

Review

Subverting and Deconstructing Gender and Social Norms in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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This study intends to survey Janie Crawford, the female protagonist of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neal Hurston, focusing on the sexuality as one part of her identity formation. It then moves to depict the plot of Janie's journey from object to subject by focusing on Janie's life, beginning from childhood and ending at the point when she is matured. The paper also aims to demonstrate how Janie Crawford begins as a docile object and becomes an autonomous being, or a subject. With this in mind the sexual system constructed by a patriarchal society is challenged and deconstructed by means of subverting the customized values and ideologies. Away from using cultural studies, African-American literary theories and feminism, the main emphasis rests on Hurston's theories of identity and her feministic viewpoints and Julia Kristeva's notion of the speaking being, Foucault's power and also many African-American women theorists like Alice Walker. Therefore, a close reading of Zora's masterpiece *Their Eyes* and her own viewpoints will follow.

Key Words: Sexuality, African-American, Feminism, Community, Objectification, Patriarchy

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INTRODUCTION

Their Eyes Were Watching God is concerned with the question of African American women's sexual legitimacy. When the pages of the novel, *Their Eyes*, begin to unfold, there is one striking note from the first pages facing the readers. Women are classed off from the other sections of society. Janie is called an old forty year woman when she returns from Everglades without her husband and the porch talkers wonder why Janie does not stay in her class? The first things men notice in Janie, after returning from Everglades, is her sexual appearance. Zora Hurston writes, "The men were saving with the mind what they lost with the eye." (Specify what TE means first and then mention that the paper will refer to it henceforth as TE, 2)

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 men of the community. In *Their Eyes*, women are politically oppressed and are engaged in a power game in which the winner is patriarchy. Violence is an ever-present theme in case of Nanny and Leafy. Both women are raped by a superior white male and both of them endured child-birth. Janie lived and grew up in an atmosphere in which there is always the danger of being assaulted and raped by a male supremacy. If we look at sexuality in terms of a system, so 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)."¹ So in this novel we witness the sexual abuse that black women experience both from white men and black men. This has mostly been done to black women due to their double reduction from power in history.

Such sexual violence can be best explained through what Nanny tells Janie: "de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out."(TE, 14) Nanny tries to convince Janie to marry a man who will provide Janie with comfort. In the name of protection, Nanny forces Janie to get married and this is all for the fear of male patriarchal society. She fears for Janie the same fate that haunted Leafy, her daughter, and herself.

In this respect, Foucault defines sexuality in other terms. He believes that

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.²

Objectification of women is another element seen both in the novel and the patriarchal societies as a tool used to suppress. There are many instances in the novel to prove my point. Janie and Joe Starks run off to find an all black community and there Joe with his power to control and order makes a mighty powerful city. At one point, 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__"(TE, 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 or at least a human being but belongs to Joe the mayor. Joe believes in this concept and all his actions and behaviors are crystal clear to show that he thinks of Janie as a mere 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 still, more in order to show his people that he is the boss and she will do whatever he commands. "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."(TE, 55)

Joe even goes so far as to order Janie what to do and what not to. There is this scene in which most of the people of Eatonville are attending the burial of the poor mule. In this part Janie wants to accompany Joe and attends the ceremony, but to her surprise Joe disagrees and his excuse is that the gathering is the gathering of commonness and she should not attend such a gathering because, "de mayor's wife is somethin' different."(TE, 60) Joe decides 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 in her class. He wants Janie to be in the same mood as he is. "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." (TE, 62)

Joe is not the only man in the village who dares decide for his woman, this is sort of prevalent among the community and the whole concept is clear when Joe himself reveals: "Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves."(TE, 71)

At this point Janie defends herself and also other women but she is not strong enough to fight Joe the mayor, the final attack is on the way. Violence continues in different forms. Joe uses physical violence to ensure the continuance of his power over Janie. He slaps Janie, "until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store." (TE, 72)

After this incident, a petty story goes on in the store acting as a foil for Joe's physical violence. The story is 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 and they claim they would behave otherwise if they were in his shoes. We hear 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." (TE, 75)

This is one of supremacy in the sexual system constructed by patriarchal society. There is always the threat of violence against women and in this way they are always kept passive and subordinated. Lofflin mentions the primitive place, where Janie and Tea Cake live and work together as suggesting Eden and the physical violence committed on Janie by Tea Cake as the Fall from Eden, so this can suggest the origin of black

¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1990). Hereafter referred to as *Their Eyes* and in parentheses as TE followed by page number.

¹ Madsen, 154.

² Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997)171.

women's oppression.³

Women internalise patriarchal values to perfect their obedience; they conform to the stereotypes, they display unwavering loyalty, they do not betray any sign of dissatisfaction or resistance to male control – all in order to avoid violence against their persons. And this threat of male violence is present all around each individual woman in patriarchal culture: 'rape, wife beating, forced childbearing, medical butchering, sex-motivated murder, sadistic psychological abuse'.⁴

As I mentioned earlier, violence has many forms and it is not only the physical violence that oppresses women. We can also refer to intellectual violence in which all the meanings and concepts in the society is divided into sexual classes. In these pre-defined meanings, everything related to women is repressed and subordinated. Everything related to male category supreme and powerful. So, women experience a world that is unjust and segmented sexually.

Another form of violence, which I believe has a greater impact on women, is the psychological aggression. Janie is constantly under attack by patriarchal concepts of what constitutes the 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 properties are big challenges for her as a woman. "'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.'"(TE, 90)

But Janie learns to be patient and decides wisely for her life. She chooses Tea Cake for her third marriage, not to escape from being alone or just having a man as a shelter to keep the cruelties of society off herself but rather because she finds part of true womanhood while being with Tea Cake. The first thing is that Tea Cake teaches Janie how to play checkers and the list goes on as he teaches Janie how to drive, how to play coon-can. They go hunting, fishing; they dance and go to movies together. Tea Cake gives Janie a little space for herself to experience new things. These make the town people so jealous and wishful: "She sho looked good, but she had no business to do it. It was hard to love a woman that always made you so wishful." (TE, 116)

Still and all, Tea Cake is a man who grew up in the same patriarchal society. It is clear that he is so mild

about many things and is not as harsh as Logan or Joe, but he shows his patriarchal ideologies at times. When he put together a party using Janie's money and pays two dollars to each ugly woman not to come to their place and he 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, she gets the same answers as she gets from Joe her second husband: "Dem wazn't no high muckty mucks. Dem was railroad hands and dey women folks. You ain'tusetuh folks lakdat..."(TE, 124)

In another part of the novel he whips Janie, all for no 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 peeled and knew he was the boss. "Ah didn't whup Janie 'cause *she* done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show them Turners who is boss." (TE, 148)

Theoretical perspectives

In this novel, sexuality is twice removed from the power, and by this I 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 remain oppressed. Nanny and Leafy, both are victims of a patriarchal society in which black women are the most oppressed and this is Janie who passes fragmentation and oppression and reaches a level of authenticity. There are not many options for a black woman of such. If she could escape the harsh real fate of Nanny or Leafy, she should marry a well-to-do man and again live like a slave but Janie changes this paradigm.

The novel examines the vertical axis of upward social mobility in opposition to the horizontal axis of sexual autonomy, where post-emancipation black women could either marry and replicate the Victorian model of morality or immerse themselves in "the muck" - a hazardous space with numerous pleasurable possibilities, but without a predictable, controllable outcome.⁵

But the question remains unanswered, how did Janie reach this level of autonomy? To answer this question, we may turn our attention back to the novel and observe every minute step Janie takes on the path of salvation.

Janie Crawford sees the differences between the sexes in the society. She doesn't abhor in what she sees in the opposite sexes rather she enjoys the differences. Janie seeks not to accept the white male supremacy or the black male power structure and again she seeks not to be a victim like her mother or her Nanny. Janie tries to

³Lofflin, 125.

⁴Madsen, 161.

⁵Dabee, 9.

understand the differences between men and women in all black community and she knows this fact that she cannot reject the differences or fight with them. Janie is a subject who masters the differences, as Collins believes: "If universalism presupposes an erosion of differences for the good of the individual, 'indifference' presupposes rather the individual's capacity to play with all these differences. In either case identity is not constituted by any determining factor: the subject transcends differences and claims to be in some way master of them."⁶

It is through her relationships with men that Janie learns to differentiate between what she deems as a true womanhood and what men expect her to be. In each of her marriages she learns something new. To analyze every step of Janie toward becoming mature we should consider her background, her sex, her race, class and prevalent ideology in her society. Although these are important, there is a constant and repeated pattern in every relationship between men and women in every part of the world and that is the domination of women by men. It is as if it became a universal truth. As Collins states: "these relationships are constructed asymmetrically in the schema of domination, and therefore that they can and should be deconstructed."⁷

As we know, deconstruction is not the same as destruction. When we deconstruct a system we do not replace some other system but rather undermine the agreed demarcations in the society. To deconstruct the concept of 'other': "Beginning with the ancient 'two' which preserves the uniqueness of the One in order better to position the other as Other to the One, deconstruction strengthens the other in order to transform alienation to otherness, at the same time disseminating this otherness."⁸

This otherness can be tracked in the novel in two different ways. Janie detects both in others and in herself this mentioned otherness. Joe slaps Janie for the spoiled food for his dinner and then Janie feels something fell off inside her. At this point, she knows that she has an inside and outside and so she knows and learns how to differentiate between these two. But this level occurs nearly in the end of novel and as I said, we should map her journey step by step.

Boisnier quotes from Downing and Roush's five stages of feminist identity development.⁹ The first stage is being passive and in this step a woman accepts how society

defines her and she accepts her traditional gender role. Janie Crawford accepts what Nanny offers her. She should get married to a man many years older than herself and she should be satisfied. So on 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 a land to work on. If Janie marries Logan she will be satisfied and comfortable in Nanny's eyes. For women and especially black women in the novel, the economic comfort is number one advantages for a woman.

The second stage is a revelation in which series of events and happenings lead to a dualistic thinking that 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. His belly is too big and, "his toe-nails look lak mule foots. And 'tain't nothin' in de way of him washin' his feet every evenin' before he comes tuh bed. 'Tain't nothin' tuh hinder him 'cause Ah places de water for him. Ah'druther be 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." (TE, 24)

This pattern recurs for Janie in her second marriage to Joe. The citified, stylish man turns out to be a shallow man in search of ultimate power. All the things Joe did 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, parting her off from the rest of society and from the most common pastime which is storytelling, making fun of her in the middle of store and among the members of society and many other things lead to a shattered picture of Joe in her mind and heart.

In the third stage, we have 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."¹⁰ There are rare moments in the novel to indicate that Janie has such a privilege as to have a chance to mix with a society of female friends. The only friend, she has got is Phoeby. Joe is very strict about her mingling with the common people; so she is alone most of the time. It seems that this level of Identity faces a problem for Janie. She can't have an active presence among her own kind, the women of society and consequently she can't share her problems, her findings and her character. Phoeby is the only person in Eatonville who tries to understand Janie and, she acts as a bridge between Janie and other citizens. Janie feels

⁶Kelly Oliver, and Lisa Walsh, Ed., *Contemporary French Feminism*. (New York: OUP, 2004) 15.

⁷ Oliver, 17.

⁸ Oliver, 28.

⁹Alicia D Boisnier, "Race and Women's Identity Development: Distinguishing between Feminism and Womanism among Black and White Women." *Sex Roles* 49:5/6 (2003)211-218.

¹⁰ Alicia D. Boisnier, "Race and Women's Identity Development: Distinguishing Between Feminism and Womanism Among Black and White Women," *Sex Roles* (2003) 49:5/6. 2

comfortable when she speaks to Phoeby as if she unloads a heavy load of unspoken words. She trusts Phoeby and knows that Phoeby will support her wherever needed.

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."¹¹ This level of identity begins when Janie and Tea Cake get married. In this marriage we can see no trace of forced marriage or a marriage that is the result of dissatisfaction with the previous life as is the cases with first two marriages of Janie but rather Janie chooses Teacake because she feels she should care about herself, her feelings and her freedom. For the first time in her life, somebody care about what she thinks and wants and desires. Although in this marriage, she is still dependent upon a man, she begins to acknowledge herself. She begins to see herself and her beauties. She learns to give as 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 learn from them. She sees Teacake as a miracle from God. With Teacake beside her, she can touch the life she 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."(TE, 131)

The fifth stage is active commitment. In this stage the woman commits herself to meaningful action toward feminist goals. Janie returns to Eatonville, full of experience, full of love and remembrance for Teacake. She is satisfied with her life. She experienced the true love, something which is rare among the women of her society. She says: "love is lak de sea. 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."(TE, 191) The one action that Janie performs alongside the feminist goals is to share her experience with Phoeby and indirectly with the whole women of her society and to encourage them to reach for the horizons. Although Janie takes an important step, her action in the end of the novel is not a total manifestation of being a feminist.

Alice Walker coined the term womanist in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*.¹² In this book she explains the notion of womanist movement and what are its interests. A womanist, "gains her strength from her community and uses that strength to uplift her people

physically, spiritually, economically and politically."¹³ So, basically Janie can be called a womanist because she develops survival strategies in herself in spite of the oppression of her sex. Womanism focuses on women but it never negates the male gender. The main basis of womanism is to search for survival strategies which save the whole people, whether men or women. The purpose of womanism 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."¹⁴ Womanism celebrates the transition from the innocence of childhood to the maturity of womanhood and this is apparent in *Their Eyes*.

One way of this transition, is through their relationship with other women; in another word, through solidarity. Janie refers to Phoeby as her "kissing friend."(TE, 7) 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. In *Their Eyes*, Phoeby, worries that Janie might end up like Annie Tyler, whose young lover left her poor and alone, cautions Janie about the improvident Tea Cake and persuades her to pin inside her shirt \$200 as 'insurance' money.¹⁵

Phoeby remains friendly, while the society is antagonistic toward Janie. She has an important role regarding the message she should 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 won't tell her tale 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."¹⁶

This love between women is evident in *Their Eyes* 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. After Nanny discovers Janie has been prematurely ushered into what she considers womanhood by kissing young Johnny Taylor, she fears for Janie's purity and

¹³Lajuan Evette Simpson, *The Women On/Of the Porch: Performative Space in African American Women's Fiction*, diss., (North Zeeb Road: Louisiana State University, 1999)11.

¹⁴Alisha P Castaneda, *Hues, Tresses, and Dresses: Examining the Relation of Body Image, Hair, and Clothes to Female Identity in Their Eyes Were Watching God and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Diss. (The Faculty of the School of Communication, 2010. Parkway: UMI, 2010)11-12.

¹⁵Beverly B. Holmes, *The Influence of The Sentimental Novel and the Attendant Cult of True Womanhood on Four Novels by African American Women*, diss. (Parkway, 2008)76.

¹⁶Holmes, 77.

¹¹Boisnier, 2.

¹²Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (New York: Harcourt, 1983.)

wellbeing and, consequently, orders Janie to marry immediately.

Although Nanny degrades Janie's individual personality by making her marry someone she doesn't like, if we go deeper than the surface, we see that Nanny wants protection for Janie by providing her a man who means comfort in life. Nanny experiences hardships and slavery and subjugation, so all her decisions are emanated from her 'mule' life. She decides to create another fate for Janie; we can say that her decisions are well-intentioned. 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" (TE, 15). So Janie understands the good intentions of her grandmother which are misguided but out of love. She shows her love in return by submitting to marriage.

Alice Walker gives another definition for the concept of womanism as that of "outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful [sexual] behavior."¹⁷ This negative connotation can be applied to Janie when she let the young boy kiss her and consequently, Nanny decides to marry her off. Nanny observes Janie's behavior and sees the kiss and other signs of upcoming womanish acts. In Nanny's opinion, these womanish behaviors are threats against Janie's predicted bright future. The kiss is innocent in Janie's mind; however, Nanny operates under the influence of years as a slave and recently freed black woman living in an environment that is under the influence of racial issues.

Another element of this love toward others appears in the storytelling part of Janie. Janie grants Phoeby the authority to tell other women her story. She wants her story to be shared among her community women so that 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 to help them construct their African American female identity. This shows that Janie reaches a self actualized state at the end of her journey

Black women in general and Janie in particular follow the womanist movement.¹⁸ The womanist identity model, developed by Helms, 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."¹⁹

Talking about this change from external to internal, one remembers Kristeva's notion of sexual identity. Kristeva sees women as both producers of culture and

reproducers of the species and hence being in a psycho-symbolic structure which is based upon "metaphysics of identity and difference, where one sex (or class or race or nation) is seen as a rival of another."²⁰ Kristeva asks us to internalize this structure. From this point of view, the other, which exists in women is not an evil being or foreign; and consequently women learn to join together the fragmented pieces inside. Janie learns about her other self when she is pictured as follows: She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (TE, 72) There is a difference between Janie's "prostrating shadows of herself"(TE, 77) and "she herself" who "sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes."(TE, 77) this exterior, prostrating Janie acts like the limitations put on her identity by Joe.

Her developments and transformations are shaped by her experiences of her heterosexual relationships. The first experience is marrying someone she doesn't love and is forced to bear him and his house. The second experience is living with Joe for a long time and she is continually silenced and made to feel powerless. In her third experience, Janie can feel the love on this condition that Tea Cake assumes the supremacy in the relationship and still she endures a physical violence. When she explores her interior existence, she feels powerful.

When a woman learns that she is not what patriarchy defines and she can define herself based on her experiences and 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 passes many stages of life; she spends time knowing others only to learn that, the one about whom she should learn is herself. She should know her real self. Black feminist writers have two meanings for realness: In the first, realness denotes complexity, authenticity, and truth; in the second, realness signifies an unassimilated black perspective.²¹ This black perspective, I believe consists of celebrating black roots and ideal of black life. Black women can find this realness, if and only if they appreciate their culture, their emotional fluidity and their strength.

One of the main aspects in a black woman's life is her

¹⁷ Castaneda, 17.

¹⁸See Also Sotunsa Mobolanle Ebnoluwa, "Feminism: The Quest for an African Variant." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3:1 (2009)227-234.

¹⁹Boisnier, 2.

²⁰ The structure that Kristeva refers to is psycho-symbolic and she tells us we should internalize this structure. "From that point on, the other is neither an evil being foreign to me nor a scapegoat from the outside, that is, of another sex, class, race, or nation," Kristeva writes. "I am at once the attacker and the victim, the same and the other, identical and foreign." See also McAfee, 101-102.

²¹Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Indiana: Indiana UP, 2004)159.

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 and compared to other members of society which are all-black, she is more in the center of attention. She is somehow in a state of friction between white and black society. 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 and the other is the encounter with Mrs. Turner.

In the first incident Janie looks at herself in the picture and this revelation follows: "Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!" (TE, 9) Now Janie knows that she is different from all those people around her, the ones she played with and lived with. Soon after this incident Nanny moves to another house.

The relocation results from a compilation of racially and class-charged events, including how Janie is treated by the other black children. The deliberate othering²² by the white woman forces Janie's recognition and acceptance of her Blackness and opens a chasm between races in the child's mind. While Janie is separated from the Whites as a child because of her darkness, she encounters a form of segregation within the Black community as a result of her lightness.²³

The second incident, the encounter with Mrs. Turner, is essential in Janie's understanding of herself. Mrs. Turner negates the "black niggers" because she believes they hold the better blacks, mulattos, back and prevent the progress. She protests about the niggers' mannerism. Mrs. Turner even goes far as to question the intention of Janie in marrying Tea Cake. She calls Tea Cake a dark Negro and is surprised by such a marriage. She cannot comprehend why Janie loves Tea Cake. She blames Janie for marrying such a black laborer and gambler.

Talking about body image, we may say that in her first two marriages, Janie's body is restricted by Logan and Joe. In her marriage to Logan, she is accused of lack of wifely attention, both sexual and non-sexual. When she gets married to Joe, she is shown all through the city like a prize by Joe, when they first come to Eatonville; but later Joe, out of jealousy, restrict her body and clothes. There are many points in the novel that indicate Joe is jealous of other men and also Janie being 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" (TE, 78). Or "Don't stand dererollin' yo' pop eyes at me widyo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees" (TE, 78).

But after Joe dies, she discovers her outer true beauty. When Janie looks in the mirror, she finds out that "[t] he young girl [is] gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place" (TE, 87). I believe that it takes Janie years to reach this step toward self-actualization, but the real awareness comes after she returns from Everglades, after burying Tea Cake.

When she marries Tea Cake, she learns to care about herself as well as others. Tea Cake saves Janie from a life full of monotony, from the whim of her surroundings. Janie, now, feels a freedom in her relationship to a man and finds time to learn more about her. She returns to Eatonville after the death of Tea Cake and this scene is the most revealing about Janie's body image. Most women deride her out of jealousy and most men adore her in their hearts. Janie's "great rope of black hair swing [s] to her waist," (TE, 2) draws the attention. Despite the manly clothes, she is attractive and full of confidence.

There is another element to be discussed regarding Janie's sexuality and that is her hair. When Janie is with Joe before their departure toward the new town she is told by Joe, "Kiss me and shake yo' head. When you do dat, yo' plentiful hair breaks lak day" (TE, 30). But this changes during their common life. Joe becomes jealous of other men enjoying the sight of his wife's plentiful and beautiful hair. So he forces Janie to wear head scarf and hide her beauty.

The man who once promises to show her what it feels like to be treated like a lady and give her the world in the form of a Negro utopia (Eatonville) is now a jealous tyrant who forces her to hide the glory of her beautiful locks. The people of the town cannot understand why a woman with "hair look that" would "keep her hair tied up lak some ole 'oman" (TE, 49).

Joe has many good reasons to force Janie wear a head rag. First of all, he notices there are many single men living around and he is well aware of the fact that Janie is beautiful, so he fears losing Janie. Then there is the jealousy element, he watches the men "figuratively wallow in [her hair] as she [goes] about things in the store" (TE, 55). He wants to protect his wife but he is not successful because he takes obligation for protection.

After Joe's death, Janie liberates herself. She tears "the kerchief from her head and let[s] down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there" (TE, 87). However, she respects the corpse and decides to wait for the funeral and then she burns every one of her head rags. The next day she wears her hair in a "thick braid swinging well below her waist" (TE, 89). The act of letting down her hair and burning the kerchiefs is the first step toward restoring her self-identity. However, the acceptance, love, and companionship she finds in Tea Cake push her along the journey toward self-

²²See Also the theory of "Mimesis" and "othering" in relation to Adorno. Renee Heberle, *Feminist Interpretation of Theodore Adorno* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2006)154-159.

²³ Castaneda, 30.

actualization."²⁴

After seeing Tea Cake and meeting him more often, 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" (TE, 103). We can observe the different treatments Janie receives from Joe and Tea Cake. Joe Starks sees Janie's hair as a tool of his control over her, but Tea Cake enjoys her hair and let her enjoy it herself. 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." (TE, 2) She met a good man and found her true self.

Dresses are another element in the process of self-actualization. Normally, dress symbolizes class and individuality. This is true in this novel as well. Janie as a child wears clothes given to her by the white landowner. These are the clothes that her grand children no longer wear. In the novel, it is mentioned that her clothes, though second hand were better than most of 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 Clark is a man who dresses citified and stylish. He buys new clothes for Janie trying to show them as more powerful and more stylish. He even tells Janie what to wear. Joe actually tries to class Janie and him off by using different methods, especially clothing. He doesn't care about Janie's beauty as worthy in itself, but he tries to show her like a beauty fair to other people. In the novel we read that, "Jody told 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" (TE, 41).

We should notice the kind of clothes Janie wears while living with Joe. They are formal, full of rigidity, dark colors which show somber emotions:

Both attributes of the dress are reflective of the ensuing years of stringent oppression Janie endures by Joe's side. However, a significant change occurs with Janie's wardrobe once she and Tea Cake form a relationship. She begins wearing light, thin fabrics that have vibrant colors, and Janie wears "pink linen," "dresses in blue," dons "high heel slippers and a ten dollar hat."²⁵

While she lives with Tea Cake, Janie wears to please willingly not out of force. She wears bright colors which are in harmony with her mood. She enjoys seeming attractive and she knows that Tea Cake cares not only 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." (TE, 134) This style of clothing suggests a sort of independence Janie gains in her relationship to Tea Cake. She is no more compelled to dress as the community wish or her husband order. She is free to choose.

She even uses her overalls in Tea Cake's funeral: "No expensive veils and robes for Janie this time. She went on in her overalls. She was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief" (TE, 189). This is an important step in that it shows, Janie doesn't care about the social standards, she wears to be comfortable. When she returns to Eatonville, she is in the overalls and has more self-confidence than ever. Women of the Eatonville ask venomous questions: "What she doing coming back here in demoverhalls? Can't she find no dress to put on?—Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in?" (TE, 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 life and been in state of destitute in order to be wearing a man's clothes: "Where all dat money her husband took and died and lift her? . . . What [Tea Cake] done wid all her money?" (TE, 2)

CONCLUSION

Despite the cynicism and derision of women, Janie, now a mature woman learns to answer their harsh looks and venomous tongues with solidarity and womanism, by sharing her story and horizon.

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²⁴ Castaneda, 59.

²⁵ Castaneda, 68.

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