vital in shaping one's feelings about the situation.

In The River Between, Muthoni the protagonist rebels against Christianity to get initiated into the ways of the tribe. She realizes that she cannot be a full woman if she is not initiated into the ways of the tribe. She runs away from home and goes

to her aunt's place so as to be initiated. She successfully goes through the operation but dies from the wound. Though she eventually dies, according to her, she is a fulfilled woman. She asserts this position, just before her death. She tells Waiyaki to tell her sister Nyambura that she can see Jesus. She dies happy that she is both a Christian and also a tribal woman.

In Possessing the Secret Of Joy, Walker depicts Tashi as a young innocent African girl, who is vulnerable and unsure of herself. She decides to get initiated to retain what she felt was African in her. But as the plot develops and she relocates to America as a married woman, she redefines herself. She matures and begins to question the ritual of female circumcision and the effect it has on the woman. She vocalizes her concerns directly, her perception of issues broadens and matures. At the height of her development, she realizes she has to fight the ritual.

The two texts also demonstrate variant levels of gendered discourse. Though both the texts have structural similarities they differ in the presentation of the material. Ngugi's female is presented more through the narrative report of speech act than through direct speech while Walker's presentation of the female voice is captured more directly.

In Ngugi's narrative even if the story is speaking on behalf of women, the discourse is structured by male perspective. For example, the presentation of Nyambura and Muthoni at the riverside is handled with intense illusion of reality.

However, the two are discussing what is happening at the moment the value of circumcision. Taking into account the text's attitude towards clitoridectomy, we find the girls are not fighting the system. Muthoni, whose courage the novelist admires in protesting against Joshua, is conniving with the tribe to keep herself in their bondage. The issue that concerns them is how Joshua will react to Muthoni's decision to be circumcised. The speaking subjects are female but the matter of reference is a male character. The novel suggests that it is really not presenting the innocuous girls but their fanatical father. When Nyambura speaks later her voice is overwhelmed by the fear of Joshua.

Muthoni, the principal female character in the narration, enjoys the privilege of serving as a frame of reference whose consciousness of events is fulfilled from the author and narrator to the reader. Muthoni in *The River Between* is silenced early in the text when she attempts to fight for the retention of the traditions by clitoridectomy. She is projected as a courageous if wilful girl who rebels against her christian fundamental father to be circumcised the traditional way. The location of the narrative within Waiyaki's perception of the world engenders the silencing of Muthoni's mother on the matter. Although she is secretly shown as a complacent as to withdraw completely from the fate of her daughter. The text suppresses her feelings, Nyambura, Muthoni's sister is also muffled hence the girls end up as mouth pieces rather than flesh and blood characters.

But in *Possessing the Secret Of Joy*, Walker is bolder than Ngugi in presenting

woman's voice. Tashi voices the text's view point. The way the novel opens indicates at once its gender allegiance. Tashi narrates to us the story of the beautiful young Panther who had a co-wife and a husband. Through this brief narration, we learn of the pain of polygamy and how women suffer in such relationships. From Lara's story, Walker's position is clear. Women need to form deeper satisfying relationship with themselves and other female.

Walker gives Tashi an opportunity to reflect the action that the novel is pre-occupied with. Her mind is used to show what happens in the story. Through Tashi we learn of how clitoridectomy is carried out– the physical and psychological pain and impact it has on the women. We are also told that Olinka people saw M'lissa as a national monument, a prized midwife and healer while the Olinkans who had turned to Christianity shunned her.

More revealing is how Tashi's clitoridectomy and its physical and psychological effects actually results from the conflict between the Olinkan traditions and Christianity. Indeed it is suggested that Tashi's predicament could have been prevented, had Catherine, Tashi's mother agreed with M'lissa to do it at the proper age and time. But having turned Christian, Catherine had turned a deaf ear to M'lissa. The grown up Tashi goes to M'lissa to get circumcised because she wants to be recognized as the only remaining stamp of Olinka Tradition.

Through Tashi, we learn about clitoridectomy and the varying consequences

derived from it. The traumatic experiences of painful operations, childbirth and intercourse. In this way, women learn to submit to the male of their societies and accept their secondary position. In Possessing the Secret of Joy it is assumed that the African woman can heal from the scars inflicted upon her in Africa and discover her sexuality only in the west, in this case America.

Walker's views are in sharp contrast with Ngugi's attitude towards clitoridectomy. Ngugi through Waiyaki focalizes the value of circumcision to the community.

It kept the people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of social structure and something that gave meaning to a man's life and the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's concolon and integration would be no more. (66)

It is important to note here that in The River Between, the text's dialogue is dominated by male voices not only because the central characters are male, but because the narration treats the female characters as less important. Ngugi's text is focalised by an outsider in gender and it is silent on feminist critique of the men's argument.

Walker, in turn, writing as an outsider but female, who as it were, has watched and observed the rite of passage feels that the practice of female circumcision has no functional value at all, other than it being violence on the woman hence she terms it 'mutilation' To Walker, the main function of the operation is in order to reduce

woman's sexual desire. She believes that woman's sexual desires are minimized by the removal of parts of their external genitalia. Here is what Tashi claims:

From the prison our teacher said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial – by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies. 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. (119)

As a feminist, Walker argues that female circumcision among the Olinkans exists for reasons other than the maintaining of tribal identity. The Olinkans encourage polygamy, require women to be virgins before marriage and forbid women to masturbate although males are encouraged to masturbate before marriage. She continues to argue that the motive of cutting off the clitoris is to prevent the girls from developing sexual feelings. Therefore female circumcision maintains male dominance among the Olinka by therefore violently enforcing heterosexuality and by giving man a right of sexual and emotional access to women.

Though Walker purports to be objective, she fails to recognize that women may experience the rites of passage differently from the way her characters do. The reason being that Women often perform and insist on the operations. However, the argument in both cases has been that the operations are not necessarily voluntary

because the women who perform and insist upon the operation are not fully informed. If women had accurate information, they may choose to refuse to perform or allow circumcision. Thus their choice is not in fact “voluntary” if men in the tribal groups who advocate clitoridectomy had accurate information, they might also refuse to allow it.

Walker portrays women as total victims of male dominance. She universalizes the issue of women. But as Robyn has argued,

There is no universal concept of the position of women, the subordination of women and male dominance. Instead each woman experiences her gender and social relations differently from other women, depending on her race, nationality class ethnicity and age. (25 of 50)

Walker is very bold in presenting the issue of clitoridectomy which in itself is taboo. In her presentation, she employs language that borders on taboo. While Ngugi in The River Between suppresses his use of taboo expressions, maybe because he is talking about a taboo subject which he seems to support. According to Evan Mwangi “Taboo words are those words that are used in polite society because they refer to intimate parts of the body” (119). Walker sees juiciness in the particular words that she uses. The text seems to suggest that we would forgive its use of taboo language because it is capturing a very barbaric ritual. Hence here Walker’s standpoint of an outsider is apparent.

Right from the onset of the text, Walker dedicates the text with tenderness and respect to the Blameless 'vulva'. This kind of dedication already indicates that she is going to talk about a taboo subject. Walker defines Africa from the perspective of taboo. In one scene, Adam brags about having broken and defiled "the strongest taboo in Olinkan society," by making love in the fields:

"Love making in the fields jeopardized the crops, indeed it was declared that if there was any fornication whatsoever in the fields, the crops definitely would not grow. No one ever saw us and the fields produced their harvest as before" (27).

In an episode in the court room, Walker portrays Adam lashing at African men for not only refusing to see their children's suffering but fear of taboo itself. "He wonders indeed if by taboo they mean sacred in which case nothing could be publicly examined for fear of disturbing the mystery or if the suffering is so 'profane' that they must not explore it lest they corrupt young people" (161). The point being made is that Walker through Adam sees Olinkan traditions as barbaric and therefore there is need to discard them.

Although, Possessing the Secret of Joy is a text about a taboo subject, it however contains specific elements of proper taboo expressions. Evelyn tells Raye, her African American therapist who replaced, Mzee that she discovered "what was supposed to be down there" only when she came to America. She continues:

"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 (119).

Walker has given Tashi the right to use taboo expression which ordinarily she would not do. Towards the end of the conversation, Evelyn tells us how she used to stroke herself though it was taboo. She also reveals that though they made love via 'cunnilingus,' oral stimulation of the clitoris on the vulva, she always experienced orgasm. Also later in the novel M'lissa reveals that she too used to follow her mother to the forest where after her mother had left, she would play with 'a small smiling figure with one hand on her genitals, every part which appeared intact she would then lie down to compare her vulva to the little statuettes.' She adds "hidden behind a boulder, I very cautiously touched myself. The blissful, open look of the little figure had aroused me, and I felt an immediate response to my own touch" (213).

Walker empowers her female characters to reveal their sexual desires by openly discussing this taboo subject. We see that though young then and before circumcision, they knew and still know what is 'down there' and that they were aware of their female circumcision. That is the only way Walker can criticize female circumcision which has so erased those sexual experiences and the awareness of their bodies that only a therapy session can bring their memories back.

Later, in the novel we are told how circumcision came into existence Walker gives detailed description of how God Amma created earth and a feminine body:

This body, lying flat, face upwards, in a line from north to south is feminine. Its sexual organ is anthill and its clitoris a termite hill. Amma being lonely and desirous of intercourse with this creature approached it. That was the occasion of the first breach of the order of the universe. Because termite hill rose up, barring the passage and displaying, its masculinity God cut down the termite hill and had intercourse with the excised earth. But the original incident was destined to affect the course of things forever. (169)

Walker uses taboo expressions liberally to show women as recipients of male injustice. Women exist for man's pleasure and convenience. Walker's language is highly significant. Her American citizenship provides here distance to use such language.

The characters in Ngugi's and Walker's works compliment one another across the gender – and ideological spectrum. However with Ngugi, men occupy more visible spaces so that his narratives are predominantly male arena with female as supplement.

Mwangi's observation on Ngugi's narrative style illustrates this: "As a dialogue writer, he stands outside his gender to look at the world from the point of view of

the other gender. But the female remains in Derridean terms a supplement serving the interests of the male centre” (120). For instance, Muthoni stands out as the only woman foregrounded in the narrative because she decides to rebel against her father and goes to be initiated. She is set against the background of many other people in the narrative.

The River Between also remains silent about other subjects. For example, it fails to recognize the oppressive gender relations and role that are reinforced by rites of passage. It could be said that being male Ngugi is biased in favour of the dominant male gender. He does not give the women the tools or language to articulate the oppression in the gender hierarchy of the tribe.

Ngugi's work is the work of an insider who is male and therefore an outsider in women's perspectives, concerns, experiences, and feelings. Though he has been socialized in the Kikuyu culture, the information he gives on female circumcision is second hand. Ngugi is different to gender hierarchy in his own society. He does not think of showing the role gender plays in the practice of clitoridectomy.

The text does not indicate that men were concerned with how Kikuyu women feel about the ritual of clitoridectomy and how it affects their lives and perceptions of themselves.

The novel would have had a greater impact if Ngugi had given us the view of the

Kikuyu women who perform the operation and the girls who undergo it and how they feel at the time the operation is done. Do the Kikuyu women believe that the operation is crucial to maintaining cultural identity, what about the pain and death involved? Ngugi being a native and male defends the Kikuyu practices against European Christian values. Because he was defending the practice, he was not about to write about the pain and death involved. Even though Muthoni dies, Ngugi represents the practice in the best of light in order to persuade Europeans that female circumcision may be barbaric to them, but is crucial to preserving Kikuyu tribal identity.

Alice Walker is an outsider culturally, being a woman her presentation of the practice of clitoridectomy among the Olinka people is less biased than Ngugi's. She questions the women about their perceptions and experiences. Walker, has helped the reader by establishing the importance of the study of gender in structuring human societies, their histories, ideologies, economic systems and political structures.

But as argued earlier Walker writes as an outsider. Who has watched and observed these rites of passage. Yet, being a woman, she writes from the point of view of the women. However, her argument of seeing "the privileged and explanatory potential of gender difference" as the origin of female circumcision prevents Walker from discussing the fact that in Africa the actual cutting is only part of rite that young people undergo as an initiation rite into adulthood. Her view

also prevents her from recognizing that women may experience the rites of passage differently from the way she feels. She also ignores the functional value the ceremony may have- particularly the intrinsic value the participants may enjoy. Perhaps, the operation contributes to the participant's awareness of herself. Perhaps the women participants experience the operation as deeply meaningful, evoking emotions and feeling that do not exist in daily life.

Walker's argument that the primary reason clitoridectomy is performed on women is to control women's sexuality does not capture the African woman's scenario. Sex is part of life but it is not THE life as Buchi Emecheta puts it (177). The beauty in African women is not sex only. It is arguable that African women believe that they are here for many, many things not just cultivating themselves pretty for men and in attaining sexual orgasm. Infact the polygamy she criticizes so much and sees it as a form of oppression and way of male dominating women is sometimes seen as a weapon which women use and to work for themselves. As Emecheta argues :

Few of our women go after sex per se. If they are with their husbands they feel they are giving something out of duty, in love or in order to have children. A young woman might dream of romantic love, but as soon as they start having children their loyalty is very much to them, and they will do everything in their power to make life easier for them.(176)

Ngugi includes gender insensitivity as part of the Western hypocritical view of

democracy. In Moving the Centre (1993) he says that there is need for a shift in attitude from dominant views that marginalize certain sectors in the society. Moving the Centre, for Ngugi, includes “Freeing of world culture from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender”. To Ngugi, gender comes last in along list of categories. Ngugi is more angered by the tendency to look down upon the peasant, and equate the rural person with illiteracy and women. One feels the view that to be equaled with a woman is an insult. On the contrary, Alice Walker incorporates the male subject in her politics of difference. There is a host of admirable characters in her fiction. These include Adam, Tashi’s husband Pierre, her stepson and Mzee the psychiatrist. This shows walker as a committed artist who is ready to call on other gender into her fiction to enable her aesthetically pass her message across.

A reading of Ngugi’s The River Between and Alice Walker’s Possessing The Secret of Joy shows that writing not only conveys a message about the content, but also conveys a message about the writer. We agree with Mwangi when he says that “a creator’s subjectivity cannot be fully erased from his or her creative product. Although the writer’s presence may be guaranteed, its absence is impossible” (58). The writers are writing themselves, incorporating personal experiences into fiction works.

In this chapter we have attempted a comparative gender based analysis of Ngugi’s The River Between and Walker’s Possessing the Secret of Joy. We have come

to a conclusion that the author's subjectivity cannot be erased from their works. Though African and male, Ngugi responds to the issue of initiation of the African woman as an outsider. He does not appreciate the technicalities that go with this rite of passage. Although being gender insensitive, he does recognize that the practice of clitoridectomy contributes to and maintains gender hierchies in society.

While being African from the diaspora but female Walker responds to the issue of initiation as an insider. Though an outsider by virtue of her race and culture, she however depicts the practice of clitoridectomy as a woman who feels the pain. She interrogates the feelings of the victims and empathies with them.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the present study was to examine the conceptualisation of initiation and identity in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's The River Between and Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy. Secondly, to analyse how the same theme is treated in the above creative works. The study also set out to explore the gendered disparities that emerge as regards the portrayal of the theme. The assumptions underlying this investigation were anchored on the fact that one of the authors is African male while the other one is Afro-American female. The study's assumption is that there are gender-based differences in their writings.

By focusing on the principal characters in the two works all of whom are female, the study arrived at the conclusion that the two writers treat the woman's condition differently. It is apparent that the two writers in dealing with the issue of initiation and identity develop two divergent perspectives.

Ngugi considers clitoridectomy as crucial to the maintenance of a tribe as a separate distinct tribal entity. There is need therefore for the woman to undergo the ritual. Walker's view is that clitoridectomy is a form of violence against the woman for it entails the mutilation of the geography of a woman's body. We further explored how oppressive gender relations and hierarchies are maintained through the practice of clitoridectomy.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, writing from the background of the Kikuyu culture and tradition, and defending his people against colonialist missionary strives to make the point that initiation is key to forming the identity of an African woman. He further argues that the loss of this practice is the loss of values, traditions and structures of the entire society. Ngugi subscribes to Kenyatta's contention that for both boys and girls, initiation into adulthood – through circumcision or clitoridectomy marked their admission into full membership of the Kikuyu society and was a very momentous occasion both socially and individually.

Through circumcision and the period of initiation and instruction that accompanied it, an individual became a full participant in society as a whole, beyond the scope of the village and their families. Their responsibilities, therefore, extended not just to their family group, but to the Kikuyu as a community.

The River Between thus demonstrates the value and importance attached to clitoridectomy. Even when Muthoni dies from the wound inflicted on her as a result of undergoing the ritual, she is happy and fulfilled and that is why she says "I am a woman beautiful in the tribe (66).

Walker on the other hand, writing as an Afro-African woman argues that clitoridectomy is set up as a process of violence against women. Through her main character Tashi, Walker reveals the plight of the woman as she undergoes

the ritual earlier. Earlier in the novel Tashi undergoes clitoridectomy so as to be able to retain her Olinkan tradition. But later when she is grown and married and re-locates to the United States of America, she redefines herself. She realises that clitoridectomy is only a form of violence on the woman. She therefore decides to fight the ritual. She returns home, kills M'lissa the circumciser who is a representative of the ritual of circumcision. Walker explores the black woman's struggle to claim herself, in order to change her life and secure her rightful place within the society.

Their views regarding the theme of initiation and how it informs the identity of the African woman vary. Ngugi defends the Kikuyu practices against European Christian values. He represents the practice in the best of light in order to persuade westerners that female circumcision, barbaric as it may seem, is crucial to preserving Kikuyu tribal identity.

However, being male, Ngugi had no intention to emphasise the pain and death involved, even though Muthoni dies. Ngugi ignores the prescribed gender roles and imbalances that clitoridectomy enforces.

Walker writes as an outsider who has watched and observed the rites of passage. But being a woman, she writes from the point of view possible of the woman. She can visualise the pain and physical harm the operation may cause which eludes her male counterpart. But by being an outsider she misses the fact that in Africa, the

actual cutting is only part of the rite that young people undergo as an initiation rite into adulthood.

Although Ngugi's presentation of the practice of clitoridectomy appears objective and neutral, he ignores the experiences and perceptions of the women involved. He is less conscious of gender relations or gender hierarchies. But Walker gives us the perceptions and experiences of the woman and the fact that clitoridectomy creates gender hierarchies in society.

This project was very specific and as such was limited to Ngugi's The River Between and Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy. Although the researcher was aware that the two authors are prolific writers who have other texts to their credit, the nature and scope of the study gave no room to venture into their works.

However, this study would not give due credit to Ngugi and Walker without a recognition of the fact that in their other works they have broadened their perspectives on the woman question and woman's position in society.

In conclusion, therefore, while analysing Ngugi's and Walkers approaches to the issues of initiation and identity, the study raises other issues such as the role of women in male-dominated societies. Such pertinent socio-cultural issues would be interesting to revisit in the context of a future, comparative study of other works by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Alice Walker in addition to The River Between and

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