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Genotype, Phenotype and Resistance to Damnation in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

Ousmane NGOM

Universite Gaston Berger
Saint-Louis, Senegal

E-mail: Ousmane.ngom@ugb.edu.sn ; ousngom1503@yahoo.fr

Abstract:

This article attempts to show the power exerted by genotype and environmental determinism on the individual, especially the blacks in the South of America during the Jim Crow era. It highlights how the slavery-impacted Southern culture of poverty, self-hatred, and resignation affects generations of blacks. The article is based on behavioral genetics theories which postulate that genes and exposure to environment determine people's behavior even though the latter can make their own choices. Thus I envision the interface between freewill and fate to show how one navigates the intricate nexus between genotype and damnation.

Keywords: agency, damnation, education-type, genotype, neo-slavery, phenotype.

Introduction

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (Walker, 1970) focuses on the lives of three generations of a black family in Georgia. Grange Copeland is a farmworker for the white man Shipley. He lives with his wife, Margaret and their son, Brownfield, in a hut rented by his boss. Over the years, having become aware that he can never free himself from his near-slavery condition, Grange flees to the North, abandoning his family. After several weeks of waiting, Margaret, unable to bear her husband's departure, commits suicide after killing her adulterous baby, Star. However, Brownfield shows proof of his ambition by deciding to break away from the slavery-like agricultural system. He refuses Shipley's offers and leaves for a better life in the North which he will never reach. Instead, he remains stuck in the South, reproducing the same patterns as of his father. Despite Brownfield's longing to depart from the model offered by his father he sees as a failure, he ironically does everything similarly. Indeed, Brownfield is a younger replica of Grange, physically and psychologically, and his life is a reduplication of his father's in the worst aspects.

I contend that the notions of genotype and phenotype can be summoned to explain the similarities and repetitions in father's and son's behavior facing the same racist environment. By genotype I mean that nature creates genes which parents pass down to their offspring and then to future generations by way of heredity. The phenotype is the outward expression of the genes faced to environment. According to behavioral geneticists, genes record the experience of their ancestors and are capable of restituting them in similar situations. In fact, "the genetic behaviour patterns of a species are the product of battles to adapt to the environment during the long evolutionary period (Vetta, Courgeau, 2003/4: 418).

Applied to Walker's novel, the notion of behavioral genotype indicates that the practices and policies of racism and neo-slavery condition people's minds to act in a certain way. As such, behavioral genetics will explain the dissimilar conduct of the different groups depending on their position on the racial and social side of the fence. In fact, the "context-dependent effects of genes" (Trudy et al, 2007: 312) in the racist South trigger "race-based trauma" on the black population (Perot, Edis 2019) which manifests in self-hatred, resignation to poverty, and fatality. However if Brownfield, raised in the same environment as his father acts in a similar way, his daughter Ruth, exposed to a positive environment displays a different phenotype and breaks the nexus between black and damnation.

This essay attempts to show that the black child, born in racist America during the Jim Crow era, is damned by a conditioning rhetoric and practice of white hegemony. Belief in, and acceptance of, this discourse ingrain the seeds of the culture of poverty and fatality through self-hate and reflexive violence, further sealing the entrapment. And eventually a great work on the self, through education and positive experience, is required to invert the tendency.

I Genes, Environment and the culture of poverty

The Third Life of Grange Copeland deals with the culture of poverty and misery affecting black people's lives in the American South. On the onset the reader learns that Grange is "owned", that his "family would never amount to anything because they didn't have sense enough to leave Green County, Georgia," and he is in debt that he will never be able to pay back because he is a drunkard (Walker, 10). From this gloomy portrait, we know that Grange's problems find their origin in the unfavorable environment that he cannot move from and in his own defeatist personality. Perot and Edis accurately say that "Grange's life under the sharecropping system deprives him of any rights, values, and emotions" (2019: 76). In fact, in the first part of the novel, Grange is presented as a taciturn man who voices successive sentences only when he is intoxicated and showering abuses against his wife, Margaret, and son, Brownfield. Grange's case is unfortunately no exception in the particular context, as Sedehi et al put it:

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970) highlights black characters' entrapment in a racist society. Racism influences the male characters both physically and psychologically, and as a result of racial pressure, the male characters' relationships with their wives and children fail. As these black men are marginalised in society and are supposed to obey their white masters, they in turn impose these pressures on their family members; therefore, family relationships become distorted. (Sedehi et al, 2015: 967)

Walker illustrates that in a racist society where blacks are helpless and fully aware that whatever their efforts they will not be able to free themselves from the grip of neo-slavery, parents feel a kind of frustration for not being able to ensure a decent present and future to their offspring, but ironically this frustration transforms into wrath against one's own family. That is the reason why Grange violently abuses Margaret and is disdainful to his child whom he threatens to kill in his moments of intoxication, whereas in his moments of soberness he regrets he did not commit the act: "Ought to throw you to the damn well" (Walker, 5).

Grange's peculiar attitude is a way of masquerading his feeling of guilt of being humiliated before his own family by the white boss. His sentiment is a mixture of hate and shame toward his dependents who he cannot cherish nor provide with a decent living. Even worse, humiliated parents like Grange take revenge on their own family. Stylistically, the configuration of certain motifs in the novel creates an embedded structure due to their capacity for reduplication or resemblance. For instance, W. Lawrence Hogue declares: "The scene where Brownfield witnesses his father being humiliated by the white landowner is followed immediately by a scene where Grange is drinking and uses abusive language with his son [...]. Here we see the father-son relation being constituted in a language of violence and domination that reflects the master-servant relation between Grange and the landowner" (Hogue, 1985: 48).

Family abandonment is another theme dealt with by Walker to underscore the disastrous blacks' parents-children relationship in the racist South. For instance, when Grange fully understands that he cannot thrive in the South no matter his efforts, he abandons his wife and child and heads north. This act too is an instance of desperate parents' lack of love and caring for their family. Moreover, it entails tragic consequences as Margaret commits suicide out of despair and bitterness, leaving young Brownfield to nurture hatred for his parents because of their abandonment that forces him, without any preparation, to fend for himself in a hostile environment. Indeed, Brownfield cannot understand his parents' motivations. He considers his father's escape and his mother's suicide as rejection and irrefutable proof of contempt towards him. Thus, all his subsequent decisions and deeds are in reaction to the failed relationship he had with his parents.

All along the novel Walker shows how the genotype-environment double bondage ensnares the characters whatever their striving to get through. For instance, Brownfield is ashamed by his father's failure. He wants to do everything differently but behaves as if compelled by unseen forces to do identically like his father.

Nevertheless, after Grange's departure, the narrator seems to give a new twist to Brownfield's life and ending the gloomy atmosphere of the story. Years of observance of his father have awakened Brownfield to the impossibility of anything good coming from the plantations of the South. Hence, it is to break this vicious cycle that he refuses Shipley's offer of taking over Grange's work and shack. By deciding to go to seek fortune in the North, Brownfield aims to fulfill his childhood dreams of marrying a beautiful and refined lady, having happy children, living in a large home, and driving a limousine. The description of the weather in this passage offers exceptional gaiety to the novel because the sun, the flowers, and birds seem to sympathize with Brownfield, as if to encourage him in his daring enterprise. The dreamlike landscape he crosses on his way, the woods, the rivers, and the grass reflect the character's enthusiasm: "He would be his own boss. From the forlorn and empty house he took only his box. As he left the clearing a thousand birds began widely singing good luck. [...] Rivers and creeks crisscrossed his route, and everything he saw delighted him (Walker, 21; 27).

However, such respite in the tone of the novel is short lived since Brownfield will never reach the North. He ironically finds himself caught up by the same destructive vortex in which his father was struggling. In so doing Walker proves her talent in displaying the intricate forces that topple the characters and dissipate their aspirations no matter their longing for good. In fact, when Brownfield marries Mem, a schoolteacher, and decides to work provisionally on a farm, it was just done in order to raise a necessary amount of money to start another activity. Yet, because of "some form of genotype-environment interaction" (Vetta, Courgeau, 2003/4: 417) he continually gets bogged down in difficulties. The narrator portrays with irritated sarcasm that as time goes by Brownfield is more and more stuck in the dehumanizing system: "Three years later [...] he was working the same farm and in debt up to his hatbrim [...]. He felt himself destined to become no more than overseer, on the white man's plantation, of his own children" (Walker, 49; 54). Brownfield rightly feels that he is doomed without any possibility to escape. As such, he badly suffers "the shadow of eternal bondage, which plagued him constantly" (Walker, 49). This pathology is described by Roger Rosenblatt as a central theme of the African-American novel which manifests itself in what he calls: "a 'cyclical nightmare' which traps the hero in meaningless repetition leading to 'self-disintegration'" (Rosenblatt, quoted by Butler, 1988: 67). Indeed, the imbrications of similar motifs shared at different times by Grange and Brownfield give a sense of repetition to the novel.

Violence out of frustration and despair is another expression of the interplay between genotype and phenotype in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. "Aggressive behavior is defined as the intent to hurt, harm, or injure a person" (Tuvblad C. et al, 2016: 708). Grange and Brownfield are physically and verbally violent, using an abusive and degrading language as well as a heavy hand against the members of their family. The way Walker describes the deterioration of Brownfield's attitude from the highest optimism to the deepest despair gives more insight to the mechanism that causes this shift. Black men in the South do agricultural work for humiliating white landowners and are often inclined to use drug and domestic violence to restore lost masculinity, usurped by their masters. In fact, Brownfield explains his wrongdoings by summoning the determinism of the Southern environment. After a violent dispute with his wife Mem, Brownfield atones to her. In a moving account, he reveals his initial good intentions and how the system of racism shattered his hopes, leading him to take revenge on his own family. Thereby, he rejects his own responsibility and blames it on the whites who do not let blacks lead their lives as they would:

"You know how hard it is to be a black man down here. You knows I never wanted to be nothing but a man! Mem, baby, the white folks just don't let nobody *feel* like doing right. [...] Lawd, Mem, you knows how hard I try to do the right thing. I don't make much money, you know that. And the white folks don't give us no decent houses to live in, you knows that. What can a man do?" (Walker, 95)

The character's use of the word "man" twice in this short passage reveals the frustration of black males who feel that their manhood is compromised by a system that turns them into things and consequently makes them violent toward their families. Robert James Butler indicates such aspect of blacks' lives in these terms: "Brownfield's narrative concentrates all that is negative about Southern culture: he is cruelly victimized by the extreme racism and poverty of the Georgia backwoods world in which he was born and raised" (Buttler, 1993: 197).

In this respect, the continuity in violence as suggested in Grange and Brownfield brings a kind of degeneration, a rottenness, because despite his initial upright intentions, Brownfield becomes worse than his father. Behavioral genetic theorists sustain that the external environment alone does not determine the individual's propensity to violence; the model offered by the parents is a key factor too. For instance, people who "were exposed to violence and at the same time experienced a positive parent-child relationship reported lower levels of physical aggressive behavior [...]" (Tuvblad C. et al, 2016: 716). In the case of Brownfield, he does not enjoy a healthy parent-child relationship that could counter the violence of the South. Therefore, although he hated his father for his violent character, Brownfield ends up being a bully of his own wife and children, and eventually kills his wife and baby boy. He reveals to Josie that the reason why he killed his son is that the baby, by the color of his skin (he was albino) and by his physical features, reminded him of his two oppressors: the white man and his own father. Barbara Christian perceives this infanticide as the intense self-hatred that slavery and racism have eventually entrenched in black Americans in general to the extent of causing them to despise their children, a reflection of their own failure.

Brownfield [...] killed his son, his future, because he doesn't believe there is any future. The instinct in all living things to see their offspring as the future is reversed in Brownfield's mind. For him his son is despair not hope: "I just didn't *feel* like going on over my own baby who didn't have a chance in the world whether I went on over him or no." In Brownfield's twisted mind, his despair, his futility, meshes with his hatred for his father and his hatred for himself, for his father's blood flows through him to his son: "I got sick of keeping up the strain." His act is the essence of self-hatred. (Christian, 1980: 198)

By confessing being "sick of keeping up the strain" Brownfield exhibits his hatred for the genes he inherited from Grange and his willingness not to see himself in his own son. By his desperate act, Brownfield confirms unwittingly a genetic theory according to which "the basic principle of genetics is that genes are transmitted only through children and if a genotype has no progeny, its genes will die out" (Vetta and Courgeau, 2003/4: 409). The child is perceived by Brownfield as the reflection of his own failure, a mirror he would rather not face.

Through Brownfield's story, Walker highlights the destructive features of the phenotype of the South. The author indicates that black southerners are not able to make their own lives in a racist America; whatever their desire to be free, they always find themselves in stronger bondage. In this respect, Walker creates a particular form of repetition in *The Third Life* using analogy to present a cyclic duplication of damnation. Indeed, the very structure of the novel is based in part on the reproduction of the same schemes of violence, despair, and gloominess. This structure of the novel contributes to the impression of continuous repetition of passages since the parts concerning Brownfield are an exact reduplication of those concerning Grange. Therefore, the repetition of the same dismal patterns labels the story as Hogue points out: "The seeming insolubility of the text's problem causes the reader to turn the pages, for its repetition of discursive facts presupposes a closure. It is this pressure to finish the solution to the text's problem that pushes on the narrative" (Hogue, 1985: 50).

Brownfield's constant exposure to violence by his father, his witnessing of his mother's infanticide and suicide, and his experience of the loneliness of abandonment turn him into a cruel person. Despite his attempts to break through the vicious cycle of violence, he cannot resist the temptation whenever the occasion presents itself. Violence is deep-seated in his genes waiting for an occasion to flow out. When this happens, his true nature is revealed: a cynical Brownfield who does not feel the slightest compassion for anybody, even his wife or children. He pitilessly drowns cats and laughs as they struggle for life, commits infanticide and femicide, and causes severe, irreversible trauma to his daughters Ornette and Daphne who he abused physically and verbally.

It is worth mentioning the impact of the physical, political, economic, and social environment on the characters. Grange and Brownfield as well as the other black characters of the novel, men and women alike, are literally and figuratively trapped. This stigma is so intense and recurrent that blacks even end up believing in the fatalism of their situation. The oppressive environment as described by the author is a fixed and closed one, where the black characters are forced to stay in the South. The South is a place where Grange (in his first life) and Brownfield know that they cannot achieve anything, but where they are mentally chained, because they know no other place, and are economically entangled by employers whose ploy consists in granting them loans while being fully aware that they can never repay as the debt keeps on growing day by day.

Furthermore, the name of Brownfield and the story related to it is indicative of this culture of damnation. It illustrates the lack of importance black Americans of that era placed on their children because they are aware that they could not give them a bright future. In fact, when Brownfield was born, his parents did not feel any joy and, to choose a name for him, his mother asked his father to go outside the room and tell her the first thing he sees: “And he, standing before the door, saw the autumnal shades of Georgia cotton fields. ‘Sort of brownish colored field,’ he answered. [...] ‘Brownish color,’ she had said [...] ‘Brownish field. Brown-field.’ There was not even pity in her for her child” (Walker, 178). Nevertheless, to be fair to Margaret, the reader should understand that she is just a victim of a society which does not let her bloom. “Drained of emotion by her disastrous marriage, disgusting job and duties at home, Margaret is lonely and is not capable of showing her son Brownfield any love and affection” (Choudhury, 2013:67).

Right from his birth, Brownfield’s fate is sealed by unpassionate parents and a merciless society. His name operates like a burden which chains him up and condemns him to the earth. That is why he has never been able, nor has he even really wanted, to leave the South for a better life in the North. Even worse, it is in prison that Brownfield comes to the cynically happy conclusion that he loves the South too much to leave it: “In prison... He realized an extraordinary emotion. He loved the South” (Walker, 163). Brownfield’s life is therefore a failure like a field that would not bear a harvest, as Butler explains: “Brownfield is indeed a ‘brownfield’, a crop that has failed to mature and bear fruit because his life has been deprived of the necessary nutrients” (Butler, 1993: 197). In fact, the character is plagued by absences in his life. As Sedehi et al comment, “He could not mature as a man as he did not have any father figure to follow, and because the white racist society emasculated him” (Sedehi et al, 2015: 973).

Furthermore, Brownfield has no model to offer his children; worse, he infests the parent-children relationship by seeing his daughters as enemies, or at the very least, as burdens to bear. He fails to create the physical and psychological environment necessary for the children’s education, he deprives them of confidence, and literally seals their future by repeatedly throwing at their faces that they will not amount to anything good. In fact, his first daughter Daphne, who he constantly called “stupid and crazy,” (Walker, 111) ends up in a madhouse and Ornette, who he tagged a “plump, easygoing tramp,” (Walker, 112) eventually becomes a prostitute. In contrast, his youngest daughter Ruth is more fortunate under the adoption of her grandfather Grange who instils her self-esteem and confidence through the instauration of a positive relationship.

Education-type for self-esteem and agency

Through this section I analyze the process of positive transformation undergone by Grange and which later impacts his granddaughter Ruth. When he comes back from the North, reformed, Grange takes back the course of his life. With both his Southern and Northern experiences he can assess his past actions and beliefs. This stage of his life is embodied by his granddaughter Ruth. In fact, if Grange is at the core of the novel, he is doubled in all the phases of the story. For instance, we can observe from the title that he has three lives. His first two lives intertwine with Brownfield’s and his third with his granddaughter’s Ruth. It is in the third part that Ruth emerges as the real heroine of the novel crystallizing the positive aspects of Grange’s maturity. In fact, when Brownfield is jailed for the murder of his wife, Grange adopts Brownfield’s daughter Ruth and sets himself the task to provide her with the best education with the view of freeing her from the entrapment from which he and the black community suffered. To reach his goal, he needs to protect her from the damning genotype and phenotype by creating for her a safe, healthy, and comforting environment in which to evolve. In fact, theorists of behavior genetics note that “the environmental sensitivity framework posits that the genes that seem to make individuals overly vulnerable to adversity may at the same time provide advantage when it comes to benefiting from exposure to environmental support, including mere absence of adversity” (Tuvblad C. et al, 2016: 714). Grange understands that this favorable environment is more psychological than physical.

To shape Ruth mentally, at the waning of his life, Grange sets himself the challenge of sharing his life-long experience with his granddaughter so as to preserve her from the misfortunes and entrapments facing blacks in racist America. He draws from his experience examples and counter examples of what to do and what to avoid. Stained at the backcloth of his teachings is his own failure the causes of which he points out as a beacon of the trail not to take. For instance, the narrator and Grange pinpoint some reactionary practices that are more likely harmful to the black man: escapism, victimization, and misdirected love or hate.

Escapism or more precisely fleeing to the North, which is a major theme in African-American literature, is reconsidered by Grange in the light of his own experience. He sees the practice of escaping the Southern plantations for the urban life of the North as a counterproductive choice simply because, as shown in the first part of this essay, the problem of the black man during this period is endogenous as well as exogenous. Unless he addresses his internal strife, he will find the North to be similar to the South in terms of seizing blacks' opportunities. Since they were born and raised in a culture and environment of poverty and damnation, unless they are free psychologically they will not strive in a white supremacist. There are numerous cases of people who went to the North and were unable to succeed because of prerequisites they failed to comply with. So Walker emphasizes that the main issue is not a matter of external place but rather that of internal attitude.

Grange flees the austerity of the South only to find sadly that the North is equally oppressive and humiliating. Having abandoned his wife and child in Georgia to pursue his fortune in the North, Grange is disillusioned to discover that blacks are victimized in the North as well. In New York, he is hopeless, begs, and indulges in petty crimes for food. He even ends up regretting leaving the South. There he was despised, therefore he existed, whereas in the North he is ignored, unnoticed as if nonexistent. The invisibility which characterizes him in the North is symptomatic of the lack of inclusion that he and his community suffer from. They are outside the official circuits of society which confines them to its margins. There they act mostly in negative ways to make their way out. In fact, Uncle Silas who refuses to work on the Southern plantations ends up in New York addicted to drugs and is eventually murdered while trying to rob a beer shop. Likewise, Daphne and Ornette, the two elder daughters of Brownfield, who move to live with their maternal grandfather in New York after their mother's death, end up in a madhouse and a brothel respectively. All these tragedies highlight the entrapment of Walker's characters, for the North only offers the illusion of freedom that masks the reality of complete imprisonment. According to Mason, "by undermining the attractiveness of the North, Walker does not offer a concomitant reevaluation of the South. Instead, she collapses the distinctions embodied by the different poles of this vertical axis, thereby removing any possibility of escape for her characters" (Mason Jr., 1989: 299). In fact, the author refuses to give in the temptation of the easy denouement by a freedom as easily achieved as moving to another place.

Therefore, if Grange narrates to Ruth the example of the Hebrew exile for "a hundredth time," it is not necessarily to push her to a physical exile but simply to invite her to a mental evasion and spiritual freedom. The novel shows that Grange succeeds in the South but only when he is disillusioned by the North. Making his third life and its concomitant success occur in the South rather than in the North is food for thought because it dramatizes the idea that success is not tributary to the milieu but rather to the individual. This is why Grange's lot and the barbed fences surrounding it are metaphor for the man's owning his own self and belongings. It is an affirmation of his liberty and property as shown in the section called "Good fences make good neighbors" where Grange calls upon legal texts for his right to shoot any intruder found in his lot: "You know the good part about owing a fence around propity you also owns is that you gits to shoot down any man or beast that sets foot over your boundaries. There is a law that says you can do that" (Walker, 179).

Moreover, Grange is against the rhetoric of victimization, of putting the blames of one's failure on the other. For him, trying to explain one's failure and wrongdoings by evoking the dominant whites' obstructive maneuver is just scapegoating. Instead, men should take the responsibility and assume the blame for their acts. He tries vainly to reason with Brownfield to have him abandon the rhetoric of victimization: "We guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it" (Walker, 207). As discussed in the first part of this essay, Brownfield has a tendency of throwing the responsibility of the failure of his life, his couple, and family on the other: "the white folks just don't let nobody *feel* like doing right" (Walker, 195). However, Grange sees now the danger of such numbing rhetoric because it is not only defeatist, but also it comes down to a solace for one's failure and an excuse of their wrongdoings:

By George I *know* the danger of putting the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of your life. I fell into the trap myself! And I'm bound to believe that that's the way the white folks can corrupt you even when you done held up before. 'Cause when they got you thinking they're to blame for *everything* they have you thinking they's some kind of gods! You can't do nothing wrong without them being behind it. You gits just as weak as water, no feelings of doing nothing yourself. Then you begins to think up evil and begins to destroy everybody around you, and you blames it on the crackers. *Shit!* Nobody's as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own *souls*, don' we? (Walker, 207)

Reformed Grange sees the responsibility of black men in the crimes perpetrated against them in the sense that they believe in fatality. As he puts it, he himself has fallen into the trap from which he wants to protect Brownfield and Ruth. This means that he intends to make them wise by letting them live on his own experience to avoid the big mistakes of life. Walker aims to eradicate centuries of alienation and denigration from the colonized psyche and mentally empower the African-American in order to get him act rather than accept a fate imposed on him. Through Grange she conveys that having constantly the shadow of the white man behind one's shoulder is proof of mental slavery. It gives the white man too much power, like an omnipotent and omnipresent god figure. Instead, Grange "creates a human self in his third life by reclaiming the free will he needs to move forward in life and thus breaks the cycle of futility which society has designed for him" (Butler, 1988:75). So, by saying "we get our own souls" he is advocating for strong, responsible agency, for "decolonising the mind" as Ngũgĩ wa Thĩong'o (1981) would put it.

In the same respect, Grange detects other attitudes towards the white man which are equally negative and self-destructive for the black individual because they all place the white oppressor at the front and center of the relation. For instance, Grange's sentiment towards the white oppressor evolves through the novel, and one can identify three main stages of this drastic shift. In the first place when the novel opens, he is presented ill-at-ease in front of his landlord Shipley. Even his child Brownfield notices and is embarrassed by his father's fright in front of the white man. This act of inhibiting emotion in the plantations of the South makes room for hatred in response to his confinement to nonexistence in the North. "This reveals his metamorphosis journey. He has to fight back to recover from his trauma and survive. The degradation and humiliation he suffered under the white hegemony are turned into rebellion and redemption" (Perot & Edis, 2019:82). In fact, when he 'kills' a pregnant white woman, Grange feels free, and for the first time he senses the urge to live. As he reveals it, "[...] after freeing your suppressed manhood by killing whatever suppressed it, you were then taken with the most passionate desire to live" (Walker, 153). Then, "the murder and the hate that both caused it and flowed from it" (Walker, 156) trigger Grange's preaching the attitude of white hate as a means of liberation. Actually, Grange did not kill her. He saw a pregnant white woman drowning in a pond at Central Park, New York and he offered a helping hand to save her. The woman who held on to the hand for a second rejected it when she realized it was black, and proffered insults against Grange. This tragic, extreme racism of a person who prefers to die rather than being rescued by a black man serves as a trigger for Grange. Hatred is his newfound religion which he preaches in the streets and in churches arguing that only hatred of the Whites can help the Blacks to survive: "Don't teach 'em to love them! Teach them to hate 'em!" [...] "We loves 'em now. And by God it killing us!" (Walker, 154).

The sentiments of fear, love or hate still raise the issue concerned with centeredness and marginality. Grange realizes that whether you love or hate the white man, you are perpetuating a white-centered perspective. What is needed instead is an attitude that puts the black at the front and center of his own interest. Here too we can apply another intellectual resistance concept advocated by Ngũgĩ wa Thĩong'o, which is "moving the center" (1993). It encourages a decentering of the intellectual and cultural canons from the West to focus on the subaltern potentialities. Here, Walker reflects the ideology of the Black renaissance movement and negritude that promote self-love, self-respect, and self-determination as necessary assets for a true liberation. This needs empowerment, not only in terms of knowledge and equipment, but also in terms of psychological freedom. Thus, in many regards, Walker's vision intersects with that of the Afrocentric movement in advocating freedom for the black. Grange's reliance on education is an education like the one Mazama enounces: "the Afrocentric methodology must generate knowledge that will free us and empower us. Our primary task is to generate knowledge that opens us our heart" (Mazama, 2003: 26).

Grange is adamant that education is the only tool for breaking the nexus between phenotype and damnation. But it is not the type of classical education at the school of the 1920s, segregated and reproducing the mainstream dominant racist culture. This alienating type of school only taught the blacks to accept the racial hierarchy and be good servants. For that reason, even educated blacks like Mem and Ruth's school teacher Mrs. Grayson cannot reach to the social, intellectual, and economic levels of their white counterparts. Hence when Grange comes back from the North, the whole meaning of his life comes down to his granddaughter Ruth, to whom he endeavors to give a good education, both academic and experimental, capable of saving her from the destructive cycle which threatens blacks' lives in the United States.

“More importantly he nourishes her mind and soul [...] in an important way he also becomes her teacher, instructing her in ‘the realities of life’ drawing materials from his own wide experience and his extensive knowledge of black folklore” (Butler, 1993: 199).

Grange is a teacher for Ruth, but even more, he is a mentor, a guide, an initiator through life. So, his is a mixture of education through books and also education through shared experience. For that reason he becomes a story-teller whose “stories and talk are barbed with the insights of a man who has been constantly at odds with the law and the social structures of both white and black communities” (Hellenbrand, 1986: 122). The purpose of Grange’s narration is to save Ruth’s life and emancipate her. To do so, he recounts her his life story, which can be understood by the disarray of the South and the disillusionment of the North. As a good pedagogue, Grange invites Ruth on a quest for physical and spiritual independence and gives her the competence, the will, and the know-how necessary for its achievement by telling her stories of evasion, in particular that of the Hebrews from Pharaoh Egypt, of the black folktale character Uncle Remus, and John, a plantation man who tricks his way out of any difficult situation.

Grange strives to dissipate Ruth’s racial and social complexes and to empower her by offering the knowledge, the equipment, and the assets needed for a true liberation. In addition to teaching her lessons of survival, he trains her in how to fire a gun and provides her with one, but insists that Ruth dresses as a woman and in a decent way. He liberates her mentally and later economically by giving her the plot of land he teaches her to protect by all means necessary. As a gift for Ruth’s seventeenth birthday, he offers her a car with the view of empowering her more. In fact, according to Butler, “automobiles are used persistently in the novel as images of power and independence, and are often contrasted with houses, which are perceived as signs of entrapment” (1988: 78). It is worth noting that in the context of the South where even many white males do not possess a car, the narrator’s dramatization of a young black girl driving one is a symbol of Ruth’s victory over the damning genotype and phenotype.

For Ruth’s evolution process to come to term, he is ready for everything, even killing his son Brownfield who jeopardizes Ruth’s fulfillment, and eventually accepting the ultimate sacrifice of his own life so that his granddaughter be completely liberated in life. As the narrator indicates, “survival was not everything. *He* had survived. But to survive *whole* was what he wanted for Ruth” (Walker, 214). For Hogue, “the text’s title, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, signifies that Grange Copeland, the protagonist within the text, has three lives and that it is ‘the third life’ that has the most significance” (Hogue, 1985: 47). If the third life, the sequence which most interests the author, represents Ruth, the title then is metaphorical in the sense that it coincides with Ruth. It is all the more significant, since Grange chooses to die under bullets of the police to ensure Ruth the possibility of a better life. In the same vein, Hellenbrand usefully warns against a misreading of the novel’s ending, the meaning of which can vary radically from the most irreversible pessimism to the most radiant optimism depending on who one considers the main character of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*:

When viewed with Grange as the central figure, this sequence suggests a painful lesson: not just that the past cannot be escaped but, more relevantly, that white hegemony corners blacks into internecine conflict. The love story, the family chronicle, in other words, is distorted by the inexorable pressures of white power. When we view Ruth as the central figure in this episode, a different configuration emerges. She is not trapped by the past. Rather, with her father and grandfather dead, Ruth is left alone to face the future. (Hellenbrand, 1986: 124-125)

The novel ends on a positive note, suggesting a glimpse of hope for the future. But Walker is realist enough to trace the painful evolution which makes this ending possible. After creating a positive parent-child environment for Ruth and personally taking care of her education, which helped her vanquish the race-based trauma, Grange eliminates Brownfield and himself to let Ruth live her life without any burden.

Conclusion

In the *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker showcases how the lives of generations of black people are crushed by the racism of the South. The race-based trauma entailed by the Jim Crow policy creates a Southern culture of poverty, self-hatred and fatality, passed on from one generation to another. As such, entrapped by negative genotype and phenotype, black characters act in manners that destroy them and their community.

Indeed, the novel is replete with violence ending in tragic deaths and irreversible trauma. The fact that about two-thirds of the novel is concerned with these tragic failures and only the third shows glimpses of hope is solid proof that failure is the norm for the African-American community and success the exception. However, although very tiny, the possibility of success does exist, but it requires creating a positive environment and a healthy interplay between genotype and environment.

Love, education, and solidarity are necessary assets for the individual to thrive, as is symbolically proved through the character Ruth, who Perot and Edis consider as a symbol: “Ruth is the epitome of a bright future for the black community. Grange’s love towards Ruth is an embodiment of presenting the power of love to achieve the survival of the community” (2019: 83). In fact, Ruth’s popping out of the hole of damnation is the single success that compensates for the many failures because it was all the least probable from a young black girl. It is also meaningful because it is made possible by the enlightened guidance of a reformed Grange who journeys from being presented as a failure in the beginning of the novel to becoming a role model by its end. As such, Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is ultimately a celebration of an education that empowers the individual into self-determination and agency to win over the Southern culture of fatality.

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