

READING NGUGI'S *WEEP NOT, CHILD* ALONG WITH ALICE WALKER'S WOMANISM

Adel El-Sayed Hassan, PhD

Lecturer of English literature (Novel & Prose), Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education, Mansoura University, Egypt

Abstract

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* may be read as a novel about the anti-colonial strife of the Mau-Mau guerrillas against the English colonialists. It may also be read as a novel featuring the estrangement of the African people from their ancestral land. Further, it may be read as a novel about the experience of the African women in general. Still, *Weep Not, Child* can be read as a womanist novel concerned with the experiences of women of color. Drawing upon Alice Walker's womanism and her theoretical writings about the gender issue and motherhood, this paper examines *Weep Not, Child* to demonstrate how womanist it is. The paper reveals that the female characters in the novel epitomize most, if not all, the characteristics of women underlying Walker's definition of womanism. In addition, it indicates that the black women's struggle against patriarchal oppression and their perseverance to educate their children materialize Walker's theoretical views about gender and motherhood. The novel does not solely concentrate on the black experience, but it also takes the white position into consideration. The paper concludes that the novel incarnates the universalist attitude central to Walker's womanism by pleading for connectivity, understanding and compatibility among races and genders.

Keywords: *Weep Not, Child*, womanism, girlish, universalist, gender issue, motherhood, patriarchal, polygamy

Introduction

In her article "Feminism: The Quest for an African Variant," Eibunoluwa (2009) argues that feminism's main objective is the emancipation of all women from sexist oppression. Nevertheless, it fails to handle the peculiarities of Black females and men of color. In effect, feminism addresses the needs of middle class white women in Britain and America while pretending to undertake the emancipation of women worldwide. Consequently, the inadequacy of feminism to advance a theory

or an ideology that satisfies the needs of Black women folk later results in the development of another variant of feminism called Womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker in her collection of essays titled *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (pp.228-29).

Walker's proposition of womanism as an attitude for African American women to express their difference from white feminism is also a reaction to the denigration of colored women in feminist critical theory and politics. Womanism begins then as a response to the emerging differences between those African American women who find feminist program adequate and useful for handling issues pivotal for them, and those who find it unresponsive to the problems of racial and classist issues. Consequently, the new political and critical scheme of womanism arises from the need to tackle gender issues without opposing men and "to foster bonds between African American women and men in order to successfully resist racism" (Mazurek, 2009, p. 21).

1. Alice Walker's Womanism

1.1 Definition

In her collection of essays referred to above, Walker (1983) offers a four-part definition of womanism:

Womanist 1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish", i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in great depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself [...].

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (pp. xi-xii)

According to Torfs (2008), Walker's definition has four entries. The basic part of the first entry is concerned with the origin of the term "womanist". The word is derived from the adjective "womanish" that features in the black folk expression: "You acting womanish." It is also similar in meaning to another folk expression: "You trying to be grown." The two folk expressions are associated with the adjectives "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful*" that suggest strong determination and plenty of motivation. However, the emphasis on 'willful' implies that most black women have been denied their own free wills. Both expressions suggest an attitude related to the will "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one." Furthermore, the expressions imply maturity. As indicated above, "womanish" is the opposite of "girlish", which means "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious." In contrast, "womanish" suggests being responsible, in charge and serious. This emphasis on the maturity of womanists may demonstrate that the great attention given to the black woman's case does not stem from immature passions. Rather, it is closely connected with feelings of responsibility for the fate of black women (pp.18-19).

In the second entry, Torfs (2008) explains that Walker's definition reveals different types of relationships between women. On the one hand, womanists love other women, particularly for the traits that make them female, e.g., their female culture, their emotional life, and their strength. On the other hand, they show interest in lesbian relationships. Regarding their attitude towards men, womanists show no reluctance to maintain heterosexual relationships. Although Walker appeals to her audience to love themselves merely because they are female, she does not have hard feelings towards men (p.19). In this regard, Walker's view is asserted by Collins (1996)'s notion that "[w]omanism seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men. [...] Moreover, womanism appears to provide an avenue to foster stronger relationships between black women and black men, [...]" (p. 11). Walker's non-separatist or universalist attitude suggests that a womanist has a concern for the survival and wholeness of all people, male and female. She demonstrates this through the metaphor of the garden in which "the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity" (Collins, p.11). According to Collins, this notion of the colored race "both criticizes colorism [...] and broadens the notion of humanity to make all people of color" (p.11). In fact, what Walker wants to say is that a tolerant attitude should be adopted not only among sexes, but among races as well. Thus, she adopts an outlook here which is useful for both black women and the whole of mankind. Walker further

touches upon one particular feature of women: the relationship between a mother and her child. The fact that the exchanges in this entry involve a mother-child relationship implies that Walker looks upon motherhood as basic to the experience of being a woman (Torfs, p. 20). Walker's view of the importance of motherhood to black experience is emphasized by Abdullah (2012), who claims that "motherhood [...] is essential part of who we are" and that "[w]omanist mothers experience motherhood as [...] a site of resistance and struggle" (p. 65).

In the third entry, Walker defines "womanist" concomitantly. She lists things a womanist loves, including the moon which is considered a symbol of femininity. In her list, Walker also mentions music, dance, love, food and roundness as symbols for the worldly, bodily pleasures in life as well as the spirit as a symbol for the spiritual dimension of our being (Torfs, 2008, p. 20). In this regard, Walker's reference to spirituality as fundamental to human survival in general and black and womanist experience in particular is emphasized by Harvey (2013), who defines spirituality as "a relationship with a Higher power that fosters a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life" (p. 82). In her list, too, Walker contends that womanists love struggle. This womanist attitude to carry on strife is "a part of the larger human struggle for greater peace, beauty, freedom and justice" (Abdullah, 2012, p. 57). In addition to loving their folk in general, womanists, as indicated by the above definition, also love themselves.

Regarding the fourth entry, it consists of the phrase "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender". With this statement, Walker suggests that both womanism and feminism have much in common; nevertheless, they are unquestionably different (Torfs, 2008, p. 21). However, Walker does not identify the similarities and differences between womanism and feminism, or between purple and lavender. Exploring Walker's four-part definition of womanism, Hudson-Weems asks if there is any difference between purple and lavender. She concludes that there is hardly any difference for Walker except in shade and color (Clark, 2012, p. 49). The difference between feminism and womanism, however, is that the former "tends to favor the separation of the sexes," while the latter "urges for a union of males and females in joint endeavors to promote the advancement of the human race" (Mogu, 1999, p. 69). Evidently, this view complies with the notion of womanism's commitment "to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" advocated by Walker in her definition of womanism mentioned above. Davis (2005) cites Dubey's view that Walker's womanist project seeks to "integrate the past and present, individual and community, personal and political change, into a unified whole." (as cited in Davis, p. 33). Maduka (2009) sums up Walker's vision of wholeness by stating that womanism "does not emasculate the self-pride of men; rather it lures them

into accepting to live harmoniously with them [women] by abandoning their self-perception as superior partners in the collective struggle of the race for a better society.” (pp.14-15).

Tsuruta (2012) voices her concern for Walker’s womanism and its vital importance to black women. She also expresses her unease about attempts to define and redefine it and use it and its root ideal, womanish, to divorce it from its cultural context and social reality.

[T]he term womanish is culturally derived and African-centered and that womanism and womanish must be preserved and constantly developed as valuable ways of Black women thinking, asserting themselves and living in the world. (p. 3)

2.2 Womanism in Alice Walker’s Theoretical Writings: The Gender Issue as well as Motherhood and Matrilineage

Along with the theoretical part on Alice Walker’s Womanism, the paper will briefly elaborate on the concept in her theoretical writings, paying special attention to two themes well-suited to this paper, namely the gender issue as well as motherhood and matrilineage.

2.2.1 The Gender Issue

Gender is an essential feature of a black woman’s identity. Although black people suffer from racism as a community, black women fall victim to sexism not only from outside, but also from within that same community. hooks (2000) says: Males [...] do benefit the most from patriarchy, from the assumption that they are superior to females and should rule over us. [...] In return for all the goodies men receive from patriarchy, they are required to dominate women, [...] (p. ix).

Consequently, hooks sees in feminism the best solution to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression: “To end [...] we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action. (p. ix)

Like hooks, Walker addresses sexism and the sexist exploitation of black women. She writes countless passages about the situation of black women in patriarchal societies. She obviously recognizes the dualistic identity of black women: she [the black woman] has experienced life not only as a black person, but as a woman. Walker further maintains that because of their bipartite identity, black women fall victims to both racism and sexism. This prompts her to declare that the black woman is abused almost by everyone. Expressing it with a folkloristic image, Walker mentions that Black women are looked upon as the mule of the world, since they have carried the burdens that everyone else has refused to handle. Walker

perceives the double discrimination black women undergo even within black society itself. She examines both the sexism within black culture and the racism within feminist circles. About the sexism among blacks, Walker refers to the attitude adopted by black men towards black women and children. She explains that her father adopts a sexist behavior which, according to Walker, is not inborn but rather an imitation of the behavior of his society. She criticizes black women for their loyalty to men rather than to themselves. She thinks that this is likely to bring about their self-destruction. Unlike white feminists, Walker affirms that black woman play an important role in constructing a better future and offering a new image for mankind. Walker's view evokes womanism's commitment to the "survival and wholeness of entire people" in her definition. It further asserts her universalist standpoint. Even in her description of lesbian women, Walker shows herself to be explicitly non-separatist (Torfs, 2008, pp. 24-25).

2.2.2 Motherhood and Matrilineage

Along with the gender issue, Walker also discusses motherhood and matrilineage in her collection. She blends two senses of motherhood. Firstly, she talks about motherhood in its biological sense. She writes about being a mother herself as well as about her own creative mother, whom she connects with flowers. She recalls her mother's infatuation with gardens with different flowers. This perhaps explains why Walker's collection of essays is labeled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. In this regard, the image of the garden with different flowers in Walker's womanism has become an emblem for her universalist stance. In addition to her argument about her mother, Walker similarly talks about biological foremothers. She refers to their deep spirituality, knowledge, overwhelming generosity, and selflessness. Besides, she calls attention to their suffering from and toleration of physical abuse. Secondly, Walker also talks about motherhood in its symbolical and spiritual sense. For example, referring to Zora Neale Hurston, she admits that Hurston has been a symbolical foremother, whose impact on her cannot be denied. This is asserted by the view that "[w]hen black women began to write creative works, they looked back to their foremothers in Africa and throughout the diaspora for creative inspiration" (Thompson, 2001, p. 178). Talking about spiritual matrilineage, Walker takes pride in being a black woman descending from great foremothers that have provided her as well as other black women with hope, affirmed the majesty of the blacks' past, and motivated them to lay claim to the richness of the future (Torfs, 2008, pp. 27-29). Walker's notion of the symbolical and spiritual sense of motherhood is affirmed by the view that "[m]otherhood transcends being a mere biological designation to a philosophical and operational paradigm that ensures strategic intervention in crises while simultaneously serving as the

community's strategic life-support resource" (as cited in Muwati, Gambahaya, & Gwekwerere, 2011, p. 4). This means that in most African communities, motherhood is not looked upon as solely complementary to fatherhood; rather, it "stands at the center of African life as a major organizing rubric around which life is constructed, sustained, and fulfilled" (Muwati, Gambahaya, & Gwekwerere, 2011, p. 4).

To conclude this part, Walker's definition of womanism and her essays in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* have addressed the black woman's characteristics from a womanist perspective, the gender issue, as well as motherhood and matrilineage.

3. Womanist Features in *Weep Not, Child*

In what follows, Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* will be investigated in terms of Walker's theoretical writings on Womanism. Walker's own definition of the concept will be the starting point of the investigation. In addition, the themes—the gender issue as well as motherhood and matrilineage—will be considered for a more thorough analysis, pointing out important aspects about Womanism as well. A brief introduction to the author and his novel will be made.

3.1 The Author and the Novel in Brief

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is an eminent Kenyan writer. Along with Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, he is one of the increasing number of African writers of international stature and reputation. He writes novels, short stories, plays, and essays. Raised in British-ruled Kenya, he witnesses the conflicts of European and traditional African cultures. As a child, he attends a mission school and then is sent to a Gikuyu school during the Mau Mau Revolt. Some of his family members get implicated in the fight against colonialists. This explains why he becomes a revolutionary writer who makes use of language and literature as weapons to confront postcolonial imperialism in Africa and his homeland. His early novels are written in English. However, after realizing the inappropriateness of producing his literary works in English, he makes up his mind to write only in his native Gikuyu. Moreover, he appeals to fellow African writers to write in their native languages and give up writing in European languages. Ngugi has recently published a collection of essays in which he, as Waita (2013) notes, "argues that indigenous African Languages can be used to bring about an African renaissance as away out of the current alienation of the continent" (p. 45) In his novels, Ngugi focuses on "politics, economics, culture, land, history and the role of the church in the Kenyan struggle for independence" (Addei, Osei, & Annin, 2013, p.164). In addition, one of his main

preoccupations is the improvement of the position of Kenyan women and other marginalized groups in Africa.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first published novel is *Weep Not, Child*. It traces the adolescence of a boy called Njoroge as his life begins to fall apart when Kenya is about to gain its independence. Njoroge's life begins to change when he has the chance to go to school. His main preoccupation is to help his family and his community improve. However, his life soon undergoes hardships when his brothers join the revolutionary Mau Mau, thus getting involved in the perilous politics of the region. Njoroge is in love with Mwhaki, his childhood friend and the daughter of a rich African farmer, Jacobo, who owns the land on which Ngotho, Njoroge's father, and his family live. Njoroge's father and Mwhaki's are in clash throughout the novel, as Jacobo has earned land and special privileges by collaborating with the white colonists. One of Ngotho's sons kills Jacobo, and this affects Njoroge as he knows it may lead Mwhaki to terminate their friendship forever. However, when Njoroge's family begins to be threatened by the struggle of the Mau Mau guerrillas against the British regime, his desire to learn increases, as he realizes that formal schooling can help him restore ancestral lands and achieve Kenya's independence. His life quickly collapses, though, when he is forced to terminate his school life due to his father's death and his brothers' entanglement in the political activities. Working temporarily and eventually fired by an abusive shopkeeper, Njoroge's hope to pursue his dreams of studying abroad and returning to help his family and his nation is shattered. His last hope is to run away to Uganda with Mwhaki. However, Mwhaki declares that she cannot leave her mother to go with him. Feeling that he has been forsaken by everything he once cares for, Njoroge attempts suicide but is fortunately rescued by his two mothers Nyokabi and Njeri.

3.2 Universalism (Non-Separatism) in *Weep Not, Child*: Commitment to the Survival and Wholeness of Entire People, Male and Female

As one may recall, Walker argues in her definition of womanism that a womanist's essential concern is the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. In the same way, she looks forward to a universalist attitude between the races, allowing women and men of different colors to coexist like flowers in a garden. Walker communicates a similar message in her theoretical writings by putting a lot of emphasis on community. This non-separatism and the stress on community are evident in *Weep Not, Child*. As will be illustrated, the novel pleads for connectedness and compatibility among races and sexes in general and between the white colonizers (represented in the novel by Mr. Howlands) and the colonized black subjects (represented by Ngotho), in particular. It promotes the

dividedness of all races, particularly those living in the same community. The best illustration of this is the following exchange between Njoroge, the novel's protagonist and Ngotho's youngest son, and Stephen, Mr. Howlands's youngest son.

"I used to hide near the road. I wanted to speak with some of you."

Stephen was losing his shyness.

"Why didn't you?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. I was afraid that you might not speak to me or you might not need my company."

"Was it all that bad?"

"Not so much." He did not want sympathy.

"I am sorry I ran away from you. I too was afraid."

"Afraid?" It was Stephen's turn to wonder.

"Yes. I too was afraid of you."

"But I meant no harm?"

"All the same I was. How could I tell what you meant to do?"

"Strange."

"Yes. It's strange. It's strange how you do fear something because your heart is already prepared to fear because maybe you were brought up to fear that something, or simply because you found others fearingThat's how it's with me. When my brothers went to Nairobi and walked in the streets, they came home and said that they didn't like the way Europeans looked at them."

"I suppose it's the same everywhere. I have heard many friends say they didn't like the way Africans looked at them." (pp. 124-25)

When Njoroge and Stephen meet at a football match, the two boys avoid each other at first but gradually discover that they share similar interests. Discussing the reasons that preclude their communication as children, they find out that their previous impossibility of interaction is ascribed to shyness rather than to antagonism, which suggests the possibility of friendship and coexistence between the white colonizers and the colonized black people, or rather, between different races, in a more general sense. This is reminiscent of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, in which the author thinks that the British colonizers and the colonized Indians can live together in harmony and shun any racial prejudices. Here, Stephen reflects on how fears and prejudices spread within a community. He suggests that some people are inclined to be antagonistic due to the influence of their family and their society, which implies that hatred and prejudice are rather acquired than inborn. Njoroge and Stephen's propensity to make friends with each other and promote a healthy relationship entails that accord between races is

possible, and conforms to Walker's womanism which advocates the entirety of all people. The presence of and interaction between Njoroge and Stephen who represent different races illustrate Walker's concept of wholeness which includes all races.

3.3 Womanish (Not Girlish) Behavior, Courage and Responsibility in the Novel

As Walker indicates in her definition of womanism above, the concept centers on women's characteristics which include being womanish (not girlish), acting like grown-ups, as well as being courageous, audacious, responsible, and serious. The most explicit illustration of this attitude in *Weep Not, Child* figures in the scene in which Mwihaki responds to the incident where Njoroge is bullied by a number of schoolboys:

One boy told him, "You are a *Njuka*."

"No! I am not a *Nju-u-ka*," he said.

"What are you?"

"I am Njoroge."

They laughed heartily. He felt annoyed. Had he said anything funny?

Another boy commanded him, "Carry this bag. You're a *Njuka*."

He was going to take it. But Mwihaki came to his rescue.

"He is my *Njuka*. You cannot touch him." Some laughed. Others sneered. (p.16)

Evidently, in her interaction with Njoroge's trouble, Mwihaki displays womanish traits though she is still in her adolescence. She shows courage and audacity when she rushes to save Njoroge from his intimidators, who laugh at him and make coarse jokes that shock him. Her prompt action to rescue her friend reflects instinctive qualities typical of most, if not all, black women. It also suggests that she innately feels responsible for looking after and protecting Njoroge, who is about to start his new school life. Like many other black women, Mwihaki is ready to help those in trouble.

Another scene displaying Mwihaki's mature behavior and audacity is when she boldly responds by saying, "No, no" to Njoroge's request to "go to Uganda and live" together (p.150). Her womanish, bold, mature and responsible attitude is in line with the dictates of the black values which necessitate obligations towards family and community:

"Yes. But we have a duty. Our duty to other people is our biggest responsibility as grown men and women."

"Duty! Duty!" he cried bitterly.

"Yes, I have a duty, for instance, to my mother. Please, dear Njoroge, we cannot leave her at this time when— No! Njoroge." (151)

As the above quote indicates, Mwihaki has obligations towards her mother and other people in her community. Acting as a grown woman, she

cannot give up her duties towards her mother, family and community for anything, however dear it might be. Besides, she is serious about her decision to decline Njoroge's offer to run away together. Obviously, her responsibility and seriousness evoke Walker's description of womanists as serious and in charge.

3.4 Womanist: A Woman Who Loves Individual Men, sexually and/or Nonsexually.

Walker's definition of "womanist" as a woman who loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually also finds expression in *Weep Not, Child*. Consider the following scene in which Mwhaki and Njoroge confess their love to each other:

"Mwhaki, you are the one dear thing left to me. I feel bound to you and I know that I can fully depend on you. I have no hope left but for you, [...]. It was only when she had called him again and he saw tears in her eyes that he felt encouraged. [...] He held her left hand in his. She did not resist him and neither did she resist the tears that now flowed freely down her face. She tried to speak but something choked her throat. She struggled within herself. She must not lose control. Yet it seemed hopeless because she wanted him to go on holding her by the hand and lead the way.

"Don't! Don't!" She at last struggled to say. She knew that she had to stop him before he went very far. Yet she felt unequal to the effort and she blamed herself for having come. And Njoroge went on whispering to her appealing to her with all his might.

"Mwhaki, dear, I love you. Save me if you want. Without you I am lost."

She wanted to sink in his arms and feel a man's strength around her weak body. She wanted to travel the road back to her childhood and grow up with him again. But she was no longer a child.

"Yes, we can go away from here as you had suggested when-

"No !no !: she cried, in an agony of despair, interrupting him. "You must save *me*, please Njoroge. I love you." (149-50)

Early in the novel, Njoroge and Mwhaki are portrayed as very close friends, who have similar interests, e.g., their willingness to learn reading and writing. Though younger than Njoroge, Mwhaki takes him and shows him the way to school. Just as he admires her, she is pleased with him. She feels more secure with him than she feels with her brothers who fail to care much about her. Furthermore, she confides in him and likes walking home with him. In class, she asks him questions about class work (p.50). At times, they regard themselves as siblings. Their childhood friendship continues regardless of their different social backgrounds and their fathers' hatred of each other. However, towards the end of the novel, their love becomes

romantic. Despite their capacity for a sexual relationship, there are certain considerations which inhibit the achievement of their sexual desires. As Nicholls (2012) notes,

Njoroge and Mwihaki are constructed with a vast erotic potential, but the increasing proximity of the two characters does not translate into an admission of their mutual attraction. Njoroge and Mwihaki are placed in a filial relation to substitute for a thwarted amorous relation. (p. 26)

In addition to the filial relation that binds Njoroge and Mwihaki and makes their relationship operate “on a denial of sexual attraction,” Njoroge’s “subscription to Christian theology” is another factor which impedes his desire to have sex with Mwihaki (Nicholls, 2012, p. 25). This view of the erotic desire of Mwihaki (and Njoroge as well) indicated above by the exchange between is consistent with Walker’s definition that a womanist is a woman capable of sexual and/or nonsexual love. Significantly, the interaction between Njoroge and Mwihaki who represent masculinity and femininity respectively is basic to understanding Walker’s notion of wholeness or non-separatism which includes both categories.

3.5 Womanist: A Woman Who Loves Other Women, Sexually and/or Nonsexually

In her definition of womanism, Walker shows that one characteristic of a womanist is that she is a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. This can find expression in the relationship between Nyokabi and Njeri, Ngotho’s wives. Although Njeri is Ngotho’s first wife, yet she does not feel jealous of Nyokabi, Ngotho’s second wife. On the contrary, the “two wives liked each other and were good companions and friends. [...] His wives were good women. It was not easy to get such women these days” (p.12). Furthermore, Nyokabi and Njeri like and enjoy each other’s company. The narrator says that “Njeri and Nyokabi went to the shamba or market together” (p.45). Seldom do they miss the chance to spend a lot of time together, particularly at night when their sons and daughters gather in either Njeri’s or Nyokabi’s hut to shorten the night:

All the sons of Ngotho with other young men and women from Mahua ridge were in Njeri’s hut. They usually went there to shorten the night. At such times Njeri would leave the young people and she would go to sit with Nyokabi. When they went to Nyokabi’s hut she too would do likewise, leave them, and go to visit Njeri. (p. 13)

Clearly, the relationship between Nyokabi and Njeri shows that their love for each other rises above sensuality. As the above passage indicates, both women love each other for considerations other than sex. For example, each woman feels lonely and seeks company as she lacks communication with a husband engaged in activities other than mitigating his wife’s sense of

isolation. Their mutual love is perhaps due to their feelings that they have a lot in common.

3.6 Womanist [is] A Woman [...] Wanting to Know More and in Great Depth than is Considered “Good” for One.

This part of Walker’s definition of womanism can be applied to Nyokabi’s mother, who “yearned for something broader than that which could be had from her social circumstances and conditions” (18-19). It is Nyokabi’s mother who has instilled in her the desire to know more than she could obtain from her surroundings. In her turn, Nyokabi wants to foster this ideal in her son, Njoroge. She wants to see herself in her son. She wants him to achieve what she has failed to carry out. She wishes that “Njoroge could now get all the white man’s learning” (p.19). Furthermore, she is always obsessed with “the desire to have a son who had acquired all the learning that there was” (p. 19). Consequently, she “impressed on her husband Ngotho the need for one son to be learned” (p. 19). She views education as a good means to enhance her son’s knowledge and make him rise above the commonplace knowledge.

Nyokabi’s preoccupation with giving her children the best education so that they can acquire all the learning is motivated by her admiration of the Howlands woman and Juliana, Jacobo’s wife, who have educated their sons and daughters. The narrator says:

She [Nyokabi] tried to imagine what the Howlands woman must have felt to have a daughter and a son in school. She wanted to be the same. Or be like Juliana. Juliana [...] must surely have felt proud to have a daughter who was a teacher and a son who would probably be flying to foreign parts soon. That was something. That was real life. (p. 18)

As the above quote indicates, Nyokabi’s sole aim is to get her children well-educated, whatever this undertaking may cost her: “It did not matter if anyone died poor provided he or she could one day say, “Look, I’ve a son as good and as well-educated as any you can find in the land” ” (p.18).

3.7 Womanist: Also: A Woman Who [...] Values Tears as Natural Counterbalance of Laughter

Weep Not, Child teems with passages in which female characters shed tears owing to their experience of unfavorable circumstances. For example, Njeri’s “Tears were on her face” (p. 85) when she speaks bitterly of the white man’s oppression of her black folk. She is embittered by the white men’s oppressive attitude towards any man of her tribe who “rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of [their]land” (p. 85). Mwihaki also is capable of being in tears. The narrator says that “he [Njoroge] saw tears in her eyes” (p. 150) when she feels remorse for

suspecting Njoroge's complicity in her father's murder. Commenting on Mwhaki's frequent crying, Nicholls (2010) maintains that " the character who cries most abundantly in the novel is Njoroge's female childhood, Mwhaki, who is usually rendered in childlike imagery, even as an adolescent" (p. 12).

Female characters in *Weep Not, Child* also burst into tears as an expression of grief over the death of someone dear to them. Reacting to the death of her father, Mwhaki "burst into tears. Njoroge was horrified to see the tears of a big girl. [...] [H]e would not have believed this of Mwhaki. [...] And Mwhaki took her handkerchief and wiped her eyes" (p. 107). Nyokabi and Njeri are also capable of shedding tears over the eminent death of their husband, Ngotho. As the narrator says, "Nyokabi and Njeri sat in a corner. Njoroge could see tears flowing down their cheeks. [...] [A]s a child he had been told that if women wept when a man was ill it showed that the patient had no hope" (p, 138).

As the above argument indicates, the capacity of female characters in *Weep Not, Child* to cry conjures up Walker's notion that a womanist is a woman who values tears.

3.8 Womanist [is] a Woman [Who is] Traditionally Capable [and Displays] Willful Behavior

The best embodiment of Walker's definition of womanist as a woman who is traditionally capable and displays willful behavior in *Weep Not, Child* is the character of Njeri, who insists on partaking in the political discourse permissible only to male characters. Despite the masculine attempts to exclude Njeri from political dialogue, she displays unprecedented willfulness and great capacity for articulating her political views. This figures clearly in the following passage in which she, unlike most women in her tribe who are denied their free will, shrewdly voices her view on the injustice of Jomo Kenyatta's arrest and subsequent trial:

Nyokabi said, "I knew he [Kenyatta]would lose. I always said that all white men are the same. His lawyers must have been bribed."

"It is more than that," said Njeri. "[...] The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law or what you may call it, he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe. [...] Now that man is taken by the same people who made the laws against which that man was fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is that man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers . . . I mean." (p. 85)

As the above passage demonstrates, Njeri is audacious in defiance of the tyranny of the white colonialists and the corruption of the lawyers

responsible for defending Kenyatta. Despite the restrictions imposed on her by the patriarchal system, she voices her own views, thus rejecting traditional gender roles and moving beyond the traditional male/female dichotomy.

3.9 Representation of Motherhood, Mother-Child Relationship and Struggling Mothers in *Weep Not, Child*

The notions of motherhood, mother-child relationship and struggling mothers expressed in Walker's theoretical writings are incarnated by *Weep Not, Child*. Although the novel takes place in a time and a place where women are looked down upon as inferiors, it gives a positive picture of them. From the first pages of the story when one of Njoroge's moms asks him if he would like to attend school, to the ending when his moms save him from committing suicide, Njoroge's moms, Nyokabi and Njeri, are the roots of his life. Following the death of his father and the imprisonment of his brothers, there are no male figures left to look after Njoroge throughout his perilous adolescence. Only his moms are always there to take care of him.

In a biological sense, Nyokabi and Njeri are mothers dedicated to Njoroge to help him achieve his goals. They are also nurturers and homemakers, while at the same time attending to other people and their environment. In a symbolical sense, they stand for cultural identity, community and continuity (Nicholls, 2010, p. 30). They also symbolize the collective struggle against the marginalization of black women.

Part of the task of the struggling mothers in *Weep Not, Child* is to undertake the edification of their children to contribute to their community and resist the oppressive systems in their society. Early in the novel, there is an incident in which the schoolboys laugh at Njoroje and make vulgar jokes which horrify him. However, he responds by deciding against "mak[ing] such jokes" because "if he did," "Nyokabi, his mother, would be angry" (16). This shows the African mothers' attitudes towards their children: they endeavour to educate them in good manners. The good upbringing given by Nyokabi to her son Njoroje shows most clearly in his response to her suggestion that he "go to school" (p. 3):

"Would you like to go to school?"

[...]

"I thank you mother, very much." [...] "O, mother, you are an angel of God, you are, you are."

[...]

"You won't bring shame to me by one day refusing to attend school?"

"o mother, I'll never bring shame to you. Just let me get there, just let me." (3-4)

Evidently, Njoroje appreciates his mother's ardent pledge to send him to school by displaying gratitude and great respect towards his mother. The mother-child relationship, or rather, Njoroje-Nyokabi relationship is based on respect and mutual understanding.

Faced with the colonizers' oppression and exploitation, not to mention the dominating treatment of their husbands and sons, women adopt a strategy that has education as its core. While men's strategy to resist oppression opts for violence, terror and bloodshed, women's strategy applies education as an effective means of bringing knowledge to the life of the oppressed and arming them with the political agility and understanding to fight against the oppressive systems.

In particular, the women in *Weep Not, Child*, conceive of education as a means of indoctrination that helps women bring up their children. This policy differs from that of the previous generation which adopts a passive faith in the Gykuyo creation myth and its concomitant legends of the messianic figure who comes and restores the lands. The new generation raised by these women is also different in terms of their understanding of human behavior and equality between men and women. Njoroje's character undergoes such transformation owing to the education he receives during his school days. The patriarchal view that he clings to at the beginning of the story dwindles at the end and he comes to identify Mwihaki as a woman equal to men in terms of rights and merits. Accordingly, while men's approved strategy ends in hideous bloodshed and ruin of both family and society, women's adopted strategy of education and indoctrination of the male blooms in a metaphoric birth of a man who, unlike his biological and metaphorical father, is not reluctant to take orders from women and is compatible with them in terms of sound judgment and correct assessment. By insisting on education that transforms Njoroje's character and takes him steps ahead toward genuine humanity, Nyokabi appears as an unyielding mother, who proves herself as a real missionary whose indoctrination of the male can be emulated by other women seeking a world void of patriarchal and oppressive systems (Maleki & Lalbakhsh, 2012, p.74).

To conclude the account of Nyokabi's contribution to her son's transformation, the narrator says that Nyokabi's persistent efforts to have her son educated have been crowned with success:

Nyokabi was proud of having a son in school. [...] She felt elated when she ordered her son to go and do some reading or some sums. It was to her the greatest reward she would get from her motherhood is she one day found her son writing letters, doing Arithmetic and speaking English. (p.18)

Keen on giving equal opportunities to her children, Nyokabi does not only educate her son, but she also wants to send her daughters to school: "These days she even thought that if she had much money she would send

her married daughters to school. All would then have a schooling that would at least enable them to speak English” (p. 19).

Obviously, Nyokabi’s interest in educating not only her sons but also her daughters is the best illustration of Walker’s non-separatist attitude which focuses on all people, male and female.

3.10 Facets of Gender Oppression in *Weep Not, Child*

Male domination almost pervades every sphere of human activity. Consequently, African literature ultimately depicts male-dominated societies, “in which women became mere appendages: as wives to be bullied, and help the man to preserve his lineage, or as daughters to be given away in marriage” (Bassey & Eton, 2012, p. 47)

The society that Ngugi delineates in *Weep Not, Child* is strikingly a patriarchal society in which women undergo sexual, physical and mental oppression, abuse and maltreatment. Rape and ensuing pregnancies, violence, polygamy, and objectification of women are examples of the aspects of oppression plaguing women in a society in which class and race control women’s life and identity. The black women in this society are doubly colonized. In addition to being colonized by the white Britons, they are oppressed by the black men, which is an extra burden that turns the life of most Kenyans into a hell (Maleki, Nasser, & Lalbakhsh, Pedram, 2012, p. 68).

Polygamy is one facet of the patriarchal oppression occurring in *Weep Not, Child*. Fiercely condemning polygamy, Ransome-Kuti, the women’s rights activist, says:

They smile while their wives weep. Women . . . were created with blood and flesh like men. I wonder how a man could tolerate any of his wives should have a male friend . . . I think this attitude of disrespect to women’s feelings was caused by the fact that the purchase price had been paid on the women. (as cited in Reed, 2001, p. 171)

The repugnance of polygamy expressed by Ransome-Kuti is echoed by many other African feminists. For example, the African feminist writer, Awa Thiam, contends that “African women should not rest until they have “equal” status to that of their European counterparts” (Reed, 2001, p. 171).

Polygamy is a familiar practice in Africa including Kenya. In the Kenyan society, women are looked upon as something to be possessed. They are denied the right to oppose this oppressive practice, and therefore they remain silent. As the novel shows, Ngotho has two wives, who never complain of polygamy because they must accept it as a social norm. The narrator says that “[Ngotho’s] home was well known for being a place of peace,” (p.12) which implies that his two wives live together in harmony regardless of the psychological pain this habit is likely to cause. Nyokabi and

Njer's toleration of this practice is likely to be a kind of resistance meant to ultimately subvert this deeply rooted, brutal praxis.

Men's unfaithfulness to their wives is another manifestation of the sexist oppression permeating the Kenyan society in *Weep Not, Child*. Men deceive their wives by engaging them in the domestic labor while they fool around, enjoying themselves without paying any attention to their wives and their obligations towards them. The narrator points out that men hardly display any honesty to their wives. He adds that it is common that men lie to their wives by pretending to go out to do some errands while they actually go to the town to drink and do nasty things. Conscious of their immoral behavior, these men "cannot even look at [women] in the face" because they know that their women are sure that their men go "to loiter in the town...to avoid work...and drink...while...[women] must live in toil and sweat" (as cited in Maleki, Nasser, & Labakhsh, Pedram, 2012, p. 69). Here women pretend to be blind to their men's filthy conduct. However, their delayed response to their husbands' foul behaviour seems to be a deliberate strategy meant to shame them into recognizing and therefore amending their disgraceful ways. This testifies to women's shrewdness and proves that they are more intelligent and willful than men in the novel.

Physical abuse is also a feature of the patriarchal oppression embodied by Ngotho's treatment of his wife, Nyokabi. When Ngotho hears about a forthcoming strike arranged by workers seeking better wages and fair treatment, he wants to participate, but he also loves working on the land and fears to lose his job. He ultimately makes up his mind to join the strike, which makes his wife angry and brings about a bitter fight between them.

"I must be a man in my own house."

"Yes - be a man and lose a job."

"I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman."

"We shall starve. . . ."

"You starve ! This strike is important for the black people. We shall get bigger salaries."

"What's black people to us when we starve?"

"Shut that mouth. [...]"

"But he's paying you money. What if the strike fails?"

"Don't woman me I" he shouted hysterically. (p. 60)

The fight culminates in physical abuse when Ngotho "slapped her on the face and raised his hand again". (p. 60)

Evidently, Ngotho's failure to coerce his wife to obtain her compliance drives him to beat her. This habit of wife beating lies at the core of the Kenyan culture whose repressive patriarchal system allows a man to beat his wife. However, beating is not an effective method to make women change their minds; on the contrary, it increases their intransigence. As

Ngotho admits, “When a woman was angry no amount of beating would pacify her” (12)

Njoroge witnesses the fight between his parents and concludes that this “real discord” between his father and mother threatens “the home that had hitherto been so secure” (p. 60). However, being a member of a family pervaded by patriarchal philosophy, Njoroge assimilates a lot of its tenets which he blindly puts into practice. There is an incident in the novel which displays and affirms Njoroge’s patriarchal behavior. Returning very late from school with Mwihaki, Njoroge “knew too well that [his mother] was annoyed” (p. 18). He takes out his anger on Mwihaki, considering “it all Mwihaki’s fault. And he thought her a bad girl and promised himself that he would not play with her any more. Or even wait for her” (p. 18). Significantly, Njoroge’s aggressive attitude towards Mwihaki stands for a common practice in his community where males take out their anger and frustration on females.

The ruthlessness of patriarchal oppression is epitomized in the treatment of many black women by the Italian prisoners, who are engaged in building a road: “The Italian prisoners who built the long tarmac road had left a name for themselves because some went about with black women and the black women had white children” (p. 6). The impregnation of those women by the prisoners result in black children, who “were ugly and some grew up to have small wounds all over the body and especially around the mouth so that flies followed them all the time and at all places” (p. 6). This ugly image of the black children is, according to the narrator, a kind of “punishment” the black women deserve for “Sleep[ing] with white men who ruled them and treated them badly” (p. 6).

Like the black women, the white women hardly survive sexual exploitation. The account of the black barber’s adventures among white women testifies to this. The barber boasts that during the war he “shot white men,” “slept with their women” and “had to pay some money” to “many who were willing to sell [their bodies]” (pp, 10-11). The black barber’s denigrating an exploitative attitude towards the white women echoes that of the Italian prisoners towards the black women: both attitudes entail men’s transgression against women.

The objectification of women, as Maleki and Lalbakhsh (2012) explain, is an additional side of sexist oppression in *Weep Not, Child*. Women and land have much in common in terms of the way they are perceived and treated by men. Mr. Howlands says that the land he owns looks like the woman he has courted and conquered. He has to be awake and alert lest someone else should seize the chance and possess her. This, according to Maleki and Lalbakhsh, “is an explicit show of one man’s understanding of women, but it is also an adroitly generalised picture of the

way that women are exploited and oppressed both economically and sexually.” (pp. 69-70). This possessive attitude of men towards women underlies the domineering-domineered relationship that governs men and women in Kenya, in a more general sense. Nevertheless, if the domination of women by men works for men like Mr. Howlands and Ngotho, it fails in the case of Njoroge and Mwihaki, since “Even love, his last hope, had fled from him,” which implies Njoroge’s failure to subdue Mwihaki.

Like Mr. Hollands, Ngotho judges women in the light of their physical appearance and sexual attraction. There is no room for love in his marriages. As he admits himself, he has married his wife out of pity and because nobody else has proposed to her. Maleki and Lalbakhsh (2012) regard this as “a humiliating justification that does not seem to be true,” and they also see that Ngotho’s relationship with his wives “is a sign of [his] (and other men’s) materialistic attitude towards women; a sign that justifies having more than one wife simultaneously” (p.70). Although Ngotho’s wives live happily together, one cannot be certain that they live an ideal life; they have no other choice under the domination of their husband. Similarly, Mr. Howlands has married his wife not because he loves her, but because he feels lonely on the African lands and therefore leaves for England to “[pick] the first woman who could get” (as cited in Maleki & Lalbakhsh, 2012, p. 70).

The silencing of women’s is an additional materialization of the patriarchal conduct in *Weep Not, Child*. Despite some local attempts like that of Njeri (referred to above) to express their political astuteness, men do not allow women to give voice to their political views. As Nicolls (2012) states,

The three men—Howlands, Jacobo and Ngotho—hold dialogue with one another at various narrative junctures, whereas their wives never once had dialogue among themselves, nor with each other’s husbands. This gender-political strategy situates women outside of history, denying them sites of articulation and occasions for political community. (p. 27)

An example of those women whose opinions are ignored by their men is Juliana, Jacobo’s wife and Mwihaki’s mother. Sensing that her husband will be murdered, she advises him against going to the land but he does not listen to her:

“I have always told him to take them away from the land. I have always said that such *Aboi* were dangerous. But a man will never heed the voice of a woman until it is too late. I told him not to go. But he would not listen!”

“What has happened, mother?” Mwihaki asked anxiously.

“O, well may you ask. I’ve always said that your father will end up by being murdered!” (p. 63).

What Juliana anticipates has come true, which bears witness to her sound judgment which contrasts with her husband’s shallow mind and

stubbornness. Had Juliana's husband listened to her advice about the danger he might be faced with by insisting on going to the land to urge the strikers to return to work, perhaps he would not have met his end.

To conclude this section, one can safely say that the female characters in *Weep Not, Child* are more intelligent, capable, tolerant, unyielding than male characters despite the sufferings and oppression inflicted on them by both their male counterparts and their ruthless community.

In regard to the above thesis, the novel's message complies with Simon and Obeten (2013)'s view that preaches the "recognition of fundamental human rights of people-men and women, especially the black women who have suffered marginalization, oppression, deprivation etc, because of their sex" and recommends "that equal opportunities be given to women to showcase their talent, instead of being tied down with the tedium of life as wives, mothers, farm hands, punching bags, sex partners, hewers of wood and drawers of water" (p. 202). The word "people" in Simon and Obeten's argument includes black and white people.

Conclusion

As the above argument indicates, this paper has investigated the theoretical aspects underlying Walker's womanism and her views on the gender issue and motherhood and their applicability to Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*. As has been pointed out, Walker's obsession with the black women experience and the stance of women of color makes her coin the term "womanism" which she equates with black feminism. Her multiple definition of womanism allows her to list several characteristics typical of black women. For instance, she states that womanists are universalists or non-separatists in terms of race and gender, which demonstrates their universal stance towards all people, black or white, male or female.

In addition to her definition of womanism, Walker also focuses on important themes, such as the gender issue and motherhood, in her collection of essays, which are basic to gaining an understanding of her notion of womanism. As indicated above, Walker shows how gender is a central aspect of a black woman's identity, pointing out that black women suffer from not only racism but sexism as well. Along with the gender issue, Walker also discusses motherhood and matrilineage in her collection. She talks about herself, her mother and foremothers. In addition, she talks about motherhood in its biological and symbolical senses.

Not only has the present paper examined Walker's theoretical views, but it also applied them to *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi's famous novel. As indicated above, the novel does not solely concentrate on the black experience, but it also takes the white experience into consideration.

Consequently, *Weep Not, Child* can be regarded as a womanist novel. The book is the best embodiment of Walker's non-separatist stance which she advocates in her theoretical writings. Pleading for connectivity, understanding and compatibility among races and genders, the novel therefore incarnates womanism to a large extent.

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