

# Juxtaposition of Women, Culture, and Nature in Alice Walker's *Possessing The Secret Of Joy*

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the tradition of women's circumcision in the African tribe of Olinkan in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The Olinkans are asked by the white settlers to stop women's mutilation, but Olinkan men continue this custom stealthily to ensure their patriarchal dominance. This novel is a complicated juxtaposition of two different types of oppression: one by White male colonizers over an African native land, and the other one by the native Olinkan men over native women. In this juxtaposition women and land are both victims exploited and manipulated by men, no matter Black or White. This novel is also seen as a fertile ground to analyze the dual domination of both nature and women by the Olinkan men and White colonizers who are both trying to impose their androcentric rules that are created to dominate women and land, respectively.

Keywords: Alice Walker, ecofeminism, patriarchy, female genital mutilation, colonization

## INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* that Cogeanu (2011) introduces as "the most African of [Walker's] novels...with a painful and revolting subject matter...a text that comes closest to political activism" is an intricate narration in which women and land are depicted as passive sources subordinated to men for materialistic goals. However, it is also a revolutionary attack on the oppressive customs of White colonizers whose domination is fought back, through the novel, by Olinkan men who are themselves depriving women of their natural right over their body and forcing them to undergo genital mutilation. Ironically, although the novel is a colonial piece of writing not talking about land explicitly, the omnipresence of land is implied by the cultural imperialism and White missionaries' desire to replace the native culture with that of their own. It can be categorized as one of Walker's novels, however, that regardless of their geographical or socio-cultural context try to analyze "societies that suffer from cultural shifts and decline" (Lalbakhsh & Torkamaneh, 2015). It can also be considered a novel that demonstrates how a specific kind of "historical invasion" can end in "identity dilemma" that leaves "people with instable identity" (Mahmoodi, 2012).

The novel has been approached by many critics and scholars who have read and analyzed it from different

points of views perhaps because, as Wankhade's (2015) observes, it is a novel that is concerned with "the quest and consciousness for Black identity, their individual relation with society on various dimensions of spiritual, social, physical, cultural, and the problems of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as racism and sexism". Teard (2011) introduces the novel as one of Walker's works that "demonstrates [that]...wholeness is achieved through reconciliation but also through creation". Dent (1992) calls it a novel "that at once appropriates and recontextualizes the restrictive neocolonial adage that gives Walker her title. Kuhne (1999) believes that by focusing on a "brutal ritual that was once largely unknown in the West" Walker has made the issue a "controversial issue" to be attended to by American culture and political system. Another critic, Moore (2000), has highlighted Jung's archetypal patterns of ego, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the Self in Walker's novel. Brum (2005) has tried to foreground the extent Tashi comes to be a tool in the hands of Walker for showing her anger and loathe toward the different forms of oppression that females suffer from. Gaard (2000), on the other hand, defines the novel as an exploration of "the meaning and relevance of traditional practices which harm women and yet are seen as cornerstone of cultural preservation", and Gourdine (2002) maintains that the novel "critiques the myths

of culture that sanction and sustain ‘mutilation’ and attempts to create for its women subjects a tradition that is liberating and conducive to build strong gendered selves”.

However, taking an ecofeminist approach in this paper, we are concentrating on the concurrent relationship of women, culture, and nature to foreground both types of oppression—one over Olinka and another over Olinkan women—side by side, and to argue that Walker’s depicted world in her novel is a world in which females and land are both considered victims to the oppression which is imposed on them by Olinkan men and White colonizers. Emerging in 1970s and 1980s as a body of feminist and environmental concerns, ecofeminism’s innovation was critical thinking in relating the capitalist and patriarchal institutions’ domination of nature to that of women.

## DISCUSSION

It can be argued that ecofeminism, in general, links environmental activities with those of feminism and the idea of oppression that in any case is performed by men. What exasperates ecofeminists is the devaluation of both women and nature by men to extort their hidden energy in their own favor and for more power and dominance. We cannot deny that the long history of domination, for different reasons, has created the affinity between women and nature in many ecofeminists’ notion. “An ecofeminist,” he maintains, “might claim that the analogy between ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ is inherent, or (increasingly) that it is historically contingent” (Buell, 2005). By definition, therefore, Ecofeminists try to stop the increasing trend of nature destruction in order to change the whole system of domination because ecofeminism holds that “the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (Gaard, 1993). To support Gaard’s proposition, Ruether (1975) refers to the liberation of nature as the best practical way to terminate women’s oppression, because she believes that the system of nature’s domination is the same as that of women’s, and must be overturned to stop any form of oppression in the world.

What makes ecofeminists sympathize with nature is the fact that a lot of cultures and civilizations have given feminine attributions to land and considered it as a feminine entity. In Greek mythology, for example, the goddess of fertility and childbirth is female. As Egan (2006) points it out, “The likening of

human female fertility with the fertility of the Earth is, of course, a major poetic trope present in every culture and underlying the common metaphor of Mother Earth”. Mythology, too, holds that human being is created from the offspring of the male god on the body of female earth. Talking about the femininity of earth Egan (2006) refers to Bate’s idea of the Mother Earth that “Nature is calling to us in a voice like that of our primal mother. Likewise, in many cultures, the dominating god is male while the dominated land is female and this myth of creation has caused many ecofeminists to emphasize the link between female oppression and the oppression imposed on the land. The myth of creation, therefore, introduces the earth as a female body whose validity and values are established and determined if a male god approaches her. Such long established assumption justifies the patriarchal supposition that both nature and the female are there to be at the service of males. As Buell (2005) puts it, “nature having been androcentrically constructed as a domain for males, in contradistinction to female-coded domestic space, yet at the same time symbolically coded as female – [is] an arena of potential domination analogous to the female body”.

The domination of female body and land has also come to be Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Here too the only way of male god’s intimacy with the female earth is the intercourse which according to the Olinkan story is that of rape and force, not free will and satisfaction. As such, the female members of Olinka are dominated by male members, who deprive women of enjoying their full femininity by forcing them to undergo a nonhuman surgery that rips women off their entire feminine identity. This stands in parallel with the remark that “Subjugation of women and nature may be a loss of intimacy within themselves” (Allister, 2001).

## Culture and Nature in Colonialism and Ecofeminism

Power, subordination and oppression are seminal facets of colonialism since they are the colonizers’ means for further exploitation of native lands and its inhabitants. Human’s desire for owning extended areas of the untamed lands mobilized White colonizers into such off-the-beaten-path territories as Africa. Being full of gold mines and other precious stones besides the lush jungles replete with biodiversity turned Africa into a certain region for most of colonizers’ ambition for the exploitation of nature. But exploiting nature under the pretext of civilization and culture has created a dichotomy in which culture/nature became two opposite poles. In many of eco-

feminists' arguments the deliberate construction of binaries to define concepts in an androcentric society is the easiest way to dominate. As a result, civilization and culture have turned into the primary goals of the male colonizers arriving at newly discovered lands.

In many of the colonial stories the lush jungles of Africa are the symbols of evil and brutality while the White settlers are introduced as representatives of enlightenment and culture. The most noticeable example of the land of darkness and brutality is the dark forest of Amazon which is indicative of primitivism and brutality. In most of Europeans' first colonial stories the Amazon is "virtually" in "every part of non-European world, and provide images of insatiable sexuality and brutality" (Loomba, 2005). Along with White settlers' further permeation into the dark lands of Africa, however, the dichotomy of nature/culture became more noticeable. To establish the foundation of civilization and culture White settlers started preaching new ideologies and rejected any part of native people's life as uncivilized and primitive. They even used priests in the native lands to proselytize Christianity and started to change people's dress code for further assimilation with White culture.

Following this system of hegemony, the dichotomy of Self/Other was added to that of culture/nature. Interestingly, all these dichotomies and further ones have been created by the androcentric societies to facilitate any form of oppression. As Jordanova (1980) asserts, any kind of hierarchy and the dichotomies in which nature/culture and Self/Other are discussed are means for further imperialistic purposes alongside the women's suppression under the pretext of the "ideology of progress" which can also be regarded as "a struggle between the sexes, with men imposing their value systems on women in order to facilitate social progress". In this sense both nature and women are reduced to resources by patriarchal system, while ecofeminists, using the "ecological science," renounce any kind of hierarchy and dichotomy in the nature since in their notion the whole cosmos is related and there is not any split between different parts of it. Indeed, they condemn the androcentric structure of society for creating and imposing dichotomies to such concepts as nature and women. As King (1983b) puts it "Ecological science tells us that there is not hierarchy in nature itself, but rather a hierarchy in human society".

Most of ecofeminists believe that any form of oppression is a way to duplicate any further oppression on women because any form of oppression is produced by male dominated tendency toward hier-

rarchy. "[We in the ecofeminist movement] believe in the philosophy of nonviolence – that no person should be made into an 'other' to despise, dehumanize and exploit" (King, 1983a). In her opinion the process of objectification and turning nature and women into mere resources for imperialistic interests are the rudiments of their oppression; that is why she asserts "as women we have been an 'other' but we are refusing to be the 'other' any longer and we will not make anyone else into an 'other'. Sexism, racism, class divisions, homophobia and the rape of nature depend on this process of objectification". In this sense, objectification of nature for its materialistic and imperialistic aspects has facilitated its oppression by the male colonizers who have tried to tame and exploit nature under such pretexts as civilization and culture. The process of objectification of nature as an inevitable part of colonialist exploitation over virgin lands has created a model of oppression that appears in most of ecofeminists' arguments because it is believed that all systems of oppressions are interconnected and duplicated in the objectification and subordination of women. Therefore, the best way to eliminate any type of oppression is breaking any dichotomy that serves the capitalist patriarchal ideology.

### **Nature/Culture Dichotomy in Olinka**

Olinka is an example of exploited African lands where White colonizers try to create a new system of dominance. Trying to exploit its natural resources for capitalistic interests, the White colonizers practice different types of hegemony over Olinka. To enhance this dominance they have created a hierarchy in which culture/nature, White/Black and Self/Other are well-established. Thus Olinka can be considered the land where both colonization of land by White Western colonizers and that of native women by their male-dominated tribe are concurrent.

Although, unlike other Walker's works, the exploitation of nature by White colonizers is not explicitly depicted in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, its importance and presence can be felt in the culture/nature dichotomy. As Esposito (2010) puts it Walker provides a spiritual revisioning that embraces nature while questioning the masculine doctrines and religious institution. Like other colonized lands, Olinka is exploited for its mines, goals and its natural resources and in the name of enlightenment. In this dichotomy White culture is imposed while native people show resistance by not yielding to it and adhering to their own traditions. In fact the dichotomy of culture/nature is partly implied by showing people's resistance in not accepting the new culture. This reminds us of

Merchant (2006) clarifying “that material or ecological changes [may not] *cause* or *determine* ideological changes. Rather, they make some ideas prevalent at a given time seem more plausible than others”. Ironically, Colonizers’ first step to establish their dominance over Olinkans is to create the culture/nature binary opposition based on which nature should be at the service of culture. This is why any sign of native culture and ideology is obliterated and replaced by newly preached White ideologies. Even Olinkan dress code is to be replaced by White settler’s costumes. Under the pretext of civilization and culture colonizers extend their monopoly over both human and natural resources of Olinka. This is well in parallel with the idea that identifies “The weather forecaster who tells us what Mother Nature has in store for us this weekend and legal systems that treat a woman’s sexuality as her husband’s property ... equally guilty of perpetuating a system repressive to both women and nature” (Merchant, 1980).

Infuriated by imperialism after the permeation of colonialism in their lands, Tashi expresses her feeling of how the Whites had exploited their native land and its virgin nature under the name of culture and civilization: “why don’t they just steal our land, mine our gold, chop down our forests, pollute our rivers, enslave us to work on their farms, fuck us, devour our flesh and leave us alone?” (Walker, 1992). To nullify White colonizers’ further exploitation of natural and human resources, the novel’s native people try to keep their customs and culture alive. In this sense, they start to fight back by adhering to their traditional as a defense mechanism. By protecting their cultural heritage they endeavor to break the dichotomy that puts nature and culture in two opposite poles. For Olinkans the only way to extricate their land from colonization is by keeping such customs as scarring the face and Female Genital Mutilation alive; as a result, new culture will not find the opportunity to be established and no dichotomy is made to sacrifice nature in favor of culture. Adhering to the Olinkan tradition to resist colonization, Tashi puts emphasis on their duty to fight “the White oppressors without ceasing; without, even, the contemplation of ceasing; for they would surely still be around during our children’s and our children’s time...That we must take back our land” (Walker, 1992).

In the eyes of Tashi and her people colonizers are thieves and the cause that made them “stripped of everything but [their] black skins” (Walker, 1992). They want colonizers to leave their lands and let them alone. That is why Tashi puts emphasis on “struggle for our people” and calls Olivia and her family foreigners who should “ship [themselves] back

home” one day. Like Tashi, Olinkans hate the way that Whites try to assimilate Blacks into Whites’ lifestyle and religion, bringing them a “God someone else chose for you”. Ironically, while during her childhood Tashi and her mother turn to Christianity, as an adult she finds herself committed to her native tribe’s religion and rituals, therefore, rejects Christianity in favor of Olinka’s religion. Even she stops wearing European clothes and sneers at the way Olivia, the missionary’s daughter, has dressed through all these years in Olinka not “[wearing] the maelie row fan hairstyle that was traditional with Olinka women” (Walker 1992). Likewise is Tashi’s scarring her face willingly to prove her commitment to her Olinkan roots; a practice about which Olivia says, “one of the things we thought we’d helped stop was the scarring or cutting of tribal marks on the faces of young women” (Walker 1992).

Thus, against missionaries’ expectations, native Olinkans prefer to stick to their customs, though false and irritating, to force colonizers to leave their occupied lands; that is why Olivia comments on Tashi’s scarred face as “a way the Olinkan can show they still have their own ways, said Olivia, even though the White man has taken everything else”. For native people the Whites were the marauders who had ripped them off whatever they had and the only precious things they have and wish to preserve are their forefathers’ customs. As a member of this tribe then Tashi feels herself in the state of betraying her tribe’s survival in the face of White colonizers by not doing genital mutilation and scarring face. Therefore, aware of its excruciating pain she accepts to jeopardize her health and connubial life in favor of doing genital mutilation; hence Olivia’s belief that “Tashi didn’t want to do it, but to make her people feel better she’s resigned” (Walker, 1992).

In spite of Olivia’s assertion that nobody in Europe or America does what Olinkan do to themselves, implying the uncivilized nature of the Olinkan tradition, Tashi does not yield to the Olivia’s idea preferring to be attached to her own tribal tradition that gives her more satisfaction and sense of achievement. To Olivia’s surprise “Tashi was happy that the initiation ceremony isn’t done in Europe or America ... that makes it even more valuable to her”. To justify her reason for accepting her tribal customs Tashi refers to the heredity that is hidden in customs and nobody can evade his or her responsibility to follow “the arrangements that come down to [her]”. Indeed, Tashi rejects any endeavor from Whites’ part to stop such custom as scarring the face. In fact she believes that in spite of missionaries’ struggle to replace their culture with White culture, Olinkans adhere to their roots,

because despite “big campaign against what they called the scarring of our faces with the Olinka tribal markings” Olinkans feel “obviously proud of” markings that their ancestors had on their faces” that is why it gets very difficult for them “to hear the missionaries’ objections, or to care about the missionaries themselves” (Walker, 1992). Neglecting tradition means losing their true identity and culture and letting colonizers to exploit their soul as well as their land.

### **Female Genital Mutilation and Sexual Oppression**

Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is an obvious example of a society in which the patriarchal ideologies are dominant, and tribe's women, from their early childhood, are demanded to follow the male defined customs and norms to preserve the tribe's sanity. Olinkan men are allowed to have three or more wives at the same time without any responsibility to satisfy women's emotional needs, while these women are forced to live with one man even if the husband is not suitable to live with. Such domination, however, is imposed systematically by a society whose ideology and worldview establishes women's suppression and submissiveness. Most of Olinkan women feel some sort of emotional emptiness in their connubial life and to fill this emotional gap, and to forget it at least for some time, they fill it with hard work; hence, Tashi's pronouncement that “only hard work ... fills the emptiness” (Walker, 1992).

However, to be a real woman in Olinkan culture, genital mutilation must be done and a young girl is not accepted as a natural woman and worthy to get married unless she accepts to do it. Tashi's description of the status of an uncircumcised woman and her difficult life under ridicule and humiliation is telling. It is through her words which we come to a vivid picture of the unacceptability of one for having an “uncircumcised vagina,” since “after all, none of them had vagina lips; none of them had a clitoris; they had no idea what these things looked like”. In this way sexual dissatisfaction and suffering that are the outcome of mutilated deformed genitalia come to be an extra burden added to the emotional gap that Olinkan women are suffering from. It is this deformity that changes their intercourse to one painful and torturing experience accompanied by heavy bleeding. This is while Olinkan men believe that women's sexual organ is unclean before mutilation and that is why they force them to get rid of their womanhood while nobody insults their manhood and nobody dares to deprive them of their body under the excuse of being unclean or monstrous. As Adam says, “If every man in this court room had had his penis

removed, what then? Would they understand better that condition is similar to that of all the women in the room?”. Witnessing Tashi's mental disorders, Adam points to the pain all the women undergoing mutilation have been experiencing, reminding that “the women are suffering from an unnatural constriction of flesh their bodies have been whittled and refashioned into” .

Additionally is the fact that the omnipresent pain and suffering women tolerate deprives them of the opportunity to think about themselves as free humans equal to men in terms of sexual pleasure and other life enjoyments. While Smith (2014) believes that bodily scars of mutilation signify women's resistance to patriarchal control over their gender and sexual beings and identities Tashi's explanation about her ignorance to her own body before her trip to the United States is the proof of such claim of deprivation as she says that her body was just a big “mystery” to her. They were told that they need to cut their “unclean parts of their bodies out” and “Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they'd soon touch her thighs; she'd become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way” (Walker, 1992).

But the world of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is not only a very dangerous world for women, it is also a dangerous world for the men who do not follow the tradition and show lenience in their treatment of their women. Torab is such a young husband who is thrown out of the village because he is believed to lose control of his wife, a very evil thing to do in that society because it threatens the fabric of the web of life – at least the web of life as the villagers knew it. While the young man dies “deserted, filthy in tatters,” the girl's family is forced to move out of the village and the girl's body is “dragged from the river and left to rot, her body food for vultures and rodents” . Accordingly, Olinkan women are the target of the men's sheer brutality which is not only excruciating women but all the men who do something against the tribe's patriarchal norms and practice. Ironically, Tashi's interpretation of men's brutality against women is that it is their secret weapon to paralyze women and ruin their self-confidence leaving them submissive and subdued.

Therefore, Olinkan men have been preserving this custom for decades by keeping its nature secret and by prohibiting talking about either mutilation or its outcomes. As a result, Olinkan women have gradually changed into “perfect audience” that as Tashi puts it, is “mesmerized by our unconscious know-

ledge of what men, with the collaboration of our mothers, do to us". Thus, through the course of time, the older women change into the guardians of a custom that keeps the monopoly of the male elders alive and ongoing. M'Lissa is an example of such women who, as George (2001) puts it, "is a complex product of culture and individual history" serving as a guardian of male-defined customs and tradition. While she has been the victim of mutilation as a child and part of her body is lame due to its side effects, she has been practicing it on all the young girls of the tribe and is responsible for Dura's death and Tashi's mental disorders. In spite of her complicity in hurting and leading many young girls into death, M'Lissa is known and announced as a sacred national monument for her selfless struggles to keep tradition alive and she is even, after her murder by Tashi, turned into a saint whose life was devoted to humanity.

Furthermore, the society reacts to the revelation of Adam about the effect of the mutilations. Defending Tashi in the court, Adam points to the destructive effect of mutilation on her mental sanity. All the audience from Olinka get infuriated by hearing that their taboo is being discussed publicly and, even worse, by a stranger who is not from their tribe. They condemn Tashi for killing a saint and preserver of their tradition, and calling Adam a "disgraceful American" order him to "shut up" and not to put their "business...in the streets" because they firmly believe Mother Lissa has been a "monument...the Grandmother of the race" (Walker, 1992). They cannot tolerate a stranger commenting on "accepted tradition of which they are a part that has gone on, as far as they know, forever".

### **Women Oppression through Female Body and Female Stereotypes**

In the previous section we discussed aspects of female oppression in the novel in terms of sexual and emotional suffering they tolerate under a patriarchal system that tries to keep its ideology in place and ongoing no matter what happens to women as the victims of such oppressive system. In this section, however, we examine the female stereotypes created to keep women tame, submissive and inert and the manipulation of female body through the creation myth that has come down from one generation to another. Tashi remembers the story of female earth waiting for the male god to circumcise it:

The earth is flat, but the north is at the top. It extends east and west with separate members like a fetus in the womb. It is a body, that is to say, a thing with members branching out from a central mass. This body, lying flat, faces

upwards, in a line from north to south, is feminine (Walker, 1992)

The prevalent myth in Olinka narrating the way creation started and human beings spread over the earth holds that mother earth was a woman who fascinated a male god with a strong desire to sleep with her. As the myth holds it the sexual organ of the earth was like that of the god, so the god himself was forced to mutilate mother earth to create human beings. As Olinkan creation myth reveals it, "the creation itself [begins] with mutilation and rape..." (Walker, 1992); that is a way for men to keep women "enslaved by their own body". Ironically, prior to undergoing genital mutilation, Tashi is satisfied with her womanhood and enjoys a normal life with Adam, but after mutilation she notices that the feeling of emptiness grows in her soul due to the removal of a part of her identity. It is after mutilation that Tashi feels the anger toward her tribe's men for deceiving women and ruling over them. She starts to see herself as a woman who has been robbed of her true self, paying no attention any longer to the racial issues that had preoccupied her before being circumcised. From that point onward she feels that prior to the color issue of Black and White is Red, "the color of woman's blood."

In such society an ideal woman is a tool who acts based on tradition to meet the demands of a male dominated society. Therefore, "a proper woman" is considered to "be cut and sewn to fit only her husband, whose pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, even years to enlarge". As such, the role of women in Olinka, as Olivia mentions it, is "to suffer, to die, and not know why". Tashi believes that under such patriarchal society it is not possible for women to feel and find their true self; that is, women cannot feel "that look of confidence. Of pride. Of peace ... because self-possession will always be impossible [for them] to claim" (Walker, 1992). Thus women are not even the owner of their bodies and identity, since their body is a means for their servitude. Ascribing stereotypical roles to women in this society weakens their self-image and keeps them in a state of hollowness and inertness since they are raised to live with these stereotypical roles without having a space left for greater individual growth and powerful roles in their social and private life.

Interestingly, one of the characters tells Tashi about the female African ancestors, "Early African women, the mother of womankind" who were "notoriously free!" (Walker 1992). However, notwithstanding this fact, the Olinkan men adopt the White colonizers' strategy and create stories about feminine roles in

their society to keep them under their control. By keeping the tradition of storytelling among men they wish to keep the stereotypes of men and women alive and effectual. It is through such stories that the ideological basis of women's oppression and subjugation is laid. As Tashi remembers it, in their stories, men have always mentioned a woman as a Queen who has been given to them by god, himself, so that they can treat her as they like, "to feed her so well that she will stay plump...even her excrement will be plump (they laugh)". This is ironic because they are understood and treated not as real queens but as the queen of "white ants" imprisoned in a dark whole, without any power to fly because the wings are plucked out to be inert and paralyzed and never to be able to leave her prison, "If left to herself Queen would fly...and then where would we be? But God is merciful. He clips her wings. She is inert". So, the story that Tashi heard is different from the reality that happens in the community,

Following the Olinkan myth, men force girls to undergo mutilation to be like the inert queen in future, but surprisingly they never take the responsibility of this cruelty toward women and know god responsible and willing for women impotency. They justify their acts by relying on the idea that god has "put the Queen's body there to make [their] offspring" (Walker 1992). Thus the only role for women is to be machines to produce children. Ironically, Men's argument is a haphazard mixture of myth and religion that they concoct to justify their ways in treating a woman; a god-given gift "whose body has been given to [them] to be [their] sustenance forever" (Walker, 1992).

The oppressive ideology of the male-defined Olinkan society leaves women psychologically affected and paralyzed to the extent that Tashi finds herself in a constant state of perplexity intensified by terrible dreams of a dark tower wherein she is captivated and not allowed to move. The same dream is repeated in Tashi's nightmares, yet Tashi does not dare to talk about her inner terror and it is only by the help of her psychologist and Pierre that the riddle of her nightmares is revealed, "This is your dark tower. You are the Queen who loses her wings. It is you lying in the dark with millions of worker termites" (Walker, 1992). In her conversation with M'Lissa she admits that Olinka is a society enslaved by men's tradition of female circumcision to keep them silent, yet she insists that the first thing to be liberated is women's lives from the domination of Olinkan male supremacy; a dream that as Tashi pronounces at the time of her execution can come true through

'resistance' that is the secret of possessing joy (Walker, 1992).

## CONCLUSION

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a revolutionary novel in which the patriarchal world of Olinka is delineated courageously and critically. As the findings of this study show white colonialism and Olinkan patriarchal domination are two facets of women's oppression and subjugation. Occupying Olinka as a native African colony White settlers create a new system of hegemony over Olinka to exploit its mines, rivers, jungles, and whatever natural resources that could be financially beneficial for them. To be able to enhance their monopoly over Olinka they establish a new system of oppression based on which the dichotomy of culture/nature is defined. Ruling Olinkan native lands in the name of civilization and enlightenment, White settlers reject any sign of native culture in Olinka and try a system of assimilation based on which the Olinkans should practice a new identity imposed by white settlers. Creating this hegemony helps White male system of natural resources exploitation easier and more convenient. Accordingly, both women and nature are suffering from the same system of oppression imposed by male-oriented social institutions for the sake of capitalistic and social benefits. As a result, we can argue that by foregrounding the mechanism of androcentric systems, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* comes to be a resonant outcry for both women and nature liberty since both have been exploited by male-defined social institutions for capitalistic and personal interests.

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