Chapter IV

Owning the Body Beautiful and Becoming the Mother
Universal: Studying Wholeness in Possessing the Secret of Joy and By the Light of My Father’s Smile

Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992) is a novel that extends Alice Walker’s Womanist theory to the realms of the psyche of the African women. Tashi, a minor character in The Color Purple acquires the center stage in this novel, which comments on the psychological and spiritual damage caused to the young African girls who undergo painful genital mutilation in the name of tradition. Tashi being an African who has recently moved to America is a perfect spokesperson for all those silenced voices on the far-away continent of Africa.

The story is about a fragmented personality who is unable to forget her past. Once again here we have a character that needs to be made whole through her spiritual healing. Apart from the six fragmented personalities of Tashi, her story is told through the narratives of Olivia, Adam, Pierr (Adam’s son from his mistress Lisette) and Lissette herself and also her psychoanalyst Mzee, Lizette’s Uncle Carl. All these characters accompany Tashi in her journey towards wholeness. Each and every one of them have a particular role to play in her life.

Though Tashi is married to Adam in flesh, in spirit she is betrothed to Olivia, who is her spiritual soul-mate. It is Olivia who remembers the tearful Tashi on the first day of their arrival in Olinka. Adam on his part fails to remember Tashi’s tears but only remembers
her liveliness. This is a typical patriarchal behavior where men deliberately blind themselves to the pain of women:

And now when Olivia says, But don't you remember, Adam, Tashi was weeping when we met her / I am at a loss. For this is not the little girl I remember. The Tashi I remember was always laughing, and making up stories, or flitting about the place on errands for her mother (PSJ 14).

This is the Tashi that Adam wishes to remember, because to see the tears would be to participate in her pain – a pain that is specifically woman-centered. It is not that Adam doesn't share Tashi's pain. He takes up pain for his wife which is more political and cultural. To make her feel comfortable in America he also gets tribal markings on his face. But, beyond that her psychological scars are of no concern to him. The best that he can do is to take her to a psychoanalyst, who tries to help Tashi on the lines of the theory of personal and collective unconscious of the noted psychoanalyst Carl Jung. This doctor is also called Carl and he is the one who interpret Tashi's dreams and helps her to get rid of her the false mask acquired by her from her society.

Dr. Carl, whom Tashi calls Mzee, is the one who unravels all the mysteries that flog her mind. After a few sessions with her; the doctor notes a peculiar thing about Black or rather Negro women, he says that a Negro woman is difficult to understand because she does not blame her mother for anything, "Negro women, the doctor says into my silence, can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame their mothers" (PSJ 18). Though on the face of it this statement seems very sexist and racist both, but as we read on we come to know from the account of Tashi's Tsunga M'Lissa that the
African women were as much responsible for the pain caused to their daughters as the patriarchal society. Once Tashi confronts this truth her reconciliation and healing begins to unfold.

By bringing in a White man as a healer of a Black woman Alice Walker opens up her doors to one more section of humanity which was till now missing from all the action. Here, it is not one but two white men who successfully help Tashi to unravel her mysteries by interpreting her dreams for her. One is this Dr. Carl the other is Pierre, Adam’s illegitimate bisexual son. Womanism opens it arms for the white men with their healing inclusion in *Possessing* and accepts that they are also a part of the whole. Olakunle George discusses this point and gives due credit to Walker for including this White man in her narrative:

Carl emblematizes the novel’s yearning for universal fellow-feeling. Though white and privilege, he is admitted, so to speak, into the progressive camp in the novel because he uses his knowledge I good ways and transcends the limitations of his cultural formation (George npag.).

At Dr. Carl’s ‘Tower’ Tashi is able to recollect and voice the pain that she felt at the death of her sister Dura. How the elders of the tribe tried very hard to stop her mourning is the first thing she says in her sessions with Mzee “They were always saying you mustn’t cry!” (PSJ 15). They want her to forget Dura’s death, because it was her tears that reminded them of her sister’s death. Nobody wishes to take up the responsibility of Dura’s death, so they do not wish to give it much notice.
When the doctor asks Tashi to remember the reason behind her erratic behavior, she begins not from the beginning but from the end of her journey in Africa. She reveals the fear that she felt on first seeing Adam at the Mbele’s camp after she underwent the initiation process. So first she remembers her pain and then gradually she moves towards the actual pain of her sister’s death.

The narrative is anything but coherent, it moves from one narrator to another. Together they make a complete whole. Adam, Olivia and Tashi together begin to narrate the events which lead to Tashi’s running away from home to join the Mbeles. Tashi remembers that Olivia begged her to not go, but Tashi had insulted her calling her “the white people’s wedge” – an outsider who would not understand the pain of the Africans, somebody who will just leave and go back home:

Olivia begged me not to go. But she did not understand....
Only, don’t do this to yourself, please, Tashi....
.... You and your family are the white people’s wedge....
You are a foreigner. Any day you like, you and your family can ship yourselves back home (PSJ 21-2).

Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff observe the strange manner in which the African Americans are dismissed by the Africans. And that is exactly what is reflected in Tashi’s behavior in Possessing, they note:

Olivia had begged her not to mutilate herself, but Tashi rebutted her, calling her and her family “the white people’s wedge” (22), as African expression dismissive of African Americans as “sell-outs” or Uncle Toms. Tashi’s fate is thereby sealed (Warren npag.).
Tashi not only joins the Mbele’s in their revolution against the while occupation of their country, but also undergoes the female-initiation oppression which completely destroys her already weak frame of mind. She has the false image of a martyr, who gives up her life for her country and her tribe because the outside forces are bent on destroying them. Her ego-centric madness prevents her from seeing the consequences of her actions. Geneva Cobb Moore disintegrates the false self-image of Tashi in her article titled “Archetypal symbolism in Alice Walker’s Possessing the Secret of Joy”, she writes:

Tashi is forced to see the falseness of her masked self as “Completely woman Completely African. Completely Olinka” – the self-centered and limited, petty world of the ego. Tashi then confesses to having had an “outlandish outsized image of myself” (Moore npag.).

This realization enables Tashi to look at her pain and at herself objectively, which becomes her first step towards her healing. In order to fight against the white man’s oppression Tashi was so much influenced by the talk other political leader that she is ready to accept the patriarchal stand on a woman’s life and her body. Her readiness to sacrifice herself for the sake of her nation’s cause is evaluated in the right spirit, only after she comes to America.

Tashi’s disappearance to join the Mbeles makes a man out of Adam, who follows her and brings her back, but not before she has undergone the soul-killing process of initiation. Adam’s first reaction on reaching Tashi is to feel the difference in her gaze. A wounded animal displays its wound through its eyes. Tashi’s gaze seems completely flat, no fear, no surprise nor happiness is reflected in her eyes:
The first thing I noticed was the flatness of her gaze. It frightened me.... I could not tell if she was happy to see me. Her eyes no longer sparkled with anticipation. They were as flat as eyes that have been painted in, and with dull paint (PSJ 40-3-4).

Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff make the following observation regarding Tashi’s flat gaze in their article mentioned earlier:

The eye as window to the soul can reveal the deepest hurts; Tashi’s eyes reflect her wounds. In fact, some researchers claim that if a woman has been genitally mutilated, it is evident by the look in her eyes (Warren n.pag.).

Olivia, Tashi’s soul-sister is the first one who is able to see the blow that the initiation process has had on Tashi. This relationship between Olivia and Tashi resembles Olivia’s mother Celie’s relationship with her own sisters-in-laws Kate and Carrie. The woman-bonding that we had witnessed in the earlier novel is repeated here in the next generation of Walker women. Olivia does not need to be taught to love Tashi, she very naturally cares for her friend and sister-in-law, who needs her more compared to her mother Celie. It is Tashi’s eyes once again which reveal her pain:

It was heartbreaking to see, on their return, how passive Tashi had become. No longer cheerful, or impish.... That her soul had been dealt a mortal blow was plain to anyone who dared look into her eyes (PSJ 65).

Adam realizes that Tashi’s mutilated spirit needs to be mended pretty urgently when one day he wakes up and finds his wife slicing her
hands in a bid to commit suicide. He takes her to the Jungian psycho-analyst Dr. Carl, who attempts to understand Tashi’s ailment by interpreting her dreams. But Tashi refuses to reveal her dreams to him and as a result Dr. Carl shifts to another form of treatment, wherein he uses art to help her reveal her secrets. He shows her a documentary about female initiation process which helps her connect with her sister Dura’s death. First, in reminiscence of *The Temple of My Familiar*, Tashi draws a picture of a leopard with two feet and her pregnant mother with four feet, remembering her mother’s encounter with a hurt and wounded leopard when she was expecting Tashi:

> He set me to drawing. The first thing 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 know (PSJ 54).

Later on she draws the picture of a huge cock which grows in its fierceness as days move on. This cock resembles the cock that devoured the unclean part of Dura’s body. Dura’s shrieks have not left her, but as she has not been able to properly label her death as murder, committed in the name of tradition by her own people, she is unable to move on. It is her art which frees her from her self-imposed prison. A prison guarded by the words of her elders who forbid her from crying over her sister’s death. Only when she sees the documentary about the initiation process that she allows herself to remember and recollect the events before Dura’s death. She paints the picture of a huge cock which gobbles down the unclean part of clitoris disposed off by M’Lissa. After she finishes painting the picture she is ready to talk to Adam and the
doctor about the pain that she has been hiding since a long time. For a very long time a boulder had been sitting on her throat which prevented her from calling Dura death a murder:

.... I remembered my sister Dura's .... I could get no further. There was a boulder lodged in my throat. My heart surged pitifully. I knew what the boulder was; that it was a word; and that behind that word I would find my earliest emotions.... I took a deep breath and exhaled it against the boulder blocking my throat. I remembered my sister Dura's murder, I said, exploding the boulder (PSJ 80-1).

This is where Tashi's true healing begins, now that the disease has been identified and named the cure can also possibly be devised and administered. This revelation opens up Tashi's hitherto hidden feelings and emotions. She acknowledges the undying presence of her sister in her life. It is not only the pain of her sister's death which stops her from living a normal life, but also the fact that if she allowed herself to accept the death as a murder, than she would want to get Dura justice for her murder. Then she would have to do something to avenge the death of her sister, “She has been screaming in my ears since it happened, I said, suddenly feeling weary beyond expression....Only I could not hear her, I sighed. You didn’t dare, said The Old Main” (PSJ 81-2).

These words of her doctor are almost like an epiphany, because not only did she hide her true feelings about Dura’s murder, but she had also never dared to consciously accept the murder. She had gone deaf as far as this matter was concerned. May be she must have thought that if she forgot or ignored Dura’s scream she would be able to forget her death. But alas that is not her destiny. She had to fight for herself and for Dura. In fact this fight does not stay contained within the four walls of
the family; it gets translated into a fight for the basic human rights of all those girls who undergo the most inhumane of human custom of genital mutilation, in many patriarchal communities of the world. Olakunle George observes, in his essay titled “Alice Walker’s Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction”, that Tashi’s actual healing begins from this point forward. He observes:

We also see the novel’s deployment of the ethnographic gaze in the way Tashi’s cure is narrated. She is able finally to pronounce the death of her sister Dura as a murder and thereby articulate the cause of her own psychic breakdown. She achieves this not just through verbal language, but through visual metaphor. She paints an intimidating cock to represent patriarchy and the violence it perpetuates on women. She is brought to this point by a silent film make by Carl in Africa. This ethnographic documentary unearths the repressed memory of her sister’s death and her own mutilation (George npag.).

What Walker seems to be doing here is giving voice to the pain that generation after generation of women have suffered. Patriarchy has been very systematic in first negating a woman claim on her own body and then silencing her by never allowing her to voice her pain. Walker being a Womanist needs to heal this unacknowledged pain of one half of the humanity. All the women around Tashi, happily ignore the cries of the dying Dura. Including their mother no one mourns the death of one of their daughter, “But my mother never wept” (PSJ 17). This absolute lack of misery has a very devastating effect on Tashi, she doesn’t understand as to why do women don’t acknowledge their pain, why do they preserve their tears for the men and don’t shed it for themselves and their daughters:
But my mother never wept, though like the rest of the women, when called upon to salute the power of the chief and his counselors she could let out a cry that assaulted the very heavens with its praising pain (PSJ 17).

Throughout *Possessing* Walker has discussed in detail the consequences of women denying their suffering, and men using this silence to justify their own actions. Tashi becomes the first one to confront the patriarchal society by exposing her wounds and seeking revenge for it. Maxine Sample analyses Tashi’s response, by bringing out the importance of the efforts undertaken by Tashi as under:

An adult Tashi seeks an understanding of the cultural and collective agent of her woman’s pain. Once she names the source of her torment and unearths repressed emotions, the healing begins. Tashi’s recognition of the continuum of pain connecting the two sisters is an important first step. Women’s denial of their own pain, a denial passed from generation to generation is the message that an older Tashi takes back to her village (Sample npag.).

What Tashi, the African American woman, learns from her white male doctor is that one needs to voice one’s pain before anyone becomes ready to listen to ones cries. If women would never acknowledge their own pain then patriarchy would be happy believing that there was no pain. Tashi begins to accept this acknowledgement as her destiny which completely alters her reality, “If you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it” (PSJ 106).

Only after reaching America does Tashi become aware of her own sexuality. The taboo attached to sexual pleasures disappears once
she enters a new society. Only when Tashi realizes the magnitude of her mistake, does she learn to appreciate her body. As the immediacy of her revolutionary environment wears off she looks at herself as a woman, in its totality:

It was only after I came to America, I said, that I even knew what was supposed to be down there. Down there?
Yes. My own body was a mystery to me, as was the female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost everyone I knew (PSJ 119).

Christianity and its values clubbed with the atrocities and colonization of the Olinkan’s at the hands of the white plantation owners, were responsible for fierce protectiveness that the Olinkans felt towards everything that was native and established their African identity as firmly as possible. The initiation process was one such thing. Tashi had not undergone the initiation ceremony when she was young because her mother had adopted Christianity and so she refused her to allow daughter to be initiated. But later on the circumstances made Tashi decide in favour of it.

The most absurd extreme of penis envy can be seen in Tashi’s story, according to her there was a dominant belief in the Olinkan tribe, that if the clitoris of a woman is kept uncut it would grow to become a penis which would get its own erection, hence hindering the act of love making between a man and a woman:

Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they’d soon torch her things; she’d become masculine and arouse herself. No
man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way (PSJ 119).

The ridiculousness of this belief cannot be stressed any further. It is an eye-opener for the outside world to understand the oppression that Olinkan women had to undergo in the name of tradition. The absurd kind of peer pressure that uncircumcised girls felt from those ones who had been circumscribed was too much for these young girls to handle. Girls like Tashi were made a laughing stock in their village because of their uncut clitoris and vaginal lips:

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 (PSJ 120).

Here Tashi reveals the reason behind her decision to be circumcised, it was the constant jeering and the feeling of being left out which pushed her to decide on circumcision. Also because of her friendship with Olivia and her relationship with Adam, Tashi was treated as a traitor and was never allowed to mingle and be a part of her own tribe. Olinkan people were also instigated by their own leader, their Jesus Christ, that no Olinkan man would marry an Olinkan who was not circumcised:

To be accepted as a real woman by the Olinka people; to stop the jeering.... Besides, Our Leader, our Jesus Christ, said we must keep all our old ways and that no Olinka man --- in this he echoed the great liberator Kenyatta --- would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised (PSJ 121).
Through almost all her women characters, Walker exhibits the extent of oppression and humiliation that women have to face, in most parts of the world. Lisette, Adam’s lover shares her story of women’s subjugation with her young son Pierre when he is about to meet his father in America. Lisette tells Pierre the story of how she met his father, when he was taking care of Torabe an old man who was banished from his village because he could not control his young wife, who ran away from him and committed suicide. Through this story about Torabe, Walker seems to highlight the connection between genital mutilation and enslavement of the African woman by her own man, “It was about how, at last, I recognized the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world” (PSJ 137).

Torabe got married to a young girl after all his earlier wives died; as the new wife’s vaginal opening was very small he cut her open with a hunting knife on their bridal night. She went back to her parents but her father ordered her mother to send her back to her husband, because after marriage a girl is supposed to stay in her marital home. So finally she ran away and drowned herself “in water that didn’t even reach her knees, rather than return” (PSJ 136).

The men would not have been so powerful had the society not supported them in their act. Men in the society were threatened by the hidden power of women and so they try to subdue the women as much as possible. They were afraid to lose their manhood if they allow women to be themselves. And so apply all the means available to have absolute control over their women. Women themselves are so brainwashed into believing whatever the man says that they do not even come out and
help other women in distress. The society punishes those men who cannot control their women, and also those families who cannot control their daughters:

Torabe was thrown out of the village because he lost control of his wife, a very evil thing to do in that society because it threatened the fabric of the web of life.... The girl’s family too was ordered out of the village, and the girl herself was dragged from the river and left to rot, her body food for vultures and rodents (PSJ 137).

Lisette, though is very far away from all this as she is a white French woman, she understands the deep roots of patriarchy which have used women against themselves in order to rule over them. The sexual politics of men have separated different generations of women from one-another by establishing relations between women through them. Women have to consciously come out of this mind-set and create a sisterhood in order to survive whole both in body and in soul. Lisette tries to understand this complex structure of oppression constructed by men for their own benefit, “We are the perfect audience, mesmerized by our unconscious knowledge of what men, with the collaboration of our mothers, do to us” (PSJ 138).

Women unknowingly become a party to this historical and social oppression of women. In fact women have been used as tools by men to work against women themselves. The pain is evident in Lisette’s statement when she observes that men have been successful in ill-treating women especially with the help of their mothers. Women have been used against women in the name of religion, tradition, social obligations and so on and so forth. Nagueyatti Warren and Sally Wolff
remark in their above-mentioned essay that Walker ultimately puts the responsibility of protecting themselves and their daughters on the women themselves because patriarchy would never give up its subjugation, unless women themselves intervened:

Alice Walker develops in her works the dichotomous view that, on the one hand, women must contend with rape and violence imposed upon them from outside forces; but, on the other hand, they also victimize themselves and self-inflict wounds. Walker places the ultimate responsibility on women to resist societal expectations and the demands of tradition (Warren 15).

In the midst of this entire woman – betrayal where the elder women instead of protecting their younger girls inflict wounds on them, there are depictions of community women healers who stand by one-another and heal the wounded with their love and understanding. Before the Swiss Doctor dies he sends Tashi to an African American woman psychiatrist who in the true African way empathizes with Tashi by getting a dental surgery done on her, thus sharing the pain of her patient and understanding it better. Tashi identifies her as a witch, who intuitively practices the magic of empathy:

.... she was intuitively practicing an ageless magic, the foundation of which was the ritualization, or the acting out, of empathy.... My psychologist was a witch, not the warty kind American children imitate an Halloween, but a spiritual descendant of the ancient healers who taught our witch doctors .....In my heart I thanked Mzee for her, for I believed she would be plucky enough to accompany me where he could not. And that she would (PSJ 131-2).
Against the back-drop of Tashi’s victimization we see an alter ego who is constantly cross with people. She seems to be a shadow of the original self. Benny her son remembers her as “the driven, frowning mother I’d always known” (PSJ 92). She is the woman who collected stones from the day Pierre was born, because he was the son of the woman whom Adam loved. The fierceness, with which Tashi attacks Pierre when he visits their home, shows the dark side of this wounded woman. Geneva Cobb Moore brings in Carl Jung’s views about the dark and primitive side of a personality, which needs to be accepted before attaining wholeness, in her essay mentioned earlier:

The victims of her shadow self are Benny.... She “frequently” and with little cause, no cause, boxed Benny? ears, making him “squeal and cringe”; and she hurls stones at Pierre.... Jung states that awareness of the dark and primitive side of the personality is essential for self-knowledge .... Thus, Walker’s treatment of her heroine’s passion and rage, psychoanalysis and therapy over an extended period of time after which Tashi recognizes and loses her shadow is, it appears, realistic (Moore npag.).

Apart from the two psychoanalysts, it is Pierre who helps her regain her “sanity” and strive to become whole. After the initial hatred Tashi whole-heartedly welcomes him into her heart, even allowing him to help her cure herself. It is Pierre who is able to decipher the meaning of Tashi’s dreams.

On realizing the source of her ailment Tashi decides to come back to Africa and face the ghosts of her past. She decides to punish the woman who physically and spiritually mutilated the Olinkan girls, at the behest of the men. The Tsunga – the woman who performs the initiation
ceremony is called M’Lissa, who Tashi finds to her horror, has been elevated to the status of a National Monument. She was worshipped for having protected the Olinkan tradition and culture against the Western onslaught and was specially taken care of by the Government. It is obvious that this Government is made up of men, who have no idea about the pain and sufferings of their own daughters’ and mothers’. M’Lissa has been brought out of her old hut and placed as a living Goddess in a beautiful new home with full-time servants to take care of other. There was a photograph of a broadly smiling M’Lissa along with the article, but it is Tashi who is able to see the coldness behind her smile:

There was something sinister, though, about her aspect; but perhaps I was the only one likely to see it. Though her mouth was smiling, as were her sunken cheeks and her long nose, her wrinkled forehead and her scrawny neck, her beady eyes were not. Looking into them, suddenly chilled, I realized they never had (PSJ 148).

The Olinkans like most of the societies of the world have decided against taking up those issues for discussions and observations which make them question the validity of their ‘tradition’. It is only because most of us are happy pushing unpleasant things under the carpet that it becomes impossible for us to retrospect and introspect. The questions themselves make us uncomfortable, forget about the answers. The pain and the trauma that their children face in the name of tradition are beyond them to comprehend. They neither have the will nor desire to acknowledge the extreme pain of their children:

They do not want to hear what their children suffer. They’ve made the telling of the suffering itself taboo like
visible signs of menstruation. Signs of woman’s mental power, signs of the weakness and uncertainty of men (PSJ 161).

The male protagonists in the *Possessing* seem to be breaking the so-called mould created by man. Adam, to a great extent is a Womanist character. May be he is unable to empathize with his wife’s physical pain but here again we remember Walker’s Womanist theory, wherein she does mention that a Womanist is “Not a separatist, except periodically, for health” (SMG xi). Woman’s health might be an issue where man-as he is-might not to actually feel the way in which a woman would. So, it can be understood that as far as Tashi’s health-related issues are concerned Olivia understands her better than Adam. But yet in *Possessing* Walker seems to be breaking many stereotypes both physical and mental stereotypes which typify or separated men from women. Differences which have become more sociological than biological. Walker takes up the argument made by Marcel Griaule in his book titled *Conversations with Ogotremmel* wherein he writes that the spirit endowed both man and woman with two souls of different sex, so a man also had a female soul and a woman also had a male soul:

Thus it came about that each human being from the first was endowed with two souls of different sex, or rather with two principles corresponding to two distinct persons. In the man the female soul was located in the prepuce; in the woman the male soul was in the clitoris (PSJ 171).

This section from the above mentioned book is being read out by Adam and Lisette’s son Pierre to Tashi, the woman who first welcomed him with stones. Pierre is a bisexual anthropologist who has been studying
the biological differences of men and women. He helps Tashi understand the loopholes in the myth of creation which firmly separated the men from the women. Being a homosexual himself Pierre wonders if men and women could ever converge together and become one. This is the wholeness that Walker is talking about, that Carl Jung is referring to. The stones that Tashi throws on Pierre are also very symbolic, because those stones according to Jung are symbolic of wholeness. Geneva Cobb Moore refers to this in her above mentioned essay, and says that Pierre becomes the "corner" stone from where her life take a new turn which leads her to her wholeness:

Through his character, the author treats homosexuality as non-aberrant and explores the religious symbolism of stones, Jung’s symbol of wholeness.... Initially rejected, like the biblical Christ, Pierre has become for Tashi the sacred "corner" stone that she once hurled at him (Moore npag.).

Pierre unravels the mystery of circumcision, the event that has marred Tashi for life. According to him this utterly unnatural and health-threatening tradition has been going on since ages because patriarchy has been striving very hard to keep men and women separate. Accepting the oneness of the two beings would take away their power and bring in equality of the two sexes:

.... The man is circumcised to rid of his femininity; the woman is excised to rid her of her masculinity. In other words, he said, leaning forward in his chair, a very long time ago, men found it necessary to permanently lock people in the category of their obvious sex, even while recognizing sexual duality as a given of nature (PSJ 171-2).
Through Pierre, Walker is exposing the sexual politics behind the tradition of circumcision. By killing away the duality within the two natural sexes, the African society has prevented its own people from attaining wholeness. Geneva Cobb Moore opines in her above-mentioned article that Walker is attacking the African society which rejects the inherent duality of the two sexes, thus devouring the natural rights of sexual pleasure of both men and women:

Presenting what she appears to believe is a natural male/female duality; Walker subverts and exposes traditional Africa’s rejection of this duality and autonomous rights of pleasure and gratification for women as well as for men (Moore npag.).

Pierre seems to be the most evolved Womanist out of a host of male characters visualized by Walker. He seems to have kept his femininity intact, and so he can very easily and naturally understand the intricacies of a woman’s body. Pierre wonders as to why women are not allowed to express their sexuality as openly as men? Why does a woman always has to be called a slut and a man excused for the same kind of behavior? Walker’s focus seems to be equality in sex for both the sexes, and so she make Pierre question, in a Womanist way, the rules of sexual morality that are so very different for men and women:

"The word you are looking for, says Pierre, is wantonly. Loosely. A woman who is sexually “unrestrained,” according to the dictionary, is by definition “lascivious, wanton and loose.” But why is that? A man who is sexually unrestrained is simply a man (PSJ 175)."
Pierre makes many such observations which differentiate his way of thinking from the general opinion that men have about women. Pierre’s point of reference is his girlfriend Queen Anne, named after Queen Anee’s lace, the ‘wild flower’. She was a woman who he termed to be a ‘pan sexual’ person, a person who could have sex with almost everything in nature. Not in the sense of being promiscuous or loose, but in the sense of being connected with almost everything in nature:

She could experience orgasm doing almost anything. She said that at home there were favourite trees she loved that she rubbed against. She could have 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 (PSJ 176).

Though this seems outrageous according to Indian standards of morality, we do have examples of women having orgasms not only through masturbation but also through rubbing against an animal like horse. Dr. Chinoo Modi’s Play *Ashwamegh* is based on an identical theme. Pierre himself does not see this as a perversion on the part of his girl-friend or other women, in fact he sees this as a very positive light. Pierre wonders as to why women are more experimental as far as their sexual options are concerned. The truth is that he is in awe of women-kind who can be as unrestrained as God’s nature. Man’s inability to indulge so freely seems to be his limitation not his moral strength. Pierre believes that man is not open to this idea may be because man does not seek this kind of oneness with the earth:

Is it only woman who would make love to everything? He asks. Man too, after all, has external sexual organs. But
does man seek oneness with the earth by having sex with it? (PSJ 177).

Walker does mention the perversion that is so freely available in the name of pornography. Women are made to copulate with almost anything from animals to broom sticks and coke bottles, but this according to Walker is the result of man's jealousy, because he envies a woman's pleasure for which she does not need a man. "Man is jealous of woman's pleasure, Pierre says after a while, because she does not require him to achieve it" (PSJ 178).

Pierre goes on to try and connect this jealousy with the tradition of circumcision. The whole concept of penis envy also seems to have its roots in this jealousy. It is not women who are envious of man's penis but it is in fact vice versa. By circumcision, man denies woman this very pleasure and makes her depend completely on him for all her sexual needs:

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 (PSJ 178).

Evelyn meets a woman called Amy who relates to her the story of her own circumcision. The only difference between the two circumcised women Evelyn and Amy is that one is a black African American woman and the other is a White American woman. Evelyn is shocked to know that even in America women have been circumcised because they claimed their own sexuality. Amy as a child was in a habit of touching
her own self which her mother was dead against. She tried various different means to stop Amy from touching herself but did not succeed and therefore she made her family doctor cut down her clitoris:

I mean, said Amy, sighing, that when I was a very little girl I used to touch myself... there. It was a habit that mortified my mother. When I was three years old she bound my hands each night before I was put to bed. At four she put hot pepper sauce on my fingers. At six years of age our family doctor was asked to excise my clitoris (PSJ 185).

Evelyn finds this absolutely unbelievable that such a thing could be happening in America. She could not accept the fact that even in the democratic and free country like America there would be people who would sexually mutilate their daughters. Evelyn had a very romantic idea about American and she did not wish to disturb her own thought, “I don’t believe you, she said, rising to go. For I saw the healthy green leaves of my America falling seared to the ground. Her sparkling rivers muddy with blood” (PSJ 185).

For Evelyn America symbolized freedom, security, modernization and liberty. And therefore she is surprised to know that even in America in the name of morality small girls are subjected to the inhumane desexualization. It seems that women’s sexuality is a threat to men anywhere in the world. Men have realized that as far as sexual pleasure is concerned women do not need men, yes maybe for procreation a woman might need the help of a man, but that’s it. A woman seems to be complete in herself, and that is what threatens men. To combat this fear man has devised ways and means to control women. Circumcision is one of them.
Tashi returns to Africa not just for destroying the woman responsible for the mutilation of almost all girl-children of Africa, but for showing her resistance towards the man-made tradition in totality. She is voicing the feelings of more than just one person. The African women have been silenced into submission in the name of tradition. Again it is not the first time that a Tsunga is going to be murdered by one of the girls on whom she has performed the operation, in fact it is again part of the tradition. M’Lissa shares this information with Tashi, “She had told me it was traditional for a well-appreciated Tsunga to be murdered by someone by she circumcised, then burned. I carried out what was expected of me” (PSJ 274).

Tashi’s encounter with M’Lissa is enlightening in more than one way. She understands the way in which the sexual politics have been working against women from the beginning to the end. Women are so very much conditioned to accept their secondary status as women that they have forgotten all about equality. Even M’Lissa has accepted the fact that she is going to be murdered by one of the girls whom she initiated, because she is ‘a well-appreciated’ tsunga, one may ask well-appreciated by whom, and the answer would be of course, men. Tashi’s arrival for the specific reasons does not go unnoticed by M’Lissa, “The very first day she came I could see my death in Tashi’s eyes, as clearly as if I were looking into a mirror. Those eyes that are the eyes of a mad woman” (PSJ 205).

The ‘looking into the mirror’ part is very suggestive. The madness that she has been living throughout her life is reflected in Tashi’s eyes. Though she instantly sees her murder, M’Lissa tries to postpone it as much as she can. She uses the ancient Olinkan trick of diverting a mad-
person’s attention and fleeing towards safety. M’Lissa indulges Tashi in the play of worlds. In the process M’Lissa wishes to pass on her wisdom and those experiences of a natural African woman which would never have reached Tashi, except for her. The first thing the tsunga wishes to know is the accurate description of an American. The question is like a koan, the answer enlightens the seeker as much the prober. In her attempt to describe an American, Tashi fumbles and comes upon the most amazing description of an American. She realizes that the different kinds of people who live in America are different from one-another in their physical appearance but are thoroughly similar in their emotional make-up, as all of them have fled away to America from their own histories of pain:

I’d offered her hundreds of descriptions of Americans who rarely resembled each other physically and yet resembled each other deeply in their hidden histories of fled from pain (PSJ 203).

But then suddenly Tashi finds the perfect definition of an American person. He/she is a person with some kind of internal wound, a wound which is hidden from everyone else, sometimes even from their own selves, “An American looks like a wounded person whose wound is hidden from others, and sometimes from herself. An American looks like me” (PSJ 208). Before allowing Tashi to take her revenge M’Lissa shares with her the painful events leading to and from her own initiation process. According to M’Lissa even her own mother was a tsunga. A forced tsunga, who knew the pleasures of keeping the sexual organs intact. She had carried forward the remnants of matriarchy, which allowed women to touch their own bodies and acquire the much
forbidden pleasure. The divinity and purity of a woman’s body was well understood by her. She tried very hard to protect M’Lissa’s sexuality which she wished would be worshipped like the earlier times. M’Lissa had once seen her mother go into a forest and take something out of a hole of a tree, she held the thing up, kissed it and placed it back after carefully wrapping it up. After her mother had left M’Lissa brought out the thing, unwrapped it and found that it was a small figurine with one hand on her genitals:

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 in tact (PSJ 213).

Here Walker seems to argue that women playing with themselves for pleasure is not a new phenomenon but an age-old tradition. A tradition which has been forcefully taken away from women. It is once again the threat that men felt when they found out that women did not need them at least for sexual pleasure.

M’Lissa had out of curiosity touched herself in the same manner as the figure and what she felt thrilled her beyond imagination. It also frightened her. This incident occurred before her circumcision so she could touch her clitoris and her vulva:

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. (PSJ 213).
Even in the midst of the hatred felt by the protagonist for this old tsunga Walker gives us the lost Womanist past of M’Lissa thus bringing about a complete alteration in our opinion about this old woman. Walker absolves M’Lissa of all her wrong doing and attempts to justify what she has been doing to the Olinkan children as a necessary survival tactic. It was not that she was unmoved by the screams of the little girls, but she chose to ignore their wails because if she would have allowed herself to hear them then she would have to acknowledge her own forgotten pain too. Though after a very long time M’Lissa vividly remembers the pleasure that she had received on touching her own self.

While discussing the pain that the women and children suffer in the name of ritual, M’Lissa comments about the existence of God and sounds almost like Celie in *The Color Purple* who refuses to acknowledge the existence of God because she feels that God has ignored her. M’Lissa also comments that for women there can be only one God and that is autonomy, “That there is no God known to man who cares about children or about women. And that the God of woman is autonomy” (PSJ 216). M’Lissa wonders as to why women have been suffering for so long and why women would come to the tsunga to be resewn tighter than before so that the man can have all the pleasure that he desires. At this Tashi tells her that younger women have been taught by older women like herself that men find pleasure only when they have to struggle for a long time to get into a woman. But they never mentioned anything about a woman’s pleasure or her suffering:

Men love and enjoy the struggle you said. For the woman .... But you never said anything about the woman, did you, M’Lissa? About the pleasure she might have. Or the suffering (PSJ 217).
It is on her death bed that M’Lissa allows herself to hear the wails of the little child whom she had left behind in the initiation hut, when a new insensitive, hard M’Lissa walked out of it. M’Lissa understands as to why she has not been able to cry ever since she left that hut, because all her tears have been taken by the lost and forgotten child, a child who is still crying as a result of the betrayal of her own people:

You know I left her there bleeding on the floor, and I came out. She was crying. She felt so betrayed. By everyone.... She is still crying. She’s been crying since I left. No wonder I haven’t been able to - she has been crying all our tears (PSJ 218).

The final acceptance of all the evils that she has performed on the small children, in a way makes her passage into the other world a little more bearable. She questions the very notion of their national identity and tradition. After being upheld as a National Treasure M’Lissa has often been called upon to grace one occasion or the other to reinforce their concept of Nationality and identity. A concept that M’Lissa declares as false and admits the true identity of her own people, “In service to tradition, to what makes us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. But who are we but torturers of children?” (PSJ 219).

Olakunle George suggests in his essay mentioned earlier that M’Lissa, who seems to be the evident evil, is very much relieved of her sins, because Walker does put her evilness in the right perspective:

Alongside the pathological ambience the text gives M’Lissa, it also portrays her as a complex product of
In spite of itself, the novel casts M'Lissa as at once a stereotypical evil witch and a subject with a mad, altogether human, integrity. Thus she narrates to Tashi her own experience of excision, and how she has tried to cope with the pain and the duty of socializing young girls by perpetuating this ritual (George npag.).

Though, as mentioned earlier, it is the part of the initiation tradition for the tsunga to be murdered by someone whom she has initiated, what Tashi seems to be doing here is giving it a touch of objectivity. She left America, understood her pain, got it analyzed and then returned to display her resistance to whatever the Olinkan society was doing to their daughters. Masurie Sample in her article quoted above adds that Tashi returns to learn about the helplessness of the women who unwillingly take part in the demuanizing tradition of initiation, they were mere pawns in the hands of the tribe elders:

.... Women who participate or appear to sanction the subjugation of other women are often not free themselves to challenge tradition or remove barriers erected by the societies to which they belong. Thus, the slaying of M'Lissa – someone, Tashi confesses, “who, many years ago killed me” (274) is not simply an attack on a woman but a conscious effort to resist dominance, to break the chain of oppression (Sample npag.).

Thus, M'Lissa’s murder not only heals Tashi but also liberates M'Lissa from the guilt of having betrayed her own womankind. M'Lissa takes up the responsibility of passing on the matrilineage of her community to the next generation of women like Tashi. She reveals all the secrets that have been kept away from women for ages together.
It is Pierre on the other hand who deciphers the meaning of the tower dream that Tashi has been having for a long time. Pierre follows the footsteps of the Swiss psychologist Uncle Carl and shows Tashi a documentary that he has made on the similarity between women’s sexual organs and a termite hill. The termite queen is beautifully and analytically compared to a woman whose wings are cut off and she is made to blindly produce offspring after offspring for something as little as food in return. Pierre while comparing a termite queen with a woman makes the following observations:

You are the queen who loses her wings. It is you lying in the dark with millions of worker termites – who are busy, by the way, maintaining mushroom farms from which they feed you – buzzing about. You being stuffed with food at one end – a boring diet of mushrooms – and having your eggs, millions of them, constantly removed on the other (PSJ 227).

Pierre reveals his understanding of the power politics played by the elders of the Olinkan tribe. The cutting off of the queen’s wings was a metaphor for the control that the men desired over women. Clipping their wings was synonymous to desexing of the women within their tribe. Once her vulva was completely scratched off the woman would have nowhere to go but to their own men. Their plan was heavily coded and preserved in mythology where the decoding was done only by the male village elders. The women were completely kept in darkness. To quote from the text:

Not told you directly that you, as a woman, were expected to reproduce as helplessly and inertly as a white ant; but in a culture in which it is mandatory that every single female
be systematically desexed, there would have to be some coded, mythological reason given for it, used secretly among the village elders (PSJ 227).

The women themselves would never distrust their own man and the position of the village elders was also undefiable so they could never be questioned nor expected to give answers. Women were enslaved in their own bodies, by always keeping them pregnant, "It is about keeping a woman pregnant, says Pierre, stretching out these arms and curving them into a pumpkin shape. Enslaved by her own body" (PSJ 228).

Religion is used to keep women down on their knees. The story about God wanting to make love to a woman whose uncut clitoris rose and barred him from entering a woman’s body, and so God cut the clitoris and cleared his way and entered her body:

When the clitoris rose, I continued, God thought it looked masculine. Since it was "masculine" for a clitoris to rise, God could be excused for cutting it down. Which he did. Then, I said, God fucked the hole that was left (PSJ 229).

This is the story which has been coded in the minds and memories of the village elders. The involvement of God in this story puts it beyond the human survey. When God did it, humans are supposed to blindly follow. For centuries together women have been oppressed in the name of religion. Because in most of the religions practiced around the world God is always a man and women are always the other, who are just supposed to take orders and allow their fates to be decided by God through men. Raye, Tashi's psychiatrist makes a very sarcastic
comment on this, she says, “Religion is an elaborate excuse for what man has done to women and to the earth, says Raye, bitterly” (PSJ 229).

Then Tashi remembers a day from her childhood when she had taken food and water for the village elders who sat under a baobab tree gazing wisely at the fields. She overheard a discussion amongst them, though at that point she was too young to understand what was being said, but when she remembers the incident in retrospection she adds the new information provided by Pierre to what she had known earlier, and thus gets the whole picture of the story of women’s desexualization. There were four elders sitting and talking about God and how he controlled women:

All : Woman is queen.
Number One : She is a queen
Number two : God has given her to us....
Number three : If left to herself the Queen would fly
Number two : True
Number three : And then where would we be?
Number four : But God is merciful
Number one : He clips her wings (PSJ 231).

Once Pierre discloses the hidden meaning behind Tashi’s dream and the reality of the African women’s existence, Tashi is able to make a connection between what she had heard as a child and what Pierre was trying to tell her. Tashi remembers that as she was a child the elders did not pay her any attention and went on discussing about the story involving God and a woman. According to these elders it was “God” who taught them the tactics of keeping women under control. Tashi recollects the dialogue that went on amongst the elders, which seemed horrifyingly similar to Pierre’s story:
Number four: And when she rose up....

    All: Hah!
    Number three: Rose up indeed.
    Number four: She did not see God's axe.
    Number two: No, she was blind like us then. She did not see it.
    Number three: God struck the blow that made her Queen!
    Number four: Beautiful enough for him to fuck.
    Number one: God liked it fighting!
    (Laughter)
    Number two: God liked it tight!
    Number two: Because He liked it tight!
    Number three: God likes to feel big.
    Number four: what man does not?(PSJ 232-3)

The brutality of the entire talk sinks in when Tashi remembers it later on and wonders as to how the elders could have been so insensitive as to talk about her and the way in which they are going to change her life in her very presence without realizing what impact it would leave on her:

    The old men discussing her and all the females of the village did not care that she heard them Tashi would not be able to figure out what they were talking about. They were discussing her, determining her life, and at the same time she did not, could not, know (PSJ 233).

The most interesting dialogue happens between Tashi and M'Lissa, the woman whom she hates enough to have come to kill her. M'Lissa tells her how women have been used and abused by patriarchy in the name of tradition. M'Lissa reveals to Tashi the fact that the Rebels had sent for both M'Lissa and Tashi so that they can create an authentic Olinkan village from where they can fight. They needed a
tsunga to complete their traditional formality and then they needed a 
woman or girl-child who would volunteer for undergoing the initiation 
process and for that volunteer they decided upon Tashi, whose catholic 
mother had not allowed the circumcision to happen on her. Tashi asks 
M’Lissa of her reaction on seeing Tashi in the rebel camp, asking her to 
“bathe” or “purify” her. M’Lissa says that (the first thing that she felt 
was) she thought that Tashi was a fool, first because she did not see any 
women around the camp yet she decided to stay on and allow the 
circumcision to happen on her:

I thought you were a fool, she says without hesitation. The 
very biggest....Because, first of all, there were no other 
women in the camp. Didn’t you have eyes in your head? 
Didn’t anyone ever teach you that the absence of women 
means something? Or were you 80 wrapped up in yourself 
you didn’t notice? (PSJ 237).

M’Lissa blames Tashi for not protecting herself from the clutches of 
those people who wanted to and conspired to enslave women. Tashi was 
so pre-occupied with her pair that she missed out on the fact that there 
were no other women besides M’Lissa and her on the camp M’Lissa’s 
advice, though a bit late about how the absence of women should be 
interpreted. Women are absent only when they do not feel needed. And 
also when they realize that they are being exploited in the new place just 
as they were being ill-treated in the earlier place. M’Lissa herself gives 
the reason for women leaving the camp and going away, “When the 
women came they were expected to cook and clean – and be screwed – 
exactly as they had been at home. When they saw how things were, they 
left”(PSJ 237).
Though M’Lissa performs the initiation ceremony on young girls as a tsunga, she voices for the first time, her absolute reservation against the circumcision of women. Tashi says that young girls welcome circumcision only because they are encouraged by the other older women like M’Lissa and their leader as well, “But you encouraged it, I say, puzzled and hurt…. But Our Leader informed us ….” (PSJ 238). At the mention of their Leader M’Lissa erupts saying that after-all ‘Our leader’ was also a man who needed women just to work as their magic mirrors, enlarging their own images more than four times their original size. according to M’Lissa their leader was one of those men who believed in male supremacy and would wish only the women to make all the sacrifices. Men like their leader protected their own sexuality but eagerly advocated the desexing of women:

Did Our Leader not keep his penis? Is there evidence that even one testicle was removed? The man had eleven children by three different wives. I think this means the fellow’s private parts were intact (PSJ 238).

It seems from all this discussion that M’Lissa had always been against the circumcision of girls but being a tsunga was a family tradition and therefore she could not deny being a tsunga. She is frustrated to know how men have been treated always; M’Lissa again argues that it is the women who are unable to see the fact behind a smiling face. M’Lissa feels that women are responsible for not acknowledging their own pain:

Even the sweetest mango in my mouth is bitter to me, she say. But women, she sneers, women are too cowardly to look behind a smiling face. A man smiles and tells them
they will look beautiful weeping, and they send for the knife (PSJ 238).

Tashi counter-argues that women have a reason to be afraid precisely because women do not favour or stand-by one another. They generally favour the son, or the father or the husband. The entire control of the village is in the hands of the male and therefore women need to fear them, “They have reason to be afraid, I say. You, especially, cannot deny this” (PSJ 239).

Then M’Lissa responds with a bomb of an argument which cannot be countered even by Tashi. M’Lissa tells that if women have to stand by one-another then they will have to kill their own sons, which means the women will have to come out of the shadow of patriarchy which has conditioned her to love only her sons and not her daughters and daughters-in-law. Women themselves will have to come up and protect other women. They will have to take-up arms and acknowledge their own pain so that they can stop the other women from feeling the same pain. What M’Lissa knows is that in the hidden corners of their hearts even women know that they will have to kill their own sons if they have to protect other women, which they are not ready to do:

Their biggest fear is that they will have to kill their sons, she says angrily. Even if they themselves almost died the first time a man broke into their bodies, they want to be told it was a minor hurt, the same that all women feel, that their daughters will barely notice, and cease, over tie, to remember. If I tell them that, it makes it almost possible for them not to completely despise their sons.

For the pain they inflict.
Yes. Breaking into someone else’s daughter. Just as another woman’s son breaks into theirs (PSJ 239).

From all that M’Lissa tells Tashi makes her seem like wisdom incarnate. She not only enlightens Tashi on the sexual politics indulged in by their own men, but also awakens her towards female sexuality as well. M’Lissa shares with Tashi the hidden pleasure that women can have if they desire, “The pleasure a woman receives comes from her own brain. The brain sends it to any spot a lover can touch” (PSJ 240).

Thus, Tashi’s encounter with M’Lissa leaves her richer in more than one ways. She passes on the treasure of women’s wisdom to the next generation, through the never failing tradition of the African women. In George Olankunle’s opinion, the relation between Tashi and M’Lissa is more of a transition of power and knowledge than of a good-versus-evil fight. He writes:

Tashi’s relationship to M’Lissa is thus not simply that of a vengeful daughter getting rid of an evil ancestor. At the same time that the novel seeks to present the relationship in convenient good-versus-evil terms, it inscribes a richer, more interesting drama of transition and supersession, wherein every new generation has to immolate its predecessor in order to fulfil a self-defined historical mission (George npag.).

Tashi is sentenced to death as a punishment for killing her Tsunga M’Lissa. While she waits for her execution she helps Olivia in tending for the AIDS patients. She is angry at the utter helplessness of the people in the ward. The patients have no idea as to why he or she is sick.
Their dumbfoundedness reminds Tashi of her own suffering. Because they quietly suffer, they are punished all the more. Tashi finds the African attitude of non-protest responsible for all this:

Their dumb patience, as they wait for death. It is their animal-like ignorance and acceptance that most angers Tashi, perhaps because she is reminded of herself. She calls it, scornfully, the assigned role of the African to suffer, to die, and not know why (PSJ 245-6).

Tashi believes that so many young girls are dying of AIDS because of the unclean tools used by the Tsunga infects them more than anything else. After the initiation process, the Tsunga sews the women up so tightly that whenever they have intercourse there is a lot of tearing and bleeding. It is this constant mutilation of their organs which ultimately kills these young women:

Tashi is convinced that the little girls who are dying, ..., are infected by the unwashed.... Knives used by the Tsunga.... almost every act of intercourse involves tearing and bleeding, especially in a woman’s early years (PSJ 247).

Tashi’s Tsunga M’Lissa reveals the exact circumstances at her sister Dura’s initiation process. M’Lissa tells Tashi that it was her mother who insisted on having Dura bathed. According to M’Lissa she tried to stop Catherine, but Catherine felt that if her daughter was not initiated then may be no one would marry her. But M’Lissa’s argument was more interesting than Catherines’ fear, “If Dura is not bathed, she said, no one will marry her. She never seemed to notice no one had ever married me, and that I lived anyway” (PSJ 253).
Marriage, for Catherine was the ultimate goal of any girl’s life. She was not ready to accept the pain that women undergo as a result of the initiation process. She further argues that Dura’s father was tolerant with her mother, so there was nothing to fear for her daughter as she would also find a caring husband. Even, when she knew that Dura’s body was so constructed that even a small scratch would make her bleed profusely, Catherine made her undergo the bathing process, “That she was that one in a hundred girls so constructed that the slightest scratch made her bleed like a stuck cow” (PSJ 253). From this revelation it seems that Tashi’s mother Catherine is more responsible for Dura’s death than M’lissa. Tashi also wonders that may be M’Lissa is telling a lie. But she has no way to find out the truth and so she accepts it as the truth, “Stop, I say. Even if she were lying, as I now knew she often did, I could not bear to hear it” (PSJ 253).

The confession that Adam hears from a desperate dying young man changes many things for many people. Adam’s numbness is thawed, the young boy is able to die, somewhat peacefully, and the readers are dragged into the filthy world of materialism. We witness how the so-called developed countries exploit the ecology and the people of under-developed economies. The animals in his story seemed to be more humane, than the humans. In one such instance, the boy admits that they were able to kill the male monkeys easily and without any remorse, precisely because they loved their captured family so much that they followed them even at the cost of their own security:

.... the father always fought, then screeched a warning to others as he ran away. If we captured his mate and child he would often follow so closely and with such disregard for
his own safety it was easy to shoot him. This we often did, laughing (PSJ 259).

The African boys unknowingly become a part of the unethical and criminal designs of the money-hungry MNCs of this world. The corrupting power of money reaches almost all places of this world. Initially the boys don’t realize what they are getting into, but then their conscience does not allow them to smilingly slaughter their own kin:

I had smiled jauntily, myself, the first year I worked for them, .... We were paid good money, and of course we ate or sold those animals who became usually out of concern for their stolen families – meat. But soon I could not smile (PSJ 261).

The placement of this story is also perfect, because it is only after listening to this confession does Adam thaw out of his numbness. It has a purging for both the narrator and the listener.

Among all others Tashi is also being cared for by Mbati, the girl who took care of M’Lissa. She would often come to Tashi and read to her. In one such reading session the two of them comes upon a book by a while colonialist woman, who in her assessment of Black people writer that they have been able to survive years of oppression because they “possess the secret of Joy. To quote further:

....the book of a white colonialist author who has lived all her life off the labor of Africans but failed to perceive them as human beings. “Black people are natural,” she writes, “they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can
survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them” (PSJ 269).

This according to her is atrocious. This statement is as bad as the statement about Black women’s painless delivery. It reflects the perfect colonialist attitude, wherein the oppressor, without any hint of remorse, oppresses the natives, convinced by his belief in their possessing the secret of joy. This absolute imagined immunity is the killing factor of all colonialists. Tashi’s reaction is very typical of Alice Walker:

Oh, I say. These settler cannibals. Why don’t they just steal our land, mine our gold, chop down our forests, pollute our rivers, enslave us to work on their farms, fuck us, devour our flesh and leave us alone? Why must they also write about how much joy we possess? (PSJ 270).

After all the atrocities committed by the whites, when they playfully begin to theorize about them, then begins the problem. You can’t rob a people of all their happiness and then comment on their joy.

After M.Lissa’s revelation about her mother Tashi begins to review her views about her mother. She begins to separate herself from her mother and starts looking at her as an individual. She finds that her mother was too much under the influence of her society that she could not think beyond her role, which is determined by the patriarchy:

.... I believed she and I were one, I made the part of her that was me think about me. In truth my mother was not equipped, there was not enough of her self left to her, to think about me. Or about my sister Dura, .... She had just
sunk into her role of “She Who Prepares the Lambs for Slaughter” (PSJ 273).

Towards the end of her life Tashi is freed of many of her misconceptions. Adam had become a preacher in San Francisco, and every Sunday Tashi would go to listen to him. After 5 years of patient listening Tashi began to feel tired of hearing about Jesus’s suffering alone. She wanted Adam to talk about the suffering of women as well. But Adam said that he would be embarrassed, if he talked about women’s suffering:

Still, I began to see how the constant focus on the suffering of Jesus alone excludes the suffering of others from one’s view.... I know I wanted my own suffering, the suffering of women and little girls, still cringing before the over-powering might and weapons of the torturers, to be the subject of a sermon. Was woman herself not the tree of life? And was she not crucified? Not in some age no one even remembers, but right now, daily, in many lands on earth? .... He said the congregation would be embarrassed .... He would be ashamed to do so (PSJ 273-4).

Adam’s sympathy for his wife’s suffering appears to be quite superficial as when it actually comes for him to take a stand and let the world know about the sufferings of the African women, he flatly refuses to do so. Nagueyatti Warren and Sally Wolf have taken up this point in their article mentioned earlier and have called Adam’s protests against the ‘genital mutilation’ of young girls as hollow:

While Adam claims to detest the practice of excision and infibulation, his reach against protestations are hollow, for
he refuses Tashi’s request to use his ministry to preach against the practice, with the excuse that his congregation would be too embarrassed. Tashi construes his refusal as further evidence that he is just another cog in the patriarchal system that perpetuates her suffering (Warren 13).

As Tashi herself writes this incident pushes Tashi away from Adam, a man who is just not able to empathize with his ailing wife. Tashi withdraws from one man but opens her arms for his son Pierre who towards the end of her life’s journey gives her a beautiful picture of a whole, free and completely in control of herself African woman – “the mother of mankind” – as he calls her:

.... these women, is that in their own ancient societies they owned their bodies, including their vulvas, and touched them as much as they liked. In short, Chere Madame Johnson, early African woman, the mother of womankind, was notoriously free! (PSJ 276).

Tashi is now free and happy to have received the answers to almost all her questions. She faces her execution with a positive feeling of having accomplished the mission that she was born for. She takes blue hills of her country as a memoir for her journey up ahead. Mbati, with the help of Tashi’s family reveals the final answer to her mystery regarding the joy that one possessed. Mbati unfurls a banner which reads the answer:

Mbati is unfurling a banner, quickly, before the soldiers can stop her .... all of them – Adam, Olivia, Benny, Pierre, Raye, Mbati – hold it firmly and stretch it wide. RESISTENCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY![sic] It says in huge block letters. There is a roar as if the world cracked
open and I flew inside. I am no more. And satisfied (PSJ 278-9).

Though, Tashi’s life is sacrificed at the end of the novel it is not a wasted life. Tashi is a martyr for the cause of women’s liberation and freedom. Through Mbati, Tashi passes on her struggle for the protection of women onto the next generation. She teaches them to resist the power and find fulfillment and wholeness. Walker’s attempts to highlight the struggle of the African women seems to have reached more people, than would be otherwise possible. From all the incidents and struggles described in the novel it certainly becomes a Womanist novel in many ways. From here on Walker moves to explore the other spiritual and enlightening aspects of the Womanist theory.

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile*

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile* is a novel which differs from the earlier works of Alice Walker in its theme and content. The theory which it expounds is essentially the same Womanist theory on which the earlier works are based. Till *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Alice Walker has dealt with various aspects of Black Women’s lives, including the African tradition of Genital Mutilation. Here, Walker celebrates women’s sexuality in all its forms. She releases women from the shackles of the traditional bondage of sexuality. She allows women themselves to decide their sexual orientations. No judgements are made, no sermons given.

The narrative begins with the story of Susannah, the daughter of the narrator, who seems to be in search of something, but does not know
what it is, goes to Kalimasa looking for that thing. The narrator remembers his daughter’s feelings during his funeral and even after that. He is looking at everything quite objective. It seems he wishes to make some connection with his daughter, a connection which did not happen while he was alive.

*By the light* marches ahead in a new direction. Mother-daughter relationship has been the focus of Walker’s novels till *Possessing*. This novel explores the father-daughter relationship: The Womanist insistence of inclusiveness and wholes. The father is very much a part of a daughter’s childhood and her self image is established on the basis of her relationship with both her parents. The intense lesbian love-making scene sets the tone of the coming events. Through Susannah and Pauline Walker firmly establishes the role of lesbians in her scheme of events. The father does not see anything unusual in his daughter’s lesbian relationship, may be because he has become an angel, one who is quite open in his thoughts.

The second chapter is titled after his second daughter Maggie, whom he lovingly calls Mac Doc. Maggie has also been very different, right from the beginning. She would unashamedly be interested in things which she should be discreet about. She was interested in knowing about the male body ever since she was a child:

She was a six that already started boldly at anything that interested her. And what interested her, it seemed to me, even at that early age, was men, and what was concealed by their trousers (BFS 16).
Like, a womanish child Maggie wishes to know more than she is supposed to do so. She is unlike the image of a girl child that his father nurtures. She is as boy-like as she can ever be. The father is unable to understand as to why his daughter is what she is? Instead of Maggie she was called Mad dog but her father did not allow her to do so. Maggie, instead of learning feminine traits like pottery and saving, was more interested in jumping from one boulder to another and learning to run like wind throughout the village. The father was unable to understand his daughter’s wild spirit:

I did not understand her spirit. I yearned for guidance. It seemed to be necessary to tame her, though no one among the Indians or in my own family showed any signs of thinking so (BFS 19).

Macdoc is a born Womanist because she is born to a Womanist mother. A mother who is very much a Womanist in all aspects of living. She is the one who invites Macdoc’s father to dance with him regardless of whether her parents would approve of it or not. When her husband is worried about their daughter’s curiosity regarding male body she just silences him by flatly saying that children are basically curious, and that he should just stop worrying. Again when the father tried to control his teenage daughter’s rendezvous with young Indian boys, it is Langlay who fights with him about her daughter’s right to live her life on her own terms:

I insisted that she be called Magdalena. This was one of the reasons Langley and I fought. She did not agree that Magdalena did anything wrong in expressing her own nature (BFS 20).
Even when the father tries to argue that Maggie might get pregnant if she moves around with the boys so very freely Langley loses her patience with her husband and flatly answers what she thinks is on her daughter’s mind, “But it does not seem to me that Mad dog wishes to sleep with anyone, other than with her sister” (BFS 20).

Again, Langley’s reference to her daughter Mad dog, rather than Macdoc or Magdalena, infuriates her husband to no end. He insists that she be called Magdalena, because he finds the name very unchristian and blasphemous. Whereas his wife argues that mad dogs are considered wise in the village that they live in, so there isn’t anything to worry about, “Well, she cannot be called Mad Dog, I said. She is the daughter of a minister? But mad dogs here are considered wise, said my wife” (BFS 20). Langley, is a born Womanist. She knows the need for girl children to be allowed to grow by themselves. As naturally as possible Langley knows that it is the spirit that counts not anything else.

As soon as Maggie’s father started to impose restrictions on her Mad dog begins to stay aloof and self-centered. The first thing that her father suggests is that she should change her name from Mad Dog to something that people in Long Island could relate to. She very drily selects her new name on the basis of the name of the month they were in:

I shall be called June, she said. .... It is perfect. And that is the month we are in!
Yes, she said drily, without returning my gaze.
(BFS 22).
Maggie is hurt because her father does not attempt to know her in earnest. He simply refuses to acknowledge the pain that his daughter is going through because of his inability to understand her spirit. She was hurt because her father did not care. The father realizes his folly only after he dies and his pure spirit makes him see things as they are and not as they should be. After returning from the short walk with his daughter, where she chooses her new name, the narrator notices that something is missing between him and his daughter:

> When we came down from the walk in the mountains it is true that I felt I missed, was missing something. I felt a vacancy around my heart, an emptiness.... And why didn’t I care? (BFS 22)

But the final realization comes only after his death. He realizes that his daughter is lost only after he looks at their relationship posthumously, “I don’t think we know we have lost our daughters until they are gone” (BFS 22). Maggie is a woman, who has a live connection with the spirit that inhabits every living and non-living entities. She can see the connection between a naked human body and the nakedness of the sky. This connection is something that Walker elaborates upon in her later novel titled *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*. The father hears his daughter hum a pagan song about the connection between the naked body and the naked sky. This was the kind of song which would not have been allowed within the church premises because of its openness. But yet it was the true voice of connectedness, which he as a priest could not ignore:

> As we packed to leave the mountains for good she hummed a pagan song. Something about the oneness of the
unclothed human body and the nakedness of the sky.... The song June sang, with its carnal message of unity with creation and no credit to a creator (BFS 23-4).

This oneness that Maggie feels with nature is an essential ingredient of Womanism. Womanism is a spiritually liberating experience, which rather than binding, frees the spirit. There are no dogmas, no ceremonies, etc. which the followers have to adhere to.

The chapter which is titled Twigs, fresh vines, Maggie’s father is shown as puzzled by the tradition and convention that he was unable to understand. The spiritual connection that his daughter has made with the spirit is something that he is unable to decipher. She holds some power which he is unable to understand. Maggie got the power from the people they were living with, when her father was teaching them the Bible, she was imbibing the natural power of the tribals. He wonders how his daughter has been able to exert such power over the God that he wishes to share with the Indians and over himself:

Were the people still chanting this song in secret ceremonies? June obviously knew. And knew as well that I did not know. This was her power, exposed. It was a power, not only over the God we’d come to share with these people, it was a power over me (BFS 24).

In the section narrated by June/Maggie she describes her relation with Manuelito, who she calls her twin spirit. Their love does not need to be proclaimed at the top of their voices, but rather it is something that they feels in their hearts. As and when they touch one another they feel
at times as if they own one another but that ownership dies after that moment of touch:

We’d been twin spirits since the day I arrived with my family so many years ago.... We did not speak of loving each other. No. that was not our way at all.... And when we touched each other there was a casual ownership about it, an ownership that claimed just the moment of the actual touching, nothing more (BFS 26).

Alice Walker connects the act of love-making with the act of worshipping a God. So when Manuelito makes love to Maggie she feels as if she is being worshipped. The fact that he had been taught by his father and other elders the art of not impregnating a woman made the whole act an act of sheer pleasure. It is the woman who almost always pays the price of passionate love-making. Not to impregnate a woman is respecting her body to the highest extent. Generally men are least bothered about what happens to a woman, once the act gets over. So when men think about it not harming a woman through her body, then one has to sit up and acknowledge the good effort. Maggie is lucky to have one such lover in her life. Though her father feared that she might get pregnant, Maggie was convinced that she was safe:

But by then his (Manuelito’s) father and uncles and older brothers had taught him .... How not to impregnate anyone. I was safe. Worshipped is how it felt. To know myself so thought of, so cared about (BFS 28).

Just before leaving Mexico Maggie goes for the last time to her home which she has set up in the mountains in a small cave, with Manuelito. There she has her last physical encounter with Manuelito.
Her father who knows about this all the while decides to punish her for her disobedience at this moment of departure. He beats her up with the belt that was Manuelito’s gift to her. It is a leather belt decorated with silver coins. Maggie is unable to decipher the hatred in her father’s behaviour. He beats her up in absolute silence. She takes the beating in silence. Her father had always said that he loved her, so she wonders why he could punish her for acquiring so much pleasure:

But I did not understand his violence, after I had just experienced so much pleasure. So much sweetness....But no, he thrashed me in silence. I withstood it, in silence (BFS 29).

The pattern of mothers not standing by their daughters is once again repeated here. While outside her daughter’s room she promises to leave her husband because of his behaviour. But as usual fails to implement her decision, “Once again, because of his stubborn behavior, she said, she was going to leave my father. She never did” (BFS 29).

The most damaging impact of this beating was not on Maggie or her mother; it was on Susannah who watched it through the key-hole. The beautiful picture of her soft loving father instantaneously changed into that of a monster. Though at the end of a month the father won over the mother, but he lost his little darling daughter forever. This according to Maggie was her revenge against her father:

But something had happened to precious little Susannah at the keyhole.... She would never be loved back to her daddy again. With time, as I understood how severely the twig was bent in that moment of her horror and disbelief, my revenge against my father, .... As for my father, he would
never again be permitted to really know or enjoy his favorite little tree (BFS 29-30).

As a result of her sister’s punishment Susannah’s understanding of sex was permanently tarnished. She could not enjoy the most beautiful happening of God’s creation. The beating always threatened her as a violent consequence of ecstatic sex. She would never be able wholeheartedly participate in the act, but would rather be crippled:

As I see her, crippled in a place that should be free, and still, after all these years, perplexed by the memory of his sister’s stubborn face and the sound of the whistling silver belt. And my own face, what did she read there, what message about the consequences of a searing passion, ecstatic sex? (BFS 31-32).

Because this is *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, the father’s introspection and retrospection has to be the focus of the novel. Even though this introspection happens after his death, it does relieve his soul from the prison of his daughter’s revenge:

My own remorse for having struck the child was great. In the solitude of my ostracism, an estrangement from all my girls, Langley as well as June and Susannah, I contemplated my error. I could find no justification for it. Yes, the child was willful. She was born that way (BFS 34).

Though in his solitude he regretted what he had done, he was too proud to accept his mistake and make amends while there was a chance. It took him very long to realize that the spirit which went missing in him was responsible for his rough behavior, “How long it took me to realize
it was the mestness of me that was missing!” (BFS 35). Here the father is unable to recognize the Womanist hidden in the body of his child. She is ‘willful’ and ‘disobedient’ according to him, but what he fails to realize is that she is just being an inquisitive child, whose spirit is Womanist in all its essence. But the saving grace for this man is that he loves his wife immensely. He himself enjoys sex with her but is unable to appreciate his daughter getting pleasure out of her own relationship. Perhaps the Christian belief of pre-marital sex as sin, may have had the better of him.

Maggie’s or rather June’s father could not take the consequences of his action of depriving her of her physical pleasure. Maggie refrained from sex but indulged in food. She became a glutton, whom her father could not stop, “June especially seemed to take perverse pleasure in gorging food and over my protest, being able to hold whatever she was enjoying well above my reach” (BFS 46). Maggie the child could not stop her father from interfering in her life but, June the adult could keep her father away from her indulgences. Susannah married a Greek when she grew up, a Greek who was ready to disconnect himself completely from his Greek past. The biggest contribution of Susannah in her husband life was that she gave him back his culture and his past. She made him appreciate the value of his heritage:

One is that she taught him so much about himself; his history, culture, heritage. Taught him to look at it, in fact. He’d thought it something to dump. To shed like excess baggage in the New World (BFS 47).

He very grudgingly introduced her to his parents, of whom he was very ashamed, because he considered them backward. He was
surprised to find his wife so very receptive and open. She simply loved them. She, like all her earlier fictional and non-fictional Womanist sisters, is interested in the small things of life. Her eye catches the beauty of the table cloth spread out in her husband’s ancestral home, “Look at this! She was looking down and pointing at the table.... But no; she meant, giving it a tug, Look at the table cloth!” (BFS 50).

The Womanist in Susannah awakens the dormant Womanist in her mother-in-law also. By asking her about the history and the lives of the woman she sees around her:

She wondered why many of the old women wore black. Why they stopped aside with deference when men passed. What was that quality of resignation in their joy? .... She asked me about the killing of the adulterous women in *Zorba the Greek* (BFS 53).

These questions about women were quite unfamiliar to the old woman. Because till today she was told to never question anything but quietly accept all the decisions taken by men. They were not only silenced but also debarred, from expressing their emotions. Along with their lives even their faces are wiped shut. Her son notices the subtle difference which is coming in his mother. The apparent emotionless woman is beginning to reveal her true emotions only now:

For I had known it all my life to be a face with a certain limited range of emotional expression. I did not recognize the looks she was beginning to give my inquisitive wife.... I saw my mother begin to awaken, against her will. As if from ancient sleep. To shake herself as an animal after liberation might do. I saw her rouse her memory (BFS 54).
The Womanist stirrings jolt the old woman out of her complacency, and she begins to look at herself in a new light. The Black color that she has been wearing all her life begins to seem like bondage. Even when it was extremely hot, she was not allowed to wear anything else but Black. All her life neither she nor any other woman she knew questioned the dress-code given to them by their society. They had never thought about themselves as individual identities. Individuals with their own personal desires, choices and wishes:

I saw her look down at herself, as if for the first time since girlhood, over sixty years ago, and see all the black clothing shrouding her, and the kerchief, black, in all this Greek heat, tied under her chin. I saw that she feared what might happen to her, under Susannah's curious questions. And that her solution was to entice Susannah into becoming a tourist (BFS 54).

The old woman is so shocked at the sudden realization that creeps into her, that she immediately wishes to creep back into the security of her shell. And she forbids her daughter-in-law from probing any further. She pushes her off to see the church, which proves to be a boon for Susannah. Because it is in the church that she meets Irene, the dwarf. An illegitimate child, Irene was given away to the church after her mother's death. Irene was a dwarf in body but a giant in spirit. At first Irene seems to be a recluse and an isolated being. But her eyes seem to be very inviting and therefore Susannah visits her the next day. What she discovers astonishes her a great deal. Irene, the out-caste is a world in her own. Though no one was allowed to speak to this woman she knew not only Greek but many other languages. Irene tells Susannah all those things that her mother-in-law wishes to camouflage. She shows
her the pillars where men used to stone women to death. An absolutely fool-proof way to keep woman under control:

They used to stone women, here, said Irene into the silence, not so very long ago.... You can be sure they stoned a great many, before they got their vaunted “democracy” in these parts (BFS 62).

In *By the Light* Walker thus includes many more communities of women from across the world. She connects women through their oppression by the patriarch and unites women in their pain and triumphs. Irene and Susannah are two women who have broken the traditions and conventions of their respective societies. These ‘outcasts’ are no longer ‘out-casts’ because within themselves they have created a sisterhood of their own. The universality of these ‘different’ women becomes more of a rule than an exception. Irene proves that even the society tries very hard to confine a woman, she will find a way out. Irene becomes a perfect Greek example of Womanism as she fits the definition of Womanism to the niche. She is willful, wants to know more than is ‘good’ for her, in charge of her own life – not bowed down to the dictates of the society- in love with everything around her, especially woman. Susannah wonders as to what is it about Irene that women come to her especially tourist women, because for the locals she was out of bound. Her reply is that her red curtains attract the women because the colour red is the color of life. That behind the black door of the white house is a colorful slice of life is what is suggested by the red curtains:

I think they are drawn by my red curtains....Why does it surprise you that I, even I, should have a thirst of life? Said Irene. A
Irene comes in a form of a guide or a maternal ancestor. Somebody who has come to help Susannah finds what she has lost, i.e. her father. The balancing of the Yin and Yang aspects of Susannah's life is as important as giving a new birth to her. Because she is cut-off from the male element of her Spirit, it is difficult for her to acquire the desired wholeness. Irene helps her regain her male elements. Through her tarot-card reading Irene allows Susannah to connect with her inner male:

There is a man inside you, your own inner man, so to speak, and he is dedicated to helping you. He is lifting you into the carriage of your own body, in which you can begin to take charge of your own life (BFS 70).

Irene is like the mysterious witches of the older times. Nobody knows what she is, but everybody is aware about her powers. There are many misconceptions about her as there were about the earlier powerful uncontrollable women-named witches. Susannah's father-in-law is full of inquisitive questions about Irene which confirm the oppressions that such women must have had to face in the olden times:

Is it true she keeps a black cat? He asked Susannah...I haven't seen one, actually, she said. And does she make a brew of bitter herbs that she tries to pass off as medicine? No, said Susannah, laughing, she makes and serves teas. (BFS 71).
Susannah and June’s father’s spirit refuses to leave his daughters alone till they attain their own wholeness. Even while he was alive he tried to make amends, but both his daughters refused to accept his apology. Irene helps Susannah to find her wholeness, whereas Magdalena or June is once again united with Manuelito in order to heal her of the pain caused by the thoughtlessness of her father. The father knows, albeit after he has left his own body that the body is as important as the spirit and so the body also needs to be satisfied before the wholeness of the spirit can be attained.

Separated in their childhood, Magdelena and Manuelito meet once again to heal one another physically, before Manuelito leaves this body and moves on to the spirit world. The father suffers the agony of seeing the two long-lost lovers coming together, who were forcefully separated by him:

All your life you have the necessary illusion that you know all there is to know about heartbreak.... Her enormous hand cuddling his.... I had beaten her for loving his young body! If I were not dead already, I would have killed myself (BFS 92).

The basic purpose of Manuelito’s coming at this stage of their lives was that he needed to be healed as much as Magdalena. They will both attain wholeness only after they forgive Magdalena’s father and receive his blessings. She would have attained wholeness much earlier only if she was allowed to be with Manuelito all her life. Because the Mundo tribe to which he belonged had great respect for women whom they considered as sacred as the mother earth, Alice Walker describes how this ancient ‘uncivilized’ tribals were much more civilized in their own
way. They never lied in their lives and they tried to protect their women from any wrong information about women themselves from the outside world:

... just because they didn’t lie... they had never understood how woman could be considered evil, either, since they considered her the mother of corn.... The men had not wanted the women to even hear what they were accused of;.... And when the women found out, they were so hurt (BFS 90-1).

The father is not able to find his own wholeness, precisely because he is unable to understand the importance of having a girl-child in his family. And also because the patriarchal ideology of owning this world prevented him form respecting the individualness of a person.

Walker is becoming increasingly spiritual in her journey as a Womanist writer and so she brings in the spiritual wisdom in this novel as well. The Womanist character in this novel seems to be Magdalena or June or Mad dog. Walker appreciates the ancient belief of considering a Mad dog wise, because the Mundo people believe that a Mad dog is out of his mind and therefore truly wise. It respects the natural spirit, the unlearned unspoilt wisdom, which is free from the shackles of the thinking, analyzing mind, “The mad dog is considered wise because it has lost its mind, I said.... Instead of thoughts, we have visions, and that is how we guide ourselves” (BFS 102-3).

Magdalena was the crazy one in their family. Since her childhood she had the free Womanist spirit which was wise without making any superficial efforts. She was the one who could not hide whatever she felt. Walker shifts the western gaze from the mind to the heart. The need
to appreciate craziness – the mindlessness – is a belief she drives home as firmly as ever. Putting the mind to rest so that the other part of our Being i.e. our spirit is allowed to roam freely and give us the taste of those experiences which cannot be understood by our minds:

It is a way of saying you must not live too much in your head. It is a way of reminding you to stay in your emotions, no matter how nutty they are; it is a way of saying, also, that craziness has value (BFS 103).

Pauline, Susannah’s lover’s story is the story of a mother betraying the trust of her daughter. This betrayal seems to be worst than the betrayal of her father. Pauline’s mother helped her husband and the other male members of her family to enslave her in marriage. Very shockingly she assisted her daughter’s rape, and that is something which Pauline is not able to forget. Susannah while trying to console her calls her by the mythical name of Persephone, the girl-child symbol of rape in Western mythology. Pauline remarks that at least Persephone was not betrayed by her mother:

Persephone’s mother did not betray her, I said…. My mother didn’t even ask me what had happened…. When I turned up pregnant she said how lucky I was Winston was around and that he was someone who wanted me (BFS 116).

By including the archetype of white western mythology and by referring to white women’s classic like Moll Flanders Walker is expanding the canvass of her Womanist theory. It is becoming increasingly universal.

Lesbian relationships are given a center-stage in this novel. Especially the sex scenes of Susannah and Pauline are vividly described
and surprisingly compared to the religious rituals undertaken by the devout believers. Susannah compares Pauline's love-making to her firm religious belief:

Jesus might love you, this you might know, but being made love to by a woman like Pauline puts the love you fantasized about then in a new perspective. Obviously Pauline is doing loving like Jesus couldn't and wouldn't (BFS 121).

According to Walker sex is a liberating experience and the two girls Susannah and Magdalena are scared to the core of their being, because one of them was severely punished for indulging in one of the most fulfilling sexual experiences. Walker continues with the theme of female-bonding through the depiction of the two sisters, who are reminiscent of Celie and Nettie of The Color Purple. Magdalena like Celie is sinned against by their father and then both the sisters make him pay the price of their love for what he did to one of them. it was the Christian morality which didn't allow him to accept his daughter's physical pleasure. Susannah and Magdalena were brought up among the Mundo tribe and therefore they imbibed the values and morality of the people they lived with. Sex, for the Mundo, was the closest thing to God. It was the most spiritual moment, and that was when one felt closest to God. Manuelito shares this knowledge with Magdalena's father Robinson:

It is understood that spirituality resides in the groin, in the sexual organs. Not in the mind, and not in the heart. It is while fucking that you normally feel closer to God. The other time you feel close to the Creator, of course, is when you create something (BFS 122).
Magdalena does not wish to forgive her father, as she feels that she will forget Manuelito in doing so. If she could forgive then she could definitely heal herself, but she does not seem to want to heal herself. She feels that one life-time is too short to heal from some the pain of some wounds, “I think that some things you don’t heal from. Not in this life time, anyway. We could try to help each other heal, said Susannah. We could heal each other” (BFS 135).

Susannah tries her level best to make her sister let go of the pain caused by their father. She tries to remind her of the father that loved them before he humiliated her. Susannah tries to remind her sister of the fact that finally even he was a human being, who could make a mistake. We did try to apologize and redeem his spirit, but his elder daughter just did not allow that to happen:

Try to imagine the father I love, why I love him. Why Mama loved him. Why you loved him before he humiliated you. Don’t pin him to that one moment. We was a human being, like you and me …. Maggie, please, just forgive the son of a bitch (BFS 135-6).

By looking at the overall design of Alice Walker’s fiction it seems that she takes up any one aspect of her Womanist theory in a given text, and elaborates it fully through the course of the work. By the Light essentially takes up the physical aspect of female-bonding, i.e. Lesbian relationships, and elaborates it through the characters of Pauline and Susannah. Pauline describes lesbian sex as a liberating experience, because then women don’t have to worry about the ultimate bondage that heterosexual sex leads to – motherhood – is no longer a
consequence. Women need to enjoy sex and that men should not be the only beneficiary of the act is what Walker is trying to say:

Women all over the world have been brainwashed to think sex is not meant to be pleasurable to them, only to the men fucking them.... I wondered if my mother had ever truly enjoyed herself. Was ever able to relax into it, so to speak, without the worry about another mouth to feed? (BFS 143).

According to Pauline men have not only colonized women’s bodies but have also controlled their orgasms. Orgasmic freedom has always been men’s birth right, whereas women have been at the mercy of their men for their orgasms. Susannah understands the importance of this freedom once she has had the experience of it. She is the one who voices Walker’s views about orgasmic freedom, “Orgasmic freedom has been a male right, said Susannah, with any woman they’ve wanted to fuck, since the beginning of patriarchy” (BFS 146). Both Pauline and Susannah attain this freedom when they indulge in Lesbian sex. Thus Pauline and Susannah prove to be Womanists in their own way, because according to Walker a Womanist is “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually .... Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually” (SMG xi).

Along with both his daughters Mr. Robinson himself needs to be healed in order to be complete or whole. Magdalena’s lover Manuelito helps her father heal his wounds. He shares all his knowledge about life, death and the Spirit with the senior man and shows him his way towards redemption. The elder man is unable to know what it is that he needs to do in order to move ahead even after death. Manuelito tells him that he needs to heal others, whom he has hurt before he can be healed:
The dead are required to finish two tasks before all is over with them: one is to guide back to the path someone you left behind who is lost, because of your folly; the other is to host a ceremony so that you and others you have hurt may face eternity reconciled and complete (BFS 164).

Spiritual healing is also the essence of *By the Light*. Almost all the characters need to heal themselves and other in order to acquire the ultimate goal of spiritual wholeness. According to Walker the tribals with their unorganized religions are closer to the ultimate Truth, than the ones who try to believe in the tenets of those religions which neglect the most powerful nature Gods. When they worship nature they very obviously nurture it. Environmental issues would not arise if man would not exploit the natural resources for his own personal benefits. Walker reveals her thoughts through the musings of Manuelito:

First of all, it was a puzzle way the sun was not worshipped on its nameday, Sunday. Always the Mundo worshipped the sun; it is the god, next to Nature and Earth itself, that is most obvious to everyone (BFS 163).

The Mundo initiation song that Manuelito teaches Magdalena's father brings out the inherent Womanist qualities in it. just as Womanism is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (SMG xi), so is this prayer, which sanctifies the existence of both men and women. The two polar-opposites which unite and balance the entire creation, and so the Mundo bow and pray to both elements of creation:

Anyone can see that woman is the mother of the oldest man on earth

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is it not then a prayer to bow before her?

Anyone can see that man is the father of the oldest woman

on earth

Is it not then a prayer to bow before him?....

We know woman and man as equals.

Differently beautiful, as the elders would say (BFS 178-9).

In contrast to this equality is Irene, the Greek dwarf’s her/story. She ties to revive the ‘mother’ that her European male ancestors have systematically destroyed, burned at stakes and tortured at the behest of the church. They killed not only women but also men who worshipped their women. They destroyed their spirit in the process:

Imagine your strongest, best, most spirited women –
And wisest, Irene interjected.
And best men, too, continued Susannah. Because the best men always love women. Imagine all of them captured, tortured, and systematically put to death, over a period of centuries.... and made to shrink its spirit to half its size (BFS 205-6).

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile* is very important from the point of view of the wholeness of the Spirit of not only all the characters but also the author herself. As mentioned earlier, Alice Walker herself was not very close to her father, and even she needed to iron out her differences with him, so may be this could be a tribute to all father-daughter relationships. Manuelito brings about the reconciliation between the estranged father Mr. Robinson and his daughter Magdalena. It is only after Robinson blesses his daughter with a smile that she would be able to become whole by attaining oneness with Manuelito. According to the Mundo custom both the parents kiss the
five points from where light enters our bodies before two lovers begin their life together. Mr. Robinson has to kiss those five places to bless his daughter before giving her away to Manuelito. By doing this the father will be redeeming himself from the sin committed against the spirit of his daughter. The father has to be happy for the beautiful experience of sex that his children are going to enjoy. And so like a crescent moon he will smile and bless them:

"by the light of my father's smile!" and that is why no one among the Mundo would marry when the moon is full, but only when it has waned and then reappears, as a smile in a dark face, in the sky! (BFS 233).

The father heals not only his daughter but also himself in blessing her and allowing the light to come to her. He knelt down and kissed palms and arches of her feet and also her knees, because he realizes that going down on one's knees is the only form of prayer which liberates the unyielding human ego:

I kissed not only her palms and the arches of her feet, which seemed to buzz with energy, but also her knees. Because, after all, it is to our knees that we must sometimes be driven, before we can recognize, witness, or welcome our own light (BFS 243).

After Magdalena now it is Susannah's turn to be healed. If Maggie was sinned against by their father, Susannah was sinned against by Maggie herself. Maggie destroyed all the love that Susannah felt for their father, always reminding her of the monster he had become when he beat Maggie up for having sex. Maggie seeks her redemption by coming into her sister's dream. Irene analyzes Susannah's dream for
her, and tells her that she has come into her life as a guardian angel that will help her heal herself, “You have suffered a spirit fracture. I am the angel, perhaps, who has arrived to help it be, at last, properly set” (BFS 223).

Irene explains through the reading of her tarot cards that Susannah’s spirit got fractured because she was not allowed to reciprocate her father’s love even when he apologized immensely to his elder daughter. Magdalena using a salt-shaker always over-seasoned her food and spoilt the taste. Maggie transferred all her hatred onto her younger sister and thus destroying not only her childhood but also her life:

At many different points you might have reconnected with your father, but there was a shaker of salt right by your elbow. Before you knew it, in all kinds of ways, Magdalena had unpalatably over seasoned your food. A word here, a whisper there (BFS 223).

Susannah was unlucky in the fact that she had two not one woman in her life who tried to steal her childhood from her. Maggie spoilt her relationship with their father, whereas Pauline tried to steal her ‘seemingly’ happy childhood from her. Both these women were appalled at seeing the placid happiness in Susannah and that is what both of them desired. They hated her for being so very happy and content in whatever she did. Irene explained that it appeared to both of them that she was happy with everything and so never rebelled, not understanding that she was born with it:
You were born with yours, and somehow managed to keep it, said Irene, softly. That is why to others it appeared you never rebelled. Even going against the grain made you happy. Being naughty and even being punished for it made you smile! This is sometimes enough to make an enemy of anyone (BFS 224).

Pauline seeks her forgiveness by sending her a jar of green-apple jellybeans, a memory associated with her father. And Magdalena comes for her forgiveness at the time of Susannah’s death. Susannah forgives her sister and introduces her to Anand, the brother of her ex-husband Petros, who became her lover and then friend. Anand was the man who helped them dig up Irene’s mother’s grave and took part in the ceremony of dancing thereafter. His dancing and weeping alongside the women made Susannah fall in love with him, “He was dancing and weeping, right along with us” (BFS 237).

Magdalena has come to witness her sister’s funeral and see all those people who loved and cared for her while she lived. She is surprised to see that the people are preparing to burn her away with her entire house and its belongings. She is worried that Susannah by wishing this would not leave any legacy behind for others to remember her with. Susannah’s answer surprises her, “Magdalena, she said, you are here because you are sorry you deliberately led me astray such a very long time ago. That is all the legacy I need” (BFS 240).

Susannah, like a true Womanist, has lived a life of contentment and happiness. She dies content. And it is to the Spirit that pervades all her characters that *By the Light* is dedicated. People don’t die with the body, they just move on to be something else. Death is seen to be a
liberating force not a destroying one. The different Spirits which seek healing are healed at the end of the novel and continue their journey towards eternal fulfillment.

Walker has successfully taken up new challenges and increased the application of her Womanist theory through the two novels discussed in this chapter. If genital mutilation is discussed in detail in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* then spiritual mutilation is at the center of *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. Biological and Community mother's and their relationship with their daughters is the theme of *Possessing*, whereas father-daughter relationship haunts the pages of *By the Light*. Both these novels prove to be true Womanist text not only from the point of view of the characters but also from the angle of the issues discussed in them. Walker only refines her ideals as she moves from one novel to another, never losing her grip on Womanism even for a second.