



University of Tehran press

## Research in Contemporary World Literature

http://jor.ut.ac.ir, Email: [pajuhesh@ut.ac.ir](mailto:pajuhesh@ut.ac.ir) p-ISSN : 2588-4131 e-ISSN: 2588 -7092

### African Women, Nationalism, and Politics of Empowerment: An Analysis of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Black Feminist Thought

Mitra Mirzayee<sup>1</sup> 0000-0002-0612-4528 Zeinab GhasemiTari<sup>2</sup> 0000-0003-2317-353X  
Seyed Mohammad Marandi<sup>3</sup> 0000-0003-3877-870X

1. Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, Alborz Campus, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [mitra.mirzayee@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mitra.mirzayee@ut.ac.ir)
2. Department of North American and European Studies, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [ghasemitari@ut.ac.ir](mailto:ghasemitari@ut.ac.ir)
3. Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [mmarandi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mmarandi@ut.ac.ir)

---

#### Article Info

##### Article type:

Research Article

##### Article history:

Received: 09 October 2023

Received in revised form: 18 June 2024

Accepted: 18 June 2024

Published online: Spring 2025

##### Keywords:

Black feminism, nationalism, female circumcision, politics of empowerment, collective consciousness, self-definition.

---

#### ABSTRACT

Understanding the complexity of the situation of African American women in the moral and social systems is one of the challenging topics in the literature of African Americans, which attracts the attention of many writers, especially female African American writers. While women's voices have historically been marginalized, Black women's voices have faced even greater suppression. Black feminist writers critically challenge mainstream feminist narratives, bringing to light the unique struggles of Black women. Among these voices, Alice Walker emerges as a strong advocate for Black women's rights, championing their bodily autonomy in both American and African contexts. Through her literary critique, she interrogates the role of cultural traditions like female genital circumcision in perpetuating the oppression of Black women and exposes its horrifying consequences that persist in parts of the world. Black feminist thought provides a framework to analyze systemic oppression experienced by Black women across intersections of race, gender, class, and culture. Employing Patricia Hill Collins' approach based on the Black feminist thought that addresses topics such as Black nationalism, identity, and the politics of empowerment of Black women, the present article attempts to answer this question in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992): how Black nationalist movements, under the pretext of resisting the ideology of power and preserving the traditional values, lead to the weakening of the agency of African women. In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990), Collins explores the principles of Black feminism. These principles aim to empower Black women by identifying and challenging systems of domination. Drawing on the experiences, narratives, and perspectives of Black women, Collins questions the prevailing racial, class, and gender patterns in society. She also examines how Black women can resist or transform intersecting oppressions by defining themselves, valuing themselves, and engaging in collective action against the injustices they face. Employing the descriptive-analytical method, this research article criticizes Walker's approach to some nationalist movements of African tribes and the promotion of female circumcision as a form

---

---

---

of resistance against colonialism. This study is significant in addressing the intricate and complex issue of Black women's struggles, which has long been a contentious subject. Walker's objective in crafting this novel is not to denigrate the traditional values of Africa but to critically examine and expose practices that perpetuate gender-based oppression. It emphasizes the necessity of breaking the silence surrounding various aspects of oppression, including the circumcision of Black women. Resisting this form of cultural nationalism essentially rejects the patriarchal priority that subjugates African women's bodies to purposes defined by men.

---

**Cite this article:** Mirzayee, M., GhasemiTari, Z., and Marandi, S. M. "African Women, Nationalism, and Politics of Empowerment: An Analysis of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Black Feminist Thought" *Research in Contemporary World Literature*, 2025, 30 (1), 135-156. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2024.366370.2464>.



© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2024.366370.2464>.

---