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Gender Roles and Racial Influence in Zora Neale Hurstons' *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1937

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents who have always been my source of inspiration, strength, and courage; who never hesitate to provide me with emotional, spiritual, and financial support.

To my siblings, friends, and my beloved ones; to whoever believed in me and pushed me forward.

To the closest to my heart, my best friend, with whom I shared the bittersweet moments.

Nadjela

Dedication

All thanks to **Allah**, the most gracious and the most merciful for giving me the strength to accomplish this work.

I warmly dedicate this fruit of serious work to:

The soul of my beloved father who is always with me in spirit.

The one whose limitless love, endless support and admirable patience are towering high above my own esteem, my dear mother.

My beloved adoring siblings who believed in me.

To my friends who were always by my side.

You All Have a Significant Role in the Success of this Work

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“ Some say, you never meet your heroes, but I say if you are really blessed you get them as your parents.”

Laura Dern

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My beloved parents for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement throughout my educational career and my personal life.

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Abstract

The study under investigation examines the gender roles in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by the eminent African American author, Zora Neale Hurston. It attempts also to trace the racial segregation among the African American community. This research aims to explore the nature of gender relations and women's undervaluation as well as the supremacy norms in the African American society through analyzing the journey of the protagonist “Janie” to identify her self-worth and independence. The study conducts a descriptive analytical method depending on the feminist theory to demonstrate the male gaze and feminine oppression. This study reveals that male dominance can be expressed variously throughout Janie's marriages; however, women themselves can see the traditional gender relations as necessary and worthwhile. Furthermore, Janie's realization of her self-worth, independence, and voice are affected by her gender as a woman and her skin color as black.

Keywords: gender roles, racial segregation, African American community, feminist theory.

الملخص

تفحص الدراسة الحالية الأدوار التقليدية للجنسين في "عيونهم كانت تراقب الله" (1937) للمؤلفة الأمريكية الأفريقية البارزة، زورا نيل هيرستون. كما تحاول تتبع التمييز العنصري في المجتمع الأمريكي الأفريقي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف طبيعة العلاقات بين الجنسين والاستخفاف بالمرأة وكذلك معايير السيادة في المجتمع الأمريكي الأفريقي من خلال تحليل رحلة بطلة الرواية "جاني" لتحديد قيمتها الذاتية واستقلالها. تتخذ الدراسة منهجًا تحليليًا وصفيًا اعتمادًا على النظرية النسوية لإثبات النظرة الذكورية والقهر الأنثوي. تكشف هذه الدراسة أنه يمكن التعبير عن هيمنة الذكور بأشكال مختلفة خلال زيجات جاني ؛ ومع ذلك ، يمكن للمرأة نفسها أن ترى العلاقات التقليدية بين الجنسين ضرورية وجديرة بالاهتمام. علاوة على ذلك، فإن إدراك جاني لقيمتها الذاتية واستقلالها وصوتها يتأثر بجنسها كامرأة ولون بشرتها الأسود.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدوار الجنسين ، التمييز العنصري ، المجتمع الأمريكي الأفريقي ، النظرية النسوية.

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General Introduction

African American literature has become an integral part of the American culture and history. It reflects the blacks' resistance against the whites' oppression including racism, social segregation, violence, and abuse. However, black female writers in the American society tend to create their own identities and movements by challenging both of racism and sexism. In addition to racism which refers to any social classification depending on skin color, black women had also experienced another social stereotypes that is gender discrimination and male dominance. Zora Neale Hurston is considered as one of the most prominent female authors in the African American literature. Thereby, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is regarded as Hurston's masterpiece tackling the issues of gender differentiation as well as the racial segregation among the African American community. Hurston represents her themes through the eyes of the protagonist Janie Crawford, An African American young lady, along with her journey of self-realization confronting the social norms. The novel becomes a staple in the black American literature which inspired several contemporary female authors.

The motivation that led us to select *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is that it reflects Hurston's objectives to cease the social norms that categorize individuals according to their gender and race. It highlights women's ability to liberate themselves despite the life circumstances. Additionally, the novel tackles the issues of racism, sexism, and class oppression simultaneously which the heroine confronts jointly.

The research paper aims at identifying the protagonist's journey to obtain her self-independence through facing the social norms. It also attempts to determine the struggle of the African American women who do not suffer only from gender discrimination but also from racial segregation as being black individuals. In addition, it provides an analysis of the impulsive factors that lead Janie to realize her final state of liberation. In all, the

objective of the study is to investigate the gender roles and social racial influence in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

To fulfill the aims of our research, three questions are formulated to be answered:

1. How does Hurston portray gender relations in her novel?
2. How does racism influence Janie's life?
3. Does Janie have her self-liberation out of social norms?

Their Eyes Were Watching God has been identified as a controversial literary work which received several critical analyses from various points of view and perspectives. The novel has been criticized as being an anti-feminist work; a thesis, written by Hilde van Rees in 2012, entitled “*Their Eyes Were Watching God: Black Feminism and White Ideals*” discusses the contradicted aspects to feminism within the novel and the struggle of Hurston to combine feminist ideals with traditional gender roles. The paper results that the novel lacks feminist qualities due to Hurston's representation of Janie as a passive character.

Therefore, our research paper attempts to combine both of the themes of racial segregation and gender roles that have been emphasized in Hurston's novel in relation to the protagonist's target goal of self-liberation. Our research focuses on the issues of racism and gender roles within black women in the American community. It deals with a novel written by an African American female writer Zora Neale Hurston who narrates a story of a black young lady; Janie Crawford. Thus, in order to consider these elements, we adopt the feminist theory that is regarded to be adequate to comprehend the relationship between the themes of the work and the oppressed woman.

The current work is divided into two interrelated chapters. The first chapter is entitled Gender Roles and Racism: Feminist Perspective and Historical Background. It is concerned with a theoretical representation of gender roles and racism by introducing its notions and relations from a feminist perspective. The chapter provides a historical background of slavery and racism in America. It also traces back the origins of the black American literature and its writers and major movements in order to gain a full understanding of the black females status and their hardships in the American society.

Subsequently , the second chapter entitled The Representation of Gender Roles and Racism in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their eyes were Watching God* is a practical chapter that introduces an analysis of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by prescribing Janie's characterization in relation to gender roles and racism from a feminist perspective. Throughout the analysis of the protagonist's journey and characterization, the study reveals that the black woman is able to achieve her self-liberation and actualization despite of the obstacles of the social norms.

Chapter One: Gender Roles and Racism: Feminist Perspective and Historical Background

Introduction

It was never a choice to be a woman during the Harlem Renaissance. Back then, women were undervalued and their work was inferior and worthless. They were only meant to be controlled by the patriarchy. In some cases, women who belong to a specific ethnic or racial group may suffer double or multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender and race. Black women, particularly, thought to suffer not only from sexism at the hands of man but also from racism at the hands of whites. Accordingly, this chapter provides definitions of the key terms and concepts used in this study and gives a theoretical overview of gender role beliefs, male dominant society, and race. In addition, it tackles black women's movements to equal rights known as black feminism. Moreover, it undertakes a historical background, definitions, and the main achievements of black writers from the colonial period till the present. Furthermore, it aims at identifying the reasons that led to the appearance of black literature.

1. Definition of Gender Role

During the last half of the 20th century, gender and gender roles had been a topic of study that dominated much of the scholarship in psychology, anthropology, sociology, and literature. To understand the term "gender roles", one is required to understand the term "gender". Gender is a social term that is often used interchangeably with the term "sex". However, sex and gender define different concepts.

According to *Oxford Dictionary*, 'Sex' is defined as a biological concept which is determined on the basis of the primary sex characteristics of individuals. Gender, on the other hand, is referred to the characteristics, values, and meanings that people attribute to different sexes. Dina Anselmi and Anne Law define gender roles as "socially and

culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women” (195). So, the term gender role is mainly adopted to refer to the different attitudes of both men and women based on the social role, behavior, identity, and position appointed by one's culture. Gender roles are different from sex roles in that the latter are biologically determined whereas the former is culturally determined.

2. Definition of Racism

Racism cannot be defined without defining the term race first. According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, race is defined as “a class or kind of people unified by community of interests, habits, or characteristic”. This means that race has nothing to do with the biological construction of people. It is a social concept.

Wijeysinghe et al further explains racism as “a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on certain characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly skin color)” (88). From this definition, racism can be explained according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary as the assumption that all races are different plus the belief that a certain race is inherently superior and dominant over other race (qtd in Zuckerman, 1301).

Moreover, Charles Ridley defines racism as “any behavior or pattern of behavior that tends to systematically deny access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group while perpetuating access to opportunities and privileges (preferential treatment) to members of another racial group.”(28). Accordingly, people who belong to a certain race are seen as inferior and are denied access to power and privileges. While these definitions are important to display the dynamics of domination related to racism, it fails to show what specific actions and behaviors that are considered racist.

Some authors have attempted to investigate some of the behaviors that encompass racism. Mahavijit in her publication explains three levels of racism as identified by the civil rights activist Camara Phyllis Jones. The first level is the institutionalized racism which is a pattern that social institution such as governmental organizations, banks, schools and courts of law , tend to treat certain group of people negatively based on their race. The second level is: internalized racism. It is when people of color hate themselves for being different. They suffer from the negative messages spread about them. Thus, suffer from low self-esteem. This level encourages them to marry people from different race so their children will not suffer like them. The last level is interracial racism. It is when black people discriminate other blacks who have darker skin and more African features. (6)

3. Gender Roles Theories

As gender role became a formalized study. Different theories from different schools of thought emerged to explain why men and women held differing roles within a given culture. These theories which include evolutionary theory, object-relations theory, gender schema theory and social role theory are based from different angles on human development and cultural practices.

In the article “*Biological Theories of Gender*”, Mcleod explains how the genetic bases are one of the principles of gender differences which is described in evolutionary theory. This theory attempts to trace the function of genes and differentially developed behaviors. It suggests that gender roles result from the differences in the biological traits involving chromosomes, brain structure, and hormones. These differences in genes

determine how human behavior is adaptive. Both man and woman develop distinct strategies to ensure their reproduction and survival.

Paradoxically, object-relations theorists such as Chodrow claims that socialization has a major effect on gender evolution; therefore, gender roles can be affected by women themselves through mother and children's relationship. He affirms that the primary relationship between mother and child affects boys and girls disparately. However, males separation from females role such as males children separation from mothers can result to depreciating women's role (qtd. in Wiley 7-9). This socialization of training girls and boys to behave in different ways influence the emergence of gender roles.

In addition to socialization, cognitive organization is considered as another dimension of gender schema theory as developed by Sandra Bem. This theory assumes that children internalize gender schema and beliefs through the way their societies and cultures determine them (qtd. in Starr and Zurbruggen 3). Hence, gender roles can be a product of the interaction between the social experiences and gender schemas produced and ultimately it identifies the adequate traits and behaviors.

Additionally, another point of view about gender development depending on socialization is presumed by Alice Eagly. Eagly's social role theory suggests that the discrimination in societal anticipations and labor among males and females is based on stereotypes adjusting gender roles. Eagly proclaims that there are two different categories of gender stereotypes: communal and agentic characteristics. The former refers to the role characterized by attributes that are related to domestic activities and to women commonly such as nurturance and emotional expressiveness whereas the latter refers to public activities that are commonly related to men including independence and assertiveness attributes as an example. (qtd. in Smith et al. 1160-1161)

Gender roles largely affect behaviors when cultures and societies approve certain stereotypes and create specific gender roles and expectations (Wood and Eagly 77). "Stereotypes are "overgeneralized" beliefs about people based on their membership in one of many social categories" (Anselmi and Law 195). Accordingly, people who belong to a certain social group are determined to behave the same. Therefore, Kay Deaux views that gender stereotypes can be classified according to traits, role behaviors, physical characteristics, and occupations (qtd in Osad'an 25). However, according to Hope Landrine, culture, race, and social class also may raise another dimensions of gender stereotypes. L.Best also states that "Culture has profound effects on behavior, prescribing how babies are delivered, how children are socialized, how they are dressed, what is considered intelligent behavior, what tasks children are taught, and what roles adult men and women will adopt" (202). In this perspective, culture, race, and social class may govern the development of gendered behaviors.

4. Patriarchy Identity

The idea of a patriarchal society emerged with the development of agriculture, approximately nine thousand years ago. According to Frederick Engels, men realized their part in reproduction and started to depreciate women. Therefore, societies preferred the idea of control and was transferred into a patriarchy to save the male line. (35) this led to the creation of inequality between the two sexes because men held power over women.

Societies slowly moved towards a patriarchal model that emphasized control. First, there was a need to control the natural environment for planting and harvesting purposes. Second, it was necessary to control the breeding of domesticated animals for labor and food. And third, men's understanding of their part in reproduction lessened their reverence

for women and instigated their desire to measure descent through, and thereby control, the male line.

These factors led to a worldview that ordered the world into unequal binaries, with men holding positions of power over women. The prevalence of this inequality over the last several thousand years has led to the coming in of measures in the last several decades to address some of these disparities. (35)

Patriarchy mainly refers to the domination of men whether in private or public domains. It can be referred to also as the rule of the fathers. (Sultana 2). Feminists use this concept to describe a society where the power of men and women is unequal. Johnson claims that, “a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered” (5). In this kind of society, women are oppressed and controlled. Men holds superior authority in every institution; political, economic, educational, religious and even more. By dominating higher positions, different power between men and women are created. Hence, men claim the bigger share of wealth, are the ones in control, and considered superiors and more valued. (5-6). This means, that society identifies a specific group, such as men, to be the standard of mankind.

Throughout recorded history, some form of patriarchy has prevailed in most human societies, reinforced by cultural values derived from systems of male dominance. It has been so commonly and continually practiced as to appear natural rather than as humanly constructed social order that is both changing and changeable. In its present form patriarchy has become more an ideology and belief system than the explicit social and political systems of earlier times (Goldberg). This is so because it permeates every sphere of human endeavor. Seen along the same lines as capitalism and socialism, patriarchy and feminism have become bedfellows. Even in countries where legal equality of women and

men has been established, the deep psychological and cultural roots of patriarchy survive as a belief system in the minds of many women and men. A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege, by being male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. By this definition, patriarchy can be viewed from a societal or structural perspective as a general organizational feature of society that was initiated by men and has men as its principal beneficiaries. The word patriarchy comes from the Latin word pater which means father. It most often refers to the political power and authority of males in a society. Patriarchy can also refer to the power of fathers within families(Goldberg). In essence, the overall construction of patriarchy is rooted in the domination of women.

Patriarchy comprises two elements, its structure and its ideology. The structural aspect of patriarchy is manifest in the hierarchical organization of institutions and social relation. The maintenance of such a hierarchical order and the continuation of the authority of the few to some extent is dependent upon its acceptance by the many. The patriarchal ideology serves to reinforce this acceptance (qt in Yahia, 3).

Patriarchy is male-dominated in that, positions of authority, be they in the political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military or domestic sphere, are generally reserved for men. Johnson poses the question as to what patriarchy is, and postulates that “A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privileged by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women.” (3). When women find themselves in such positions of oppression; there is generally some bewilderment as people begin to ask if such women will measure up. In a patriarchy what men say tends to have greater credibility than what women say, all buttressing the privileges of men. Johnson and other scholars assert that when a society identifies a particular group, such as men, as the

standard for human beings in general, it follows that men will be seen as superior leading to a situation where everything male is seen as superior.

In *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, Goldberg states that “Anthropologists have written at length of the areas in which women are unquestionably superior to men” (25). However, his arguments, point to what he describes as the “inevitability” of patriarchy. Goldberg emphasizes that there is no exception to male dominance. He defines patriarchy as, “any system of organization (political, economic, religious, or social) that associates authority and leadership primarily with males and in which males fill the vast majority of authority and leadership positions. ” (30) According to Goldberg, despite varieties different societies have demonstrated in developing different types of political, economic, religious and social systems, there has never been a society that has failed to associate authority and leadership in these areas with men.

5. Black Feminism

Even though the results after the second wave of feminism made a difference in the life of women in the United States, the movement is often remembered as being too white. Many black feminists responded to the women's liberation movement with writings that critically analyzed the second wave of feminism or provided missing pieces of the puzzle. However, there are different aims of each feminist ideology that does not concern only the gender but also the race.

Regardless of the success of the second wave of feminism, some women in the united states still suffered certain kinds of oppression. The movement of feminism was actually considered “too white”. In order to reply to the women’s liberation, many black feminists produced writings in an attempt to make their situation clear by analyzing

critically the second wave of feminism. The aim of these black feminists not only to address the issue of gender but also of race.

Unlike white feminists, Black feminists had to deal with the rooted sexism and racism from both lenses in the white society and the African American one. In this regard, Bell Hooks, in her famous book *Ain't I a Woman* Black Woman and Feminist, states "Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification" (1). Black women were being invisible though they shared the feminist's campaign against patriarchy and sexism.

Even though black feminists share the feminist's campaign against sexism and patriarchy they had to take up the rooted sexism and racism in the American society from both lenses the African American and the white society. In contrast to narrow characterizations of black feminist theory, Valerie Smith offers an expansive description arguing that it does not only refer to a written or practiced theory that is held by black feminists "but also to a way of reading inscriptions of race (particularly but not exclusively blackness), gender (particularly but not exclusively womanhood), and class in modes of cultural expression" (Abel, Barbara, and Moglen 144).

Class, gender, and race are the key features which black feminists seek. Smith describes black feminist theory as not only a written or a practiced one "but also to a way of reading inscriptions of race (particularly but not exclusively blackness), gender (particularly but not exclusively womanhood), and class in modes of cultural expression" (Abel, Barbara, and Moglen 144).

So that to reply to the women's liberation, many black feminists produced writings in an attempt to make their situation clear by analyzing critically the second wave of

feminism. The aim of these black feminist not only to address the issue of gender but also of race.

Therefore Class, gender and race are the features of black feminism they seek to approach. One must mention that “Womanism” stands as a term for this task by black feminists which was coined first by Alice Walker. After dealing with several works of Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes were Watching God* and other works of black female writers, Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* came up with the term "acting womanish" (13).

Many colored women in the 1970s had sought to expand the feminism of the Women's Liberation Movement beyond its concern for the problems of white middle-class women. The adoption of the term womanist signified an inclusion of race and class issues in feminism. Walker also used womanist to refer to a woman who loves other women, whether platonically or sexually(Brekke, Dalakoglou, et al 189).The term womanist is thus both an alternative and an expansion of the term feminist.

In the second wave movement, the question of gender and race were always being a debated issue for black feminist. Bell Hook notes that white feminists did not contributed to criticize the negative side of oppression experienced by the blacks. On the contrary, they intended to romanticize the issue. In addition, black women were considered strong for bearing such oppression. Bell views, " to be strong in the face of oppression is not the same as overcoming oppression" (8). The notion of strength here has a negative aspect because reality is being ignored. Hook further comments that the negative impact of sexism on black women should be discussed by all feminists of all colour. (8). Idealizing the struggle of blacks only confuses the issue of sexism more.

It seems that the question of race and gender were always the debated issue when dealing with black feminism in the second wave movement. Being oppressed by both, Bell Hook notes that white feminists have not contributed to denounce that negative side of the oppression; rather they intended to romanticize it. Moreover, white feminists emphasize on the notion of black women are being strong while bearing that oppression. The "strength" that Hooks views is a negative aspect because their reality is ignored , " to be strong in the face of oppression is not the same as overcoming oppression" (8). Because those who observe the black female experience from different lenses tend to romanticize the whole cause; Hooks comments that feminists of all colors should discuss the negative impact of sexism on the black female lives (8). Hooks and other Black feminists call all feminists to understand that sexism and racism stripped, and still continue stripping, their femininity; therefore, romanticizing this struggle could confuse more their issue.

6. Background of Slavery in America

In 1819s, slavery firstly appeared in America when twenty Africans were brought to the territory of Jamestown, Virginia by a Dutch ship. They were sold as servants for a limited time contract; they were brought to work only for a temporal period of time. Gradually, they became slaves rather than workers serving the whites in all their daily needs; those slaves represented the forced African immigrants in America. Slavery then spread in the colonies widely since the colonists needed more handworkers in the different fields of labor such as agriculture and industry. Slaves therefore witnessed hard life conditions including racism, violence, and abuse; whereas, they explored the other side of the American dream which it became a nightmare during the eighteenth century due to such circumstances. (Kolchin 3-4)

Slavery in America has mainly appeared by the year of Africans were brought firstly to America by a Dutch ship to the territory of Jamestown, Virginia; they were sold as indentured servants for few years. However, American slavery started with these servants since they became slaves serving the white men representing the forced African immigrants to America. Hence, slavery spread sharply in the colonies in order to offer more handworkers. the colonists imported uncountable number of Africans to work in their fields; slavery became fixed and widespread in many colonies. Slaves tasted and saw the other side of the American dream in which it became a nightmare during the eighteenth century. (Kolchin, 3-4)

Slavery in America represented a new system that appeared to encounter the lack of labor in order to help the landholders to grow their crops like sugar, cotton, and tobacco. However, the spread of plantation production controlled the bonded labor. American slavery was a commercial agriculture competition; the southern states were the most producers of the plantation than the north to the blacks. (Kolchin 4)

Kolchin illustrates that the majority of Africans were slaves under the control of the white masters who thought that they are supreme over the blacks and the rulers of the world. As a consequence, the new world slavery was characterized with unequal relationship among whites and blacks. The white men identified the black people as an essential part in the economic order especially in agriculture. (5-6)

Black and white societies were two different environments. The rate of the whites was higher than the one of the blacks. The masters renamed slaves from "Africans" to "African-Americans"; this conversion extended to other slave societies in America. Before 1750, African slaves named their new born children with pure African names, but later on

the African-American slaves received Christian American names during the civil war. (44-45)

In his work "*A Companion to African American History*", the scholar Alton Hornsby asserts that the status of the first blacks in the New World was contended to be submissive, they must be viewed within the perspective of such conceptions and realities of servitude. Though, many historians believe that slavery in United States is primarily a system of race relations; as the goal of slavery was enhancing white supremacy rather than the production of crops. Hornsby claimed that slavery was mainly emerged as an economic need when the colonies firstly brought the Africans as laborers to whom they offered lower payment. However, Africans turned into slaves rather than workers due to their hard conditions in America which is considered as a foreign country to them. (144)

Hornsby, Jr claimed that "slavery developed incidentally in colonial America as economic circumstances - namely the scarcity of cheap labor, the abundance of land, and the helplessness of Africans - resulted in the institution of African slavery." The institution of slavery led to the classification of supreme race "White race" and inferior race "Black race". It generated the collapse of the culture and character of Africans. Colonists soon become aware of the differences between themselves and African immigrants and "color emerged as distinctive feature of the slave status; the trace of color became the trace of slavery". (Hornsby 144-145)

Hornsby also argues that the white servitude was the historic base upon which slavery was constructed. Interestingly, the blacks lost the possibility to acquire property as the basis of genuine freedom; the true shift was that free blacks were not only losing property, but they gradually became property; a transition which was ultimately crystalized in race. (145)

Indeed, slavery was a central institution in the American history until 1865, through which the Africans were subjugated to very atrocious treatment from the early time of captivity then the Middle Passage till the life in the South colonies. The term slavery has been generally described as the submission of one human being to another who can be regarded as property. Likewise, they became slaves or servants to sell and buy at the auction block. The scholars Jean Allain and Keven Bales in their article: “*Slavery and Its Definition*”, claim that slavery is the status where one’s liberty is deprived; turning to be “un-free” serving others.

Furthermore, they presented that the term slavery is challengeable to be precise in a definition in spite of the international adoption of the existed definition since 1926 which is “slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.” (Allain & Bales 3) They discussed the negativity of the general perspective of slavery as an illegal practice against humans and its inappropriate usage. (3)

Bales argues that slavery is the control of one person over another; the slaveholder upon the slave. This control transfers power, freedom of movement, access to the body, and labor benefits to the slaveholder supported by violence and aggression. The aim of this control is primarily economic exploitation, but may include sexual use or psychological benefit. (13)

In his “*Book Atlas of African-American History*”, James Ciment explained the relationship between the slave and the master as “a part of a modern and dynamic economic system” (53). Slaves were harshly exploited by their masters to gain much more profits. For Ciment, slavery was more than just a labor or economic relationship; masters control the slave’s personal life too. As Ciment says: “For slaves, marriage, family,

friendship, home, labor, leisure—all depended upon the whims of the master” (53). The institution of slavery helped the American economy to develop rapidly by producing goods especially cotton production. Ciment supported his point of view stating that “Between 1800 and 1860, cotton production doubled every ten years. By the latter year, the American South was producing two thirds of the world's supply” (53)

James D. Torr, in his work “Slavery” presented several points of view about slavery in history. He discussed John C. Calhoun's, the senator of the United States, point of view who asserts that slavery is a truth of human history. He believes that slavery as owning people and use them as properties without payment is a common practice. “Where two races of different origin...are brought together, the relation now existing in the slave holding states between the two, instead of an evil, a good a positive good.” (Torr 23) According to the previous quotation, Calhoun claimed that slavery is something positive and good since there are two different races in all societies.

There must be one class under the domination of the other class and ought to hive as labors. Calhoun warned the northern abolitionists that they are threatening the division of the U.S., and proclaims that the southerner's masters have to care their slaves better than to freed them and let them work in the industrial north. Besides he assumed that all societies each upper class benefits from the lower class -slaves-, fueled their economic system, and create a stable society. (Torr 23).

In the other hand, the abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld describes slavery as an evil and depicts the cruelty of the slaveholders stating that “there is no man on earth does not believe that slavery is a curse.” (Torr 28) He claimed that many have the same judgment to the case of Human rights against slavery, in which that decision is “Guilty”. Weld argues that humankind have the same sentence “Let it be accursed” that it had an echo in all over

the world. He assumes that slavery is a curse, because slaves lived in conditions of separated families, working in plantation, captured from their mother land to America by force and put in fear, and deprived from their liberty. The historian Weld considers slavery as a crime in human being rights. Through the cruelty that the slaves were treated by, it is a robbing of somebody's freedom and life. (28)

7. An Overview of Black American Literature

Racism and the issue of color conflicts are primarily the reasons that led to the emergence of the black American literature. Thus, African Americans used Literature to establish a position for themselves in the American society.

However, the whites enhanced this issue of discrimination. They developed such inferior ideas and distinguish between the two races through specifying preconceptions originated in images of blackness and physical differences (Bruce 02). Those negative images were brought by English adventurers and traders who visited the African Continent.

The creative writings meanwhile provide a negative portrayal of Africans describing them as savages and ugly people (Bruce 01). The black witnessing in court had been eliminated earlier in the 18th century especially in the south. Accordingly, the free Blacks were obliged to pay taxes and were prohibited from property owning. In Virginia, African Americans had no right to vote as well; they suffered from unjust actions such as donating wives to other men. (64)

African Americans were called 'Colored' 'Negros' 'Black' and 'African American'. Basically, African American literature including novels, poems and plays tackles the status of race as a whole in which those works reflect the identities of its writers. (Warren 05)

African American literature presents a wide range of writings from the colonial period to the present. It is related to different literary periods: The colonial period (1746-1800), antebellum period (1800-1865), the reconstruction period (1865-1900), the protest movement (1960-1969), and contemporary period (1970- present). African American literature attempted to narrate the ugly truth of the American society. Slave narrative was the starting point; though, prose was transformed into the protest novel during the 19th century. (King & Moody-Turner xi).

During the contemporary period, African American authors and artists represent an important part of American literature. Their works were neglected for a long time until the 20th century. Contemporary African American literature was the starting point for a transformation as slavery and racism became less important subjects (King & Moody-Turner xi). This period of time is considered as the golden age of African American literature. Black American writers wanted to prove their skills and glorify their blackness pride. Compared to the previous generation of writers, there was a remarkable difference in their works. (Andrews et al. 14)

A racial conflict emerged as a consequence of the First World War which effect the ongoing sufferance of the African Americans in the years following 1918. (Ellis 284). It allowed African American writers to discuss the racial politics of the USA. Accordingly, Richard Wright determines:

Our black boys do not die for liberty in Flanders. They die in Texas and Georgia; Atlanta is our Marne. Brownsville, Texas, is our Chateau-Thierry. It is a lesson we will never forget; it is written into the pages of our blood, into the ledgers of our bleeding bodies, into columns of judgement figures

and balance figures and balance statements in the lobes of our brains. (Ellis 284)

African American soldiers participate the war in France. This war led to the appearance of the second class of African Americans as they faced policies of discrimination despite they aided the war financially and physically (Ellis 285). The African American press in USA was interested in the events of the war. Hence, poetry was printed; it was called Partisan Poetry which was written by editors, clergymen soldiers or professional readers. During the war, such poetry was a mean to express African American patriotism and sacrifices (290). Some Poets published in African American newspapers and magazines such as *The Crisis* and *The NAACP's House*. Later, much of this poetry was published in collections discussing distinctive themes such as heroism and patriotism of African American soldiers who fought two battles one against the Germans and one against domestic racial prejudice (287).

8. Themes Adopted by Black American Writers

African Americans suffer from segregation and discrimination in all kinds of labor due to their skin color differentiation. Therefore, the themes of oppression and racism are frequently discussed in their writings and literary works. Fiction also tackles the themes of oppression and racism. Hence, Walter White's novel "*The Fire in the Flint*", describes the story of a black physician whose success was hindered by the racial prejudice. Additionally, In Ralph Ellison's "*The Invisible Man*", the concept of invisibility reflects the discrimination that black people witnessed. In the beginning of the novel, the author characterizes the protagonist as a nameless invisible man who bumps into a white man. He thinks that it was an ordinary accident when two people bump into each other due to darkness; however, the protagonist the day after finds his picture published in the Daily

News under the title of “An invisible man bites a white man”. In fact, what bit fact, what bit the white man is his own oppressive and prejudicial views to the black man as savage and violent. (Abbot 46,47; Ward et al. 17).

Another central theme discussed by African American writers is the quest for identity. Identity refers to the characteristics, behaviors, values, and attitudes which define individuals and communities. For African Americans, identity is a central issue because of the oppression and segregation they had undergone. Thus, the theme of identity is recurrent in their literary works. Dasylva & Jegede (2005) summarize the themes in African American literature as “a passionate concern for race and identity, nationhood and dignity, self-integration and self-assertion and a general quest for roots and freedom stemming from the physical and psychological dislocation which slavery had caused”. (191)

African Americans were confused whether they remain blacks and being part of the American society or to become whites and melting in the other part of the American society composition. African American literature is a unique legacy that is produced with a sense of cultural dualism along with its emergence. Historically, slavery and duality of African American are the socio- cultural undercurrent responsible of the emergence of this literature. (Dasylva & Jegede 191).

The Africans who were brought to the US as slaves bring with them their inherent properties, customs, and values which formed the special black identity. Later, these characteristics became the concern of the African American writers in their quest for identity within the American society. Claude McKay, a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance literature uses images in his novel *Home to Harlem* to reflect his nostalgia to his origins which entails his belonging to his black identity as it is stated in the following quotation: “Sometimes there were two or three white women who attracted attention

because they were white and strange to Harlem, but they appeared like faded carnations among those burning orchids of tropical race” (McKay 106)

Slavery as well is considered as the hallmark of the American history which began early in the 17th century. The slaves suffered from psychological and physical struggle. They found themselves sold and bought as goods and treated as nonhumans. The fact that African were sold and bought as goods influenced African American writers to adopt the theme of slavery. They described the experiences of the slaves through a huge number of literary works. Fiction is the most common genre in which the themes of slavery are dominant and covered including fictional novels, biographies and autobiographies. A Countable examples of such works are Frederick Douglass’ “*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*”, Harriet Jacobs’ “*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*”, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, Mary Henderson Eastman’s “*Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*”, and Alice Walker’s “*Color Purple*”.

According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner Dictionary*, Alienation is defined as “the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you”. In other words, it is the feeling of estrangement and disconnection from the other. Black Americans oppression and racism experiences led them to feel alienated; therefore, they withdraw to themselves to feel safer. A classic example is *The Invisible Man*. In addition to the feeling of alienation resulting from the feeling of being unwanted by the other, knowing about their history of slavery caused the need for the quest for their roots. In a number of works, the characters look for a place to call home. Alex Haley’s *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* exemplifies the quest for roots as a theme in African American literature.(Okolo I)

9. The Harlem Renaissance

According to the scholar Alton Hornsby, Jr. in his work *A Companion to African American History*, The term Harlem Renaissance stands for: Harlem is a street in New York City where the black intellectuals used to meet to expand their skills through art, literature, theatre, etc. However, Renaissance means renew or rebirth. For instance, Harlem Renaissance or Black Renaissance was a successful Afro-American cultural movement from 1920 to 1935 which focuses on arts, Afro-American literary history, music, theatre, and visual arts particularly.

It aims at redefining the Negro and to damage the white vision against them and their heritage. Also, it tries to awake the dead African culture. The blacks moved from the rural segregated harshest South to the industrial North looking for labor and freedom. This period witnessed a great exodus; it was known as the Great Migration. The African Americans were aware about their race and proud of it (“Uplifting” the race). They wanted to express their culture and identity in order to give an appropriate image to the black society. The black population in Harlem was the largest population in the globe; it represents the Negro capital. Harlem Renaissance was a means of integration to the African American, because they wanted to melt in the American culture and society. (Hornsby479)

This movement associated with the Civil Rights and formed an organization named the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People 1910) in which the latter defended the Africans civil rights generally. In addition, it looks gaining repeal of the Separate-but-equal doctrine, because the majority of the blacks were living in the south. Harlem gathered most of the African intellectual and leaders to redefine and discover their souls; it plays an important role since it was an economic city and the largest

one in America. Accordingly, they were able to publish their books and magazines in the different available cultural institutions. (Hornsby 479).

The Harlem Renaissance movement had a great effect on the literary production and influence on the history of Africans and American culture. Thus, the scholar Nathan Irvin Huggins asserts that the Harlem Renaissance became an important sign in history which refers to the resistance of the Africans, their fighting for identity, and their black character which was represented through their literature, art, and knowledge. (Hornsby 480)

In addition to Du Bois, the Jamaican poet and novelist Claude McKay (1890 ,1948) is also considered as a prominent figure in the movement. arrived to Harlem in 1914 and became the best-known poet of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay's most published poems are "*Harlem Shadows*" and "*Invocation*". In his works, McKay describes the alienation feeling of the Afro-Americans that racism gave to them. He also wrote a poem titled "The Tropics in New York" which describes his nostalgia and the beauty of his African homeland which he named it the Tropical home. (Howes 240).

Another symbol of Harlem Renaissance poets is Langston Hughes. He born on February 1st, 1902 in Joplin Missouri and died on May 27th, 1967 in New York. Hughes is a novelist, a short story writer, a playwright, a nonfiction writer, and the most famous African American poet. His themes mainly tackle the search for freedom and truth using the dialect English in writing his poems. Mostly, Hughes wrote about the black working class and their culture such as his first book *The Wearing Blues* and the poem of "Fine Clothes to the Jew" . he portrayed the needs of the Blacks and their legacies. (Howes, 203)

Black women poets rarely appear in the Harlem Renaissance. However, Helene Johnson is the only female poet of Harlem Renaissance who wrote in English dialect. She published her first poem "*Tree at Night*" in addition to "*My Race*" in which she

discussed the Blacks senseless of their race. Moreover, “*The Road*” is a poem in which Johnson tackles the issue of racial identity. (Howes 35)

Nella Larsen, a significant novelist in the Harlem Renaissance, born on April 13th, 1891 in Chicago, Illinois, and died on March, 30th, 1964 in New York, New York. She wrote about the biracial community since she experienced a self-conflict of whether belonging to the Blacks or the whites Due to her mixed blood. In her two famous books *Quicksand* and *Passing*, Larson provides an image about self-struggle that the biracial individuals face to finally realize her black blood and pride. (Howes 227)

Adding to the previously mentioned figures, the American philosopher, educator, and writer, Alain Lock who was born on September 13th, 1886, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and died on June 10th, 1954 in New York. Lock was the father of the New Negro Movement; he wrote about the aims of the Harlem Renaissance to pass it all over the world for gaining support. In 1925, he published his famous book “*The New Negro: An Interpretation*” which represents the Afro-Americans' role in developing the racial consciousness, self-confidence, and cultural identity.(Howes 233)

The Blacks were striving for freedom, self reconstruction, and social equality in America. This movement provided a chance to the Blacks to play a role in the American culture. the Harlem Renaissance was an optimistic movement by which the Afro-Americans could redefine their culture and regain their identity through their literature, arts, and ideology.

Conclusion

The ideologies of superiority and inferiority had been deep rooted in the American society. These beliefs were attached to negative meanings to difference. The issues of

racism effected profoundly the African Americans and left its legacy for a long time. However, women with African origin suffered doubled repression of both sexuality and racial discrimination. They were victimized, and marginalized in the scope of their race as well as gender. many works in American literature reflected the miserable life of black women. Black women lived in the bottom of the society. Therefore, they called for attention in a movement know as black feminism. They fought to overcome the inequalities and the stereotypes thrust upon them. African American literature became an essential part of the American literature, culture, and history. Since white Americans failed to apply the values of equality and justice on African Americans, the black liberation movement emerged. Literature was a way for black Americans to defend their social situation. It has described the struggles of African Americans with racism and slavery through providing portrayals that enlighten their experiences and undergone reality of discrimination and segregation. This creative writing has been marked with distinctive names such as African American literature, Negro literature, colored literature as well as Black American literature.

**Chapter Two: The Representation of Gender Roles and Racism in Zora
Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

Introduction

"Their Eyes Were Watching God" (1937) is written by the anthropologist, the folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. This novel is considered as a classic of the Afro-American literature for Hurston created a positive image about the protagonist Janie Crawford and her fulfillment of her feminine identity as a black woman. Hurston depicts the evolution of Janie and her journey from her infancy to her three marriages until she realizes her individuality. This chapter examines the different gender roles beliefs in the African American society. Moreover, it represents the existing racism forms in this society explained accordingly with the application of black feminism theory to demonstrate Janie's liberation and achieving her identity.

1. Plot Summary of Their Eyes Were Watching God

Their Eyes Were Watching God depicts the life of Janie Mae Crawford and her quest for womanhood and freedom. The novel opens in Eatonville, Florida when the protagonist, Janie who is forty years old returns to town and tells her story to her friend Phoeby Watson. Janie who never knew her parents is raised by her grandmother, Nanny. She is a former slave who was raped by her white master. They lived in a white house where she works as a maid. Then, they moved to Eatonville, the town of black people. The journey of Janie starts with the decision of her Nanny to marry Logan Killicks, an old man who owns a house and considerable property to secure and protect her. Janie is not content with this marriage but hopes that she will love Logan someday. Unfortunately, she is abused by him until she meets Joe Starks and flirts secretly with him for a couple of weeks. Eventually, she escapes with him and they got married. Joe Starks became a mayor then he starts controlling and treating her as his own property. Twenty years later, Joe dies and Janie

meets a much younger man: Tea Cake Woods who was described in the novel as “a glance from god” (148). Janie finds true love with Tea Cake even though he is twelve years younger than her and they lived a happy marriage. Unluckily, their joyful life comes to an end when a hurricane hits the Everglades. Tea Cake is attacked and infected by a rabid dog then he goes mad. During his ill and maniacal state, she is forced to shoot him in order to protect herself. In her trial, she is announced innocent by the all white-male jury. Janie returns to Eatonville with gratefulness for Tea Cake for allowing her to taste the true unconditional love which she has been looking for her entire life.

2. Biographical Overview of the Author

Born on January 7th, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, Zora Neale Hurston was the fifth of eight children. When she was three years old, the family moved to the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. Her father, John, was a carpenter, Baptist preacher and mayor of Eatonville. Her mother, Lucy Potts, was a schoolteacher. The death of her mother and the remarriage of her father led the outspoken Hurston to leave her hometown at fourteen and become a wardrobe girl in an all-white traveling show. She completed her education at Morgan Academy in Baltimore and Howard University in Washington, DC, supporting herself with a variety of odd jobs. Her first published story appeared in Howard University's literary magazine in 1921 and she received recognition in 1925 when another story was accepted by the New York magazine *Opportunity*, edited by Charles S. Johnson. The reputation of Hurston grew throughout the rest of the 1920s, she published over than fifty short stories, including two of her most famous works, “Spunk” and “Sweat.” She also published many short plays and presented several revues programs that featured folk music, dance, and storytelling, told in dialect, in an effort to recreate and celebrate black people.

The 1930s and early 1940s was the peak of Hurston's literary career as she considered the novel as her preferred artistic genre. She published four novels and an autobiography. In 1930 Hurston collaborated a play titled *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts*. She published her first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, in 1934 which was well received by the critics because it represented the African American life orderly by stock figures or sentimentality. In 1935, A folklore collection entitled *Mules and Men* followed. Which represents a study of folkways among the African American population of Florida, Hurston traveled to Haiti and wrote what would become her most famous work: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Then she published her second collection *Tell My Horse* in 1938, which represents a blend of travel writing and anthropology based on her examinations of voodoo in Haiti. In 1939 Hurston finished the busy 1930s with the publication of her novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, in 1939. A retelling of the Moses myth from an African American perspective, the novel often shows Hurston at her comic best.

Zora Neale Hurston witnessed many of the major events of the twentieth century concerning modulations of gender, class, and race in America, the events have an ultimate impact (Williams 175). In spite of the struggles that she has confronted due to her status as a black female writer in the early twentieth century, Hurston produced an impressive number of literary works including short stories, drama, nonfiction essays, novels, and folklore. She died from a stroke in 1959 and was buried in unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida on January 28th, 1960. In 1973, her grave was adorned with a headstone placed there by Alice Walker which reads, "Zora Neale Hurston A Genius of the South (1901-1960) , Novelist , Folklorist ,Anthropologist".

3. Investigating Gender Roles in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

3.1 Logan Killicks and the First Marriage

At the age of sixteen, Janie kisses a guy named Johnny Taylor under the pear tree. When Nanny sees her kisses Johnny she arranges her marriage to Logan Killicks but when Janie refuses: “Ah ain’t goin tuh do it no mo’, Nanny. Please don’t make me marry Mr. Killicks.” (Hurstons 47), her grandmother convinces her by saying “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (47). Nanny believes that the only way leading to black woman’s independence is through financial security: “Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection. Ah ain’t gittin’ ole, honey. Ah’m *done* ole” (47).

Also, her past experience as a slave refers to the racism in the novel and explains the troubles that she had to go through as a woman from one side and as a black slave from another. Her traumatic past explains her forcefully protection of Janie but at the same time it foreshadows the sad truth that Janie and Logan’s marriage must be certainly sour for it is not based on her own desire but on her Nanny’s desire and she is not excited because this marriage is the product of her grandmother’s hopes for her, not her own dreams. However, Janie convinces herself that she will love Logan after marriage because “Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant” (53). Janie does not feel sexual desire towards Logan; therefore, she is aware that her love and gender views are different from those of her grandmother.

Despite her financial stability after marriage Janie still does not have feelings for Logan and she complains to Nanny about the absence of love but she faces a severe criticism from her Nanny:

“You come heah wid yo’ mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection [...] you come worryin’ me ’bout love [...] you is wid de

onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road"(55)

Making reference to Logan's wealth again indicates Nanny's projection of her own fear of instability on Janie and as a result controlling her life. After Nanny's death, Janie can decide for herself about love and identity.

Logan is not treating Janie well. He starts to boss her around in an aggressive way and rebukes her for not being different nor gracious and not helping in the fields : "Ah thought you would 'preciate good treatment. Thought Ah'd take and make somethin' outa yuh. You think youse white folks by de way you act." (63). Forhim, by not being passive and dependent, Janie's behavior is not proper for a black woman. This validates Janie's refusal of marrying him in the first place as well as indicating the flaws of Nanny's traditional views of marriage. One day, Janie decides to run away when "a feeling of sudden newness and change came over her" (65). She leaves her husband and heads to south.

3.2 Joe Starks and the Second Marriage

Joe Starks is a handsome black man whom Janie met in the noon down the road while she was married to Logan then. She escaped with him and they got married. While Logan is making her work, Joe is making her dream. His criticism of Logan's treatment of Janie like a dehumanized animal, the opposite situation of marriage that he is presenting to her, foreshadows their problems after marriage. He desires her to be obedient and silent and shows no qualities other than her beauty. He became the mayor and Taylor invites Janie to make a speech but Jody forbids her "Thank yuhfuhyo' compliments, but mahwife 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." (78). Joe believes that his wife does not

possess the intellectual capacity of speech-making as he does and her role as a wife is to stay at home where she belongs which is the traditional world view of a woman. His refusal to allow her to speak indicates that he seeks power over her by trying to suppress her voice and silence her. Her discomfort with his decision marks the first step of her realization that it is necessary for her to have her own voice and express herself.

Jody's will have a big voice "Ah told you in de very first beginnin' dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad, 'causedat makes uh big woman outa you." (82) affirms his attempt to repress Janie's voice, and power for him is something he can only get at people's expense. Also, his need to cover Janie's hair because it is a symbol of her sexuality and unique identity reveals his need of controlling her and her behaviors.

Mrs. Robbins the wife of Tony Robbins comes to the store and requests Jody a bit of meat to feed her children because her husband is not feeding them. The men on the porch started laughing at her and emphasizing that they would never let their wives be in her situation but Janie stands up for her and shows her disapproval of their attitude: "He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuhdifferent [...] It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens." (115)

The men on the porch desires power over women. Janie's decision to defend Mrs. Robbins came as an outbreak of emotions she has experienced but has yet to show is another step in her journey to find herself through this male dominated world.

Despite Janie's passive position in relation to him, her self-awareness has developed towards a more dramatic reconnaissance of her own liberation. Joe gets sick and he becomes unable to walk or sit in a normal way and whenever his health worsens, his insults to Janie becomes more and worse. One day, he humiliates Janie in the store because

she wrongly cuts a piece of tobacco. He also makes fun of her age: "I god amighty! A woman stays round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don't stand dererollin' yo' pop eyes at me widyo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees!" (118). Not only Joe reproves her for her inability as a woman but also for her old age and the way she looks. Surprisingly, Janie does not remain silent as usual and stands for herself: "Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'nyoukin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain'tnothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life." (119)

All the silence and the words she was holding for years because of Joe's oppression breaks in an enormous discharge of vengeance in front of the citizen whom Joe is considering himself superior than them. Joe's illusion of irresistible manhood covered by pride was stolen by Janie publicly. Hurston states: "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible" (120). Janie's response to his humiliation indicates the result of remaining the silence for many years.

Joe eventually dies from his illness and the widowed Janie realizes that her property is a great challenge and she notices how men were offering their advice to her: "But you will. You'se too young uh 'omantuh stay single, andyou'se too pretty for de menstuh leave yuh alone. You'se bound tuhmarry." (132).She laughed at them because she knew that they do not want her but they want her money and she rather wanted to stay single because she likes the feeling of freedom

3.3 Tea Cake and the Third marriage

After Joe's death. Janie visited the store by a tall, handsome man named "Vergible Woods" known as "Tea Cake". They flirt for a few minutes before he invites her to a game

of Checkers “Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice.” (137). This indicates that he treats her equally which makes him different than her previous husbands, Logan and Joe. Their relationship gradually evolves even though he is twelve years younger than her. One night, he suggests that to go fishing at midnight which represents Tea Cake’s uniqueness and his willingness to go against the social norms which is what makes Janie attracted to him.

Hezekiah Pott’s is an employee in Janie’s store. He warns her of Tea Cake because he believes that Janie is superior to him, thus, she should not be with him. She is affected by his warning to some extent but she is still overwhelmed by Tea Cake’s presence.

In her book, *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*, Meisenhelder states: “ Tea Cake's fundamental defiance of the dominant culture's notions concerning both race and sex and his rejection of the oppressive hierarchies that typify a world of mules and men make him "a bee to [Janie's] blossom" ” (Meisenhelder 69)

Janie compares Tea Cake to the pear tree which brings back the memory of Johnny Taylor and the moment of her sexual awakening which indicates her sexual desire towards Tea Cake as well as her excitement about this relationship, however, she still feels that she needs to keep it a secret so that she avoids the judgment of the citizens of the town.

Tea Cake disappears for three days then he returns in a car which he bought to take Janie in a town picnic in order to make their relationship public. This marks that he is different than her previous husbands because he wants to make Janie have fun and to be an equal participant in this relationship and not only a passive voice. Meisenhelder explains: “Tea Cake represents an ideal of masculinity in pointed contrast to Starks's oppressive,

white male god and is the fitting mythic consort for the powerful black woman that Janie becomes.” (67)

After their picnic together, Janie becomes the center of the towns gossiping which explains the consequences of Janie’s behavior to act according to her own desires rather than the traditional norms of the society. Her best friend Pheoby visits her and warns her that people are gossiping about her relationship with Tea Cake saying that Janie is in a higher position and much older than him. Thus, she should not be with him but she rather be mourning her husband’s death: “Folks seen you out in colors and dey thinks you ain’t payin’ deright amount uh respect tuh yo’ dead husband.” (Hurst 155). Pheoby’s warning represents the traditional view of how a widowed woman should act after the death of her husband but Janie is at ease with expressing her joy: “Ah ain’t grievin’ so why do Ah hafta mourn? Tea Cake s me inblue, so Ah wears it.” (155)

Janie and Tea Cake leave Eatonville and move to Jacksonville and they finally got married. Then, they moved to the south to a city named Everglades in order to Tea Cake finds a job in picking beans. Janie is surprised by the fertility of the land and how different it is from any land she has ever seen which symbolizes the new and the lush relationship of her and Tea Cake. He teaches her how to shoot and fire a gun until she becomes more skilled than him but he is not offended by that which puts Janie in a different relationship than she used to. Eventually, she works with him in the fields and she fulfills her role as a wife in the house. She is satisfied because “The house was full of people every night. That is, all around the doorstep was full.” (177) which is something she never experienced before. According to Meisenhelder:

Janie is just another person rather than Mrs.
Mayor, and the Saws, instead of being ostracized,

are accepted as equals. The gender hierarchies of Nanny's metaphor are also foreign to this community [...] black men do not toss the load on to black women; and in the absence of oppressive sex roles that restrict women to serving men, Janie and Tea Cake "partake with everything;" sharing in both paid labor and domestic work.(7)

In her book *The Cambridge introduction to Zora Neale Hurston*, Lorraine King declares that their relationship is depicted as realistic rather than idealized because Tea Cake has his own chauvinistic attitudes; He slapped Janie one day to emphasize his manhood and his masculine control in their relationship. Also, Janie was jealous from a woman named Nunkie hinted at the infidelity of Tea Cake (56).

In spite of Tea Cake's flaws, he was the only love of Janie. Tragically, a hurricane hit the town and they have to move in the storm so he is bitten by a rabid dog when he was saving Janie. He eventually develops rabies and during his maniacal state, Janie killed him in self defense by shooting him with a pistol.

4 Exploring Racism in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

9.1. Features of White Oppression Against Black People

In her journal article entitled "Racism, Feminism and Language in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," Qashgari explained that since its publication, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* received mixed reviews over Hurston's depiction of African Americans' sufferance. The African American critics saw the novel as an oversimplification of racial issues. However, a closer reading of the novel proves otherwise (Qashgari 32).

Qashgari states that Janie's grandmother declares to her that white people are on the top of the social hierarchy. Hurston states "Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out" (qtd. in Qashgari 34). Janie was raised by her Nanny in the backyard of the white folks where her Nanny works as a maid who suffered slavery and was raped by her white master and beaten by her white mistress after she gave birth to Leafy, Janie's mother. The mistress was surprised because the baby is not black "'Nigger, whut'syo' baby doin'wid gray eyes and yaller hair?" (Hurston 50). She beats her and slaps her face then she promises her merciless beating "de overseer will take you to de whippin[...]One hundred lashes wid a raw-hide on yo' bare back. Ah'll have you whipped till de blood run down to yo' heels." (50). Then, she escapes in order to have a better life for her and her daughter. Unfortunately, her heart breaks again when her daughter is raped at the age of seventeen by her teacher. Nanny's traumatic past makes her control Janie's life. "Ahwas born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery." (48) thus, Janie is stuck living in her Nanny's dreams and not living her own life as she desires.

The theme of racism is also represented when Janie and Tea Cake are in Palm Beach after the hurricane and the dead bodies were spread everywhere. Two white men force Tea Cake to help in burying the dead corpses "A huge ditch was dug across the white cemetery and a big ditch was opened across the black grave yard." (217). The corpses are buried differently "They makin' coffins fuh all de white folks [...]" "Whut tuh do 'bout de colored folks? Got boxes fuh dem too?" "Nope. They cain't find enough of 'em tuh go 'round. Jus' sprinkle plenty quick-lime over 'em and cover 'em up." (217). The white corpses are buried with respect but the black ones are thrown like trash thus, Tea Cake cannot bear the emotional pain "Janie, de white folks down dere knows us. It's bad bein' strange niggers

wid white folks. Everybody is aginst yuh.” (218); therefore, they returned to the Everglades.

Janie’s trial after killing Tea Cake is a representation of racism; the judges and the jury are white people. Also, the white audience in the courtroom seat in the front while the black seat in the back. After she is announced innocent, the black people who did not get the chance to witness against her argue that if Tea Cake was white Janie would be announced guilty “She didn’t kill no white man, did she? Well, long as she doesn’t shoot no white man she kin kill jus’ as many niggers as she please.” (238)

9.2. Interracial Racism

Their Eyes Were Watching God does not only approach racism from a limited perspective as being between black and white people; Hurston broadens the concept of racism into what Lester refers to as “intra-racism” (Qashgari 34-35). Tyson define intraracial racism as discrimination within black people against the ones with darker skins and more African characteristics; for instance, the texture of the hair, the shape of the nose and the lips. It is the belief that lighter skinned black people are more attractive and smarter than darker skinned black people (Tyson 156). The concept of intraracial racism is represented through the characters of Joe Starks and Mrs. Turner in the novel.

When Janie and Joe Starks are married, she senses that the citizens are jealous of her and Joe because their lifestyle is higher than the rest of them. Their house for instance has two stories with porches and banisters which makes rest of the town look like servants’ quarters surrounding Joe’s house which was painted in white (Hurston 82). His house represents slavery and racism against his population as well as his need to feel powerful and superior to others even by creating a racist situation. “It was bad enough for white people, but when one of your own color could be so different it put you on a wonder” (83).

Joe went so far that one day he caught a citizen named Henry Pitts taking his ribbon canes. He took them from him and drove him out of town. Some of the citizens complained that he should not do what he has done “Colored folks oughtn’t tuh be so hard on one ’nother.” (84).

The people of the town agree that Joe uses his position as the mayor and he had taken advantage of them and how he uses his knowledge to look better than them “He loves obedience out of everybody under de sound of his voice”(84). They even wonder how does Janie handle living with him and his controlling obsession (85).

Matt Bonner, a citizen who owns a mule. People always make fun of the look of this mule and accuse Matt for not taking care of it. One day the town’s people torture it which makes Janie sad and pity it; therefore, Joe buy it to save him from torture as well as to make Janie happy. When it dies, Joe makes a funeral in the form of a celebration and people from all around the town attend, however, he forbids Janie from attending “You’s Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can’t see what uh woman uh yo’ stability would wanttuh be treasurin’ all dat gum-grease from folks dat don’t even own de house dey sleep in.”(90). Even though he bought the mule because of her, he prohibits her from attending the funeral because not only he believes that he is superior than the rest of the people, he also wants Janie to act according to her position as his wife.

Mrs. Turner is Janie’s neighbor in the everglades. Hurston depicts her as a light black skinned woman who is proud of her pointed nose and her thin lips because she thinks that they make her different than the Negroes (183). “Anyone who looked more white folkish than herself was better than she was in her criteria therefore it was right that they should be cruel to her at times, just as she was cruel to those more negroid than herself” (188). That is why she wants to be Janie’s friend. In spite of her black skin, Mrs Turner is as racist as

white people. She affirms her hatred for black people as she declares her understanding of the reasons why white people hate the blacks, she says: “Ah can’t stand black niggers. Ah don’t blame de white folks from hatin’ ’em’cause Ah can’t stand’emmahself”(qtd.in Qashgari 35).

Mrs. Turner insists on Janie to meet her brother and marry him because for her, lighter skin black people should marry each other in order to “lighten up the race” because there are already too many black folks (Hurstons 183).

Lester (1990) argues that instead of focusing on the violence and hostility between the black people and whites, Zora Neale Hurston’s “social protest” is expressed through “decentring” the white people and their existence in her “celebration of the fullness of black existence” (qtd.in Qashgari 35).

10. Janie’s Rebellion Against the Social Norms and Achieving Self Fulfillment

Janie aims at achieving her individuality and obtain her own voice in a male dominated society. She experiences three marriages before she finds her true self. Her kiss with Johnny Taylor under the blossoming pear tree when she was a teenager marks her first sexual desire which Janie believes that it is true love. Her Nanny arranges Janie’s marriage with Logan Killicks to assure Janie’s protection and security. However, Janie is not satisfied with her marriage because she does not feel the love she has experienced under the pear tree. Janie explains: “Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree” (Hurstons 56). Still, when she complains to her grandmother, the latter accuse her of not being grateful; therefore, she is aware that her love views are different from those of her grandmother. “She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (57). Janie is aware that marriage

and love are different. Moreover, her belief that she will eventually love Logan is proven wrong; consequently, she identifies herself as a woman.

Logan is mistreating Janie. He starts to boss her around aggressively and rebukes her for not being different nor gracious and not helping in the fields. His treatment worsens every day until Janie stands for herself one day when they have a big fight: “Youse mad ’cause Ah don’t fall down and wash-up dese sixty acres uhgroundyuh got. You ain’t done me no favor by marryin’ me. And if dat’s what you call yo’self doin’, Ah don’t thank yuh for it.” (64). This incident marks Janie’s first step towards discovering her real self; thereafter, she runs away with Joe Starks.

After she runs away with Joe and he becomes the mayor, the town’s people suggest her to make a speech as she is the mayor’s wife but Joe forbids her because he seeks power over her by trying to suppress her but her inconvenience with his decision marks the first step of her realization that it is necessary for her to have her own voice and express herself. He also decides that she must cover her hair with a head-rag when she is in the store because she is “for *him* to look at, not those others.” (91). Janie’s silence makes him control her behaviors and also her appearance.

Joe does not allow her to participate in the conversations with the town’s people and when he organizes the mule’s funeral her forbids her from attending whereas people from all around the town are going to attend. After this event, Janie is annoyed more than ever so she decides to speak up and she tells him: “You sho loves to tell me whut to do, but Ah can’t tell you nothin’ Ah see!” (110). Janie starts to find her voice which Hurston describes as: “she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush” (110). She gradually starts to participate in the social conversations.

In her article “Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*”, Maria J. Racine states that in the pursuit of her independence and voice Janie violates Joe verbally when he was dying in a comparable scene(288). Hurston states:

Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours inme.(127)

- Feedback: in-text citations shouldn't be written in this way. Check the MLA

Joe begins by suppressing Janie's voice, but in the end, his own is suppressed. Despite his voice is full and eligible of motivating a town to organize and prosper, it is not authentic or skillful in expressing his internal thoughts and emotions. (Racine288).

The day of Joe's death, Janie looked in the mirror “the young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place” (Hurston128). She is able to see and her beauty. Then, she removes the head-rag that Joe forced her to wear which symbolizes the removing of his control of her life.

After Joe's funeral, Janie thinks of her Nanny and she admits that “all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity” (130). Janie hates the social norms that her Nanny believed in and applied them on Janie “Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon and pinched it in to such a little bit

of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her" (130).

In her article "*The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'*", Claire Crabtree asserts that Hurston obliges the reader to reevaluate Nanny in the light of Janie's self recognition following the death of Joe that Nanny's notion of what Janie should fight for is not only deficient but it is withering. Nanny who was born as a slave wants Janie to exceed the limitations she had suffered (60). Janie's wrath against her Nanny marks her beginning of achieving her self-awareness.

Janie meets Tea Cake and starts to fall in love with him when she thinks of him as "a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring" (Hurston 148) which indicates her excitement about their relationship.

Despite Tea Cake's financial and social inferior situation to both Logan and Joe, he has the ability to express more greatly his feelings for and Janie than either of the other prominent husbands in her life, as is partly witnessed by his expressed desire to comprise Janie in his play as well as his work. And with his support and encouragement, Janie continues to strengthen her voice because she flourishes in love and experiences the respect of an equal partner that she never experienced in her previous marriages (Racine 288).

Janie and Tea Cake live a happy marriage based on mutual respect and love which makes her experience a new sense of self-fulfillment until the hurricane hits the city and Tea Cake is beaten by a dog and infected with rabies which leads her to kill him in order to protect herself. "Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service." (Hurston 233). In spite of her love

for Tea Cake, Janie chose herself over him. “This particular phase in Janie's life marks the epitome in her journey for self-autonomy and gaining her own sense of a horizon. Tea Cake is an essential partner with whom she experiences a sense of fulfillment, as he calumniates her quest for "Chance and change" though at his own sacrifice” (Al-Khazraji 27).

The trial of Janie for murdering Tea Cake, and in front of twelve white-male jurors and a lot of Tea Cake's friends, illustrates the strength of her voice. According to Robert Hemenway, this scene represents her independence as a woman, for she proves to herself to be "a complete woman, no longer divided between an inner and an outer self"(Racine290)

Janie says to Pheoby: “Ah done beentuh de horizon and back” (Hurston 241) which indicates that she has found her voice and built a strong personality in a patriarchal society and she is no longer a passive voice in someone’s life. Janie finally achieves her self-individuality and independence.

Conclusion

Their Eyes Were Watching God portrays Janie’s long journey towards achieving her voice and self independence in the African American society in which the women have to endure the segregation of being women as well as being black. “The novel represents one woman’s courage to go beyond the luxurious life and to explore the real beauty of life and love. It is a story that never ends because “there is no end to reach” (Qashgari 40). The novel portrays the oppression and racism of white people on blacks; furthermore, the racism between blacks themselves. The heroine; Janie, requests love and independence which she finally achieves after experiencing three marriages and overcoming the traditional social beliefs.

General Conclusion

The aim of our research paper is to explore the significance of gender roles and racial influence in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It depended on the descriptive analytical method and relied on the feminist theory in order to provide a truthful image of black women's experience of racism and sexism. The study went through two interrelated chapters.

The first chapter dealt with gender roles, racism and feminism. It started with the definition of gender roles with the differentiation between the terms sex and gender. Then, it outlined the gender role theories that shall be applied. Next, it defined racism with reference to patriarchy. In addition, it gave an overview of black feminism which is the core theory of this study. Since slavery has been a central dilemma for centuries in America, the chapter also provided a concise background of slavery in America; its emergence, reference, and causes. Africans were primarily brought to America as forced servants for labor. Gradually, slavery had expanded all over the country forming such notions of oppression, discrimination, and racism. As a result, Black American literature had emerged as a sort of resistance and self-identification; it serves as a means to convey their preoccupations, interests, hardships and visions.

As far as the black American literature is concerned, this study provided an illustrated survey of the literary writings that were produced by the African American intellectuals. American literary production reflected the struggle of the blacks for freedom and justice; it attempted to narrate the racial segregation and the ugly truth of the American society. The themes of African American literature had developed through writings in different genres including prose and poetry which aided them to express their life conditions and literary legacies. Since African American history is marked by racism and sorrow, African American authors focused in their writings on the themes of racism and oppression, the quest for identity, slavery, and alienation.

Finally, this chapter had also traced the main literary movement that inspired the African American intellectuals to arise awareness of their identity. Harlem Renaissance was a successful Afro-American cultural movement which focuses on arts, Afro-American literary history, music, and theatre. It aims at reshaping the blacks' negative modality that the white vision developed against them. Also, it tries to awake the dead African culture and their heritage.

The second chapter dealt with the analysis of the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to demonstrate how did Zora Neale Hurston portray the themes of gender roles and racism through the life of the protagonist "Janie" who experienced three marital relationships in order to find her true love simultaneously with searching for her voice and self-independence.

Initially, the chapter tackled the struggles that Janie faced during two abusive marriages based on the social traditions as well as the love that she has found on her third marriage. Furthermore, it examined the different forms of racism that exists in the African American community, highlighting that the black people endured two different sorts of segregation; white racism likewise, black racism.

Lastly, it portrayed the evolution of Janie's personality and investigated her journey to find her self-worth from being a voiceless woman who plays a passive role in her relationships with her grandmother and her husbands, into a confident woman. The protagonist rebelled against the traditional social beliefs which impel women to be under men's control and succeeded to express her own identity as a black woman which is the study ultimate result.

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