



Between Pleasure and Danger: Tashi in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker

Ahou Alphonsine N'GUESSAN

Université Félix Houphouët Boigny –Abidjan Cocody (Côte d'Ivoire)

ahounguessan03@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper discusses the concept of Tashi in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. It argues that Tashi connects with the feminine body/ sex that brings pleasure and the matter as the effect of power. Using Michel Foucault's theory of pleasure and Judith Butler's theory of the matter of sex/bodies, the study reaches the conclusion that Tashi connotes the feminine body / sex caught between sexual exploration and agency as well as sexual violence and oppression.

Keywords: Tashi –feminine body/sex –pleasure –danger –sexual agency –sexual oppression

Résumé: Cette étude s'intéresse à Tashi en tant que concept dans *Possessing the Secret of Joy* de l'écrivaine Alice Walker. Elle soutient que le concept de Tashi en réalité définit le corps/ sexe féminin qui déclenche le plaisir sexuel et qui est un matériel au service de l'hégémonie patriarcale. En utilisant la théorie du plaisir de Michel Foucault et la théorie du matériel corps/ sexe de Judith Butler, l'étude conclut que Tashi implique le corps/ sexe féminin qui signifie autant de l'exploration et de l'agentivité sexuelle aussi bien que de la violence et de l'oppression sexuelle.

Mots clés: Tashi –corps/sexe féminin–plaisir –danger –agentivité sexuelle – oppression sexuelle



Introduction

Published by Alice Walker in 1992, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* plots excision, a cultural practice in Olinka, a fictional village, that initiates the girls as the path to womanhood. As a native of Olinka, Tashi is expected to go through excision, a vivid archaeology of what remains of the Olinka tradition following the arrival of the Black missionaries and the White colonists. In the novel, as stated by the character of Tashi –Evelyn, “ The very first day after Mbatl left, and I was required to wash M’Lissa, I saw why she was lame... Yes, touch it, my daughter, she exclaimed, as she felt my fingers exploring the keloidal tissue of the old wound, as hard as a leather shoe sole. It is the mark, on my body, of my own mother’s disobedience” (1992 :211).

This statement attests the character of M’Lissa yearning aroused by Tashi –Evelyn’s fingers on the old wound left on her body by excision during a moment of washing. It is such yearning that resounds “touch it.” Yet, “touch it” is subject to interpret the feminine body as what carries pleasure and, the danger occasioned by excision. It is such a context in which Tashi with the connotation of “touch it” attached to the feminine body is exposed to pleasure and danger that gives my interest in the following topic : “Between Pleasure and Danger : Tashi in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker.” The choice of this topic is motivated by Carole S. Vance’s essay entitled “Pleasure and Danger : Exploring female Sexuality.” To preclude any misunderstanding on this topic, it is of paramount importance to define the key terms “pleasure” ; “danger.”

If for Vance the pleasure of sexuality is simultaneously a domain of “explorations of the body, curiosity, intimacy, sensuality, adventure, excitement, human connection, basking in the infantile and non-rational” ; the dangers of sexuality are occasioned by “violence, brutality, and coercion, in the form of rape, forcible incest, and exploitation, as well as everyday cruelty and humiliation” (1984 :1). Bringing to the fore the critic’s view is to consider Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and the character of Tashi who generates various meanings : the pleasure of sexuality through explorations of the feminine body ; excitement on the one hand and, the dangers of sexuality in form of sexual coercion and exploitation on the other.

In *Helene Cixous : Writing and Sexual Difference* (2005), Abigail Bray quotes Helene Cixous who understands *writing* as an essential practice which relies upon sexual difference. If writing is about recuperating the feminine body through the text, Cixous suggests that “There’s tactility in the feminine text, there’s touch, and this touch passes through the ear. Writing in the



feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic” (28). One way of reading the quotation from Cixous is to take cognizance of the notion of touch in the feminine text. Indeed, Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* underscores the relevance of the concept of “touch” in studying Tashi. As well, the critic Luce Irigaray considers touch as “this sex which is [not] One” and explains it as follows :

About woman and her pleasure...woman lives her own only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ...she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman "touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two –but not divisible into one(s) –that caress each other. (1985 : 23-24)

In the above passage, Irigaray basically argues that a woman is more able to experience pleasure without the mediation of a man. She supports that woman and her pleasure undoubtedly is at the source of one factor which makes it unavoidable, that is, “touches herself all the time.” Needless to emphasize, woman and her pleasure is essentially about the fact that she touches herself all the time without any man’s assistance. There is one reason for a woman to experience pleasure alone. In fact, the simple possession of genitals which are formed of two lips and which, a woman effectively touches or caresses makes her to assume independent sexual choices that come as the result of pleasure.

The idea of the exploration of woman's pleasure highlighted by Irigaray is opposed to sexual danger indeed manifest in Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar’s *Warrior Marks : Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1993). Thus the term “Warrior Marks” is just an expression used for violence, oppression and humiliation against the feminine body and the interpretation of the woman’s dangerous sexual experience. Thus, How does Tashi enter into women’s sexual pleasure experience as well as their dangerous sexual experience? Put in details, How does Tashi convey the discourse of sexual pleasure and danger? In which sense Tashi represents sexual pleasure and danger? To explore the different questions, the study uses Michel Foucault’s theory of pleasure and Judith Butler’s theory of the matter of sex/bodies.

The work is structured in two sections. The first section deals with the lesbian phallus and the use of pleasure. It highlights Tashi who brings pleasure to her genitals through masturbation, a lesbian practice. By so doing, her genitals become the phallus especially the representation of sexual dominance, autonomy through the pursuit of pleasure. The second section is about the elsewhere that matters. It shows that a woman’s genitals are attributed the stereotype of elsewhere, that is, unclean and impure and therefore, is found as matter or sexual danger. As



such, female circumcision or else, genital excision and mutilation are used to fulfill men's ideology that will perpetuate the woman's genitals as the elsewhere that matters.

1- The Lesbian Phallus and the Use of Pleasure

The Lesbian Phallus, which Judith Butler invokes in *Bodies that Matter*, is considered "a possible site of desire" and, "of erotogenic pleasure" (1993 :91). In *Possessing*, the character of Evelyn (who is also given the name Tashi in the novel) converses with her therapist Raye who asks her the following question: "And yet it is from this time, before circumcision, that you remember pleasure?"

To Raye's question, Evelyn answers : "When I was little I used to stroke myself, which was taboo. And then, when I was older, and before we married, Adam and I used to make love in the fields. Which was also taboo. Doing it in the fields, I mean. And because we practiced cunnilingus" (1992 :120). Despite the apparent simplicity of Evelyn's explanation on the possibility for a woman to trigger pleasure through touching her sex, Raye keeps on asking "did you experience orgasm?"; Evelyn offers a sound conclusion when she states "Always" (1992 :120).

As we reconsider Evelyn's statement, we understand that pleasure is most probable when she conducts the sexual activity. According to her, she permanently experiences pleasure in a quite specific way. The foregoing quotation is about the mode of sexuality she goes through when she has to satisfy her libido. By attempting to give more detailed explications, she says, "I used to stroke myself."

Clearly, the earlier –mentioned "myself" means to consider the woman's self in matters concerning sexuality on the one hand and on the other hand, to point to the most important element of her body parts which is in the process of bringing up pleasure in the course of the sexual act. In addition to that, the notion of "stroke" as mentioned by Evelyn seems to have come under scrutiny. Whenever she passes her fingers with tender touch over her genital, she sort of produces pleasure. Such pleasure brings her to know how her body can make a difference when it leads her at the heart of sexual pleasure.

As we take into account what Judith Butler calls "the phallus", it is an imperative to bring about sexual pleasure as well as it is intended to stimulate one's sexual appetite. And, like in the case of Evelyn, it is therefore the phallus that gives such sexual pleasure. So, it is important to conclude that, with Evelyn as the center, we can see how her phallus triggers erotogenicity and finally falls into a lesbian category. Butler makes reference of Freud's conceptualization of



“phallus” in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud’s own definition of the “phallus” connotes “the privileged signifier...which originates or generates significations” (1993 :60).

Freud’s masterly examination along with his thematic orientation lead Butler to further elaborate this argument when she states ; “the privileged and generative signifier by...erotogenic body parts” (1993 : 61). Moreover, according to Butler’s thought, the phallus can be associated with “which confers erotogenicity and signification on these body parts” (1993 : 61). Needless to say, the proximity of the phallus with its predominant achievement in the form of erotogenicity confirms Butler’s assumption that it is indeed responsible for “conveying sexually exciting stimuli to the mind” (1993: 60). So, in this way, let us conclude that the phallus is that erotogenic zone.

Apparently, as far as we can understand, the phallus is fundamentally transferable and is, at the basis of erotogenic transferability, and yet, it is through this transfer that body parts become more accessible. Indeed, while referring to Walker’s fiction, Evelyn obtains pleasure from her body parts. So, to apply the phallus to her body parts presupposes that we acknowledge it as the origin for which pleasure exists. In other words, the character can bring or trigger any pleasure since certain zones of her body have become “an originary site of erotogenization” (1993 :60) as Butler phrases it. However, it seems to believe that the phallic property is restored to her body parts.

Additionally, Raye’s question “did you experience orgasm ?”, to which Evelyn replies can not go unnoticed. If Raye can afford to mention “orgasm”, she is extremely watchful as regards the one related to the genitals and which is experienced as an achievement of ejaculation. As matter of fact, what Michel Foucault denotes as “The Use of Pleasure” is plainly adequate as referring to orgasm. Foucault is rich in giving detail about “The Use of Pleasure” in the following : “the manner in which an individual managed his sexual activity...the conditions in which he accomplished sexual acts” (1985 :53).

Through the notion of the Use of Pleasure, one can also grasp what Foucault identifies as “masturbation” in sexual act. The critic defines “masturbation” as “the most direct means of appeasing sexual appetite” (1985 :55). Consequently, in the majority of the cases, the Use of Pleasure especially through Evelyn’s relationship with her phallus is provoked by, and the result of “masturbation.”

The practice of masturbation, which is possible to satisfy one’s sexual appetite through a simple contact with the genitals, is also applied by the character of Amy (Evelyn’s psychoanalyst). As



Amy puts it while referring to her own experience with masturbation, “when I was a very little girl I used to touch myself” (1992 :185). To fully grasp this statement, it is interesting to consider masturbation as when Amy touches her body parts as a way of triggering pleasure. Clearly, with Amy’s touch, she is fully aware of the possibility of making another area of transferability.

By evoking another practice similar to masturbation, Walker uses the image of “touching” (1992 :187). Touching is therefore the metaphor of the Use of Pleasure mainly through the process of “rubbing of the genitals” (1985: 127). It is this rubbing of the genitals that is mainly carried out by some characters in the author’s fiction. In *Possessing*, Evelyn gives an account on the pictures of statuettes. These pictures are on old photographs that M’Lissa (the traditional practitioner) has never thrown away. The statuettes are indeed considered in the novel as “dolls” or else “idols” (1992 :197).

From Evelyn’s comments, the idols go through a ritual that certainly emphasizes their use of pleasure. As she puts, “... smiling broadly, eyes closed, and touching...genitals...the word “MINE” were engraved on their fingers...” (1992 :197). Closely observed, the Use of Pleasure occurs through such fundamental body parts as fingers which therefore function identically and certainly “act as substitutes for the genitals and behave analogously to them” (1991: 60).

Seen from this angle, we may conclude that fingers carry out erotic function –that of stimulating the Use of Pleasure. In addition, by considering the word “MINE” as it is stated in the narratives, it becomes vital to this study. It is an important notion which somewhat echoes with the concept of “The woman –identified.” The lesbian critic Bonnie Zimmerman has explored “The woman –identified” which points to lesbian existence.

It is within “The woman –identified” that Zimmerman’s notion “What Has Never Been” (1985 :200) bears its significance. As Zimmerman deals with The woman –identified, she presents it as “the primacy of women bonding with women emotionally and politically,” (1985 :204). To put it in a nutshell, The woman –identified works favourably with a consciousness –changing group as it soundly summarizes, “We [women] see ourselves as prime, find our centers inside of ourselves” (1985 :204).

This statement probably means to underscore an exemplary lesson inscribed in a communal spirit. It is within this communal spirit that the ideology of the woman –identified emerges and consequently, women make certain to claim themselves as the centers. What is observed with these identified women is also true with the idols whose consciousness has definitely been the

woman –identified results in a natural reaction, that is “smiling.” sharpened that they articulate “MINE” to indicate their genitals which are also taken as women’s phallus. The meaning of “MINE” in consolidating the philosophy that holds

Remarkably, on sight of the idols’ smiling and the delightful atmosphere all around, M’Lissa decides to go ahead touching her own genitals. She provides the details of all these happenings in a lengthy explanation:

After my mother had left, I crept up to the tree in which the small wrapped object lay, and took it carefully down into my lap, where I unwrapped it. It was a small smiling figure with one hand on her genitals, every part of which appeared intact. This was before I was circumcised, and so, with the ready curiosity of a child, I lay right down to compare my vulva to the little statuette’s. 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. It was so sudden, so shocking and unexpected, it frightened me (1992 :213)

In light of the foregoing, when M’Lissa employs the term “compare”, this indeed exposes the fact that her genitals are effectively identified and therefore associated with the statuettes’. Obviously, it seems evident that M’Lissa has neither felt connected to her genitals nor imagined such outcomes as erection and ejaculation. As she declares, “I very cautiously touched myself” she in fact regards her undertaking as the expression of care and cautiousness. Moreover, such precautions taken by her are indicative of the fact that she has to exercise a great care in the handling of the genitals’ rubbing issue.

With the character of Celie in *The Color Purple*, Walker also articulates the causality link between the rubbing of the genitals and the Use of Pleasure. After a moment of hesitation, Celie accepts to hold the hand –mirror. She has the mirror in – between her legs when she states,

I lie back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking glass tween my legs. Ugh. All that hair. Then my pussy lips be black. Then inside look like a wet rose. It a lot prettier than you thought, ain’t it? She say from the door. It mine, I say. Where the button? Right up near the top, she say. The part that stick out a little. I look at her and touch it with my finger. A little shiver go through me. Nothing much. But just enough to tell me this the right button to mash. Maybe. She say, while you looking, look at your titties too. I haul up my dress and look at my titties. Think bout my babies sucking them. Remember the little shiver I felt then too. Sometimes a big shiver. Best part about having the babies was feeding ‘em. (1982 : 82)

In the above- quoted passage, the emphasis is put on the mirror, which recaptures Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic concept of the “Mirror Stage” (2006: 27). The fundamental role of Lacan’s mirror is that it provides a “reflected form” (2001: 1281) of the child’s whole image



that can be seen reflected through the instrument of the mirror. The Mirror Stage is fulfilled when Celie looks in the mirror and sees her image or reflected self.

The Lacanian implication becomes more apparent once Celie's genitals is reflected back to her through the mirror and, she then acknowledges it. To put it in Lacanian terms of "identification" and "recognition", Celie's reflected genitals are identified and recognized as "it mine." Indeed, the phrase "it mine" perpetuates the woman-identified mentality. There is "the fact that" as noticed by Adrienne Rich "a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience" (1980 : 648).

Through the instrument of the mirror Celie recognizes the "hair" that covers her pubis from the outer gaze, her "black pussy lips" and her feminine vagina symbolized as a "rose." At the sight of the hair, the black pussy lips and the 'rose', Celie adopts a contrary attitude. The hair represents Celie's self-revulsion, evident in her spontaneous "it mine." She sees the 'wet rose', the symbol of floral imaginary. The intertextual link between the vulvic images of the rose contextualizes Celie's moment of looking at her vulva for the first time as a kind of sexual awakening.

Foucault's the Use of Pleasure may be obvious with other characters in Walker's *Possessing*, apart from Evelyn and M'Lissa, who feel vaginal orgasm doing any other sexual acts. For example, Adam (Evelyn's husband) reports that, "a Berkeley student with whom Pierre [the son Adam has with his white concubine Lisette] often went horseback riding. She rode bareback, always, he tells me, as we sit on a boulder in the park in the middle of an afternoon hike. She experienced orgasm while riding the horse" (1992 :175).

Clearly, it is through the practice of horseback riding that Queen Anne (Adam's son Pierre's girlfriend) reaches orgasm. Horseback riding mainly functions to reinforce the Use of Pleasure. Without any doubt, Pierre will later confirms, it is only through such practice of horseback riding that "woman's pleasure might be found so easily" (1992 :175).

Similarly, always insisting on the case of Queen Anne, she would be familiar with vaginal orgasm anytime her naked body is connected to some elements of the nature, especially to the trees, the boulders and the earth. According to Adam's testimony, "...at home there were favorite trees she loved that she rubbed against. She could orgasm against warm, smooth boulders, like this one we're sitting on ; she could come against the earth itself if it rose a bit to meet her." (1992 :176). From what Adam's statement suggests, such natural things as trees, boulders, earth can become objects of eroticization, which may, in the end, lead to orgasm. In

a measure, it is through Queen Anne's relation with the trees, boulders and earth that she has experienced genital arousing and pleasure.

Moreover, Queen Anne is introduced to the reader as someone who "... never been with a man" (1992 :176). As well, beyond Queen Anne's refusal to stick with a man ; of more significance is her rejection of heterosexuality. Her attitude towards heterosexuality implies that she is "pansexual" (1992 : 178). Walker's own definition of the term "pansexual" means to be "related sexually to the earth itself" (1992 : 178).

As we can notice, Queen Anne's pansexual orientations indicates her denial of that sort of sexuality with a man. To cut it short, pansexuality is visibly a challenging project against heterosexuality because the procedure of rubbing of the genitals is reached outside man's phallus in the plan. As a privileged witness of Queen Anne's preference of pansexuality, Pierre has come to testify what follows;

I'm afraid my lovemaking had a dampering, a drying effect, he says. No matter how I tried, it was hard to approach her from a stance of dominance. When making love with me, she became less and less wet. His face is sad for a moment, then he grins. She went off to India, I think she left me for an elephant she learned to ride, or perhaps for a slow, warm trickle of water from a waterfall, of which there were many amorous ones on her Hawaiian island (1992 :176)

Pierre is perfectly aware of the frustrations and fear that are related to Queen Anne's sexual choices but on the other hand, the challenge is too important for him to face. Therefore, if she never achieves orgasm anytime she has sexual intercourses with him, there actually is nothing manly to be proud about. Pierre's manhood looks incomplete here because it has created reverse effects with a woman. With exasperation, he recognizes that "it was hard to approach her from a stance of dominance."

If we should rephrase Pierre's statement which acknowledges his failure to dominate, control sexually Queen Anne, it would read something like this : the sexual act normally never escapes the man's control over the woman. In other words, the man is the one who is always given prevalence over the woman and this, in order to perpetuate his phallic power and virility. The feminist theorist Kate Millet attempts to provide an idea of the same issue. She therefore formulates an overview of the term "politics" in the book *Sexual Politics*. So, on purpose, she writes, "Politics shall refer to power –structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons in controlled by another" (1970 :23).

If the relation between man and woman should be referred to politics, it must combine pleasure to power, satisfaction and moral or physical pain. What another feminist theorist Adrienne Rich



observes of the relationship between man and woman is equally transcribed through political lenses. It is the notion of “Compulsory Heterosexuality” that gives credence to Rich’s thought. By way of summary of her thought, Compulsory Heterosexuality reflects that sexual politics’ objective often orchestrated by males and points to it as a vector of power. In Rich’s analysis of “Compulsory Heterosexuality”, she links heterosexuality to “male dominance.”

Moreover, it is understood as “producing sexual inequality” (1980 : 638). The function of Compulsory Heterosexuality as “enforcing heterosexuality on women” (1980 : 640) is such an evident reality in Pierre and Queen Anne’s relation that it looks nearly important to mention it. Unfortunately, much to his surprise, Pierre fails in enforcing heterosexuality on Queen Anne. Although he plans to do so, during the sexual intercourses, the sexual organ or else “the penis”, Butler’s term, proves inadequate to fulfill its phallic functions such as penetration and jouissance ; but rather, it meets resistance.

All things considered, *The Lesbian Phallus and the Use of Pleasure* in Walker’s fiction certainly challenges the fundamentals of Compulsory Heterosexuality on the one hand and, encourages autonomous erotogenic choices simultaneously masturbatory and lesbian in nature on the other hand. For instance, in *Possessing* as well as in *The Color Purple*, many female characters see it important to make use of their phallus with the main purpose of appropriating the Use of Pleasure and of redefining their selves.

Quite unfortunately, as Walker observes, “Man is jealous of woman’s pleasure...because she does not require him to achieve it. When her outer sex is cut off, and she’s left only the smallest, inelastic opening through which to receive pleasure, he can believe it is only his penis that can reach her inner parts and give her what she craves” (1992 :178). Although Walker bases her analysis on the issue of *woman’s pleasure*, her observations are extended to specific maneuvers employed by man that do not favor a site in which woman can obtain pleasure.

Walker lays finger on significant practices whose objective is none but to keep control on the woman and therefore forbid her to enjoy sexual pleasure. Among such practices, there are what Walker’s narratives allow the reader to recall such as female circumcision (1992 :117) ; excision (1992 :118) or else genital mutilation (1992 :282). Female circumcision, excision or genital mutilation in *Possessing* reflect the sexual politics set by man that gives him an exceptional privilege and a feeling of superiority over the woman. Thus, the reader could guess man uses female circumcision, excision and genital mutilation that render him powerful and sustain his philosophy that holds “penis that can reach her inner parts and give her what she



craves.” To cut it short, the definitions of female circumcision, excision or genital mutilation evoke the image of “outer sex...cut off” in the narratives.

Besides, it is unquestionable that Compulsory Heterosexuality being a sexual politics which consists in annihilating woman’s pleasure, it is thus a powerful tool to the different issues of female circumcision, excision, genital mutilation in Walker’s novel. That being the case, the ‘Elsewhere’ seems to be interpreting the very condition of woman’s pleasure that is evidenced through the apparatus of Compulsory Heterosexuality. The ‘Elsewhere’ indeed matches “what is most strictly forbidden to women...that they should attempt to express their own pleasure” or else ; that “... leaves woman’s sexual pleasure aside” (1985 : 77). The ‘Elsewhere’ of woman’s pleasure is a tangible case of the persistence of “matter” that is, of “rupture or cut” (1993 :46).

2- The Elsewhere that Matters

The politics of Compulsory Heterosexuality operates concomitantly to perpetuate the notion of “elsewhere” of woman’s pleasure, and this, in order to define woman’s body parts as a sort of matter. It is indeed through the character of Our Leader in *Possessing* that we understand the functioning of the notion of “elsewhere” of woman’s pleasure. Indeed, Evelyn is the one who reports Our Leader’s discourse requesting the women to get rid of what he considers as “unclean parts.” A detailed reading of Our Leader’s message will definitely confirm the repulsive attribution of “unclean parts” to the woman’s body parts ;

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 (1992 : 119)

The message delivered by Our Leader is mainly focused on his intention of cleansing or purifying the woman. According to him, the unclean parts undoubtedly increase the risk of making her impure or unclean. Moreover, he undoubtedly believes that the woman represents a threat or else a source of defilement since her unclean parts are not circumcised. In other words, there is a danger that certainly awaits any man who feels like having sex with her.

Our Leader voices out the type of danger the man personally runs and the trouble to which he would be exposed with the woman’s unclean parts as he explains : “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.” The fact that woman’s unclean parts are endowed with masculine qualities generated through erection represents one major danger.

Furthermore, another major danger that Our Leader denounces is that woman’s unclean parts are always in competition with man’s penis. According to him, as long as the penis fails to penetrate these unclean parts, it would cause a danger. In reality, if Our Leader’s view proves true to the failure of penetration as a danger, it is because it constitutes a site in which the compulsory heterosexual matrix occurs. Thus, compulsory heterosexuality, being inside the hegemonic order, brings into relief the danger man’s power falls into.

Our Leader is very much certain that it is almost not possible for woman’s unclean parts to secure the penetrability of the penis as he puts, “if a woman was not circumcised...” In fact, by considering Our Leader’s statement, he is persuaded that uncircumcision is what forbids a relation of penetration between man’s phallus and woman’s phallus. However, the danger lies on the fact that the masculine is not established through this exclusive position as penetrator ; the feminine is not equally placed through this exclusive position as penetrated.

Mary Nyangweso’s words probably echo with the central idea of danger that gives sense to the concept of impenetrability through the uncircumcised feminine. Nyangweso has suggested “outcasts” ; “Ekisagane” to understand the uncircumcised feminine and also, the danger the feminine can face for being uncircumcised. She gives a further interpretation through the book *Female Genital Cutting in Industrialized Countries : Mutilation or Cultural Tradition ?* which summarizes well “one who has not been cut” (2014 : 34).

Similarly, in *Possessing*, Evelyn recounts the danger she continues to represent –that of not having circumcised her own unclean parts –which eventually causes expulsion and exclusion from the community of women. She provides the details of what she undergoes in the company of women whose significant actions are summarized through laughing :

Certainly to all my friends who’d been circumcised, my uncircumcised vagina was thought of as a monstrosity. They laughed at me. Jeered at me for having a tail. I think they meant my labia majora. After all, none of them had vaginal lips, none of them had a clitoris ; they had no idea what these things looked like ; to them I was bound to look odd. There were a few other girls who had not been circumcised. The girls who had been would sometimes actually run from us, as if we were demons. Laughing, though. Always laughing (1992 : 120)

As Evelyn puts in the aforesaid explanation, she is exhibited through demonstrations of humiliation ; frustration and rejection. According to her narratives, most of her friends (women in general) produce discourses wherein they seek to deny her humanity, or in short, femininity.



Because they are openly supportive of circumcision, Evelyn who is opposed to it is often presented as ‘odd.’

In fact, ‘odd’ proves useful to explore factors or circumstances wherein discriminatory treatments are perpetrated against uncircumcised women. Obviously, ‘odd’ functions in a similar way with another indication of woman’s unclean part which is known to the reader as ‘tail.’ The term ‘odd’ implies the notion of ‘tail’ as the elsewhere that matters. Needless to say, through the notions of ‘odd’ ; ‘tail’, it has been possible to see how the politics of Compulsory Heterosexuality plans to control woman’s body parts through female circumcision, excision, genital mutilation and, manages to perpetuate the discourse of ‘odd.’

In other words, since woman’s body parts are confined to a peripheral existence, the discourse of ‘odd’ in which the purpose of Compulsory Heterosexuality is evidenced, there is no doubt that circumcision produces a corresponding impact which is imprinted through cutting the tail in order to forbid woman to be familiar with sexual pleasure. Consequently, we clearly perceive the ideological agenda of female circumcision since all women who go through it are believed to develop a high level of “pride...that without it no man would marry [them]” (1992 : 228).

Furthermore, when still confronting her on the issue of female circumcision and all other practices of equal functioning, Evelyn’s friends employ ‘monstruosity’ ; ‘demons.’ Closely observed, by remaining attached to Compulsory Heterosexuality and its ideological tools among which there are female circumcision, excision and genital mutilation, they invent discourses in which ‘monstruosity’ ; ‘demons’ are articulated so as to other those who are not circumcised and as a consequence, believed non –feminine. Essentially, ‘monstruosity’ ; ‘demons’ are used to identify the “stigma”, a term used by bell hooks throughout *Ain’t I A Woman ? Black Women and Feminism*(1982). The particular stigmatisation of monstruosity and demons is placed on Evelyn and therefore confirms the manner in which her body parts turn into unclean parts.

Furthermore, *Possessing* has allowed the reader to discover the following terms : ‘vagina’ ; ‘labia majora’ ; ‘vaginal lips’ ; ‘clitoris’ which are closely linked to Evelyn’s identity and, identified with her unclean body parts. Yet, monstruosity and demons could be used to explain the term “sexual exploitation” coined by hooks. Sexual exploitation, as hooks indicates, is “peculiar to black women...directly related to their sexuality and involved rape and other forms of sexual assault” (1982 : 24).



In Walker's work, sexual exploitation emerges out of most sexual assaults including female circumcision, excision, genital mutilation men or the people in position of power impose on women, those unprivileged people. In addition, besides its exploitative feature, what characterizes monstrosity and demons is its devilish and demonic attributes which have been projected onto the woman who overtly is endowed with "inherent evil demonic qualities."

All in all, female circumcision and all other practices have allowed to deeply understand the functioning of the politics of Compulsory Heterosexuality, how the woman's body parts are stigmatized as unclean, monstrous and demon-like and are condemned to the condition of matter, that is, under the ban of suspension or exclusion.

Always bringing to the fore various contexts in which female circumcision, excision and genital mutilation are performed, Walker quotes the French Anthropologist Marcel Griaule whose book *Dieu D'eau : Entretiens avec Ogotomméli* (1948) especially explores the background of these practices through the Dogon's myth. This unfolds in Pierre's reading of Griaule's book. As he reads,

The God Amma, it appeared, took a lump of clay, squeezed it in his hand and flung it from him, as he had done with the stars. The clay spread and fell on the north, which is the top, and from there stretched out to the north, which is the bottom, of the world, although the whole movement was horizontal. The earth lies flat, but the north is at the top. It extends east and west which separate members like a foetus 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, face upwards, in a line from north to south, is feminine. Its sexual organ is an anthill, and its clitoris a termite hill. Amma, being lonely and desirous of intercourse with this creature, approached it...As God's approach the termite hill rose up, barring the passage and displaying its masculinity. It was as strong as the organ of the stranger, and intercourse could not take place. But God is all-powerful. He cut down the termite-hill, and had intercourse with the excised earth (1992 :169)

From this above-mentioned paragraph about the Dogon's myth, Pierre, who is an Anthropologist, gives an account of the God Amma who, after creating a feminine body, has decided to have sex with it. But the God Amma is no longer allowed to have sexual intercourse with the feminine body. The major reason is that there exists the feminine sexual organ that takes the shape of anthill and termite hill-clitoris. And the worst is the termite hill-clitoris does not facilitate the penetrability of God Amma's phallus.

Walker's interpretation of the failure of Amma to penetrate the feminine body stands on these two words "approach"; "barring." On one side, "approach", in Jacques-Alain Miller's view, involves "the phallic function" that "helps situate as men" (1975 : 71). However, the act of approaching finally indicates "the cause of [man's] desire." And on the other side, with



“barring”, what needs to be emphasized is, as Miller contends, “there is no chance for a man to have jouissance of woman’s body...that says no to the phallic function” (1975 : 71 –72).

Additionally, as noticed with Fedwa Malti-Douglas’s essay in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Men, Women, and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (1995), clitoridectomy is men’s practice to control women’s sexuality. Malti –Douglas explains how men (also known as gods) show clitoridectomy as one key solution to women’s sexual desire and what the High Priest (called ‘the Egyptian god’) often expects from it.

The High Priest believes as Malti –Douglas reports, that “woman’s desire is greater than her intellect, and that desire must be controlled—by removing the organ of desire” (1985 : 85). It is no coincidence, for example, that the High Priest’s rejection of woman’s desire seems perceptible. Definitely, as he categorically concludes, “...the operation of clitoridectomy in woman will deprive her of desire only” (1985 : 85). Needless to recall, the only argument the High Priest has is that clitoridectomy is welcomed to suppress woman’s sexual desire as best as possible.

In *Possessing*, it is indeed Our Leader who voices out clitoridectomy as being adequate for the suppression of woman’s sexual desire. For example, Our Leader calls “bathed” ; “cleaned off” (1992 : 240) to deal with clitoridectomy. The feminist theorist Germaine Greer also contributes the meaning of clitoridectomy. Greer quotes “castration” and explains it as “the clitoris...cutting” (1984 : 54).

It is indeed with Pierre V. Zima’s “sociolecte” (1985:130) that one gets an insight of the ideological meanings of “bathed”; “cleaned off.” The sociolecte, according to Zima, is a “linguistic code” by which ethnic groups identify themselves. In *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora* (1992), Gay Wilentz quotes *Efuru*, a 1966 novel published by Flora Nwapa. In the novel, the sociolectes “bathed” ; “cleaned off” designate excision for the Igbo people from Nigeria. To conclude with, “bathed” ; “cleaned off” fulfill Our Leader’s socio –ideological project of categorizing woman as sexually impure and unclean. Also, clitoridectomy works subtly to govern woman’s sexuality as the elsewhere that matters, and therefore, to make it pure and clean.

Conclusion

The exploration of Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* through the lens of Michel Foucault’s theory of pleasure and Judith Butler’s theory of the matter of sex/bodies has helped

reveal that Tashi is not merely a female character but a concept that generates meanings in narratives. Indeed, Tashi has connotations of the feminine body/sex that has the ability to trigger sexual pleasure on the one hand and on the other hand, Tashi is invoked as an issue of sexual difference.

In this sense, Tashi is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce and differentiate the bodies it controls. Thus excision is a regulatory power to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.

This has been achieved through the lesbian phallus and the use of pleasure ; the elsewhere that matters. Tashi has been revealed as Walker's representation of the lesbian phallus and the use of pleasure. To say the least, sexual pleasure is clearly apparent as far as woman's libidinal jouissance is neither identifiable by the man nor referable to the masculine, rather, it gravitates around the typically feminine gesture through masturbation.

As for the elsewhere that matters, it is what constitutes the materiality of the feminine body/sex as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect that has been analyzed. Therefore, there is a way to understand Tashi as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as the material body or its given sex. Consequently, Tashi operates concomitantly with the politics of compulsory heterosexuality and its ideology through female circumcision, genital excision and mutilation to regard pleasure as taboo.

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