



## From Neurotic Anxiety, Guilt of an Unlived Life, and Bad Faith into Self-Unfoldment in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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### Abstract

Being a frequent well-annotated postmodern novel for its psychological in-depth and existential anguish, Alice Walker's (1944- ) *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) suggests a deep feeling of remorse of unlived life when life is painfully and retrospectively looked upon with an eye of repent and dissatisfaction. The novel's protagonist, Tashi, receives a sense of guilt manifested in two different life phases; at first, in her lack of belonging to her community, for not doing the rite of female mutilation, an African woman's symbol of obedience and devoutness, and then in her trauma of being mutilated with facing its dreadful consequences. In the edges of her dilemma between the two forms of existential guilt, Tashi is torn into becoming a human who has lost 'self' and is regretful for being incapable of living fully and meaningfully. This study, entitled as 'From Neurotic Anxiety, Guilt of an Unlived Life, and Bad Faith into Self-Unfoldment in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*', is committed to shed light on psychologist Rollo May's (1909-1994) paradigms of neurotic anxiety and guilt, as well philosopher Sartre's (1905-1980) 'bad faith', mirrored in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* under paradigms of the approach of existential psychotherapy, which is a contemporary approach blended of psychoanalysis and philosophy. The study entails a theoretical demonstration of the concepts of neurotic anxiety, guilt of 'unlived life', 'bad faith' and the therapy of 'self-unfoldment' under lenses of existential psychotherapy, and then it discovers them within extracts grasped from *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.

**Keywords:** Existential Psychotherapy, neurotic anxiety, guilt, 'unlived life' and 'bad faith'.

### 1. Existential Therapeutic Concepts

Before delving into details around discussing existential psychotherapy in the body of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, it is necessary to unveil some theoretical roots of some psych-existential terms that are often misplaced or naively interpreted.

#### 1.1. Existential Psychotherapy and Neurotic Anxiety

Existential psychotherapy is a term apt for profound discussions. While the positive psychodynamic schemes attempt to inspect the human condition with solely reading his/her past memories, existential psychotherapy is an approach that has a broader perspective. Existential psychotherapy reinvestigates human psychology with the current 'engagement with existence and the world'. Inspired by the philosophy of Existentialism, it questions the purpose of life, its meaning and the spectrum of human choices and the challenges of being (Cooper et al 2019). In Existential psychotherapy the human dilemmas and psychological problems are inspected in light of free will, meaning, isolation, death and anxiety that have deep universal dimensions (Berry-Smith 2012). One of the concepts largely studied in the field of Existential psychology is anxiety.

Despite its agreeable significance in the field of Existential psychology, anxiety remains an issue prone for different and endless interpretations. Philosopher Kierkegaard



(1957), defined anxiety as ‘seeking after adventure, a thirst for the prodigious, the mysterious’ (38) which signifies that anxiety ignites the human effort to unveil mystery. However, Paul Tillich (1952), a German Existentialist, addressed anxiety to be ‘man’s reaction to the threat of non-being’ or ‘emptiness’ (46); in other ways, it is a common human defence mechanism to preserve his being and sustain his continuity amid various external threats that may perish his existence at any moment. According to Existentialist psychologist Schneider and Mendelowitz (2007), anxiety-defence, which could be a counterpart of anxiety, is ‘the capacity to experience mystery (infinity, being)’ (42). Whereas Michelman’s *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* defines anxiety as follows:

It is ultimately rendered as dread, as anguish, in translation from the French word *angoisse*, or left in the original German as *angst*, it is not only a psychological state, it is an ontological phenomenon that reveals the deep truth about the nature of human beings, it is a reckoning of the self with its essential freedom to choose what it shall be in the face of its radical responsibility for that choice (2008; p.35).

If the preceding definition attached anxiety to the human nature of freedom, there are other definitions that associate anxiety to an external catastrophe or an emotional crisis. Kurt Goldstein (1940) believes that anxiety is ‘the subjective experience of the organism in a catastrophic condition’; believing that an exterior turmoil triggers such experience (91). Furthermore, Reinhold Niebuhr (1996) viewed the term of anxiety through another angle, by believing that Anxiety is ‘the internal description of the state of temptation’, in which it must not be recognised in relation to the concept of ‘sin’ because there is always the model remorse-pattern that man is driven by and entangled with, as subsequently man is stuck and dazzled in the ‘paradox of freedom and finiteness’ (182). Niebuhr relied on a previous philosophical paradigm, of Kierkegaard (1813-1855), that is induced by theological interpretations to bring back anxiety to its roots of human act of committing sin. Kierkegaard believes that anxiety, of which he calls *dread*, is the ‘presupposition of original sin and as explaining original sin retrogressively in the direction of its origin’ (1957; 41). However, Kierkegaard’s theological connection is rarely alluded to in the modern interpretations of anxiety.

These elucidations come in alignment with Rollo May’s ingenious and brief terminology for anxiety. Rollo May (1996), who was one of the founders of Existential psychotherapy especially in United States, considers that anxiety is ‘the experience of being affirming itself against nonbeing’ (10), and it is ‘our human awareness of the fact that each of us is a being confronted with non-being’ (316), and for him, nonbeing is exhibited in the destructive forces such as aggression, fatigue, boredom and death (10). May (1996) strongly maintains that, if we are true to ourselves, normal anxiety in our lives ‘cannot be avoided’ (316) because anxiety is ‘an essential’ prerequisite of human life that has ‘meaning’ and is important for our survival (9); therefore, for May ‘an oversimplified’ idea for human psychology is the false notion that psychological well-being is owing a life that is empty from anxiety (326).

In Rollo May’s (1996) paradigms, anxiety is categorized into two forms: ‘normal anxiety’ and ‘neurotic anxiety’, the first one is natural to the needs for survival for humanity, and the second one, which is an exceeding and disorganized portion, is a mental pathology. For May, as long as there are different ‘possibilities’ for man to choose *what* he wants to be, in terms of measureless regular activities he performs, of which he calls ‘creating one’s self’, there comes anxiety (33). Man is prone to undergo normal anxiety, of worrying over choice making amid numberless arbitrary ‘contingencies’, because man, unlike animals, is not *only* driven by instincts; rather, man is capable of realizing his freedom through practising his awareness (1-10). Such ‘normal’ anxiety, being naturally awarded,



is vital for the human life because it ‘sharpens our sensitivity’ for the necessities of man’s endurance (May 1996; p. 1-10).

Neurotic Anxiety, however, emulates a different matter. When man ‘fails’ to peruse his own character-development and fails to fulfil his own self-actualization, at a given time, he confronts a sharp sense of neurotic anxiety. In such a case, his stage development is intruded with ‘confusion, alienation, disorientation, uncertainty towards values and acceptable values’ (May 1996; p. 1-5). This analogy incites understanding the mental status of man and composes the bedrock of Existential Psychotherapy because only through perceiving these patterns of mental health the roots of ‘integration’ or ‘disintegration’ of personality could be figured out (May 1996; p. 1-3).

This study aims to provide a discussion about anxiety in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, embodied in Tashi’s disintegrated personality and her obscure mental experience, which will be discussed later in this study.

## 1.2. Guilt in Existentialism and Existential Psychotherapy

Guilt is a considerable issue that has conquered a remarkable area in Existentialism and Existential therapy. Stewart (2010) affiliates its Existential dimension to philosopher Schopenhauer who says: ‘Nothing is more certain than the great sin of the world, [...] nothing does our existence bear so close a resemblance as to the punishment of a misdeed and guilty lust’ (76). Webber (2009) indicates Existentialists’ views about the concept of guilt, saying that these intellectuals, especially Sartre, believe that an individual need to feel guilty not for something that the consciousness of community wouldn’t accept, for example social taboos, but they need to be guilty only about situations that are involved into the domain of his freedom especially in regards to making choices. They also assert that guilt feelings arise when one ‘distorts’ his vision of the world and other people in the way they view oneself (Webber; 83, 143).

Roots of guilt in Existentialism emerge from the uncertainty of man’s performances and his destiny resulting from the multiplicity of *possibilities*. American Existentialist Hans Cohn (1997) considers that guilt is an existential dilemma, and it happens when a human constantly fails to deliberately project future, the way which he desires, by carefully choosing one possibility, out of many possibilities. Cohn shows no doubt to argue that since there is no fixed essence given to man in this universe to decree upon his action, parallel to Heidegger’s (1889-1976) idea of man being ‘thrown’ to existence (2001; p. 174). For Cohn, man’s actions create a huge burden of unlimited possibilities, and therefore, man is forced to pick up some possibilities of survival for the details of his decisions. And as he ‘lags behind’ the correctness of these possibilities, he feels guilty amid such deficiencies (1997; p.72).

However, in the field of therapy this concept becomes more of an internal matter. Pitchford (2009) contemplates that guilt can stimulate people to make correct choices to meet and achieve some sense of life-goal or even a meaning after crisis. And he believes that avoiding guilt, instead of compromising with it, ‘sickens’ the soul of people both bodily and psychologically (445). This interpretation of guilt helps the present study to maintain a new paradigm in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* for existential suffering which shall later be discussed in detail. Karl Jasper (1883-1969), psychiatrist and Existentialist, theorized that the concept of guilt illustrates conditions of ‘limit situations’, a term he coined, that inflicts boundaries on human beings (1963; p. 305, 672). Jasper contends that guilt feeling is a condition in which the human psyche challenges the limits and pathological narrowness of its existing forms, he also believes that guilt is triggered when humans think of the ethical dimensions of his decisions, in such a case man judges his own personality, deeds and behaviour through an inner voice. However, when guilt becomes too depressive and tormenting, Jasper regards it to be ‘delusional’ (ibid; p. 173, 195).



Heidegger (2001) expands our knowledge of guilt deeper. He believed that when an individual does not fulfil their personal liberty, he/she undergoes a sense of guilt, and it can be minimised by obtaining authenticity. He categorizes guilt into four classes: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical. The nearest one that is related to this study's scope is moral guilt reflected in Tashi's decision of both undergoing the female infibulation and then regretting it. Flynn (2006) adds up to Heidegger's orientation of moral guilt, defining it to be: 'a matter of personal conscience formed with dialogue with one's ethical community' (87). Iacovou and Weixel-Dixon (2015) refer to two other categories of guilt; they are neurotic guilt and existential guilt. They denote that neurotic guilt is an unnecessary obsession with some act 'that is not deserving of condemnation' but the community dictates to disapprove it; whereas existential guilt is sourced from a lack of taking action when it should be done (47).

Iacovou and Weixel-Dixon took this conception from the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Bose (1979) who argues that individuals who fail to obtain a thorough and meaningful network of relationships with other humans are prone to undergo feelings of guilt especially at the verge of terminating their existence because they are 'terrified' that death comes soon. In such a condition, man is 'indebted' to himself. Bose also believes that feelings of guilt are inescapable; man can set himself free from it only when he has no choice to make out of multiple possibilities. This is because as long as there is freedom for making choices in life, there is guilt coming from its consequences (112, 294). To what extent these elucidations of guilt can be found in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, especially with Tashi's characterization? This study will come in terms with it elaborately.

### 1.3. 'Bad Faith' and Existential Implications

One of the important models that has a broad significance in Existentialism and Existential psychotherapy, of utility to inspect this novel, is 'bad faith' rendered as a philosophical insight by French Existentialist Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Concisely, Sartre (1978) states that bad faith exists when an individual 'lies to oneself' or lives in a condition of 'falsehood'. For him, 'The ideal description of [such a] liar would be a cynical consciousness, affirming truth within himself, denying it in his words, and denying that negation'. Further, he believes that such a liar who doesn't seek authenticity and truth 'intends to deceive and does not seek to hid his intention from himself'. He 'disguises the translucency of consciousness'. As such, any individual who lives in bad faith, for Sartre, is a victim, as he says: 'doubtless it happens often enough that the liar is more or less the victim of his lie, that he half persuades himself of it' (48). Spade (1995) explains this further; he believes that living in bad faith is being involved into 'self-deception' through denying truth since truth eliminates the certainty of a fabricated illusion or a lie, despite *knowing* that it is a false belief (133). Bad faith is living in an existential sham, an oblivion recession, and an inauthentic life-structure. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* holds tactile examples of 'bad faith' which will be tackled later.

### 1.4. Therapy through 'Self-Unfoldment'

A true replacement for neurosis is therapy, and it happens once guilt and bad faith are eliminated by a deliberate and authentic act of fulfilment (Jacobsen (2007). Self-consciousness, thus, plays a crucial part in this act of fulfilment. According to Rollo May et al (1958), 'an intrinsic and inseparable element in human being is self-conscience' (42), signifying that human's existence in his thinking, actions, and behaviour is determined by his self-conscience. Whatever is laid between man's being and non-being is assigned by 'his own self-choice' (42). May (1983) implies that what makes one to *be* a true human meaningfully is one's potential of decision-making. May also alludes self-unfoldment to the process of *becoming* and self-realization; however, he thinks that in order for a human



to reach the completion of *becoming* he needs a form of compulsion, which could be self-blame or a sense of guilt, to stand determined for achieving a condition of perfection (112). Jacobsen (2007) verifies May's theory, asserting that: 'Since human beings will always contain unfulfilled potentialities, guilt, like anxiety, will be something that belongs to everyone's life' (97).

May (1958) also argues that for achieving a personal growth, one has to become engaged into self-unfoldment through a 'dissolution of life-form' by 'form-destroying' in order to establish a new form instead, that is based on personal choice and determination (186). What is grasped from him is that one cannot obtain personal advancement unless compromising the compulsions that destroy a form of life that is unwanted, and this is to establish a form of life that is personally decreed. May means that self-unfolding reflects 'unfolding an entire world and an entire way of existence' (188). May (1981) also attaches self-unfoldment to the human thrilling of exploration and the 'joy' of experiencing (242).

Bo Jacobsen (2007) adds up to Rollo May's understanding for self-unfoldment by stating that decisions of man especially, in the modern age, are never one dimensional because 'every single choice is in favour of something is also a choice precluding something else', which means that when one casts his/her decision or makes a choice for something, simultaneously he/she denies another choice in advance (113); implying that the human acceptance of a form of life comes within his self-blaming reject to another form of life.

## 2. Dimensions of Existential Psychotherapy in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

In the following pages, it is argued that *Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a novel that holds a deep psycho-existential message that depicts human life as a sketch of confronting suffering within existential issues and agonizing limitations. Such confrontation starts from neurotic anxiety and ends up with self-unfoldment and the arrival of a new image about self and life.

### 2.1 Neurotic Anxiety in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

*Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy* has received many critical comments as well as praise that are worthy for its controversial embodiment of human psychology. The psychological issues that the novel has referred to indicate human deep existential and universal suffering. Gillespie (2011) argues that due to posing many existential and philosophical questions around the humans' existence and the nature of human being, the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* has gained worth of praise to be a 'canon' of the 20th century (151). One of the aspects of human psychology that the novel has emulated is disintegrated self and anxiety.

The novel is largely attuned with a trait of character depiction that is, who's at the beginning undeveloped and unfulfilled due to a lack of self-awareness then consequently a lack of self-acceptance. The roots of both lacks are convincingly attributed to neurotic anxiety. Being a subjugated and oppressed girl, and growing into a repressing community where body deformation is a must, Tashi is an existential sufferer whose mental and physical pains are incarnated in her being disintegrated because she is perplexed to make her correct choices in her lifetime, and then thus, is victimised to suffer throughout her life mad.

Although the structure of *Alice Walker's* novel is obscure and sophisticated, for having a retrospective multi-narrator plot, it could easily be grasped that Tashi's narrated events and her lifetime is an *unlived* one, because due to communal urges, she sacrifices her wellbeing for the rite of female genital mutilation, that is cutting her genital 'unclean' parts (Brum 2005; p. 40), and pays the whole life repenting over it. Female genital mutilation damages her life and the whole existential experiencing of living for Tashi



seems like a dream that once you wake up you surely remember its horrors but could barely remember its joy. Lissette, the mouthpiece of Walker's existential sharp wit, says: 'Life goes on, the pain of it so sure, the sweetness of it so mysterious' (Walker 1992, p. 96). Tashi's sense of unlived life is implied in her being overwhelmed by her constant pain, as Hasanthi (2105) states that in this novel 'pain is the only reality' that exists (555). It ought to be recognized that Tashi's unlived life and her suffering have not always been an inevitable decree; to the contrary, she used to be an ambitious, delighted and prosperous girl who enjoyed practising her desire. Adam, her husband, asserts that before the act of female genital infibulation she 'wanted me in making love as much as I wanted her' (Walker 1992, p. 32), but later, her submission to the act of genital circumcision, which was carried out by M'Lissa, transformed all of her life into self-denial and resentment. Olivia, Adam's sister, illustrates Tashi's negative transformation from cheerfulness into anxiety, saying: 'It was heart-breaking to see, on their return, how passive Tashi had become; no longer cheerful, or impish' (Walker 1992, p. 65).

Walker uses a word like 'passive' to portray a very deep dimension of Tashi's neurotic anxiety. Existential psychotherapy affirms that neurotic anxiety is man's deviation from the dynamicity of life; as when an individual loses the aliveness of the continuous and active process of becoming, and stays passive, then s/he gets entangled in the pit of neurotic anxiety (Kiser 2007; p 192). It is also important to realize that passivity is another face of the same coin with neurotic anxiety, in which man's authenticity is not fulfilled due to a lack of satisfaction. In this perspective, Simon de Beauvoir (1956), one of the greatest of Existentialism, whose feminist contributions to liberate woman's soul from passivity is referenced in this novel of Walker, says: 'This is an inauspicious road, for he who takes it—passive, lost, ruined—becomes henceforth the creature of another's will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value. But it is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence' (1992. P.20). Beauvoir's words could facilitate understanding the core of Tashi's anxiety. Tashi is a sufferer, who is walking on a 'inauspicious road' whose 'will' is not determined by her, but rather by other 'creatures' like M'Lissa and her community which impose on her an unfair ritual of silencing her own body, therefore she is in a status of passivity and mental collapse.

Tashi's gist of suffering is her inability to figure out her selfhood and to accept her existence with senses of security and satisfaction. The time her genital organ was not circumcised in the village of Olinka, where a woman's body had to be strictly mutilated for men's desires, she feels as if she has no sense of belonging to that community, and therefore her self-esteem is in the state of uncertainty (Lalbakhsh 2014). Mzee, Tashi's psychiatrist, later reveals this dilemma when he says that Tashi's self was 'horrified' because of 'an indescribable suffering' that was 'done' to her in her African village (Walker 1992, p. 84). Rollo May assigns this feeling as one of the symptoms of neurotic anxiety; May believes that 'man's persistent searching for self compulsively', reflected in his fragmented self, is an indication of neurotic anxiety (2-3). Tashi is a clear example of an individual, whose existence permeates her selfhood with compulsiveness rather than relief, thinking that gaining love and admiration should come externally from the people of Olinka rather than intrinsically from her own values. This leads Tashi into depression and even suicidal failed attempts. Lissette, Tashi's French co-wife, depicts Tashi's neurotic anxiety through mentioning her status of depression, she says: 'She flew into a rage that subsided into a years-long deterioration and rancorous depression. She tried to kill herself' (Walker 1992, p. 125), thus prefers to stay in isolation.

Another face of Tashi's neurotic anxiety is her yearning for acceptance outside herself rather than for self-content from within. She undertakes the burdens of an urge for alteration; she has to suit herself into the patterns of her community, by things she shall



realize their hazards later, in order to be accepted. And this urge renders her neurotic anxiety, which is the anxiety of not being authentic to herself. In Existential therapy, this *urge* for self-alteration that is not from within and is not authentic for certain subjective values, is referred to as ‘authority’, because one is vulnerable to experience anxiety when s/he is different to others. Golomb (1995), in this regard, says: ‘man tends to rely on ‘authority’, that of an institution, to formulate his privilege, which leads to shortcomings, it is an urge to ‘prove’ his attempt of authenticity’ (40). That is how Tashi pleases to back up the authority of her community and rely on the tradition of Olinka as an institution rather than her self-realized values. This creates her neurotic anxiety. The source of her anxiety, at first hand, is manifested in her lack of readiness to take the burdens of being different from the rest of the Olinkan girls for being uncircumcised. It is hard to live being different in a community where an uncircumcised lady is considered to be ‘unclean’ (Walker 1992, p. 119) and where a woman must undergo circumcision in order to be ‘accepted’ (Walker 1992, p., 120) because a lady who refuses to do the act of circumcision is labelled by the people as a ‘bitch’ (Walker 1992, p. 275). Tashi’s anxiety comes from her irritation of feeling ‘incomplete from her tradition’ (Anuradha 2019; 285) amongst women of Olinka who take circumcision as an identity for their own existence. Therefore, she, in Femina’s description (2019), ‘pays the price for being different from other girls of her community’ because she inflicts upon herself a procedure of physical alteration in order to ban herself from being looked at as ‘an outsider’ (217) of such a strict community.

Another face of Tashi’s disintegrated self is explicably reflected in her inner turmoil embodied in her sleeplessness. There are more than one orientations in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* implying that Tashi is a sleepless sufferer who witnesses frequent nightmares and bizarre dreams; Adam says: ‘Evelyn slept badly’ (Walker 1992, p. 75) and ‘I hoped Evelyn had yielded to exhaustion and drifted into one of her deep, coma-like sleeps that could last for days’ (Walker 1992, p. 76). Sleeplessness provides many hints for neurotic anxiety. Rollo May (1996) offered a checklist for diagnosing neurotic anxiety, phobias, and fears in individuals; one of the pillar points of this checklist is ‘fatigue and sleeplessness’ (76), and ‘bad dreams or nightmares’ (348). Moreover, for May, sleeping is one of those activities such as eating, drinking and sex that ‘gains satisfaction’ (148) because they denote the bodily organization of human existence; so consequently, lack of sleep indicates a deficiency in human satisfaction. Sleepless and mentally disturbed, Tashi lacks the very basic indications of human physical satisfaction.

Besides her insufficient sleeping pattern, nightmares haunt Tashi’s mind. Symbolic forms of fear overwhelm her nights with horror; she proclaims: ‘I do not tell him [her psychiatrist] about the dream I have every night that terrifies me’ (Walker 1992: p. 25). Tashi’s repressed self, in her unfulfilled wishes and her failure to actualize her authentic being, is transformed into a recurrent pattern of nightmares. Nightmares have become Tashi’s mean of expressiveness about neurotic anxiety. Adam draws Tashi’s status of horror punctiliously when he speaks to her psychiatrist: ‘But I am instantly back in our bed, sharing the night, and its terrors with my wife. She is upright, clutching her pillow. Her eyes are enormous; she is shaking with fear’ (Walker 1992, p. 26). Rollo May (1996) considers dream as one of the means of inner communication and a channel for expressing ‘the unconscious emotional life’ of the individuals (77), in which, as a symptom of neurotic anxiety, right after their bodily dizziness terrible dreams occur (87).

At a large scope, nightmares are considered to be ‘very disturbing dreams’ causing the dreamer to wake up, and they have been proven by studies to have valid correlations with low rate of mental well-being especially when they frequently happen. They are often interpreted to be the by-products of stress, anxiety, and depression (Blagrove et al 2004; p.129). Typical to an existential sufferer, Tashi often wakes up amidst her recurrent nightmares screaming, terrified and perplexed. Her bizarre dreams are true representatives



of her complex emotional world; denoting her disintegrated self and her neurotic anxiety. Such horror is a condition which Kumari and Syal (2020) consider to be Tashi's embarking into the 'wonders of dream worlds' in which everything for her is a token of 'melancholy and depression' (p. 1925-1926).

Another formula of neurotic anxiety, that Rollo May has proposed, is the patient's encounter with fear impetuses. May (1996) believes that fears are not equivalent to anxiety because essentially any type of fear refers to a specific 'object' that creates an image in the mind of the patient, whereas anxiety comes from feelings of facing life's unpredictability and vagueness (47); in other words, fear is facing *something* that one sees it as a source of danger, but anxiety is facing *nothingness* when one doesn't know what is likely to happen next therefore feels uncertain and insecure. Tashi is undergoing both feelings simultaneously; genital infibulation transforms her life from stability into anxiety then phobia. Despite her zeal for ritualizing the African act of scarring and infibulation, feelings of insecurity and unpredictability engulf her existence when she realizes how hazardous the cutting-act has been on her body. Tashi, only then, starts to suffer from a lack of health-stability, of no clear clue of body-awareness, and of a long-life physical impairment which she has to bear in the future. And, at a later stage, such a feeling is transformed into nightmares and phobia: 'I had been afraid of the sight of blood for such a long time. And *then* there had been a period when, if I cut myself, whether accidentally or on purpose...' (Walker 1992, p. 79-80). Tashi's phobia from blood, even if its cutting a finger slightly and accidentally, is a symptom of suffering from an advanced level of neurotic anxiety transformed into phobia because her experience is exactly of what Rollo May (1996) has described to be 'an intense, sudden, unexpected and novel stimulus' that triggers such a deep emotion when an individual is 'unprepared' for it (81). Tashi's recurrent nightmares of being stuck at a creepy and mysterious tower and her shocking triggers of horror aroused by glancing blood are clear indications of such deep 'sudden' impulses that May implied and mentioned above. Its only then, with this sudden flash of truth that emerges, after she has lost her sense of peace and security, Tashi wakes up from deep oblivion and self-deception about the act of female genital mutilation.

To sum up, Tashi is imprisoned in shackles of anxiety, in her thoughts of uncertainty, vagueness towards her destiny, and the unpredictable risks to create herself amid unknown possibilities, before the and after the act of infibulation, in order to survive in life with security and well-being. And this is compatible to a definition of Rollo May for anxiety that has been discussed earlier (1996; p. 33). These profound realizations trigger senses of self-blame in Tashi's mind. Since neurotic anxiety comes along with 'confusion, alienation, disorientation, uncertainty towards values and acceptable values' 1996; p. 1-5), Tashi is a confused individual who has lost her senses of security, social touch and self-organization, therefore she is overwhelmed with a deep vibe of guilt which will be the topic of the forwarding sub-section. She lives in loss and obscurity; she is confused about how she deals with her own body-image, and how her community enforces its tradition on her that violates her dignity.

## 2.2. Guilt of 'Unlived Life' and Bad Faith in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* implies notions of guilt and establishes paradigms of guilt-therapy. The novel portrays Tashi as an existential sufferer who, towards the maturity of her life, is guilty of owing herself some taste of real living for being unable to fulfil her individuality. Tashi's guilt feelings comprise two different phases; one which she lacks a solid identity, that is at the beginning of the novel, and the other which she resents her deceptive identity and years for self-fulfilment freedom at the end of the novel. She suffers from remorse of abandoning the togetherness of the crowd, and then later the guilt of submitting to the will of the crowd.





Tashi is a victim of privileging a communal ritual over self-safety, causing her to be left with disintegrated identity and a chaotic mental status. Living in a patriarchal and objectifying society where preserving the ritual of female infibulation is given priority and superiority over women's basic rights, Tashi is prompted to take a wrong road.

What makes Tashi's condition worse is that she is not only a victim of patriarchal ruling system in the village of Olinka, of procedures that objectify females, but she is also a victim of a patriotic apathy created in reaction against the Whites' colonialism, since the Whites imposed 'colonial hegemony' on Olinka by 'mass murders' (Ekwueme-Ugwu and Essein 2017; p. 30-31) which in result, created in Tashi's mind-set a defence mechanism and a dogma that preserves the culture of Olinka rather than questioning it. Such strict colonialist condition ignites emotional apathy for Tashi and prompts her to be a part of the collective unconsciousness that preserves the blacks' local rituals rather than scrutinizing their validity and usefulness. Being a part of the mob, Tashi is prompted to be imprisoned into a false moral dilemma; she had to either undergo the female infibulation or she would not be a true and devote Olinkan girl like the other girls.

This false moral dilemma is the beginning of triggering guilt in Tashi that makes her return from the United States to Africa again. Her logic is that as far as her body has not been wounded by the razor of African tradition yet, she is not a sincere African lady to fight against the Whites' colonialism. This notion pushes her to be an obedient devotee to her tribe's leader who is in the prison for fighting against colonialism: 'Our leader said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial—by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies' (Walker 1992, p. 119). Being intoxicated by patriotic slogans, especially of her leader, there were no room to doubt for Tashi in order to scrutinize the authenticity of this objectifying act that subjugates her body to men's will, since 'everyone believed it' (Walker 1992, p. 119) and therefore Tashi submits herself and her will to a false collective unconsciousness to believe that since female infibulation is a traditional act of African tribes, it is a mean to fight against the Christian missionaries and the White colonialists. Donnelley (2020) argues that Tashi is committed to remain devotee to her African identity at the expense of damaging her own body.

Tashi's apathy of self-sacrifice for the sake of preserving the African tradition at the expense of her will and individuality is a mere reflection of 'bad faith', previously mentioned as a concept of philosopher Sartre. Living in falsehood and a culture of passivity and sham, Tashi embodies *bad faith* in her living within a complete surrender to her African tribe. Despite Olivia's precautions, as a lady of missionary calling, about the harms of genital circumcision, and despite being warned of the evil consequences that it would inflict on her body and mental safety (Walker 1992, p. 250), Tashi jeopardizes submitting her body to the razors of M'Lissa who is an icon of the tribe's tradition. Thereafter Tashi will become indulged into self-deceptions of believing in a ritual act that verdicts only misfortunes on her; she becomes 'a victim of a lie' that is the lie of fighting the Whites' colonialism by preserving the circumcision act. She betrays her innermost consciousness and follows her tribal pack by silencing, or using Sartre's words 'disguising' her consciousness. She surrenders herself to an insane decree of the infibulation act by deceiving herself that 'everyone believed it' (Ibid, p. 119), but later she wakes up to ask herself: 'how had I entrusted my body to this bad woman?' (Ibid, p.148) when there is no way to undo it; and this is why she suffers the whole life of a sense of resentment and guilt. Abirami and Leelavathi (2015) correlate Tashi's submission to the genital infibulation to a form of 'protest against a colonized land' (52), and this is what prompted Tashi into bad faith because ironically she considered protesting the Whites' will but muted her own will by subjugating her own body. After the circumcision, Tashi's life undergoes a huge traumatic transformation. Her stage development fails to complete



and she is transformed from a sovereign female into a suppressed and fragile one who has to battle mental suffering and yearn for therapy (Kumari and Syal 2020).

Tashi's major pattern of guilt is embodied in her shocking waking up from bad faith. Having her consciousness raised, she resents her past and looks back at it in anger and frustration. Meantime the trial in the court, for murdering M'Lissa, Tashi and Olivia have an open-heart conversation; hence Olivia asks her why she confessed being the culprit of the murder, Tashi replies: 'There's nothing more of this life I need to see. What I have already experienced is already enough. Besides, she says soberly, maybe death is easier than life, as pregnancy is easier than birth' (Walker 1992, p. 249).

Tashi discredits her living experience and her existence because she has a deep sense of 'the un-lived life'. The sense of 'un-lived life' is a term coined by Bo Jacobsen (2007) that attributes to Rollo May's concept of existential guilt, which states that a person who seems to physically have accomplished his/her life-aging but has not actually been able to obtain his/her self-fulfilment meaningfully. It is also another form of death anxiety that often occurs before encountering death (38). Rollo May (1996) explicated the concept of guilt, as an inevitable human condition, by addressing that when an individual experiences living with no notable accomplishment and when undergoes 'forgetting being', he is 'indebted' (63) himself some life to want more to time live.

Tashi's cynical answer to Olivia that she has *seen* everything in this life before encountering her persecution is an ironic connotation to her sense of being un-lived or lived falsely. Tashi has seen 'enough' in this life of torture and trauma, hence it would be meticulous to say that she has seen life 'enough' (Walker 1992; p. 249) feignedly.

Guilt shockingly emerges into her existence because female circumcision disfigures and damages Tashi's physical unity. For instance, after the infibulation she cannot urinate properly due to damages and pain in her urinary system: 'it now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee' (Walker 1992, p. 64), and 'her menstrual periods lasted ten days' (Ibid, p. 64) denoting a dysfunctional status of her biological balance. It is later on that she grasps to what degree she readily brought on herself adversity, that even her proud walking deformed to become the walking of a subjugated woman: 'Because if the pain involved [...] the hidden scar between Tashi's thin legs. The scar that gave her the classic Olinka woman's walk, in which the feet appear to slide forward and are rarely raised above the ground' (Ibid, p. 65). These physical deficiencies, which cripple her confidence and self-esteem, lead Tashi face mental break down and neurotic penitence of a sort of self-resentment; as Adam says: 'My wife is hurt, I say; Wounded, Broken. Not mad' (Ibid, p. 163).

Capitalising words like 'Wounded' and 'Broken' and writing 'mad' with an under case letter denote Alice Walker's demonstration that Tashi's impulsive violent behaviour of murdering M'Lissa, for fulfilling revenge, doesn't happen out of a spontaneous form of madness, as it was interpreted by her surrounding, but it rather is a token of real dread that encompasses a *wound* in her memory. And Tashi, with the appalling outcomes of the act of genital infibulation, transforms into a *broken* entity. According to Sedehi and Talif (2014), Adam's court-testimony, formerly mentioned, incorporates how the infibulation act altered Tashi 'from a lively woman into a depressed one' (63), and for this her personal conscience hurts her thinking that she could have avoided such self-harm to happen.

Previously mentioned, in the Existential psychology of Karl Jasper, guilt is transfigured into a sense of judging an individual's self and character, which is exactly what occurs to Tashi. Questioning her mindfulness of 'how had I entrusted my body to this bad woman?' (Walker 1992, p.148) embraces her repentance over her naivety in the past when she recalls her memory. Besides, in a letter written one day before her death to Lisette, Adam's mistress, she recalls the act of infibulation perpetrated on her sister Dura and herself described to be 'cruel' that she ought to 'speak' about it: 'is it cruel to say this?



I feel it is cruel; but that it is only the cruelty of truth, speaking it, shouting it, that will save us now' (Walker 1992, p. 273). Tashi's insistence to 'shout' the truth about her suffering is a defence mechanism to mitigate her conscience-unrest that she suffers from since she underpins judging herself for letting herself undergo 'a barbaric ritual' (Anisha and Christina 2018; p. 16) that could have been avoided.

Another pattern of Tashi's existential guilt is her sense of futility and disappointment towards the fabric of social relationships around her. Tashi's relationship with Adam precedes their marriage for years, then she comes to knowing his sister Olivia; further, she has a big role in encouraging the Africans resist the Whites' colonization. These relationships indicate that Tashi used to be an extrovert and gregarious person, and to be a woman of warm intimacy for large social networks. However, after undergoing infibulation, Tashi converts into a self-isolated person, torn and fragmented inside, who prefers to separate herself from the rest of the community. This is because, as Hamid (2018) asserts, Tashi suffers from 'an unstable self-image' and a low rate of self-esteem because of 'emotional deregulation' (13) that makes her unable to establish social connections properly. Adam illustrates this analogy by explaining her negative transition saying: 'Unfortunately I remembered no moment between us of special tenderness. On the other hand, generally speaking, tenderness permeated our friendship' (Walker 1992, p. 97), then Lissette says: 'Tashi had run away from you, even from your kisses' (Walker 1992, p. 97). Thus, she is obsessed with the guilt of failing to nourish her husband sexually and emotionally as she used to do previously. Tashi's detachment from her surrounding reflects Medard Bose's interpretation of guilt, as declared earlier, that those who face a decline of meaningful relationships with other humans are susceptible to experience existential guilt in their lives (103).

### 2.3. Therapy through Self-Unfoldment in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

Despite the human's agonies, previously mentioned, the novel also depicts human to be a being of self-transformation through therapeutic decisions. By ascribing to Rollo May's theory of 'self-unfoldment', one can argue that although Tashi endures a painful feeling of harmed conscience; in the choice of submitting her body to a practise of female infibulation, and then later, she is capable of compromising her harmed conscience by transforming her self-image, form of *being*, into more positive form that is individually accepted rather than collectively imposed.

A close look at Tashi confirms Rollo May's theory of 'Self-Unfoldment'. For instance, Tashi exorcizes her sense of guilt when she chooses to reverse her submission to M'Lissa by revolting against her conventions and even murdering her. Her self-unfolding process emerges when she chooses to ease following the crowd by no more believing in the Olinkan suppressive tradition of female infibulation. She destroys a *life-form* of passivity, nativity and surrender to the will of crowd through bringing a life-form of vengeance. She unfolds her self-conscience and guilt by *precluding* her submission to M'Lissa by murdering her instead of submitting to her will. Tashi unfolds her guilt-feelings in a letter to Lissette where she says: 'Tomorrow morning I will face the firing squad for killing someone who, many years ago, killed me' (Walker 1992, p. 272). Revealing that she is keen to kill someone who 'killed' her is a denotation to Rollo May's 'dissolution of life-form' by a sort of daring 'form-destroying', as previously cited. She demolishes the existence of a passive version of Tashi by destroying the source of Tashi's torture; hence, guilt conscience exorcizes. She understands the agony of the real life then destroys its source with an actual physical change; as Kumari and Syal (2020) state that she repels reality, discovers and then reformulates it.

Appealing to moral codes, murdering M'Lissa is a sophisticated ethical dilemma. Even Tashi herself is confused in feeling or not feeling the guilt of being a criminal; when



Olivia asks her if she is 'innocent' or not, she proclaims: 'well, I say. Yes and no. I am puzzled' (Walker 1992, p. 250). However, Tashi's act stays crucial to understand that she *did* want to make a constructive change for the future of her community, and she did that in hope to wipe out her guilt-conscience: 'even if it is wrong, I am being what is left of myself' she says (Ibid, p. 250). In light of Rollo May's concept of self-unfoldment, she speaks out her trauma by choosing to resist a false ritual practice rather than passively choosing to let it continue. It is her guilt of letting the African next generation undergo such suppressive practice that she finds no mental rest unless she does some actual thing to resist it: 'If we do not, Africa may well be depopulated of black people in our grandchildren's lifetime, and the worldwide suffering of our children will continue to be our curse' (Walker 1992, p. 273). As such, Tashi's *compulsive* guilt of 'to be or not to be' eventually formulates a vigorous process of self-unfoldment that transforms her pain into an act of social change at a bigger scale.

### Conclusion:

Existential psychotherapy, with its deep philosophical expedition of inquiring the meaning of life, is a genuine approach applied to restudy Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, that has frequently been reinterpreted with various critical examinations. Suffering from the trauma of a painful past, of her sister's death and its cage of phobia from blood, the novel encompasses deep implications of neurotic anxiety and guilt. Neurotic anxiety underpins Tashi's fear of being left alone and not being affiliated to her community, Olinka, and its communal standards. This fear comes up due to being 'unclean' as she has not undergone to female genital mutilation. Later, neurotic anxiety in this novel is manifested in self-denial and disharmony due to her regret over the folly of letting M'Lissa do an operation of female genital mutilation on her. Exemplifying, Tashi's idiocy of letting her body undergo female genital mutilation underpins her suffrage resulted from two Existential concepts; 'bad faith', a Sartre's concept for the human false and inauthentic living, and 'unlived life', a term of Rollo May for human's remorse over life's wrong-doings. Tashi's inauthentic living mirrors Sartre's 'bad faith' because she is fooled by slogans of anti-colonialism, victimising her own body for a torturing African culture. And her inauthentic life echoes Rollo May's concept of 'unlived life' since she overwhelmed with the remorse feeling that she lacked authentic, happy and meaningful living. However, towards the end of the novel, Tashi gets rid of 'bad faith' and 'unlived life' as she undertakes therapy; she unfolds her 'self', by falsifying wrong beliefs and she retrospectively heals her memory by murdering M'Lissa, the actual source of her trauma, and by bringing a sort of self-acceptance to her life through confronting her guilt senses and stressing upon individuality.

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## له پارایی دهروونی و ههستکردن به تاوانی ژیايتی نه ژیاو و پروای خراپه وه به رهو خوددۆزینه وه له پۆمانی "داگیرکردنی نهیئی چێژ" ی ئالیس وۆلکهر

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### پوخته

بهوینییهی که پۆمانیکی پۆستمۆدێرنی زۆر ئاماژه پیدراوه، پۆمانی (داگیرکردنی نهیئی چێژ) ی ئالیس وۆلکهر، لێوانلیوه له رهههندی قولایی دهروونی مروڤ و مهینهتی بوونیهانه. ئەم پۆمانه ههستی قولی پهشیمانی لیدهفامریتته وه بۆ ژیايتی که تیدا نه زموونی ژیا نکهراوه، ئەم ژیا نه به شیوهی ژان و له پێگهی دووباره گێرانهوه وه، به چاویکی پر له ههسرهت و نارازیبوونه وه، ئاوری لیدهدرتته وه. پالهلوانی سه رهکی ئەم پۆمانه کچیکه به ناوی تاشی، که دوو چاری ههستکردن به تاوان دهییت، وه ئەمهش له دوو قوناعی جیاوازی ژیا نی ئەودا پهنگه داته وه: له سه ره تادا، ههست به تاوان دهکات چونکه ههست ناکات لایهنگیری ههیه بۆ کۆمه لگه کهی، بهوینییهی که نه ریتی خهته نه کردنی کچانهی به سه رخۆیدا جیهه جینه کردوو، که ئەم نه ریتته به هیمای دلسۆز و گوڤرایه لیبی ژنی ئەفریکی دادهنریت. وه پاشان، له قوناعی دواتردا، ههست به تاوان دهکات له ودا که خهته نه کردنی توشی سه دمه به کی دهروونی و لیکه وه تهی خراپ و به ئازاری دهکات. ئەم ههسته تاشی توشی دۆشدامان و پارایی دهکات له وهی که له نیو بهرداشی دوو فۆرمی ههستکردنی بوونیهانه به تاوان به مینیتته وه، بۆیه تاشی دهییتته مروڤیک که له ناخه وه له تله تبه وه، (خود) ی خو ی ل وون بو، وه په شیمانه له وهی که نهیتوانیوه له ژیا نی خویدا به شیوهی کی پراوپر و واتادار بژیت. ئەم لیکۆلینه وه به، که ناوونیشانه کهی بریتیه له: "له پارایی دهروونی و ههستکردن به تاوانی ژیايتی نه ژیاو و پروای خراپه وه به رهو خوددۆزینه وه له پۆمانی "داگیرکردنی نهیئی چێژ" ی ئالیس وۆلکهر"، نه رخانکراوه بۆ تیشک خسته سه ره چمه کهانی ههستکردن به تاوان و پارایی دهروونی دهرووناس رۆلۆ مهی (1994-1909)، ههروهها چه مکی "پروای خراپ" ی فهیله سوف سارته ر (1980-1905)، که له پۆمانی (داگیرکردنی نهیئی چێژ) دا پهنگیان داوه ته وه، ئەمهش له ژیر چاویلکهی تیوره کانی پێبازی دهروون چاره خوازی بونگه رای. ناواخی ئەم توڤزینه وه به ده رخته به کی تیوری له خو ی ده گرت، بۆ چه مگه لیکي وه کو پارایی دهروونی و ههستکردن به تاوان بۆ "ژیايتی نه ژیاو" و "پروای خراپ" و خوده ه لدا نه وه - خوددۆزینه وه، ئەمانهش له ژیر چاویلکهی دهروون چاره خوازی بونگه رای، که پێبازیکي هاوچه رخه له ئاویته بوونی دهروونشیکاری و فه لسه فه. پاشان ئەم توڤزینه وه به لده ستیت به دۆزینه وهی شو ئپه نه جی ئەم چه مکه له چه ند ده قیکي هه لئنجراوی پۆمانی (داگیرکردنی نهیئی چێژ).  
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### من القلق النفسي و الشعور بالذنب في حياة لامعاش و الاعتقاد السيئ الى الكشف الذاتي في رواية (احتلال سر الذوق) لآليس وولكر

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### ملخص

رواية (احتلال سر الذوق) لآليس وولكر، هي إحدى روايات ما بعد الحداثة المشيرة إليها كثيرا، مليئة بالأبعاد العميقة النفسية للإنسان ومأساة وجودية، حيث يفهم منها إحساس الندامة العميقة لحياة لم يجرب فيها، الحياة التي من خلال الألم و استعادة سردها ويعيون مليئة بالحسرة وعدم الرضى أيضا. الشخصية الرئيسة لهذه الرواية فتاة اسمها تاشي، التي تعرضت للجريمة، وانعكس ذلك في حياتها من مرحلتين مختلفتين، إذ إنها في البداية تشعر بالذنب بما إنها لم تكن لها انتماء لمجتمعها، لما لم يطبق عليها عادة ختان البنات عليها، حيث إن هذه العادة رمزا للولاء والتزام المرأة أفريقية ما. وكذلك إنها تشعر بالذنب؛ إذ إن الختان تصيبها بصدمة نفسية لها إفرزات سلبية ومؤذية عليها. وكان هذا الإحساس تجعل تاشي قلقة ومتحيرة بين مطرقة ثنائية الإحساس الوجودي وسندانها وتبقى محسوسة بالذنب. ولذلك تتحول تاشي الى إنسانة مشتتة و فاقدة لذاتها، وهي نادمة لأنها لم تتمكن من العيش برهاية. إن هذه الدراسة، بعنوان: "من القلق النفسي و الشعور بالذنب في حياة لامعاش و الاعتقاد السيئ الى الكشف الذاتي في رواية (احتلال سر الذوق) لآليس وولكر"، تسلط الضوء على مفهوم الإحساس بالذنب والقلق النفسي عند النفساني رولو مي (1994-1909)، وكذلك مفهوم "الثقة العمياء -



السيئة" للفيلسوف سارتر (1905-1980)، اللذان انعكسا في رواية (احتلال سر الذوق)، وذلك من خلال نظريات مذهب العلاج النفسي الوجودي. تحتوي هذه الدراسة عرضا نظريا لمفاهيم عدة، مثل القلق النفسي، الشعور بالجريمة لـ"حياة انعدامي" و "سوء النية"، وكشف الذات، وهذه تحت مظلة مذهب المعالج النفساني، كنهج نقدي مُعاصر مختلطٍ من التحليل النفسي والفلسفة. وبعد ذلك تحاول هذه الدراسة أن تكشف بصمة هذه المفاهيم من خلال نماذج مختارة من نصوص رواية (احتلال سر الذوق).

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العلاج النفسي الوجودي، القلق النفسي، الشعور بالذنب، "حياة انعدامي" و "الثقة السيئة".