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**SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, LANGUAGE,
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EDITORIAL

Among the Senufos from the north of Côte d'Ivoire, the sacred grove is called "Sinzang". The first of these would date from the time of the patriarch and leader of Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). It is the tutelary space of the initiatory institute of the secret society: the Poro. These sacred forests exist in all the villages of the region and are highly protected and managed. The proof is that in their midst, adolescents perform the rite of passage leading them to the age of maturity. The "Sinzang" is also the centre of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Thus, the teaching of ancestral knowledge, ontology and cosmogony- contributing to the future spiritual, moral and social formation of the Senufo elite-is associated with this pantheon.

In line with this pedagogical and academic logic, the SINZANG Journal aims to promote African and Western humanities in Literature, Language, Communication and Education Sciences. To do this, it is part of a process of promoting the reflections and studies conducted by Teachers-Researchers and Researchers for the sustainable development of society.

As distinctive signs of "Sinzang", Jacqueline DELANGE, in *Arts et peuple Senufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifies among others the huts, earth cones and statues (masks). The visual identity of this magazine presents two masks, one symbolizing ancestral knowledge and the other Western science. The two facing the entrance of a sacred hut express the encounter of diverse knowledge put at the service of humanity. *In fine*, they export to other horizons, hence the idea of huts in perspective.

SINZANG is a pluridisciplinary and biannual peer-reviewed scientific journal. It is published in English and French but also accepts work written in German and Spanish. Moreover, depending on the requests made at the discretion of its review committee, it may issue special thematic publications and conference proceedings.

CONTACTS

Postal Address: BP 1328 Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire

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ÉDITORIAL

Chez les Sénoufos du nord de la Côte d'Ivoire, le bosquet sacré est communément appelé « Sinzang ». Les premiers du genre dateraient de l'époque du patriarche et chef de Korhogo SORO Zouakagnon (1840-1894). C'est l'espace tutélaire de l'institut initiatique de la société secrète : le Poro. Lieux fortement protégés et aménagés à l'envi, ces forêts sacrées existent dans tous les villages de la région. La preuve en est qu'en leur sein, les adolescents effectuent le rite de passage les amenant à l'âge de la maturité. Le « Sinzang » est aussi le haut lieu de la transmission de la connaissance intergénérationnelle. Ainsi, l'enseignement du savoir ancestral, de l'ontologie et la cosmogonie-contribuant à la formation spirituelle, morale et sociale de l'élite Sénoufo de demain-est associé à ce panthéon.

S'inscrivant dans cette logique pédagogique et académique, la Revue SINZANG ambitionne de faire la promotion des humanités tant africaine qu'occidentale dans le domaine de la Littérature, des Sciences du Langage, de la Communication et de l'Éducation. Pour ce faire, elle s'inscrit dans une démarche de vulgarisation des réflexions et des études menées par les Enseignants-Chercheurs et des Chercheurs pour le développement durable de la société.

Comme signes distinctifs du « Sinzang », Jacqueline DELANGE, dans *Arts et peuple Sénoufo de l'Afrique noire*, identifie entre autres les cases, les cônes en terre et les statues (masques). L'identité visuelle de cette revue présentant deux masques, l'un symbolisant le savoir ancestral et l'autre la science occidentale. Les deux se faisant face à l'entrée d'une case sacrée expriment la rencontre de connaissances diverses mis au service de l'humanité. In fine, elles s'exportent vers d'autres horizons ; d'où l'idée des cases en perspective.

SINZANG est une revue pluridisciplinaire à comité de lecture et scientifique. Elle est bilingue : éditée en anglais et en français. Mais elle accepte également les travaux écrits en allemand et en espagnol. C'est une revue semestrielle,

tenant deux parutions l'an. Au demeurant, elle peut procéder, selon les demandes ou les sollicitations formulées à l'appréciation de son comité de lecture, à des parutions spéciales thématiques et à la diffusion d'actes de colloque.

CONTACTS

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**PATRIARCHY, DETERMINATION AND WOMEN'S
SUBORDINATION: A REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S
NEGOCIATION OF IDENTITY IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S
COLONIAL NARRATIVES**

Kouakou Guillaume YAO
Institut Polytechnique Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Yamoussoukro
Email: yaoguillaume72@gmail.com

Alama OUATTARA
Université Peleforo GON COULIBALY, Korhogo
Email: ouattarakolotioloma@upgc.edu.ci

Abstract

Women's condition is a key issue in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels. His works are often criticised for their inability to dismantle the patriarchal structures that keep women under male domination. Leaning on Marxism and womanism, the study establishes the link between the negotiation of women's identity, their subordination and patriarchy to highlight its implications in the colonial narratives of wa Thiong'o. The results show that women's subordination is consequent to the limits established by patriarchal norms and values. Moreover, in the colonial narratives of wa Thiong'o, women do not negotiate their identity in the sense of overthrowing the patriarchal system. Instead, they seek the homeostasis of the social conditions that allow them to express their femininity, even if this implies being subordinate to men.

Keywords: Determination, Identity, negotiation, Patriarchy, Subordination

PATRIARCAT, DÉTERMINATION ET LA SUBORDINATION DE LA FEMME: UNE RÉFLEXION SUR LA NÉGOCIATION IDENTITAIRE DE LA FEMME DANS LES RÉCITS COLONIAUX DE NGUGI WA THIONG'O.

Résumé

La condition féminine est une question clé dans les romans de Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ses œuvres sont souvent critiquées pour leur incapacité à démanteler les structures patriarcales qui maintiennent les femmes sous la domination des hommes. S'inspirant du marxisme et du womanism, l'étude établit le lien entre la négociation de l'identité des femmes, leur subordination et le patriarcat afin d'en sortir les implications dans les récits coloniaux de wa Thiong'o. Les résultats montrent que la subordination des femmes résulte des limites établies par les normes et valeurs patriarcales. En outre, dans les récits coloniaux de wa Thiong'o, les femmes ne négocient pas leur identité en vue du reversement du système patriarcal. Elles sont plutôt en quête de l'homéostasie des conditions sociales qui leur permettent d'exprimer leur féminité, même si cela implique d'être subordonnées aux hommes.

Mots-clés : détermination, Identité, Négociation, Patriarcat, Subordination

Introduction

This study deals with women's identity negotiation in the frame of patriarchal domination in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives. By colonial narratives, one should understand tales covering the period of colonisation as depicted in his novels. Accordingly, though the analysis is based on wa Thiong'o's colonial novels⁵³, it also deals with sequences of his postcolonial narratives related to colonisation.

Criticism of wa Thiong'o's stories deals with various issues, including women's condition. B. Nicholls (2010, p.3) points out the significance of females' representation in wa Thiong'o's work by contending that his novels have undergone an ideological development, and the different stages cannot be separated from his shifting representation of women. Yet, Wa Thiong'o's portrayal of female characters and the social conditions in which they develop are diversely appreciated by critics.

F. Nankuri et al. (2021, p.9) consider wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* as a novel in which the author demonstrates his feminist inclination through the exposition and struggle against patriarchal abuses. In quite the same line of thought, F. Stratton (1994, p. 158) acknowledges that wa Thiong'o is among the male writers committed to gender reforms. Contrarily to F. Nankuri et al., Statton (1994, p.160) argues that wa Thiong'o's portrayal of female characters preserves patriarchal relations. In the same vein, E. Boehmer (2009, p.49) observes that the persistence of the mechanisms of subordination in wa Thiong'o's novels stands for his failure to dismantle the structures and traditions that marginalise and oppress women.

One of the problems with criticism of gender relations is that it tends to advocate for the dismantlement of patriarchy with the view of ending women's subordination. A possible explanation for this position is that patriarchy is often seen as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (J. Pilcher & I. Whelehan, 2004, p.95). A. G. Johnson (2014, p.26) observes that in the definitions of this kind, gender oppression is often taken to indicate that all men are oppressive, an argument Johnson rejects. For him, it is necessary to discriminate between patriarchy as a social system and the people who participate in it. Johnson, therefore, proposes a consideration of patriarchy as a social system in which both men and women experience and are defined following patterns of

⁵³ The phrase "Colonial novels" refer to *The River Between*, *Weep not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat* which are novels presenting the span of history going from the first encounter with the coloniser to the achievement of independence.

behaviour anchored in cultural ideas, which work as norms for the evaluation of the goodness or badness of men and women.

Drawing from Jonhson, this study approaches patriarchy as a social system in which both men and women negotiate their selves following established rules of behaviour. As in previous studies, this study acknowledges that notwithstanding social changes, the patriarchal rule prevails in wa Thiong'o's narratives. Yet, it departs from them by emphasising women's responsibility for their subordination and the perpetuation of patriarchy. Accordingly, the study aims to show that, in wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, women do not behave with the view of overthrowing the patriarchal system. Instead, the negotiation of their identity favours the persistence of the patriarchal mechanisms of gender subordination.

Three hypotheses underlie this argument. While the first assumption states that, in wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, patriarchal ideology works at subordinating women to men, the second one asserts that women comply with patriarchal ideology. The last postulate assumes that this compliance has to do with women's negotiation of their identity.

Patriarchy involves interactions among people of different sexes, beliefs, and norms that regulate these interactions. To get insights into the patriarchy in wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, the study takes on the Marxist idea of determination, meaning "the setting of limits" (R. Williams, 1977, p.85), to investigate patriarchy as a system that shapes personalities and ideas to establish a form of consciousness, a conception of life corresponding to specific social conditions.

The relations between males and females under patriarchy do not operate in the same way both in time and space. As J. Pilcher & I. Whelehan (2004, p.95) observes, many writers advocate an alternative approach to theorising gender, "one which encourages a focus on specifics of social relations". As such, the study analyses the relations between wa Thiong'o's male and female characters in the African context depicted in the corpus in the light of womanism. According to L. Phillips (2006, p.xxv) states that womanism is not about creating demarcation lines; instead, it is about "building structures of inclusiveness and positive interrelationship" even though it "does not need to resolve internal disagreement to function effectively". The approach will help analyse the attitudes of wa Thiong'o's female characters vis-à-vis their subordination within the frame of African patriarchy.

The study falls into three parts. The first part analyses gender relations to show how patriarchal determination leads to and maintains women in subordination. The second one is concerned with exposing the falseness of the ideas that rear the patriarchal ideology, while the last section of the study discusses women's attitudes toward the determined law of the patriarchal system.

1. Patriarchal Determination and Women's Subservience

In wa Thiong'o's texts, the interplay between patriarchal determination and men's leadership is highlighted in the family contexts depicted. This determination reinforces men's leadership, making men enjoy privileges and be positioned as the pillars of families. In *Weep not Child*, the following passage describes Ngotho's family:

The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polygamous families. Njeri and Nyokabi went to the shamba or market together. Sometimes they agreed amongst themselves that while one did that job the other would do this one. This was attributed to Ngotho, the centre of the home. (N.W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.40)

The excerpt exhibits an androcentric tendency. The unity and stability of the family are attributed to Ngotho, though this harmony and steadiness is the result of all the members' actions and attitudes. As the patriarch, Ngotho is likened to the cornerstone of the household. By crediting the older man with providing stability, the text presents a social structure that places greater emphasis on the status of men. Looking at the interactions among the characters that compose Ngotho's family, they are engaged in a social dynamic wherein individuals positioned on the periphery (Njeri and Nyokabi, Ngotho's wives) exert efforts to uphold the reputation of the centre (Ngotho). The corpus also establishes Ngotho as a man able to control two women in an indisputable oneness, thus highlighting the capacity to control an indeterminate number of women. This confirms the traditional gender roles in phallogocentric societies where men are born to rule and women to be ruled.

Aspects of the superstructure of the societies depicted in wa Thiong'o's novels define women's position and social conditions, and the androcentric tendencies that permeate social interactions in his novels are justified by beliefs and norms that characters learn and interiorise. In *The River Between*, a narrative sequence reports Chege, who tells his son Waiyaki a story. The story goes like this:

Long ago, women used to rule the land and its men. They were harsh, and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animal you saw was their goat. Because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. (N.W. Thiong'o, 1984, p.15)

Different aspects of the story are worth considering. First, there is the content. The story begins with the exposition of a social environment where women rule and entirely own resources and assets. Then comes a scenario where women lose their property. They failed in the management of property and were overthrown by men. The story associates women's

failure with pregnancies that weaken them. The pregnancy shows that penetrative sex decrees women's submission to men. To defeat women, men made them pregnant. Thus, they lost their power. Considering that pregnancy is a natural phenomenon bestowed upon women, one can say that the story associates pregnancy with the status of females. This association connotes women's status as naturally weak.

In addition to being weak, women are also denied management abilities. In Chege's narrative, one reads that 'because women could not manage them, the goats run away'. This statement expresses women's inability to manage property. This incapacity raises the problem of women's labour power⁵⁴. As presented in the story, women do not have the knowledge and skills necessary for property management, but men do. By highlighting women's inability to handle property, their weakness and their overthrow by men, the story attests to men's superiority and, therefore, works as a superstructural apparatus which legitimises men's leadership. Chege's story explains why women are subjected to men. In fact, upon the social conditions in which patriarchy exists, "a whole superstructure is reared of various and peculiarly shaped feeling [...], illusions, habits of thought and conception of life" (R. Williams, 1977, p.76). In other words, patriarchy results from a form of consciousness in which both men and women develop a sense of self and in which phallogentric stereotypes are constructed and established as norms.

In addition to the content of Chege's story, the act of narrating it is also worth considering. Chege's narration is a moment of transmission from the elder (Chege) to the youth (Waiyaki). Telling the story to his son, Chege is teaching the latter about beliefs that guide people's lives and interactions. In the novel, the narrator explains: "It was then Waiyaki understood why his mother owned nothing" (N.W. Thiong'o, 1984, p.15). It stems from the narrator's explanation that the storytelling session has been a moment of revelation for Waiyaki. Waiyaki learns something inherent in phallogentric communities: women are to be poor compared to men. Here, Chege uses a tale to explain to his son the principles of patriarchal societies, which hold women in low positions. This is part of the father's mission in oral tradition to train his children in social facts. Among the Gikuyu, children learn the inferior status reserved for women. In that sense, Chege's story helps Waiyaki understand why his mother, and women in general, are propertyless in the community. As a result, the boy is not only acquainted with social norms but will interiorise them and behave in ways that fit them.

Chege's act of narration is a moment of transmission of the patriarchal ideology. The learned and interiorised patriarchal ideology affects the division of labour among men and women. In *Petals of Blood*, Nyakinyua expresses her discontent with the arrest and subsequent

⁵⁴ The phrase "labour power" is used here following Cohen G. A. (2000, p.32; p.55) who defines it as the productive faculties including strength, skill, knowledge and inventiveness.

forced labour of her husband. She laments the irony of their husbands being taken away to maintain the productivity of the white man's farms while their own husbands' lands suffer from neglect and deterioration. She wonders: "How could she grow sugar cane, yams, sweet potatoes which used to be man's domain? How could she break new ground? [...] All that and do her own share of work?" (N.W. Thiong'o, 1977, p.213). It stems from these questions that a gender-based division of labour characterises farmwork. Growing crops such as sugar cane, yams and sweet potatoes is associated with male agricultural practices. Besides, one can infer from Nyakinyua's second question that, following the prevailing cultural norms, it is commonly believed that men engage in activities like 'breaking new grounds' that are deemed too challenging for women. As such, Nyakinyua's words express the belief that men possess greater physical strength than women.

Chege's story is androcentric, and relating Nyakinyua's words to Chege's story, which introduces women as weaker than men, one can say that the story is a discursive apparatus that establishes and legitimises the hierarchical arrangement that characterises the relations between male and female characters. This hierarchical arrangement of social relations is evidenced in the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, which are structured along gender-based attributions.

In K. Marx's view (1971, p.77), societies are defined as "the sum of connection and relationship". In these societies, people engage in different relations regulated by norms and values. In wa Thiong'o's novels, the depicted social environments present characters who interact and whose interactions are delimited by patriarchal cultural and legal arrangements. Living in a patriarchal culture, Wa Thiong'o's male and female characters learn how to behave and what is expected from them. The legitimisation of women's treatment under the Gikuyu patriarchal system is based on a set of ideas rooted in the community and which determine people's value in relation to established norms of conduct. Nevertheless, patriarchy is a dynamic phenomenon that undergoes constant transformation and reconfiguration. Paradoxically, in Wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, even though "the colonial state exacerbated pre-existing inequalities" (F. Nankuri et al., 2021, p.10), colonisation created a social context favourable to deploying women's inherent capabilities. The alteration brought by colonisation in the patriarchal functioning of society is the focus of the next section.

2. Colonial Changes and the Debunking of Patriarchal Determination

Colonisation, one of the significant historical events in Africa, has been the source of changes and calamities in African societies. Regarding women, that period was one of "double bind" (T. DeHay, 1995) since they experienced it as both women and colonised subjects. However, the reading of Wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives reveals that colonisation has created

favourable circumstances that allowed women to deploy their knowledge and capacities, accordingly shaking the limits set by the patriarchal system.

As mentioned earlier, one of the critical features of the patriarchal system is the gendered division of labour. In wa Thiong'o's narratives, colonial rule impacts this gender-based division of labour since it ignites a significant shift in the societal roles assigned to men and women. *A Grain of Wheat*, for instance, depicts a reversal of roles between men and women, as illustrated by the situation wherein women were compelled to build houses.

The Mau Mau rebels' various military actions forced the coloniser to implement measures to control the indigenous population's actions. One of the strategies implemented involved the destruction of dispersed villages to gather them in more centralised settlements. With their husband detained, the decision of the coloniser leads women to act beyond the limits set by the patriarchal rule. Since building the new villages has to end quickly, women like Mumbi "put on trousers" overnight and engage in activities traditionally attributed to men. They climbed "on the roof of the new huts hammering nails" (N. W. Thiong'o, 1967, p. 160). This particular work was traditionally assigned to men within the gender-based division of labour. In the current scenario, Mumbi is assuming responsibilities often associated with men in the construction of houses.

Another scenario in *A Grain of Wheat* involves deconstructing the societal perception of men primarily as providers and women primarily as carers. Gikonyo is Mumbi's husband. During the period of Gikonyo's detention, Mumbi assumes the role of the primary provider for her family. She works on a tea plantation. Using the funds she acquires, she purchases sustenance for herself, her mother-in-law, and her parents (N. W. Thiong'o, 1967, p.166). In contrast to the circumstances depicted in the novel *Weep not, Child*, where Ngotho assumes responsibility for paying school fees, Mumbi is the primary financial contributor, working hard to cover her brother's educational expenses and her family's needs. Mumbi's characterisation does not reverse the primacy of the male breadwinner role only. It also foregrounds women's inclusion in paid work, thus attesting to a change in the labour market structure. In addition, it implies a revision of the public/private dichotomy⁵⁵.

In wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, characters' intervention in the public and private domains is affected by patriarchal norms. Men often refuse to listen to women, as with Jacobo (N. W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.63) and Ngotho (N. W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.70). Women are also

⁵⁵ Discriminating between the public and the private realms, J. Pilcher & I. Whelehan (2004, p. 124) explains that in the public realm refers to "activities individuals undertake in wider society and in common with a multitude of others, such as engaging in paid work, and exercising political, democratic rights" while the private realm, which is the realm of the household, and of personal or family relationships, is characterised by "activities undertaken with particular others, relatively free from the jurisdiction of the state".

forbidden to argue with their husbands, as Miriamu's stance in *The River Between* shows. In the novel, Miriamu explains that even when her husband is unfair, she dares not speak, "not being given to arguments" (N. W. Thiong'o, 1984, p.35). Thus, women do not have to argue with their husbands, and, as Miriamu's case highlights, silence becomes a characteristic of womanhood in wa Thiong'o's novels, silence men wish and which reinforces men's control over the public realm. When Ngotho's wife tries to convince him not to participate in the strike, he replies: "I have never taken orders from a woman" (N. W. Thiong'o, 1984, p.60). Ngotho's reply is affected by a view of men as superior to women. His status makes him see his wife's demand as a command, and he cannot accept to listen to her.

For J. Pilcher & I. Whelehan (2004, p.125), the private and public domains serve as a "justifying rationale" for the organisation and preservation of social relations in which men are privileged over women. This can explain why men ignore or prevent women's attempts to intervene in the public domain. Ngotho, Jacobo, and Joshua's behaviours show that men do not allow women to argue, or when they do, they do not always consider their opinions; above all, when this concerns politics, a domain considered masculine. However, Wa Thiong'o's texts question the argument of women's incapacity to intervene in the traditionally male-dominated spheres.

In *Weep not, Child*, one can read the following passages:

Jacobo had small boys and one big son and big daughter. The big daughter was a teacher. Her name was Lucia. (N. W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.15)
The teacher had stood in front. He was a short man with a small moustache which he was fond of touching and fondling. They called him Isaka. (N. W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.37)

In the excerpts, the characterisation in the colonial school setting reveals the existence of both male and female instructors, exemplified by the characters Isaka and Lucia. To become teachers, people follow training and acquire competencies. The existence of female teachers in the narrative translates to their abilities to do as men since the level of competence required to pursue a career in teaching is equal among individuals. The passages also incorporate women into the new social order in which the barriers to women's involvement in the public realm are removed, and there is an attempt to emphasise women's abilities to intervene in that realm. Lucia, being a teacher and a civil servant, shows how the colonial system benefits the female gender. As the phallogocentric rule oppresses them, women find a new identity in contemporary times. School is viewed as an instrument that helps women deconstruct patriarchy. Owing to education, they can even compete with men to draw level with them to fulfil professional tasks reserved for men.

In *Weep not, Child*, reacting to what is considered Kenyatta's unfair trial by the coloniser, Njeri articulates her opinion in the following terms:

[...] Although I am a woman and cannot explain it, it seems all clear as daylight. 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 a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of land. 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. (N. W. Thiong'o, 1983, p.75)

This passage shows that Njeri, a woman, can critically assess a social issue. This evidence demonstrates that the exclusion or silencing of women is not attributable to their inability to notice or critique. The existence of reflections like Njeri's challenges the idea of their intellectual inferiority, which poses a potential challenge to men's perceived superiority. Accordingly, the marginalisation of women in the political sphere might be interpreted as the result of the self-interest stemming from men's inclination to uphold their power and privilege and maintain phallographic tendencies.

The patriarchal ideology creates mechanisms of exclusion that organise gender relations in a hierarchical reality, keeping women subordinated to men. The analysis of the functioning of the patriarchal norms and beliefs during colonisation reveals that the limits set by patriarchy are organising tools serving a phallographic tendency. The impact of colonisation on the Gikuyu civilisation results in significant alterations to the patriarchal structure, although it does not eradicate it. The colonial changes lead women to act beyond the limits of the patriarchal system. They engage in activities that show their labour power in the different domains of social life, which labour power patriarchy seeks to control.

J. Butler (2004, p. 42) states, "gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine take place...". If gender is regarded as the mechanism that facilitates the creation and acceptance of the concepts of femininity and masculinity, it could also be "the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (J. Butler, 2004, p.42). What Butler says about gender prevails for patriarchy. It is a system in which women participate. To take after A. G. Johnson (2014, p.32), this participation shapes their lives and allows them to change or perpetuate it. However, in Wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives, a noticeable fact about female characters is that though they have the knowledge and skills that position them as equal to men, they comply with the norms and values of the patriarchal system that subordinate them to men. The following section addresses women's compliant attitude vis-à-vis patriarchy.

3. Determination and Women's Negotiation of Identity

In Ngugi's colonial novels, determination is a key element in the functioning of the patriarchal system. Owing to the limits it sets, patriarchy works as a system in which both men and women negotiate their identities. In the frame of this identity negotiation, wa Thiong'o's female characters act to preserve social homeostasis. In *Weep not, Child*, Njeri develops her

opinion about the political situation in the following terms: “Although I am a woman and cannot explain it [...]” (N. W. Thiong’o, 1983, p.75). Reading this passage, Brendon Nicholls observes that while wa Thiong’o bestows on her the capacity for keen observation, he imposes restrictions on her ability to articulate herself in a language commensurate with the clarity of her observations (2010, p.75). The sense of limitation that comes out of her words is undeniable, and its implication tells a lot about women’s identity negotiation.

Njeri’s use of the modal ‘cannot’ can also be understood as her awareness of the limits set by the phallogocentric milieu in which she lives. In other words, she seems to apologise for what she is about to say since she knows that her intervention implies acting beyond the barriers of the patriarchal system. In this system, “identity negotiation establishes the personas that each person will assume in a relationship” (W. B. Swann, Jr. & J. K. Bosson, 2008, p.451), which involves attitudes that each identity negotiator must have.

Regarding Njeri’s case, despite the determination of the phallogocentric tendency of society, she wants to have a leeway to give her opinion. Yet, she wishes not to break the norms. Instead, she longs for assertiveness, and her attitude can be interpreted as a desire to be part of the women who are given “due attention and are regarded as nurturers and sustainers of the values of society” (S. Sadek, 2014, p.175). As such, Njeri behaves in the motherhood frame that L. Phillips (2006, p. xxix) considers a womanist method of social transformation rooted in African cultural legacies. For her, instead of a purely biological connotation, motherhood is “a set of behaviours based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual mediation, and dispute resolution” (L. Phillips, 2006, p. xxix).

Like Njeri, Miriamu also framed her relation to her husband in motherhood. According to the text, Miriamu did not question life; “it has given her a man and in her own way she loved him and cared for him, her faith and belief were coupled with the fear of Joshua. But that was religion, and it was the ways things were ordered” (N. W. Thiong’o, 1984, p.39). From this perception of life, three key points need to be considered. First, Miriamu is grateful to life for giving her a man, that is, to have a husband she loves and cares about. The love and caretaking attitude that enter her characterisation defines her as a mothering character. Her love and care for Joshua imply a devotion to the welfare of her family, the presentation of a good image of that family and the preservation of Joshua’s reputation in the community. As such, the novel celebrates and values “the mothering role as evidence of women’s ‘natural’ disposition towards nurturance and pacificism” (J. Pilcher & I. Whelehan, 2004, p.57).

Secondly, when Miriamu’s faith and belief are coupled with her fear of Joshua, one cannot but think about the domestic violence she is the victim of. She explains that Joshua would “never refrain from punishing a sin, even if this meant beating his wife” (N. W. Thiong’o,

1984, p.35). Notwithstanding this violent character of Joshua, she keeps loving him 'in her own way'. The act of physically overpowering an individual necessitates the exertion of physical force. In the context of men engaging in physical altercations with women, it can be argued that such behaviour serves as a means for men to demonstrate their strength despite the possibility of women possessing superior physical capabilities. The whole thing concerns women's education to accept and submit to such practice.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Wanjiku explains that she cannot understand today's women. In her own words, "[t]hey cannot take a slap, soft as a feather, or the slightest breath, from a man. In our time, a woman could take blow after blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents" (N. W. Thiong'o, 1967. p.206). Wanjiku consents to physical punishment as an integral aspect of their development into femininity. She perceives it as a weight that nature has imposed upon women, a perception shared by Miriamu, leading to the third aspect of Miriamu's behaviour.

Miriamu perceives her subservience as an inherent aspect of the societal structure rooted in religion. For her, whatever she experiences with Joshua is religion, and it is the way things are ordered. Through this perception of life, Miriamu integrates spirituality as a key variable of her identity negotiation. She "openly acknowledges a spiritual/transcendental realm with which human life, livingkind, and the material world are all intertwined" (L. Phillips, 2006, p. xxix). Looking at Miriamu and Njeri's conditions, the integration of motherhood attitudes of caretaking, love, pacificism, and spirituality in negotiating their identity allows them to act within the parameters determined by the patriarchal system that regulates social interactions.

Women's mothering attitudes in wa Thiong'o's colonial narratives lead to compliance with patriarchal rules. Their reactions to the changes brought by colonisation are illustrative in that sense. In *Petals of Blood*, Nyakinyua's laments are expressed in the following terms:

Imagine that: taken to keep the white man's shambas alive while theirs [our husbands'] fell into neglect and waste! For a woman alone can never do all the work on the farm. How could she grow sugar cane, yams, sweet potatoes which used to be man's domain? How break new ground? And how could she smith, make chains, pull wires, make beehives, wickerwork for barns? (N. W. Thiong'o, 1977, p.213)

The passage highlights the malfunctioning of the traditional division of labour during colonial rule. Nyakinyua is unsatisfied with the new social order, and her words can be read as a wish to restore the social order. As such, she desires a material condition of existence that fits the patriarchal norms. A similar situation is observed in *A Grain of Wheat*.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, colonial rule affects the relations of production. Not only do the natives lose their land, but they also have to work for the white man. The lousy pay they receive does not allow them to fulfil their responsibilities at home. They, therefore, decide to go on strike. The narrator reports that the strike is meant “to paralyse the country and make it difficult for the white man to govern” (N. W. Thiong’o, 1967, p.205). However, some men decide not to go on strike. In the novel, Wambui is an older woman who believes in the power of women to influence events, particularly when men fail to do so. In front of men’s reluctance to go on strike, Wambui and other women take the floor and say:

Was there any man who felt water in the stomach at the sight of the white man? [...] Let therefore such men[...] come forward, wear the women’s skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women. Men sat rigidly in their seats and tried to laugh with the crowd to hide the inner discomfort. The next day, all men stayed away from work. (N. W. Thiong’o, 1967, p.205)

In this excerpt, women’s words aim to shock men and urge them to action. The procedure they adopt shows that these women acknowledge that fighting against colonial oppression is everyone’s responsibility, but men have to be granted the first place. When they propose that men exchange their trousers for women’s skirts, Wambui and the other women ask men to give up all the assumptions of leadership, power, and superiority associated with manhood. Men could not concede this privilege to women. That is why they stopped hesitating and went on strike.

In wa Thiong’o’s colonial narratives, patriarchal norms and values determine women’s subordination to men. This determination implies an external force beyond their actions and attitude but settles or decides them. Women’s attitude is, therefore, “a form of response and interpretation that is conditioned” by their experience of objective conditions in the material world (R. Williams, 1977, p.86). Responding to the change of social order resulting from colonisation, Wambui and her fellow women work to establish material conditions that restore men to their position and bring societal equilibrium. These women are preoccupied with honouring an identity that they negotiate within the frame of patriarchal norms and values. Negotiating their identity, women in wa Thiong’o’s colonial narratives do not seek to overthrow patriarchy. Instead, they adopt mothering attitudes of love, care, spirituality and commonweal. They are concerned with the homeostasis of social conditions that allow them to express their femininity, even if this implies being subordinated to men.

Conclusion

The study dealt with women’s identity negotiation in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s colonial narratives. In that sense, it scrutinised the patriarchal system as a system that functions through ‘determination’ and the women’s subordination to men. The main task assigned to

this study was to demonstrate that, in the corpus, the persistence of the patriarchal mechanism of gender subordination is an outcome of women's identity negotiation.

Patriarchal ideology is about determining who is a man and who is a woman. As such, it sets boundaries that define men and women. The women whose conditions and attitudes have been discussed in the study accept their position and behave accordingly. Their aim is not to dismantle the patriarchal social system. When they decry the colonial rule and the subsequent social crisis, it is because the new social order did not allow them to define and experience their femininity according to the patriarchal norms that regulated gender interaction in their community. Their attitudes vis-à-vis the patriarchal alignments verge compliance with the patriarchal norms. This compliance results from the negotiation of their identity, a negotiation rooted in mothering behaviour of commonweal, caretaking and spirituality. As identity negotiators, wa Thiong'o's female characters agree on the roles that each person must play in the interaction, and they act to achieve a social equilibrium between their interaction with men and the satisfaction of their identity-related aims.

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