

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA**

**FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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**DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES
STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE
OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION**

**A Journey of a Black Woman in Zora Neale
Hurstons' *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Master Degree**

By:

Miss. Amina Meriem NECHNECH and Miss. Ismahan CHERGUI

Academic Year

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents for their continued support and love throughout the writing of this dissertation and also within my own life

To my dear sisters Nesrine and Amira.

To my supervisor Dr. Houria MIHOUBI for all the guidance and support she has given us.

To my teammate Meriem without her this dissertation might still be unfinished.

To my friends for standing by my side when times get hard

To Dr. Mohsen HAMRIT

Ismahan CHERGUI

I would like to dedicate this work to my loving parents for their endless devotion and encouragement.

To my sisters and brothers for their constant support.

A special gratitude goes to the teacher Meriem BEN NACEUR for her assistance and precious advices.

Amina Meriem NECHNECH

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation examines a black woman's quest for identity in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Throughout the novel, Hurston's heroine, Janie, struggles to shatter the social gender role in order to find her voice, self and therefore her identity in a world prevailed by a male who attempts to restrict and oppress her. Thus, this research aims to shed light on Janie's journey to self-discovery and her quest for independence through analyzing themes of female self-revelation and self-realization in male dominated society. To achieve this goal, the feminist approach is adopted. After the investigation, it has been revealed that woman's identity formulation comes from one's own experience than others' one.

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Introduction

During the early time of writing's innovation, literature has been controlled by and served only the male. Thus, most of the literary works have been written by male with a male protagonist. However, the feminist period has started to extend and flourish by the nineteenth century during which women begin to contribute in social practice as literature and, therefore, they are introduced to be addressed as writers and as a subject of writing. This era has witnessed a set of master-works of literature that are written by women. Among this progressive literary works stands Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is one of the most renowned works of African-American literature and women studies that seek to celebrate black woman's liberation from a white-dominated society. It is published in 1937 during the Harlem Renaissance. It portrays a black woman's life in early twentieth century America and her quest for identity. This theme takes a major place in many African-American Literary works.

Hurston's protagonist Janie Crawford is a middle-aged black woman who struggles for equality and liberation from the restrictions and limitations imposed upon her by a masculine society. Janie searches for self-fulfillment, independence, autonomy, wholeness, self-hood, self-reliance, self-revelation, and self-realization. In that case, she starts experiencing her own change of life to form her identity through a journey of discovery. Thus, this dissertation focuses on the theme of woman's identity in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The main purpose of this present research, hence, is to investigate the female selfhood throughout the novel in the light of the feminist theory and to examine the patriarchal norms that shape women in accordance with men's desires. Thus, this study aims to shed light on the heroine's struggle to free herself from the oppressive gender roles during the course of her

three marriage to achieve her final position of self-fulfillment and to examine Janie's voice evolution and her attempt to achieve her visibility in term of power in a world dominated by a male who tries to oppress her.

Since Hurston's masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a strong example of the black women's struggle to achieve the true selfhood in a society that ignores her. Thus, the present study tends to answer the main research question: how did a black woman achieve her own voice and autonomy in the patriarchal society? It will also attempt to respond to some sub-questions: How did the novel represent Janie's struggle against male domination? And how did Janie's experience through her three marriages construct her self-realization?

To answer the research questions the feminist approach is adopted for this study. In the light of this theory, the study aims at showing how Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reflects feminist issues such as loss of identity, women's exploitation and subordination in a male-dominated society where a woman is treated as an object. Hurston focuses on problems such as gender inequality, women's oppression and inferiority in Janie's patriarchal society. In this society, woman is intended to be reduced to slavery status and being a mere mean for man's use.

Hurston's novel is one of the most important works written during the Harlem Renaissance. It gains insight into African-American women's situation. That is, many scholars, critics, and black women writers see Hurston's work as a crucial link in the black female literary tradition. This novel forms a wide space of debate and many intense studies carried out on this novel.

Many critics has tried to examine Hurston's conscious use of tradition or Folk materials in the novel. This viewpoint is exposed in Claire Crabtree "*The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching*

God”(1985) which emphasizes on Hurston’s use of the folk material into the body of the novel such as: storytelling frame, language, metaphor and symbol of a specific rural community. The value of the folk material’s use is to assert African-American cultural identity.

Additional work held by Sigrid King “Naming and Power in Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes were Watching God* taken from “*Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations*”(2008) deals with the issue of naming in African- American tradition and its link to the power and personal identity as it has been discussed by Kimberly Benston. It explores the idea of exercising power throughout Hurston’s novel.

On the other hand, Mary Helen Washington “Hurston Failure to create a Genuinely Librated Female Voice” taken from “*Bloom’s Guides: Their Eyes Were Watching God*” (2009) represents the female voice within a male dominated society in which woman is excluded from the power of oral speech and her voice is inferior.

Those studies offer different interpretations for Hurston’s work; one deals with Hurston’s use of folk material, other depicts the power of naming to assert individual identity and the last one depicts how Hurston subvert a female voice in her novel. However, neither a female voice evolution and identity nor the social gender roles are exposed in their works. Thus, this study is an attempt to depict the impact of the social norms and the traditional gender roles on a woman’s identity. It will also show how a black woman escapes the narrow social restrictions of her sex and race to achieve her self-realization.

The present dissertation will be divided into two chapters. The first one is entitled “Theoretical and Socio-Historical Backgrounds”. It is divided into two parts: the first one provides a general view of the feminist theory by illustrating its fundamental premises which serve to analyse *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The second part is about the socio-historical

background of the novel. It is concerned with the Harlem Renaissance during which the novel is written. It also portrays Hurston's life as a feminist writer with focusing on her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The second chapter of the study sheds light on Janie's journey of discovery and her quest for identity. This chapter, in turn, is divided into two parts. The first one is entitled "The Female Self -Revelation in a Male Dominated Society". It sets out to provide an insightful analysis to the theme of a woman's voice with various stratifications of meaning as one part of her identity formation. While the second part is entitled "The Female Self-Realization in a Male Dominated Society" that sheds light on the journey of the heroine, Janie Crawford into self-realization through her different marriages along with her female identity evolution. It also raises attention to the double oppression of the black women in racist and sexist society.

Chapter One: Theoretical and Socio-Historical Backgrounds

Since Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is counted as a successful model of feminist writings that illustrate women's life in a patriarchal society, this chapter will be an attempt to discuss the feminist theory, its historical background through three waves and its connection to literature in theoretical part. It also examines the two key concepts of traditional gender roles and patriarchal ideology. Since this work is revolving around a black woman's struggle, black feminism is tackled too. In the second part, this study will examine the historical context in which the novel is created because history plays a fundamental role in shaping literature; particular time and place rim the entire literary work. In addition, it shows how Hurston's life and the major events she has lived shape her as a feminist writer.

I. Theoretical Background

The theoretical background is a necessary part of conducting research in literature. It guides the research and helps to develop the effective strategies. This current study holds a feminist theory and its concepts that are relevant to the research problem. It serves to analyze and interpret Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from a feminist perspective.

I.1. Feminist Theory

The feminist theory is one of the most popular, progressive and dynamic literary theories that is now practiced throughout the universal academic study of literary texts. However, this theory has no exact definition. It is a complex notion that has vast differences in meaning and

connotation. In the most general sense, Feminist theory seeks to promote equality for men and women in social, economic and cultural fields ('The Saylor Foundation' 1).

As a literary theory, feminist theory examines the ways in which literature represents women and their relationships with men, heeding to how women are marginalized and denied voice of their own literature. It also deals with how literature reflects the ideological assumptions regarding gender and sexual identities as an opposition between men and women within a given culture and society (Peña 3).

Similarly, feminist theory closely examines women's roles and experiences in various disciplines, explores the real causes of the inequality prevalent between men and women in society, exposes how women are objectified and oppressed as they portrayed in a literary work, and identifies patriarch's responsibility for this oppression and women's subordination in society.

Furthermore, feminist theory serves to oppose women to be treated as a sex object; they must be treated as a human being and not an object for male gratification, to offer their equality with man, and to change the 'mindset' of women as well as men that the world is a place to live for both men and women (Kaur 1108). Thus, it will reduce and eventually overcome discrimination based on gender.

As a result, the feminist theory is a strong approach that is selected in this study to discover the male dominant society, to create a unique place for women in that society and then to improve women's social position through analyzing Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and evaluating the portrayal of women in this work of literature.

I.2. Historical Background of Feminism

According to the historians of feminism, the history of the American feminist movement appears at distinct moments as a series of three waves of feminist thought and activity. These waves illustrate the advanced activity of women movement with progress and shift. Thus, each of them is centered on feminist issues with different angles.

I.2.1. First-Wave Feminism

First-wave feminism refers to a period of women's movement that becomes apparent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century throughout the world particularly in North America and Europe. In the United States, it begins with the publication of a *Vindication of Rights of Women* in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft, an English writer, who promotes equal right between men and women.

This wave focuses on women's suffrage that concentrates on the women's right to vote. In fact, this suffrage movement is confined only to white women, while women of color are not included. It is led primarily by Elizabeth Cady Stanton¹ and others who organize the Seneca Convention "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and right of women" ("Women's Rights Convention" 3). At that convention, they issue the Declaration of Sentiments that indicates women's rights and proposes the convenient solution for that issue (Freedman 2).

Likewise, those "suffragettes" are elite members of conservative Christian groups who fight for prohibiting alcohol. Then, they shift their interest to questioning "the full integration of women into all aspects of social, political, and economic life" (qtd.in O'Hara, 11).

¹**Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (November 12, 1815 – October 26, 1902) was an American suffragist, social was an American suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, and leading figure of the early women's rights movement. Her Her declaration of sentiments, presented at Seneca Falls Convention, was a revolutionary call for women's rights across a variety of spectrums (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Cady_Stanton). Accessed 12th Feb. 2017.

Furthermore, they work to get a legal identity for themselves that include the right to own property and to form legal contracts. The pioneers of this movement ignore issues that are associated with the lives of black women such as sexism and poverty. Though, they start as abolitionists who believe in egalitarianism and the legal rights for all (qtd.in VanNewkirk, 9).

The first wave of women's movement is ended by writing the nineteenth amendment that grants women the right to vote. Thus, the primary gain of feminists' first wave is women's political equality that gives the white women a new form of empowerment (Bernard 1). Although the first wave of feminism is massive to the women's movement, there would be no hope for feminism in current times without the outstanding of the second wave because each wave is connected and dependent on the other's history.

I.2.2. Second-Wave Feminism

Second-Wave feminism refers to a period of women's movement that emerges in the early 1960s and lasts through the early 1980s. This wave is known as the era of "women's liberation". The second wave of feminism has no longer believed that the gain of suffragists would have solved women's problem. Thus, they concern themselves with broader social relations as family, sexuality, and work (Stacy et al. xxi).

This wave witnesses the emergence of women's consciousness-raising group, abortion rights, women's healthcare, the eradication of violence against women, and the Equal Rights Amendment that is called women's liberation movement. It focuses on the discrimination that exists in American culture in all fields. Many of its leaders are white middle class women who start to see themselves differently than just wives and mothers. Thus, they ask for equality with men in a public sphere due to the publication's influence, including Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (Anna et al. 4).

In fact, women of color consider this wave as typically distinguished for white women because the issues that are associated with them are not fully addressed in this wave. Likewise, they recognize their suffering of intersecting oppression in terms of sexism from men, racism from white feminism, and classes from the middle class that are inherently not valued in both waves.

In fact, leave behind such issues that concern black women who do not belong to the middle class in the first and the second wave feminism creates certain challenges about racism and discrimination tensions between generations. Thus, the next wave of feminism, third wave feminism in the early 1990s, emerges to cope with such subjects (“Feminist Theory and the media” 6).

I.2.3. Third-Wave Feminism

Third wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity that begins in the early 1990’s to present day. This wave arouses as a response to the perceived failures and as a revolt against the premises that are created by the second wave. It challenges the feminist’s definitions that are celebrated in the second wave; it emphasizes only on the experiences of upper middle class white women.

This movement’s pioneers criticize the older feminists ‘second wave for being led mostly by white rich women. Thus, they celebrate the diversity of feminism and create a new activist floor. Many proponents of this wave consider their feminism as being distinct from the earlier waves to obscure the continuities of feminism between particular ‘waves’. However, this wave is just an expansion of the second wave with a focus in new directions. As Rebecca Walker states, “We want to be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women’s movements, but we also want to make a space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and so we chose the name Third Wave” (xvii).

Moreover, third wave' women movement holds diversity and change. It is a multicultural in nature because that women and feminists come in many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, cultural backgrounds and sexually diverse as well including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual perspectives. It also focuses on intersections of identity as gender, sex, and race that will be explored in the next chapter. Thus, this wave embraces contradictions and conflict for compassing no single feminist ideas (Henry 32).

Third wave feminism expresses the concerns that linked to the young women with preserving second wave platform and tries to create new subjects focusing on issues of race, social class, sexuality and fighting the new backlash against feminism that is pretended in media such as the portrayal of women as sexualized objects; gratifying solely to the man's needs. Thus, the third wave feminists tend to shatter the "glass ceiling" in different fields in which women have a limited access and to show a powerful image of women who have made and continue to make a legal evolution in that fields from the first to the third wave (Iannello 71-72). In fact, this period has diversified into many distinct groups, including Black feminism.

I.3. Black Feminism

Black feminism is a branch of a feminist thought that is concerned with issues that are attached to African -American women. It erupts of black women's experience of intersecting oppression including racism, sexism, gender and classes with work and family during slavery and after libration. According to many black feminists, the ideology of culture, racism, and sexism are used to justify black women's oppression. To keep African-American women in subordinate place, the elite white male has developed certain stereotyping images such as mammy, the matriarch, welfare mother, Jezebel, and the breeder women of slavery. These prevailing images of Black womanhood are designed to protect their interests and to justify

the social practice in the United States of America. Thus, many African-American women writers tend to depict black women's resistance to these controlling images and to offer a comprehensive view of black women's struggle to form positive self- definition in the face of such images (Collins).

In that case, one core theme in U.S black feminists is the search for identity in a journey that starts from internalized oppression to the last state of a self-defined to cope with and to transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. For Collin, the goal of self- definition's journey is to understand how the intersecting oppression shapes the personal life of black women not identity because identity is just 'point of departure' in that journey. Peaches' statement, "I'm awfully bitter these days because my parents were slaves" (Collins 114). This expression stimulates black writers to challenge the stereotypes images by replacing the bad reputation with good ones.

The era of the twentieth century has witnessed many black feminist writers who have probably been the most successful in their writings about black women's life as Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston refuses gender, sexism, white male supremacist and other structure of domination. Black Feminism emerges as a response to the black liberation and women movement's failure to discuss black women's issues as sexism and racism. Feminist movement creates racism in presenting feminism as only for white. Thus, Black women remain largely invisible feminists. Even though, they take part in feminist organization. However, Black feminism challenges the assumed whiteness feminism and disrupts this false universal term; the feminist movement is for both white and black (Collins 13).

To get a comprehensive or representative account of the history of feminist theory, stress should put on its fundamental premises.

I.4.The Fundamental Premises of Feminism

All Feminists may focus on women's inferior place in society and the discrimination that meet them because of their sex. That is, they call for changes in social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce this discrimination. However, it is difficult to find any other common premises between the different strands of feminism. Thus, one will explore the two key concepts of traditional gender roles and patriarchal ideology that all feminists may share (Freedman 1).

I.4.1. Traditional Gender Roles

For Magda Arnold, a feminist psychologist, being a female or male is based on biological and natural facts. But, this assumption has paved the way to the concept of gender that considers the fact of being women as feminine and men as masculine is based on the cultural and social factors (Gral 40). Thus, Gender is "a socio-cultural construct of female and male identity that shapes how individuals live and interpret the world around them" (Richman's 1), while Sex is "a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function"(Delphy 33). This distinction implies that gender, hence, is a socially constructed concept that is learned in the society based on biological characteristics of given sex. In that case, Colette Guillaumin, a feminist, asks "if masculinity were really natural and inherent to males, then why would so many measures have to be introduced to protect it" (qtd.in Allwood, 86). Arising out of this, the differences between women and men are not inherently natural but socially constructed based on the proper behaviors allowed of men and women in a given context (Richman's 1).

Similarly, gender roles ideology is a set of attitudes, beliefs, and social practices associate with men and women within a contextual culture or society (qtd.in Gral, 40). Sandra Bem, a feminist psychologist, argues that gender role refers to the people who are constructed to

behave in certain gendered characteristics according to their sex (qtd.in Tess A, 3). Furthermore, gender role serves to regulate and constrain the behavior of men and women in an unequal measure.

Likewise, traditional gender role ideology stems from stereotyped beliefs about men and women; a belief that women primary responsibility is home and children tasks, while men primary responsibility is financial support of a household (qtd.in Gral, 41). Women are caring, nurturing, emotional, domestic, sensitive, passive, gentle, and soft, while men are tough, providing, rational, public, thick-skinned, active, rough, and hard (Eisenstein 8). Such ideas have a powerful effect on deciding the social position of men and women in society and justify women's oppression that include the exclusion of them from equal opportunities with men such as "paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job or exclude women from performing specific careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering" (Tyson 85).

Conversely, these gender inequality ideas between men and women are addressed in patriarchal ideology too.

I.4.2. Patriarchal Ideology

Patriarchy is "a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence"(Hooks 1). This definition implies that patriarchy refers to male domination, describes the power relationship between men and women, and characterizes women in a subordinate place. Hooks considers violence as a necessary mean to keep the patriarchal dominance, exploitation, and oppression upon women.

That is, Hooks rejects the hypothesis which states that God is a male and he creates both men to rule his world and women to help them do this task. In fact, this hypothesis explains both the idea of biological determinism in which men and women are born naturally different. For example, modern psychology believes that “women’s biology determines their psychology and, therefore, their abilities and roles” (Sultana 4) and “the notion that every person man is always in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one” (qtd.in Sultana, 3).

In another hand, Sylvia Walby, a sociologist, defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (qtd .in Hooks, 2). This shows that patriarchal thinking is socialized based on the attitudes that are learned in society, taught by parents, and reinforced in schools and religious institution. It is used to prove women’s subordination and structural inequality between women and men. On this basis, patriarchy is a belief that stems from the core discrimination toward women. It is created by male to become an ideology promoted by biological determination, oppression, and gender discrimination.

To get beyond these premises, the French feminists have offered Additional strategies about them.

I.5. French Feminism

French feminism is a branch of feminist thought that originates in France. It represents the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva who are not originally from France. But, they have worked almost in France and the French tradition. These three theorists reject the feminist thought of the 1970s that comes with women’s liberation movement which originates in France and promotes male exclusion, the autonomy of its groups from political parties and rejects the idea of hierarchy and leadership. In that case, Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva

and other French feminist thinkers reshape feminist thought by adding a philosophical and psychoanalytic focus. Thus, French feminism has two different types: materialist feminism and psychoanalytic feminism.

French materialist feminism focuses on women's economic and social oppression that erupts from the patriarch who controls the economic and the material world (Tyson 96). To prove this oppression, for instance, women's labor within the home, the patriarch handles the biological sex differences between male and female to shape the right behaviors, rules, and institutions that manage marriage and motherhood. That is, French materialist feminism maintains that women's subordination is not natural, but socially constructed. Thus, the materialist feminists support that women's material exploitation is initial, and the notion of men and women's nature and the belief of the two genders corresponding to the two sexes are secondary concerns of this manipulation (Delphy 190).

In another hand, Psychoanalytic feminism focuses on the individual psychological experience and creativity of each woman in patriarchal society and how the latter repress her psychology unconsciously. The French feminists believe that women could not be taught how to liberate themselves from patriarchy unless they have inner belief that men are not superior to them. For instance, the binary opposition that is used by structuralism and might be defined as system that consists of two oppositional elements, one of which is considered superior to the other such as: Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day /Night, Father /Mother, Head/Emotion, Intelligible/Sensitive (Cixous and Clément 63). According to the patriarchal society, women occupy the right side, while men occupy the other one. In that case, Iregary believes that men's high concession in society at the cost of women is due to the belief in that binary opposition. Similarly, Helen Cixous shows that binary opposition asserts women's inferiority (Cavallaro 24). In this way, such ideas affect the psychological side of women and, therefore, eradicate women's creativity. In short, French feminists believe that the material

and psychoanalytic feminism are connected in which women's social and economic oppression by men determines the individual psychology of each woman (Tyson 96). In fact, the work of the French Feminist thinkers has influenced feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular.

I.6. Feminism and Literature

Literature is the product of material realities in which bodies are shaped and categorized by gender, class, race, religion and sexuality (Plain and Sellers 1). Thus, Feminist critics try to check the way in that literature presents women and their social role within a given context to explore the unique nature of the female outlook and world in literature, and to show how language is used to marginalize women. Likewise, many feminist critics focus on the image of women that is represented in books by male writers to expose the patriarchal ideology and how women characters are portrayed. Moreover, they try to show how male writings emphasize masculine dominance and superiority over feminine. Thus, Feminist criticism concerns itself with stereotypical representations of genders.

Feminist literary criticism enables a reader to study literature in different perspectives. One might check the language and symbol that are used in terms of gender. Others might say that men and women write differently; women tend to use reflexive constructions more than men. Thus, they tend to analyze how the gender of the author affects the way of literary text to be written. Moreover, feminist literary theory tends to explore the relationships between men and women and their role in society through the production of literature and within literary texts. Feminist literary critics ask the reader to consider viewing familiar literature through a feminist perspective².

² <http://www.charlesyoungs.com/english12honors/criticalapproachestoliterature.html>. Accessed 15th Feb. 2017.

From the foregoing discussion, the goal of feminist criticisms as Lois Tyson maintain, “to increase [the] understanding of women’s experience, both in the past and present and promotes [the] appreciation of women’s value in the world challenge patriarchal power” (119). Similarly, Lisa Tuttle believes that feminist criticism seeks to develop and expose female tradition of writing through rediscovering old texts, analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective, increase awareness of sexual politics of language and style and interpret the symbolism of women’s writing. As a result, feminist criticism tends to encourage the bright illustration and the fair conduct of women in the text to ensure equality (Gillespie 107).

II. Socio-Historical Context of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The story of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston took place during early twentieth century (Jones 137). During this period slavery was legally ended, and the Reconstruction set the ground for equal rights through constitutional amendments. However, African- Americans were still suffering segregation and racism in their daily life. After the end of the Reconstruction, white Southerners were discontent with the prospect of living or working equally with blacks whom they considered inferior. As a result, local authorities passed Jim Crow laws, a series of anti-black laws that asserted and maintained the supremacy of the whites over the blacks. The Jim Crow system dominated Southern and border States as well as parts of Northeast, the Midwest and the West (‘The Truth about the Jim Crow’ 3). In a period stretched from 1890 to the 1960s (Gavins 13).

In addition, the Jim Crow laws were a way of life more than a body of rules. Under this severe system, black Americans were given the status of second-class citizens, culturally inferior to whites. They were also oppressed and systematically deprived of their constitutional rights. The laws were explicitly racist which intended to separate the blacks

from the whites everywhere. Therefore, the access of the blacks to public facilities like transportation was restricted. Additionally, they were enforced to attend inferior and separate schools that were limited to a few lucky black children. Moreover, African-Americans were denied their right to vote that was guaranteed by the fifteenth amendment of the Reconstruction. This fact enhanced the white's dominance over the blacks ('The Truth about the Jim Crow' 6-8).

Economically speaking, blacks were discriminated and paid low wages. The majorities of Southern blacks were living in rural areas and worked in agriculture. They were tenant farmers or hired laborers for a short time. In towns and cities, black men worked primarily as unskilled laborers. Besides the economic hardships and the deep and persistent social obstacles, African-Americans were threatened by racial violence (Tolnay 1214). African-Americans, in fact, had gained their freedom but were prevented from enjoying it by local laws; they had gained the right to vote but were intimidated at the polls.

Perhaps, the major victims of the social changes were the African- American women. They endured the bitterness of slavery in which they had been subjected to the worst kind of oppression and exploitation. After the end of slavery, however, their social status was not better than before. Moreover, African- American women during the Jim Crow era were opposed to racial and gender discrimination as blacks and women they had a double burden. Indeed, the black women had to work inside house taking care of their husbands and children under the supremacy and oppression of male power. Furthermore, outside the house, black women faced segregation and degradation by the whites (Padhi 38).

Similarly, Kumar Padhi states that the African- American women "continue to experience the age-old oppression of woman by men. In the home, she becomes "the slave of a slave"...men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on

the part of the ruling class, but at least they can take out their frustration on someone else, their women”(38). Black women had to play the role of good mothers and submissive wives. Steven Hoelscher describes the black women as “a construct that depended on passivity and male protection (...) [who] empowered by an image of weakness” (666). Beside home responsibilities, black women had to work in the field or in business to support the family income. In which they were subjected to attacks by a segregated white society (Padhi 38).

Raymond Gavins mentions that segregation against black women and men did not prevent them from fighting for their rights. They expressed their refusal to the white domination through establishing civil right organizations and graduating from black universities (14). Among those African-American educators and civil right activists, there was a group of intellectuals and writers who would contribute to raise the voice of the oppressed blacks who were silenced for a long time.

II.1.The Harlem Renaissance and Zora Neale Hurston

Around an era when almost all blacks were still suffering the legacy of slavery and the bitterness of segregation and were deprived of expressing their voice, a gifted group of African-American intellectuals and writers was making significant contributions to American literature, music, and arts. This era was known as the Harlem Renaissance. It stretched from 1917 to 1937 and took Harlem, New York, as its center (Lewis 68).

II.1.1.The Birth of the Harlem Renaissance

One of the forces that helped to shape the Harlem Renaissance was the Great Migration. It was a massive movement of African-Americans from the rural and Southern areas to Northern and urban cities, it extended from early to the mid of the 1900s (Jones 223). Meanwhile, with the outbreak of World War One the industrial working force decreased in urban industries that

resulted in a severe labor shortage. This situation enforced factories owners to depend on black Southerners as alternative labors (Bodenner 4). This was a great chance for black Southerners who were suffering economic and social oppression due to Jim Crow laws. This led thousands of Southern Americans to relocate to Northern cities, where they could find better opportunities and increased wages William J. Collins mentions that from 1910 to 1950, 3.5 million of blacks migrated to the industrial North (607). Cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit were common destinations for the majority of black migrants (DeSantis 475).

In urban locations, however, Black Southerners' dream of a greater life soon was destroyed by the bitterness of reality. Indeed, the occupations that blacks accepted were exhausting and unpleasant; they occasionally experienced discrimination and were often exploited and paid low wages. In addition, black migrants faced housing problems because of high costs and segregation they confronted by the whites who refused to sell or rent houses to them. This led to the emergence of the so-called the black neighborhoods. These areas were characteristically overcrowded and sometimes unhealthy (Crew 36). The terrible life conditions coupled with racial violence, as well as whites' fear of the potential economic and political competition with the blacks had escalated tensions that culminated in the Red Summer of 1919, which witnessed some of the worst race riots in United States history (Bodenner 5).

The Red Summer's violence did not prevent black scholars and civil rights activists from attempting to improve life conditions for blacks, and stood against racial prejudice. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the major civil rights defenders. Through his organization the NAACP, or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he fought for legislation to end racial segregation and protect African-Americans' rights. He was the editor of the NAACP magazine, the so-called the Crisis. The latter set the stage for African American writers and

artists to express their voice, it gained a wide claim among the blacks as well as sympathetic whites. The National Urban League, another organization that was devoted to improve work opportunities and quality of life issues of the blacks. One of its major accomplishments was its journal *Opportunity* (Jones 229-30). Additionally, The Universal Negro Improvement Association was another major organization that worked to maintain economic independence and self-improvement for the blacks (Bodenner 6).

In fact, civil rights leaders like Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson were significant agents that propelled the Harlem Renaissance. David Levering Lewis supports “The Harlem Renaissance was a somewhat forced phenomenon, a cultural nationalism of the parlor, institutionally encouraged and directed by leaders of the national civil rights establishment for the paramount purpose of improving race relations in a time of extreme national backlash” (68). In other words, organized political and economic movements helped to urge the Harlem Renaissance by creating a new sense of empowerment among African-Americans who agreed that it was time to demand racial equality with whites.

The artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance took Harlem city as its center. Harlem was a predominantly black neighborhood in Manhattan, New York. It became overcrowded with people of all ranks: middle class, poor, literate, illiterate immigrants, migrants as well as civil rights leaders, organizations and religious groups. It was a “racial metropolis” (qtd. in Jones, 226). Harlem was a heterogeneous city that attracted black intellectuals and artists. According to Sidney H. Bremer:

Harlem's African American newcomers constituted a critical mass large enough to sustain a subculture and to achieve high visibility. Harlem, too, had its own cultural resources of language, folkways, and ritual aesthetic forms. (...) Harlem's migrants from the Jim Crow South viewed the city as a “promised land” (48).

In the twenties, however, Harlem became a symbol of pride and achievement, and also a place of opportunity and hope. It witnessed an artistic explosion and cultural flowering; it was the Harlem Renaissance or the “New Negro Movement”. It was often defined as “a period of remarkable creativity in literature, music, dance, painting, and sculpture by African-Americans, from the end of the First World War in 1917 through the 1920s” (Abrams 114). As a matter of fact, the Harlem Renaissance was a celebration of black cultural heritage. African American artists expressed themselves through a wide range of art disciplines.

The Harlem Renaissance coexisted with the Jazz age. A period when Jazz and blues sparkled with gifted black musicians and composers like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong Cab Calloway and Bessie Smith. These forms of folk music first bounded from New York clubs then it migrated across the nation and beyond. Furthermore, blues as a distinctive part of African-American culture was embraced by some of Harlem Renaissance writers like Langston Hughes who in many occasions incorporated blues either thematically or structurally into his poetry and stories (Hillstrom 58-59). Intellectuals such as Du Bois and Alain Locke also celebrated the spirituality of the age. Alwyn Williams adds, “Harlem was a wild place in the twenties, and jazz was its theme song” (1).

Additionally, Theater was another artistic genre that flourished with the so-called Shuffle Along performance. It was a musical revue that gained a wide recognition among blacks and whites. Among its major performers were Florence Mills and Josephine Baker (Hillstrom 61). Visual arts were another important aspect of the Harlem Renaissance. Some of the great works appeared in the fields of painting and sculpture along with Aaron Douglas and Augusta Savage (Hillstrom 69). Through enormous creative works, black artists revived the richness of their culture and reflected a new vision of their experiences as African-Americans.

With the artistic output of the Harlem Renaissance came to a debate over the direction and purpose that black writers and artists should pursue through their works. As a result, two separate ideologies were dominant. The first was represented by the chief proponent of the "Talented Tenth" W. E. B. Du Bois. In his essay "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926), he demanded that art should be used for propaganda. In other words, black artists should fight the racist stereotypes by presenting respectable images of African Americans that would be embraced by the white society. Accordingly, he called for a body of art that would be accepted and integrated into the mainstream culture and stressed art as a mean for political gain rather than artistic value (Buck 2). The first view held by Du Bois, however, limited the artistic expression into political themes and subject matters that would serve the common issue of African-Americans.

Opposition to art as propaganda view came with the critic, philosopher Alain Locke. In 1925 he published his important anthology *The New Negro*. This publication was considered as "the definitive text, the Bible" of the New Negro movement. It provided, in a comprehensive way, a definition and a review of the cultural achievements of the movement "through the eyes of African-Americans" (Rampersad 87). According to Locke, "Art must discover and show the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid. And all vital art discovers the beauty and opens our eyes to that which previously we could not see."(qtd.in Buck, 2). Likewise, Locke urged African-American writers and artists to express themselves through art and represent the beauty and authenticity of their culture. Moreover, their works should reflect the voice of the black masses, not drawing proper images that appealed to the whites (Bodnner 11).

The second view led by Alain Locke rejected cultural integration and encouraged black artists to celebrate their cultural richness through genuine works that mirrored their distinctive

identity. Despite the opposing views about the function of art black intellectuals agreed upon the power of art in bringing about profound changes in African-American race relations.

II.1.2. Literature of the Harlem Renaissance

Great voices of the Harlem Renaissance were shaped through literary works that dominated the artistic scene more than other disciplines. Scholars generally divided the literary movement into three phases. The first phase stretched from 1917 to 1923. It started with Claude McKay's essay "The Harlem Dancer" in 1917. During this phase black writers were influenced by the leading white intellectuals and writers, they often borrowed from their works to produce African-American cultural expression. Many of them passed their time interacting and working with the Bohemians in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York. Only a handful of African-Americans published significant works of fiction or verse during this period. One of the major texts was *The Book of Negro Poetry* (1922) by James Weldon Johnson, and Claude McKay's book of poetry *Harlem Shadows*. This period is said to end with the publication of Jean Toomer's fascinating novel *Cane* (1923). With the publication of these great works black writers started to allure close attention by mainstream publishers (Beeby 59).

The second phase lasted until about 1926. It was led by the civil rights activists who attempted to use literature to fight against the negative stereotypes of African-Americans and racial segregation. Black writers during this phase enjoyed the support of media through magazines especially Du Bois' *Crisis* and *Opportunity* along with financial support by sympathetic white patrons such as Carl Van Vechten and Charlotte Osgood Mason. The period witnessed some of the most famous publications in the Harlem Renaissance. For instance, *The New Negro* by Alain Locke (1925) was one of the key texts of the movement. Other landmark works included *There Is Confusion* by Jessie Faust and Langston Hughes'

The Weary Blues (1926). The literary output of the second phase, however, was guided by Du Bois's view to art as propaganda and as a mean to convey the positive image of blacks to the world (Beeby 61).

The third phase was the most definitive one because it was dominated by the writers themselves, who expressed their discontent with the Harlem Renaissance's direction. Clashes grew between writers over the role of the black artist and the African-Americans' representation. These tensions however fueled a new period of intensive creativity and expression. Writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay took a stand voiced in Wallace Thurman's short-lived journal, *Fire!!* In which they reflected the need for authentic expression of the black artistry without giving much importance to the white world. Among the prominent works of this phase were Hughes' article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and Nella Larsen's superlative work, *Quicksand* (Beeby 60-61).

The Harlem Renaissance produced a lot of inventive writings that covered a wide range of themes such as race, identity, gender, class, marriage, history, sexuality and slavery versus freedom. Black writers focused on using a style and language that transcend their identity. Therefore, their writings were characterized by the use of folk, bourgeois, and proletarian elements. Folk aesthetic can be found in the use of rural setting with a working class character. Bourgeois aesthetic, however, featured characters of the middle class who achieved social and economic success and they often used standard language. With the proletarian aesthetic black writers raised social and political problems with the intention to find solutions. The role of these texts was to inform and explain rather than entertain (Jones 228-29).

By the late 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance began to wane along with the Great Depression. Incomes drastically reduced; as a result, people had less money to spend on

cultural productions. Consequently, the demand for artistic works decreased. Additionally, mainstream sponsors stopped funding works. Black artists were affected by the economic collapse since they depended on white patronage (Jones 231). Despite the fact that the Harlem Renaissance was short lived, however, it succeeded in taking place in the American literary tradition and became a source of inspiration for future writers (Buck 4). Arnold Rampersad asserts “the Renaissance succeeded in laying the foundations for all subsequent depictions in poetry, fiction, and drama of the modern African-American experiences” (91). African-American writers faced great difficulties during the Great Depression that led to the decrease of literary works. Some devoted writers, however, continued to produce prolific works among them was Zora Neale Hurston.

II.2.3. Zora Neale Hurston Iconic Figure of Black Literature

Zora Neale Hurston was born on January 7, 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, although she gave different birth dates and place in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (Bloom 12). Hurston was raised in a middle-class family in the incorporated black town Eatonville, Florida that provided the inspiration for most of her fiction. Her father John Hurston was mayor of Eatonville, her mother Lucy Potts was a teacher. Hurston’s mother played a major role in her life as she always advised her “to jump at the sun” and fulfill her dreams (Jones 3-4). Hurston enjoyed a stable and comfortable childhood.

When Hurston was thirteen years old her family life was destroyed. She was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to attend school. Hurston was a self-made woman she started to work at an early age to support herself and finish her studies. In 1915 she started working as a performer in a traveling Gilbert and Sullivan company. Two years after she began studies at Morgan Academy in Baltimore where she gained a high school diploma in 1918. She went to Washington, D.C. where she enrolled at Howard University. While there she took classes in

Spanish, Greek, English, and public speak and published her first short story in the college literary magazine. She earned an associate degree in 1920. In 1925 she won a scholarship to Barnard College where she studied with the anthropologist Franz Boas (Jones 4-6).

Hurston's marriage life was unstable, in 1927 she married Herbert Sheen her college friend, four years later they divorced. Her second marriage was to Albert Prince in 1939, however, this marriage lasted a short period before ending. In the last period of her life, Hurston struggled to earn her living; as a result, she worked varied jobs as a teacher, reporter, librarian and even maid (Jones 9-6). In 1959, she suffered from the stroke and she was forced to enter a welfare home in Florida where she died on January 28. 1960. She was buried in unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida. Hurston remained forgotten until 1970 Alice Walker rediscovered her grave and replaced a marker engraved with "A Genius of the South" (Harmon et al .70). Although Hurston was raised and died in poverty and almost forgotten but her works revived interest in her genius writing.

II.2.4. Hurston's Literary Career

Hurston a major African-American female writer was a novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist. She produced a rich body of works with four novels, two books of folklore, and an autobiography, and more than fifty short stories and essays. She is recognized as the first black American writer to collect and publish African-American folklore (Valade III 105). Hurston was a talented and vibrant writer, through her works she attended to be distinctive and creative Florence Edwards Borders says. "She had great self-esteem and confidence in her own ability and judgment. She was not afraid to swim against the tide; and much that is distinctive in her creative work, in her use of anthropological data, and in her personal life can be traced to the tendency not to be swayed by the crowd" (90).

Hurston's literary career was launched during the Harlem Renaissance. She published a collection of short stories such as "John Redding Goes to Sea", "Drenched in Light" and "Spunk". Her works were introduced in Harlem's major magazines like Opportunity. She was also acknowledged as one of the major voices of the short lived magazine Fire!! That devoted its pages to stand against the restricted ideology that dominated Harlem Renaissance artistic works (Jones 4-6). Hurston, in fact, embarked on the richest artistic period of her career when she published her novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Mules and Men*. The novels gained a wide success in which Hurston was praised for her use of "figurative black language and the fusion of anthropological studies with fiction" (Gates III). That made her writings "distinctive", "original" (Jones 7-8).

Additionally, Hurston published other significant fictions such as her book *Tell My Horse* (1938) and her novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939). The latter was considered as a significant contribution to the African -American culture because it described the struggle of the blacks to achieve their freedom. Another important work was her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942). It was an exuberant account of her life and experiences through which Hurston gave pictures from her life and invented others, in order to shed light on complicated issues like race, gender, and class (Jones 9-10). Gates describes the work as a way in which Hurston "wrote herself, and sought in her works to rewrite the "self" of "the race," in its several private and public guises, largely for ideological reasons. That she chooses to show the life of her imagination, as it sought to mold and interpret her environment" (IV).

Perhaps, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was Hurston's major acclaimed work. She wrote this novel in Haiti in a short period of time. It chronicled the life of a young black woman who was searching for her identity in a patriarchal society.(Jones 9). It came in a form of a story inside a story, told through two narrative voices that reflected the novel's complexity

(Jones 173). The work was harshly criticized by some major literary figures like Richard Wright who described the work as a defect and “minstrel technique”. Alain Locke also criticized Hurston’s work as “poetic phrase, for rare dialect, and folk humor” according to him the novel lacked seriousness and it gave a shallow view to social issues (Jones 9).

Despite negative critics of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the novel became a source of interest to many scholars and critics. Loius Gates for instance, depicted the novel as a reflection to Du Bois metaphor of “double consciousness” he states, Hurston’s “usage of a divided voice, a double voice reconciled, that strikes me as her great achievement, a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world”(VI). Jennifer Jordan states that Hurston skillful representation of black female self-realization in a sexist and racist society was considered as “feminist protest” against the domination patriarchal power (108). Accordingly, S. Jay Walker depicted the text as a “black novel of sexism” in which Hurston raised important feminist issues (qtd.in Howard, 403).

In fact, Hurston writings focused on issues related gender, race and class in which she depicted African-American life experiences in America. Through her works, she celebrated the black oral traditions by combining folklore into her texts. She was also noticed for her use of the black vernacular in which she represented the complexity and the beauty of the African-American dialect. Sharon Jones states that Hurston “was implicitly validating a literary tradition that had long been considered secondary”(X).

Hurston’s literary career started to decline when she was charged with molesting a child although she was proved innocent. Years after, she composed works that were not published like *The Lives of Barney Turk* and “The Golden Bench of God,” (Jones 11-12). After her death, Hurston almost disappeared from the literary scene, until Alice Walker reintroduced

her to the public through the article about her life journey. In 1977 Hemenway's *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* promoted her legacy. Soon after, interest renewed on Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it became widely read and discussed by researchers (Bloom 16-17). Despite the obstacles that Hurston faced as black female writer during her life, she produced a staggering number of works and created her place among the prominent figures of the black culture.

II.3. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: A Feminist Novel

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston depicts the struggle of a black woman against male domination. Her protagonist Janie Crawford is searching for her identity and self-fulfillment in a patriarchal world. Janie is raised by her grandmother after her mother runs away. Nanny is a former slave who has experienced the horror of slavery she devotes her life to protect her granddaughter from the harshness of the outside world. Janie spends her childhood in the house of her grandmother's white employer, the Washburn family. With their help Nanny buys land and a house for herself and Janie. In her search for her identity, she goes through three different marriages with three different men.

When Nanny discovers her granddaughter engages in an innocent first kiss, she enforces her to marry an old farmer Logan Killicks because she thinks that this marriage will protect her from male exploitation. Janie's first marriage is not successful. She never feels happy with him because Killicks subdues her and treats her as his mule by obliging her to do farm labor.

Unsatisfied with Killicks oppressive power, Janie leaves him and runs away with Joe Starks to Eatonville, Florida. Jody as she calls him is an ambitious entrepreneur who wants to rebuild the town. Jody soon succeeds in becoming the mayor of Eatonville. Jody builds a beautiful house for Janie and he buys her the best of everything. Soon after the wedding, Jody starts to subdue Janie; he obliges her to cover her hair when selling goods at their store or at

the post office. Furthermore, he tries to silence her when he prevents her from expressing herself and interacting with common people. Jody considers Janie as a possession and he tries to shape her into his vision of what a mayor's wife should be. Things turn aggressive between Janie and her second husband Joe. After a time, Joe falls ill and dies.

After Joe's death, Janie meets Tea Cake (Vergible Woods), who is much younger than she; he is an itinerant laborer and gambler. With him Janie feels for the first time that she is free to act and express herself, she experiences a sense of freedom and personal growth. After their marriage they move to the Everglades, to work in farming. Although Tea Cake is not able to offer her a beautiful house and dresses like Starks does, but he offers her the most important thing that Janie lacks in her previous marriages it is a true love. Eventually, a terrible hurricane hits the town and in an attempt to rescue Janie, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog. Weeks later he falls ill and is driven mad due to rabies. Ultimately, Janie shoots Tea Cake in a self-defense. Janie happy days with Tea Cake come to an end. She is immediately put on trial for murder, but she is proven innocent. She returns to Eatonville to Joe's house more powerful and in peace with herself.

This chapter has shed light on the feminist theory through its three waves along with its major premises. It has also focused on the Harlem Renaissance as an important literary movement during which African-American artists and writers raised their voices against white discrimination and depicted the richness of their culture. Additionally, a part of this chapter has been devoted to raise attention to Hurston's life as a writer with focusing on her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Chapter Two: A Black Woman's Quest for Identity in *Their Eyes*

Were Watching GOD

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Zora Neale Hurston depicts the life of a black woman who is searching for her self-recognition in a world dominated by patriarchal power. Through the novel, Hurston expresses her condemnation to the restriction and oppression of the African-American women. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the journey of the heroine, Janie Crawford into self-realization through her different marriages along with her female identity evolution. It also raises attention to the double oppression of the black women in racist and sexist society. Additionally, the chapter focuses on the progression of the protagonist's voice and her struggle against male power and social conventions to achieve her self-revelation.

I. The Female Self-Revelation in a Male Dominated Society

Self-revelation includes both the experience of conversation and the act of storytelling or self-narration; it is related to the way of voice exercise (Kaplan 101). Feminism as an academic approach to literary criticism revolves around this fundamental value that the voices of women have been oppressed throughout history. The recognition of women as normal human beings who can be identified as possessing power is the major outcome of feminism discourse (Zahara 91). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is concerned with the question of women's identity. Thus, this section will survey Janie, Hurston's heroine, focusing on the dichotomy of women's voice with various stratification of meaning as one part of her identity formation.

I.1.The Image of Janie in a Patriarchal Society

As said in the previous chapter, the feminist theory serves to treat women as a human being and not an object for male gratification. Sandra Bartky, a feminist, believes that women in patriarchal societies experience a kind of destruction “by being too closely identified with [their body]... [Their] entire being is identified with the body, a thing which... has been regarded as less inherently human than the mind or personality”³. In that case, Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* that “woman is reduced to an object condition” (qtd.in Zarrinjooee, 69). Thus, women are confined to their body to be served for male pleasure. In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as Janie returns to Eatonville after a lengthy absence, a group of men objectify Janie and notice her only as a sexual being that is created for their eyes with:

her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist an unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breast trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with their mind what they lost with their eyes. (Hurston 2)

One can understand from the foregoing quotation that Janie is a sex-saturated being or an object for the male gaze. Not only she is seen this way by the men, but she is also thought about and remembered as an object. Thus, Janie is marked by the male because of her physical beauty not her experience, according to Clark “controlling vision means controlling what we see, how we define the world. Visual power, then, brings political power, since those who determine what is seen determine what exists” (qtd.in Hozhabrsadat and Daram, 84). Janie’s body is strongly visible in her community where women are defined by their physical beauty and not their inner one, but what Janie needs is the visibility of power that is part of

³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-objectification/>. Accessed 2nd Mar 2017

her identity formulation. That is, Janie's invisibility is more oppressive when her image is erased by force, not by choice.

Similarly, Joe Starks, Janie's second husband, tries to objectify Janie from the first moment he sees her, "A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on (...) special for you" (Hurston 34). Such words like "pretty," "doll," and "sit" in the discourse of black men like Joe, show that black woman is an object to be watched and enjoyed by men; this is the purpose for which women are created (Zarrinjooee 479). Likewise, Joe also forces Janie to wear the headscarf to hide the glory of her beautiful hair because he sees men not just "figuratively wallowing in it" (Hurston 64) but literally touching it, and she "was there in the store for him to look at, not those others" (Hurston 65). Joe wants to engage privately in scopophilia within a public forum, without subjecting Janie herself to this public gaze. Once she is fixed by gazes other than his own, he loses his exclusive ownership of her body" (Clark 605). This action reveals the reason man works to silence woman's voice because she is not respected as equal human being; she is a mere tool for the male's pleasure.

I.2. Janie's Economic Dependency and Men's Exploitation

French materialist feminists maintain that women are suppressed due to their economic dependence to men who have an exclusive economic power (Tyson 96). In *their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's first real experience as a subject of an economic oppression comes with her first marriage to Logan Killicks who Janie's grandmother, Nanny, has chosen him to be Janie's husband. For Nanny the world's fundamental oppression is economic (Haddox 23), she says:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de

nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!. (Hurston 17)

Based on this quotation, one can observe that the black woman's oppression is economically defined as the “mule uh de world”, she performs unfulfilling physical labor for the black man, who is in turn oppressed by the white men. That is, Nanny’s memories of her own harsh life in slavery and after that period are still affecting her. Thus, she convinces Janie to marry Logan who is older than her because she believes that he will offer her protection as well as stability as he owns “a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road” (Hurston 25). Nanny becomes as “The chief spokesman for prosaic materialism” (Giles 52) because of her existence with the white world (Padhi 49). However, in doing so, Nanny becomes responsible for Janie’s oppression, for as Killicks’s wife, Janie quickly becomes a “mule of the world”.

In fact, Killicks intends to exploit his wife, Janie, by forcing her to work in his field. He says: “Ah need two mules dis yeah. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah’ m talkin’ ‘bout is got tu mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle ‘im’” (Hurston 32). One can notice that Logan tries to reduce Janie as a mere machine, adaptable to a variety of tasks, as he also tells her, “You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh” (Hurston 37). In that case, the materialist feminists maintain that women’s labor exploitation within the home is initial, and the notion of men and women’s nature are secondary concerns the patriarch handles to justify his manipulation (Delphy 24-25). As Logan exploits Janie to work like a mule on the farm, Joe Starks also forces her to stand behind the counter of the shop like shop assistant.

Furthermore, Joe forces Janie first to work in the store without paying her, and then he overwork her and at last prevents her from taking part in communal activities. According to Todd Mc Gowan Joe “does not dominate Janie by forcing her to labor but by turning her into a thing, transforming her into his commodity” (89), Joe tends to oppress Janie and control her by turning her into an overworked mule because when he hears the porch sitters talk about Matt Bonner’s overworked mule, he “would hustle her [Janie] off into the store to sell something” (Hurstons 63). In fact, Jody's concept of a wife is a mere object to be possessed.

Likewise, Janie undergoes the economic dependence also in her third marriage with Tea Cake; he takes her money without consulting her for one week after their marriage. Janie immediately believes that Tea Cake steals her money and abandons her. Nevertheless, Tea Cake returns at dawn but having spent Janie’s money. These actions reinforce that the economic dependence is at the centre of women’s subjection to men (Baldellou 80), even Janie’s three husbands represent different economic manners of black life and her role is also different with each husband from Killicks’ servant to Joes’ wife and then Tea Cake’s lover, but their treatment is the same when one compare the places that are allocated her by three husbands, Killicks: “You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh” (Hurstons37); Starks: “. . . uh woman and her place is in de home” (Hurstons51); Tea Cake: “Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be” (Hurstons173)⁴.

I.3. Patriarchy and the Subordination of Women

In the patriarchal society, a woman is defined as man’s other, she is subordinated to and depended on a man in all spheres of life. Thus, all the power within the family or society maintain totally in his hands (Sultana 7). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Joe perceives

⁴ Jürgen C Wolter, “From History to Communal Narrative: The Merging of Cultural Paradigms in "Their EyesWere Watching God". *American Studies* (46). 2 (2001): 240.

Janie as inferior, solely because she is a woman. This attitude becomes clear when the crowd demands a speech from Janie, Jody tells the townspeople that his “‘wife don't know nothin’ ‘bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home” (Hurston 51).

One can understand from Joe's discourse that a male dominance can be linked to authoritarianism, which according to Lauren E. Duncan: “is related to holding negative attitudes toward feminism and feminists, devaluing women's problem-solving skills and holding misogynist attitudes”(43). Joe aims at silencing women's voice through preventing her first from speaking in public and then prohibiting her from telling stories with the rest of the people on the porch that Janie loves to take part “Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge” (Hurston 63). This illustrates how a male-dominated society of Eatonville denies woman's voice existence. As far as the porch's tradition is one of the main traditions in Eatonville for men and women to participate and exchange views; this habit can be defined as a sociopolitical activity for people in this city (Ash 78-79). In this way, man tends to exclude woman from the process of cultural and social transformations.

In fact, the patriarchal society deprives women from their legal rights and opportunities because the conventional values are constructed mainly to serve men and restrict women's mobility and freedom. This can be illustrated in the novel when Sam, Pheoby's husband, adopts a patriarch norm to talk about women in Eatonville. Pheoby, in her conversation with Janie, reflects Sam's view of women:

Mah husband git so sick of ‘em [women] sometime he makes
‘em all git or home (...) Yeah, Sam say most of ‘em goes to
church so they'll be sure to rise in Judgment. Dat's de day dat

every secret is s' possessed to be made known. They wants to be there and hear it all. (Hurstons7)

One can understand from Sam's humorous talk about those women who go to church, that their action is completely ridiculous because they do not go to church to say their prayers or to take part in a religious ceremony; here, Sam wants to show that there is a different world between men and women in observing their church duties. In fact, Sam's discourse demonstrates that women are as a second status in the society when he uses "em" and "they" five times to refer to all women. In this way, Sam defines women in a way which ascribes a set of negatives behaviors to them, since they are "they" and "them", while men are the opposite term. Thus, Sam employs the binary opposition to put men in a favorable position and women in an unfavorable one.

Through this binary opposition, men define women in terms of absence and lack and men in terms of presence and self. The patriarch uses this oppressive binary opposition to asserts women's inferiority. In *their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston recounts: "Janie loved the conversation (...) and "You' se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman uh" (Hurstons 63). Based on this quotation, one can notice that Joe silences and objectifies Janie not because she is woman, but because she is the Mayor's wife and "... he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her" (Hurstons 48). Joe controls his wife like slave owner to insist her submission. (Wolter 239). In addition, the narrator presents Janie's thought in third person point view, while Joe's thought in first point view. This illustrates Janie's absence and Joe's presence in a male dominated setting (Zarrinjooee 479).

Furthermore, another remarkable example of binary opposition appears in Joe's speech with Janie:

Ah want to make a wife outa you (...) De day you put yo' hand in mine, Ah wouldn't let de sun go down on us single. Ah' m uh man wid principles. You ain't never knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show yuh. Call me Jody lak you do sometimes (...) Leave everything else to me. (Hurstun 35)

Joe Stark speaks in the first point of view that demonstrates a man's strong sense of presence and power. He tends to relegate Janie to submissive roles when he works to define himself as the voice in their marriage. His repetition of the word "Ah," which is the same with I, denies the slightest degree of agency and subjectivity to Janie as a woman, he speaks of himself as one who can create something out of her by saying "Ah want to make a wife out of you". Cixous' claim that woman in the binary thought of activity/passivity occupies the right side in patriarchal societies (Cixous and Clément 63). This is manifest when Joe always assigns the passive role to Janie. He supports the left side of his patriarchal thinking to prove that man is stronger than a woman.

I.4. Men's violence against Janie

Feminism theory maintains that all the domestic violence against women is caused by the patriarchy as part to sustain his power in society (Tracy 576). *In Their Eyes*, Violence is an ever-present theme in case of Nanny and Leafy who are raped by a superior white male. This sexual violence can be explained through what Nanny tells Janie: "de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out" (Hurstun17). Thus, Nanny wants Janie to marry Logan Killicks to protect her from the danger of being raped by a male supremacy and meet the same fate that haunted Leafy, her daughter, and herself (Hozhabrossadat 169). This illustrates the sexual abuse that black women experience from white men who consider the black women only as a mere object of sexual desire.

However, Janie first verbally refuses to do so: “Naw, Nanny, no ma'am (...).He looks like some ole skull head in de grave yard”(Hurston 15). This reaction motivates Nanny to insist her marriage to Logan; Janie again tries to refuse, this time without words: “The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn't know how to tell Nanny that. She merely hunched over and pouted at the floor” (Hurston 17). Janie ‘s silence makes Nanny into slapping her to bring her to the harsh reality of black women, enslaved and raped, Janie submits to Nanny's wish to marry her because she has no voice of her own self, and the power of speech, authority, over her was in the hand of her grandmother (Wendy J 26).

Likewise, Janie, in her first marriage to Killicks, Logan attempts to assert his power by ordering Janie to help him. She refuses and Logan warns her not to “change too many words” with him or he “take holt uh dat axe and come in dere and kill” her (Hurston 38). From this quotation, one can see that Logan tries to silence Janie’s voice by threatening her to be killed because she argues with him about moving a pile of manure. Moreover, he blames her “of her mama, her grandmama and her feelings, and she couldn't do a thing about any of it” (Hurston 38).In fact, Killicks tends to suppress Janie’s spirit and destroy her autonomy by confronting her with her past because, as Marks states, he believes that he has done her a great favor by marrying her, claiming that he has taken her from “de white folk's backyard”(Marks 153). Janie and Logan relationship becomes polluted with domestic violence in the form of verbal abuse. Thus, it results in Janie decision to leave him.

Furthermore, Janie is also violently silenced by Joe when he strikes her several times. Joe “slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears” (Hurston 84-85) when the dinner does not satisfy him. Here, Janie does not say a word, nor does she try excuses or cry out of pain. In fact, this behavior adds Joe a sense of power and victory, while Janie gathers strength for her counter-attack. As Fivush argues silence can lead to power through providing the

space for narratives' creation of resistance and healing. In Janie's case, it is "being silent" rather than "being silenced" (qtd. in Al-Khazraji, 25).

Accordingly, Janie attacks Joe with his words against her when he criticizes her again in front of the townspeople. Janie uses them directly against him in front of his friends and make clear that he has not completely dominated her. This is a weapon she once used against her first husband, and now she resorts to it again in her fight against the abuse of her second husband. According to Tasharofi, once the male feels emasculated, there is a very high probability that he will abuse his wife (124). That is, what Joe does he "struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store" (Hurston 95) because Janie's humiliation before his friends destroys his public image and threatens his place of dominance. This attack, in fact, drives Joe soon to get sick and then dies.

Though Janie and Tea Cake are in love, their marriage does not free from abuse .This can be illustrated when Tea Cake hits Janie because Mrs. Turner, a neighbor woman, who comes to convince Janie leave Tea Cake and marry her wealthy brother. Likewise, Janie also slaps Tea Cake when she suspected him flirting with Nunkie. According to Wolfenstein, the domestic violence occurring between Janie and Tea Cake shows the two aspects of masculinity which are the tension between love's generosity and the selfishness of possession (qtd in. Tasharofi, 126).Tea Cake beats Janie because he feels jealous and he fears that she leaves him for another man. However, out of sexual jealousy, Cake beats Janie to assure his possession and to "show he was boss" (172). That is, Tea Cake, jealous of a suspected rival, beats Janie and the latter did the same action for the same suspicious. Thus, one can notice that the order of the events implies that Janie's action is derivative of Tea Cake's one .This supports the tendency that Tea Cake is a dominant male lover, S. Jay Walker argue (qtd.in kubitschek, 110). In short, the patriarch stimulate all these types of violence from threat of

sexual violence to the verbal and physical abuse only to give themselves the greatest levels of power and authority.

I.5. Shattering the Conventional Stereotypes and Restrictions

One of the traditional gender roles is the belief that woman primary responsibility is home tasks, while man primary responsibility is financial support of a household (Lavalle41). However, in Hurston' novel, *Tea Cake* with Janie breaks conventional gender roles. He displays the opposite traits a man supposes to show in his relationship with a woman. He combs Janie's hair and prepares breakfast for her, "He wouldn't let her git him any breakfast at all. He wanted her to get her rest. He made her stay where she was" (Hurston 127). He teaches her hunting and playing checkers. He asks her to work alongside him picking beans. This relation emphasizes the equal status between man and woman. Likewise, Janie plays a reversed gender role when she works in Joe Starks' store and Logan Killick's field like plowing with mules and chopping the woods shop, but these two relationships are about domination where they ask to work for rather with them. Janie suffers defined sex-role oppression (Miller 77); she is a servant to Logan and ornament to Starks. On the other hand, her relationship to *Tea Cake* is about egalitarian where both give enough space and respect to each other.

Through Hurston's novel, Janie challenges the conventional stereotype roles constructed to men and women in the African-American community. According to Lilli P. Howard "the story of *Their Eyes*, has universal implications for women in that it protests against the restrictions and limitations imposed upon women by a masculine society" (93). For instance, when Janie returned to Eatonville after her moving away with *Tea Cake*, one of the porch-sitters of black women says:

What she doin' coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal? Where she left dat young lad of aboy she went off here wid? Thought she was going to marry? Where he left her?. (Hurston2)

One can observe from this quotation that those women maintain the values and norms of patriarchal black society and they consider any defiance to its role as unacceptable. Thus, they harshly criticize Janie's act of remarriage after the death of Joe Starks and how tragedy happens when forty-year-old Janie marries a twelve-year younger Tea Cake. For them, a woman should not leave her husband even if he is dead and should not marry a man younger than her (Zarrinjooee 476). In fact, the traditional black women are the first obstacle in Janie's way to achieve her identity. Thus, she deconstructs those conventional traditional gender roles and creates her own gender identity to overcome. That is, storytelling by Janie to her best friend Pheoby Watson is a sign of shattering the conventional gender roles. Sharon L. Jones maintains in this context:

As a woman she is in control of her own narrative. She crafts and tells her own life by transcending standard gender roles and breaking free from the expectations of her grandmother and her husbands, Janie has been able to construct an identity that affirms self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-respect. The tale ends in tragedy, but Janie emerges strong, a free woman who determines her own life and, by telling the story to Pheoby, inspires others. (199)

In the process of narrating her own story, Janie exercises her voice and becomes an articulate storyteller which is confined only for a male traditional. The one action that Janie performs along the feminist goals is to share her experience with Phoeby and indirectly with

the women of her society and to encourage them to reach the horizons. Likewise, Hurston like her protagonist Janie struggles against male prejudice throughout her literary career as she revolts against conservative literary ideologies. Such as Hurston's use of African-American dialects of English or what Ive has termed "literary dialect" that is different from the Standard English, such as, "Ah" for the standard "I" and "d" for the standard "th".

In addition, she employs the frame narrative device as a conversation between Janie and her friend Pheoby, to whom she tells her life's story to convey the oral communication that is a part of the Eatonville community's tradition on printed pages. According to Elizabeth A. Meese the frame is not completely believable on the literary level. She argues that the framing device illustrates Janie's "participation in the oral tradition of the culture" (53) than to serve the mimic conversation between friends. Hurston rejects the happy ending of the traditional novel to show how Janie achieves a powerful and independent voice that allows her to come back and tell her story as a mature voice of experience and wisdom (Garner 221). Robert Stepto finds that:

Hurston's curious insistence on having tale-her personal history in and as a literary form-told by an omniscient third person, not by a first-person narrator, implies that not really won her voice and self after all that her author (...) cannot way clear to giving Janie her voice outright. (qtd.in Levecq, 90)

Stepto believes that Hurston's use of third person narration undermines Janie's development of a powerful voice, while, some critics as Prasanta Kumar Padhi sees that third person narration does not prevent reader's attention from Janie's achievement of a voice self-empowered. Further, it draws attention to Hurston's authorial voice and her writing's importance because narrator's tone is similar to Janie's one. That is why Hurston's narrator is

engaged, familiar, and close, unlike the conventional third person narrator who assumes the story distant (51).

Through the novel, Hurston seldom celebrates masculinity. She characterizes woman as a superior gender when she portrays her intervening in a male conversation to challenge the idea of male superiority. In addition to the character of Tea Cake who brings Janie to life; even he belongs to the working class. Therefore, Hurston challenges the conventional belief that the male who is able to offer the best material possession is the best desirable partner. In fact, Hurston and her protagonist Janie both break free of the barriers impose upon them by their own people. They assert their choice and stand for it. In this sense, they do not only break conventional gender roles but also create a new woman's identity (Padhi 51).

II. The Female Self-Realization in a Male Dominated Society

Self-realization or preoccupying with one's self constitutes one of the main issues of Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The story represents the spiritual journey of the protagonist in a male dominated world. It is a portrayal of a black woman's struggle to achieve her autonomy in a society that is prevailed by gender norms and social constraints. According to Toni Flores:

Their Eyes Were Watching God stands squarely within the context of domination and yet sees autonomy, the rejection of domination, and the right to be one's own proper self not only as vital to a fully lived existence but also as possible. Janie claims her own people and she own self, and she makes her own story. (57)

Janie is a stark representation of woman's suffering to find her voice in patriarchal society. As a black woman, she is exposed to all kinds of ignorance and marginality, by men of her own race as well as the white society. However, Janie resists the alienation fostered by

male supremacy and she refuses to be under the control of social conventions. Instead, she takes her own path to self-fulfillment.

II.1.The Concept of Marriage versus Independence

The image of marriage for women and blacks in particular, during early twentieth century, is dark and tragic. Renata Grossi states that for feminists, marriage is regarded as an unequal partnership between men and women with women taking the inferior position. Under this social institution, women are considered as possessions on the hands of their husbands, weak and submissive under the power and domination of men (19-20). She adds, “The dominance of the male/ husband, and the complete subordination of the female/wife. This was so complete in the legal definition of marriage that (...) was, in fact, a ‘civil death’ for women, who were treated like children, idiots, criminals and even slaves” (19). Thus, married women are restricted and abused by the socially constructed norms of gender roles that define male superiority and female subordinate (Laslett and Brenner 382).

Hurston in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* sheds light on marriage as a central and important aspect of female life. In order to show the strong impact of patriarchal values on the process of female self-realization, she plots the protagonist’s growth within the context of marriages to three different men. Janie’s marriage to Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake Woods each represents significant stages in her growth as an independent woman. In her marriage to Logan Killicks, Janie feels imprisoned, since she never loves him. With Jody Starks, she is silenced, and subdued. With Tea Cake, Janie feels fulfilled and empowered (Jones 187).

Surinder Kaur describes the use of Janie’s character as Hurston’s debunking to “the orthodox ways of society that treats a woman as mere an object to be possessed, to be used and to be kicked when no longer fulfilling its assigned role of inferiority and unquestioning

submission to patriarchy” (2). Hurston, in fact, expresses her rebellion against patriarchal ideologies that control women’s life. Furthermore, she calls women to resist the unfair treatment of men. Kaur adds, “[Hurston] questions women’s acceptance of society’s biased manners and urges them to awaken their dormant souls to affirm their status as equal beings and to see the beauty of love and life” (2).

II.1.1. Janie and Logan Killicks: The Domination of Patriarchal Ideology

In the first stages of Janie’s journey to self-fulfillment, she discovers the true meaning of marriage when she is touched by the scene of the bee pollinating the blossom:

She was stretched out on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming with delight. So this was a marriage!.
(Hurston13)

This ideal picture of “natural union” (Jones 189), affects Janie’s view to her life as a woman. Susan Meisenhelder states that Hurston represents marriage as “one free of domination and active/passive polarities: there is no suggestion of rapacious violence by the (male) bees who “sink into the sanctum of a bloom” or of passive victimization on the part of the “sister-calyxes [who] arch to meet the love embrace.”(119). through the image of a blossoming pear tree, Janie conceptualized marriage as an equal relationship that is full of love and harmony between men and women.

Janie’s vision of marriage is soon shattered by the reality that imposes women to male control and restricts her liberation. After she sees Janie kissing Johnny Taylor, Nanny, formed

by her experience of being the powerless object of her white master's desire and the helpless victim of her mistress's violence, she warns Janie about the role she will be expected to play in the world of male-female relationships. She says:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule of de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. (Hurston 17)

In the quotation above, Nanny describes the real picture of the women's world that is completely different from that of Janie. Nanny's experiences with institutionalized racism teach her that black women are mules who carry the heavy burden of their white masters and husbands. They are abused and discriminated, they are victimized by racial, sexual, and class politics. Nanny, in fact, voices "society's degrading notion of colored women" (Kaur 6), who has no choices to live their own lives. According to Julie A. Haurykiewicz, Nanny's explanation of the nature of black-white and male-female relationships is a preparation for Janie to accept "the unavoidable realities of life" (52). This reality puts women under men subjugated.

In order to protect her granddaughter from facing the same fate as the mule woman, Nanny enforces Janie to marry a rich old man, because for her, this marriage can offer Janie with social and economic security. In reality, this is the greatest dream of Nanny. Jongkit Wongpint asserts that "Due to what they have faced such as starving, rapes, violence, what these women [like Nanny] always dream of is to live in a better condition" (33). In other

words, according to Nanny marrying a wealthy man is a shelter from sexual exploitation and economic instability. She puts Janie under the “big protection” (Hurstun 27), but she neglects her right to be free and to take her own decision towards her life.

With the old Logan Killicks, Janie’s comes to face the bitterness of reality. Through the character of Killicks, Hurstun represents the patriarchal ideology that restricts women’s role in the domestic sphere and puts them into view of dependency on male support. As Logan tells Janie, “a whole lot of mens will grin in yo’ face, but dey ain’t gwine tuh work and feed yuh” (Hurstun 36). Logan buys a mule for Janie and he obliged her to help him in the labour: “Ah needs two mules dis yeah (...) Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle”(Hurstun 32). By this act, Logan puts Janie on “his patriarchal pedestal”. This pedestal restrains Janie’s liberty (Kaur 7).

Furthermore, Logan tries to turn Janie to the role of the mule by enforcing her into his obedience. He tells her, “You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick” (Hurstun 32). Logan, in fact, tries to subdue Janie through using his patriarchal power, Toni Flores states that “Logan begins to use the little power he might have in the white man's world, the power over his woman. He seeks to tame her, punish her, harness her, almost literally make her into his mule” (56). In this marriage, Janie is obliged to play the conventional gender role and to be obedient to her husband.

Janie’s ideal conception of marriage is destroyed by Logan Killicks. In this stage, Janie comes to realize that “marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (Hurstun 30). With these words, Hurstun declares the growth of the young Janie to a woman. Todd McGowan maintains, “Hurstun's suggestion here is quite clear, that it is only through the loss of the dream, in this case, the not fulfillment that Janie begins to

develop as a subject” (112). The unhappy relationship with Logan, do not prevent Janie from following her dreams and seeking a chance to find her autonomy.

After freeing herself from Logan’s oppression, Janie feels a sense of empowerment: “What losing so much time for? A feeling of newness and change came her (...) From now on until death she was going to have flower and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom” (Hurstun 38-39). In this phase Janie takes the first step towards her liberation because she refuses to stay under the control of Logan, instead, she takes her own decision about her life. Triggers by her dream of equal and happy marriage, Janie chooses to marry Joe Starks who promises her a better life.

II.1.2.Janie and Joe Starks: The Unquestioning Submission

A new phase in Janie’s journey to self-realization starts with Joe Starks. As Mrs. Starks, the wife of a successful mayor, Janie enjoys social prominence and economic security. However, she is still dominated (Lupton 47). Starks, however, confines and controls every aspect of Janie’s life, he dictates her how to dress and ordered her to keep her head covered. Moreover, he prevents her from interacting and participating in speeches. He announces, “Mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home” (Hurstun 51). Todd notes that Joe Starks tries to control Janie by transforming her into his possession (113).

Joe Starks, just like killicks, seeks to dominate Janie’s life and degrades her to a mere object. Jennifer Jordan asserts, “Joe reduces Janie to an enviable possession. As a possession, she is denied any self-defined goals and even the expression of her own opinions” (109).Once again Janie finds herself weak and submissive to the patriarchal power imposes by her second husband Starks. The latter determined the role of his wife to the domestic sphere, “She’s uh woman and her place is in de home”, he prevents her from her right to be independent and

from expressing herself. Saurinder Kaur explains that Jody wants Janie to follow the traditional gender roles associated with male/ female relationship; that define female passivity and unquestioning submission (8).

Although Janie is silenced by her husband as she is mentally and physically abused. This does not prevent her from expressing her rebellion. When Starks criticizes her appearance in front of people, saying that she is an old woman and nobody wants a woman of her age to be his wife, she strongly replies:

Stop mixin' up mah doings wid mah looks, Jody (...)Yeah, Ah'm nearly forty and you'se already fifty (...) Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo'but den Ah ain't no old women neither. Ah reckon Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big-bellies round here. (Hurston 94)

From the quotation above, one can understand that Janie is a self-confident woman. Despite the oppression and humiliation she faces from her husband, she never considers herself inferior to him. In that case, Jongkit Wongpint points out that Janie's silence and submission to Starks do not mean that she is weak. By keeping silent she increases her inner strength and she learns how to empower herself (43). Janie's challenge to Stark's authority can be seen as an assertion to her self-empowerment. In this phase, Janie releases herself from Starks' control Jennifer Jordan agrees that "Janie liberates herself by engaging in a verbal battle with Jody" (109). Wendy J. McCredie adds "Janie establishes her independence from his voice and causes the death of that voice for the rest of the town" (27).

After Stark's death Janie feels released and happy, she experiences the sweetness of freedom. Hurston says:

Years ago, she had told herself to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the handkerchief on her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. (Hurston 133-4)

By taking off the “handkerchief on her head and let down her plentiful hair”, Janie figuratively removes the constraints of her husband that restrict her freedom, and she “moves one step further in her journey towards developing an independent female identity” (Kaur 10). Apparently, Janie’s strength is developed after Joe’s death she becomes a responsible for herself. She is able to keep the store and manage the financial by herself (Wangpint 46).

II.1.3. Janie and Tea Cake: The End of Male Domination

Janie’s life gradually changes when she meets Tea Cake. She perceives in him the fulfillment of her dreams:

He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to the blossom? a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung upon him. He was a glance from God. (Hurston 126)

With Tea Cake Janie’s ideal image of marriage comes to be true. She feels free to act and express herself. Tea Cake, in fact, loves her and treats her as his equal, with him she has a voice and a right to participate in the community (Jordan 111). And he represents her “self-fulfillment and self-assertion”(qtd .in Kaur, 13). Mary Jane Lupton in her article “Zora Neale Hurston and the Survival of the Female” she states that Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake

breaks her isolation from the physical world in which she “learns to work, to love, to shoot a rifle, to be free, to tell stories, and to strike Tea Cake in their quarreling”(47).

Todd McGowan points out that in Janie’s former marriages she is treated either as a domestic servant (by Killicks) or as an ornamental possession (by Starks). In both marriages, she is oppressed and humiliated. However, in her relationship with Tea Cake, she is liberated and equal (110). Janie tells Phoeby that “Tea Cake ain't no Jody Starks” and that their relationship “ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now I means tuh live mine” (Hurston 134). Susan Meisenhelder explains that Tea Cake breaks the restrictive gender roles which Starks wants to impose and he builds a free and equal relationship with Janie. Unlike Starks who wants to silence and subdue Janie Tea Cake supports her to voice her feelings (123). Cake says, “Have de nerve tuh say whut you mean’ ” (Hurston 129).

Similarly, Todd states that Tea Cake’s liberation to Janie has a side of domination that appears in his jealousy and his attempt to assert his control by his physical abuse of Janie (118). As Hurston notes, “Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (172). Tea Cakes physical abuse can be an indication to the nature of the male character in which Hurston may want to show that in male/female relationship there is always a kind of domination, and man is the dominator. This may be an explanation to the end of the story in which Janie kills Tea Cake, in a self-defense, and she puts an end to male domination. Todd supports “[by shooting Tea Cake] Janie allows [herself] to obtain freedom, to lose her submission to the other. She becomes a subject separated from the other” (111). In fact, the way Hurston ends her story shows that Janie’s self realization lies within herself not in her relationships with men (Greene 271).

After her struggle against male patriarchy, Janie emerges as an independent woman who possesses voice and self-realization (Greene 271). Through her several relationships she goes through a journey from an “object into a subject” (qtd. in Todd, 110) in which she resists the stereotypical gender roles that impose women’s submission to men’s power. Janie takes her own path to selfhood and she finally succeeds to reach her dreams.

II.2.The Evolution of Janie’s Female Identity

Aside from tracing Janie’s struggle against gender norms through her different marriages, Hurston’s novel draws also the internal progression of the protagonist into a self-made woman. In the course of her three relationships, Janie passes through different stages in which she blooms from “a docile worshipper of patriarchy to a self-sustained woman” (Kaur 2). As a result of her several experiences, Janie grows from a voiceless girl into a self-determined woman who is responsible for her life.

Surinder Kaur in her article “Standing Tall: Mapping Step by Step Metamorphosis of Janie Crawford in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” She mapped the journey of Janie into self-realization depending on Downing and Roush’s five stages of women’s identity development. This approach suggests that in female identity formulation, a woman passes through five stages in which she develops from a passive character into an active one (Kaur 4-5).

The first stage of Janie’s female identity development is “Passive Acceptance” (Kaur 4), in which women accept to be controlled by her social norms and traditional gender role (Sepideh 171). Janie, in fact, passively accepts to marry Killicks. She is obliged by her Nanny who is adhered to social traditions and who believes in female needs to male protection. Nanny obliges Janie to accept that women are inferior and dependent to men (Kaur

6-7). In this stage Janie allows her grandmother and her society to determine the way she has to live. Moreover, she is passively convinced that women should be submissive to a man.

Janie enters the second stage of her self-formation which is “Revelation” when she starts to think positively about herself and negatively about men (Kaur 4). This pattern recurs for Janie in her second marriage to Joe who abuses her verbally and physically. This aggression led to the empowerment of Janie’s identity in which she learns to challenge Joe’s authority by her voice. She comes to realize that she has a “split selves” (Fard & Zarrinjooee 96). As Hurston reveals “She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them” (Hurston 85). Zahra Fard et al. explain that Janie realizes that her “internal life is divided between two men: her outside self-exists for Joe and her inside self she is “saving up” for “some man she had never seen” (96). This major change in Janie’s character suggests that she becomes aware of her identity as a woman.

The third stage of female self-formation is “Embeddedness–Emanation” in which woman feels socially and emotionally connected to other women (Kaur 4). Because Janie is socially isolated by her second husband Joe, she has no friend but Phoeby. In this level of identity, Janie faces a problem because she has no contact with women of her society and she can not share her feelings and experiences with her community. Phoeby is the only one who listens to Janie and tries to understand and support her. She can be considered as a bridge between Janie and the members of her community (Kaur 11).

The fourth stage of female self-development is “Synthesis” that occurs when a woman acquires an independent identity and freedom of making decisions according to her personal views (Kaur 5). Janie reaches this level of identity in her marriage with Tea Cake. In which she makes her own choice and decides to live with a man who is younger than her. In this relationship, Janie is seen as an independent woman who speaks and acts naturally. She is

able to express herself freely and to interact with the common people. All this strengthens Janie's self-awareness, and she realizes that women have their own identity (Kaur 12-13).

The last stage of women's identity construction is "Active Commitment". In this phase, a woman commits herself to social change. She strives to end oppression and promote gender equality (Kaur 5). Janie returns to Eatonville full of experience and more powerful than before. Through the course of her relationships, she resists the stereotypes about women as inferior and dependent entities. By telling her story to her friend Phoeby, Janie encourages her and all women of her community to stand against traditional social norms and to look for their own self (Kaur 13-14).

From the earlier analysis, one can understand that Janie passes through different stages in which she moves from a passive follower of male ideology to a self-made woman. Despite the hardships and oppression she faces under patriarchal power, she succeeds to achieve her own voice and autonomy. In fact, Janie refuses to be like her Nanny or her mother Leafy, who were victims of male power and gender norms. In other words, she wants to be her own self.

II.3. Black Female Double Burden: Racism and Sexism

One of the main issues that are raised in Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the African-American women's victimization in a racist-sexist society, especially during slavery. As stated earlier in the first chapter, black feminism maintains that the Afro-American women suffer the intersections oppression of racism and sexism in which they are imposed to exploitation and degradation because of their color and gender. Bell Hooks in her book *Aint I a Woman Black women and feminism* explains that race and gender are an oppressive force that suppresses the black women and exposes them to the power of male-dominated culture both in white and black societies (15).

II.3.1. Sexism and Nanny's Slave Experience

Besides being oppressed by patriarchal power, black women also have faced segregation because of the system of slavery. In fact, black female slaves have experienced violence and humiliation. They have been dehumanized and forced to work in fields along with male slaves and in the domestic household. Furthermore, enslaved women have been subjugated to sexual exploitation by their white masters (Hooks 22). Additionally, due to their sex and race female slaves are exploited and abused more than male slaves. Hooks states, "although it in no way diminishes the suffering and oppression of enslaved black men, it is obvious that the two forces, sexism, and racism, intensify and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of black women" (22).

As a former slave, Nanny, Janie's grandmother has endured exploitation and oppression by her white masters. Nanny recounts her story to Janie, the story that echoes the sufferings of all black slave women, she says:

You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat no body down so till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work- ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn't mah will for things to happen lak they did.
(Hurston 19)

Nanny describes the African-Americans as "branches without roots" this may show that black people have no origins. As slaves, black women have been kidnapped and separated from their families. Once they have arrived to the United States they become the property of their masters who exercise sexual abuse to assert their control over them (Wu1053). This fact

can be one of the reasons that led to the destruction of black families. Laura Dubek states that the white male sexual violence is one of the factors that “precipitate” family separation (115). Due to slavery “it wasn’t for [Nanny] to fulfill her dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do”. She has no right to live her life as she wishes. Her fate is controlled by her white owner.

Nanny is raped by her master; she gives birth to Janie’s mother whose features provoke the anger of her master's wife. The later has demanded to know “whut’s the’ baby doin’ wid gray eyes and yaller hair?”(Hurston 21), and has tried to make Nanny speaks by slapping her “jaws ever which a way”. The weak and helpless Nanny replays, “Ah don't know nothin’ but what Ah’m told tuh do, ‘cause Ah ain’t nothin’ but uh nigger and uh slave” (Hurston 21). The missus is dissatisfied with Nanny’s answer, she has promised her “one hundred lashes wid a raw-hide on yo’ bare back” and that “as soon as dat brat is a month old Ah’m going to sell it offa dis place”(Hurston 22). This conversation may show the harsh reality of the female slave life. In fact, the enslaved women have been enforced to submit to the sexual will of their male masters and to the brutal exploitation of the white women. Thus, it is their race and gender that subjugate them to the worst kind of oppression and exploitation. Hook supports “while racism was clearly the exile that had decreed black people would be enslaved, it was sexism that determined that a lot of black females would be harsher (...) than that of the black male slave” (43).

Nanny flees the tyranny of her missus; she wants to protect her daughter from death. With the emancipation Nanny gains her freedom and she devotes herself to give a better life for Leafy. She “was ‘spectin’ to make a school teacher outa her” (Hurston 23), however, this never happens because, at the age of seventeen, Leafy is raped by her teacher. Once again Hurston represents rape as an oppressive force that asserts male’s power and domination. Tasharofi and Afrougheh maintain that the sexual exploitation of Nanny is because of the

time of slavery; however Leafy's rape is a form of sexist oppression (755). Despite Nanny's effort to offer a stable life for Leafy, she is unable to protect her from male power.

II.3.2. Janie in a Racist Society

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston highlights the black female's oppression in a racist society in which blacks are considered inferior race. One of the incidents that reflect racial discrimination is that of Janie's childhood. When she sees herself for the first time in a photograph taken of her and the white Washburn children, for whom her grandmother works as a servant, Janie does not recognize herself. She recounts the incident to Pheoby:

So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile a me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me Every body laughed, even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, 'Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?' Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named different names. Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said: Aw, aw! Ah'm colored! Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest. (Hurston11)

One can understand from this excerpt that the little girl Janie does not see herself in racial terms. She thinks that she "wuz just like de rest", however when she notices her blackness she comes to realize that she is different. In fact, the laughter of the whites can be considered as a sign of segregation and a lack of consideration for the blacks. Fard and Zarrinjooee mention that by laughing at the blacks "the whites try to deprive the blacks of their selfhood and their

strong sense of identity” (477). This incident may show racial classification reality in which dark-skinned people are ranked in the bottom.

Similarly, Janie says that she has been called with different names one of them is “Alphabet”. This fact may reflect the racist view of the whites who consider the colored people as mere objects to be used and named as they wish. Fard and Zarrinjooee maintain that by denying Janie of her proper name the Washburn family “eradicate” and destroys her sense of identity they transformed her into a possession (477). The little black girl Janie realizes that the black people and the whites are not alike. The blacks are degraded and discriminated because they are considered inferior to the elite whites. This reality, in fact, encourages Janie to accept her blackness and “opens a chasm between races in the [her] mind” (qtd. in Hozhabrossada, 174).

Additionally, Hurston reflects on intra-race relations through the character of Mrs. Turner. The latter is a mulato woman she sees herself superior to the other black folks because she has a lighter skin and features that resemble the white woman. She says:

Ah ain't got no flat nose and liver lips. Ah'm uh featured woman. Ah got white folks' features in my face. Still and all Ah got to be lumped in wid de rest. It ain't fair. Even if dey don't take us in wid de whites, dey oughta make us uh class tuh ourselves. (Hurston 166)

In fact, Mrs. Turner is affected by the white ideals of beauty she thinks that black women who have a lighter skin and straight hair are ranked in the top of society whereas the ones with darker skin and curly hair are stood at the bottom. Mrs. Turner, in fact, is a victim of internalized racism in which the black women believe that the white standards of beauty are a sign of superiority (Tasharofi 1).

According to Sharon Jones, the character of Mrs. Turner “symbolizes racial self-hatred” through which Hurston wants to show the dangers of “intra-racial color prejudice” (191). In fact, Mrs. Turner holds a racial view towards the darker skinned people. She tells Janie, “Ah can’t stand black niggers. Ah don’t blame de white folks from hatin em cause Ah can’t stand em mahself. ‘Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid em. Us oughta class off.”(Hurston 165). Janie replays, “Us can’t do it. We’s uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks” (Hurston 165). Although Janie is a lighter skinned woman but she does not believe in racial classification. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Turner internalized racism can be a result of racial oppression that defines the whites as dominators and superior and the blacks as inferior and submissive.

Through the character of Nanny and Mrs. Turner, Hurston sheds light on the double plight of the African-American women. Because they are blacks and women, the Afro-American women have experienced oppression and degradation in a male dominated society.

II.4. Love and Dream in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston depicts Janie’s search for self-fulfillment and her dream of a true love. At the beginning of her novel, Hurston distinguishes between the dreams of men and that of women. Hurston says:

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston1)

One can understand from this excerpt that dreams of men and women are different. Men do not fight to fulfill their dreams; they either sail “with the tide” or “forever on the horizon”. Whereas women resist and fight to realize their dreams because for them “dream is the truth” James Krasner supports “while men are “Watchers,” observing the fulfillment of plans, prophecies, and desires over time, women are creators, building up and tearing down their temporal fictions as they go”(113). Through this quotation, Hurston may want to show that despite social constraints and male power, women have a strong will to reach their horizon and free themselves from male domination, and through the character of Janie she stresses on this fact.

In fact, through her journey to self-realization Janie searches for a true love that resembles the image of the bee and the blossoming tree. However, Janie’s dream of a true love is destroyed by the reality that neglects love as a significant element in male/female relationship. Nanny performs this reality; she enforces Janie to marry the old Logan killicks to protect her from suffering because of love. Nanny says, “Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! Dat’s just whut’s got us uh pullin’ and uh haulin’ and sweatin’ and doin’ from can’t see in de mornin’ till can’t see at night” (Hurston 28). According to Nanny, love is a mean used by man to abuse and oppress women. Carla Kaplan states that “Love [for Nanny] is a myth, a form of social control, a tool of the patriarchy to trick women into compliance with their own subordination” (125).

Janie’s dream of a fulfilling love comes to be realized with Tea Cake the one who resembles “the love thoughts of women” (Hurston 126). With Tea Cake, Janie experiences the real love. Tea Cake respects her and treats her as his equal, and with him she is able to express her feelings (Kaur12). Unlike her former loveless relationships, Janie describes her relationship with Tea Cake as “uh love game” (Hurston 134). Despite the quarrels and the problems that have faced the two lovers, their relationship stands till Janie shoots Tea Cake in

a self-defense. This tragic end of Janie and Tea Cake love story does not destroy their love but strength its passion (Jordan 110).

From the previous analysis, one can conclude that Hurston's novel reveals the struggle of a woman for equality and liberation in a male-dominated society where she is objectified and oppressed through imposing the image of 'othering' upon her. It also raises issues of gender and class as the main obstacles in Janie's way to achieve her self-fulfillment. In addition, it shows Janie's struggle to articulate her voice that is silenced by men's power and violence. Therefore, violence is one feature that characterizes male's authority and power in Janie's journey to self-discovery. Moreover, it is a journey of women's quest for self. Thus, throughout the story, Janie changes relationships and lifestyles three times in her quest for happiness. As Janie's search for happiness evolves, she comes to shatter masculine limitations that subvert all the pure feelings and emotions of a woman seeking pure love with assertiveness.

Conclusion

The present study has been an attempt to explore the woman's quest for identity in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The novel serves as Janie's struggle to meet her self-fulfillment in a male dominated world. It also stands as a mirror that reflects the experiences of African-American women in sexist and racist society. Moreover, Hurston in her novel skillfully highlights significant feminine issues and raises attention to the harsh life of the black women in early twentieth century America.

The first chapter of this dissertation has been set out to give a general insight into the feminist theory that has been adopted to analyze the novel. As one of the major literary theories, feminist thought has undergone several changes through which women have raised their voices against male oppression and have worked to promote equality between man and woman in various social fields. Black feminism also has appeared to be one of the major parts of feminist thought in which black feminists have expressed their discontent to the ignorance they have faced by the white feminists as well as their protest against the intersection oppression of sexism, racism, and classicism.

Since *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has been associated with the Harlem Renaissance, the second section of the first chapter has been an attempt to give a general account of the literary period. The African-Americans have experienced discrimination and marginalization by the white American society. As a result, they have tried to raise their voice against the white domination and have striven to create a new black identity. During the Harlem Renaissance, African-American writers and artists have celebrated the richness of their culture through a range of artistic and literary works. Among those great writers is Hurston,

her works have reflected significant issues related to the African-American women and all blacks in America.

The second chapter has been devoted to analyze themes of self-realization and self-revelation in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In approaching the novel with a feminist perspective, it has been shown that Janie, as all black women in her society, has faced oppression and exploitation by male power. However, Janie is not like ordinary black women who have accepted to be submissive to male domination, because she has refused to be under male control and she has taken her own path to self-fulfillment. Through her different marriages, Janie has struggled against social conventions and gender norms. She has fought to achieve her freedom from male power and she has succeeded to liberate herself from oppression because at the end of the novel she has appeared to be an independent woman with her own status and identity.

In addition to Janie's struggle against patriarchal power, she has striven to achieve her self-revelation. Throughout the novel, Janie has been silenced in many occasions. Under the authority of Nanny, she has been deprived of expressing her opinion about her first marriage. With her second husband, she has been silenced and obliged to take the role of a mere object. Despite the verbal and physical abuse that Janie has met in her relationships she has learned to articulate her voice against male oppression and domination. She is seen at the end of the story sitting with her friend and narrating her experiences with a strong female voice.

After a close analysis of the novel from feminist perspectives, the conclusion that one can draw is that Janie's search for her identity has undergone a number of obstructions that have been reinforced by social conventions and male power. As a black woman, she has been oppressed and silenced; her identity has been denied due to different patriarchal forces that have subjugated her to submission and passivity. However, Janie's success in breaking the constraints of male power and her achieving of her identity has proved her to be a model of

feminist ideology. Eventually, as a master dissertation, the research is limited in scope and content. However, this dissertation may help to give a view about the experiences of African-American women in the American society.

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ملخص

تدرس هذه المذكرة معاناة المرأة السوداء و سعيها للحصول على هويتها في "عيونهم كانت تراقب الله"، الرواية التي كتبتها زورا نيل هرستن. من خلال الرواية، البطلة جاني تكافح لكسر قيود ومعتقدات مجتمعتها من أجل العثور على صوتها ثم نفسها كأثى وبالتالي هويتها في عالم يهيمن عليه الرجل الذي يحاول قمعها. لهذا يهدف هذا البحث إلى إعطاء تحليل ثاقب لموضوعات الكشف عن الذات النسوية و تحقيقها في مجتمع ذكوري، من خلال رحلة جاني إلى الاستكشاف و سعيها إلى الاستقلال. لتحقيق هذا الهدف يعتمد النهج النسوي. بعد التحليل تم الكشف أن الهوية النسوية تأتي من تجربة الشخص ذاته بدلا من تجربة الأخر