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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI**

**WOMAN'S VOICE AND IDENTITY
IN "THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD"
BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON
WITH REFERENCE TO RACE, CLASS AND GENDER
Yüksek Lisans Tezi**

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ABSTRACT

In this study we will focus on the race, class and gender effects on the development of voice and identity. The identity of women is an important concept and shapes the lives of women in their own conditions. There is not just one stereotype of woman rather there are women coming from very different life conditions, groups and classes. For this reason identity is a concept that is changing with regards to many conditions. In this study identity concept is analyzed in general and adapted to the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

After the analysis of identity, African American writer Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is surveyed. In doing the analysis the characters within the book are decomposed and then the events that take place in the novel are looked over. The important theme Janie's struggle to find her voice and identity in terms of race class and gender is analyzed. The theme of voice, gaining one's own voice is important to gain an identity and has been given special emphasis.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada ırk, cinsiyet ve sınıf farkının kadın kimliği ve buna bağlı olarak ta kadın sesi oluşumundaki etkileri incelenmiştir. Kadın kimliği oluşumunda içinde bulunulan sosyal, sınıfsal ve ırksal koşullar direkt olarak etkilidir. Ayrıca bu çalışmada kimlik kavramı genel olarak ele alınmış ve gerçekçi bir roman ve romanın kadın karakteri referans verilerek ele alınmıştır.

Afrika asıllı yazar Zora Neale Hurston'ın "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*", "*Tanrıya Bakıyorlardı*" adlı 1937 basımlı romanındaki kadın karakteri Janie'nin kadın kimliği ve sesi oluşumundaki süreci, sebepleri ve sonuçları yaşamı incelenerek irdelenmiştir.

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INTRODUCTION

The identity of women is an important concept. Identity shapes the lives of women in their own conditions. Women have multiple identities because of their changing lifestyles and life courses. There is not just one stereotype of woman rather there are women coming from very different life conditions, groups and classes. These women in different classes have all their own identities and these identities are different from each other. For this reason identity is a concept that is changing with regards to many conditions. In this study we will focus on the race, class and gender effects on the development of the identity.

The identity of white women is different than the identities of African-American women since the two groups of people have different lifestyles and different backgrounds in life. There is African-American identity and African-American consciousness that makes the identity of African-American women different than their white counterparts. The problems of white women are not as much as the problems of the African-American women. The African-American women have several important disadvantages within their lives. These disadvantages are regarding their blackness, regarding their social groups, classes, regarding their works etc. For this reason they have a different consciousness than the white women. The African-American women have been oppressed by white, male society in the U.S. For this reason it is important for them to struggle with this white, male, patriarchal society. So they have been struggling for this reason.

Patriarchy is the male dominated powers of the society. In patriarchal institutions males have the ruling power. They decide and apply power on the women. In most of the fields of life they are more active than women. The patriarchal society is ruled by the men and women are usually oppressed in this society. This causes too many problems in the lives of women and several women fight against the patriarchy to have a better place in the society as well as to gain their own voices and their freedoms in the male dominated world. This is especially true for the feminist women who struggle against the oppressions of patriarchy for the freedom of women and bring in a self conscious and voice.

If we consider the case of African-American women we see that they don't struggle solely against the patriarchal powers within the society. On the other hand they also strive against the white women and their identity construction process which has got nothing to do with them. So they have to construct their own identities and their own realities. In all fields of life they give a fight against the oppression of the society. There is their feminist thought and feminist criticism which is distinct from that of the white women.

In the first part of the introduction to this study the identity politics and feminism will be dealt with in general. In this part the sameness and difference of identity are analyzed with respect to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Other than this the feminist views of identity are analyzed to some extent. Then in the second part of the first chapter the African-American women and identity

concept has been examined and has been adapted to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In this part the realities about the African-American women are surveyed. And in the last part of this chapter identity of women and voice has been evaluated.

After this analysis of identity, feminism and African-American feminism, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is surveyed in the second chapter of the study. In doing the analysis the characters within the book are decomposed and then the events that take place in the book are looked over. The important woman character of the novel is Janie. The important theme is her struggle to find her feminine identity. She begins her journey as a voiceless woman but then experiences a big change and becomes self-confident woman who possesses her own voice and her own freedom. The theme of voice, gaining one's own voice and identity is important and has been given special emphasis.

The reason why I have chosen this study is the importance of self awareness of the issue of finding one's own identity can mostly be achieved by finding one's own voice.

The reason why I have chosen especially this book to examine is; the author deals with the women issues and identity, which will be discussed in this study. Hurston experienced being "the other" in terms of class, race and gender in another cultural environment and reflects this issue in her writings.

I- THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY AND FEMINISM WITH REFERENCE TO “*THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*”

1.1. Gender Role Acquisition and Identity

Gender role is acquired by acquisition of gender knowledge, gender role learning, and parental impact, impact of peers, education and media. So gender role is acquired by interacting with these different social institutions and with the people in these institutions.

Bussey and Bandura say that children's first socialization takes place in the family. As children perceive the world better they begin to label people, objects, and styles of behavior according to gender. As the children begin to learn the language they then notice that there is a difference in naming the male and the female. They hear others using different and specific words to indicate the males and the females. Then they learn the boy and the girl and then the mother and the father and then more generally men and women. So they both learn to categorize people on the basis of gender and also the activities that characterize these genders. (696).

Sex differences are both naturally formed and learned and gender roles are learned. The sex difference has its biological, psychological and social components. First of all females and males have different biological make up. According to Wood and Eagly sex differences in behavior “emerge primarily from physical sex differences in conjunction with influences of the economy,

social structure, ecology, and cultural beliefs is potentially reconcilable with theories of co evolution by genetic and cultural processes” (421). So the natural difference between the male and the female then is shaped by socially learned and inherited gender roles and labels.

Wood and Eagly sex differences cannot be reduced to a simple nature-versus-nurture dichotomy. Both the environmental factors and the biological origins should be taken into account to understand sex differences. There may be both genetically mediated adaptations to primeval conditions, as well as the environmental and cultural factors that shape and interact with adaptations to create sex-typed responses (413). So gender roles are formed with the interaction of the biological foundations and social and cultural understandings and labeling. As a realistic novel, which will be analyzed in the next chapter of this study, Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be a good example to support the aforementioned ideas. Janie is the protagonist of the novel and one of the male figures playing prominently in Janie's life is the white man who raped her grandmother; her lineage determines, therefore, that Janie will look whiter than other black women. Yet that outward appearance aside, Janie’s identity takes shape in response to the white male tyranny that made her own birth possible.

From the early ages onward the child learns the gender role differences and labeling from his/her parents and then as mentioned above from other institutions and from a socially-created gender roles. Then certain social roles are said to be the roles of women and others the role of the men. For example

house work like cleaning, ironing, washing are considered to be female roles and women choose certain professions like nursing more since these professions are considered as female jobs. Such role learning takes place in many societies where women have a secondary role with respect to men. Again an exemplification from T.E.W.W.G can support the aforementioned idea. After joyfully discovering an archetype for sensuality and love under the pear tree at age sixteen, Janie quickly comes to understand the reality of marriage when she marries Logan Killicks, then Joe Starks. Both men attempt to coerce Janie into submission to them by treating her like a possession: where Killicks works Janie like a mule, Joe objectifies her like a medal around his neck. In addition, Janie learns that passion and love are tied to violence, as Killicks threatens to kill her, and both Joe and Tea Cake beat her to assert their dominance. Yet Janie continually struggles to keep her inner Self intact and strong, remaining resilient in spite of her husbands' physical, verbal, and mental abuse.

Bussey and Bandura state that parents play an important role in children's gender development by structuring, channeling, modeling, labeling, reacting and directing the gender-related issues. As the children grow their verbal and cognitive abilities increase, they become more receptive and open to the direction of their parents. So their parents instruct them about gender-related actions and styles of conduct. They teach them the roles beyond classifying objects and people and help them to classify activities into male and female categories (698). An exemplification from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to reinforce previously described concept:

In the first section of the novel we see Janie's early years with her grandmother, Nanny. This segment of the book is important as it shows Nanny's protective love for Janie and how she wants her to have a better life than she did. In addition, this section is also important because it illustrates Janie's feelings and dreams about love, which is a central theme throughout the novel. Hurston compared her life to a tree, "Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done, and undone (Hurston 8). The image of the pear tree continues as Janie becomes captivated with one in Nanny's backyard. She sees a bee enter the center of a bloom and extract pollen and begins to understand and dream about love and marriage. "So this was a marriage," is an important sentence because it shows free indirect discourse between Janie and Hurston's voices (11). Janie desires true romantic love-unconditional love, which she will not get until her third marriage. This portion of the story is very important because it illustrates how different Janie is than the other black women in the novel. The other women like Nanny accept their conditions while Janie alone has the power to see what she wants and desires. For instance, Nanny believes that all black women have to bear the burdens of society because they are the "mules of the world" while Janie sees beauty in nature and knows there are bees someplace that will sing for her. In the first stage of Janie's life, we see different types of love established. Janie's identity is very much intertwined with her grandmother's, putting her own desires on the back burner to make her Nanny happy. I would call this love a caring love but not an unconditional love. Janie tried to express her own wishes but was unsuccessful and ended up marrying Logan Killicks, suppressing her own dreams of romantic love. We could say her dream was deferred.

Huston states that when children's socialization goes beyond the home their friends become another important source for their gender development. Their friends are sources of social learning. They present models and styles of conduct. They become references for personal approval of which actions are appropriate for certain genders. In giving a meaning and socially creating their activities children associate themselves with the same gender while they are playing, they develop gender-specific interests and activities (389-393).

According to Bussey and Bandura the other two important factors in gender role development are the educational practices and the media. School is the first outside the home institution affecting and developing the gender roles. Schools are the second important socialization institutions where the children meet their same genders and exchange ideas and imitate behavior of their peers. Teachers also play an important role in the acceptance and development of gender roles. For example, teachers criticize children for engaging in play activities which are seen as inappropriate for their gender. Teachers have certain ways of rewards and punishments when the students engage/do not engage in appropriate gender activities and gender roles. Also teachers pay more attention to boys than for girls. Boys are praised more and teachers pay more attention to boys than girls. There is also a difference in the way of rewarding. Boys are rewarded for academic success and they are criticized for misbehavior. On the other hand, girls tend to be praised for tidiness and compliance and are criticized for academic failure. Children are continually exposed to different gender related behavior models in story books, normal and

comic books, video games, radio, newspapers, television and the Internet. In these representations males are generally shown as directive, venturesome, enterprising, and busy with their occupations. On the other hand, women are usually shown as acting dependently, not ambitious, and in emotional ways. Men are shown with careers of high status, but the women are shown in the house and limited to domestic roles or employed in low-status jobs (701).

Woods and Eagly say that when gender differences occur in power, status and control of the society's resources women become disadvantaged in comparison with men. So a patriarchal system forms. In the non-industrial societies as well as the industrial ones women are subordinated to men in different forms. For example, women lack political representation in many societies. Also women are less educated and they are less literate, they have less access to health care and sexual autonomy. They are also disadvantaged in their control of economic resources, wages for paid labor, and access to professional and managerial employment (710).

According to Hodges and friends male and female televised characters are also shown as differing in their capabilities. Men are more likely to be shown exercising control over events. On the other hand, women tend to be more at the mercy of others, especially in the coercive relationships that populate the prime time fare (539-541). Women take the softer and care-taking roles and the house work and they are subordinated to men because their work does not have a higher market value and it is overlooked. Men are shown to have careers often of high status, whereas women are largely limited to domestic

roles or employed in low-status jobs. But in the changing world with globalization this static gender division and gender roles at work are changing. But still the basic gender difference continues. As stated by Bussey and Bandura, In the modern computerized workplace, men appear as managers and experts, whereas women appear as clerical workers or as merely attractive attendants in computer work stations (701).

In the eastern societies like China, Japan and Korea the social organization is very hierarchical, the civil society did not develop much and the men are the power holders. But in the west the state is more democratic, civil society has developed, the society is open and democratic. Women are less dependent on men, especially in economic terms. The gender roles are not so strict and the social institutions like schools and media do not directly give a strict gender role definition. But still in both the east and the west gender roles are defined and they favor the males. So even as the social organization and the economic organization changes throughout history the gender differences stay. They take different forms but still the difference exists.

Wood and Eagly state that with the technological revolution women are getting better opportunities. The new opportunities and advantages to women are brought with the technological revolution and the change in education and work place. Women's rates of school and university education now exceed those of men in the United States and some other nations (721). Even if it is not so much there is a tendency of increase in men's responsibility regarding child care and other domestic work and technology is helping this. These changes

are creating the social environment and organization to refine the patterns of behavior that are appropriate for women and men. The post-industrial society is giving more chances and opportunities to women since the society can now handle the child care and women are getting more involved into the work life, especially in the very developed nations like US, Europe and Japan.

1.2. Identity and Its Principles by examining *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Identity is a crucial concept for the self and especially for women most of whom see themselves through the eyes of the socially-created images and identities. Such socially created and directed identity concepts, reflections and images most of the time conceal their true identities. This is more so in the case of woman identities since the male-dominant conceptions of identity prevail. In order to support aforementioned idea Hurston's novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* can be a good example. The main woman character Janie clearly is subjugated in two places by Joe. The first incident was when he prevents Janie from speaking. His "big voice" stifled hers making her feel unloved, "Joe spoke without giving her a chance to say anything and it took the bloom off of things" (43). The second example of Janie's subjugation was the way he made her tie her hair up. Janie's hair was a symbol of her character, and by making her tie it up or hide it, we see his need to control her and his desire that she remain unattractive to other men. In this section of the novel we also see chiasmus used in conjunction with antithesis in the phrase, "The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe's positions and possessions, but none had the temerity to challenge him. They bowed down to

him rather, because he was all of these things, and then again he was all of these things because the town bowed down (50). The aforementioned phrase is important in terms of Janie's identity because she was also responsible for allowing Joe to control her-she was still buying into her own oppression at this point in the novel.

In order to begin to analyze the concept of identity in general it will be very useful to resort to the standardized definitions of identity which are found in the dictionaries. Identity is a concept that includes the opposite forces of sameness and difference. The meaning of identity is given by Hekman from the Oxford English Dictionary as follows:

1. The quality of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness.
2. The sameness of a person or thing at all times and in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality. (5).

From these definitions it can be seen that identity, individuality and sameness are connected and interrelated. A person is a different one but s/he is identical with all others in his/her class or any other group. To be the same with himself/herself over time makes a person different among other persons. So the concept of identity includes a paradox or includes the opposites in it. Identity by including these opposites provides a place for opposites on which

the sameness and the difference of the individual are constructed. Women are identical among themselves but at the same time they are different from each other. Identity is about the personal, about sameness and about the social and difference.

The second part of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, can be a sample for aforementioned information that tells the story of Nanny as well as the end of Janie's childhood. Nanny tried to live vicariously through Janie and wanted her to have the life she dreamed of as a girl-never mind what Janie wanted. Nanny always aspired to live a secure life and wasn't concerned about love like Janie was. Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks wasn't anything like she dreamed it would be and this disappoints her greatly. In addition, this part of the story is very important because it shows again how different Janie is compared to the other black women in the book. Janie is unhappy in her marriage while Nanny is totally baffled by her unhappiness. To Nanny, Logan Killicks seems like the perfect husband, due to his 60 acres of land, because she grew up a slave and owning land was something only white people could do. Nanny wants Janie to have land because she equates land with power and desires Janie to have that power. However, Janie is a different type of woman and land would not be enough to make her happy. Janie said, "Ah want things sweet with my marriage like when you sit under a pear tree and think" showing her close relationship with nature (24). She had feelings and dreams and the people in her life weren't supportive of her, so she expressed herself to the falling seeds.

Hekman states that the sexes are identical with each other according to Plato (6). The reason for this is that souls are sexless. This is one of the basic

principles on which individuals are constructed. The individual is thought for most of the time as an abstract and neutral being. But this individual is lacking a social context yet. There is no individual that lacks a social context. All individuals are defined within a social context. This social context determines their being to an extent. So an important problem here is that the individual also has got a sex. This point is not being regarded by many thinkers who have worked on identity, but the point needs to be seriously taken into consideration. In its original form the identity of the human body is a neutral and blank state and on this neutral and blank state of the human body the social texts are written. So before there is a social body there is the body of the individual and on this blank body of the individual the social texts are written and in this way the individual is constructed. But there are many differences between the individuals in this respect. As stated by Hekman individuals come from different social contexts and they belong to different social groups and classes such as the Latinos, Blacks, Whites, etc. (7). For this reason they have different bodily needs and desires. We can understand this body of the individual by looking at its desires and at its aims in life. The body of the individual wants to get liberated and wants to construct its own identity by gaining its own voice in the social world. An example from T.E.W.W.G to support aforementioned concept: In living her dream while embracing her voice and blackness, Janie's character shows us the importance of being who you are. She embraced her culture, her roots, didn't try to be white or anything other than what she was. Part of Janie's discovery of who she was entailed learning about her blackness in which Tea Cake played a valuable role. However, Janie was still oppressed as a woman in black society in the novel. She was not a mule, or a showpiece, but was

beaten by Tea Cake to show Mrs. Turner's brother and everyone in their community that he had control over her. Some people might say that Janie lost her voice for a while in this section of the book due to her love of Tea Cake and her silence at the trial after his death, but I would disagree. At the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we see how during Janie's trial she is condemned by her fellow black people and how a white doctor speaks for her during the trial. The fact that we don't actually hear Janie speak during the trial in no way shows her lack of voice to speak in her own defense. Janie knew using her voice in this scene would be of no use to her so she decided to keep quiet. Her power and voice is shown by the fact that she made the choice to stay silent. Janie, during her journey, has made sense of her marriages and of her struggle to find her own voice. She no longer needs to stare off into the horizon in hopes of change, but instead she can rejoice in her memories. She is free to wear her overalls and her hair down. Janie is secure in her own womanhood having experienced her dream of true love. Janie's struggle can be summed up with, "you got to go there tuh know there," which exemplifies how important it is to go through life and experience it without judging others.

As described by Hekman, identity is constructed in order to define the individual within a given social context. Identity in this respect also has the elements of fixed attributes of individuals and the more fluid elements. Identity seems to be more fixed at a particular time and space and in this respect it is more tangible and stable. But for a whole course of life identity is more fluid than it is thought to be (7). As years pass the ideas and feelings or the attitudes of the individual change towards the same things. Identity has elements that

are both fixed and fluid at the same time. It has changing elements as well as tangible and non-changing elements. For this reason in constructing one's identity these fixed, fluid, tangible and non-changing elements should be taken into consideration. A sample from T.E.W.W.G to support aforementioned hypothesis:

Janie began to resist her oppression when she became angered by the treatment of the yellow mule. She identified with the mules struggle, herself being a mix of sorts-for she was part white and part black. Janie wasn't able to voice her rage at the treatment of this animal, or of her own ambivalent treatment. She was prevented from attending its funeral, but nature was able vent theirs and Janie's rage in the form of the buzzards. Janie was restricted by her controlling husband Joe Starks. Janie's character was controlled and not allowed independent thought by her husband, making her rebel against the constraints of her loveless marriage.

In Hurston's novel we see how Joe silences Janie's voice again and again. For instance, we are given the image of Joe Starks standing on top of a dead mule giving a speech in his "big voice", a mule that had been starved to death. If women "are the mules of the world" then Janie, as well as all women (especially black women) are turned into mules by their husbands and are "starved" of love and slowly die from lack of nourishment. Janie wasn't able to find her voice and speak out against the mistreatment of the mule but she began to speak up when Mrs. Robbins was being starved of food by her husband. Janie also becomes more and more agitated with her hair ties, which

illustrates her impatience and growing discontent with her marriage. Then Joe beat her for cooking a bad meal and Hurston writes, “Janie stood where he left her for some time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her...” (72). Janie’s character have found her voiced ness and establish it by letting her husband he won’t be controlling her any longer. In this section of the novel we see another instance of foreshadowing whereby Janie will find true love after all when she says, “she was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen” (72). Finally, in this section we see Janie learn how to stand up to Joe and use her voice to overpower his. We also see Janie’s character develop her inner strength and voice which will carry her throughout the rest of the novel.

According to Hekman there are several different identities in each individual which define him/her and each identity defines the individual in a different way than the others. Identity should be felt as continuous in time and space. But as said earlier there are multiple identities that define the individual and it is hard to make them exist peacefully in a coherent way. There is a “dense self” that is responsible for choosing and consenting. The acts of the individuals occur through this “dense self”. The dense self is in action through the daily activities and it chooses, wants, and consents. This dense self is the daily identity of the individual. It is not taken as the more general lifelong identity of the individual. The wishes and desires are more concentrated in this dense self of the individual. One need to know who one is before one chooses and acts. Until this there is no identity to be problematic at all (9).

Hekman states that identity and difference are interconnected but this brings several problems too. Differences involve power and are created and enforced by societies, governments, and institutions. The differences within the polity should also be recognized. There are different groups within the broader category of women and all should be recognized (11). These different groups of women are being oppressed by different powers but one common power is the patriarchy that oppresses all kinds of women. So against the forces of patriarchy all the women have to cooperate and construct a common language and a common identity of women in order to get liberated from the ties of the patriarchy. Patriarchy is debasing women for most of the time. Then comes the problems of the different women in different categories. These women should also build their own identities. They have to define and construct a language of their own e.g. the ethnic women, women from the Third World etc. They are being oppressed by different power groups. Women should utilize their own resources while constructing their own identity. On the other hand women also oppress each other. Several women who are supported by the patriarchy and are on the sides of patriarchy suppress the women who need to build their own identities and who have to gain their own voices.

One may know one's own identity and its constitutive elements, but one cannot experience this fluid construction in reality. On the level of experience one must know that one has a stable self. This "deep self" makes the choice possible. For women, for example their gender should be more central to their identities than their clothes and their particular performance in a particular role. Their gender is more central to the identity of women than the changing clothes

and the changing roles of women. Women may have different clothes and performances in different roles in particular times. But gender is a non-changing element on which their identity in the social life is built. In everyday life identity is a necessity.

1.3. African-American Women Voice and Identity with adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*"

Davies states that whiteness and blackness are not only related to physical characteristics but are characteristics that define the whole identity of the subject. Women are being pushed towards accepting their given places in the society which are determined by outside forces. Being African-American in an American community also its disadvantages. African-American people and especially African-American women want to assert themselves against the white society and against its powers and politics (6). African-American women and their identity are erased in the world of the white men. It is ignored, erased and spoken for.

Since its publication in 1937, Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, has been the subject of much criticism and debate. Many critics have noted how Hurston uses the voices of the characters to illustrate their development. This is especially true with Janie Crawford, who emerges as a tragic heroine as a result of her enlightening journey. It is through her personal journey and growth that Janie finds her voice. In addition, it is through her tragedy that she discovers who she is and what life is all about. Through

the technique of narration, Hurston is able to emphasize Janie's journey in a way that includes the African American heritage of oral tradition and the traditional notions of romance. These elements operate together to emphasize Janie's maturity as well as her identity. Janie moves from being an individual influenced and controlled by others to one that is self-reliant and self-assured.

Looking at the dialogue of the characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reveals much not only about the characters but also Hurston. Critic Deborah Clarke maintains that one of Janie's earliest bits of insight to Pheoby is about recognizing visual differences, which is significant to understanding. According to Clarke, when Janie tells her that it takes understanding to know the difference between a mink fur and the fur of a coon, she is implying that identity is shaped by one's appearance, namely the color of one's skin. (Clarke) This notion is significant to the African American heritage of oral tradition. From this point of view, we can see how *Their Eyes Were Watching God* carries on this aspect of African American culture. Clarke writes, "Voice announced that visual difference was only skin deep, that black bodies housed souls that were, in essence, no different from those residing in white bodies" (Clarke). Janie's journey is one of discovering her own voice, which results in her discovering her true self. Later, when Nanny tells Janie, "We can't know nothin' but what we see" (Hurston 14), Hurston is reinforcing the idea that how we perceive things influences our knowledge. Clarke suggests that Hurston is reacting to this history of African Americans moving from being objects to subjects. This is an accurate assessment when we see how Janie moves from being the object of the men who love her to becoming a strong woman that acts and thinks

independently. It is through the narration of the novel that this becomes most evident.

Critic Janice Daniel notes that Hurston's narrative style is one that blends aspects of traditional romance with psychological realism (Daniel). Again, this idea refers back to Janie's earlier statement of understanding what it is that one sees. In short, things are not always as we perceive them and they are rarely what they seem to be. Hurston's narrative style is essential to how the novel operates in that it is not narrated from an:

omniscient outsider. She employs a limited third-person narration at the beginning and again at the end and within this narrative frame the storyteller shrewdly takes over as Janie's limited third person that also utilizes dialect of the characters. Consequently, it is Janie's story which simultaneously has the advantage of an objective observer. (Daniel)

Daniel maintains that this technique keeps Janie at the forefront of the story, while allowing us to have the experience of being on the inside and outside of the story. In addition, we also have the advantage of knowing what is going on with Janie psychologically.

In the same vein, Henry Louis Gates notes that the novel moves from first person to third person to illustrate Janie's self awareness. (Gates 187) He states, "In its concern with the project of finding a voice, with language as an instrument of injury and salvation, of selfhood and empowerment, it suggests many of the themes that inspire Hurston's oeuvre as a whole" (Gates 187). Critic Maria Racine observes that this type of narration is essential to understanding the development of the characters in the novel. According to

Gates, Hurston's style is interior, which allows us to understand their voices.

Racine contends:

The term interiority refers to an author's relatively full and non-judgmental rendering of the internal consciousness of a character. Hurston . . . uses interiority . . . to characterize those who are silent and lack their own voices, as well as to add dimension to those with voices. (Racine)

As the novel progresses, Janie's voice matures and her relationships with men become healthier. Hurston's narrative style makes this transition easy for us to see as it unfolds.

As Janie moves from one bad relationship to another, her voice strengthens and she becomes a more mature individual. In the beginning of the novel, she thinks that marriage constitutes love and that spouses loving each other was a given. (Hurston 20) In addition, she also believed that marriage took away all loneliness. Later, she has the courage to tell Jody that he has to die to find out that "you got tuh pacify somebody beside yo'self . . . You ain't tried to pacify nobody but yo'self. Too busy listening to yo' own big voice" (82). In this scene, we see the importance of Hurston's narrative style. Janie is actually asserting herself with Jody and he cannot handle the power of her words. Another significant event in this scene occurs when Janie considers what happens in making a voice out of a man. (83) His big voice does make a big woman out of her but not in the way that he anticipates. As Janie looks into the mirror, she realizes that the young girl she used to be is gone and she was now a woman.

Racine observes that after her talk with Jody, Janie has purged herself of any anger and bitterness, which is an act that allows her to enter into a healthy relationship with Tea Cake. It is with Tea Cake that Janie discovers who she actually is and part of this stems from the fact that Tea Cake accepts her as she is. While she is on trial, we see how Janie has developed her own voice and, as a result, her own sense of self. She speaks her case and does not beg anyone for anything. She only tries to convince the jury that Tea Cake could not be himself with the madness in him and the only alternative was death. She tries to make them see that a “man is up against a hard game when he must die to beat it” (Hurston 178). Janie’s voice is the voice of one human fighting for survival and, deep down, she knew what she had to do. Another important aspect of Janie’s development in the trial scene is how she finds the strength to live despite losing her husband. Racine states, “No doubt Janie has experienced a sense of helplessness--she knows that her husband's illness is incurable, that he will die, and that there is nothing she can do--yet she decides to live” (Racine). What we see in Janie’s actions is a woman making an obvious choice to live, even if this choice means killing her husband to do it.

Janie’s journey of finding her voice and herself is the tale of tragedy. Janie’s voice becomes a powerful force at the end of the novel, revealing everything Janie has learned. Her tragedy is not futile in this sense. Her conversations with Pheoby uncover her wisdom. When she returns to Eatonville, she is no doubt a changed woman. She no longer cares about what other people think or say. She understands the complexities of love and tries to tell Pheoby that she has traveled to the horizon and back. She knows love is

different for every one of us and compares it to the sea in that it is different when comes to every shore. (Hurston 182) In addition, Janie understands the spiritual significance of her journey. Though she denies her own death in many ways, she understands it because she tells Pheoby that everyone must go to God in their own way. Critic Darryl Hattenhauer expands on this idea, maintaining that this journey has been “more psychological than geographic” (Hattenhauer) because she cannot find the words to explain she has learned. She tells her, “You got tuh go there to know there . . . Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh do fuh themselves” (Hurston 183). This statement includes the positive and negative aspects of life and living. As Hattenhauer points out, what Janie learns is not something that anyone could have told her and it is not something that she can impart to anyone else. Hattenhauer notes that this revelation is significant to the narration of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because Janie cannot articulate the truth and she will not be alive long enough to tell it. (Hattenhauer) Here we see how Janie’s story is her own and her words to Pheoby are true in that they belong to her. Her voice and her words become her legacy.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a powerful tale of self-discovery that is enhanced through Hurston’s narrative technique. Janie’s dialogue illustrates her growth and maturity. She moves from being silent and submissive to a woman with a powerful voice. Narration is also significant because Hurston is paralleling Janie’s existence with the African American slave experience. Janie emerges from the novel not as an object belonging to anyone else but a subject of her own education. In addition, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a tragedy,

with Janie arising as the heroine. Only through her tragic experiences is able to discover her own voice. Hurston successfully combines narration and ideas of romance in this novel to explore what self-discovery is all about. In this sense, Janie's story transcends all boundaries of race and sex, becoming a novel of awakening applicable to all.

1.4. Identity of Women and Voice

The identity of women is very variable and changing. Since there are many women coming from very different backgrounds so there are many identities that are changing and are different. But the general category of women covers all of these identities. The general category of women also works well against the category of patriarchy. So all the women are included under the general category of women and this helps them in their fights against the patriarchy. Here another important thing that is related to the identity of women is their voice or the language they use.

Voice has importance in a world which is dominated by patriarchy hence by the male. Through the language and through their voice women can become free in this world of patriarchy and it is their task to find a voice for themselves in this world of patriarchy and to devise a language that is proper in expressing the problems, needs, and feelings of women in general. Here they may also be differences in the voice of women since there will be many women coming from very different backgrounds e.g. women from higher classes, women from lower classes, African-American women, Hispanic women or women belonging to other minority groups.

Women from different backgrounds have very different experiences. For example women from higher class may have a career of their own; they can win their bread and can for this reason become freer in the world of men. Through their access to power they can also have a voice of their own and can use this voice to devise a language of their own. Working class women also have careers. They just earn less. Those women who are from the upper class have also different relations with the patriarchy. They are freer than the women from the working class. They can have their own voice in the patriarchy dominated world. They are freer in choosing and making their own decisions. They are not forced in making decisions like the women from lower classes. Their language is freer than the language of women from lower classes. The language and the voice of these women are not suppressed by males. They have several privileges when compared to other women. They can speak and can raise their voices in a male dominated world. Through raising their voices they can become freer in this male dominated world. On the other hand there are also the Women coming from lower classes and women coming from different ethnicities. They are not free in making their decisions and in choosing for themselves. The decisions and the choices are made by their husbands, fathers or brothers. So these women are voiceless and cannot raise their voices against the patriarchy which oppresses them. These women have no autonomous language of their own, a language through which they can express themselves and become free in the world. Their language and ideas are also oppressed by patriarchy. They speak and express their feelings rarely in the society. So there are many differences between the women. On the other hand

women from different ethnicity are also not free in the social life. They are being forced by the patriarchy and by the male dominated white thought. In this male dominated white world they have no language of their own. Their ideas and feelings are being suppressed by the male and white people. These women also cannot raise their voices. Most of the time they conduct a life which is tied to patriarchy. So they are not free in making their own decisions and in choosing for themselves. These women have a voice of their own but they are not being listened to by the patriarchy and by the powers which shapes their lives. There have been many movements to change this situation of African-American women. Women have raised their voices and have developed a language of their own. In this way the women have also become free in the world. Today the African-American women have also careers along their husband and this gives them economic freedom. So many things have changed when compared with the past. In the past these women were voiceless but today they have a voice. There is the effect of the feminist movement in the development of a language of the African-American women of their own. Through these movements the African-American women as well as women from other ethnicities have developed a language of their own. This language is closely tied to their identities as feminist ethnic women or as feminist African-American women. Language and voice also helped these women in developing their own identities. Through the language and voice the women have become freer in choosing their fates. So voice and language have contributed much to the freedom of these women in the social life. These African-American women mostly live under the oppression of racist patriarchy and they are not being liberated mostly by their relatives. For this reason it is hard for them to develop

a language of their own. But once they find such an opportunity to develop a language of their own they get conscious about the male and white society. Hence language also develops their consciousness and their minds. Language is the ability to use words to communicate and it is also a kind of manner which is used to express ourselves. The words that are used, the tone and the attitude provide a language of their own. They become more active in the social life and participate to events that are important in their becoming free.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK “THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD” BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON IN TERMS OF VOICE AND IDENTITY

2.1. Construction of feminine identity in “Their Eyes Were Watching God”

Janie Crawford-Killicks-Starks-Woods in, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is very different character. However, she is in search of independence, self-fulfillment and love. In Hurston’s novel, we see a frame narrative in which the story both begins and finishes with two people, Janie and Pheoby, sitting on the porch of Janie’s house. Over the course of an evening Janie tells her story about what has happened since she left Eatonville as well as some reflections of her childhood. We experience the narrative through Janie’s eyes. There are different sections of her life within the novel. In telling the story in a frame narrative, Hurston was able to show Janie coming to consciousness while enabling her to have a voice. With the use of first person narrative in this framework it establishes Janie’s voice, her strength and independence through her search for love. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, shows a woman in pursuit of her own identity while embracing her blackness.

The book is about Janie Crawford and her life, her three marriages and the journey of Janie towards freedom. Voice and women are important elements of the book. The book is chosen, it is because the journey of a young African-American woman towards freedom is narrated. Janie is a woman who searches for her own voice and her own identity to become liberated and

independent woman in the world. The life of Janie is covered from her early ages on. She begins as a young woman and ends as an adult woman who has become self-conscious. As a young woman Janie has no voice and she cannot raise her own voice and make her own decisions. Her decisions are made by her grandmother. So in the beginning part of the book Janie is voiceless hence dependent on her relatives who are older than her. She is forced to marry but does not find happiness in her first marriage. Then Janie runs away with another man and marries him. In this marriage she cannot find her own voice too. Because the man she has married to oppresses her too much. So she cannot become a free woman besides her husband. She is forced to work within a shop for six days a week and she is not given freedom. The African-American society -as well as white society- did not develop socially in the 1930's. They oppress women much. They have not given freedom to women yet. For this reason Janie cannot get her freedom yet. Janie began to stand around the gate in hopes of something better. She may have been young but she knew life had a lot more to offer and that settling or deferring her dream was necessary for the time being. Her first dream of love within marriage had died and her loved ones had failed her. By looking over the gate Janie was declaring her hopes of a new beginning, which foreshadows that her life was about to change.

The second section of the book also includes Janie's transition from one marriage to another. Logan had stopped talking to her in rhymes which was tantamount to him not loving her. He also stopped looking at her hair, a symbol of who Janie was, and this indicates his lack of interest in her as well. Janie

met Joe Starks and he seemed to be everything she had dreamed of. Joe reminded Janie that she was young and beautiful. He also impressed her with his big thinking whereas Logan only thought in terms of his 60 acres of land. Janie said to Logan, "You don't take nothin' to count but sow-belly and corn bread," illustrating her discontent with his lack of vision of the horizon (30). She ran out to the gate to meet Joe in hopes that he would be the "bee for her bloom"(32). However, Joe didn't represent "sun-up and pollen and blooming trees" which were important things to Janie as they represent true love.

In the third section of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we see Janie's years with Joe. She experienced early happiness with Joe and their marriage but then became dissatisfied with him as he treated her like a possession. Again, we see her defer her dream of true love while supporting Joe and keeping her own voice silent. Joe's love for Janie was possessive and she suffered from being in such a controlling and loveless marriage. Like Logan, Joe didn't speak in rhymes to Janie and in her mind rhymes were a verification of love. Joe Starks also was compared to white people in the novel because he acted white. He acquired spittoons like white people, smoked cigars like white people and obtained his power by mistreating his fellow blacks just as the whites did. We see how empowerment through subjugating others is destructive as shown in Joe's "big voice."

As her husband dies Janie becomes a bit freer and gets acquainted with Tea Cake who is a young and free spirited man. Janie gains her own voice with Tea Cake. Tea Cake gives more freedom to Janie. So Janie becomes a

woman with her own voice. She raises her own voice and develops a language of her own. But due to a mad dog Tea Cake also dies at an early age and Janie remains all alone in the world. She returns to her shop in the town and tells her story to her friends around her.

In 1920's-1930's American society at this age has been a patriarchal society. Although slavery had ended in 1865 poverty reigned in the African-American society. For these reasons the women were not given much freedom in the African-American society. They were not free in choosing. On the other hand even though slavery had ended there was the pressure of the white society over the African-American society. In this atmosphere the women could not raise their own voices and could not become free and independent individuals. Rather they were tied to males and dependent on them for their living. They were not economically independent and for this reason they could not gain their own voices in the society. This is also the case of Janie. When she is married to Logan Killicks she has no property of her own. She has no land to make her living but is dependent on Logan for her living. It is a story about the struggle of a young woman for freedom and independence. At the end of the story Janie gains her own voice and becomes a free woman for which she struggles throughout her life.

In the book Hurston uses the language of African-American people. The African-American people speak with English that is developed by them. It is folk language and is authentic in essence. These people have become the slaves of the white men for many years. The decision of Janie is made by her relative and

she is not being listened. The following conversation between Janie and her grandmother shows this:

“-Janie, youse uh ‘oman, now, so,

-Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain’t no real ‘oman yet.

The thought was too new and heavy for Janie. She fought it away. Nanny closed her eyes and nodded slow, weary affirmation many times before she gave it voice.

-Yeah, Janie, youse got yo’ womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin’ up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away.

-Me, married? Naw, Nanny, no ma’am! Whut Ah know ‘bout uh husband?

-Whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don’t want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin’ yo’ body to wipe his foots on.”(Hurston 12-13).

As it can be seen from this conversation between Nanny and Janie that Nanny is not listening to the ideas of Janie. Nanny has seen Johnny Taylor kissing Janie and for this reason she had decided that Janie has become a woman yet. Janie refuses this idea that she has become a woman yet. She is too young and does not know anything about womanhood and even tells this to her grandmother. But the grandmother does not listen to what Janie tells to her. She has seen Janie being kissed by a boy and this is enough for her to decide that Janie has grown up as a woman. Since Janie has become a woman in the eyes of her grandmother she also had to marry. The grandmother is decided to do that before she dies. But Janie again opposes to her grandmother and tells her that she also does not know what a husband is. Her oppositions and the things she says to her grandmother are not sufficient enough to change the mind of her grandmother. So for this reason Janie is married a man chosen by her grandmother who does not listen to any word that Janie says to her.

Janie does not become happy in her marriage with Logan Killicks. Rather she is being oppressed by Killicks. Janie needs to talk sometimes with Logan about their marriage but Logan is not so much willing to talk about their marriage and treats Janie in a bad way such as in the following conversation:

- “- Logan, you ‘sleep?
- If Ah wuz, you’d be done woke me up callin’ me.
- Ah wuz thinkin’ real hard about us; about you and me.
- It’s about time. Youse powerful independent around here sometime considerin’.
- Considerin’ whut for instance?
- Considerin’ youse born in a carriage ‘thout no top to it, and yo’ mama and you bein’ born and raised in the white folks back-yard.
- You didn’t say all dat when you wuz begging Nanny for me to marry you.
- 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.” (Hurstons 30)

It can be seen from this conversation that the attitude of Logan toward Janie has changed after they have married. Before they have married he treated Janie in a good manner and even begged her Nanny to marry her but after the marriage things have changed and Logan cannot even find the time to answer Janie and as he answers his answers become harsh. He blames Janie of being raised up in the white folk’s back-yard. Even he tells her that she thinks she is a white folk by the way she acts. So Logan is no longer polite and neat toward Janie.

Janie waits for a long time for love to come to her marriage but it does not come. One day Joe Starks enters the scene with the aim of becoming a bigger voice in life. He has a dream to settle in a town which has been built by the people of color. For Janie this seems as an opportunity for freedom and she

runs away with Joe. They marry and settle in a town called Eatonville. They begin to run a shop there. But Joe Starks is not a man that can bring freedom to Janie. He is very jealous and does not even want Janie to speak in the public. The following conversation can be an example of this case:

“-And now we’ll listen tuh uh few words uh encouragement from Mrs. Mayor Starks.
 The burst of applause was cut short by Joe taking the floor himself.
 - Thank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ‘bout speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home.
 Janie made her face laugh after a short pause, but it wasn’t too easy.”
 (Hurston 43)

Even though people want to hear Janie talking as the wife of the new Mayor Joe does not allow him. He does not allow Janie to speak in the public. He is rather a conservative man and he is also jealous. But Janie got upset with this event. She never thought that Joe would oppress her freedom and even freedom to talk. Joe defined her limits with his talk and according to him the place of Janie was home. The reason why Joe did not allow Janie to talk in public is not only because Joe is a jealous man but also he wants to be a big voice that no one should ever go further than him as an individual. At that time period this behavior is not considered as a bad manner and it is seen normal to prevent women to have their own voice.

Joe also forces Janie to wear her hair up in a head rag because he is jealous about Janie and about that the other men would have lust over her. He sees Janie as his possession. “This business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store.

It didn't seem sensible at all. That was because Joe never told Janie how jealous he was" (Hurston 55). Joe oppresses Janie due to his jealousy. Joe does not allow Janie to gain her own voice. He does not give her even the right to speak as in the case when he was chosen a Mayor. He rather thinks that her place is home. In addition to this Joe is very busy with becoming a big voice himself. So Janie this time is oppressed by her husband Joe. For this reason she cannot gain her own voice even in her second marriage and even though she wants to do that. But the problem of gaining one's own voice is important in becoming a free woman. Without gaining her own voice one cannot become a free and emancipated woman. Joe does not allow Janie to become a free woman. Rather he takes her under his command and directs every movement of her.

Joe does not want her to appear in the public. This limits the action space of Janie. In this way she cannot establish relations with the people in the town. So she is being restricted and limited. She is under command. In addition to this Joe does not like the talks that Janie makes. An example is from a conversation which was about beating women.

"Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation.

- Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens.

- You getting' too moufy, Janie, Starks told her.

- Go fetch me de checker-board and de chckers. Sam Watson, you'se mah fish."(Hurston 89)

Janie is ready to talk but she does not participate to conversation and probably because of Joe. But Joe on the other hand is not willing that Janie talks and tells her ideas in the public. Janie is being shut up by Joe. He becomes very angry to hear Janie talking in the public and telling her ideas. Janie is being oppressed too much by Joe. In this way there is no way for Janie to find her voice and to develop this voice to gain her identity. As also stated by Johnson, Janie also shows that she is a woman who can also speak in the world of men. This is an important action and moment for the self and voice of Janie (49). Her feelings about Joe and his oppression are as follows: "The years took all the fight out of Janie's face. For a while she thought it was gone from her soul. No matter what Jody did, she said nothing. She had learned how to talk some and leave some".

Janie has much to say about the actions of Joe but she cannot tell this to him. Rather they remain with her and years pass in this way between the house and the store. There are no new events in the life of Janie. She lives in a restricted manner and there seems to be no hope for her freedom. Happiness is postponed again.

Joe and Janie also fight in the store about a receipt. Janie does not put a receipt where Joe wants it to be put and Joe gets angry with that. Joe desires that Janie totally submits herself to him. One night even Joe slaps Janie because the dinner isn't enough for Joe. So the image of Joe changes in the mind of Janie and she begins to imagine a different future for herself. Free from the oppression of Joe. Then several other attacks are made by Joe to Janie.

One day Janie makes a wrong cut on a plug of tobacco and Joe gets angry for this but this time Janie also responds and answers the attacks of Joe as in the following:

- “- Stop mixin’ up mah doings wid mah looks, Jody. When you git through tellin’ me how tuh cut uh plug uh tobacco, then you kin tell me whther mah behind is on straight or not.
- Wha – whut’s dat you say, Janie? You must be out yo’ head.
- Naw, Ah ain’t out amah head meither.
- You must be. Talkin’ any such language as dat.
- You de one started talkin’ under people’s clothes. Not me
- Whut’s de matter wid you, nohow? You ain’t no young girl to be getting’ all insulted ‘bout yo’ looks. You ain’t no young courtin’ gal. You’s e uh ole woman, nearly forty.
- Yeah, An’m nearly forty and you’s e already fifty. How come you can’t tlak about dat sometimes instead of always pointin’ at me?
- T’ain’t no use in getting’ all mad, Janie, ‘cause Ah mention you ain’t no young gal no mo’. Nobody in heah ain’t lookin’ for no wife outa yuh. Old as you is.”(Hurstons 75)

This conversation between Joe and Janie damages the manhood of Joe very much and for this reason Joe gets angry and after this he moves to sleep in a different room. Here Janie fed up with always being criticized and controlled by Joe. According to Joe Janie speaks too much again and a good wife should not do that. Joe has several standards for a good wife. This conversation is a big threat for him in terms of his macho approach to life and marriage. His manly reputation is shaken by the words of Janie in public. As a result of this way of thinking, the words of Janie have created the effect of gunshot.

They continue to stay in the same house but in different rooms. Joe gets sick at this time. He has a kidney failure and the doctor says that Joe will die soon. Because of this Janie feels herself guilty and she is also very sorry about

Joe. Here Joe does not allow her to enter her room even though he is very ill.

Janie enters the room of Joe and tells him her ideas him. These are as follows:

“- Ah knowed you wasn’t gointuh lissen tuh me. You cnages everything but nothin’ don’t change you - not even death. But Ah ain’t goin’ outa here and Ah ain’t gointuh hush. Naw, you goingtuh listen tuh me one time befo’ you die. Have yo’ way all yo’ life, trample and mash down and then die ruther than tuh let yo’slef heah ‘bout it. Listen, Jody, youon ain’t de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You’s 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 uth make room for yours in me.

- Shut upé Ah wish thunder and lightnin’ would kill yuh

- Ah know it. And now oyu got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo’self if you wants any love and sympathy in dis world. You ain’t tried tuh pacify *nobody* but yo’self. Too busy listening tuh yo’own big voice.

- All dis tearin’ down talk! Jody whispered with sweat globules forming all over his face and arms.

- Git outa heah.

- All dis bowin’ down, all dis obedience under yo’ voice – dat ain’t whut Ah rushed off down de road tuh find out about you.”(Hurston 86-87)

At the end Janie tells her ideas and feelings about their marriage to Joe as he was dying. During all of their marriage Joe has pacified Janie and was too busy to listen to his own voice. So Janie has not been listened to by him even though she had many things to say to him. In this way Janie was hindered of gaining her own identity and of finding her own voice and language. Johnson states the following about Janie: “For most of the twenty years of her marriage to Joe, Janie adopts silence as a survival strategy. Once Janie finds her voice her expressiveness becomes so powerful against male discourse that her language actually kills Joe” (50). So this was also implied in the death of Joe. Joe became ill after Janie began to speak openly in the public. This to some extent shows the power of the discourse of Janie and her will to freedom.

Language and voice is a weapon for people. By constructing their own language and by gaining their own voice people get liberated in this world. They become free, they find the ways to express their feelings, and they can act for themselves and become independent entities. Voice is important in the construction of identity of individuals. Through the voice one expresses his or her ideas, his or her opinions and forms a consciousness. S/he becomes a more conscious individual. But this voice should be listened to by the people around the individual. If the voice and the speeches of individuals are not listened to by the people around it is in vain for them to talk and to find their own voices as in the case of Janie. Throughout her lifetime nobody listened to her voice even though she had one. She was always willing to free herself from her ties which made her too much dependent. But she could not find the opportunity to be listened by the people around her such as Nanny, Logan Killicks, and Joe Starks. All of these people oppressed her and her voice. So they didn't pay much attention to the development of her identity.

The fourth and final section of Janie's story began with her adjusting to life without Joe. She performed by "starching and ironing" her face for the rest of the town while secretly she rejoiced in finally being free of an unhappy marriage. She illustrated her newfound freedom by burning her head rags. Janie ends up meeting Tea Cake and is immediately attracted to him. She noticed his eyes and lips and never mentioned those things about her previous husbands, which is interesting to note because it tells us that Janie is sexually attracted to Tea Cake unlike her previous husbands. Another difference

between Joe and Tea Cake is that unlike Joe, Tea Cake wanted Janie to be a part of the community. Joe wanted Janie to be above the rest of the town folks while Tea Cake encouraged Janie to go to the baseball game and play checkers like the rest of the town members and to enjoy her life. It is clear that Tea Cake is different from Joe in many ways but the most important one being that Joe relied on money while Tea Cake relied on nature. Janie, at this time in the novel, is free to express her true passions and her love of nature as well. In meeting Tea Cake, Janie's feelings and true self began to emerge and we see finally how she may get her wish for true love after all. She tells Tea Cake of her fears, doubts and we see the sacrifice she makes to run off with him and the sincerity of their love. We also see Tea Cake fall in love with Janie's hair, as well as the fact that he came through the gate to her-which is another first for Janie. Tea Cake fed her literally and metaphorically he fed her soul. Janie finally recognized the difference between her dream and her Nanny's dream and decided to marry Tea Cake. She found her own voice and had the courage to live a life of giving and receiving unconditional love.

In living her dream while embracing her voice and blackness, Janie's character shows us the importance of being who you are. She embraced her culture, her roots, didn't try to be white or anything other than what she was. Part of Janie's discovery of who she was entailed learning about her blackness in which Tea Cake played a valuable role. However, Janie was still oppressed as a woman in black society in the novel. She was not a mule, or a showpiece, but was beaten by Tea Cake to show Mrs. Turner's brother and everyone in their community that he had control over her. Some people might say that

Janie lost her voice for a while in this section of the book due to her love of Tea Cake and her silence at the trial after his death, but I would disagree. At the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we see how during Janie's trial she is condemned by her fellow black people and how a white doctor speaks for her during the trial. The fact that we don't actually hear Janie speak during the trial in no way shows her lack of voice to speak in her own defense. Janie knew using her voice in this scene would be of no use to her so she decided to keep quiet. Her power and voice is shown by the fact that she made the choice to stay silent. Janie, during her journey, has made sense of her marriages and of her struggle to find her own voice. She no longer needs to stare off into the horizon in hopes of change, but instead she can rejoice in her memories. She is free to wear her overalls and her hair down. Janie is secure in her own womanhood having experienced her dream of true love. Janie's struggle can be summed up with, "you got to go there tuh know there," which to me exemplifies how important it is to go through life and experience it without judging others. Janie's strength is also illuminated in the Bessie Smith song, "Ain't Nobody's Business If I Do," wherein Bessie states, "There ain't nothin' I can do or nothin' I can say, that folks don't criticize me; but I'm going to do just as I want anyway, and don't care if they all despise me!" The aforementioned lyrics show how Janie is through living for others and how she has the maturity and freedom to do as she pleases-she found her peace.

Janie was considered as a dangerous woman by Johnson "because she metaphorically kills her second husband with her language and literally, albeit unintentionally, kills her third" (52). Tea Cake died as he begun to become

jealous and beat Janie. This is another instance that shows the power Janie has for freedom and for liberation. Even though she became free women with Tea Cake still she was beaten by Tea Cake. As Tea Cake began to change toward Janie their lives also changed and the flood occurred which stopped the actions of Tea Cake as he died after the disaster. So in this respect Janie is considered as a powerful woman who searches freedom and her own voice.

As Janie returns to her town she begins to tell her story to her friends around her and she becomes the narrator of her life events. The book also begins with the narration of Janie. In this respect Janie gains her own voice in a powerful way at the end of her last marriage with Tea Cake. She becomes a free and liberated woman in the world. She stands alone but all free in the world. She no longer deals with the adverse behavior of her husband or other men.

2.2. Janie's Identity Development in Terms of Race, Class and Gender

Although we oftentimes would like to believe otherwise, how we behave is not simply based upon our personalities, but rather is shaped by the complex forces of various social factors, such as race, class and gender. This is, of course, true in the real world, and also in the world presented in many works of literature, particularly if the author writes in a relatively realistic manner, although social forces can play a role in fantasy and science-fiction novels, as well. Zora Neale Hurston's novel of African-American life in early twentieth-century Florida, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is a realistic novel. As such,

social forces motivate the actions of the characters, including the main character, Mrs. Janie Woods. In fact, race, class and gender all play roles in the way Janie Woods acts throughout the novel. Race and class are important in the work, and, certainly, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was received and interpreted as an African-American novel when it was first published in 1937. More than race and class, however, it is gender which is the most pervasive and powerful social force in the life of the main character of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie Woods.

Race is an important social force in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, although it is not the dominant social force. Janie Woods is an African-American woman in the South in the early twentieth century. Although slavery had been abolished before the time during which the novel takes place, the novel is not all that far removed from slavery. The oldest characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are old enough to have been slaves. This is in particular true for Janie's grandmother, who reared her (Hurston 16). Nevertheless, the portrayal of white characters in the novel is positive, as opposed to the portrayal of whites in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for example. Janie grew up with a white family, for whom her grandmother worked. Janie describes this family as "quality white folks" (Hurston 8). The Washburns, which was the white family's name, were also helpful in Janie's grandmother's purchasing of land and a house (Hurston 10). Overall, they are shown positively, since Janie still speaks well of them many years later. The other white character of any importance in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is the

doctor, Dr. Simmons. He is kind and helpful to Janie and Tea Cake while diagnosing Tea Cake's fatal illness (Hurstons 175-177).

Race is a social construction; there is no genetic basis on which a person can be separated from another that would correspond to what is understood by "race." That race is socially constructed is made abundantly clear in a vignette from Janie's childhood. A photographer takes a picture of Janie along with the Washburns' children. When the picture is developed and everyone looks at it together, Janie does not recognize herself. This was because she did not realize she was "colored" (Hurstons 9). Until she was told, and having been reared in a unprejudiced household among white children, Janie never noticed the difference between her and others, until it was pointed out to her. In fact, this closeness to white children caused problem, since it made the other African-American children at school dislike Janie (Hurstons 9-10). Race does not play a large role in one's life until it is pointed out and made into an issue. The biggest exception to this is Janie's grandmother, who was born into another time. She had to endure the evils of slavery. The episode about the birth of her daughter with some Caucasian characteristics best illustrates the hatred that the white owners had for her, which culminated in threats of a whipping and their use of the term "nigger," which is also used by blacks themselves in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurstons 17; 13).

The most egregious display of prejudice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* comes not from whites, but from an African-American herself. This person is Mrs. Turner, and she associates with Janie because Janie is lighter-skinned

than most African-Americans (Hurstons 140). Mrs. Turner is virulently racist. She “can’t stand black niggers,” that is, dark-skinned African-Americans (Hurstons 141). She harangues Janie about spending so much time with such dark-skinned African-Americans, and Janie resists Mrs. Turners efforts to get Janie to separate herself from them. Janie response is significant. It shows the diversity of the African-American population, while at the same time is an acknowledgement of a common bond between all African-Americans. Janie responds that African-American’s are “uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks” (Hurstons 141).

Class is important in determining behavior in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, although, just as Janies race was more significant to her detractors at school than herself, so is her class more important to others than to her. When Janie returns to Eatonville and does not greet the gossipers on Pheobys porch, they ask, derogatorily, “Why she dont stay in her class?” (Hurstons 2). As a result of her marriage to Jody Starks, Janie becomes a highly respected and well-to-do resident of Eatonville. After she is widowed, she has many men who want to marry her, even if they do not say so in such terms. Rather, they try to convince Janie that “widowhood and property was a great challenge in South Florida” (Hurstons 90). Janie is aware of the mens intentions; she knows that the other unmarried women “were poor” and therefore were not bothered in the same way she was (Hurstons 90).

Although class can determine behavior, Janies position as a member of Eatonvilles elite was not her choice. She does not insist on being treated as if

she were better than others. She states this on multiple occasions. First, she replies to her friend Pheoby's utterance that she "always did class off" by stating that it wasn't her wish, but rather the wish of her late husband to remain above the rest: "Jody classed me off" (Hurstons 112). Everyone assumed that her position meant she was haughty, but this was not the case. Tea Cake has the same concern about his wife, who Janie now is. He throws a party for his fellow railroad workers without telling or inviting Janie. This is because he is afraid she would leave him if she saw him associating with such people. Janie, however, does not care. She wants to "partake wid everything" that her husband does (Hurstons 124).

Of all the social forces that affect one's behavior, the most significant one for Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is gender. Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator sets out the importance of gender. The first two paragraphs are a comparison of men and women (Hurstons 1). Janie's grandmother, in one of the most memorable quotes of the novel, summarizes the plight of African-American women, a population doubly marginalized because of race and gender. Janie's grandmother morosely states, "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurstons 14). In stating this, she also acknowledges, as she expressly states later, "it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do" (Hurstons 16). What those wishes are, however, are the typical, traditional view of a woman with an upstanding husband, as becomes clear in Janie's grandmother's urgent desire to see Janie married.

Janie, however, is different. She does not want to be the meek and subservient wife. She “wants to want him [her first husband] sometimes” (Hurston 23). This is an affirmation of woman’s sexual identity, and Janie’s dissatisfaction in her first marriage is the reason she leaves with Jody Starks before even divorcing her first husband. Before that, however, the narrator makes it clear that the life of a woman in the setting of *Their Eyes were Watching God* is a difficult one: “Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (Hurston 25).

Janie began life as Mrs. Jody Sparks happily, but the happiness soon faded. This is because Jody was a domineering husband who did not let Janie be herself. He “spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything” (Hurston 43). This left Janie feeling “coldness and fear” (Hurston 46). Jody Starks is unquestionably the mover and shaker in Eatonville, but that comes at the expense of his wife. Jody “wanted her submission and he’d keep on fighting till he felt he had it” (Hurston 71). He feels that “somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows” (Hurston 71). This is demeaning to all women, and Janie feels it. Janie eventually manages to tell her husband her dissatisfaction when he is on his deathbed. She states, “Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours and me” (Hurston 86). Man tries to dominate and subjugate woman, but Janie shows she still resents this subjugation; she has not lost her fight after twenty years of marriage.

Although Janie's marriage to Tea Cake is a happy one, in this case it is Janie who willingly subjugates herself. Because of her love for Tea Cake, she is willing to do whatever he wishes. Tea Cake is adamant in his insistence that he be the source of financial support for the couple, even though Janie has a substantial amount of money in the bank. Tea Cake states, " Ah no need no assistance tuh help me feed mah woman. From now on, you gointuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same. When Ah ain't got nothin' you don't git nothin'" (Hurston 128). This is very chauvinistic, but Janie's response is a meek "Dat's all right wid me" (128). Tea Cake also abuses Janie just "to show he was boss" (146). Janie, however, does not mind. She does not mind, however. Tea Cake boldly asserts "Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be" (148). Janie, unfortunately, would happily agree to that. Thus, although she resents being dominated when she is not wildly in love, she tolerates it gladly when she is.

Human behavior is shaped by more than sheer force of personality. Social forces such as gender, race and class shape behavior, as well. This is certainly true in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. Janie, the main character, is an African-American woman, and a fairly affluent one. Her race and her social standing (class) influence her actions, but, above all, it is her gender that is the most significant aspect. Although at times she tries to rebel against male domination, in the end, she, too, subscribes to the same notions of female subservience as her husbands do.

2.3. Regional and Gender Identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the characters represent different aspects of their regional and gender identities. The character Janie struggles to find her identity amidst a lot of controversy. Janie attempting to come to terms with who she is, and how that fits with the society of the time. The story deals with a woman who is being oppressed and ultimately become independent of not only the men in her life but also the whole of society, which has set up and followed these standards to which Janie had formerly adhered.

Hurston can certainly be considered feminist, although at the time that she was writing she may not have used this particular term. It is obvious that in this work, she is giving a voice to the characters that do not seem to know that they have the means to speak. Critics have said that, "the novel is encouraging as well as awakening because it was against the traditional black literature of the time (Awkward)." It is interesting that Awkward would choose to use the work awakening when referring to Hurston's work. While Hurston's intent may have been for Janie to be the only one to have an awakening, Awkward steers his readers in the direction that perhaps Hurston's readers should also be having awakenings of their own, and this may be why Hurston is considered to be a feminist.

In the South where *Their Eyes Were Watching God* takes place, the vernacular used is very specific to the region. Some say that, "over the ages, women have used language to instill a sense of self as a subject. Feminist

theory is more concerned with power to rather than power over; that is it deals with personal control rather than dominance. Janie shows that she also has power over her life through the language that she uses (Bartkowski).” Janie’s hair and speech seem to be the main sources of her power throughout Hurston’s novel. Janie is not often quiet about her thoughts, and for the most part she creates and controls the situations that she finds herself in. When she spoke up for herself around Joe for other town members to see, she took back her control which she seemed to have lost in the shuffle of marriage to an oppressing man that only wanted her as a trophy to show off. Using slang like, “Nah, Ah ain’t no young gal no mo’...(Hurston),” regionalizes this story. Even if a reader were unsure of the setting when first starting this novel, once they read the dialect, it would not take them long not only to figure out that this story was set in the south, but also it would be easy to figure out that the people talking are probably African-American.

It is interesting that Janie come to awakening toward the end of her story, she thinks or seems to think that at first her awakening is based on the love of men in her life, and how the men make her feel. Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake is a perfect example, “Janie is deliberately forgetting some of the truth. She constructs the truth in a way that will maintain and justify her dreams. When Tea Cake hits her, it is the ultimate betrayal, because he has not lived up to her idyllic view of him. She continues to think of him as the perfect man because it is the version of the ‘truth’ that she likes the best. It is only after he has been killed that her voice finally becomes strong and assertive (Davies).” When Tea Cake does die, Janie must face who she is, without a man in her life,

and without her grandmother's ideals ruling her actions. This may be how many battered women feel when they return to their husbands. They do not know what to do when they are out of the situation, therefore it is easier for them to put themselves back into the situation where they at least know the rules and what will make the husband happy and unhappy, rather than having to make it on their own and think for themselves. Janie must come face to face with who she is without someone to govern her actions. She must learn who she is and who she is supposed to be without a set code of behavior to follow.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a work that touches on very important subjects about womanhood. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* focuses on this, but Janie is not only dealing with her role in society as a woman, she is dealing with her role in a different society as a black woman. Janie came to terms with her self-identity, once she figured out that she had to do that part by herself, and Hurston inadvertently encourage her readers to do the same.

CONCLUSION

The identity of women is an important but a rather complex concept. Identity is both about the sameness and the difference of women. Woman as a category differs in itself and opens up to many subgroups. These subgroups include white women, African-American woman, Hispanic women etc. In addition to this women come from very different social backgrounds such as different classes and groups. All of these women have different cultures and experiences and for this reason they have different problems in life too. But against the general patriarchal construct it is necessary to use a general women category. This category of women helps in determining the needs of all women against this patriarchy. Then comes the needs of particular groups such as the blacks or the whites. These need to be analyzed in a separate way and as distinct from each other. African-American women have to deal with the burdens of white, male society. This society oppresses them as African-American women in the world of these white men. So this situation is to be analyzed as separately from the situation of white women who have a place besides their husbands and who have also a career along with that. But all of the women that come from the different origins and different ethnicities, classes and groups have a common point as to gain their own voice. These women have to develop their own language which will free them from the ties of the patriarchy. They should construct themselves an identity by using their own voices and by liberating themselves from the ties of the patriarchy. All of these women are hindered by the patriarchy in their ways to liberation and emancipation.

Janie is an African-American woman. She begins her lifestory as a voiceless being. At the beginning of her journey she is being directed by her grandmother. She does not have much freedom of her own. She makes two marriages and two of them become unhappy for her. Her first marriage has been arranged by her grandmother and has been forced to marry a man with land. The man is older than Janie. Her grandmother says to Janie that love will come after the marriage. So Janie begins to wait love to come but it does not. But she gets bored with her first marriage. In her second marriage she made her own choice and ran away with a man who has a far horizon and who wants to be a bigger voice in life. But in this marriage she could not catch her own voice and she continue as a voiceless woman in her second marriage too even though she has had opposite ideas. She wanted to have her own voice but her husband was so jealous that he did not allow her to speak even for herself in the store. So she became a voiceless being. Janie remains silent for twenty years in her second marriage. But one day she speaks and this affects her relations with her husband and even her husband becomes ill after her speech and he dies. After the death of her second husband she quickly caught her own voice and became a free and liberated woman of her own. Then she made another marriage with another man who is younger than herself. She has found happiness in this third marriage. She was both happy and has had her own voice. So she was totally free. Her marriage continued very happy until one day her third husband also became jealous about Janie. He also began to beat Janie. But a disaster ends these beatings and after the disaster the third husband also dies. To some extent this shows the power of Janie. After the

death of her third husband Janie becomes totally free and alone in the world. But she does not lose the game and returns to her town to continue to live as a free woman who has gradually gained her own voice and her own identity.

The voice of the women is an important concept that is analyzed in this study. Race, class and gender issues also have a crucial effect on the development of the identity that is examined in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The voice makes women free and emancipated beings. Through gaining one's own voice one becomes a free woman and gets liberated in life. If the women are voiceless then they cannot make their own decisions. Somebody else speaks and makes the decision for them. In this respect they are not free in choosing and in making decisions about themselves. But one does not get one own voice immediately at the beginning of her life. Rather one has to struggle in order to get one's voice. So gaining one's own voice is like a big journey. The voice of the women is related to their identities. As one gains her identity one also gains her own voice. Without a voice one has no identity of herself too. So in this respect identity and voice are interrelated concepts. Through a well established identity and through a proper voice, one becomes a free and emancipated woman in the world.

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