

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN

Paix – Travail – Patrie

UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I
ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE
DEPARTEMENT DE ANGLAIS



REPUBLIC OF CAMEROUN

Peace – Work – Fatherland

UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I
HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THE REDEFINITION OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

Présentée en vue de l'obtention du Diplôme de Professeur de l'Enseignement
Secondaire deuxième grade
Mémoire de D.I.P.E.S II

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Année Académique
2015-2016



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ABSTRACT

This study titled Gender Stereotypes and the redefinition of the self: a study of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows how Zora Neale Hurston reverses society's patriarchal culture in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to promote gender equality. It portrays the stereotypical categorization of women in a typically twentieth-century American society and proves that the novelist opts for the re-evaluation of culture in order to foster the woman's redefinition. The New Historicist approach is instrumental in tracing the cultural, historical and biographical factors that both inspire and inform the author's work. Meanwhile, the Womanist approach enables the work to shed light on gender discrepancy in the text and to demonstrate how the author interrogates existing gender categories in order to usher in change. The work proves that Hurston, a twentieth-century American female writer, combats the socio-cultural oppression and the stereotyping of women through her characters. She encourages women to revolt and assert themselves by by-passing all the cultural barriers. She also establishes the fact that, by revolting and standing against handicapping cultural barriers, the woman achieves a new identity. Finally, she advocates a society free from aspects of discrimination and prejudice in which men and women can be complementary to each other. Drawing inspiration from this vision, the study proposes the creation of gender awareness in an ESL class in view of eradicating wrong tendencies from Cameroonian high school students.

RESUME

Cette étude intitulée *Gender stereotypes and the redefinition of the self : a study of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God** montre comment Zora Neale Hurston renverse la culture patriarcale de la société dans son œuvre *Their Eyes Were Watching God* pour promouvoir l'égalité du genre. Cette œuvre peint la catégorisation des stéréotypes féminins dans une société américaine typique du vingtième siècle et démontre que la romancière opte pour la re-évaluation de la culture afin de renforcer la redéfinition de la femme. La Nouvelle-historicisme est importante parce qu'elle permet de tracer les facteurs culturels, historiques et biographiques qui inspirent et informent le travail de l'auteur; tandis que l'approche womaniste permet de mettre en exergue la discrimination entre les genres dans le texte et de démontrer comment l'auteur interroge les catégories de genre existantes afin de stimuler le changement. Le travail montre que Hurston, une écrivaine américaine du vingtième siècle (20^e siècle), s'insurge contre l'oppression socioculturelle et la stigmatisation des femmes à travers ses personnages. Elle encourage les femmes à se révolter et à s'affirmer en surpassant toutes les barrières culturelles. Elle établit aussi le fait que, en se révoltant et en s'opposant aux barrières culturelles indisposantes, la femme retrouve une nouvelle identité. En définitive, elle réclame une société sans aucune forme de discrimination et de préjudice dans laquelle les hommes et les femmes peuvent être complémentaires les uns aux autres. S'inspirant de cette vision cette étude propose une prise de conscience des questions de genres dans une classe de l'enseignement de l'anglais comme seconde langue dans le but d'éradiquer les tendances erronées chez les élèves du secondaire au Cameroun.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people have contributed to the successful conduct of this research endeavor. My greatest intellectual debt is to my supervisor, Dr. Yvonne Iden Ngwa, who—through her irrepressible curiosity, her tireless enthusiasm, and resolute devotion to the continuous intellectual development of both her students and herself—has initiated me into the proper conduct of research. I have really learned much from her and I am both proud and thankful to have worked with her.

I am likewise thankful to the staff of the Department of English for guidance and mentorship. My appreciation goes to the Chair of the Department, Professor Augustin Simo Bobda, as well as the rest of the staff. I would like to thus cite Prof. Daniel Nkemleke, Prof. Aloysius Ngefac, Prof. Justina Njika, Prof. Babila Mutia, Dr. Divine Che Neba, Dr. Napoleon Epoge, Dr. Eleanor Dasi, Dr. David Kusi and Mr. Kum Julius.

I cannot forget the contributions of Dr. Oscar Labang, Dr. Louisa Lum, Dr. Marcel Nyanchi and Mr. Princewill Njong either. They have mentored me throughout my stay in the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences of The University of Yaounde I. I equally acknowledge Mr. Charles Azane who has been of great assistance to me.

In the same vein, I am grateful to all my family members for their love, care and advice. Hence, I acknowledge my mother and father—Angeline Isah and Maxwell Nanje—and my uncle (Mr. Iyambe Clement) and his wife.

Lastly, I acknowledge the contribution of my friends: Beltus Lukong, Victor Shwembom, Paul Mouafo, Nkanu Mazou, Pierre Rodrigue Onguene, Germaine Atogo, Derick Mbibah, Maxime Ekwelle, Sylvester Endumabi, Emmanuel Ndonwi, and Nelson Temesas Akeh. Thanks also go to all my class-mates especially Vera Wechie who proof read this work, Harriett Achoanoh, and Bianca Muke Njeba.

DEDICATION

To Professor Djockoua Manyaka Toko, a woman of exceptional qualities

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this dissertation, entitled “Gender Stereotypes and the redefinition of the Self: A Study of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” has been written by Sakwe Standley Itoe and submitted to the Department of English of the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde in view of obtaining a Postgraduate Teacher’s Diploma (DIPES II) in English.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Male and white-dominated societies have established biased customs and traditions that impinge on the liberty of the woman. As her status is narrowed down to that of a second-class citizen, her search for better avenues forces her to resist. By resisting, she aims at clamoring for her rights and, hence, asserting herself in a society that is bent on subjugating her. Zora Neale Hurston, as an African American female writer who has a passion for reforming the world, considers women as what one can term ‘imprisoned spirits’ who are struggling to break free from societal restrictions (*Encyclopedia of African American Literature* 260).

Looking at women as possessing the strength of character not only to survive, but also to fully enjoy their rights, Hurston shows her disgust for a society that subjugates and marginalizes her. She presents the unprotected female character who, either because of her wish or ignorance, is not able to achieve an identity. In other words, Hurston thinks that possessing an identity and acquiring freedom does not only mean bread on the table, or acquiring a home and clothes. Rather, it comprises having everything the woman needs for her physical and spiritual growth.

A survey of the works of contemporary female writers, that is, female writers of the 20th Century, reveals the recurrence of certain themes. Many of these themes are found in American Literature (in general) and African-American Literature, in particular. A case in point is the archetypal quest theme. This involves a character’s attempt to search for an identity that is independent of conventional expectations and prejudices as well as sustaining one’s self-dignity in a world of growing alienation and moral decadence.

American literature has often been criticized for being non-realistic. Many critics attribute this to its failure to deal with adult heterosexual love. They claim that— rather than treating the passionate encounter of a man and a woman which leads to marriage, sex and responsibility— American literature (especially fiction) has been obsessed with death, incest, and homosexuality. Leslie A. Fieldler confirms this in *Love, Race and Death in the American Novel* when he observes that: “Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the centre of a novel” (125).

In other words, the typical male protagonist in American Literature has been a man on the run—running to somewhere else in order to avoid the confrontation of a man and woman which, one can suppose, should lead to a fulfilling relationship. Fielder seems to say here that this restlessness of the male protagonist in American Literature is as a consequence of the fact that his contemporary civilization has deprived him of any notion of fulfillment that can be derived from an ideal man-woman relationship. African American female writers, in particular, do not only highlight this man-woman relationship. They also clearly portray how and why the relationship fails to attain the desired results.

The question of ethnicity in the twentieth-century American society brings to the forefront the persistent question of gender difference that influences literary writings about female writers in the United States. For many years, scholars have depicted the woman as a subaltern, a nonentity. As a female black in a white patriarchal and hegemonic society, the African American woman has been doubly subjugated. This domination has impacted the woman's consciousness and behavior. Thus, it becomes difficult for the black woman to hold on to self in this grip of physical and psychological oppression. Yet, despite these stereotypical presentations, Hurston creates a character who traverses such stereotypes to create an identity for herself.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to show that, in Hurston's fictitious world, the woman strives to redefine herself through various means given that she has been relegated to the background of the society because of her sex. It is for this reason that disgruntled female writers have adopted similar ways of proposing the re-evaluation of culture to create room for a better redefinition of womanhood. Thus, Zora Neale Hurston— an African American female writer— reverses society's patriarchal culture in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to promote gender equality. It is believed that, from the 1970s, one distinctive quality emphasized in American writing is its moralizing bent. This is the means whereby American authors criticized specific failures of American society in their bid to understand the meaning of life and society. Some of these failures had to do with racism, sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, class oppression, and imperialism. The novel, as an art form, became one of the most important instruments for this. This study thus aims at showing that, in the work under study, Hurston debunks female misrepresentation.

To achieve its aim, the research work is guided by the following questions:

- How are gender stereotypes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* portrayed through the characters' encounters in the society?
- To what extent do the characters represented by Hurston in this text overcome these stereotypes that are thrust upon them?
- In what ways are the power relations between men and women redefined in the novel under study and what kind of society emanates from such a redefinition?
- How can an extract of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* be used to create gender awareness in an ESL classroom?

From the research the above questions, this work is thus, premised on the hypothesis that Zora Neale Hurston shows that gender stereotypes hinder the woman's development in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She rejects the idea that the woman is a subaltern, a nonentity, or a weaker sex and resorts to the black woman's redefinition to combat discrimination based on race and gender.

The work is limited to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. In this work, Hurston explores themes that are prevalent in contemporary societies. Themes such as gender and racism are relevant to human societies today because these realities pervade the whole of human existence. These are dominant issues in the American society. The text under study is important in that it treats universal themes of caste, gender, and violence on women. It focuses on an acute gender crisis that may be similar to that suffered by women of other cultural backgrounds, but which is more accentuated by wrong cultural and religious beliefs. The choice of the text is therefore due to the fact that it best fits the context of our research endeavor because it handles, in a special way, issues of gender and the quest for self-assertion by the woman.

Hurston lived in a chauvinistic society where the woman was seen as fit just for the home, childbearing, and household chores. The writer, through the creation of a questing heroine, creates awareness in the woman by making her conscious of her potential despite the stereotypes put in place by society to silence her. As such, she encourages the woman to deconstruct such stereotypes and create an identity for herself as evident in Janie—the

protagonist of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The study is therefore significant in that it focuses on issues that are of everyday interest to man and the society at large. The work shows how womanhood can be reconstructed, and emphasizes the fact that a great society is not built only thanks to the contribution of powerful men (patriarchy) but by a collective effort of both men and women. This explains the efforts made by women since Beijing to improve on their lot. The emergence of gender studies, female mobilization and a host of other global strivings attest to the relevance of the issues this study is bound to raise.

For an in-depth understanding of the work, it is necessary to define some key terms. The terms “gender”, “stereotypes”, and “the redefinition of the self” are central to this study. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the term “gender” as the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological disparities). This definition is relevant to this work because it shows that being considered male or female does not necessarily depend on the sex organs one is born with. As seen in the above definition, gender does not solely depend on biological attributes. Although the words “gender” and “sex” both pertain to “the state of being male or female,” they are used in slightly different ways. “Sex” is concerned with biological differences between male and female while gender bears on their cultural or social differences. It is important for this distinction between “sex” and “gender” to be noted. The distinction ties in with the historical perception of the term. As far back as the 14th century, gender has meant the state of being male or female with specific reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological distinctions.

According to *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, “gender is a term referring to the socially constructed identities, man, woman, masculine, and feminine.” This book further adds that gender is distinguished from sex which is the biological designation of male or female. Unlike sex, gender is widely held to be a product of the prevailing mores, expectations, and stereotypes of a particular culture” (139). Lizbeth Goodman, in *Literature and Gender*, glaringly shows the difference between gender and sex in the following extract

Gender refers to ways of seeing and respecting people and situations based on sex differences. By contrast, ‘sex’ is a biological category for female or male. ‘Gender’ is a social or cultural category influenced by stereotypes about ‘female’ and ‘male’

behavior that exist in their attitudes and beliefs. Such beliefs are often said to be culturally produced or constructed. (17)

In the above quotation, Goodman expresses her conviction that the sole reason for gender differences can either be the result of stereotypes or of constructions that are culturally influenced. She proceeds to note the contrast between sex and gender where one is a biological construct and, the other, a social construct. This distinction echoes what other critics have said about gender and sex. This present research undertaking that focuses on how these stereotypes hinder the woman's growth draws inspiration from this definition of "gender" as the bias encapsulated in the definition accounts for the women's relegation and subjugation.

The question of gender perception that has been the concern of feminist critics, political activists, humanitarian organizations, and governments among others, is paramount to this study. In recent years it has been the focus of scholarly debates and has hatched new disciplines like gender studies. One of such scholars is the feminist, Simone de Beauvoir who stated that "one is not born a woman, but one becomes one" (De Beauvoir 25). In other words, the woman in society finds herself reduced to a sub-human because of the gender power imbalance in a given culture. Thus, the circumstances surrounding the woman's existence totally change her life. In Feminist studies, gender is treated as a social construct through the concept of masculinity and femininity. According to De Beauvoir, women have historically been considered deviant and abnormal. She states that this attitude has limited women's success by maintaining the perception that they are a deviation from the normal; they are therefore outsiders attempting to emulate normality (22). And, as long as the patriarchal system and its values are in place, the society will not be reformed in any significant way, hence the quest for the eradication of the male-based society to create room for women and foster equality. It is this reconstruction of the society that will enable women to achieve their goals. And since this work is concerned with the black woman's misrepresentation, subjugation and attempts at redefinition, womanism is part of the work's conceptual framework.

Another word which is of essence to this work is "stereotypes". The word "stereotype," according to the *Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, refers to a highly generalized idea, situation, or character, derived from an oversimplified treatment in a work. More commonly, it refers to

the reliance on generalizations about racial, national, or sexual groups in the depiction of certain characters. This dictionary equally believes that “stereotype” should be defined in a neutral manner, one which does not provide a false and unjustified “resolution” of the accuracy issue by definition. A simple, broad, inclusive, pragmatic, and coherent definition is one that states that “stereotypes” are beliefs about groups. This allows for all sorts of possibilities that are not explicitly stated. Stereotypes may or may not be accurate and rational, widely shared, conscious, rigid; they may or may not exaggerate group differences, assume group differences are essential or biological, cause or reflect prejudice, biases and self-fulfilling prophecies.

This definition is proper for this work because it does not specify these issues. Rather than foreclosing answers to questions regarding the nature of stereotypes by definition, it leaves them open for empirical investigation. Stereotypes are nothing more than people’s beliefs about groups. They are much like other beliefs. Sometimes they are reasonable, rational, and useful and make a lot of sense. At other times, they are irrational and inaccurate and do not make much sense. Although stereotypes can and do lead to a wide range of biases in memory, judgment, and perception (in general) those biases tend to be quite modest. Nonetheless, research has identified conditions under which stereotypes do have some powerful effects, and it is under these conditions that stereotypes are most likely to play a significant role in prejudice and discrimination. This was the case of the stereotypical representation of the woman in Hurston’s society.

In the context of this research work, “gender stereotypes” can be considered as over-generalizations about the characteristics of an entire group based on gender. Gender stereotypes have been popularly perceived as having negative connotations. A man might say, “Women aren’t meant for combat”, while a woman might say, “men do nothing but watch sports.” Such expressions represent gender stereotypes, which are over-generalizations about the characteristics of an entire group based on gender. While women were barred from serving in military combat in Western nations until the later half of the 20th century, in recent times they have served in combat roles as capably as men. And while many men may watch sports, not all men would necessarily do so. Gender stereotypes can have negative connotations, like those above, but they can also have positive connotations, even though they are often over-generalized. For instance, the notion that women are better caregivers than men is a positive connotation, but

it is a generalization and not necessarily true in every case. This is similarly so for the notion that men are better providers than women, which while positive, can be disproved by looking at cases where men have abandoned their families and defaulted on child support. In the case of this study, such gender stereotypes are portrayed as having categorized the woman as seen in the character of Janie in the text under study.

Another term that is paramount to this research work is the “redefinition of the self.” Before talking on the redefinition of the self, it is important to shed light on the meaning of the word “self.” According to the *Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, “self” is a person regarded as an individual apart from everyone else, a typical or particular aspect of one’s behavior or character. It is equally the type of person you are especially the way you normally behave, look or feel. By this definition, we are referring to a situation where the female self is given a new identity and image of herself; different from the negative stereotypes she has been given. This identity makes her develop a positive sense of herself. This leads to the emergence of the new woman. Rosalyn Mutia states in her article “The New Woman Phenomenon in Selected Works of Toni Morrison, Margaret Afuh and Eunice Ngongkum,” that new womanism can be described as a feminist revolutionary social ideal which emerged in the final decades of the nineteenth century and ran into the first decades of the twentieth century.

It is necessary at this point, to delve into the author’s background to better understand the work in question. This accounts for this brief biography of the author. Born in Alabama on January 7, 1891, Zora Neale Hurston spent her early adulthood studying at various universities and collecting folklore from the South, the Caribbean and Latin America. She published her findings as *Mules and Men* in 1935. Hurston was a fixture of the Harlem Renaissance, rubbing shoulders with many great writers like Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. In 1937, she published her fictional text, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which has become a classic. The author died in Florida in 1960. She was also an outstanding folklorist and anthropologist who worked to record the stories and tales of many cultures, including those of her African American heritage.

Hurston was the daughter of two former slaves. Her father, John Hurston, was a pastor, and he moved the family to Florida when she was very young. Following the death of her

mother, Lucy Ann (Potts) Hurston— in 1904— and her father’s subsequent remarriage, Hurston lived with an assortment of family members in the few years that followed. To support herself and finance her efforts to get an education, the author did a variety of jobs, including being a maid for an actress in the touring Gilbert and Sullivan group. In 1920, she earned an associate degree from Howard University. One of her earliest works was published in the university’s newspaper. Around this time, Hurston experienced a few early literary successes, including placing in short-story and playwriting contests in *Opportunity* magazine. Some of her famous works are *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* and *Dust Tracks on the Road* published in 1934 and 1942. By 1936 the Guggenheim Fellowship made it possible for her to work on what would become her most famous work: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

As a woman and a Black, Hurston was a victim of oppression and societal injustices. For instance, in 1948, she was charged with molesting a 10-year-old boy. And despite the fact that she was able to prove that she was out of the country at the time of the incident, she suffered greatly from this false accusation. This notion of child molestation is mirrored in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* when her community thinks of her relationship with Tea Cake as dating one who is fit to be her child. Despite all of her accomplishments, she struggled financially during her final decade. She kept writing, but she had difficulties getting her works published. Additionally, she experienced some backlash for her criticism of the 1955 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* which called for the end of school segregation. The author also suffered several strokes a few years later and lived in the St. Lucie County Welfare Home. The once-famous writer and folklorist died poor and lonely on January 28, 1960, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida. Even in death, she has influenced several prominent writers today like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison.

The critical approaches which will be used for the analysis of the text in this study are New Historicism and Womanism. The New Historicist approach was propounded by Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault. It came up in the sphere of literary studies around the 1970s, and it will help us to examine the ideological currents that existed during Zora Neale Hurston’s literary career, that is, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. New Historicism could also be considered a reaction to New Criticism and its text-based approach as, according to New

Criticism, history is only used as background material to the text and it is not used for the interpretation of the texts (Murfin 221).

This approach judges the literariness of a work of arts, as well as the socio-historical and cultural conditions that influenced its production. In an attempt to define New Historicism, Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* posit that

The New Historicism isn't the same as the historical criticism practiced forty years ago. For one thing, it is informed by recent critical theory; psychoanalytic criticism, reader response criticism and perhaps deconstruction and feminist criticism. The New Historicist critics are less fact-oriented than historical critics used to be. They are likely to see history as being linear and progressive as something developing towards the present .(228)

In the above quote, Murfin and Ray show a clear difference between the Historical and the New Historicist approaches. This theoretical school is concerned with the concept of power as well as the cultural constitution of the self as political and cultural constructions. In this vein, the choice of the theory encompasses questions of gender representation and categorization that have been humanity's concern for ages.

The above quotation also means that New Historicism is connected to other elements like the Psychoanalytic criticism as well as the author's biography and historical background. However, New Historicism differs from the Historical approach as New Historicists go beyond the traditional way of looking at history. They do not pay much attention to facts and events but say how these facts and events influenced the author. For instance, Zora Neale Hurston's various travels as an anthropologist enabled her to get acquainted with different cultures which she puts in contrast with the white culture back home. This influenced her to produce her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which presents the clash between the white culture and the African American culture.

According to New Historicism, our self-hood—which is shaped by our culture— also shapes the culture in which we were born as Lois Tyson says:

For most New Historicists, our individual identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual activity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive (they create each other). (Tyson 280)

In this light, this theory eases understanding of the character types in the novel selected and the identity crisis represented in this text. Moreover, it portrays Hurston's text as one that examines identity crisis (not only as products of the society, culture and an individual's will), but as a novel that shows how the identity crisis defined reflect the society she operates in.

Also, according to the New Historicists, ideologies that are popular today might become unpopular tomorrow. So defining what is evil, wrong, immoral, and dangerous is then related to culture (Henry 9) from a New Historicist perspective. It is worth finding out what Hurston's novel tells us about the stand from which they are represented. This will thus foster the analysis of the similarities and differences of the writer's depiction of vice and virtue, looking at the possible reasons for such depictions. In effect, New Historicists study works of art, looking at what is considered right or normal as defined by the culture of a particular society. In different contexts, places and epochs, ideologies and issues might be accepted or rejected. As mentioned in *Critical Theory Today*, "all definitions of 'insanity', 'crime' and 'sexual perversion' are social constructs by means of which ruling powers maintain their control. We accept these decisions as 'natural' only because they are so ingrained in our culture" (Murfin Ross282). This work therefore examines how the American society imposes culture on women and the evolution of this cultural marginalization in the nineteenth and twentieth-century America.

As a theory that developed in the 1980s and 1990s, New Historicism simultaneously seeks to understand the work through its historical context and to understand the cultural and intellectual history through literature. This implies that the text selected is not only regarded as a historical product, but also as a product that reflects the ideological current of their time. There are glaring aspects of history in Hurston's novel under study. Henry Louis Gate Jr. has proven that many of Hurston's works have been greatly influenced by her own experiences as a

Southerner, as an African American, and as a woman (Ortiz *Critical* 198). Such aspects of history triggered her to produce her work. Moreover, this dimension of Hurston's craft justifies this work's resort to the New Historicist claim that an author's work is best understood against the backdrop of her whole literary production.

Although feminists have made efforts to examine the experiences of women of all races, classes and cultures, the specificity of the black woman's experience gave birth to Womanism. The term was first coined by Alice Walker, a famous African American writer, to describe the struggle of black women for self-determination in a male-dominated and white society. In 1983, Walker says, "Womanism is Black Feminism." In effect, the word "Womanism" had its intellectual roots in her famous essay, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose." She says that a womanist is: "A woman who loves other women sexually and/or none sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, values tears as a natural counterbalance to laughter and women's strength"(Walker 74-82). This means that any woman who has the interest of women at heart is a womanist. Some critics consider Womanists as having a stronger sense than Feminists with which they share the root of Feminism. But Walker makes it clear that both words, Womanism and Feminism are similar with few peculiarities as she says in 1983, "Womanist is to Feminist as purple is to Lavender" (xii). In other words, both terms move alongside each other. This is because feminism strives to free the woman from the shackles of male domination and feminist critics, especially the radical feminists, see the woman's force in female discourse which explains the creation of a movement such as "womanism."

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of solving problems in everyday spaces. The use of alliteration in the above sentence, reinforces the meaning of togetherness in the use of "everyday" as propagated by the womanists it extends to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension (ibid). Womanism therefore goes beyond liberating women from the shackles of paternal domination for the attainment of a feminine identity. According to Walker "a Womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female" (ibid). This makes it very clear that the Womanist does not exclude the

man, but strives for equality for both sexes; it seeks a society in which none will oppress the other, as seen in the case of Jody Stark's treatment of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The latter constantly attempts to suppress the heroine by suggesting that he married her to stay at home and not to sit at the porch to discuss with people. Womanists fight against racism, sexism, ageism, child abuse amongst others.

Other traits of womanism relevant for the analysis of the work under study are the emphasis womanists lay on the need for stories of black women to be told by black women themselves as well as their interrogation of the highly patriarchal overtones of the Bible. Both tenets are proper for the analysis of Hurston's work. Meanwhile, Womanism is important in this study as it explains the reasons why women behave the way they do in the novel under study. It also makes it possible for the work to highlight the woman's subordinate position and portrays their attempts to redefine their female self. The theory is one of the first movements that have the potential of cutting across all racial, class, age, economic, and geographical barriers. Womanism further shows the social implications of patriarchy as applied in the society from which the writer comes. This work is nonetheless not reduced to a lecture on detrimental gender tendencies, it investigates ways in which women and men re-examine themselves and join the train for societal growth and positive change without necessarily posing as the better gender.

Hurston is a writer whose works have excited a lot of criticism from literary minds across time. It is of paramount importance to examine some critics' opinions in relation to the topic under study. Her work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, has been interpreted from varied and contradictory perspectives. And it is this ambiguity and the incompatibility of critical opinions and shades of meaning that makes the debate on Hurston's works more crucial and fascinating. Some of these reviews are evoked in the paragraphs that follow.

This novel, like her first, received coverage in the national press, including *New Masses*, *Opportunity*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. Richard Wright noted what he saw as a "minstrel technique" of the work. He claimed that the characters in the novel "swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro" (Ortiz, *Critical* 18). Wright's dissatisfaction with what can be termed Hurston's reductionist representation of African American characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* echoes one of

the concerns of this dissertation. The work attempts to show how Hurston represents these stereotypes as a springboard to getting the oppressed, especially the female African American, to redefine herself.

Meanwhile, Alain Locke's remark is reminiscent of Hurston's arts and aesthetics that is equally of interest to this work. In a review that features in *Opportunity*, he acknowledges Hurston's talent for "poetic phrase, for rare dialect and folk humor" (18). He however asserts that these aspects prevent Hurston from diving deep into the inner psychology of characterization or to the sharp analysis of the social background (ibid). This work argues that Hurston's presumed superficiality mentioned by Locke here proceeds from her subscription to the agenda of the last phase of feminism. It is logical that, as a man, Locke should find it difficult to duly appreciate the writer's female approach to the depiction of her characters and setting. The dissertation looks at aspects of Hurston's art mentioned by Locke as part of a distinct womanist art.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. is another critic whose view in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* is of interest to this study's concern. In this work, this critic notes that

Zora Neale Hurston is the first writer that our generation of black and feminist critics has brought into the canons. For Hurston is now a cardinal figure of the Afro-American canon, the feminist canon, and the canon of American fiction, especially as our readings of her work become increasingly close readings, which Hurston's texts sustain delightfully.(180)

Gates, in his statement here, praises Hurston as a key figure in African American literature. He also presents Hurston as an African American who has championed the fight for black recognition in the world of art in American society and the world at large. The fact that her works are celebrated world-wide and taught in several colleges in the United States and other parts of the globe attests to her popularity. In effect, according to Gates, Hurston's art is so celebrated that her works serve as yardstick to judge what should be considered African

American works, feminist works and American fiction. It is both the African American and feminist dimensions of her work that ties in with the purpose of this study.

In like manner, Alice Walker, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, says that: “*Their Eyes Were Watching God* speaks to me as no novel past or present has ever done... there is enough self-love in that one book, love of community, culture and tradition to restore a world” (Qtd in Magill 572). Walker’s point of view asserts that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* does not only focus on love but also on culture and tradition. This culture and tradition according to Walker are a unifying factor for mankind. She emphasizes the fact that there is much self love in the text. The love for oneself is very important because it is said that, “if individuals are not in love with themselves, it will be difficult for those persons to love other people around them.”(572)

This book, according to Walker, is a representative of community life. This portrays the spirit of oneness in communities. The love of self is reflected in Janie’s life as portrayed the text. This is seen from the fact that although she goes through difficult times in her first two marriages, she does not for once see a reason to be angry at herself but rather strengthens her self through self love and hopes for a better future which she finally gets at the end.

In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, an autobiography written at the urging of her editor, Bertram Lippincott, Zora Neale Hurston expresses some dissatisfaction with her second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

I wrote “Their Eyes Were Watching God” in Haiti. It was dammed up in me, and I wrote it under internal pressure in seven weeks. I wish that I could write it again. In fact, I regret all of my books. It is one of the tragedies of life that one cannot have all the wisdom one is ever to possess in the beginning. Perhaps, it is just as well to be rash and foolish for a while. If writers were too wise, perhaps nothing would be written at all. It might be better to ask yourself “Why?” afterwards than before. (Hurston Dust. 1)

Hurston voices the frustrations of an artist brought up in an oral culture like that of her birthplace, Eatonville, Florida, a source of inspiration throughout her writing career and, as she informs us on the first page of her autobiography, the first all black community in America “to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self government on the part of Negroes in

America.” (1) In Eatonville, as Hurston writes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, storytellers sat on the porch of Mayor Joe Clarke’s (Starks’s in the novel) store and “passed around pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see” (48). Whereas these storytellers were able to retell, modify, and perfect the tales with which they entertained and enlightened other members of the community, authors such as Hurston had to be content with the successes they managed to achieve in written work which, with the seeming clarity of hindsight, might appear incomplete and hastily composed. Clearly, this is how she felt retrospectively about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a work written to capture “all the tenderness of my passion” (and, it seems, at least some of her ambivalence about the physical and psychological violence) experienced during the relationship that inspired the novel.

As earlier mentioned, critics of Hurston have commented on the representation of the African American, the specificity of her art and the role played by folk culture in the South. But this present research endeavor delves into issues of gender stereotypes which are evident in the text and the work shows how these women have been subdued through this means. It also examines ways in which the woman can bridge these stereotypes. Finally, this study reveals the fact that, despite the stereotypical roles ascribed to the woman; she still stands tall in society and successfully asserts herself.

This work is divided into a general introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The general introduction handles the background to the study, the research problem, the research questions that guide the study, the purpose of the study, the hypothesis, the author’s biography, the review of related literature, the theoretical framework, and the structure of the work. Chapter One is titled “Male Hegemony in America and Gender Stereotypes.” It examines the founding and progress of the patriarchal American society and sheds light on the way Hurston captures the stereotypes which are prevalent in America in the text under study. The chapter also focuses on how Hurston portrays her characters as gender categories. Chapter Two, entitled “Challenging Gender Stereotypes,” shows how the writer deconstructs stereotypes in the portrayal of the African American, especially the woman, in the twentieth-century American society characterized by race and gender biases. It argues that Hurston challenges and revisits the woman’s role by getting the latter to redefine herself.

Chapter Three, titled “The Author’s Ideal and Vision,” looks at how Hurston seeks to reform culture in America to the woman’s favor through her text. It equally delves into how Hurston’s advocacy of redefined womanhood leads to the rebirth of women when the cultures which marginalize and relegate them are revised. Lastly, it sheds light on the author’s perception of the ideal woman and society and how she represents them. Lastly, Chapter Four is captioned “Gender Awareness in an ESL Classroom.” The chapter examines the way gender is treated in a classroom situation with respect to their perception of culture. Moreover, it shows the difference in the way women are segregated against in the different classroom contexts and how they can overcome these treatments. The conclusion examines what the work set out to achieve and the critical approaches to literature used in analyzing the text. It also summarizes the findings of each chapter and of the entire work. Lastly, it makes suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

MALE HEGEMONY IN AMERICA AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

This chapter examines the founding and evolution of America as a patriarchal society and the stereotypes which are prevalent in this society as well as shows how Hurston represents this male supremacy in her book. The chapter also focuses on how the writer portrays her characters as representative of gender categories. Thus, it highlights the way female characters in the text are treated in a society dominated by patriarchy. Men did not always consider women to be equal to them. They perceived women as subservient to them. Women were the weaker sex and were supposed to accept male power. The New Historicist criticism makes obvious the fact that sexual inequality in the text under study can be traced historically as it is rooted in the social reality and social construction of the woman.

Financially men were often superior to women. They constituted the working class. With their financial empowerment, they controlled the world. In Hurston's society and culture, men were regarded as the norm, as the central position from which the female was defined. This is in line with the concern of the womanist criticism which deplores the fact that society and culture are constructed from a patriarchal perspective. By analysing issues of gender in Hurston's text, the chapter attempts to explore the root of the polemics between the writer and her society. Each author has a peculiar manner of portraying facts because of their personal experiences which are generally evident in their respective narratives. From a new historicist perspective, the chapter retraces sexual and racial relations in America and then shows how Hurston captures the resulting gender stereotypes in the work being studied.

It is believed that between 1929 and 1935, the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci is said to have written approximately thirty documents on political, social, and cultural subjects known as "Prison Notebooks" (Abrams 185). These documents were written during his imprisonment days by the fascist government. Gramsci maintains the original Marxist distinction between the economic base and the cultural superstructure, but replaces the claim that culture is a

disguised “reflection” (185) of the material base with the concept that the relationship between the two is one of reciprocity or interactive influence. The critic lays special emphasis on the popular as opposed to the elite elements of culture, ranging from folklore and popular music to the cinema. Gramsci’s most widely echoed concept is what he calls hegemony. According to him, it is a situation where a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression (ibid). It is this unwitting acceptance and internalization of male dominion by the female American caste that this chapter aims at examining.

It is hard to resist gender stereotypical inclination in the world. This is because by virtue of living in a social world, individuals informally learn the appropriate or expected gendered behavior for their sex. While individuals can accept or resist traditional gender roles in their own presentation of self, gender roles are a powerful means of social organization that impact many aspects of society. For this reason, individuals inevitably internalize conventional and stereotypic gender roles, irrespective of their particular chosen gender, and develop their sense of gender in the face of strong messaging about the correct gender role for their perceived body. Hurston’s society, like many others, conforms to these patterns. The United States and many other nations and cultures are based on gender and race to affect and normalize the distributions of goods among the races and sexes. Laws set to permit or call for racial and gender discrimination have qualified women and blacks in general to second- class citizenship. Blacks and women were set aside from receiving certain types of training, they were excluded from most jobs, and they were paid less than Whites or men for equal work. Blacks and women were simply victims of unfairness (Rothenberg 113).

All these maltreatments were ingrained in the gender and race differences which sexists and racists institutionalized in order to rationalize their behaviors. It is common knowledge that women and Blacks were not judged exactly like men and Whites but according to their skin color and sex and in accordance with their oppressors’ views. Such judgments and treatments led these two groups to question themselves and react. That is how Feminism and the Civil Rights Movement came about. Hurston explores a variety of instances of gender and racial differences in her works and this enhances the conflicting situations and ideologies. These

situations will be examined under aspects of gender stereotypes. In gender relations, it is worth noting that the woman— especially the African American woman— suffers a twofold oppression. This originates from the fact that the Black (who is a victim of the white man’s supremacy), in turn victimizes the black woman at home. The black woman is a victim of every sort oppressions: that is, to say from the white man, the white woman and her African husband. She thus suffers from the chauvinistic ordering of the society. This is evident in Hurston’s society. This domineering attitude of the man and society shackles the woman and has created a stereotype which haunts the woman, especially the African American woman. From a new Historicist stand point, it is relevant to note that most of Hurston’s works are a true representation of this gender stereotyping because she experienced it first-hand in her society.

Historically, discrimination against minorities and women in the United States of America was not only accepted, but it was also governmentally required. The doctrine of white supremacy used to support the institution of slavery was so much a part of American custom and policy that the Supreme Court in 1857 approvingly concluded that both the North and South regarded slaves as “being of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” (Rothenberg 9) From the statement it is evident the situation of the woman in the society did not attract any respect for her. Being a woman was a license for disrespect because their opinions were not in any way accepted in the society. This applied mostly in the American society wherein the black women were not allowed to vote.

White supremacy survived the passage of the Civil War amendments to the constitution and continued to dominate legal and social institutions in the North as well as the South to disadvantage, not only of blacks, but of other racial and ethnic groups as well— American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders and Hispanics. While minorities were suffering from white supremacy, women were suffering from male supremacy. Mr. Justice Brennan has summed up the legal disabilities imposed on women this way:

Throughout much of the 19th century the position of women in our society was, in many respects, comparable to that of blacks under the pre-Civil War slave codes. Neither slaves nor women could hold office, serve on juries, or bring suit in their

own names, and married women traditionally were denied the legal capacity to hold or convey property or to serve as legal guardians of their own children. (ibid)

In the above quotation, Brennan examines the fact that the woman has suffered most of the marginalization that blacks suffered during slavery as they were not allowed to own property; they were not allowed to hold offices of valuable position. He continues to say that they were equally not allowed the right to get married or to own children. They were mere tools in the hands of their masters as their services were determined by these slave masters. Brennan notes in this quotation that their plight was equally the woman's yet, the woman was even more oppressed because the black man was in turn her oppressor. It is believed that in 1873, a member of the Supreme Court proclaimed, "Man is, or should be, woman's protector and defender. The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life."(ibid)

From this statement, it is clear that the women had been seen as unfit to cater for themselves and, as such, they needed the support and guidance of the men to be able to survive. This is the image that history has given the woman. It is an image of romantic paternalism that has alternated with fixed notions of male superiority to deny women (in law and in practice) the most fundamental of rights including the right to vote, which was not granted until 1920; the Equal Rights Amendment has yet to be ratified.

The struggles faced by most women, especially the black women, have been termed a model struggle because this struggle is interestingly mirrored in the Post World War II era. When they confront gender and race stereotypes, black women are said to be standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion. It may be surprising that the gyrate half-naked in degrading hip-hop videos that reinforce the image of black women's lewdness is accepted by some. It may equally be shocking that some black women actors seem willing to embody the historically degrading image of Mammy by accepting movie roles where they are cast as the nurturing caretakers of white women and children. This work aims at showing how Hurston's protagonist combats such misrepresentations. The first examples of literature written by African-American women

appeared around 1859, as part of a general renaissance of black literature in the 1850s. They included short stories by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, as well as Harriet E. Wilson's autobiographical novel *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. In 1861, Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* became the first autobiography published by a female former slave. The book described the sexual exploitation that all too often added to the oppression of slavery for black women; it also provided an early example of black female strength in the face of adversity.

The hardship of the Depression and the coming of World War II refocused African-American literature and art towards social criticism, as evidenced in the works of such novelists as Ann Petry. Her 1946 novel, *The Street*, chronicled the struggles of a working class black woman in Harlem. In 1949, Chicago native— Gwendolyn Brooks— whose work dealt with everyday life in black urban communities, became the first African-American poet to win the Pulitzer Prize. In the realm of drama, Lorraine Hansberry (also from Chicago) scored tremendous critical and popular success with *A Raisin in the Sun*, which opened on Broadway in 1959. During the 1950s and 1960s, few black artists—and even fewer black women—were accepted into the mainstream of American art. Elizabeth Catlett, a sculptor and printmaker, spent much of her career as an expatriate in Mexico City in the 1940s; the activism of her life and work led in the 1950s to her investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Catlett was known for sculptures such as “Homage to My Young Black Sisters” (1968).

In 1972, at the age of 80, the abstract painter Alma Woodsey Thomas became the first African-American woman to have a solo exhibit of her paintings at the Whitney Museum. Artists and writers would play an active role in the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Gwendolyn Brooks, for example, composed “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” for a black youth murdered in Mississippi in 1955; she included more explicit social criticism in her volume “The Bean Eaters” published in 1960. Poetry was also a central form of expression for the Black Arts Movement, the artistic branch of the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Important female poets of this movement, who emphasized the solidarity of the African-American community included Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Carolyn M. Rodgers and Nikki Giovanni. The autobiography of the murdered black activist Malcolm X,

written with Alex Haley and published in 1965, influenced similar memoirs by black female activists like Anne Moody and Angela Davis, who published her own autobiography in 1974. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for example, Hurston presents the disadvantaged position of women, presenting the issue of gender stereotyping and marriage choices as the main problem they have to confront. Gender came to be seen as a construct of society, designed to facilitate the smooth-running of the society. The disadvantage of women was always to the advantage of men, given that men gained power through the socially constructed subordination of women. Women were as such kept in their socially and sexually subordinate places.

This means that the men gained authority because women were forced to play subordinate roles. It was presumed they lacked the intellectual and material backing that was only found in the men. This ties in with what the womanists kick against the fact that the woman is seen as nothing other than a “mere slave.” In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, this is evident when- after Joe Starks succeeds in winning the heart of Janie from Logan Killicks- the cruelty of male power becomes evident. When Joe is made the Mayor of their Town, he restricts Janie from everything that makes her happy by patronizing her and expecting her to sit at home and play Mrs. Mayor. He does not understand why she eventually refuses what he considers to be a secured marriage. According to him, she lacks nothing given the luxurious life he can offer them. Joe can be seen here as an authoritative male who represents the domineering male system that tries to control and organize a woman’s life for her. Hurston attempts to capture the overpowering pressure that Janie feels in her book.

As earlier mentioned, it is worthy of note that Janie’s community portrays many of chauvinistic tendencies. This is because these injustices have been ingrained in the society’s perception of an individual. For instance, the heroine’s community does not see why she should walk out of her marriage to a man like Joe who, according to the same community, has a more advanced social scale than she does. The men in Hurston’s society generally saw women as domestic or sex partners who were supposed to be there for them. Joe believes he can use his authority as a man and his riches to suppress Janie just because he is the central figure in the whole of Eatonville Society. He marginalizes Janie like every other African man does. He manipulates her to suit his purpose and cares less about her feelings. Everything he does in the relationship is advantageous to him to the detriment of Janie. Generally in Hurston’s world, there

were no prospects for women other than marriage and child bearing. Marriage being the only hope for the woman's livelihood, the woman ought to grasp any marriage proposal that had good financial prospects because therein lay her protection and fulfillment as Nanny insinuates. She constantly reminds her grand-daughter of the past that was characterized by slavery and shaped her life (Nanny's) and that of Janie's mother. She contends that having been victimized by the white slave master; the African American male asserts his authority by subjugating his female counterpart. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the African American woman thus becomes the white and black men's victim. Nanny's observation below affirms this fact

Honey, de white is the ruler of everything as fur as ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is the mule uh the world so fur as ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, lawd, lawd! (Hurston *Their Eyes* 186)

In the excerpt above, Nanny shows the oppressive and hierarchical American society in which she finds herself. The black woman is at the bottom of the social ladder. The woman's plight was the legacy of slavery. She is victimized by her slave master, his wife and the rest of her society. As a black and a slave, she is considered a nonentity, subjected to the violence brought on by history it is interesting to note that Nanny's experience qualifies her as a preacher. Having learnt from her woes as a black female slave, she is ready to both tell her grand-daughter her story and to preach to her. The quotation below points to these facts:

You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and the makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfil my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want ma daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn't mah will for things to happen lak they dis. Ah even hated the way you was born. But, all de same Ah said thank

God, Ah got another chance. Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 187)

Her past in slavery conditions, Nanny to see marriage as a means of securing protection and financial security for Janie. It is however clear that while she cautions and persuades Janie to get married to Logan Killicks, she equally teaches her grand-daughter a lesson, that of never giving up because victory is sure for those who do not. These lessons give Janie the courage and wisdom that guide her in her first marriage to Killicks. Nanny's experience with what happens to Leafy, her daughter, gives Nanny the wisdom she has. Leafy was raped by her teacher and the trauma reminds Nanny of her own experiences as a black woman in the hands of white men. Here, the men use sex as a means of subjugating the women. This ties in with what Simone de Beauvoir says "one is not born a woman, but one becomes one" (*De Beauvoir* 25). In other words, the woman in society finds herself reduced to a sub-human because of the gender power imbalance in a given culture. Thus, the circumstances surrounding the woman's existence totally change her life. It is relevant to note that gender is treated here as a social construct through the concept of masculinity and femininity.

The women of Eatonville ask venomous questions: "What she doing coming back here in dem overalls?" "Can't she find no dress to put on?" "Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in?" (Hurston *Their Eyes* 2) The women of Eatonville sneer at Janie's clothes, when she returns to town, not only because she is mixing gender roles, but also because they think she must have had a hard time. They think it is because she is destitute that she wears men's clothes: "Where all dat money her husband took and died and lift her? . . . What [Tea Cake] done wid all her money?" they wonder (ibid) It can be inferred here that Janie's reason for putting on the overalls is to debunk the claim that some clothes are fit only for men. The fact that she kills her husband in self-defense only shows that women are taking the central stage and relegating men to the bottom of the social ladder, a position formerly occupied by women. Her choice to put on this masculine attire can equally be part of the fact that she is truly mourning the man she loved. By putting on this dress, it seems as if Tea Cake is still alive. Janie, in this respect, is equally seen as a woman who has gained complete freedom from the male sex. This is the object of chapter three of this study. Hurston presents a society in which the woman is viewed from the

perspective of the man. The man remains the absolute, the determiner and the designer of the woman. As such, they can afford to see women as infidels. It is a society in which these men do not think anything positive can come from a woman. They consider certain jobs to be meant for men. Art is considered to be a man's job and any attempt by a woman to write or paint is seen as unnecessary stubbornness to the conventional construct. This was the woman's situation in Hurston's lifetime as and this explains why her works were recognized only after her death thanks to the intervention of Alice Walker. The society at the time had the stereotypical view that a woman should be nothing other than a child-bearer.

Another instance of enforced male hegemony and gender stereotype which is evident in this novel as well is when Janie (as a child) wears clothes given to her by the white landowner. These are the clothes that the latter's grand-children no longer wear. In the novel, it is mentioned that her clothes, though second-hand, are better than those of most colored children in her school. This causes a sort of jealousy among other colored children. Janie receives clothes from the Whites, which sparks the jealousy others feel about the higher quality of clothes. Joe Starks is a man who dresses in a "citified" and "stylish" manner. He buys new clothes for Janie in order to display their wealth and taste. He even tells Janie what to wear and he does not care about Janie's beauty as worthy in itself, but rather tries to show her off like a beauty fair to other people. In the novel, it is recorded that, —Joe tells her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow; the other women were the gang (41). We should notice the kind of clothes Janie wears while living with Joe. They are formal, full of rigidity and dark colors which show somber emotions.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is considered by her society as a woman whose place should be in the home and whose work is to care for the home. This view is also supported by her ex-slave grandmother who is the product of this same society's stereotypical philosophy according to which a woman can have an assured life only through marriage and under the protection of a man. Counseling her granddaughter about the realities of the world, Nanny tells Janie that the world is controlled by the white man as quoted in page (21) of this research work. From Nanny's quotation above, it is clear that the suppression of the nigger woman is a historical construct which also defines the fact that the black man maltreats the

African woman because of the punishment given to him by the white master. Due to this, the black man seeks avenues to show and exercise his manliness and the woman, in this case, is the victim. This only explains the double marginalization the woman undergoes in the society as evident in Hurston's text.

It is worth noting here that the observation that Nanny makes guides Janie in her journey in the novel. Janie goes from a girl who lives her life according to how others around her tell her to do so to becoming a woman who makes her own decisions. She begins her journey with a decision that has been made for her; after Nanny sees Janie kissing Johnnie Taylor under the pear tree, she decides that Janie needs to be a married woman who should be provided for. This implies that even the woman's women folk are an obstacle to the woman's self-assertion and fulfillment. The statement above is justifiable by the events of the court room in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is the Women of Eatonville who are against Janie and not the men. According to Nanny, Janie's kissing of Johnnie Taylor is a symbol of maturity and the only way to prevent her from facing what her mother, (Leafy) and Nanny herself faced, it is better she marries.

In this novel, Hurston gives us an inside look at gender roles in African American culture set in Eatonville, Florida. This novel goes beyond what is deemed a typical love story. Real life and cultural issues are equally presented therein. In the beginning of the novel, Janie seems to be like any other young woman with a normal life until her grandmother begins to insist that she should get married. More still, as if Joe does not make a conscious effort to make Janie feel more inferior to him and other men, he manages to create feelings in Janie which become even worse by comparing women to cows and chickens thus. "You sho loves to tell me whut to do, but Ah can't tell you nothin' Ah see!" "Dat's 'cause you need tellin'. It would be pitiful if Ah didn't. Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves." (71) In the preceding excerpt, Joe's use of this metaphor is to compare women to cows and chickens because— according to him— women cannot think for themselves. They need the men to do the thinking for them and are like cows and chicken which are always at the mercy of their owners since they cannot take care of themselves. The treatment of women takes a negative phase from the metaphor Joe uses here. The selfish nature of men is reflected in Joe's attitude towards Janie. When he discovers he is getting old, he decides to restrict Janie from wearing certain clothes with the pretext that she is not getting any younger. At

that time Janie is just 37 years old. Joe expresses himself thus “You oughta throw somethin’ over yo’ shoulders befo’ you go outside. You ain’t no young pullet no mo’. You’s e uh ole hen now” (91-92). In this way, Joe commands Janie into submission. He realizes that his getting older is something he should be afraid of and believes that, if he tells Janie to cover her shoulders when she goes outside, she will not be approached by younger and more attractive men.

It is relevant to mention at this point, borrowing from Boisnier as quoted from Downing and Roush’s five stages of feminist identity development. The first stage is passive and, in this step, a woman accepts the way society defines her. She accepts her traditional gender role. Janie Crawford initially accepts what Nanny offers her. She should get married to a man many years older than herself and she should be satisfied. So at this level women think of their traditional roles as advantageous. This advantage is clear in Nanny’s speeches. Logan Killicks is a decent man; furthermore he has a house and land to work on. If Janie marries Logan, she will be satisfied and comfortable in Nanny’s view. For women (and especially black women in the novel) economic comfort is the first advantage for a woman. Nanny refers to “De nigger woman” as “de mule of de world” for as far as she can see. Through this metaphor, Nanny presents the black woman here as an animal that has a horse and a donkey as parents and is used especially for carrying loads. This is the image that the white man has given the nigger woman. She is a child bearer and caters for the home. This aspect reinforces the black woman’s plight and has been the reason for her marginalization and subjugation. In fact, the stereotypes put in place by the society have conditioned individuals like Nanny to think that, without a man, the woman is nothing. Janie, by heeding Nanny’s advice, starts off her life with a decision that has been made for her as earlier mentioned.

Janie chooses Logan Killicks, a local farmer who owns his farm, house, and organ as the right match. She chooses to go along with her grandmother’s choice, deciding that she will learn to love Killicks. And for the first year, Killicks treats her well. But soon, he begins to treat her as just any other person who works on his farm. And when Janie is disappointed that she has not learned to love him and tells Nanny this, Nanny’s response is that Janie should be happy with the stability that Killicks provides. She ought to make the best of the life that she has. But Janie refuses to settle for less than her ideal notion of romantic love. So, when Joe Starks arrives, she leaves Killicks to go away with Starks. Janie believes that she will be an equal

partner in this second marriage as Joe seems to be a man of ambition. What she does not know is that he is a man who is interested in his own ambition and is willing to sacrifice Janie's dreams for his. He becomes Mayor and a store owner. He treats Janie as one of his possessions, making her wear her hair in a head scarf and forbidding her to talk with the people who congregate on the store porch and who represent the male community in Eatonville. Joe forbids Janie from joining in the storytelling and checker-playing that takes place on the porch of the store that he owns. Instead, she must remain isolated from the group, symbolizing the superiority of Joe's possessions. Janie soon discovers that Joe's idea of a better life is centered on making his own life better, not theirs as a couple. She however lives out the marriage, doing as Joe dictates.

The men are not the only characters who see the traditional take on gender relations (strong men, obedient women) as necessary and worthwhile. Nanny, as a former slave who endured brutal conditions in her life, is understandably more concerned with material well-being than self-expression. She therefore sees marriage as a means of gaining status and financial security for her grand-daughter, and does not believe that a black woman can gain independence without a man. But Janie has different concerns, and this distinguishes her from Nanny and other women who accept the traditional gender roles portrayed in the novel. Janie seeks self-expression and authentic love based on mutual respect.

In this novel, we can trace feminist protests in parts that condemn the limitations of marriage and especially bourgeois marriage and the violence we witness in the men of the community. Women are politically oppressed and are engaged in a power game in which the winner is patriarchy. Violence is an ever-present theme as evident in the case of Nanny and Leafy. Both women are raped by a superior white male and both of them endure child-birth. Janie lives and grows up in an atmosphere in which there is always the danger of being assaulted and raped by a man. If we view sexuality in terms of a system, men will make sure that this system will continue its supremacy over women. As Madsen puts it: "Sexuality is not a neutral term it refers to male sexuality of which feminine sexuality is seen as a variant (or deviant)" (Madsen *Feminist Theory* 1).

According to Madsen here, feminine sexuality is different from what people consider to be normal and acceptable. We witness the sexual abuse that black women experience both from white men and black men in the book. Such sexual violence can be best explained through what Nanny tells Janie. She observes that “de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out” (14). Nanny tries to convince Janie to marry a man who will provide her with comfort. In the name of protection, she forces her granddaughter to get married because of the fear of their male patriarchal society. She fears that Janie’s fate may be like hers and Leafy’s.

The objectification of women is another element seen both in the novel and patriarchal societies as a tool used to suppress. There are many instances in the novel to prove this point. Janie and Joe Starks run off to find an all-black community and, once there, Joe uses his power to build a mighty and powerful city. In acknowledgment of this, Tony Taylor— one of the citizens—begins to make a speech and decides to thank Joe for what he has done: “brother Starks, we welcomes you and all that you have seen fit tuh bring amongst us-yo’belov-ed wife, yo’ store, yo’ land” (42). As is clear from the quotation above, Janie is considered one of the properties among others that are Joe’s. Janie is not a separate entity nor is she a human being. She belongs to Joe the Mayor. To represent the oppression of the black female by white male, Hurston resorts to widespread objectification, stereotypical oversimplification and outright denial of black female through the account of the lives of Janie, her mother and her grandmother.

Joe believes in this concept and all his actions and behavior clearly show that he thinks of Janie as being merely a piece of property. He makes Janie wear a head rag while she works in the store in order to keep her beauty from the eyes of strangers and more still, more in order to show his people that he is the boss and she will do whatever he commands. Hurston notes that: “She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others. But he never said things like that. It just wasn't in him”(55). Joe even goes as far as ordering Janie about: he tells her what to do and what not to do. There is this scene in which most of the people of Eatonville are attending the burial of the poor mule. Janie wants to accompany Joe and attend the ceremony, but Joe surprisingly refuses with the excuse that the gathering is one of commonness and she should not be part of such a gathering because, “de mayor's wife is somethin’ different” (60). He does decide, not only for her actions, but also for her feelings and thoughts.

He wants her to think the way he thinks and to feel just what is appropriate for a woman of her class. He wants her to be in the same mood as he is and he thinks thus: "She was sullen and he resented that. She had no right to be, the way he thought things out. She wasn't even appreciative of his efforts and she had plenty cause to be" (62). According to Joe here Janie ought to reason in the direction he wants her to. He further says Janie is bad-tempered and according to him, this is part of her. It should be noted that Joe is not the only man in the village who dares decide for his woman. This sort of practice is prevalent in the community and the men's mind-set is clear when Joe himself reveals the fact that somebody has to do the thinking for women and chillun and chickens and cows. At this point, Janie defends herself and other women. But she is not strong enough to fight the Mayor. In other words, Joe uses both his masculinity and the public office that his being male grants him to subjugate the woman. He resorts to violence in different forms. For instance, he uses physical violence to ensure the continuance of his power over Janie. He slaps her as stated: "until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store." (72). The Mayor uses violence as a means to enforce male supremacy on Janie by beating her up all in an attempt to make her understand that he is in control and not her. This form of maltreatment is common in most relationships even in our contemporary societies.

Talking about the vulnerability of the woman, it is important to refer to the story about Tony and his wife, and the scene centers around the male porch talkers and their comments on this couple's life. The porch talkers believe that Tony should be harsher with his wife and almost all of them hate the way Tony behaves toward his wife. They claim they would behave otherwise if they were in his shoes. One of the characters says that, "Tony won't never hit her. He says beatin' women is just like steppin' on baby chickens. He claims 'tain't no place on uh woman tuh hit" (75). This statement by Tony symbolizes the fact that women are vulnerable and like baby chicken, if stepped on, will be harmed. This vulnerability is ingrained in the marginalization of the women folk in the society. There is always the threat of violence against women and in this case is used to keep them passive and subordinated.

As mentioned earlier, violence has many forms and it is not only physical violence that oppresses women. There is also intellectual violence that accrues from the fact that all the meanings and concepts in society are divided into sexual classes. In these pre-defined meanings,

everything related to women is repressed and subordinated while everything related to male category supreme and powerful. So, women live in a world that is unjustly sexually segmented. Another form of violence, believed to have great impact on the woman in the text is psychological aggression. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is constantly under attack by patriarchal concepts of what constitutes true womanhood. First, it appears in Nanny's words, then in Logan's and also Joe's, her second husband. She is not free from these attacks even after Joe dies. She notices that being a widow and having some property are big challenges for her as a woman. This is reflected in the statements of some well-wishers:

“Uh woman by herself is a pitiful thing”, she was told over and again. “Dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant ‘em tuh try tuh stand by theirselves. You ain't been used to knockin' round and doin' fuhyo'self, Mis' Starks. You been well taken keer of, you needs uh man. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 90)

In the above quotation, the well-wishers remind Janie of the fact that a single woman is nothing but a lonely fellow and, according to them, she needs assistance. They even enlist God in the patriarchal when they argue that— in His wisdom as Creator— he intended that no woman should stay alone. This is to say if God sides with men as implied by the declaration of these well-wishers, then one can understand womanists' challenge of the Judeo-Christian God's partiality for patriarchy. That may explain why Hurston chooses to title her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Here, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* could mean the black female castes are looking up to God for divine intervention in the face of their plight.

In many ways, Chapter 18 is the book's climax. The battle with the hurricane is the source of the book's title and illuminates the central conflict of the novel: Janie's quasi-religious quest to find her place in the world amid confusing, unpredictable, and often threatening forces. The chapter examines the woman's harmony with God who is her only source of hope. This can be seen in the quotation below

They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He mean to measure their puny

might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 160)

The extract above examines the fact that the maltreatment the woman undergoes can only be eradicated by God. As such, the women in Eatonville look up to “Him”, seeking refuge in what they consider to be their only hope for survival. They equally ask “Him” if their might (which they consider to be small and weak) can be compared to that of the one who, according to them has no match.

It can be inferred that the muck that wrecked Eatonville apart is God’s response to the woman’s prayers as it does not spare the lives of the men meanwhile, it gives the woman liberty. It can be equally thought of as an act that completes the pilgrimage undergone by the woman in the quest for salvation as can be understood from a biblical standpoint. Throughout the novel, characters have operated under the delusion that they can control their environment and secure a place for themselves in the world. Joe, in particular, demonstrates the folly of this mindset in his attempts to play God. Tea Cake exhibits this folly as well. His ease in the natural environment—his mastery of the muck, his almost supernatural skill at gambling— have made him too proud. He feels that the storm is not a threat. The title of the novel “Their Eyes Were Watching God,” dissolves the gender dichotomies brought on by culture and history. Men, women, and animals are all subjected to natural catastrophe (flood) and all of them attempt to escape the fury of the lake.

Even Tea Cake, who is liberal, is a man who grew up in that patriarchal society all the same. It is clear that he is mild about many things and is not as harsh as Logan or Joe, but he shows his patriarchal inclination at times. When he organizes a party using Janie’s money, pays two dollars to each ugly woman not to come to their place and does not tell Janie about all this, he wants to feel powerful by creating a temporary all (man) territory. When Janie protests and asks the reason why he does these things, she gets the same answers as she used to get from Joe, her second husband Tea Cake says: “Dem wazn’t no high mucky mucks. Dem was railroad hands and dey womenfolks. You ain’tusetuh folks lakdat...”(124). In this statement, Tea Cake expresses the fact that he was afraid that Janie might not move in with him. He feels inferior

because the kind of job he does is no way close to Janie's economic and social status following her life with Joe.

He equally thinks that Joe was not someone who behaved in a very silly way towards Janie but after his realization, he too resorts to physical violence to oppress the woman as he whips Janie for no good reason. It is said in the novel that the beating was not brutal at all and it was just a kind of beating that made her eye peel so that she would know that he was the boss. "Ah didn't whup Janie 'cause she done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show them Turners who is boss" (148). From this, we see that the man oppresses the woman because he wants to prove his might to the world around them. The beating results from the fact that Tea Cake wants to react to Mrs. Turner's comment about the relationship between Janie and he. And instead of picking on the former, he victimizes Janie to show Mrs. Turner his might. Tea Cake says to this effect that "ah set in de kitchen one day and heard dat woman tell mah wife ah'm too black fuh her. She don't see how Janie can stand me" (148).

The first indication of the way black female characters like Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are viewed in a negative way is the way other black women consider her when she comes back to Eatonville eighteen months after leaving with Tea Cake:

what she doin' coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? What dat ole forty year ole 'omandoin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal? Where she left dat young lad of aboy she went off here wid? Thought she was going to marry? Where he left her? (Hurston *Their Eyes* 18)

These are words of one of the porch-sitters of black women who witnesses Janie's return to Eatonville some months after the death of her third husband, Tea Cake. The words show that the traditional black women are the first obstacle to Janie's process of self-fulfillment; these women represent the cult of women who have adapted the values and norms of their black patriarchal society. They act as a kind of agent for controlling and maintaining the values and views which black males have established for women. They have completely surrendered themselves to the male-dominated black society and consider any defiance to its rule as unacceptable. They believe

that Janie is not normal because she reverses the society's orderings. Hurston's research revealed how women were denied access to the pulpit and the store porch, the privileged site of public recognition of storytelling. They were consequently denied the commensurate possibility of self-definition.

The woman has been and is simultaneously dominated by the black traditional male-centered society. The African American woman is also doubly colonized in their encounter with the white-American culture. Hurston is one of the significant writers in American literary history and one of the five or six most cited Afro-American writers in the world. She can be defined as a nonconformist novelist who protests against traditional ways of defining the female self in the patriarchal black society as well as a path-breaker for other future female black novelists. The issue of black female sexuality, which is introduced in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, revives a history of black female sexual objectification. Hurston's literary revival became a central element in the second and third waves of black feminist thought.

It is worthy of note that identity is one of the main obsessions of this novel whose characters such as Nanny, Joe and Janie can be considered as individuals who preoccupy themselves with the sense of who they are. The suffering of black women, who have already been silenced and oppressed by black patriarchal society, is doubled by the experience of an encounter with the white man in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Djockoua Manyaka Toko, in her article entitled "Violence, Community History and Selfhood in African and African American Fiction: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Leonora Miano's *L'interieur de la nuit (Dark Heart of the Night)*" presents Joe as a representative of the white man because he is a prototype of the power monger American capitalist. He is likened to the rich white folks. He endorses the white man's oppressive capitalism that acts on the freedom and essentiality of the Black, the woman and the poor (34). His actions are seen thus:

Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. ... beenworkin' for white folks all his life. Saved up some money- round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearing 'bout them buildin' a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin' money where he was. But when he heard all about 'emmakin' a town all

outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' dis place dat colored folks was building theirselves. Dat was right too. De man dat built things oughta boss it. Let colored folks build things too if they wants to crow over something.' (Hurston *Their Eyes* 28)

Joe is seen here as the potential maker of the new community's history; he wants to change the old history by reversing the roles long established by slavery that confer all powers on the White while the Black is stripped of all authority. Unlike Janie's, his definition of change is not measured in terms of expression but of material property symbolized by his capability to build, to change the town which is still "a baby" into a developed one, an achievement that can be achieved only with money which he has saved for the purpose. When Joe realizes that the man who builds things ought to control them, he becomes very interested in building his town and in making a name for himself. He keeps Janie confined to his shop and transforms her into his chattel. Janie Logan's former mule becomes Starks's possession and speechless ornament. Like Logan who tells Janie "don't you change too many words wid me dis mawnin" (31), Joe hushes his wife with these words: "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-making.' Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home"(43). Logan and Joe's free praxis thus deprives Janie of the power to express her change in new words. Therefore one way in which the black woman is oppressed is that she is silenced.

Through the creation of semi-fictional and semi-factual characters such as Nanny, Janie, Joe Starks, and Tea Cake— and through the act of placing them in diverse situations,— Hurston brings her inner obsession with the ever-present White/Black crisis as well as her stand on the male-female conflict to the forefront in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Writing as a female in a world which is preeminently dominated by male literary and philosophical traditions and values, Hurston narrates the lives of characters such as Janie and her grandmother (Nanny) who are constrained by both traditional patriarchal African heritage and White American oppression. These women are doubly silenced and oppressed. The novelist exposes the suppression and oppression of women through both African male-dominated tradition and also by white male-

controlled American culture. The short narration of Nanny's struggle of how she has been used by the Whites for their sexual gratification; how she spent nights in the dark woods full of biting snakes and panthers during winter time; and how she fed her infant daughter is evidence of the endurance typical of black womanhood. Nanny was born in slavery but she has a spirit to struggle for existence and the desire to survive. She has an unconscious desire of freedom and tries to pass on that vision of freedom to her granddaughter.

According to the town's people in Janie's community, a woman should not leave her husband even if he is dead. They are harshly critical of Janie's act of re-marriage after the death of Joe Starks. Examples such as these speeches and conversations among women in Eatonville are frequent in this novel and Hurston has chosen this speech as a sample to indicate how Janie is defined by this cult of womanhood in her community. Black men in Eatonville are the second group of black people who 'watch' Janie's return to her house in this city; the way they look at her is the first sign of the male's view of a black female. The narrator of the novel recounts:

The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with their mind what they lost with the eye. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 19)

This quote shows how Janie is viewed by the black men in her community, although it can universally stand for the way all women are defined and seen by men. What is deplorable about the way black men in Eatonville see Janie is that they consider her as an object to be watched and enjoyed by men; they reduce her and women in general to sex objects meant to be feasted on by the male gaze. They totally deprive her of any notion of identity. Women are not to be respected as equal human beings. What is significant for these black men are Janie's erotic bodily parts such as "hairs," "buttocks" and "breasts"; that is all they find worth seeing in women. Pheoby's husband, Sam, adapts a very humorous way to talk about women in Eatonville which makes his speeches even more penetrative and destructive. In her conversation with Janie, Pheoby echoes Sam's view of women: "Mah husband git so sick of 'em [women] sometime he makes 'em all git for home [...] Yeah, Sam say most of 'em goes to church so they'll be sure to rise in Judgment. Dat's de day dat every secret is s' possessed to be made known. They wants to be

there and hear it all” (21). What is striking about Sam’s discourse regarding black women is that he aims at silencing them by forcing them to leave the porches. Porch sitting is one of the main traditions in Eatonville. It is a forum where men and women meet to discuss and exchange views; this habit can be defined as a socio-political activity for people in this city. On the porches, people talk about all social, economic and political issues. Sam, on the contrary, makes women go home; since he believes that a woman’s real place is in the home and not on the porch. His humorous talk about those women who go to church also puts women in a similar situation; it defines women in a way that makes their actions utterly absurd. For him, women do not go to church to say their prayers or to participate in a religious ceremony; because, according to him, men and women are worlds apart in observing their church duties. He thus generalizes the characteristics of all women and defines them in a humorous way. It is worth mentioning that (th)’em and “they;” have been used five times to refer to all women in a collective way. Sam accordingly defines women in a way which ascribes a set of negative traits to them, since they are “them” and “they,” and defines himself and men by exactly the opposite terms.

As far as the relationship between the black woman and the black man is concerned, the black woman is subjugated in heterosexual relationships. Janie’s first real experience in the black society comes with her marriage to Logan Killicks. Killicks oppresses Janie in a number of specific ways. Though their marriage is a brief one that lasts for less than a year, his attempt at dominion is clear. First, Killicks intends to exploit his wife by forcing her to work in his fields. This is what he says “Ah need two mules dis yeah. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah’ m talkin’ ‘bout is got tu mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle ‘im’,” or when she is talking to Joe Starks about Killicks she says: “Mah husband is gone tuh buy a mule fuh me tuh plow.” (34-36) the quoted words point to the fact that Logan’s reason for having two mules is to have good yields and to make huge profits his unscrupulous wish to use Janie at the plow shows the way these men view women. According to Logan, the mule he wants to go for is a gentle one who will assist Janie in plowing his farm. It can be said that he wants to purchase the mule the same way he did Janie. The woman is seen here as the labor machine that does all the work while the man sits and commands. Here, Killicks exposes the reasons why men get married to certain women.

At this stage, Janie is totally unable to assert herself for she “ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh” (38). Killicks, silences Janie whenever she tries to assert herself and when she refuses to shovel the manure. He tells her “Thought Ah’d take and make somethin’ outa yuh” (37). This declaration represents an old male discourse of how men define women as objects to be shaped and reshaped. When she resists Killicks’ attempts at silencing her, he threatens to use physical violence and beating. He does this by warning her not to use many words with him because, being a man, a lady is not supposed to talk back at him. In a similar way, Joe Starks objectifies Janie from the first moment he sees her, “A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on [...] special for you” (36). The words such as “pretty,” “doll,” and “sit” indicate that in the discourse of black men like Joe the black woman is an object to be watched and enjoyed by men. This is the purpose for which women were created. The verb “sit” evokes passivity and lack of subjectivity in the mind of the reader. It is equally striking that, here, Joe speaks in the first person which implies a great degree of agency, a subjective position for the speaker. Joe continues thus:

Ah want to make a wife outa you [...] De day you put yo’ hand in mine, Ah wouldn’t let de sun go down on us single. Ah’ m uh man wid principles. You ain’t never knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show yuh. Call me Jody lak you do sometimes [...] leave everything else to me. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 38)

Joe Starks once again speaks in first person point of view which explicitly demonstrates a strong sense of presence and power. The bulk of what he is saying here is about his marriage to Janie. The repetition of the word “Ah” (which is the same with “I”, and its derivations), throughout this speech, is another indication that he works to define himself as the voice in their marriage. His expression of power can be seen in every word and sentence he uses here. He speaks of himself as one who can create something out of her by saying “Ah want to make a wife out of you” (38). He even exerts his male power in letting Janie call him “Jody.” What he is implicitly trying to achieve is to disempower Janie and to deny her the slightest degree of agency and subjectivity as a woman.

As Shawn E. Miller notes, Tea Cake's invitation to Janie to work in the fields has been much-discussed as "a site where sex roles break down" (Sharon *Rereading* 189). Miller adds that the significance of this invitation dwindles when it becomes obvious that Tea Cake is only asking Janie to do what the rest of the women do. In effect, though his words are gentler than Killicks's, the essence of what he wants Janie to do is the same (*ibid*). From the above statement, it can be inferred that Tea Cake reverses the maltreatment that she underwent in the hands of Logan and Joe as he grants her the autonomy she lacked from her previous marriages. Furthermore, Tea Cake prevents Janie from being in situations inappropriate to her sex and class. Just as Joe does not allow her to mix in the "commonness" of the mule's funeral, so does Tea Cake insist that she should stay away from his gambling. In his opinion, "dis time it's gointuh be nothin' but tough men's talkin' all kinds uh talk so it ain't no place for you tuh be" (99). Tea Cake tells Janie here that she is not permitted to partake in the conversation between him and his fellow gamblers because such stories involve only tough men who are permitted to partake in all kinds of dialogue. Like Joe, Tea Cake, marginalizes Janie. So, determining the place where Janie should be is solely Tea Cake's prerogative; just as Killicks tells Janie that her place is "wherever Ah need yuh."

Tea Cake displays all the traits a man is supposed to show in his relationship with a woman. He is proud of his sexual potency "Ah'm de Apostle Paul tuh de Gentiles. Ah tells 'em and then again Ah show's 'em" (86). Tea Cake avers that he is the savior through a biblical allusion where he sees himself as apostle Paul who led the preaching to the gentiles. As such, he has the responsibility to lead the journey and show Janie the right way. According to Harold Bloom, he exhibits plenty of other negative masculine traits as well. He fights; gets slashed with a knife after a gambling win; hits Janie; is hostile to her greater economic power; takes her two hundred dollars without permission, and does not invite her to the party he throws with it (Hurstun *Their Eyes* 190). Moreover, like Starks and Killicks, Tea Cake is sexually jealous of Janie, commanding her to keep Mrs. Turner from coming to their house (110). He does so because he fears his wife might succumb to Mrs. Turner's unflattering comparisons of Tea Cake with her brother (*ibid*). This same jealousy incites him to beat Janie in order to assert his proprietorship and show that he is the boss. It is evident that Tea Cake is another man who oppresses Janie. He does so even more than Killicks and Joe. Bloom notes that Tea Cake tries to

define Janie through the binary opposition of man/woman and tries to dominate her in order to prove that the man is stronger than the woman.

Considering that this work focuses on gender stereotypes and the redefinition of the woman, in this chapter, it set out to shed light on the patriarchal nature of the American society and to explore the gender stereotypes portrayed by Hurston in her work. The chapter has shown that the American society is basically a chauvinistic society that favors male hegemony—especially male White supremacy. It has established the fact that the nation's past of slavery inclined it to support its discriminatory practices against minorities. Hence, the black woman is doubly oppressed because she is both black and female.

With respect to the gender stereotypes presented by Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the chapter has shown that women are considered as sex objects and as mules of the world through the objectification of the woman by the man. Moreover, marriage is seen as the woman's only chance of gaining security as evident in the gender role distribution: the woman's place is defined as being the home. Through the concept of the male gaze, she is reduced to a mere piece of property such as tools that can be used by a man whenever need be. Subjugated and relegated to the background, women are silenced and the men resort to physical violence to oppress them. The men have financial power to the detriment of the woman and, as such, they control the world. It is relevant to note at this point that all these ill-treatments and the victimization of women in society have incited them to fight in order to assert themselves. It is for this reason that the chapter that follows shows how the woman's attempts at redefinition deconstruct and challenge existing gender stereotypes.

CHAPTER TWO

CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

The previous chapter has shown that gender stereotypes are social constructs through which particular groups of people are marginalized. In her work, Hurston deconstructs the position of 'other' assigned to the woman in the American society. This re-assessment is nothing other than the deconstruction of otherness. Women, who are seen as the colonized or the subalterns who should not speak, move from the periphery to the centre where they assume the mantle of power. The case of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be seen from these perspectives. The present chapter proceeds to illustrate how some of these stereotypes are deconstructed as the woman redefines herself.

Janie's attempt at redefinition is verbal and otherwise. The extract below shows how she derides her second husband about the presumed superiority of the male caste:

Sometimes God gits familiar wid us women folks 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. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 88-89)

Janie lets Joe know here that God does not only speak to men, but to women as well. She tells him that men are different from women anatomically just and this does not make them superior. They should therefore not presume to know more than women just because they are men. She further states that the fact that Joe is head of the town does not make him God. This is because Joe behaves as if, since men are superior to women, they have a special connection with God. They have the power to transcend and receive messages from the divine, something that women cannot do because they are the inferior gender. This justifies the fact that most pastors were historically male. At this point, Janie defies male authority and their assumed knowledge of women whom they discuss and boss around every day. She uncovers the pretentious nature of

men by showing that, although they define themselves as surrogates for God, their idea of women and chickens are otiose. At this point we see that the heroine thus questions the existing status quo. Joe realizes she is becoming a threat to male authority and he tells her: “‘You getting’ too moufy, Janie’”(235).

This verbal form of resistance goads her to become active and even destructive when confronted by any form of violence. She thus frees herself from the oppressive grip of men by using violence to counter these male oppressors. We can say that Janie stands up for herself as any strong and opinionated woman would when they have had enough of the foul treatment from the men in their lives. Janie’s marriage to Tea Cake can therefore be read as her hope that her third husband will be different from the first two. After all, unlike the second who had not thought her intelligent enough to learn how to play checker, Tea Cake thinks she can.

It is believed that as both lovers move to the muck where they find financial security and love, they are faced with a hurricane that causes damage, forcing men and animals to seek protection. As he tries to protect Janie, Tea Cake is bitten by a mad dog and infected with rabies. To protect herself from Tea Cake’s madness, Janie has to shoot the only man she has ever loved and who has made her dream come true. Although Tea Cake differs from Janie’s first two husbands, he too is violent, (this is perceptible when he slaps Janie to show that he is the boss) (148). He also attempts to shoot her while he is mad. His madness frees him and exposes the violence that is latent in his unconscious that has been conditioned by his community’s collective unconscious marked by historical violence. Janie frees herself from all this male brutality when she succeeds in killing Tea Cake.

As a widow, she challenges all societal restrictions placed on the widow. She starts wearing overalls and freely partakes in men’s games and talks. She is an active participant in the new community history. When her aspirations are ruined by violence caused by the hurricane and the dog bite, Janie undergoes a test which leads to her full maturity, to her “attainment of a penultimate self-knowledge,” she has to kill Tea Cake or be killed. It is worth noting that, during Hurston’s days, culture was male-dominated and every discourse was patriarchal. This means that every decision that governed society was taken by the men who

saw themselves as the supreme sex as opposed to the women who were seen as the inferior sex. This can be said of the rites a widow was expected to do after her husband's death.

Acts of mourning involved wearing a black dress and staying indoors. Janie's attempt at redefinition includes refusing to conform to these societal prescriptions after Tea Cake's death. The fact that she refuses to submit to these laws gives her a negative image in society. Society thinks she is not showing respect to her dead husband. Her friend Pheoby Watson tells her: "Folks seen you out in colors and dey thinks you ain't payin' de right amount uh respect tuh yo' dead husband"(113). It is evident from this statement that there are special colors that women are expected to wear during mourning to which Janie has completely objected. Her response to Pheoby goes thus

Ah ain'tgrievin' so why do ah hafta mourn? Tea Cake love me in blue, so ah wears it.
Jody ain't never in his life picked out no color for me. De world picked out black and white for mournin', Joe didn't. so Ah wasn't wearin' it for him. Ah was wearin' it for de rest of y'all. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 113)

In the above response, the heroine makes it clear that the colors she is wearing are loved by Tea Cake and that is what matters to her. She expresses the fact that, all through her stay with Jody, the latter never for once chooses a color for her and notes that the choice of white and black as mourning dresses is the world's choice and not Joe's. She wears what she is comfortable with and makes her happy and not what Jody wants to. This brings out her realistic nature as somebody who does not live in the past. What matters is the future and that is what she has with Tea Cake. Through all these actions of hers, Janie subverts the power systems that society has put in place to silence and marginalize her. Hence, she creates an identity for herself.

Janie's process of reclaiming agency is also obvious when she drifts away from Nanny's expectations of her. Nanny's slave experiences have conditioned her mind as to what the nigger woman is and should be in conformity with society's expectations. Nanny thinks the only way she can secure her granddaughter's safety in their hostile world is to give her away in marriage. According to her, marriage ends a woman security and respect. This explains why she gives her away to the old farmer, Logan Killicks. But this instead earns her Janie's hatred. Janie sees her

grandmother's act as an enforcement of women's oppression. This is what she thinks with respect to this

Nanny had taken the biggest thing that God ever made, the horizon— for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you— and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love.

(Hurstons *Their Eyes* 89)

From Janie's thought above, it is clear that she has lost the greatest thing created by God because of Nanny. Nanny has messed her up all in the name of love. Nanny can represent fellow women folk who has been won over by the patriarchal system. She now acts against the interest of the female caste. Drifting away from her means breaking free from societal restraints. Unlike the likes of Nanny, she decides to be a woman of her own.

It can equally be said that Janie turns into what Henry Louis Gates calls a speaking subject; she destroys Jody's freedom of action with her strongest of rhetoric. This can be seen when she says:

Naw, ah aim't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon I looks my age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain'tnothin' to it but yo'big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! when you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life.(Hurstons *Their Eyes* 238)

It is evident that Janie reveals Jody's impotence in this quote and makes him lose his male status. Not even his property nor titles can redeem his self and identity that have been shattered completely by his wife. Here, we see a reversal of roles as Jody gives in by endorsing the inessentiality of his victim. Meanwhile, the latter (on her part) asserts herself by her own pronouncement "But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it." This statement is opposed to what she says about Joe "when you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life." Janie asserts her selfhood through affirming her womanhood while Jody loses the sense

of self through Janie's negation of his manhood. These are the various ways by which Janie asserts her identity, deconstructing stereotypes to her advantage.

Janie therefore moves from object to subject as her return to Eatonville is accompanied by changes in both her life and her community. She decides to teach, not just the women in her community, but the men as well through her friend—Pheoby. She talks of the fact that she is back from the horizon and now she can sit down in her house and live by comparisons. Through this, it is obvious that Janie is empowered and she can positively influence her community. It is believed that to plot Janie's journey from object to subject, the narrative of the novel shifts from third to a blend of first and third person (known as "free indirect discourse"), signifying this awareness of the self in Janie. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a bold womanist novel.

In the context of Janie's efforts to create harmony and confidence among community members, she suggests that the master narrative should include other narratives. This can be seen when she decides to make history by subverting Nanny's narrative in the text. This enables her to move from the status of the docile woman to that of an active actor. She does this by first rejecting the old economic systems: these are Nanny's plantation and household labor; Logan's sharecropping, and, finally, Jody's trade and capitalist ethics. In an act of rebellion, she rejects and throws away the sixty acres of land that Logan gives so much value to. This is evident when she says:

Youse mad 'cause Ah don't fall down and wash up dese sixty acres uh ground yuh got.
You ain't done me no favour by marrin' me. And if dat's what you call yo'selfdoin', Ah don't than yuh for it. Youse mad 'cause Ah'mtellin' yuh what you already knowed."(Hurston *Their Eyes* 199)

In the quotation above, Janie rebels against Nanny and Logan because these two consider marriage as a favor men do to women. She therefore tells her husband that Nanny and he are representative of the past generation which may have influenced her life, but (she assures them) cannot disrupt her freedom and selfhood. Janie reminds Logan that she is telling him what he already knows because she wants him to acknowledge his loss of authority. Since his authority was guaranteed by his landed property, he loses it when she devalues the said property.

During Janie's marriage life to Logan, the latter wants her to work like a laborer. And when she refuses, he gets annoyed. Janie then states her opinion, "You didn't done me no favor by marryin' me. Ah don't thank yuh for if." Logan's ego is hurt by this. He loses his temper and threatens Janie, "Ah'll take holt uh dat and come in dere and kill yuh... When throbbing calmed a little she gave Logan's speech a hard thought and placed it beside other things she had seen and heard" (200). She immediately decides to leave Logan because she considers the marital bond unworthy of consideration. Her act of quitting the marriage can be seen as a revolutionary act of self-assertion. Another instance is when she snaps sexual relations with Joe Starks (her second husband) once she realizes that there is no strand of love left in their marriage.

Janie also abandons the material comfort that Joe offers her. She does this because the former uses it to enslave her in the store where she plays the role of a beautiful doll that is at his mercy. It is evident from the above facts that both Logan's farm and Jody's store are not conducive environments for Janie's achievement of freedom and selfhood. As a result of this, she adopts a subterfuge that enables her to free herself. Her speech-making reduces Joe to silence as it is observed that he "bit down hard on his cigar and beamed all around, but he never said a word" (221). This silence of Jody's marks the beginning of Janie's resistance to her husband's violence. The resistance heightens when she mocks him because of his impotence in an effort to retaliate against the verbal and physical violence that he usually inflicts on her.

Her strength lies in deconstructing the stereotypes that give Joe the right to oppress her. This can be seen in the fact that neither the slap nor the insult weakens her speech. She then uses her newly found freedom to instruct and control the men of her community. So she put something in there to represent that spirit like the Virgin Mary's image in a church. The bed was no longer a daisy field for Jody and her to play in. It was a place where she went and lay down when she was sleepy and tired" (232). This shows that Janie is not a Barbie-doll who dances to the tune of men. And whenever circumstances force her to become a puppet at the hands of men, she thinks about it and takes quick decisions. In fact, she does not only decide but also reacts. She does not compromise and becomes an embodiment of power and courage.

From then henceforth, when Janie goes with a man; it is on her own terms. Even though Tea Cake is 15 years younger than her and she fears what the townsfolk will say, she chooses to

make herself happy. Tea Cake treats her as an equal, taking her fishing and to a baseball game. What is most important is that Tea Cake seems to know exactly what Janie needs: to live her life on her own terms and he offers her just that. As such, Janie can freely partake in men's games and talks. She is an active participant in the new community history that she has created. We are told that, when the third space is ruined by violence caused by the hurricane and the dog bite, Janie undergoes a test which leads to her full maturity and to her attainment of self-knowledge. Even though the townsfolk talk about her, she knows that the choices she has made have been in her best interest. What matters is that she is able to challenge the system and to live her life the way it best suits her to.

It is worth mentioning the second stage of feminist identity development mentioned earlier in chapter at this point. At this phase, a series of events and happenings lead to a dualistic thinking whereby women regard themselves as positive and regard men as negative entities. As Janie gets married and settles down with Logan, she notices that the reality of her life is far more different than the supposed image of marriage in her mind. Logan was never meant to be loved. This is seen when she says:

His belly is too big and, "his toe-nails look lak mule foots. And 'tain'tnothin' in de way of him washin'" his feet every evenin' before he comes tuh bed. 'Tain'tnothin' tuh hinder him 'cause Ah places de water for him. Ah'drutherbe shot with tacks than tuh turn over in de bed and stir up de air whilst he is in dere. He don't even never mention nothin'pretty." (Hurstons *Their Eyes* 24)

This pattern recurs in Janie's second marriage to Joe. The citified, stylish man turns out to be a shallow man in search of ultimate power. All the things Joe does to Janie, like forcing her to wear head rags; hustling her off inside the store and taking pleasure in doing it; slapping her face over a trivial matter; separating her from the rest of society and from the most common pastime (storytelling); making fun of her in the middle of the store and among the members of society, and many other things lead to a shattered picture of Joe in her mind and heart.

At the time this novel was written, gender role distribution in the American society was such that men were supposed to go to work and provide for the family while the women were

expected to stay home. While at home, they had to take care of the house and the children. The women had the obligation to clean and play other womanly duties. They were not entitled to any public jobs nor were their writings given much worth. In an essay by a white folklorist, it is recorded that Hurston was buried in an unmarked grave. Alice Walker, a critic and feminist, decided to correct such an injustice in line with the feminist re-visionary agenda of correcting past injustices done to past female writers.

In an essay, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston"(written for Ms. Magazine), Walker states how she goes to Florida and searches through waist-high weeds to find what she thought was Hurston's grave. She then lays a marker on it inscribed "Zora Neale Hurston/'A Genius of the south/Novelist/ folklorist/Anthropologist/1901-1960." With that inscription and that essay, Walker ushered in a new era in scholarship for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Her act brought about renewed fame for Hurston and gave her novel the popularity it deserved. Once more, the status quo put in place by patriarchy had been revisited.

It is of no small significance that Janie chooses to frame her story with a series of accounts from her childhood and young adulthood. Together, these bits map out her coming to consciousness about race, class, and sexuality and the ways in which they intersect. She begins with a poignant retelling of her motherless days as a young girl, spent in the shadow of a shameful past (her mother was raped by a school teacher) and in the backyard of a White family for whom her grandmother worked. At first blissfully unaware of her difference from the White children of the Washburn family, "Alphabet," as she was called because "so many people done named me different names," comes to the realization of her racial identity through the objectifying lens of a photograph that a White man takes of the children.

Confronted with the photograph, Janie identifies everyone but herself. "Where is me?" she asks, "I don't see me." Miss Nellie, the mother of the other children in the photograph, points to "de dark one" and says, "Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?" Janie responds with alarm and disappointment, "'Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!," provoking uproarious laughter. This scene of childhood innocence is charming in its way, but it is a deadly serious moment for Janie and for the story she tells, because it demonstrates how racialized subjects come to know themselves through the discourses of difference that marginalize them. Indeed,

Janie does not realize that she is Black until she sees herself in a picture, she understands all too well what “colored” signifies in the post-Reconstruction South. “Alphabet’s” fall from grace marks her transformation into the girl, Janie, who will go through many more such experiences and thus come to know her “ownself” more completely.

It is believed that African American women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a strong desire for revolution and it resulted in the feminist movement in America. The idea of women’s empowerment has been central to the feminist movements. The silent protest of Black American women against the oppression and the desire for breaking the shackles of slavery found an expression in the feminist literature. In the foreword to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mary Helen Washington says thus: “the ‘discovery’ of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) in the critical cannon of Afro-American literature in the 1970s and 1980s has gone to establish her as the pioneer of Black feminist revolt.” (xv) Her works present a real picture of black American women, especially her second novel—*Their Eyes were Watching God*. The significance of Hurston’s decision to make her heroine tell her own story is very symbolic. It echoes the descriptive wave of womanism that called for women to tell their own story. Both as a novelist and through the mouth of her protagonist, Hurston relates the deep experiences of women. This in itself subverts the male practice of misrepresenting the woman.

Their Eyes were Watching God is about a proud independent and idealized black woman, Janie Mae Crawford. Mary Helen Washington calls Janie Mae Crawford, “One of the few and certainly the earliest heroic black women in the Afro-American literary tradition”. (ibid) From this statement of hers, it is relevant to note that Hurston departs completely from the standards set by the modernists. This is because the novel’s high poetic undertone and its high investment in black folk tradition. Here, Hurston presents a woman who is on a quest for her own identity and unlike so many other questing figures in black literature, her journey would take her— not away from—but deeper and deeper into blackness, the descent into the everglades with its rich black soil, wild cane, and communal representing immersion into black tradition. Hurston’s text was about a woman who was not pathetic; was not a tragic mulatto; who defied everything that was expected of her; who went off with a man without bothering to divorce the one she left and was not broken, crushed or down cast.

This aspect of the author's work ushered in a new form of literature as women became highly represented in literary works as opposed to what obtained in the 1930s. Her novel is replete with dialogue reflecting local dialects that are widely perceived as racist today. For Hurston, though, it was an accurate depiction of a culture she knew better than her detractors. This style and structure deviates completely from that of the traditional novel and this deviation of hers is unconventional from what writers before her advocated. It embraces the southern heritage. It can be assumed that, through this, Hurston departs from patriarchal literary norms given that patriarchy decided that the conventional novel should have a plot, characters, themes, a point of view, structure and style in the first place, which are all evident in Hurston's novel.

Their Eyes Were Watching God offers a simple feminist critique of compulsory heterosexuality— but it does reveal the ways in which something as seemingly “natural” as the relations between men and women can be “reconstructed” by the historical experiences of forced relocation, slavery, and Jim Crow. This is one of the great ironies of the critical reception of the novel in the 1930s. While both White and African American critics tended to view the novel as a simple and universal love story, its examination of the particularities of Black love— in Nanny's words, “de very prong all us black women gits hung up on”— complicates the romance plot by revealing the devastating impact of racism on the familial, domestic, and erotic relations of African Americans. The book offers a prescient exploration of the complexities of Black sexual politics from a feminist perspective, one that forecasts the work of a later generation of Black feminist scholars.

Hurston's story-telling sequence includes the narration of Nanny's struggles. And though this old former slave incarnates the subjected black female, she initiates the consciousness and self-assertion of her descendants. The narrative is set in America during the Civil War. Nanny gives birth to her daughter. One day, in the woods, she hears that all of the slaves were free. But she knows very well that these words of freedom are not true to women. She decides, “An wouldn't marry nobody, though Ah could have uh heap uh times, cause Ah didn't want nobody mistreating mah baby” (190). Her decision indicates her awareness of the dominance of men. She had a suppressed desire of revolt for it as she says, “Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither. It she wasn't mah will for things to happen lak they did” (187). Her desire that her

daughter should not go through the same torture she had experienced throughout her life as a slave woman.

This suppressed vision for freedom in Nanny is revived in Janie. According to Janie “Nanny didn’t love tuh see me wid mah head hung down” (182). She really encourages her to fight the challenges of life and to struggle to get what she wants. Nanny tells her granddaughter “You can’t beat nobody down so low till you rob em of they will” (187). Janie seems to fulfill this wish of Nanny’s because she always does what she wants. For she never gives up. Hence, Nanny unconsciously gives a spark to the fuel of revolt that is burning inside Janie. In the dejecting and oppressing conditions of society, Janie does not succumb to the pressures and Nanny’s advice forms the stratum of her strength.

Janie, the protagonist of the novel, really claims allegiance to her freedom from the beginning to the end of the novel. She is seen as very much enthusiastic about her life. Even though she loses the first and real love, she is courageous enough to go back to her town without bothering about the mob. It is believed that due to the education she receives, she has completed the journey of her independence and self-assertion. It is equally noticed that even though her constant quest has been romance, she is constantly reminded of the “pear tree” (182), which is said to have sparked off these desires. Janie grows from strength, to strength portraying herself as a woman who does not need the protection and support of men. This is evident from the fact that, despite the notion that a woman of her caliber (widow) is not supposed to be alone, she lives alone after Tea Cake’s death.

In biblical tradition, where the woman is expected to cover her hair (headscarf, hat etc) as acknowledgement of the fact that the man is her “head” (master) the head-scarf can therefore be read as a seal of Janie’s subservience to Joe. Interestingly, when the latter dies, the men are quick to ask Janie when she will remarry. According to them, she needs to be taken care of. In other words, in Janie’s society, the woman is either a mule (a beast of burden meant for farm work in Killicks’ understanding); a commodity that ought to boost a man’s image and respectability as is the case with Joe the Mayor; or, again, a helpless person like a child who needs to be taken care of – by the men’s understanding. When Joe dies, she takes control of her life again. She removes her head scarves and burns them after Jody’s funeral, symbolizing her refusal to live according to

Jody's dictates. She soon begins to interact with the people on the porch, playing checkers and telling jokes. When she is asked when she will marry again (because certainly she needs someone to take care of her), Janie just laughs because this freedom feeling was fine. These men didn't represent a thing she wanted to know about. She had already experienced them through Logan and Joe.

Her life takes her through three marriages and in all three cases she emerges as a woman who is submissive only to leave not for any man or to Sep. She very acutely notices the deviations of each of her husbands from the track of love to the track of domination and superiority. When she becomes sure of the fact that there is no love left. She takes the appropriate decision. This contemplation or self-evaluation triggers her awareness and enables her to act accordingly Patricia Hill Collins, aptly captures Janie's process of emancipation when she remarks in "The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood" thus

I initially wrote Black feminist thought in order to help empower African-American women. I knew that, when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind. (Collins, Black Feminist 178)

This is the exact situation that we find in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston's main agenda in her text is to empower the African American woman as evident in the example of Janie.

For white men, the black females are mere objects of sexual fantasy. Such stories of rape and mistreatment of the black female by white men is a recurring obsession and anxiety for Nanny. It has become an ever-present and ever-traumatizing aspect of her memory which forces itself on her conscious mind. Nanny's insistence upon protection rather than love when she struggles to motivate Janie to marry Logan Killicks stems from her memories of sexual exploitation by white males. She strategically attempts to create a situation wherein her granddaughter will not fall prey to what she had experienced. But Janie proves her wrong because she does not only prevent herself from going through what Nanny and her mother Leafy

went through, but she also takes center stage in her relationship. Here we see that she succeeds with the help of her financial stability after the death of Jody Starks. This explains the Feminist view of the woman striving for economic stability because this is the genesis of male domination.

Throughout her writing, she revised and adapted vernacular forms to give voice to women. Hurston writes the oral culture brilliantly. “Words walking without masters” is an apt metaphor for both the novel’s folk speech and its singular prose. (*The Journal of American Folklore* 329) Hurston, in her quest for a new identity for the African American, makes use of dialect which evokes pre-literate traditions in literature. The rendering of dialect into text demands oral reading for comprehensibility and, in the transference from text to voice, many powerful elements of oral storytelling return. The novel’s transitions back and forth, code-switching between languages (Janie herself is biracial, and her journey takes her from powerlessness to empowerment, although her power does not evolve at all from white society) but from the black society as evident in the court scene of the novel. Hurston’s narrator shares the telling of her story throughout the novel, but the more eloquent expressions, the more analytical passages are still shaped by cultural rhythms, words, and metaphors. Language here serves the purpose of feminist reunion which gives the women a forum to share their marginalization by the men and society. One evident place in the novel is when the hurricane is approaching in Chapter 18. As the passage begins, thus

Sometime that night the winds came back. Everything in the world had a strong rattle, sharp and short like Stew Beef vibrating the drum head near the edge with his fingers.... Louder and higher and lower and wider the sound and motion spread, mounting, sinking, darking (Hurston *Their Eyes* 158).

This prose passage is filled with tropes of oral poetry that include metric patterns, physical imagery, personification of the storm, the lake and night, thunder and clouds. As the storyteller sings this in the background, Tea Cake and Janie tenderly express their love for each other in the earthly and simple language of dialect. Janie says, “We been tuhgether round two years. If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don’t keer if you die at dusk. It’s so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuzfumblin’ round and God opened de door” (159).

This is a stunningly affective transition. In terms of Hurston's observations of "acting" or performance, we find that when the characters speak generally, their language is deliberate, crafted and clever. Brilliant figurative expressions, patterns and rhythmic phrases abound. Often, what is not said or cannot be said farther reveals a character's heart. In this way, dialogue illuminates character beyond what a character might be able to say eloquently, but says it culturally, adding an ineffable dimension to it. It is important to note that Hurston makes use of the southern dialect and is most often celebrated for their unique use of language, particularly her mastery of rural Southern black dialect which (in this text) serves as a feminist reunion.

Identity is one of the main obsessions of this novel whose characters such as Nanny, Joe and Janie are individuals who struggle to determine who they are. Janie distinguishes herself in this quest for identity because she is the only character who finds an ideal identity for herself. It is an identity void of any interference because she does not allow patriarchy to influence her life. Hurston's heroine achieves this by going against all the societal institutions that restrict the woman by dismantling the fixed ideologies that she is supposed to live by. Janie thus detaches herself from the suffering of black women who have been silenced and oppressed by the black patriarchal society. Consequently, she seemingly advocates radicalism as a means of breaking free from discrimination and subjugation. Her attitude serves as a springboard to self-authenticity in women.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is really a tale of the woman's protest and her journey that paves the way for the empowerment of all other women of her type. That's why this novel was rejected by its male reviewers and was "out of print for decades because it marks one of the most dramatic chapters in Afro-American literature and the life of women" (*Hurston A Literary* 237). Zora Neale Hurston portrays similar issues in her acclaimed short story, "Sweat," which is an incredible accomplishment in considering the obstacles faced by black female authors at the time. Viewing the piece through the lens of feminist literary criticism, the effect of Hurston's black female identity on her writing is analyzed. Hurston's gender and race have undoubtedly shaped the story, imbuing its content with a deep political statement on social inequality. It can be argued that the quality of Zora Neale Hurston's writing, which in this case takes the form of the often times marginalized short story, is exemplary and transcends both her race and gender. It is clear that Zora Neale Hurston's work represents a noteworthy milestone in the fight for

equality for black female authors. She will forever be celebrated in literature as a strong black female voice.

Historically, writing has been classified as masculine; it is associated with paternalism, creation and even Godliness. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in their essay “The Madwoman in the Attic” that “a pen is a metaphorical penis” (63-69). In other words, the ability to write has historically been seen as derived from male sexuality and as being akin to all things masculine. Both the pen and penis mentioned here are phallic symbols that incarnate patriarchal authority. Just as maleness is associated with all things superior and femaleness associated with all things inferior as explained in the stark binaries of logocentric thinking, females are on the opposite side of the binary when it comes to writing (*Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* 228-231). Therefore, women were excluded from writing and literary circles for long, “If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power” (ibid). With a dearth of female writing from early times, this opinion might seemingly be confirmed. In more recent times, women have been shattering stereotypes and breaking into the literary field. This is true of Zora Neale Hurston.

As a skilled female author writing on the issue of female inequality in marriage in her short story, Hurston uses subtle arguments to forward the cause of feminism. The protagonist (Delia) is a strong, independent woman who finds herself at the receiving end of a patriarchal society that strongly privileges men and denigrates women. But there is another important facet to the story that deals specifically with race. Hurston is not only promoting feminism but specifically black feminism (Womanism). The story is comprised only of African American characters and makes only few references to Whites. Like Hurston, not only is Delia underprivileged by gender, she is underprivileged by race. Sykes is similarly underprivileged by race but he is dominant in his relationship with Delia because of his gender (*Sweat* 43).

Does the fact that Hurston is an African American change her writing? Hurston’s works are limited to novels and short stories. It can be argued that these genres have become the feminine area in literature. Once again, going back to historically created norms and referring specifically to novels, feminist scholar (Terry Eagleton) explains:

...here was a form without a long history in male authorities. Because the novel's genesis lay partly in forms of writing familiar to women— the diary, the journal, letters— the form could seem more accessible and approachable...In its content, also, the novel was often considered— and still is— an appropriate form for women” (88).

The short story is, in many ways, akin to the novel in this regard. Women could write about the topics they knew about in novels and short stories and, more importantly, could remain in the privacy of their homes while doing so (ibid).

It is significant to note here that, even though the American society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was characterized by patriarchy which greatly hindered female assertion of the self, not all women succumbed to this domination as they tried to forge an identity for themselves. These women did so by confronting male chauvinism as well as phallogentric and patriarchal cultures. This chapter aimed at proving that, through her protagonist, Hurston counters gender stereotypes by getting her heroine to deconstruct them. Through Janie, she shows how the woman redefines herself in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Equally worthy of note is the fact that, with respect to the gender stereotypes imposed on the woman, Hurston presents a heroine who resorts to resistance when confronted with any form of violence. She equally empowers the woman by reversing culture, which is male-dominated, to favor the woman; the woman metamorphoses from an object of silence to a subject. The woman equally creates harmony by suggesting that the master narrative should include other narratives. These are pointers to the fact that the woman is and should be a force for her liberation. Chapter Three examines how the woman, after deconstructing the stereotypes that hinder her progress in a patriarchal society, redefines herself by creating a new identity for herself.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AUTHOR'S IDEAL AND VISION

This chapter deals with the new woman that emerges after the re-vision of the chauvinistic culture and the patriarchal ordering in the world of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The redefinition of the female self means giving the woman a new identity and image of herself; different from the negative stereotypes she was initially given. This makes her to develop a positive sense of herself. The American woman can become this new woman after the re-evaluation of the culture which marginalizes her. Here, Hurston shows that with the re-vision of culture, the main obstacle to women's assertion, women will stand on their own and be able to redefine the self. This 'New Woman' is not subjected to any form of restriction.

Rosalyn Mutia, in her article titled "The New Woman Phenomenon in Selected Works of Toni Morrison, Margaret Afuh, and Eunice Ngongkum," defines the "New Woman" as a feminist revolutionary social ideal which emerged in the final decades of the nineteenth century and ran into the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Magnum, quoted in *Annals de la FALSH UY I*, Sarah Grand claimed to have invented the "New Woman" in an 1894 North American Review article where:

Grand's New Woman characters cover the spectrum of turn of the century, middle-class independent women who such as adolescent hoydens, gender-switch heroines, free love advocates, women of genius, novelists and orators, suffragists and social reformers, housewives who leave home and single women who create homes for themselves. (4)

In other words, the "New Woman" is a woman who is able to do whatever she likes without restrictions and without fear of punishment. She is free to write on any theme and her characters can behave the way they want, just as men would.

Sally Ledger, in the same journal, defines the new woman as an emphatically modern figure who can be “regarded as sexually transgressive, as heavily implicated in socialist politics and as a force for change” (6). The New Woman of the “fin de siècle” had multiple identities: she was variously a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a woman poet; she was often also a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the 19th century Women’s Movement (Ledger 1). This image of the woman can be seen as a reaction to traditional gender roles, characterized primarily by the Cult of Domesticity, which was ascribed to women during the larger part of the nineteenth century (Annals 88). Thus, the new woman seeks to break free such barriers in which they can get trapped by social conventions and through which their lives get devastated by a lack of choice.

According Mary Helen Washington, in the foreword of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie’s life is about the experiences of relationships, while Jody and Tea Cake and all the other talking men are essentially static characters (xv). Janie and Pheoby pay close attention to their inner lives— to experience— because it is the site for growth. Hurston puts Janie on the track of autonomy, self-realization, and independence. She does this by breaking the traditional ethics of writing which did not make allowance for a female character to be given such power and daring. She makes it clear that women can easily assert themselves with the re-evaluation of culture. Chapter two showed how the heroine goes against all cultural conventions in the American society which hinder her assertiveness. She refuses to follow the norms put in place by the community and does what she thinks is right. The fact that she does not end up with the love of her life only goes to attest to the fact that the barriers are too many for the woman to overcome. Her loss of Tea Cake can be seen as a way of redefining the self. Thus, women need freedom no matter the cost. It is therefore worth noting that, if these barriers were not set, Janie would not be single at the end. Hence, the revision of culture leads to the redefinition of womanhood.

The “new woman” which aptly describes American women after the re-evaluation of their culture which misrepresents them is one who must stand up and claim her rights after the continual subordination imposed on her by men has rendered her voiceless. The Black Feminist Movement grew out of, and in response to, the Black Liberation Movement and Women’s Movement. Black women were triply marginalized on the basis of sex, gender and class. The purpose of the movement was to develop a theory which is adequate enough to address the way

race, gender and class were interconnected in their lives and also to take action to stop racist, sexist, and classist discrimination. This study has sought to examine the factors that contribute to the development of the political consciousness, self-empowerment and self-identification of a black woman using Hurston's text under study.

It is believed throughout history that Zora Neale Hurston was an outstanding African American novelist, playwright, autobiographer, folklorist, anthropologist and essayist. Her works were considered as an important part of the African American and Harlem Literature. She used folk language, folkways and folk stories as symbols to measure the intrinsic values of the Black oral cultural tradition. Hurston spent much of her life in the town of Eatonville, Florida; the first all-black community to be incorporated in the United States. Rich in its culture and tradition, Hurston made the town of Eatonville the setting for much of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Janie, the protagonist of the novel, overcomes challenges to become the "new emergent woman". At first we see her in conflict with her goals as she has to face a lot of barriers in a male-dominated black community and its perceptions about a woman. What is striking about her is the fact that she does not target the expulsion of men from her world like the case with the radical feminists. But as a woman, she believes in the romantic ideal that can be gotten from a relationship with men. She believes in men and women complementing each other. It is for this reason that she always offers to give Joe a helping hand in the store.

By being "a new emergent woman," all she desires is to become a model for other black women who are still in the clutches of male supremacy and mental torture. What makes Janie "a new emergent woman" is the fact that she has her own choices in her relationships; she has a voice of her own, and she has financial independence. Moreover she tells her own story to her friend Pheoby and that inspires Pheoby. This is evident when Pheoby states "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus'listenin' tuh, Janie" (257). Pheoby admits the fact that she has an unsatisfied life with her husband, (Sam) and Janie's story inspires her to become an emergent woman. Rather than merely waiting for a man to change her life, Janie questions the traditional gender roles and embarks on self-emancipation in the course of the novel. She develops from naive and passive observer to a self-determined woman who actively strives for love and happiness. Janie does not only find true love in this quest, she also discovers the power of her

own voice and her ability for self-expression. Her three marriages represent her process of maturing in the novel.

Janie projects this new woman's ideal of a heterosexual relationship and marriage through her reaction to her three marriages. She rejects the first two in which the woman is trampled upon as earlier proven. She walks out of her marriage with Killicks and rejoices over her newly acquired freedom when Joe Starks dies. Not long after the funeral, she admits to her friend Pheoby, that she loves her freedom as a result of Joe's death. She feels liberated from the boundaries drawn by Joe Starks. Janie's new-found self-confidence is the basic prerequisite for the equal and happy partnership with Tea Cake, her third husband. Their first encounter is fundamentally different from the way Janie meets Joe.

In contrast to her previous marriages, her relationship with Tea Cake is solely based on mutual attraction and affection. The happiness of their marriage is not based on traditional gender roles—the man as the dominant, protecting part while the woman is the yielding, passive part—but rather on the individual feelings they share. It is obvious that Janie refuses to accept the concept of women as mule that Nanny attempts to teach her. She is the new emergent woman who strives for her own identity and her own voice in a community which is antagonistic to the woman's emancipation. For this community, “uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing and dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant „emtuh try stand by their selves” (86). This is the general conception of black women in their community. Janie also regains agency by finding her voice. In fact, the act of telling her own story is symbolic of her attainment of her voice. This is especially so because story telling is supposed to be the task of men in her society. As a new emergent woman, she has a voice.

In this novel, sexuality is twice removed from the power it occupies. By this we mean, women in the novel are not only removed from the white male supremacy because they are women but also because they are black. Leafy's tragic downfall is one clear-cut instance to show how slavery's roots of dominance made the black women to remain oppressed. Nanny and Leafy are both victims of a patriarchal society in which black women are the most oppressed and Janie, who is subjected to fragmentation and oppression, reaches a level of authenticity. There are not many options for a black woman such as Janie. If she could escape the harsh reality and fate

suffered by Nanny and Leafy, she should marry a well-to-do man and again live like a slave. But Janie changes this paradigm as she becomes an emergent woman who is stirred by her own desires.

Janie Crawford sees the differences between the sexes in the society. She does not abhor what she sees in the opposite sex. Rather, she enjoys the differences. It is through her relationships with men that Janie learns to determine what she deems to be true womanhood. Due to this awareness, she becomes a woman who is not bound by any societal restrictions. She instead becomes a woman who makes decisions on her own and can decide on what makes her happy. This makes her a new woman and this is what Hurston advocates in her writing. It is as if the concept of new womanhood has become a universal truth.

In the third stage of the feminist identity development, there is Embeddedness–Emanation. The woman feels strongly connected to other women and she may choose to surround herself with a self-affirming women’s community in order to strengthen her new identity. There are rare moments in the novel when Janie has this opportunity. Pheoby is the only person in Eatonville who tries to understand her and she acts as a bridge between Janie and the other citizens. Janie feels comfortable when she speaks to Pheoby; it is as if she is unloading a heavy load of unspoken words. She trusts Pheoby and knows that Pheoby will support her whenever need be. She uses Pheoby as her vehicle of communication by making her the speech maker during her return to the community. This is evident when she says my tongue is in my friend’s mouth (14). Hurston presents this scenario to show that, when the women are subjugated by their societies, there is always the need for women to come together as a force against such maltreatment from the society.

The fourth stage is synthesis and it occurs when the woman achieves an authentic and positive feminist identity in which gender role transcendence is coupled with the evaluation of men on an individual basis. This level of identity begins when Janie and Tea Cake get married. In this marriage, there is no trace of forced marriage or a marriage that is the result of dissatisfaction with the previous life as is the case with Janie’s first two marriages. Rather, she chooses Tea Cake because she feels she should care about herself, her feelings and her freedom. For the first time in her life, somebody cares about what she thinks and desires.

Although she is still dependent on a man in this marriage, she begins to acknowledge herself. She begins to appreciate herself and becomes conscious of her beauty. She learns to give as much as she learns to receive. She decides to work side-by-side her man in the fields of Everglades. She gains an opportunity to mix with common people and to learn from them. She sees Tea Cake as a miracle from God. With Tea Cake beside her, she can touch the life she has always wanted:

all night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. (Hurston *Their Eyes* 131)

In the aforementioned quotation, Hurston expresses her satisfaction in her relationship with Tea Cake which has guaranteed her freedom in many domains in life. In this relationship, she has moved from a passive to an active participant as opposed to her two previous marriages. Tea Cake and she they work together and fend for their needs together and these are part of the expectations in marriage. Cognizance of the fact that Janie and Tea Cake's relationship worked out thanks to the fact that they moved out of a town where they are well-known leads us to Hurston's idea of the new woman and her notion of a utopian society which she creates in Eatonville an all-black community. Given the realities of racism, an all-black town was more likely to provide blacks with constant and level playing field for their dreams.

Hurston presents Eatonville as a round and perfect place where black women wash clothes and catch fish for dinner, while their men earn a living by cutting new grounds and planting the groves. This is the ideal town she creates for Janie and Tea Cake in her text. Hurston is an advocate of black enterprise and she believes that in black-governed towns like Eatonville, Negroes are made to feel the responsibilities of citizenship in ways they cannot be made to feel them elsewhere. The author believes that in such an all-black town which is the main setting of her text, racism is no excuse for failure. According to her, individuals can sink or swim on their own merits here. It is interesting to note that author's father- John Hurston- was an advocate of an all-black town and it was with respect to the joys from Eatonville that Hurston says this of her

mother “she seem to herself to be coming home. This was where she was meant to be”(*Wrapped in the Rainbow* 23). This shows how much Hurston’s mother cherished Eatonville and emphasizes the fact that, when she got there for the first time, it seemed as if she had been a fish out of water all along. The same awareness is developed by Janie as she grows into a woman, and it is thanks to the experiences she gets from the place. This idea of an ideal black town is a constant issue in Hurston’s works as is the case with: *Spunk* 1995, *Sweat* 1996, and *The Bone of Contention* 1993.

Equally evident in Hurston’s romantic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are two settings which are contrasted to reinforce the author’s theme of a search for true love. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* takes place during the 1920s and 30s and is set in a series of all-black communities in rural Florida. After the Civil War, former slaves formed a number of towns all over the South, in an effort to escape the segregation and discrimination they experienced among Whites. By 1914, approximately thirty such towns were in existence. Eatonville, Florida, the town where Zora Neale Hurston grew up and the setting for much of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is set was the first of such towns to be incorporated and to be given the right to self-governance. In Eatonville, the Jim Crow laws that segregated public schools, housing, restaurants, theaters, and drinking fountains all over the South, did not exist. The setting of Eatonville, Florida, where Janie experiences life as the mayor’s wife, is contrasted with the Florida, Everglades, where Janie lives with Tea Cake in a much more relaxed atmosphere. Hurston describes Eatonville as a place that is not beneficial to an independent woman like Janie.

Janie Starks, the wife of the Mayor, is sentenced to spend her days as a worker in the town store, hair tied up, and silent. She must deal with money and figures without being able to enjoy the “lying sessions” on the porch, or attending such impressive town events like the “muleogy.” To the reader, Eatonville represents all that is repressive in life. Janie’s nature is restricted not by the town itself, but by her status in the town. This stands in contrast to Everglades or the “muck.” The muck is where Janie is free. Her hair is allowed to hang down, and she can dance, sing, talk, and socialize with everyone, from the Indians to the landowners. That is equally where she lives with Tea Cake, her true love, her “bee.” The muck symbolizes freedom and relief from the oppression that was experienced by Janie. The contrast of these two places reinforces the theme of a search for love and fulfillment. To see what an ideal situation for

an independent woman like Janie would be, Hurston first of all shows the reader what Janie cannot deal with. She gets her heroine to go on a quest, one that was begun the day she was forced to marry Logan Killicks.

The contrast in the setting is similar to one between good and evil. Janie's life with Joe fulfilled a need: she had no financial worries and was more than set for life. She had a beautiful white home, a neat lawn and garden, a successful husband, and lots of cash. Everything was clean, almost too clean. A sense of restraint is present in this setting, and this relates to the work as a whole due to the fact that this is the epitome of unhappiness for Janie. The muck, however, is filthy. The rich soil covers everything in sight, even the bare skin of its inhabitants. There are no trim lawns and gardens, everything grows wild. The house is not painted white but is a simple wood cabin. The stalks of beans grow wild and unrestrained, as Janie does, in this atmosphere. She and Tea Cake host parties, gamble, and work. They are in an almost classless society that Janie enjoys because it fosters her redefinition. This experience fulfills a desire in Janie. She has met her knight in shining armor, her true love. These two opposing forces, restraint and the freedom derived from these two settings, contribute greatly to the meaning of the work. Hurston's settings let the reader feel what Janie feels, and, most importantly, let us know when it is time to leave. Contrasting places play a major role in many novels and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is no exception.

Without such images provided by Eatonville and the muck, the reader would feel neither the desperation nor the completeness that Janie feels. It is a feeling completeness that makes her a free and an accomplished woman, whose thoughts are not defined by others. It is equally evident that the topography of Eatonville favors black settlements. This is evident in the position of its rivers which serve as avenues where black women meet and share ideas all in the pretext of fetching water. Otherwise stated, they take out time from their repression back at home to enjoy freedom with fellow women at the streams. Equally worthy of note are the economic and social lives which are different from those of Northern states. The political set-up is likewise pro-black as is the case of Joe Starks's all-black community in the text. It can also be deduced that the idea of an all-black community appeals to the African woman's revolutionary spirit. Janie's decision to fall in love with Joe Starks can be ascribed to his idea of an all-black community which, according to her, will eliminate the bias imposed on Blacks and black women by the Whites.

The fifth stage of the feminist identity development, earlier referred to in previous chapters, is active commitment. At this stage, the woman commits herself to meaningful action toward feminist goals. Janie returns to Eatonville, full of experience, as well as love and memories of Tea Cake. She is satisfied with her life. She has experienced true love, something which is rare among the women of her society. She says: “love is lak dese. It’s uh movin’ thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it’s different with every shore” (191). In this statement, the heroine compares love to a sea. She believes that, as the sea moves from one shore to the other, so does the woman move in her quest for love.

According to her, women behave in each relationship according to how they are treated and people’s attitudes differ each time. This is evident in her three relationships and it can be said that the different men were her different shores. Janie shares her experience with Pheoby and, through the latter; she indirectly shares her experience with all the women of her society. She thus encourages them to reach for the horizons. Although she takes some drastic steps, these are steps that do not exclude the man from the woman’s world. This is what distinguishes Hurston (as a womanist) from other feminists. It is worthy of note that the three last stages of the feminist identity development are an integral part of the new woman’s experience and self as analyzed in this work.

Alice Walker coined the term womanism in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. In this book, she explains the notion of Womanist Movement and the movement’s interests. A womanist “gains her strength from her community and uses that strength to uplift her people physically, spiritually, economically and politically” (vi). Janie can therefore be called a womanist because she does not develop survival strategies only for herself, in spite of the oppression of her sex, but also for her community as a whole. Womanism focuses on women but it does not negate the male gender. The main focus of womanism is the search for survival strategies which save the whole people, whether men, women or children. Its purpose is “not to reciprocate oppressive behavior against the males who often attempt to dominate females. Rather, the purpose is to recognize wrongdoing, evoke change, and move forward as a community— male and female—while specifically celebrating the strength, fortitude, and progress of the female”(xi). This is in line with Hurston’s idea of an ideal society which is void of discriminating tendencies for men or women. Womanism celebrates the transition from the

innocence of childhood to the maturity of womanhood and this is apparent in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

One of the main ways of engaging such transition is through their relationship with other women; in another word, through solidarity. In the sentimental novels, one of the important functions of a female friend is to warn the heroine of dangers, of the folly of unwise choices. Their reasons for doing this emanate from the fact that they lack the security that a heterosexual relationship should provide. It is for this reason that Janie refers to Pheoby as her “kissing friend” (7). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Pheoby worries that Janie might end up like Annie Tyler, whose young lover left her poor and alone. She cautions Janie about the improvident Tea Cake and persuades her to pin inside her shirt \$200 as ‘insurance’ money. According to Hurston’s view of the new woman her ideal of an utopic society, Pheoby is the negotiator and the point of reference for women’s unity.

After seeing Tea Cake and meeting him more often, however, Janie feels more freedom in revealing her beauty. Tea Cake cares about Janie, her inner and outer appearance. One day Janie finds Tea Cake in her house with a comb. She finds him— combing her hair and scratching the dandruff from her scalp (103). While Joe Starks used to see Janie's hair as a tool of his control over her, Tea Cake enjoys her hair and lets her enjoy it too. There exists a spirit of reciprocity in their relationship. So Janie, little by little, learns to trust Tea Cake and his good intentions. She learns to see her body and her beauty and appreciate them. When she returns to Eatonville— great rope of black hair swing[s] [to] her waist and unravel[s] in the wind like a plume (2). She has met a good man has found her true self and can be at her best. Dresses are another element in the process of self-actualization. Normally, dresses symbolize class and individuality.

As a new woman, Pheoby remains friendly even when the society is antagonistic toward Janie. She has an important role to play with respect to the message she has to convey to the women of her community. She acts as a bridge between Janie and the community in which she is regarded as an accepted member. Janie herself cannot tell her story because the porch-sitters have violated the spirit of intimacy; they are united in their ‘mass cruelty’. As they “follow”

Janie's path home through Eatonville, without Tea Cake, they hope the answers to their questions are cruel and strange.

This love between women is evident in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the relationship between Nanny and Janie and is epitomized in the scene where the elderly grandmother obligates the young adolescent to marry Logan Killicks. Nanny loves Janie and this is apparent in this passage from the book: — Ah loves yuh a whole heap more'n Ah do yo mama, de one Ah did birth (15). So Janie understands the good intentions of her grandmother which are born of misguided love. She shows her love in return by submitting to marriage. Another element of this love toward others appears in the storytelling part of Janie as earlier mentioned above. Janie grants Pheoby the authority to tell other women her story. She wants her story to be shared among her community women so as to educate them. This love is very important in such a community because expressing love, not just for self, but for others and the community as a whole is part of Womanist movement. Although women of Janie's community show abusive behavior toward Janie, she demonstrates love for them and helps them to construct their African American female identity. This shows that Janie reaches a self-actualized state at the end of her journey.

One of the main aspects in a black woman's life is her body and its relation to sexuality. One of the main elements concerning the body image is the skin tone in the novel. Janie has a white father and also a white grandfather, so she is a mulatto. Compared to other members of society who are all-black, she is more at the center of attention. She is somehow in a state of friction because of her midway position between the white and the black communities. This skin tone and the degree of blackness is an important element in her self-actualization. There are two incidents that refer to this issue in the novel: one is Janie as a child looking at her photo and noticing she is black (mentioned earlier) and the other is the encounter with Mrs. Turner.

The deliberate othering by the white woman forces Janie's recognition and acceptance of her Blackness. This also opens a chasm between races in the child's mind. There are many points in the novel that indicate Joe is jealous of other men and also of the fact that Janie is younger than him. The narrator tells us that, “—The more people in there [the store] the more ridicule he poured over her body to point attention away from his own” (78). “Or—Don't stand dererollin'

yo' pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees" (ibid). But after Joe dies, she discovers her true outer beauty. When Janie looks in the mirror, she finds out that "— the young girl [is] gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place" (87). It probably takes Janie years to reach this stage of near self-actualization. But the real awareness comes after she returns from Everglades after burying Tea Cake.

Walker otherwise defines womanism as that of "outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful [sexual] behavior" (ibid). This negative connotation can be applied to Janie when she lets the young boy kiss her. This shows Janie's appreciation of her sexuality which to her should be freewill. Her relationship with Johnnie Taylor under the "pear tree" signals her beginning romance which does not mature thanks to Nanny. In the course of the novel, she moves from being restricted to going for men on her own count (as evident in her relationship with Tea Cake, a man twelve-years-younger than her) to willfully going in for one of her choice. This is the relationship wherein Janie loved and she was loved in return.

The heroine is an incarnation of an African American female who subscribes to the womanist ideal. The womanist identity model, developed by Holmes Beverly, describes the experience of black women and how the evolution happens from "external, societal definitions of womanhood to an internal, personally salient definition of womanhood" (Holmes Beverly B179). Talking about this change that proceeds from the outside to the inside, one remembers Kristeva's notion of sexual identity. Kristeva sees women as both producers of culture and reproducers of the species and hence as being in a psycho-symbolic structure which is based on the metaphysics of identity and difference, where one sex (or class or race or nation) is seen as a rival of another. Kristeva asks us to internalize this structure. From this point of view, the other (which exists in women), is not an evil being nor is she foreign. Consequently, women learn to join together the fragmented pieces inside them. Janie is able to piece together her fragmented life after her first two disastrous marriages.

When a woman realizes that she is not the way patriarchy defines her and she can define herself on the bases of her experiences, her background and her individuality, she can feel her other self. This internal side of identity and personality gives her the feeling of realness. She knows her true goals, what she expects from life, what she should do. Janie is a character who is

unaware of her capacities, her inside other. In the beginning of the novel, she has a rosy, superficial notion of what life and love are. She goes through many stages of life; she spends time trying to know others only to realize that the person she should learn about is herself. Black women can find this realness, if and only if they appreciate their culture, their emotional fluidity and their strength.

Both attributes of the dress are reflective of the ensuing years of stringent oppression Janie endures by Joe's side. Contrary to the situation in her past life earlier discussed in Chapter One, a significant change occurs in Janie's wardrobe once Tea Cake and she start their relationship. She starts wearing light, thin fabrics that have vibrant colors. She wears pink linen, dresses in blue, dons high heel slippers and a ten dollar hat. While she lives with Tea Cake, Janie willingly dresses to please her partner not because she is forced to do so. She wears bright colors which are in harmony with her mood. She enjoys being attractive and she knows that Tea Cake does not only care for her outer beauty. So when she feels the need to work alongside her husband on the fields, she happily changes into blue denim overalls and heavy shoes (134).

Janie's choices of attire suggest the sort of independence she has gained in her relationship with Tea Cake. She is no more compelled to dress as the community wishes her to or as her husband orders her to. She is free to choose. She even uses her overalls in Tea Cake's funeral: because her conviction is that there should be no expensive veils and robes for [her] this time. She puts on her overalls because she was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief (189). This is an important step in that it shows that Janie does not care about social standards. She dresses to be comfortable. When she returns to Eatonville, she is in the overalls and is more self-confident than ever.

Despite the cynicism and derision of the women on seeing her in this attire, Janie responds to their harsh looks and venomous tongues with love and understanding. She chooses to share her story and horizon with them. This story within a story draws important links between Janie's own position at the intersection of racial and gendered oppression and a tradition of black women's thought elaborated within the confines of a system that denied them both physical and intellectual autonomy. It is a story that locates Janie's coming to consciousness within a broader

history of black women's oppression and contextualizes her struggle for autonomy as a historical struggle that reaches far beyond the individual horizon of her own aspirations.

Janie thus embarks on her travels through black womanhood armed with this historical understanding and its critical prism. It is an understanding and a prism that will shape, not only her perspective of the world, but also the story that she shares with Pheoby. By beginning her narrative with these stories of innocent childhood experience, Janie has provided her listeners with the critical tools they will need to deconstruct— as she has— the experiences of marginalization, confinement, love, and loss that she encounters on her journey. It is a critical perspective that is sharpened through Janie's experiences in a succession of marriages as evident in the novel.

This chapter's objective has been to examine the new woman that emerges as a result of the re-vision of gender stereotypes and the author's ideal of an utopic society. It has equally highlighted the fact that the society can be cautioned to see humanity in each individual. The new woman who emerges from attempts at redefinition is one who is able to do whatever she wants without any form of restrictions and without fear of punishment. She is equally presented as one who is on the track of autonomy, self-realization, and independence; one who stands up and claims her rights to shake free of the subordination imposed on her. This work has also examined the fact that the new woman is one who makes her own choices in her relationships; it has equally proven that the woman's connection with other women serves as a springboard to her freedom. She is one who is conscious of her beauty and can better utilize it to suit her desires.

She is also a woman who subscribes to the womanist ideals. It is worthy of note that even though the woman undergoes these radical transformations, she equally harmoniously bonds with both the men and women of her community. Her relationship with men is proof of the fact that she is a unifier and not a divisive agent. The utopic society is therefore one that is void of discrimination of all forms, a society where the man and the woman are going to live together and complement each other. The man and woman should see humanity in one another as evident in the creation of an all-black community in Eatonville.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER AWARENESS IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

The aim of this chapter is to closely examine how ‘gender,’ as a salient social variable, is managed in the context of the ESL classroom in the Cameroonian context. Therefore, this chapter investigates how ‘gender’ is portrayed in the ESL course-book, texts and images, negotiated in the teacher-student interactions and addressed by educational policy-makers. First of all, the chapter highlights the reasons for the adoption of a literature-based approach to the teaching of language or why literature should be used to teach language. It equally shows the differences of the gender prejudices in both the American and the Cameroonian societies and capitalizes on cultural issues/problems that can be handled when teaching the text considering the fact that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a cross-cultural piece of work that handles issues related to gender and language. To end, the chapter is concerned with how this text can be taught using a number of strategies or tasks typical of literature-based models to the teaching of language. An interdisciplinary methodological framework drawing on the state-of-the-art approaches to linguistic analysis is used (including Focus Groups for data collection).

It is worthy of note that the situation Hurston presents in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is quite relevant to a context like Cameroon where women go through the same forms of marginalization. It is for this reason that this research work sets out to investigate the gender situation in Cameroon in order to show how women are treated in similar ways as in the text. Cameroonian students were exposed to a sample text from Hurston’s novel wherein gender discrimination is evident. Respondents’ views on gender bias in Cameroon were sought using a questionnaire. Before delving into the analysis of the data collected, it is important to look at how other critics treat the question of gender Cameroon.

Like the American society, the Cameroonian society is characterized by patriarchal domination as exemplified in most traditional set-ups in the Cameroonian society. The fact that a work of art bears imprints of its socio-economic, religious and political realities, has prompted writers to use it as a channel through which revolutionary ideals on nation-building could be

proposed. Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* define art as the study of beauty in nature and arts (5). Beauty does not only refer to things that are appealing to the sight. Art also gives every artist the opportunity to represent society as it is and as they would love it to be. In this light, it serves as a revolutionary platform where subjects that are otherwise considered taboo can be discussed.

One of the issues raised of late in works of art is the ideology of gender and how society ascribes gender roles. This is a primordial part of this research work. This issue is mostly treated by those who think that the role society ascribes to gender (in general) and women—in particular—are too restrictive and serve as a major setback to societal growth. As initially discussed, most studies focused mostly on women in order to make up for the fact that earlier writings strictly adhered to the patterns of patriarchal superiority. To reiterate the above claim on the passive representation of women in works of art, Katherine Frank— in an article entitled “Women without Men”— observes that “until recently most African Novels tended to focus on social, historical and political rather than personal or domestic themes. Women’s characters were defined in these novels by their relations to men.” (29)

It is believed that the period of passive female representation is gone and the concern nowadays is on which sex should have greater power over the other. It is for this reason that critics have emerged the world over to fight for gender equality. This fight is salient in different cultural settings. It is necessary to survey the views of some Cameroonian critics. In view of the fact that the Cameroonian society is patriarchal in its policies towards the woman, critics have opted to fight for the re-instatement of the woman. One of the critics who champions this cause is Bole Butake who is interested in the role played by women in boosting societal growth. In the prologue to *Lake God*, Butake observes that drama refers to:

An informal tool of awakening and conscientizing people in diverse areas as the empowerment of women, land use management, environmental protection, good management of community property, democracy, human rights and citizenship and socio-economic upliftment. (3)

The extract above highlights the playwright's concern for female empowerment in connection with other issues affecting the society. In an attempt to foster nation-building, women are made to join forces with men to ensure a smooth running of things in the society. It is for this reason that Butake, in most of his plays, seeks to redeem women and society by exposing societal ills and making proposals on how to solve these problems that plague the society. The playwright is one of those who believes that women can substantially contribute to societal growth if they are provided with the right motivation. According to him, his emancipated women are not superior to the man. He is aware of the fact that his cultural origin does not consider a woman to be superior to men and his ideal woman must acknowledge this fact before going ahead to participate in societal growth.

In most Cameroonian writings, it is evident that the way gender is treated is quite different from those of the American society. The gender situation in Cameroon is different from what Hurston presents in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This chapter equally concentrates on the methodology used to carryout research on the field. It deals with the presentation, the description and the analysis of data collected on the field to investigate students' opinions on gender bias. As far as the methodology is concerned, emphasis is laid on the selection of subjects, the collection of data, and methods of analysis. As regards the analysis of this data, stress is laid on student's opinions about gender bias in their communities and classroom. As concerns the selections of testees (students), the students were selected from a Lower Sixth Arts Class in G.B.H.S. Etoug Ebe. With the help of some teachers, some students were tested to check the validity of the questionnaire to be administered. The questionnaire appended on page 99 was then administered. The researcher tested 45 respondents who comprised of 32 girls and 13 boys between the ages of 16-18, an age group when young people are between adolescence and their teens. It is a transitional period when young people construct their personalities and form their personal opinions. The questionnaire was also interested in students' marital status. The majority of them were single with the exception of one respondent. Their religious inclinations, nationality, as well as their regions of origin were all checked. All these facts are relevant because they contribute factors to some bias undergone by individuals.

The researcher tested respondents' ability to identify speakers in the excerpt provided. 43 respondents could identify the speakers to be Janie and Joe Starks while 2 respondents could not

decipher who the speakers of the excerpt are. They were equally asked to identify the frustrated character amongst those involved in the conversation. 39 respondents (as opposed to 6) could identify Janie as the frustrated character and were also able to justify their choice. Next, the respondents were required to give the reason for the poor treatment given to the character in the excerpt. Here, 35 students were able to give the expected answers which ranged from the vulnerability of the female caste to the historical stereotypes of the woman.

Respondents were asked to relate ideas in the excerpt to what obtains in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, a text they have on programme. In this light, 40 students were able to show how women are marginalized in both texts, they were able to compare characters like Janie and Sikira, Lejoka Brown and Joe Starks, Nanny and Mama Rashida, just to name a few. These 40 respondents were able to show that marginalization is caused by men as opposed to 5 respondents who believe women favor the marginalization of fellow women through hatred for in-group members. They were equally able to link ideas in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* to that of the excerpt. 40 of them indicated the same scenario obtains in both texts.

The researcher equally tested respondents' ability to compare and contrast both author's treatment of the theme of gender bias. Here, 42 respondents were in favor of the fact that both authors treat the theme of gender bias in similar manners through the marginalization of female characters like Sikira, Lisa, Janie and Mama Rashida who are restricted in one way or the other by the men in their lives. Meanwhile, 3 respondents argued that, even though both authors treat gender bias in like manners, the African treatment is harsher than the American treatment of gender bias. Respondents were equally tested on their ability to attempt a conclusion on the question on gender bias in the world from similarities identified in the excerpt and the text on programme. 40 respondents argue that gender bias is a universal concern that should be completely eradicated and women and men given equal opportunities in the society. 5 respondents differed from this opinion as they maintained that gender bias is a cultural issue and some cultures need to be revised to be able to meet up with standards expected of society today.

Respondents were next asked to talk on aspects of specificity in cultures. Here, 38 respondents believed that in the American society, individuals are at the forefront of marginalization as is the case in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 7 respondents did not share this

view. They rather said that in Africa, it is a general trend as the community unanimously enforces marginalization as seen in some prohibiting acts by men. The researcher equally tested respondents' ability to relate issues in the text to their society. 38 respondents saw most of the issues in the excerpt as a true reflection of the Cameroonian society. As it is the case all over the world, in Cameroon, women are victims of patriarchal subjugation as exemplified in the texts by Joe, Logan and Lejoka Brown. Respondents were then required to talk of their personal gender bias experiences. The respondents' answers varied on this aspect. Some male respondents said they have been marginalized by girls in class and by some female teachers who sometimes sanctioned them for the harsh treatments men give to women. Some female respondents, on their part, said they have suffered marginalization in their homes where certain chores they find pleasure doing have always been attributed to the boys and those that entail house catering and nursing have been given to them. One of the respondents equally said her husband has always sent her out whenever his friends come to the house for meetings. Such acts of relegation are found in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as earlier shown.

On the question of the justification of gender equality, respondents were able to elaborate on the notion of equality from God even though some boys thought otherwise. This is because, according to them, women were made from the man's rib. As such, she should be under his rule and equality is a revolt on her part. Their views were expressed thus: 43 respondents said that women should be given equal rights with men and they should complement each other. 2 respondents stated that giving women such rights is useless because they have always rejected the rights given them by the society. They (the women) have been wicked to their women folk. Finally, Respondents were tested on their knowledge of attempts at combating gender bias: 41 of the respondents believe the campaign has been successful so far because, today, most women are given posts of responsibility. They cited names like Angela Merkel of Germany, Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, Selif Helen Johnson of Liberia, and Hilary Clinton of the United States of America. Their ability to articulate some changes in this practice in recent times shows that the majority of the respondents think that gender bias is losing grounds in the world today.

There were however, a series of difficulties encountered by the researcher in the course of this research. The survey was conducted in G.B.H.S. Etoug Ebe and data was collected on the eve of Easter holiday. It was not easy to get students to sincerely express their opinions. They

were likewise very reluctant to give enough time to the research exercise since they did not want their “rascal week” to be interrupted. The researcher also faced some financial constraints as the school was quite far from the researcher’s home.

This chapter is partly concerned with the teaching of reading comprehension (a language lesson) using a passage culled from Hurston’s novel that will create gender awareness in students. As such, it is necessary to look at the implications of an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching. Since language teaching objectives lay emphasis on the main skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening) and sub-skills (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation), it is relevant to examine the role of literature (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*) in the teaching of the English language, that is to say, why literature should be used to teach English and how it contributes to the achievement of ELT objectives. The fact that languages are performance-based, (to show that you know a language, you are expected to speak it as well as write it) and this involves all the language skills mentioned above. There is an inseparable marriage between literature and language as Ezra Pound states in *How to Read: Part II* “great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost” (Qtd from *Literature and Language Teaching 2*). This ties in with Christine Savvidou’s premise in “An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in EFL Classrooms” that “literature is language and language can indeed be literary” (33). This shows that literature is no stranger in the English language classroom. Before we move any further, it is essential to explain what this work means by literature.

Following John McRae’s categorization of literature, there is a difference between literature with capital L and literature with small l. The former refers to classical texts or canonical texts while the latter refers to the non-canonical texts, that is, popular fiction, songs, lyrics, and fables. Another categorization by Kinneavy known as Kinneavy’s Communication Triangle places literature under poetic discourse and this includes novels, drama and poetry. Thus, the text under study, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is literature with small l and a novel. Since the course content of language has to do with the culture of learners, literature can help learners to develop their understanding of their culture and other cultures that are relevant to them or that they are exposed to. This helps them to develop tolerance in their negotiation of difference and gender. Students can also learn real-life values from literary texts. A text like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is endowed with them.

Literature is also instrumental in the development of language usage through the main skills(listening, reading, writing and speaking activities). “Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and this can help learners to practice the language skills in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary” (Widdowson *Stylistics* 25). As in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we have American expressions, British expressions, and African American (dialect) expressions and their structures can be compared and/ or examined and the notions of correctness and acceptability can also play a role here. This adds up language awareness since students can be asked to analyze or examine non-standard forms of language which occur in the text. So the students become more conscious of the language use (ibid).

As McRae explains in “Teaching Material: Using Literature in the ELS/ESL Classroom,” literary texts are representational unlike most language text books which are referential. Referential language only communicates at one level and has a propensity to be informational while representational language “involves the learners and engages their emotions, as well as their cognitive faculties; helps students to use language imaginatively and develops their creativity” (par 4). This implies that students should communicate effectively through exposure to literature as they use literature to develop a critical and creative use of language and, by this, they learn about the literary devices that are characteristic of the different genres – advertising, poetry, letters, invitations and so on.

It is worthy of note that the literature used in ELT classrooms nowadays is no more limited to traditional texts from certain countries or regions like the United States of America and Britain where English is a native language. The ELT classroom now exploits interesting and equally rich literature from non-native speakers of English like some African countries, India, and Jamaica and even translated texts from other parts of the world. The language learner is therefore exposed to a variety of cultures and different forms of English.

The cultural appropriateness of the literature text has to be taken into consideration before a text is picked. This is because the text has to be relevant and of interest to the learners, appropriate to their comprehension and should not be so culturally dense that outsiders feel excluded from understanding essential meaning. The ELT classrooms have become more diverse

than in the past due to migration and globalization. As such, It has become necessary for students to learn acceptance and understanding of other races, cultures, and ethnicities because knowing about the diverse world that includes them leads to improved communication, understanding, and acceptance and difference and helps in shaping one's gender as one becomes sex conscious.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a very good example of a cross-cultural or multicultural text that can assist students in building a positive self-concept and a feeling of acceptance and comfort in the classroom and beyond. It exposes the conflicts that many groups were and /or are forced to face and so it allows students to see diversity and relate information back to their own lives. The linguistic and cultural diversity of the text gives room for a broad spectrum of linguistic details and analysis. However, there are some impediments to teaching such texts because textual analyses are primarily based on what the learner has previously been exposed to; the learner's culture/centre because culture and language influence perception. So, some necessary background information (historical, cultural, and literary) may be provided to the learners for them to make sense of the text and for them to understand the language of the text (Lazar *Literature* 65).

From the text, we see how the meanings of words change in different cultural contexts and how language/perception shapes identity and world-view. Students could be introduced to some of them before reading the text or given a glossary. "Nigger" in America, when used to describe a person, has negative connotations attached to it. But in Cameroon, it does not. So too does the word "mule". Nanny, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, tells Janie that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see". The meaning of mule here is derogatory as it paints the picture of an animal that has a horse and a donkey as parents, and is used especially for carrying loads. This is the role ascribed to the African American woman in the American society. Students can be asked to identify similar words in the texts that have negative connotations in one cultural setting and are free from prejudice in another. Some of them are thin/slim, nigger, African American, bitch/girl and caste/colored or mixed. We also have new vocabulary items or expressions such as "blogger", "goy" "umph", "buggy", "britches" in British and American contexts that Cameroonian students will have to discover and learn. Students could be asked to read portions of the text where these words/expressions are used and see if they can bring out the meaning from context.

Language is one of the channels through which gender biases are expressed. Therefore the novel pays a lot of attention to the use of language and its importance in representing the individuality of the characters. The main character uses language as a means of asserting or achieving her identity and self-realization as a woman, a Black, and an African American. From such scrutiny of language, students will discover objects or products that exist in one society but not in the other. Linguistic expressions that are coded with cultural values that have identification signposts, social structures (based on wealth/color), roles and relationships (nuclear families/extended families) and beliefs and values (corporal punishment and communality/ non corporal punishment and individualism) of different communities that are peculiar to them and are thus set apart.

Some of the concepts, allusions and references implicit in the text are easy to understand as they have already been introduced to learners in their History and Citizenship lessons. But it is important for the teacher to check that they have been well understood when giving background information to the text. For instance, we have concepts like imperialism, capitalism, immigration, gender, race, identity, slavery, and historical allusions to the abolition of the Slave Trade in the South by Abraham Lincoln, The Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan. This makes it easier for the students to link characters and situations in the novel to history and even to the other texts in the programme. In other words, the learners already have some background knowledge of the novel and this facilitates understanding. Though some of the characters and concepts are drawn from the American, African American and British experiences, they could represent some other persons or ideas in other parts of the world because the issues treated are universal. The novel thus opens the children to the world of the American, the African American, and the Africans in the diaspora(in general) with their heritage and history of violence, subjugation, exploitation, abuse and segregation.

The text is equally rich in linguistic features. It is full of opportunities for teachers to integrate the teaching of linguistic/communication styles. Working with the text using stylistic analysis (stylistics) will involve the close study of the linguistic features of the text in order to arrive at an understanding of how meaning is transmitted, and this can be done with some support from the paralinguistic features because these are elements of language. Some of the stylistic components that can be taught in conjunction with this novel are phonetic variants (like

the different ways in which a name like Pheoby is pronounced), lexical variants (like the use of the words “mule” and “nigger” in the various Englishes) and syntactic variants; different grammatical constructions for the same meaning (“Datsho is de truth,...”/” that for sure is the truth...”). This implies that information can be perceived, transmitted and understood in different ways depending on the relationship between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader and the context.

From the different variants mentioned above, issues of politeness, social distance, power, solidarity and face crop up and this is essential in language teaching and learning. Lexical variants can also give quite the opposite stylistic message. For example, choosing “mule/nigger” over “black/African” to refer to someone, or a Caucasian speaker, shows one's identity and gender and establishes social distance because its racist implications are contained in the speaker's superiority (power). Cultural differences in style therefore call for teachers and students to know what attributes members of a society ascribe to features of style. This is because even though there are some general markers of politeness, solidarity, power, and social distance, our internalized cues of style may not necessarily tie in with those of groups with experiences, cultures or identities different from ours.

Thus, knowing the proper thing to say in a given context is very important as we find in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* especially with characters like Miss Turner and Nanny who are hyper-conscious of their identities vis-à-vis their surroundings. Like cultural practice, language ideologies are echoes and apparatuses that explore, reflect, threaten and acclaim social and cultural production, reproduction and representation. Even the most innocent words can evoke associations that may perhaps affect our attitude and our response to an expression which contains them. The pedagogic implication of this is that it gives the opportunity for students to be taught the various aspects of language such as vocabulary and structure (stylistics) of the different discourse forms and, at the same time, test comprehension. The length of the novel is suitable, that is, 332 pages made up of 20 chapters. This gives time to read and time for classroom discussions.

There are a number of strategies available to facilitate the exploitation of literature texts. However, some are more suitable than others especially when we consider our objectives.

Generally, students are expected to trace the plot, story line, dramatize the story, rewrite texts in their own words, and appreciate characters, themes, setting, atmosphere, and style in relation to human experiences. This helps learners to practice the four main language skills via the teaching strategies and activities implemented. The approach adopted here is the Integrated Approach which borrows from the Cultural Model, the Language Model and the Personal Growth Model which focuses on communicative competence. Savvidou opines that

Communicative competence is more than acquiring mastery of structure and form. It also involves the acquiring ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. So literature can provide a powerful pedagogic tool in students' linguistic development. (45)

In the above quotation, Savvidou calls for the unconditional marriage between literature, language and culture (gender). Below are some teaching strategies and suggestions for the teaching of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. These strategies will be partitioned under pre-reading strategies, while-reading strategies and post-reading strategies.

For the pre-reading strategies, students can be introduced to the theme(s) of the text when they are given the opportunity to watch, read or listen to material on the same subject (short story, poem, song, magazine, film). A film or music video on marginalization/subjugation, racism and gender especially those acted by Black Americans and Africans can be used. Hollywood and Collywood in recent times have produced quite a number of such films. This serves as a pre-reading activity and gives the student a hint of what the text is all about. It also serves as a curiosity trigger as the students become interested in finding out more about the text. It also gives room for cross-referencing and eases the understanding of the text.

Prediction activities often provide interesting lead-ins to the story. Students can be asked to read an extract from the novel which mentions most of the main characters and have the learners predict the main protagonist and the relationships between characters. The teacher could also briefly describe a character and have the learners predict what will happen to them. Janie, Tea Cake and Joe Starks are perfect characters for this task. This helps to improve on the listening, writing and speaking skills of the students.

While-reading strategies are those that ensure the sustenance of the reading and exploration of the text. To help learners cope with the length of the novel, the novel can be broken up into manageable portions and focus questions or language-based worksheet activities constructed to help the learners through. The teacher also needs to help the students identify key chapters or paragraphs and apply a combination of intensive and extensive reading. For example, the section of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* where Janie talks back at Joe Starks against his marginalizing tendencies is a key portion of the text. To check the comprehension of the students, they could be asked to retell the story, sequence events (drawing a time-line), paragraphs or chapters and even answer questions. As for post-reading activities, role play is a strategy that can be used. Students can imagine they are a particular character and act out a sketch.

Janie, the main character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, goes through immense psychological trauma and struggle to find ways to cope with the tough realities of being a female and an American African in the US. Students can depict the scenes that reveal the highlights of her struggles or crisis on stage (for example, the scenes where she is restricted by Joe Starks from speaking and taking part in the conversations of men).such an activity helps to develop the comprehension and speaking skills of the learners. Debates could also be used. Debates concerning the attitudes of the main characters and even some minor characters could be an interesting and enriching exercise that will incite the opinion of the whole class, thus rendering the text interesting and realistic especially when it is linked to the lives of the learners. Arguments can be made stronger when they are supported via cross-referencing or personal experiences. They could be asked, for example, to say who is to blame for Janie's marginalization or if Janie, in her attempts to assert herself, develops revolutionary tendencies.

In order to create an atmosphere in which neither the learner nor the teacher is ill-at-ease with the feelings, reactions and emotions associated with gender, the teacher should maintain objectivity towards the subject. He/ She should be ready to assume the role of the guide and mentor in the most non authoritarian way possible rather than try to comment on every point and attempt to answer every question. Questions on gender and gender-related issues like oppression, racism, segregation, class, color, and subjugation should be discussed using evidence from the text before relating it to contemporary society so as to avoid ill-feelings or emotional outbursts.

The teacher is expected to help the students shape their previously held opinions or remodel them if need be and just receive opinions without assimilating them at every critical level to fit their persons and experiences. It is relevant for the teacher to allow the students to do much of the talking so that they can air their views towards the subject no matter how silly or prejudiced they may be. The views can later be discussed in class with more attention paid to the intolerant and biased ones and the more objective ones used as examples.

It is worth noting that several ESL/EFL scholars criticized the use of these sociopolitical issues in the language classroom as indoctrination and argued that ESL/EFL teachers should focus on grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical forms (Allison, 1994; Reid, 1989; Santos, 1992, 2001; Smith, 1997). Along with critical and feminist pedagogues' assertions, hold that teaching sociopolitical issues including gender and sexuality issues should not be criticized as indoctrination. Rather, critical and feminist teachings are both needed and appropriate in ESL/EFL settings for raising the consciousness of all students toward equality and social justice.

Rather than seeing gender as an individual variable, we see it as a complex system of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts. This approach foregrounds sociohistoric, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic differences in constructing gender. We do not assume, for example, that all women—or all men—have much in common with each other just because of their biological makeup or their elusive social roles, nor do we assume that gender is always relevant to understanding language learning outcomes. Instead, we recognize that gender, as one of many important facets of social identity, interacts with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status in framing students' language learning experiences, trajectories, and outcomes.

In this study, we have been able to come up with some reasons that discuss how English language teachers worldwide address gender in the classroom in four ways: curricular innovation, that is, creating new programs and classes that address the needs of particular learners; womanist/feminist teaching practices, materials, and activities; topic management, that is, how teachers can engage learners in critical reflection by incorporating gender issues into already existing classes; and classroom management and decision-making practices. We draw

ESL examples from a variety of contexts in the United States and, Cameroon and Nigeria. Feminist pedagogy has been documented in Countries like Japan in the 1970s to some extent, and we hope it will continue to be documented in future research and feminist teaching practices elsewhere in the world.

Regardless of which particular class one is teaching, be it language and gender, or simply English grammar, at some point every teacher is faced with a controversial question, comment, or topic. We firmly believe that teachers need to be well-prepared to handle such topics, while maintaining a positive dynamic in the classroom. In fact, they may do best by being proactive, as EFL and ESL classrooms represent unique spaces where different linguistic and cultural worlds come into contact. Such classrooms offer unparalleled opportunities for teachers to engage with cross-cultural differences and the social construction of gender and sexuality, and thus to help students develop linguistic and intercultural competence, or multivoiced consciousness (*Cross-Cultural Excursions* 283-306). This approach respectfully acknowledges students' and teachers' own diverse backgrounds, while engaging them with alternative systems of knowledge, values, beliefs, and modes of gender performance.

Empowerment in the classroom may take place not only through explicit discussion of gender inequities but also through negotiation of power and control between teachers and students. It is relevant to note that, the trademark of feminist critical pedagogies is a decentering of the teacher's position, while students gain greater control of the classroom. This control means involving students in making decisions on meeting times, locations, child-care arrangements, and choosing and managing discussion topics (Frye, 1999; McMahill, 2001; Rivera, 1999).

We have discussed a variety of transformative classroom practices common in feminist pedagogy: flexible curricula that recognize the diversity of the students' needs, shared decision making in the classroom, teaching and learning that incorporate students' life trajectories, pedagogy that locates student experiences and beliefs within larger social contexts, and practices that encourage students to imagine alternative ways of being in the world.

The study of gender and its significance in language learning environments has for a long time focused on difference. Critical views of the different approach to understanding gender and language learning have emerged only recently (e.g. Ehrlich, 1997; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). These critiques point out that difference approaches are inherently context- and culture-blind because they regard gender as a static, context-free category (e.g. Ehrlich, 1997; Schmenk, 2002; Sunderland, 2000). Based on poststructuralist premises, the critiques conceive of language learners' identities as contested sites and argue for developing an enhanced framework for studying gender and its meanings within particular communities of practice (e.g., Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Peirce, 1995; Pennycook, 2001; Schmenk, 2002).

Instead of looking at what males are like and what females are like and constructing generalized images of male and female language learners accordingly, critical voices note that language learners are themselves constantly constructing and reconstructing their identities in specific contexts and communities. To understand these processes and reflect on their possible implications for language learning and teaching, English language teachers, researchers, and teacher educators need to take into account individual learners and their respective positioning in particular social and cultural contexts.

This chapter set out to investigate the gender is managed in an ESL classroom in the Cameroonian context, and how gender is portrayed in the ESL course-books. It equally showed how an interdisciplinary approach could be used in the teaching of a linguistic aspect using a literary text. It also shed light on respondents' view towards gender bias. In the course of our analysis, we realize that exposing the students to gender to gender- related issues, help shape their perception of marginalization resulting to their empowerment and the redefinition of the female. We equally realize that creating new programmes in the English language classroom helps in addressing the needs of particular learners. This is because from respondents' views it was evident that language is the principal promoter of gender bias in the society. At this point, the study will suggest a lesson plan which focuses on the teaching of the redefinition of the woman in the text. But before delving into that, it is necessary to announce that the passage that will be used to teach this aspect using a language-based approach as earlier mentioned is on page

101. Taking into consideration the students' age, language level, class, and the need for completion, the passage selected is relevant as will be examined below.

NAME OF TEACHER: SAKWE STANDLEY ITOE

SERIES: ENGLISH MODERN LETTERS

CLASS: LOWER SIXTH ARTS

NUMBER ON ROLL: 60

SEX: Female

AVERAGE AGE: 16

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

TIME: 8:00-8:50

DURATION: 50mins

DATE:13th April, 2016

SKILLS: listening, speaking, reading, writing, dramatization, skimming, and scanning.

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE: Students have already read previous chapters of the novel, discussed other thematic concerns and have been given guidance in critical thinking.

TOPIC: PROSE: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston)

LESSON: Reading Comprehension (The Redefinition of the Woman)

LESSON OBJECTIVES: By the end of the lesson, the students are expected to

1. Scan through the passage and provide answers to the questions asked.
2. Express how the events in the passage are a true reflection of their real-life situations.

TEACHING AIDS: information chart, handouts,

REFERENCES: Hurston, Zora Neale. (1937). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Negro University Press.

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STAGES	TIME	CONTENT	PROCEDURE		RATIONALE
			Teacher's Activities	Students' Activities	
INTRODUCTION	05MINS	<p style="text-align: center;">I) <u>Lead-in Task</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Picture Presentation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Picture showing a man battering a woman after a quarrel.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Questions</p> <p>1-Why do you think some men beat up their wives? (To show their superiority as men, To make the woman constantly submissive to their demands.)</p> <p>2-What are some of the disadvantages of such acts on women? (their rights are suppressed, they suffer from injuries, it exposes their vulnerability)</p> <p>3-What according to you should be done to eradicate this practice? (Men and women should be given equal opportunities in the society; both sexes should see a partner in one another.)</p> <p>Lesson Title: The Redefinition of the Woman</p>	<p>The teacher puts up a chart on the chalkboard.</p> <p>He/ She asks students some questions about the pictures.</p> <p>The teacher calls up the students to answer the questions.</p> <p>He writes the answers on the chalkboard and introduces the lesson.</p>	<p>The students listen carefully to the teacher's instructions, answer the teacher's questions by a show of hand and carry out the instructions given to them.</p>	<p>This is done to arouse the student's interest and to introduce the lesson.</p> <p>This is equally done to give the students a chance to switch on to the major theme of the text.</p> <p>It aims at arousing critical thinking in the students.</p>
PRESENTATION	20MINS	<p>II) While Reading Activities</p>			

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Presentation of Excerpt</u> Reading Comprehension passage- Chapters 6, 7,8 p.75-85 Tasks</p> <p>I. Read the text in 7 minutes and state the confrontation it is about.</p> <p>II. Read the text again and note down all the difficult words/expressions you come across in your exercise book.</p> <p>III. <u>Vocabulary</u> -Give the difficult words and expressions you came across.</p> <p>I. Lak (<i>like</i>), Ah kin (<i>I can</i>), uh (<i>a</i>), , bloom(<i>a flower on a tree that people admire</i>), tuhmorrer (<i>tomorrow</i>), commiserated (<i>to show somebody sympathy when they are upset</i>)</p> <p>IV. Read the text again and find answers to these questions. You can answer them as you are seated.</p> <p>1. Who are the characters in the text? Ans: Janie Joe and the citizens of Eatonville</p> <p>2. Identify the sex of each one of them. Ans: male and female</p> <p>3. Classify them into two groups: which gender do they represent? Ans: the male and female genders</p> <p>4. Which gender undermines the other and how?</p>	<p>The teacher gives the students instructions. He gets feedback from them. The teacher</p> <p>-Asks students to read silently while taking note of difficult words.</p> <p>He proceeds to teach the identified vocabulary using explanations, illustrations, examples, etc.</p> <p>The teacher asks students questions and discusses answers with them</p> <p>-Asks students to identify specific places in the text</p>	<p>Students read the text, they give feedback.</p> <p>Students pay attention and take down notes when necessary. They verbally contribute when called upon to do so.</p> <p>The students listen carefully to the teacher's instruction -They read and execute the task</p>	<p>To give students a general idea of what the passage is about.</p> <p>-</p> <p>This is done to ease their understanding of the text.</p> <p>This is done to enable them have a clue of what theme they are expected to extract from the passage after</p>
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		<p>Ans: the male gender. Mocking and down grading the other.</p> <p>5. Why do you think this character acts the way he does?</p> <p>Ans: because he thinks he is superior to the other.</p> <p>6. How does the undermined gender react?</p> <p>Ans: by confronting the male.</p> <p>7. Can this reaction be considered an example of the empowerment of the woman? Justify your answer.</p> <p>Ans: Yes because it serves as the springboard for self realization.</p> <p>8. How is this reaction a deviation from the expected reaction of a woman in a typically traditional Cameroonian context?</p> <p>Ans: the traditional woman is always submissive despite the situation.</p> <p>9. What is your opinion about such notions of the woman's empowerment?</p> <p>Ans: it helps the woman to break free from patriarchal domination.</p> <p>10. Justify the title of the text.</p> <p>Ans: it is evident that the women look up to God to better their situation.</p>	from which they get their answers.	<p>The students scan the passage and answer questions by a show of hand. They discuss their answers as a class.</p> <p>The students identify the specific places from which they get their answers.</p> <p>The students do as they are told</p>	<p>careful reading. To practice scanning, and critical skills.</p> <p>-This is done to familiarize the students with the various aspects of gender found in the extract.</p> <p>This is done to create an atmosphere of interaction in class.</p>
GUIDED PRACTICE	05MINS	<p style="text-align: center;">III) Post Reading Activities</p> <p style="text-align: center;">a) Oral Exercise</p> <p>(Group Work)</p> <p>1. What other forms of oppression do you think Janie had broken away from?</p> <p>Ans: freedom of speech</p>	The teacher provides the	The students follow the teacher's	This is done to enable the students put into

		<p>2. In the passage Joe Starks mentions Janie's age to ridicule her. How do you think Janie's reaction this time around brings about change?</p> <p>Ans: It changes Joe's and the others in the store's idea about Janie.</p> <p>3. Of what significance are the other people in the store in the course of this quarrel between Janie and Joe?</p> <p>Ans: they make up the population of Eatonville.</p>	<p>students with handouts and asks them to answer a few questions orally</p>	<p>instructions and do as they are told.</p>	<p>practice what they have learnt.</p> <p>This is equally done to internalize what the students have learnt and to give them autonomy in class.</p>
FREE PRACTICE	08MINS	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>RE-ENACTMENT:</u></p> <p>Some students are selected to re-enact the chat in the extract to give it a Cameroonian touch.</p>	<p>The teacher calls up a few students to act out the extract through adaptation.</p>	<p>The students take up roles and do as they are told by the teacher.</p>	<p>This is done to instill notions of new role definition into students.</p>
EVALUATION	09MINS	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Written Exercise</u></p> <p>Instruction: answer the following questions in your exercise books.</p>	<p>The teacher gives</p>	<p>They follow the</p>	<p>This is done to verify</p>

		<p>1- What evidence is there in the text that the on-lookers show no sympathy for Janie? Ans: they mock her when she is insulted by Joe.</p> <p>2- Identify some words in the text which show that Janie has regained her identity. Ans: ah'm no old woman, stop mixing my doins' wid ma words, Ah'm a woman and I know it.</p> <p>3- What effect can be brought out when Janie says to Joe "But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it"?</p> <p>3- How is Joe Starks compared to men in your community? Ans: the fact that he disrespects women and subdues them.</p> <p>5- What moral lesson can you give as regards the situation in the passage? Ans: men should see woman as human beings created by God with equal rights and opportunity.</p>	<p>the students some questions to answer in class and in their exercise books.</p> <p>He marks a few books in class and asks the students to exchange their exercise books.</p>	<p>teacher's instructions and do the exercise in their note books.</p> <p>They call on the teacher's attention, with a show of hand, for their books to be marked.</p>	<p>if the lesson objectives have been attained</p> <p>-This is equally done to motivate the students.</p>
HOME WORK	02MINS	<p>Read the passage again at home and prepare your points for a debate. Topic: the woman's redefinition solely lies in her hands.</p>	<p>The teacher gives the students a take-home assignment. The teacher fills in the log book.</p>	<p>The students copy the assignment in their exercise books</p>	<p>This is done to keep the students busy back at home and to internalize what has been learnt. It equally aims at spurring them to continue pondering on the question and to develop their own personal opinions about it.</p>

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating gender stereotypes and the redefinition of the self in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Focus has been on the woman because the novelist projects a revolutionary woman who participates in the redefinition of the self in a society that has (for centuries) kept the woman at the bottom of the social ladder in the society. It is worth noting that the revolutionary tendencies of Hurston's heroine constitute the research problem of this study. The work has attempted to verify the hypothesis that Zora Neale Hurston shows that gender stereotypes hinder the woman's development in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She rejects the fact that the woman is a subaltern, a nonentity, or a weaker sex and resorts to the black woman's redefinition to combat discrimination based on race and gender.

New Historicism has enabled the researcher to examine the background of the author and to show how her life experiences have impacted her works. It has also demonstrated that the writer is influenced by external factors which characterize her surroundings. It is the experiences of the author which form the basis for her writing: Hurston depicts the sufferings and torture of black women in a highly patriarchal twentieth-century American society. Womanism has enabled the researcher to demonstrate how the interplay of relations between men and women affects female assertion of the self. In the society's patriarchal set-up, the livelihood of women was determined by men. It was a society characterized by the oppression and marginalization of women. Womanism, being a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, creates a sense of awareness in women to free them from the shackles of marginalization.

Taking into consideration the author's life and childhood experiences which influenced the writing of her work, we can conclude that Zora Neale Hurston is disgruntled with the low status assigned to women by the American social, political, and economic milieu of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently, she strives to create a society which will be favorable to both men and women by revising their culture, the roles ascribed to women, and patriarchal domination which treats the woman as inferior. The work has shown that Zora Neale

Hurston brings to the limelight the sufferings of women, in general, and black women- in particular- because culture disfavors them. She aptly does this, through her concept of womanism coined by Alice Walker which can be summarized as “all for one and one for all.” By this, she means every person, a man or a woman, should have the interest of the other at heart as that will ensure that there is no marginalization and oppression. This striving for equality is commonplace in American literature as most women writers (mostly African American women writers) do not condone the ill treatment imposed on their counterparts as such they take it upon themselves to voice out this ill-treatment. Amongst these women are: Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Harriet Douglass, just to name a few. It is worthy of note that even though Zora Neale Hurston strives for equality between men and women, she does not propose matriarchy. She wants a society wherein men and women will work together for the good of mankind. She can therefore be called a liberal feminist as she opposes patriarchy and believe in the natural equality and freedom of human beings. She also advocates the creation of social structures that will recognize the uniqueness (peculiarities) of individuals and provide them with opportunities (Madsen, *Gender Basics*.12). This is the aim of Zora Neale Hurston in her novel. Liberal feminists also argue that equality for women can be achieved through legal means and social reforms made possible by the women’s movements which started in the nineteenth century.

This study, as a whole, is divided into a general introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The general introduction comprises an introduction to the study, the research problem, the research questions to be answered, the hypothesis, the significance of the study, the definition of terms central to the understanding of the study, the author’s biographical background, the theoretical framework used. The review of related literature was instrumental in that it has demarcated work done and has the researcher’s contribution to knowledge

Chapter One, which is captioned “Male Hegemony in America and Gender stereotypes,” has examined the origin and the evolution of gender stereotypes which are prevalent in the American society. It has treated the nineteenth and twentieth-century periods, as well as the prominent writers and activities of each era. In the course of doing so, it has presented the evolution of these stereotypes in the course of the centuries. It has also shown that stereotyping is the main barrier to female assertion of the self because it deprives the woman of the right to vote,

the right to education, and the right to own property. This chapter has also examined the nineteenth-century culture and the way it represents and marginalizes women in Hurston's work. It has analyzed the various strategies that Hurston has adopted to create a space for women. This section has also looked at the culture of the twentieth-century as represented by Zora Neale Hurston in her novels. It has shown how the author encourages women to make their conditions better. It has equally shown that the legacy of slave trade has played a key role in the stereotypes that have kept the woman in the marginal position. The chapter has concluded that Hurston portrays the plight of women. She represents women as the deprived of the society because they are placed at the bottom of the social ladder in the society.

Chapter Two, "Challenging Gender Stereotypes," has discussed how the woman overthrows cultural barriers in the quest to redefine and assert herself. This chapter has dealt with the way Hurston has reversed the roles of men through the deconstruction of otherness, making the woman to move from the peripheral position to take central stage in the society that has declared them subalterns and colonized citizens. In this vein, it has equally highlighted the gender role distribution and has demonstrated that the roles ascribed to women are improved from the degrading and oppressive ones like farming and domestic work to those formerly assigned to men like being employed even in cases in which they are not as qualified as the men. Female characters in the novel thus break free from restraints and move beyond these misrepresentations to create a space for themselves by deconstructing and challenging the codes put in place by the society to limit them. In fact, the women move from object to subject in the society.

Chapter Three titled "The Author's Ideal and Vision." It has shown the author's attempts to write the wrongs women have been facing in the past centuries. It has proposed the revision of the nineteenth and twentieth century cultures in America in order to create space for women and enable them to redefine themselves. It has equally shown the aesthetics used by Zora Neale Hurston to produce her literary piece. Through the author's vision, we were able to bring out the author's style through narrative strategies such as imagery, metaphor, allusions, euphemism, metonymy, irony, and contrast as used by the author in her work. She also handles themes such patriarchy, culture contact, gender, racism, death, oppression, subjugation, appearance versus

reality, realism to bring forth her message. The author evaluates the impact of culture on the female assertion of the self and aims at improving the woman's lot.

Chapter Four focused on "Gender awareness in an ESL classroom." It examined how gender awareness can be created in an ESL classroom. It equally shed light on the merits of an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching and has proposed such an integrated approach to language teaching. To verify the relevance of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in creating gender awareness during such a lesson, the work has resorted to field work to check how pertinent the socio-cultural realities described in the novel are in a Cameroonian context. The results of the data analysis have established the fact that the book is relevant and can be duly used. Hence, it has suggested a reading comprehension lesson using a passage from the book.

This study has validated the hypothesis that Zora Neale Hurston debunks the fact that the woman is a subaltern, a nonentity, a weaker sex and fit only for the home. This is aptly obtained through the use of the womanist approach which can be summarized as "all for one and one for all" she creates a society that equates the woman to the man and one which advocates complementarity in the relationship between the man and the woman. She equally empowers the woman in the midst of oppression by deconstructing the paradigm by dismantling every center for the purpose of equality.

Other research avenues which can be exploited by other scholars are cultural imbalances and manhood in the American society. This would mean the study of texts that have been written by men about men and the texts written by women about men. In connection to this, a comparative study can be made of Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Such a venture will be interesting as this area has not been widely explored and it will contribute much to existing knowledge in American literature and in literature in general.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

I) Text Used as Prompt for the Questionnaire Administered

So Joe Starks and his cigar took the center of the floor.

“Ah thanks you all for yo’ kind welcome and for extendin’ tuh me de right hand uh fellowship. Ah kin see dat dis town is full uh union and love. Ah means tuhmah hands tuh de plow heah, and strain every nerve tuh make dis our town de metropolis uh de state. So maybe Ah better tell yuh in case you don’t know dat if we expect tuh move on, us got tuh incorporate, and us got tuh have uh mayor, if things is tuh be done and done right. Ah welcome you all on behalf uh me and mah wife tuh dis store and tuh de other things tuh come. Amen”

Tony led the loud-clapping and was out in the center of the floor when it stopped.

“Brothers and sisters, since never expect tuh better our choice, Ah move dat we make Brother Starks our Mayor until we kin see further.”

Second dat motion!!!” it was everybody talking at once, so it was no need of putting it to a vote.

“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 yuhfuhyo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothing 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. She had never thought of making a speech, and didn’t know if she cared to make one at all. It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off

of things. But anyway, she went down the road behind him that night feeling cold. He strode along invested with his new dignity, thought and planned out loud, unconscious of her thoughts.

APPENDIX 2

II) The Reading Comprehension Text

Title: The Redefinition of the Woman

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 to 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 checkers. Sam Watson, you’semah fish.” This is the first time it happened, but after a while it got so common she ceased to be surprised. It was like a drug. In a way it was good because it reconciled her to things. She got so she received all things with the stolidness of the earth which soaks up urine and perfume with the same indifference. One day she noticed that Joe didn’t sit down. He just stood in front of a chair and fell in it. That made her look at him all over. Joe wasn’t so young as he used to be. There was already something dead about him. He didn’t rear back in his knees any longer. He squatted over his ankles when he walked. That stillness at the back of his neck. His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins. It didn’t seem to be a part of him anymore. Eyes a little absent too. Jody must have noticed it too. Maybe, he had seen it long before Janie did, and had been fearing for her to see. Because he began to talk about her age all the time, as if he didn’t want her to stay young while he grew old. It was always “You oughta throw somethin’ over yo’ shoulders befo’ you go outside.

You ain’t no young pullet no mo’. You’s euh ole hen now.” One day he called her off the croquet grounds. “Dat’s somethin’ for de young folks, Janie, you out derejumpin’ round and won’t be able tuhgit out de bed tuhorrer.” If he thought to deceive her, he was wrong. For the

first time she could see a man's head naked of its skull. Saw the cunning thoughts race in and out through the caves and promontories of his mind long before they darted out of the tunnel of his mouth. She saw he was hurting inside so she let it pass without talking. She just measured out a little time for him and set it aside to wait. It got to be terrible in the store. The more his back ached and his muscle dissolved into fat and the fat melted off his bones, the more fractious he became with Janie. Especially in the store. The more people in there the more ridicule he poured over her body to point attention away from his own. So one day Steve Mixon wanted some chewing tobacco and Janie cut it wrong. She hated that tobacco knife anyway. It worked very stiff. She fumbled with the thing and cut way away from the mark. Mixon didn't mind. He held it up for a joke to tease Janie a little. "lookaheah, Brother Mayor, whutyo' wife done took and done." It was cut comical, so everybody laughed at it. "Uh woman and uh knife— no kind of uh knife, don't b'longtuhgether." There was some more good-natured laughter at the expense of women. Jody didn't laugh. He hurried across from the post office side and took the plug of tobacco away from Mixon and cut it again. Cut it exactly on the mark and glared at Janie. "I god amighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco!

Don't stand dererollin' yo' pop eyes at me widyo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees" A big laugh started off in the store but people got to thinking and stopped. It was funny if you looked at it right quick, but it got pitiful if you thought about it awhile. It was like somebody snatched off part of a woman's clothes while she wasn't looking and the streets were crowded. Then too, Janie took the middle of the floor to talk right into Jody's face, and that was something that hadn't been done before. "Stop mixin' up mah doings widmah looks, Jody. When you git through tellin' me howtuh cut uh plug uh tobacco, then you kin tell me whether mah behind is on straight or not." "Wha— whut'sdat you say, Janie? You must be out yo' head." "Naw, Ah ain't out amah head neither." 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'tno young to be getting' all insulted 'bout yo' looks. You ain'tno young courtin' gal.you'se uh ole woman, nearly forty." "Yeah, Ah'm nearly forty and you'se already fifty. How come you can't talk about dat sometimes instead of always pointin' at me?"

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

III) QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONDENTS ON THE POWER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

This questionnaire is intended for an academic research and the respondents' answers will remain confidential. As such, the respondents are urged to answer the questions with maximum sincerity. This will aid the researcher in his quest.

Respondents' Status. Tick where appropriate

School:.....**Class:**.....

Age:..... **Sex:** Male /Female. **Social Status:** Married /single

Religious Inclinations: Christian / Muslim/ African traditional Religion/None of the above.

Nationality:

Region of origin:.....

Questions

1. Identify a man and a woman who interact in the text.

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.....

2. Who, between these two, seems frustrated?

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.....
.....

3. Do you think his/her frustration is justified?

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.....
.....

4. What accounts for the shady treatment he/she receives from the other?

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.....

5. In what ways are the events in this excerpt related to what obtains in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi?

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.....
.....

6. Cite some instance from *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* which are a true reflection of what happens in the excerpt above

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.....

7. The excerpt is taken from *Their Eyes Were Watching*, written by an African American female writer while *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is written by an African, How can you compare or contrast their treatment of the theme of gender bias ?

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.....

8. What conclusion can you draw on the question of gender bias in the world from similarities you identified in the work?

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9. From the contrast, what is specific to the cultures?

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10. How is the situation in the text reflected in your society?

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.....
11. Have you as an individual suffered from any form of Gender bias?

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.....
12. According to you is gender bias justified? Justify your answer in a sentence.

.....
.....
13. What, according to you, should be done to eradicate gender bias?

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.....
14. List some of the things that have been done this far to combat this form of marginalization.

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.....
15. What are some of the changes that have occurred in men and women relationship in recent times?