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**Identity of the African Woman in Ngugi
Wathiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and Alice
Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992).**

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Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this work to my beloved parents. My thank and appreciations to my dear cousin Leila, and my adored husband Belkadi Boussad, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my pillars throughout this academic journey. Your belief in me has been the driving force behind this accomplishment.

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Abstract:

This present dissertation is a comparative study of two literary works: Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). This study aims to show how the two authors treat the same issue of female circumcision and how it informs the identity of the African women. To achieve our goal, we have relied on Sigmund Freud's famous work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 1920, where Freud introduced his Trauma theory, suggesting that traumatic experiences could lead to mental distress. He explores the idea of the repetition compulsion, where individuals unconsciously repeat traumatic events. Regarding the id, ego, and superego, these are components of the psychic apparatus. In trauma Freud highlighted conflicts between these elements, influencing psychological responses to distressing events. In the first chapter, we initiate with an analysis of an African writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo in *The River Between* how circumcision contributes to the identity of an African woman. According to Ngugi the practice is considered as necessary for the preservation of tribal group and it is crucial to the maintenance of cultural identity. Although circumcision harms women physically and psychologically, Ngugi concealed this and tries to present the best image of this ritual. The second chapter studies how Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* depicts that circumcision is performed to control women's sexuality, and considered as a process of violence, inhumanity done to women's body. She focused on both psychological and physical violence caused by the performance of circumcision of women. In the last chapter, through the analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's and Alice Walker's works, our work concludes with the similarities and differences between The two novels "River Between" and "Possessing The Secret of Joy", and how the two authors treat the same issue of female circumcision with two different perspectives.

Key words:

Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965), Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), Female Circumcision, psychological and physical violence, power of tradition, women oppression, identity, trauma, Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

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I. Introduction:

This dissertation is a comparative study between the two works the African writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and the Afro-American writer Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). These two narrative work treat the same issue of African female circumcision and how it informs the identity of the women. In addition, Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* is set in colonial Kenya and explores the clash between Christian missionaries and traditional African beliefs. Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, on the other hand, is set in more contemporary times and deals with issues related to female genital mutilation and the African diaspora. Both novels address complex social and cultural themes but in different historical and geographical contexts.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo is renowned Kenyan writer and scholar who has made significant contributions to African literature. In his well-known novel *The River Between* Ngugi explores various themes, including the practice of circumcision among the Kikuyu people in Kenya. Moreover, he defends the tradition of circumcision as an essential cultural practice within the Kikuyu community. This ritual is central to the identity and initiation of young boys into adulthood. Ngugi portrays circumcision as a rite of passage that symbolizes a transition from childhood to manhood, and it plays a significant role in shaping the characters and their cultural values throughout the novel. Besides, the defence of circumcision in Ngugi's narrative can be seen as a reflection of his commitment to depicting the complexities of African culture and tradition in the face colonialism and Western influence. He portrays the clash between indigenous traditions and Christian missionary activities, highlighting how these cultural conflicts affect the characters and their community.

So it can be noticed that Ngugi Wa Thiongo supports circumcision in *The River Between* as a way to emphasise the importance of cultural practices and traditions in the face of external

pressure and colonialism, and to explore the impact of such practices on the lives of the characters in his novel ¹.

On the other hand, *Alice Walker* is a prominent African American author, poet and activist known for her contributions to literature and her advocacy for social justice. Her famous novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* addresses the topic of female genital mutilation, also known as female circumcision. Alice Walker is against the practice of female circumcision, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* reflects the physical and emotional consequences of female genital mutilation, shedding light on the pain and suffering endured by women who have undergone the procedure. Walker uses her story telling to raise awareness about the harmful effects of this practice on women's lives and their sense of self.

Furthermore, the reasons behind Walker's opposition to circumcision, particularly female genital mutilation, are rooted in her feminist and human rights beliefs. She views this process as a harmful and patriarchal practice that perpetuates gender-based violence and control over women's bodies. Through her writing, Walker seeks to challenge and condemn cultural traditions that harm women and violate their rights. In addition, Walker weaves a narrative that not only exposes the physical pain but also delves into the emotional and psychological toll that female genital mutilation takes on its victims. She aims to create empathy and understanding for the women affected by this practice and to contribute to the global dialogue on ending female genital mutilation ².

The two works of both authors the African writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River between* and African American writer Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* discuss and treat the same issue of female circumcision and how it informs the identity of the African women.

1-1 Review of the Literature:

After the publication of their two novels, N’gugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between* (1995), and Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) the two writers have received a large bulk of criticism on their works.

On one hand, N’gugi Wa Thiongo’s work has received much consideration and criticism. To start with, Chris Wanjala in his work **“For Home and Freedom”** he looks at “Problems of Cultural Synthesis: Alienation as an identity crisis in **“The River Between”**.”³ Wanjala focuses on Waiyaki’s character and how he becomes critically aware of these issues, eventually reconciling with the problems faced by his ethnic group. This reconciliation occurs when he acknowledges the transcendental position carved out by Muthoni, a central character in the novel. Wanjala’s analysis suggests that Muthoni’s character serves as a key figure who unveils the depth of Ngugi’s understanding of the cultural crisis depicted in the story. He argues that Muthion’s tragic fate, her death, is a result of the conflict between the two cultures portrayed in the novel. These cultures are depicted as being in opposition or “at bay”. However, it’s notable that Wanjala’s analysis does not address the role of clitoridectomy, a cultural practice, and its impact on the identity of African women. This omission highlights that Wanjala’s focus is more on the broader cultural conflict and its consequences rather than specific gender-related aspects within the narrative.

As still another critic, in his literary analysis or commentary on Ngugi’s Wa Thiongo’s work “CB Robson’s N’gugi 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”⁴. Robson notes that in the novel, Ngugi successfully portrays the atmosphere of the ridges, which are a geographical setting, and effectively captures the traditions and customs of the people who live there. The paragraph also shows that the clash between the old and new ways of life, represented by the two locations Kameno and Makuyu,

is symbolically depicted through the custom of circumcision. The importance of this ritual in the novel reflects its significance in the society. Robson further elaborates on the ceremony of circumcision, connecting it to the concept of a life giving force associated with the Honia River, referred to as the “River of Life”. The belief is that the blood from the initiates, who undergo circumcision becomes a part of the river’s banks, symbolizing a cycle of birth and rebirth. Moreover, Robson points out that the issue of circumcision as a focal point for the conflict between Makuyu and Kamuno doesn’t begin with Waiyaki but with Muthoni. She expresses a desire to be circumcised in order to become a more beautiful woman within the tribe. This suggests that circumcision plays a significant role in exploring themes of identity, tradition and conflict within the novel.

On the other hand, Alice Walker’s *Possessing Secret of Joy* has been studied by many thinkers and scholars from many perspectives. For instance, Vijay Digambar Songire (ass. Professor) in his research article “Humanist Agenda in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* says: “The novel appeals to all to develop humanist approach towards women and not to humiliate and oppress them under the name of culture. The novel is a cry for establishing humanitarian principles like equality and freedom”⁵.

This research article primarily centers around several key themes: humanism, male chauvinism, female genital mutilation, and exploitation of women within the context of African culture. The main focus of the paper is to analyse Alice Walker’s acclaimed novel, with a particular emphasis on her humanitarian concerns. It seeks to shed light on the long-standing cultural practice of female genital mutilation within the Olinka tribe, which is portrayed in the novel. This practice is described as a barbaric and unscientific, leading to the vulnerability of women’s lives. The article highlights how Walker’s novel serves as a platform for revolutionary efforts against the deeply ingrained custom of female genital mutilation. Walker’s goal is to bring about change and establish a new society that values fundamental humanitarian principles, such as equality and freedom. Her vision is to create a society where is no distinction

between men and women, challenging the prevailing cultural norms and advocating for a more equitable and just world. Ashli Dykes in her research article “*Scars of Oppression*” writes about the sufferings of the women.

Female circumcision, a major theme in Alice Walker’s novel “*Possessing the Secret of Joy*”, is a rite of passage extending far beyond the initiation ceremony. There are three types of female genital mutilation: clitoridectomy, the partial or whole removal of the clitoris in which the bleeding is stopped with pressure or a stitch; excision, where both the clitoris and the inner lips are amputated and the bleeding is stopped with stitching; and infibulations, the removal of the whole clitoris and some or all of the labia minora.⁶

Here in this article Ashli Dykes mainly discusses the central theme of the novel which is female genital mutilation. I notice that she delves into the various types of female genital mutilation processes, shedding light on the horrifying details of how women are subjugated to mutilation using sharp instruments like stones and blades, often at a very young age. This practice is not only un-hygienic but can also lead to severe bleeding, sometimes resulting in death. Furthermore, the article highlights a specific character named Tashi, who undergoes the third stage of female genital mutilation at a later age, just before her marriage. This is attributed to the cultural norms of the Olinkan culture she belongs to, and it results in her suffering. Throughout the article, Ashely Dykes also discusses other female characters who have experienced female genital mutilation, providing a comprehensive exploration of this distressing and harmful practice within the context of novel’s themes and characters.

1-2: Issue and Working Hypothesis:

From our examination of select literature discussing the works of both authors Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between* and Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, we have observed that the majority of these analyses touch upon the subject of female circumcision and its influence on the African women’s identity. To the best of our awareness, there are limited investigations on this subject, prompting us to scrutinize it in an effort to generate fresh insights.

While both novels address the issue of female circumcision, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker provides a more direct and in-depth exploration of the physical and psychological consequences of female genital mutilation, whereas *The River Between* by Ngugi Wa Thiongo embeds the topic within a broader narrative about cultural clash and change. These works contribute to the ongoing conversation about the practice of female circumcision in different cultural contexts, here our task is to identify the source of this difference.

The main goal is to conduct a comparative study between the two novels Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The analysis will be carried out with a theoretical framework that draws from psychoanalytic concepts introduced by Sigmund Freud in the 1960, specifically concepts related to trauma, id, ego and superego. In essence, the research aims to explore and compare elements of these novels using Freudian psychoanalytic theory as a lens to understand the characters and themes within them.

To demonstrate the significance of our topic within *The River Between* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, we propose that our analysis should be grounded in trauma theory, which we believe is an appropriate framework for our study. We have chosen this theory because its components align with the objectives of our comparative analysis.

1-3: Methodological Outline:

At the methodological outline level, the dissertation will follow the IMRAD method. We have started with the introduction in which we gave a general overview about the topic, and followed with the review of some works written on Ngugi Wa Thiongo *The River Between* and Alice Walker *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, then in the issue and working hypothesis section we state the purpose of our study.

In the methods section, we will try to introduce and explain the theory of Trauma (1960) by Sigmund Freud. Then, we will come to provide biographies of the authors and brief

summaries of the novels cited above in the material section. In the result section, we reveal the results reached through our study.

The discussion section constitutes of three chapters. The first chapter will explore circumcision as a sign of cultural identity in *The River Between* by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, examining both the physical and psychological resistance against Christianity from both sides. In the second chapter we will examine circumcision as a barbaric practice within the context *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker. This analysis will encompass both the physical and psychological aspects of violence. In the final chapter, we will discuss the similarities and differences between Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) in the two novels.

Endnotes:

¹ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngugi_Wa_Thiongo_African_literature

² https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Walker_African-American_literature

³ Vijay Digambar Songire, assistant Professor. “Humanist agend in Alice Walker’s Possessing the Secret of Joy”. Research insight, an International Journal of Interdisciplinary studies and Research in Humanist: 1-4. English.

⁴ Ashli Gykes, Montors: Drs. *Marck L. Beggs* & David Thomson. “Scrars of Oppression”. 1-8 English.

⁵ Wanjala, Chris. For Home and Freedom Nairobi. Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980. 1-6

⁶ *Robson*, CB: Ngugi Wa Thiongo London. The Macmillan Press Limited, 1979. 10

II-Methods and Materials:

1-Method:

a. Sigmund Freud and the Trauma Theory:

This section intends to underscore the theoretical foundation of our work, specifically aligning with the issue addressed by incorporating Sigmund Freud's Trauma theory as elaborated in his famous essay *Beyond Pleasure Principles* published in 1920.

"Trauma" refers to a deeply distressing experience, typically triggered by an unexpected and shocking event, often involving violence or death. Such events can leave a person feeling profoundly confused and upset. It is as if their mind becomes divided between their previous thoughts and emotions, and the new, unsettling reality brought by the traumatic incident. This division can disrupt their sense of self and understanding of the world, leading to feelings of fear and distress. Trauma often occurs when an individual suddenly realizes the potential threat to their own life, highlighting the fragility of life and causing a significant impact on their mental well-being.

The study of Trauma began in 1990s, and it is used ideas from Freudian theory to create a way of thinking about Trauma. This way of thinking sees Trauma as a very intense experience that's really hard to put into words, and sometimes it completely shatters our understanding of what things mean⁷.

Sigmund Freud who lived from (1856-1939), was a doctor from Austrian. He is known for creating something called "Psychoanalytic". This is a way to help people who have mental problems that come from their thought and feeling. It works by having conversations between patients and special therapists called psychoanalytic. Freud also came up with some unique ideas about how our minds work and how we make choices because of them. In Freudian theory,

the human mind is divided into two main parts: the conscious and unconscious mind. The conscious mind covers everything we are aware of or can easily think about. In contrast, the unconscious mind holds everything that is beyond awareness, including wishes, desires, hopes, urges and memories that still impact our actions without us knowing. Furthermore, Freudian theory splits the human personality into three key parts: the id, ego, and superego.

The id is like the most basic part of our feelings, hidden deep inside us. It is where all our simple desires come from, but don't even realize it is there. The ego is like the practical side of us, making sure we handle our desires in sensible, safe and socially okay ways. And then there's the superego, which is like our inner rulebook filled with the values we learn from our parents⁸.

We rely on the theoretical guideline of Sigmund Freud's Trauma theory and the three main concepts of human personality Id, ego and superego in his well-known work *Beyond Pleasure Principles* (1920), because it fits the condition of both characters of the two novels. In the sense that they share same culture, where Ngugi Wa Thiongo is an African and Alice Walker is an Afro-American. Furthermore, they treat same issue of circumcision with two different perspectives.

2-Materials:

This part of our work contains the summaries of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's "*The River Between*" and Alice Walker's "*Possessing the Secret of Joy*", and the biographies of the two novelist with regard to the issue under study.

a. Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Biographical Background:

Ngugi Wa Thiongo was born on January 5, 1938, Kamiriithu, Kenya, which was then a British colony. He began his education at a missionary school and later attended Alliance High School, a prestigious institution in Kenya. He pursued further studies at Makerere University

of Leeds in the United Kingdom. *Ngugi* initially wrote his literary works in English and gained recognition for novels like “*Weep Not, Child*” (1964) and “*A Grain of Wheat*” (1967). However, in the late 1970s, he made a significant shift in his literary career by embracing African language, particularly Kikuyu, as a medium of creative expression.

This change in language was part of his broader commitment to African cultural and political identity. Besides, he adopted the name Ngugi Wa Thiongo (formerly James Ngugi) to reflect his new perspective, and his famous work during this period includes the Kikuyu play “*Ngaahika Ndeenda*” (“*I Will Marry When I Want*”), co-authored with Ngugi Wa Mirii. This play not only marked his linguistic transformation but also his engagement with political and social issues in post-colonial Africa. Throughout his career, Ngugi Wa Thiongo has been an advocate for African literature and cultural independence. He was written extensively on decolonizing the mind and the importance of African language in literature. His contribution to post-colonial literature and his dedication to the decolonization of African culture have earned him international recognition and numerous awards.

In addition to his literary work, Ngugi is an esteemed academic and has held teaching position at universities in Kenya and the United States. His influence extends beyond his writing, as he continues to inspire discussion on language, identity and post-colonialism in Africa and beyond⁹.

b. Synopsis of *The River Between*:

“*The River Between*”, is a novel by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, set in Kenya during the early days of colonialism. The story revolves around the conflict between two neighbouring Kikuyu villages, Kameno and Makuyu, separated by the Honia River. The river serves as both a physical and symbolic barrier between the two communities. The plot follows the life of Waiyaki, a young and educated Kikuyu man who returns to his native village of Kameno after studying in Nairobi. Waiyaki becomes a pivotal figure as he tries to bridge the gap between the

traditional customs and beliefs of his people and new Christian influences brought by European missionaries. Tensions escalate as the villagers are divided between those who embrace Christianity and those who want to preserve their traditional way of life.

The religious and cultural clash ultimately leads to a tragic conflict that affects the entire community, including Waiyaki, who becomes a symbol of the struggle to find a balance between tradition and change. “*The River Between*” explores themes of cultural identity, colonialism, religious and the complexities of modernization in Africa. It is poignant portrayal of the challenges faced by indigenous communities during the colonial period and the choices individuals must make in the face of cultural transformation¹⁰.

c. Alice Walker’s biographical background:

Alice Walker is an Afro-American author, poet and activist known for her influential works in literature and her dedication to civil rights and feminism. Born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, she grew up in a racially segregated environment in the south. She faced discrimination and witnessed the harsh realities of racism, which deeply influenced her writing and activism.

Walker attended Spelman College and later transferred to Sarah Lawrence College, where she studied literature and became involved in civil rights activism. In the 1960s, she participated in the civil rights Movement and worked alongside figures like Martin Luther King Jr. her literary career began with the publication of her first collection of poetry, “Once”, in 1968. However, she is best known for her novel “*The Color purple*” which was published in 1982 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The book explores the lives of African American women in the early 20th century south and addresses issues of race, gender, and abuse.

Alice Walker’s works often tackle themes of social justice, feminism, and the intersectionality of race and gender. She has written numerous novels, essays and poetry

collections, including “Meridian”, “*In Search of Our Mather’s Gardens*”, and “*Possessing the Secret of Joy*”. In addition to her literary achievements, Walker is committed activist. She advocates for civil rights, women’s rights, and environmental issues. Her activism and writing have made her a prominent figure in both the literary and social justice communities. Alice Walker’s contributions to literature and her tireless commitment to social causes have solidified her legacy as a prominent American author and activist¹¹.

d. Synopsis of “*Possessing the Secret of Joy*”:

Possessing the Secret of Joy is a novel by Alice Walker, published in 1992. It is powerful and thought-provoking story that explores the themes of identity, culture conflict, and female genital mutilation. The novel revolves around the life of Tashi, a character introduced in Alice Walker’s earlier work, *The Color Purple*. Tashi is an Olinka woman from a small village in Africa. She has experienced the traditional practice of female genital mutilation, a ritual that is deeply ingrained in her culture. Despite the pain and Trauma it caused her, Tashi initially accepted this practice as a cultural norm. However, as the story unfolds, Tashi becomes increasingly disillusioned with her cultural traditions and begins to question the value of female genital mutilation. She becomes aware of the physical and emotional scars it has left on her and other women in her community.

This inner turmoil leads her to seek answers about her own identity and her place in the world. Tashi’s journey takes her to the United States, where she marries Adam, a compassionate and understanding man. Despite the geographical and cultural distance, Tashi still feels the weight of her past and the pain of her experience with female genital mutilation. She struggles to find her true self and make peace with her past. As Tashi’s story unfolds, the novel delves into the broader issues of cultural clashes, feminism and the quest for self-empowerment. Tashi’s experience serves as a metaphor for the larger struggle of women worldwide who face oppression and violence based on cultural and patriarchal norms¹².

Endnotes

⁷<https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ENGL301-Trauma-Theory.pdf>

⁸https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud

⁹ “Biography of Ngugi Wa Thiongo” Written and fact-checked by the Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Last Updated: Jan 1, 2023. Article History. <https://www.britannica.com>

¹⁰https://www.academia.edu/33907076/The_River_Between_A_literaly_analysis

¹¹ “Biography of *Alice Walker*” written and fact-checked by Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Last Updated: Feb 5, 2023. Article History. <https://www.britannica.com>

¹²<https://www.supersummary.com/possessing-the-secret-of-joy/summary/>

III- Results and Discussion:

Results:

This work is a comparative study of the topic of female circumcision and its impact on the identity of African women, as portrayed in the works of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Both authors address the same issue of female circumcision, but they approach the subject differently in terms of context, style and perspective. In order to reach our purpose which is comparing these two works we have relied on Sigmund Freud's theory of Trauma, developed in his famous essay *Beyond Pleasure Principle* published in 1920.

After the discussion of the two sections of the present dissertation, the findings of the works of the two authors Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* both delve into the complex theme of female circumcision within the context of African women's identity. While Ngugi Wa Thiongo explores this issue in a Kenyan setting, Alice Walker focuses on it within the broader context of African diaspora. The two authors employ distinct narrative approaches, cultural perspectives and thematic nuances to shed light on the profound impact of female circumcision on women's identity. *In the River Between*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo situates the practice of female circumcision within the cultural and historical framework of Gikuyu people. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of colonialism and the clash between traditional beliefs and the influence of Western ideologies. The protagonist, Waiyaki, becomes a symbol figure grappling with the tensions between preserving cultural heritage and embracing change. Through the characters and their experiences, Ngugi intricately examines how female circumcision becomes a powerful symbol, influencing the construction of women's identities and shaping social norms. On the other hand, *Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy* takes a transcontinental approach, exploring the repercussions of female circumcision in an African diaspora context. The novel delves into the psychological and physical consequences of the practice, particularly through the main

character Tashi. Walker employs a nuanced narrative structure, interweaving Tashi's personal journey with broader reflections on cultural preservation, colonial legacies, and the dynamics of power. By portraying the emotional and physical toll of female circumcision, Walker underscores the profound impact on women's identities, both individually and collectively.

While Ngugi's work is rooted in the specific sociocultural dynamics of pre-colonial and colonial Kenya, Walker's narrative extends its reach to encompass the experiences of African women across continents. Both authors, however, share a common goal of bringing attention to intricate relationship between cultural practices, gender identity, and resilience of women in the face of oppressive traditions. Through their respective works, Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Alice Walker contribute significantly to the discourse surrounding female circumcision, offering readers a nuanced understanding of its far-reaching implications on the identity and agency of African women.

IV – Discussion:

Chapter One: Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between* (1960):

Circumcision as a Sign of Cultural Identity

In this part of our work we shed light on the essence of circumcision and its importance, since it identifies the cultural identity of the African women. The author Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his work *The River Between*, is not so interested in the physical act of circumcision but more in how it affects people’s mind and society. He is not trying to argue for or against the surgery itself or its details, but he acknowledges that among the Kikuyu tribe, circumcision is a big deal. It is seen as something very important for their society, with educational, social, moral and religious attached to it.

a. Circumcision as a Form of Psychological Struggle to Combine Between Christianity and Tradition:

Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*, circumcision serves as a powerful symbol of the psychological conflict and cultural tension experienced by the characters as they grapple with the intersection of Christianity and traditional beliefs in their lives, highlighting the complexities of cultural identity and personal choices.

Here to start talking about Muthoni, who is suffering and struggling with constant over thinking. This makes it hard for her to eat or sleep well. She unsure about her Christian faith, feeling empty because nothing in her life has changed. “Sigmund Freud believes that feelings of anxiety result from the ego’s inability to mediate the conflict between the id end superego. When this happens the ego seeks to restore balance through various protective measures known as defence mechanism”¹³.

This is the case of Muthoni when she stood in a confused state, where she started to think about getting circumcised. There is a mental struggle within her, and this what generated a difference between two positions her id and superego, as the first position believes that she must follow the old traditions of her tribe, in order to be a complete and an integrated woman within the community. As for the second position, her Christian religion contradicts these laws such as circumcision; on the other hand, her father is a Christian preacher who considers this habit to be a satanic act. In the end, she managed to arrive at a conclusive resolution, which was to undergo circumcision, regardless of the personal sacrifices it might entail. Due to her unwavering defiance of her father's wishes, one day she confided in her beloved sister Nyambura about her ultimate choice; to undergo circumcision, aligning herself with the traditional practice of the tribe. While she never renounced her Christian faith and remained committed to it, Muthoni recognizes the necessity of fully embracing the age-old customs and traditions, viewing it as the morally sound path to follow. Accordingly, from this conversation, it can be proved that this ritual rises with its psychological desire as it illustrated in the novel:

I have thought and thought again about it. I have not been able to eat or sleep properly. My thoughts terrify me. But I think now I come to a decision. She stopped; gazing past Nyambura, she said, slowly and quietly:

Nyambura, I want to be circumcised.

Circumcised? At last Nyambura found her voice.

Yes

Father will not allow it. He will be very cross with you. And how you can think of it? "Nyambura could [...] told us it was wrong and sinful.

I know. But I want to be circumcised.

Why Nyambura ask helplessly.

Father and Mother

Look, please, I --- I want to be a woman. I want to be a girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges

But father remember him.

Why! Are we fools? She shook Nyambura. Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did [...] not prevent the hills that you and I know¹⁴.

Understanding how Muthoni feels and what she is thinking can be challenging because her desire are quite complicated. She wants to follow Christianity and stay true to her faith, but at the same time, she also wishes to undergo circumcision, a traditional practice of her tribe. Muthoni knows that her parents, despite converting to Christianity, were circumcised in the past, and this confuses her. She wonders why they oppose something she deeply desires. For Muthoni, it is impossible to separate herself from her tribal customs and traditions. All the girls she grew with have already undergone this operation. Her ultimate dream is to fully belong to her tribe, to be a complete woman with a husband and children within the cultural norms. Not living life this way would bring her great shame. So, she faces a complex dilemma of reconciling her faith with her cultural identity, which makes it hard for others to understand her emotion and thoughts, as it is argued in the novel:

No one will understand. I say I am a Christian and my father has followed the new faith, I have not run away from that. But, I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. How can I possibly remain as I am now? I knew that my father not let me and so I came. I want to be a woman. Father and mother are circumcised, but why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe, when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me? I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth¹⁵.

Muthoni's words had a big impact on Waiyaki. They made him think deeply about himself and his community. Waiyaki began to see things the way Muthoni did. He realizes that before doing anything important, it is crucial to have the support and acceptance of his tribe. This is because circumcision is highly valued in their culture, and it brings the tribe together in peace. It can be noticed that Ngugi Wa Thiongo, uses Waiyaki's thoughts to show us how important circumcision is for social and personal growth. It helps people form strong connections and gives meaning to their lives. That is why circumcision is seen as the most

important tradition that should always be followed. It is a duty for everyone to preserve this tradition and never reject it as part of their heritage, as it says in the novel:

“It kept the people together, bound the tribe. It was 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 no more”¹⁶.

Muthoni decided to do something very important to her, which was circumcision. This meant she went through a lot of pain and difficulty. Even though this procedure eventually caused her death, she felt content because she achieved what she really wanted from the beginning. She thought that all the hard things she had to endure were worth it because she managed to blend together her cultural tradition and her Christian beliefs. So, to put it simply, Muthoni did what she wanted, faced a lot of pain, but she was happy because she achieved her goal of combining tradition and Christianity. As Waiyaki reflects in the novel regarding Muthoni’s last moments she turned to him and said: “I still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe. Tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman beautiful in the tribe”¹⁷.

Muthoni’s death was seen differently by people from two areas, and this caused a conflict between them. From a medical perspective, Muthoni passed away due to an injury she got during a traditional practice which is female circumcision. But her death had deeper meaning. It is like a symbol. Muthoni made a personal choice to try and bridge the gap between her tribe and Christianity through this practice. She was trying to solve a big problem represented by the division between the two ridges. Sadly, she could not succeed, and she paid the ultimate price with her life. It is like she became a sacrifice. Moreover, her father Jushua, acted distant and proud when dealing with her death, which made people believe he might have played a role in her demise by not following his own beliefs when raising her. He even suggested that his strictness might have brought a curse upon her. Besides, people in the

community talked about the tragedy that struck Jushua's household. Some believed that if he had not embraced the ways of the Christians, this would not have happened. Chege, Waiyaki's father questioned if Muthoni's death was a punishment for Jushua for abandoning the customs and traditions of his original tribe to follow colonialism as it shows in the novel:

You see what discord in the family does. If Jushua had not sold his soul 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 [...] This was a punishment to Jushua. It was also a punishment to the hills. It was a warning to all, to stick to the ways of the ridges, to ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and songs¹⁸.

Jushua's family facing another difficult situation. The eldest daughter, Nyambura, wants to undergo the process of circumcision, similar to what her younger sister Muthoni did before she passed away. Muthoni had a special experience when she was dying due the circumcision operation. She claimed to have seen Jesus and decided to reconnect with their tribe's old customs and blend them with Christianity, even though it caused her a lot of pain. Nyambura saw how this experience changed Muthoni and made her feel like a respected woman in their tribe. Now, Nyambura wants the same thing for herself. She believes that if her lover, Waiyaki, supports and helps her through this difficult process, she can become a respected woman in their tribe. However, there is a problem, Nyambura is torn between two loyalties. On one hand, she wants to honor her father's wishes and stay true to their Christian beliefs, which she has not found fulfilling. On the other hand, she loves Waiyaki, who has shown her different kind of spiritual fulfilment. So, she is facing a tough decision about what path to choose, and it is causing her a lot of inner turmoil. Moreover, Nyambura was really sad every day at home. She thought the only person who could make her feel better and save her from all the sadness and bad things in her life was Wayaiki. She saw him like a hero, who could take her away from all the bad stuff. She believed that falling in love with Wayaiki was the solution to escape from Christianity since she was not happy with her faith. Besides, before, she lived with her father,

and it made her really sad and depressed. She did not like doing chores at home, and it made her even more upset. She felt anxious, like her heart was racing, especially when she said no to Waiyaki when he asked her to marry him. Every day, she could not stop thinking about all the good times she had with Waiyaki, and that made her enter into a tragic situation. That is why she was living in a dilemma. As it writes in the novel:

Nyambura was not happy. Each day that 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. Every day she thought more and more of Waiyaki, her happy moments being those when she was with him. She has never been the same since she rejected Waiyaki's offer of marriage. She kept her outward calmness. At home she did small jobs as usual. But she was becoming more irritable and often resented her father's commands¹⁹.

To conclude Ngugi Wa Thiongo talks about how Christianity is introduced to the Olinka people, but is not something they have to do if they don't want to. Muthoni, the main character in the narrative who makes sacrifices that show a connection between Christianity and their traditional culture. Ngugi argues that maybe some parts of their traditional ways can change because of Christianity, but nobody can stop them from circumcising because that is really important to their culture. If someone tried to stop it, it would be seen as an insult to their whole tribe's way of life. Furthermore, we have noticed that Ngugi depicts that Christianity and their tribe's traditions don't have a strong connection, so people can choose what they want to believe. Circumcision is not just about the physical act; it is also about how it affects people emotionally and socially. It is a big part of their lives social structure and gives their lives meaning. It helps keep their tribe together. In their tradition, it is not just about the physical part; it is also about how it affects a person's mind and their place in the community. This is a really important part of a person's development.

Endnotes

¹³<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/waymaker-psychology/chapter/reading-freud-and-psychoanalytic-theory/>

¹⁴*Ngugi Wa Thiongo*, "The River Between," (London Heinman, 1966), 80-85

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,P.118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,P.66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*;P.119.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,P.127.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,P.266.

Chapter Two: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992):

Circumcision a Barbaric Process

In this part of our work, it would be depicted how Alice Walker deals with certain traditions that hurt women. One of these traditions is female genital mutilation, and it is very painful. Some cultures think it makes a woman a true woman. In Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* shows how this practice is violent. It is still done in some parts of Africa, and it causes problems like being distracted, madness, and trauma. Additionally, Walker's work looks at why there conflicts, why women feel lost, and why they are treated badly. The main character in the story tries to learn how to fight against this tradition and protect women from getting hurt both physically and psychologically.

a. Circumcision as a Form of a Physical Violence:

Circumcision, explored within the context of *Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy*, serves as a deeply intricate and controversial representation of physical violence that not only shapes the protagonist's identity but also delves into the broader themes of cultural practices, gender, and the enduring consequences of bodily harm in the name of tradition.

To start with sharing the story of Tashi, the central figure in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, during her time in Africa, and the immense suffering she endured. The moment that affected her profoundly was witnessing her beloved sister Dura conducting a painful circumcision procedure, seeing her sister in a life threatening condition until she died. This horrific event left an indelible mark on Tashi, to the extent that every time she collapse and saw her blood, she wept intensely and incessantly, overwhelmed by her deep emotional turmoil. As it describes in the novel:

We did not know that on the mourning we arrived in the village one of Tashi's sisters had died. Her name was Dura, and she had bled to death. That was all Tashi had been told; all she knew. So that if, while we were playing, she pricked her finger on a thorn or scaped her knee and glimpsed the sight of her own blood, she fell into a panic, until gradually, she played in such a way as to take no risk and even learned

to sew in an exaggeration careful way, using two thimbles. But she forgot why the sight of her own blood terrified her. And this became one of the things the other children teased her about. And about which she would cry²⁰.

When Tashi grew up, she realizes that the best man for her was Adam because he was loyal, kind, and someone she had known since they were kids. They fell in love without even noticing it. They also went against their tribe's rules and customs, which limited them living their lives as they wanted. They even secretly became intimate in the fields, which was not allowed. In their tribe, women were supposed to wait until marriage and undergo circumcision before having sex. People believed that having sex in the fields could harm the crops, but turned out to be untrue. They did it in secret, and no one found out, so everything stayed normal as usual. As it shows in the novel:

In Olinka society the strongest taboo was against making love in the fields. So strong was this taboo that no one in living memory had broken it. And yet, we did. And because no one in the society could imagine us capable of such an offence-lovemaking 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 harvests as before”. “My tongue bringing us no babies and both of us delight. This was of loving, among her people, the greatest taboo of all²¹.

Tashi went to America with her friend Adam to marry him and live together. But when she got there, she felt very lonely and different from everyone else. She missed Africa, her home, her people, and her culture a lot. She wanted her keep her African culture alive even in America, so she decided to go back to Africa to learn more about her roots. This decision changed everything in her life. Tashi wanted to feel like a true Olinkan woman, so she made a big choice. She went to a special camp called Mbell where she underwent the procedure of circumcision. This was very important to her because she wanted to follow all the customs and traditions of her tribe. Moreover, even though Tashi had become a Christian when she was a child, but she determined to be just like the other women in her tribe. She did not want anyone to make fun of her or look down on her. Even her best friend Olivia, who was Adam's sister, tried to talk to her out of it, but Tashi did not listen. Furthermore, Tashi was excited about this

decision, but she did not realize how much pain and suffering she would go through. She did not know that it would change her life in a way she could not have imagined. As it depicts in the novel:

They had dug out a little hole in the dirt beneath her, and that was her personal latrine. She was on her moons when I arrived, there was only one old woman, M'Lissa, from Olinka, to help her, and there were flies, and a slight but unmistakable odor [...] as such a time that kept the stools soft, thus eliminating some of the pain of evacuation, the cleaning of the house, the washing, oiling and perfuming of Tashi's body²² [...] It now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods lasted ten days. She was incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month. There were premenstrual cramps: cramps caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an aperture as M'Lissa had left, after fastening together the raw sides of Tashi's vagina with a couple of thorns and inserting a straw so that healing, the traumatized [...] There was the odor, too, of soured blood, which no amount of scrubbing, until we got to America, ever washed off²³.

At the moment Tashi underwent circumcision, she has never seen joy in her life, all she tasted was nothing but pain, depression, suffering, and sadness. She had not experienced any happiness before that. It was really hard for her. She did not enjoy being married to Ada, her husband, because every time he tried to get close to her for intimacy, she would bleed inside and push him away because it hurt so much. This made their marriage difficult and unhappy. Additionally, Tashi experienced severe pain when urinating and during her menstrual periods due to circumcision process. Moreover, on her wedding night, they had to cut it open again with a knife, which was very painful for her. During her pregnancy, she suffered so much until the day she gave birth, which was very harmful for her. It was never easy for her, and she could not move or do her daily activities like normal. She kept her pain inside, and this caused her to have traumatic experiences and made her life very difficult, almost like a living nightmare. As it illustrates in the novel:

After three months of trying, he had failed to penetrate me. Each time he touched me I bled. Each time he moved against me I winced. There was nothing he could do to me that did not hurt. Still, somehow, I became pregnant with Benny. Having experienced the pain of getting Benny's up in there', we were terrorised waiting for his birth²⁴. [...] My doctor sewed me up again much as I'd been fastened originally, because otherwise there would have been a yawning unhealable wound. But it was done in such a way that there was now

room for pee and menstrual blood more easily to pass. The doctor said that now, also, after giving birth, I could have intercourse with my husband²⁵.

Alice Walker believes that female genital mutilation is a great issue related to how men have treated women. She thinks men have used female circumcision to control, dominate, and harm women during this process. According to Pierre, who is Lisset's son and Tashi's stepson, men might feel jealous because women can achieve pleasure on their own. So, some men insist on female circumcision, which removes part of a woman's genitals, leaving only a small opening. They believe that only a man's penis can make a woman experience pleasure. Even though, female circumcision is harmful and causes physical and psychological pain for women, men don't seem to care about these problems. They also sue false reasons to justify it, like saying it is part of their culture and identity or that it strengthens tribal bounds. But, Alice Walker thinks these are just excuses for men to control women's sexuality. As it argues in the novel:

Man is jealous of woman's pleasure insofar as the woman "does not require him to achieve it. Therefore, 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 reach her inner parts and give her what 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 sides²⁶.

b. Circumcision as a Process of Psychological Violence:

Circumcision, portrayed as a complex and controversial process with profound psychological implications, serves as a central theme in Alice Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*; shedding light on the enduring trauma and violence inflicted upon its characters, and inviting a critical exploration of its impact on both individuals and communities.

Tashi is now living in America. Earlier, we talked about how she went through a painful experience when she was circumcised, which is a procedure where a part of her body was removed. This experience caused her a lot of emotional suffering. In the story, we see how Tashi's choice to undergo this procedure affected her mental health. She became very mentally

unstable, like a person who is not thinking clearly. Even though people, especially her best friend, Olivia, Adam's sister, warned her not to do this operation, she still went ahead with it when she was older and should have known better. She did not take the time to think about it or do any research. She thought it was part of her culture, so she just went along with it, which was a huge mistake. Moreover, due to this, she became mentally unstable and started doing things that did not make sense. Her husband Adam was shocked by her actions, and he even discovered blood on their bed one morning, which was a scary and upsetting situation. As Olivia says in the novel:

And anyway, she should have had when she was eleven, if she was going to have it. She's too old for it". When a person starts going through the stage of mental illness then if even she hurts her then she will not feel any pain at all, and " completely unaware of what she was doing, she said, and feeling nothing, she had sliced rings, bloody bracelets, or chain around her ankles²⁷.

In the novel the protagonist, Tashi has been cured by Jung itself. So she goes to Mzee (is the archetypes of wise old man, Lisette's uncle) who cures her mental illness. He was able to help her get better and make her mind healthy again. She lived with Mzee for a while, and after he passed away, she was sent to live with Mzee's friend, Ray. But while she was staying at Mzee's house, something strange happened to Tashi. She started acting really crazy and drawing weird and different things on the walls, as it demonstrates in the novel:

I drew was the meeting of my mother and the Leopard on her path. For this, after all, represented my birth. My entrance into reality. But I drew, then painted, a Leopard with two legs. My terrified mother with four. Why is this? Asked the old man. I did not know²⁸. [...] I began to paint what became a rather extended series of ever larger and more fearsome fighting cocks and then one day she drew "a foot [...] sweating and shivering" as she says "as I did so" and suddenly she realized that there was something, some small thing the foot was holding between its toes and it was for this small thing that the giant cock waited, crowing, impatiently, extending its neck, ruffling its feathers and strutting about" [...] I paint the cock as huge as it now appeared to be; it dwarfed me I dragged the brush to paint each towering iridescent green feather, each baleful gold fleck in its colossal, red and menacing²⁹.

In this novel the main reason that causes Tashi to experience emotional turmoil and what eventually leads her to madness can be traced back to her sister's tragic death. Tashi's sister

died during a circumcision procedure, and this loss had a deeply impact on Tashi because she was incredibly close to her beloved sister Dura. Additionally, Tashi's bond with Dura was so strong that even after Dura's death, Tashi continued to feel her presence and hear her voice, especially each time she went to sleep. This ongoing grief and connection to her sister haunted Tashi throughout her life, eventually contributing to her mental instability. As it describes in the novel:

I remember my sister Dura's...my sister Dura's...I could not go further. There was a boulder lodged in my throat. My heart surged pitifully. I knew what the boulder was; that is was a word; and that behind that word I would find my earliest emotions. Emotions that had frightened me insane [...] She has been screaming in my ears since it happened³⁰.

Tashi does things unexpectedly, without really understanding why she is doing them. As in one of the incident where Tashi slaps a man unknowingly, who visit her house. This sudden burst of anger had been building up inside her since she was a child, especially after witnessing her sister death. This pent-up anger was making her unhappy. In another situation, Tashi unintentionally hits her son Benny. She did not realize what she is doing in that moment. This action startles Benny, causing him to cry out and withdraw. However, he looks at her with a deep sense of love and understanding, it brings Tashi some comfort. Furthermore, it is as if she finds relief in the midst of her mental disorder. Overall, we notice that Tashi character is struggling with unresolved emotions and experiences from her past, which sometimes lead to unexpected and uncontrolled actions. As depicts in the novel:

The week before someone introduced to me by Adam said, with a snigger: 'Ah, Adam and Evelyn. How cute! And I slapped him. The violence rising inside me with every encounter with the world outside my home. Even inside it I frequently and with no little cause, no cause, boxed Benny's ears. If I made him squeal and cringe and look at me with eyes gone grave with love and incomprehension, I fancied I felt relief³¹.

On one hand Tashi became so angry since the time she came to know about Adam's relationship, and that he also has a son out of that. From that day she started collecting stones

every day, and overtime, she gathered a big pile of stones. These stones were of different types, like large ones from the road, heavy flat ones from the riverbank, and sharp, jagged shale stones from a field. One day, Pierre, (Lisette's son) came to Tashi's house after his mother's death. This made Tashi even angrier because Pierre was the son of Adam's lover, whom she despised. Besides, this was the moment she could finally express her anger towards Pierre to show how much she hated him and his mother. She began to laugh as a taxi drove away, probably because she saw Pierre and wanted to confront him. As she says in the novel:

As Pierre thanked the driver and turned toward the house, he saw me and smiled. A large jagged stone, grey as grief, struck him just above the teeth. Blood spurted from his nose. I began to throw the stones as if, like Kali I had a dozen arms, or as if my arms were a multiple catapult or a windmill. Stones rained upon him and upon the cab, which had started to pull off but screeched to stop as the driver realized Pierre was under attack and sinking to one knee. I did not let up but floated nearer cradling an armful of stones. Pierre began to speak in gibberish of French, which infuriated me; I dropped the stones in order to close my ears with the palms of my hands. During this interlude, the cabbie ran up to Pierre, grabbed him under the arms and dragged him out of sight. I began to laugh, as the taxi disappeared down the street³².

Tashi's madness grew so much over time, inside her, it felt like a volcano was about to explode ever since she was a child. She knew that M'Lissa was responsible for suffering, and because of that, she had been waiting for the day when she could get revenge on M'Lissa. Finally, that day came, and in her furious anger, Tashi killed M'Lissa. Moreover, this gave her a sense of relief. However, because M'Lissa was seen as a godly figure by others, Tashi was sentenced to death for murdering her. Tashi's story ends in the novel, much like M'Lissa had predicted when she first met Tashi. M'Lissa had always sensed Tashi's madness and violence from the very beginning. She could not believe that Tashi thought she could hide it, as M'Lissa had seen madness and murderer before. As M'Lissa has depicted in the novel: "The very first day she came I could see my death in Tashi's eyes, as clearly as if were looking into a mirror. Those eyes that are the eyes of a madwoman. Can she really think I have not seen madness and murders before"?"³³.

Freud says that our behaviour develops with interaction. For this he has proposed as three vital assemblies of the human mind: the id, ego and superego. When the conflicts arise between these structures and our efforts to find balance among what each of them “desire,” governs how we behave and interact with others. And how we make the balance in the given situation regulates how we will resolve the struggle between these two predominant behaviour inclinations: our biological violent and pleasure-seeking drives vs. our socialized internal control over those drives ³⁴.

So, now discussing Tashi and her ‘Id’, which represents a powerful inner feeling driving her to make independent choice. In Tashi’s case, this longing motivates her to undergo a circumcision procedure, a practice her community follows to recognize women as complete and fully recognized members of their tribe. This is because female circumcision holds a significant role in the customs and traditions of her society. Despite, knowing the potential dangers, including the risk of her own life, Tashi remains resolute in her determination to proceed. She has also witnessed her sister Dura’s tragic fate, who succumbed to the ‘Id’, but Tashi continue to follow her strong inner drive, even at the expense of her own safety. Furthermore, it is depicted that Tashi grappling with a profound internal conflict, characterized by a return to her primal ‘Ego’, prompted by the excruciating physical and psychological suffering inflicted upon her. This inner turmoil materializes as an intense yearning for retribution against M’Lissa, the women responsible for Tashi’s circumcision and her ensuing anguish. The intricacy of these emotions and motivations underscores the depth of the character’s trauma and psychological yearnings.

To conclude this chapter, where Alice Welker illustrates how women in African society face extreme oppression, leaving them with little opportunity for verbal expression, leading to the suppression of their emotions and eventual mental distress. Under the weight of patriarchal dominance, they endure a lifetime of subjugation, which takes a toll on their mental well-being. Tashi, who bears the brunt of social norms, loses her identity and succumbs to psychological disorders, a condition Carl Jung helps treat. Moreover, her self-imposed oppression in pursuit

of social ideals profoundly alters her life. It is also observed that Walker delves into the detailed portrayal of circumcision rituals and their detrimental effects, highlighting the harm inflicted upon girls. Dura, Tashi's beloved sister, tragically dies from excessive bleeding during the procedure, leaving Tashi deeply scarred emotionally, Tashi's anger simmers within, leading to depression and mental turmoil exacerbated by circumcision, ultimately culminating in her disturbing actions. Walker emphasizes how this practice can severely impact a woman's mental health, as evident in Tashi's case.

Endnotes

²⁰ Alice, Walker, "Possessing the Secret of Joy". (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich publishers New-york 1992), 8.

²¹ Ibid.,P.26.

²² Ibid.,P.59.

²³ Ibid.,P.61-62.

²⁴ Ibid.,P.57.

²⁵ Ibid.,P.58.

²⁶ Ibid.,P.172.

²⁷ Ibid.,P.49.

²⁸ Ibid.,P.52.

²⁹ Ibid.,P.69-70.

³⁰ Ibid.,P.78-79.

³¹ Ibid.,P.136.

³² Ibid.,P.137.

³³ Ibid.,P.197.

³⁴Freudian, Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality.www.boundless.com

Chapter Three: A Comparative Study of Gendered Perspective in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and Alice Walker's *Possessing Secret of Joy* (1992)

This chapter explores how the two authors Ngugi Wa Thiongo in *The River Between* and Alice Walker's in *Possessing Secret of Joy*, respond to the issue of initiation and identity of the African woman from a gendered perspective differently. Both texts contain strongly presented central characters whose actions, words and attitude are vital in shaping one's feeling about the situation. So we shall discuss the similarities and differences between the two works.

a. Similarities :

The books *The River Between* written by Ngugi Wa Thiongo and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* written by Alice Walker share many common elements and themes, showing how these two authors explore similar ideas and concepts through their storytelling.

➤ Female Protagonists:

In both of these books, the two heroines face significant challenges due to social expectations and cultural norms. In Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River between* the main character, Muthoni, grapples with difficult decision imposed by her tribe's expectations. She also undergoes female circumcision, enduring both physical and psychological suffering during the procedure. Despite, these hardships, she finds happiness in successfully navigating the complex intersection between Christianity and her traditional customs. As it is shown in the novel her last moments before she dies: "I still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe. Tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman beautiful in the tribe"³⁵. The same thing in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the protagonist, Tashi, faces a challenging journey as she navigates social expectations imposed on her as a woman. She grapples with the pressure to conform to certain norms and makes difficult decision about her identity. Within her community, there is a belief that female

circumcision is necessary for a woman to be considered complete, and Tashi initially follows this tradition as it is said in the book: “The operation she had done to herself joined her, she felt to these women, whom she envisioned as strong, invincible. Completely women, completely African, completely Olinkan”³⁶. But later regrets it due to the physical and psychological suffering it causes. In an act of revenge, she kills the woman who performed circumcision (M'Lissa), leading to her imprisonment and tragic consequences where she died at the end.

➤ **Cultural Tradition:**

Both narratives talked about, cultural tradition. To begin with Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* he talks about how important it is to have a special ceremony such female circumcision in the Kikuyu culture. This is a big deal for the people in that culture, and it is something they have been doing for a very long time as Waiyaki has depicted in the novel: “It kept the people together, bound the tribe. It was the core of social structure and something that gave meaning to man's life and the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would no more”³⁷. Similarly, Alice Walker in her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* she discuss different kind of tradition. It is about a ritual named female genital mutilation. This also a really old tradition in those tribes. So, to notice that even though these two stories are about different cultures and different traditions, they both treat the same thing: changing a woman's private parts in some way. It is interesting to see how two different authors are writing about this same issue of female circumcision in different parts in the world.

➤ **Spirituality and Belief System:**

In the two novels both authors, look at what the characters believe in and what makes them feel connected to something bigger. First we examine Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between*, to observe that the story shows a conflict between two distinct kinds of beliefs. Some people believe in Christianity, which is a religion brought by outsiders. Others believe in the

traditional faiths of their own culture. So, in this story we notice how these two sets of beliefs clash or came into conflict. The same thing in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the characters in the novel go on a journey inside themselves to figure out what makes them feel spiritually connected. To see that this journey is about how they deal with their own experiences and feelings. It is like they are searching for something deep and meaningful inside themselves, as it is illustrated in the story: "All I care about is my people. You are a foreigner"³⁸. "Who are you and your people never to accept us as we are? Imitate any of our ways? It is always we who have to change"³⁹. So, both narratives are about what the characters believe in, whether it is Christianity or their own cultures beliefs. And how they explore their own spirituality and feelings.

b.Differences:

The two novels of both authors Ngugi Wa thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's "*Possessing the Secret of Joy* are quite different in many ways, such as their characters, setting, and themes, which make them unique and interesting to explore and compare.

➤ **Author and Background:**

To start talking about Ngugi Wa Thiongo is a male writer from Kenya. His famous book *The River between* talks about the clash between different ways of life and beliefs in a small village Kenya a long time ago, in the early twentieth century. Alice Walker, on the other hand, is a female Afro-American writer. In her book *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, she discusses the experiences of African and American people, with the focus on the issue of female genital mutilation and it take a really long time, like looking at a big picture from the past to the present.

➤ **Themes:**

In Ngugi Wa Thiongo's work *The River Between*, the narrative is about different groups of people who have different ways of life. They do not always agree because they came from

district cultures. The Kikuyu people were ruled by the British colonialists who have taken over their land. This causes problems because they have different customs and beliefs. Moreover, Kameno and Makuyu are two villages one has followed the old ways of their ancestors, while other has adopted Christianity. So, we observe that the novel talks a lot about these differences in culture, the impact of outsiders taking over, and the clash between the old traditions and new ones affect the two ridges in the story. In opposition to, Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the story is about woman, Tashi the protagonist, who is trying to understand who she is. Walker also depicts how being a man or a woman can be really important to the society, and sometimes people do things to their bodies to fit into those roles of the community. For example, female circumcision which Tashi underwent was a painful experience to her. Besides, we can see that Walker also looks at how bad things that happened in the past can still hurt people today, like a wound that will not. So, it explores questions about identity, being a man or woman, the painful practice of female circumcision, and how old injuries can still affect people's lives.

➤ **Narrative Style:**

It can be seen that the story in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* is told from a point of view where the narrator knows everything about the characters (third person omniscient). This means one can understand what different characters are thinking and feeling. Besides, In Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between*, male voices dominate the dialogue due to the central male characters, and the story downplays the importance of female characters. This novel lacks feminist perspectives and does not address criticism of the male characters. Contradiction to, in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* she tells the narrative using two different style. Sometimes, the main character speaks directly to us like they are sharing their thoughts and feelings (first-person). Other times, it is like someone else is telling the story and we can see how the protagonist sees other people (third-person). Moreover, Alice Walker's

Possessing the Secret of Joy is bolder in representing women's voices and giving them the freedom to express themselves. Walker boldly addresses the taboo topic of female circumcision using daring language, as it is demonstrated in the novel: "hidden behind a boulder, I very cautiously touched myself. The blissful open look at the little figure had aroused me, and I felt an immediate response to my own touch"⁴⁰.

While Ngugi avoids such expressions due to the sensitive nature of the taboo subject that he appears 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"⁴¹.

To conclude, the works of both writers Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, showcase distinct variations in their storytelling, themes, and cultural contexts. These differences highlight the diverse perspectives and narratives that authors bring to literature, making each work a unique and valuable contribution to world of narration.

Endnotes

³⁵Ngugi Wa Thiongo, "The River Between", (London Hienman, 1966) 119.

³⁶ *Alice, Walker*, "Possessing the Secret of Joy", (Ha-count Brace Joranorich publishers New-York 1992), 61.

³⁷Ngugi Wa Thiongo, "The River Between", (London Hienman, 1966) 66.

³⁸ Alice, Walker, "Possessing the Secret of Joy", (Ha-count Brace Joranorich publishers New-York 1992), 21.

³⁹*Ibid.*, P.21.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, P.36.

⁴¹Mwangi, Evan Miana. "Artictic Choices and Gender Placement in the Writing of Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Grace Ogot". U.O.N. unpublished PhD, 2002, 120

V.CONCLUSION

Our comparative study of the two novels Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965) and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), has revealed that both works are engaged in the identical exploration of female circumcision and how it informs the African woman's identity. I have relied on the theoretical guidelines of Sigmund Freud's theory of Trauma and the three concepts of personality the Id, ego and superego explained in his work *Beyond Pleasure Principle* published in (1920). The examination of our study illustrates that despite both novels addressing the same topic of female circumcision, they each have their unique methods of addressing this issue.

The first chapter, dealt with the representation of circumcision as a sign of cultural identity in Ngugi Wa Thiogo's *The River Between*. He regards this practice as vital for preserving the uniqueness of a tribe. Consequently, women must participate in this ritual. He primary focuses on the deep psychological significance of communal rite, largely ignoring its physical aspects. Furthermore, he refrains from presenting arguments in favor of the surgical procedure or its specifics, as his writing emanates from the cultural and traditional context of the Kikuyu people. In defending his community against colonialist missionary efforts, he asserts that female circumcision serves as the linchpin for shaping the identity of African women. Moreover, he contends that the abandonment of this tradition equates to the forfeiture of values, customs, and social structures. Through circumcision and the accompanying period of initiation and instruction, individual attained full membership in in the broader society, transcending the boundaries of their villages and families. Consequently, their responsibilities extended beyond their immediate kin to encompass the entire Kikuyu community. Besides, *The River Between* vividly underscores the profound value and significance associated with female circumcision. Even though Muthoni, the heroine, succumbs to the wound inflicted during the ritual, she experiences contentment and fulfilment. And she died at the end as it is illustrated in the novel: "I am a woman beautiful in the tribe"⁴².

The second chapter, explored the issue of circumcision as a brutal procedure and Walker stance on escaping incarceration, highlighting how it inflicts physical and psychological harm on women. Alice Walker expressing herself as an African-American woman, contends that female circumcision is establishing as a violent act against women. Through her main character, Tashi, Walker unveils the suffering women endure during this early ritual. Initially, Tashi undergoes circumcision to preserve her Olinkan heritage. However, as she matures, marries, and relocate to the United States, she undergoes a transformation. She comprehends that female circumcision amounts to nothing more than violence against women and resolves to challenge the ritual. Moreover, upon her return home, she confronts M'Lissa, the practitioner of female circumcision, serving as a symbol of the ritual. Walker delves into the struggle of black women to assert themselves, thereby reshaping their destinies and securing their rightful position in society.

The last chapter, is about a comparative study of gendered perspective in Ngugi WA Thiongo *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. These works are about looking at the issue of female circumcision in Africa. However, the two authors have different ways of treating this topic. They also have different opinions about how the African women's identity is influenced by a traditional female circumcision process. So, both novels share some thematic similarities, it is important to note they also have distinct cultural contexts and narrative style.

Both woks of the two writers delve into the complexities of cultural identity and the struggle to preserve it in the face of external influences. *The River Between* focuses on the conflict between Christianity and traditional Kikuyu beliefs, while *Possessing the Secret of Joy* explores the identity crisis Tashi an African woman subjected to the cultural practices of female genital mutilation and western influences. They also, address the damaging effects of colonialism on indigenous cultures and societies. In *The River Between*, the British colonial

presence disrupts the traditional way of life among the Kikuyu people. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the legacy of colonialism and imperialism is evident in the African setting. Moreover, both novels examine the role of gender in society. In *The River Between*, the protagonist Waiyaki's relationships with women challenge traditional gender roles, and in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, gendered based oppression and violence are central themes, particularly in the context of female circumcision. Furthermore, both works depict characters' struggles for freedom and self-determination. In *The River Between*, characters seek to regain their cultural autonomy, while in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Tashi's journey is a quest for personal liberation and self-discovery. Besides, both novels use symbolism and cultural elements to convey deeper meaning. *The River Between* uses the river as a symbol of division and unity, while *Possessing the Secret of Joy* incorporates African rituals and traditions as important symbols in the narrative.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo is a Kenyan author known for his focus on post-colonial Africa and decolonization. Alice Walker is Afro-American writer and activist known for her exploration of African American and feminist themes. Furthermore, *The River Between* is set in colonial Kenya and explores the clash between traditional Kikuyu culture and Christian missionary influences. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is set in various locations, including Africa and the United States, and deals with themes of female genital mutilation and its consequences. Moreover, *The River Between* primarily deals with themes of cultural conflict, colonialism, and the impact of Christianity on indigenous beliefs. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* addresses themes of identity, trauma, physical and psychological consequences of female circumcision. Besides, Ngugi Wa Thiongo's work often employs a straightforward narrative style with a focus on social and political issues. Alice Walker's writing often incorporates more complex narrative structures and explores the inner lives and emotions of her characters. Also, *The River Between* is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of pre-independence Kenya. *Possessing*

the Secret of Joy delves into experiences of African and African American characters, with focus on the effects of a deeply ingrained cultural practice. Finally, both authors have had a significant impact on literature, with Ngugi Wa Thiongo being a prominent figure in African literature, and Alice Walker known for her contributions to African American and feminist literature.

No matter how Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* are distinguishable in some features because they belong to different socio-cultural and historical contexts, but their works examines same issue of female circumcision.

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⁴²Ngugi Wa Thiongo, “The River Between”, (London Hienman, 1966) 66.

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