African Woman Rises from the Ashes: Alice Walker's Mimicry of Classic Ethnography in Possessing the Secret of Joy

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Summary/Abstract: Before the advent of deconstructive schools of thought in the second half of the twentieth century, anthropology and ethnography were hailed as scientific disciplines whose major consideration was to provide an objective analysis of other cultures. However, the launch of such critical approaches as postcolonialism, feminism, and postmodernism has nullified the two disciplines' claim to scientificty and objectivity by laying bare their sexist, racist backdrop. In the postist zeitgeist, new ethnographies have been promoted in an attempt to disrupt the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the studied subject of classic ethnography through including first-hand marginalized voices. Moreover, they blur the long-held generic boundaries between science and fiction via establishing the "ethnographic novel" as a medium that committedly voices the subalterns. Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992) is one of these new ethnographic novels which has as its protagonist an
Alice Walker's most recent novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy, carries the themes of women's autonomy, economic oppression, and the Female Genital Mutilation. This novel expands the focus on women's personal and political power and women's sexual autonomy. Walker's previous novels are drawing attention to a serious social issue, female genital mutilation. This issue widens the scope of interest from previous novels to include women's health and personal rights. This paper brings out the nature and history of female genital mutilation in order to gain a complete understanding of it. It is a...