

The Double Oppression of Black Women in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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ABSTRACT: The main argument in this paper is focused on the way the Black women in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), are oppressed and suppressed through the process of colonization and the dominant practices in the male-dominated African culture brought to America by the slaves. In fact, the Black women are doubly oppressed and colonized. Moreover, it shows how the Black women, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are represented and defined by both the White and Black males. In other words, the White and Black males occupy a very similar position in their treatment of Black women. The opposing definitions of female experience are at the heart of their discourses about woman. In addition, this paper shows how the confrontation between Black women and White men unfolds the main character's childhood memories. This paper sheds more light on the White male's definitions and degradations of Black women, and the main character's relation to Black men which is represented through her three successive marriages. The devastating impact of the White discourse on Black people which has targeted their identity is an integral part of this paper. To prove such points, this paper utilizes Frantz Fanon's (1925-1961) arguments concerning the ways White colonizers dominate the Black individuals.

Keywords: Doubly Oppressed, Oppressed, Suppressed, Black Woman, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Black women in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937, EWG) are oppressed and suppressed by both the experience of colonization and the male-dominated society. Women in the colonized situations were nothing but objects to be possessed by men both white and black. Apart from hard work and obedience at home, they were the source of sexual pleasure not only for their husbands but also for the white males. They were considered as exotic sexy women who easily surrender themselves to colonizers. In the colonial space black woman experiences a much harsher and severer sort of oppression because of the colonialist's excessive attention to the body of black woman as sexual object to be watched and enjoyed; that is just one dimension of black woman's unfortunate fate. This woman has already been and is simultaneously dominated by the black traditionally male-centred society. Therefore the Afro-American women can be considered as doubly colonized in their encounter with the white-American culture.

Zora Neal Hurston (1891-1960) 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 way of defining 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.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is the second novel written by black female novelist, Zora Neal Hurston. Identity is one of the main obsessions of this novel whose characters such as Nanny, Joe and Janie can be

considered as those kinds of individuals who struggle to 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, was doubled by the experience of encounter with the white man in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Therefore Black women are doubly oppressed and suppressed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Frantz Fanon is chosen as the theorist of this paper and his arguments have been cited in this study. This paper concentrates on the double colonization of Black women in patriarchal societies. Black women are not only silenced and oppressed in African patriarchal society but also in White culture; therefore, they are doubly colonized. Black women in their confrontation with White suffer more severe pain than black men.

Fanon in his critique of the European Enlightenment and rationalism draws attention to the inadequacy of white discourse to be applied universally to humankind in all its entirety and diversity. He argues that Enlightenment, Marxism and the whole European thought are characterized by their infamous desire to exclude and oppress the experiences of the 'other.' For Fanon this 'other' includes a wide range of diverse experiences such as Asian traditions, female values and African way of life which are defined in terms of brutality, savagery, immorality, objectivity, impurity, illogicality, primitiveness, excessive sexuality and so on. Accordingly this colonizer discourse, in Fanon's view, does not account for the identity and the way of life of a large part of the world's diversity and complexity.

As far as the question of the double subjugation of the female is concerned it has been argued that in the discursive understanding of female experience in general and black female in particular, patriarchal society has always employed the age-old and oppressive binary oppositions in order to put men in a favorable position and put women in an unfavorable position. Through the binary opposition discourse, men have attempted to define women in terms of lack and absence which emphasizes the otherness and exclusion of female self and subjectivity; on the contrary men were understood in terms of presence, self and subjectivity. With the arrival of the white male colonizers the situation for the black women exacerbated. The excessively biased consideration of them became intensified more than ever. Now to the already present code of femaleness was added the code of blackness; accordingly, sexism and racism became the predominant aspect which further constrained and suppressed black female identity. Even the mainstream of white feminism participates in male discourse in its disregard of the third world or black female when they were exploited in the plantations. Black female was forcibly sent to the plantations to work in a desperate situation to fill the pockets of the white man. Their body became both the source of money and a means of sexual enjoyment for the male colonizers. The rise of black female movements has significantly contributed to the active involvement with these women's suffering as well as the process of rendering their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the creation of semi-fictional and semi-factual characters such as Nanny, Janie, Joe Starks, and Tea Cake and many others, and placing them in diverse situations Hurston, a black female modern novelist, brings to the fore her inner obsession with the ever present White/Black crisis as well as her stand on the male-female conflict 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. By first exposing the suppression and oppression of women through both African male-dominated tradition and also by white male-controlled American culture, Hurston in the second step represents how her female protagonist, Janie, challenges this domination. Janie and Nanny are shown to be possessing extreme self-consciousness as well as black consciousness. They speak in a way which indicates that they are aware of the dominant discourses of their own time and the way women are defined and oppressed by these values which excludes women from socio-cultural dimensions of life. Porch-sitting tradition in which men would sit joking, laughing and inventing stories is one vivid example of the exclusion of womanhood in the process of cultural and social transformations.

Concerning the oppression of black female by white male, Hurston refers to widespread objectification, stereotypical oversimplification and outright denial of black female through the account of the lives of Janie, her mother and her grandmother. For white men, the black females are mere objects of sexual fantasy. Such stories of rape and mistreatment of 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 upon her conscious mind. Nanny's

insistence upon protection rather than love when she struggles to motivate Janie to marry to Logan Killicks stems from her memories of sexual exploitation by white males. Explicitly she attempts to create a situation for her granddaughter in which she stays away from what herself had experienced.

Janie in the Racist Society

The first indication of the way that the central black female characters such as Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are viewed in a negative way which black women consider her return to Eatonville after her moving away with Tea Cake just eighteen months ago:

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

Referring to this quotation which is said by one of the porch-sitters of black women who were witnessing Janie's return to Eatonville some months after her third husband, Tea Cake, the traditional black women are the first obstacle in Janie's way to overcome; these women represent the cult of women who have adapted the values and norms of patriarchal black society. This quotation demonstrates that these women act as a kind of agent for controlling and maintaining the values and views which black males establish for women; these women have completely surrendered themselves to the male-dominated black society and consider any defiance to its role as unacceptable. For them 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 Zora Neal 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 or gaze at Janie is the first sign of male's view on a black female. The narrator of this 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. (EWG, 19)

It 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 as a sex-saturated being or object for male gaze. They totally deprive her of any notion of identity. Women are not respected as equal human being. What is significant for these black men as far as women are considered as their body such as "hairs," "buttocks" and "breasts"; that is what can be seen or thought 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 reflects 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. (EWG, 21)

What is striking about Sam's discourse regarding black women is that he aims at silencing their voice through forcing them leave the porches. Porch sitting is one of the main traditions in Eatonville for men and women to participate 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, economical and political issues. Sam, on the contrary, makes women go home; since he believes that woman's real place is home, not the porch. Sam's humorous talk about those women who go to church also puts women in a similar situation; it defines women in a way that make their actions utterly absurd. For Sam, women do not go to church to say their prayers or to participate in a religious ceremony; so for him there is a different world between men and women in observing their church duties. In this way Sam generalizes the characteristics of all women and defines them in a humorous way. It needs to be mentioned that (th)'em and "they" have been used five times to refer to all women in a collective way. Accordingly, Sam 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.

Janie, in telling her tale to her friend, Phoeby, recounts a part related to her childhood memories which highlight the oppression of black female because of white women namely those who have accepted the white men's discourses about black inferiority. Now Janie is a six-year-old girl living with her grandmother as a maid in the Washburn family who are white-skinned and sees her own picture for the first time and notices that she is black; this moment can be significantly destructive and devastating for a girl like Janie:

Everybody laughed, even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nelle, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and siad, 'Dat's you Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?' "Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names. Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said:

"Aw! Aw! Ah 'm colored!

"Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wus just like de rest." (EWG, 24)

This laughter at the blacks on the part of whites can be considered as one of the most repeated and recurrent responses to the notion of blackness. In Janie's account of this childhood memory laughter is repeated twice which speaks the way whites react to and consider dark-skinned people. Laughter connotes lack of respect and consideration for somebody. Laughter always suggests a degree of objectification. Through laughing at them, the whites try to deprive the blacks of their selfhood and their strong sense of identity.

Another equally significant part of Janie's talking here is related to the way she is looked at as a black girl in a mixed space. In the presence of whites the migrant black ex-slaves, slaves (since we know that Nanny, Janie's mental grandmother, belongs to those black people who were forcibly transformed to Unites States from Africa to work as slaves on the plantations) are not considered as ordinary human beings whose most elementary distinction has been called by a proper name. In the household of Washburn the blacks are permanently washed and burnt; the white women, men and children try to wash and eradicate signs of identity in Janie and Nanny who represent black female in this house through denying them of any proper name. Janie says she has been called by different names in Washburn family; she is merely called "Alphabet" by them.

The first sign of identity is that a person is given a proper name which distinguishes him or her from others; so each name indicates difference and division from people of the same race or same gender. "Nanny" is what Janie's grandmother is called in this white family! "Nanny" as a term which connotes a general and non-distinctive particularity just as "Alphabet" is signified by lack of difference from a collection of signs each of which is known in a particular way. Accordingly, this way of naming Janie and Nanny by the whites deprived them of any identity; they are merely objects that the whites name and rename them in any way they wish.

Since Janie, from early childhood, becomes self-conscious about both her femaleness and her blackness, in the process of telling her experiences to Pheoby she dwells on these aspects of her tale to influence her friend concerning how they have been treated by the whites and created a sort of black and female awareness in her. She continues "Den dey all laughed real hard [...] Us lived dere havin' fun till e chillun at school got to teasin' me 'bout livin' in de white folks' back-yard" (EWG, 24). Again the terrible experience of being laughed at is told as well as the similar experience of being teased and disturbed because of living among white folk. What is clear in the novel is that black women suffer a much severer pain than black men in their confrontation with the white folks.

After their departure from Washburn Family and the passage about ten years now Nanny and Janie are living in a house owned by her grandmother and it is not a mixed race place in West Florida. Nanny wishes to marry Janie since she has noticed that these days she is flirting with a boy called Johnny Taylor. Nanny's memories of her own harsh life in slavery and after that period are still inflicting her; she is trying to win Janie over to accept to marry Logan Killicks, a man who owns sixty acres land:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's someplace 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 de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Laud, Laud! (EWG, 27)

Nanny in this conversation with Janie tells her that as far as the white man and the black woman's relationship are concerned the end result of this relationship is the further exploitation of black woman. For the white man there is no other definition for black woman but a mule; black woman needs to work as a mule in the workplaces to satisfy the white man's desire for materialism and capitalism. This is an inhuman treatment of black womenfolk by white man; they use their power to dominate both black men and women alike through reducing them to the level of animals. Since her life in these desperate and inhumanizing conditions has taught her how a black woman is considered as non-human. Nanny recounts it to help Janie stay away from white society. Nanny proceeds to remark that "Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will" (EWG, 28). This remark refers to slavery and how it puts a hard barrier in the way of black woman to fashion their own identity and slavery. According to Nanny, they "rob" the black female of all her will and dreams to be a human being, since it reduces these women to "work-ox" and "brood sow" (EWG, 28).

In recounting the story of her life in a plantation near Savannah while she was still a young girl, Nanny informs Janie how she was raped by a white man and gave birth to Janie's mother, Leafy as a result of being raped by a

white man. After the birth of Leafy the situation in plantation suddenly worsens for Nanny because she had given birth to a baby girl who looks like white people: "Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair?" (EWG, 29). Madam on the plantation threatens her to leave the place or she will sell the newly born baby soon: "Anyhow, as soon as dat brat is a month old Ah 'm going to sell it offa dis place" (EWG, 29). Nanny prefers to flee from that place and succeeds in doing so. As the time of the narrative moves forward Nanny begins to focus upon Leafy's fate after freeing herself from slavery and settling in a white neighborhood earning life as a housemaid: Ah put her in school when it got so it was a school to put her in. Ah was 'spectin' to make a school teacher outa her. But one day she didn't come home at de usual time and Ah waited and waited, but she never come all dat night. De next mornin' shev come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her oin de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby. She was only seventeen, and somethin' lak dat to happen! (EWG, 30)

The practice of raping black women is widespread wherever white men are present. Nanny is one of those black women who had been traumatized by this devastating disregard for the dignity of the black females in and out of plantation. As mentioned earlier she gave birth to Leafy through being raped by a white man and now tells Janie about what has happened to her mother; in white society black woman must expect rape and sexual harassments by white man; for the white men these women are seen as objects to be sexually enjoyed. Education for black woman results in rape, this is ironical that Nanny wishes to make a teacher out of Leafy but she becomes the object of white male's gaze and because of shame and the trauma after being raped she goes away from her mother's house and disappears: "After you was born she took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights. Couldn't git her to stay here and nowhere else. Lawd knows where she is right now" (EWG, 30).

It seems that after this experience Leafy's mental stability deteriorates and that is why she turns to drinking. The fact that Nanny does not know where Leafy is and what has happened to her, is one of the most frustrating aspects of black female's treatment by white male. Zora Neale Hurston's view of the colonial encounter of white man and black woman is fictionalized through Nanny's tale about Leafy's unfortunate and terrifying fate. Leafy can represent a vivid example of what has happened to thousands of black women living in the vicinity of white man. The severity of what has happened to black woman because of white man is not calculable in the mind of Nanny. She cannot find any other way to fight against it except through separating herself from the white man. She tells Janie:

And, Janie, maybe it wasn't much, but Ah done de best Ah kin by you. Ah raked and scraped and bought dis lil piece uh land so you wouldn't have to stay in de white folks' yard and tuck yo' head befo' other chillun at school. Dat was right when you was little. Bt when you got big enough to understand things, Ah wanted to you to look upon yo' self. Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you; have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah' m a cracked plate. (EWG, 31)

Nanny is one of those insightful black women having a comprehensive understanding of the white man's discourse concerning the black woman. All the time she is warning Janie about the danger of white man. She speaks like an intellectual about the problem of black woman; her obsessive thinking about Janie's future reveals his mistrust of white man. She is one of those women who have been broken down by white male to the extent that she speaks of herself as a 'cracked plate'; it does not need to be uttered who has cracked her.

Janie in the Patriarchal Black Society

As far as the relationship between black woman and black man is concerned, the patriarchal black society tries to dominate black women. Janie's first real experience in the black society comes with her marriage to Logan Killicks. Under the control of Killicks Janie's oppression takes a number of specific forms. Though Janie's marriage with Killicks is a brief one and lasts less than a year, one can notice how he tries to dominate her. First, Killicks intends to exploit his wife by forcing her to work in his fields. 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" (EWG, 34, 36).

At this stage Janie is totally unable to assert herself, for Janie "ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh" (EWG, 38). Killicks silences Janie whenever she tries to assert herself, and again when she refuses to shovel the manure. He says, "Thought Ah'd take and make somethin' outa yuh" (EWG, 37), which represents an old male discourse of how they define women as an object to be shaped and reshaped by men. When Janie resists against Killicks' attempts at silencing her, he threats physical violence and beating: "Don't you change too many words wid me dis mawnin', Janie, do Ah'll take and change ends wid yuh! [...] Ah'll take holt uh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh!" (EWG, 38).

In a similar fashion, Joe Starks tries to objectify Janie from the first moment he sees her, "A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on [...] special for you" (EWG, 36). The words such as "pretty," "doll," and "sit" indicate that in the

discourse of black men such as Joe, black woman is an object to be watched and enjoyed by men; this is the purpose for which women are created; "sit" invokes passivity and lack of subjectivity in the mind of the reader. It is equally striking that here Joe speaks in first person which implies a great degree of agency, subjective position on the part of the speaker of this line, namely on Joe Starks. Joe continues:

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. (EWG, 38)

Joe Starks once again speaks in first person point of view which explicitly demonstrates a strong sense of presence and power over what he says; the large bulk of what he speaks in his marriage to Janie is given in first person. 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" (EWG, 38). He even exerts his male power in letting Janie call him "Jody." What he implicitly is trying to achieve is disempowering Janie and denying the slightest degree of agency and subjectivity to her as a woman.

Silence is, again, an integral part of Janie's role in her marriage to Joe. The first time Starks leaves Janie "feeling cold," the first time he "[takes] the bloom off of things," (EWG, 46) is when he refuses to allow her to make a speech at his municipal election. When Tony Taylor requests, "uh few words uh encouragement from Mrs. Mayor Starks," Joe opposes him by saying, "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (EWG, 46). This act of preventing Janie to speak to the audience presents at that session vividly suggests that black male-dominated society of Eatonville disown women of their voice in a strictest way. As far as the tradition of porch sitting talks is concerned Janie is forbidden to participate:

Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge. He didn't want her talking after such trashy people. "You' se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman uh yo' stability would want tuh be treasurin' all dat gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in. 'Tain't no earthly use. They's jus' some puny huumams playin' round de toes uh Time". (EWG, 52)

It seems that Janie wishes to join other women in Eatonville speaking about daily matters but Joe stands in her way to get connected to other women; he wants to isolate her from social space in which the traditions and oral culture of black people circulates. It is noteworthy to see that the first two lines in this quotation that reflect Janie's thought are presented in the third person which indicate a kind of absence and passivity while from the middle of the second line the narrative's point of view changes to the first person to represent Joe's thoughts. As Mary Helen Washington explains:

Like the other women in the town, she is barred from participation in the culture's oral tradition. When the voice of the black oral tradition is summoned in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is not used to represent the collective black community but to invoke and valorize the voice of the black male community. (10)

This pattern continues through making Janie wear the head-rag, he does not allow her to join the mule-talk and checker-playing of the store porch and he insists that Janie is "gettin' too moufy" (EWG, 68) whenever she challenges him, all the way up to the day of his death, when he commands her to "Shut up!" (EWG, 74). In answer to Janie's sarcastic claim that she knows few things too and that "womenfolks thinks sometimes too" (EWG, 65) Joe remarks that, "Aw naw they don't. They just think they's thinkin'". When Ah see one thing Ah understand ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" (EWG, 65). Starks, like Killicks, resorts to scorn whenever Janie tries to assert herself, often speaks unfavorably of her looks or intelligence. The threat of violence under Killicks turns into Starks's actual violence when he beats her for a badly-cooked dinner and for insulting his sexual potency, when he "struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store" (EWG, 71). Just as Killicks on his last day with Janie threatens to kill her, so Starks, disillusioned and helpless before Janie's verbal attack, wishes "thunder and lightnin' would kill yuh" (EWG, 74). Killicks and Starks have been charged with patriarchal domination, treating Janie as little more than "chattel." The source of this domination, according to most readings of the novel, is the husband's "exacting insistence on conventional sex roles," combined with his sexual jealousy. According to Robert B. Stepto:

The first two men in Janie's adult life (Logan Killicks and Jody Starks) and the spatial configurations through which they define themselves and seek to impose definition upon Janie (notably, a rural and agrarian space on one hand and a somewhat urban and mercantile space on the other) provide as much social structure as the narrative requires. (7)

Tea Cake, again, shows all the signs of domination which Killicks and Starks have been trying to show in their encounter with Janie. His treatment of Janie is similar to theirs once we see “beyond the difference in Janie’s reactions to the treatment” (ibid). Tea Cake insists, for example, on the “traditional economic arrangements” (ibid) in their marriage. Janie is to rely on Tea Cake as bread-winner, and leave her own money useless in the bank: Put dat two hundred back wid de rest, Janie. Mah dice. Ah no need no assistance tuh help me feed mah woman. From now on, you gointuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same. When Ah ain’t got nothin’ you don’t git nothin’. (EWG, 101)

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, its significance dwindles when we realize that Tea Cake is only asking Janie to do what the rest of the women do, and though his words are gentler than Killicks’s, the essence of what he wants Janie to do is the same” (189). Further, Tea Cake prevents Janie from being in situations inappropriate to her sex and class; just as Starks does not allow Janie to get mixed in the “commonness” of the mule’s funeral, so Tea Cake insists that Janie stays away from his gambling: “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” (EWG, 99). The place for Janie to be is, in fact, solely Tea Cake’s prerogative; just as Killicks tells Janie that her place is “wherever Ah need yuh” (EWG, 38), so Tea Cake in his talk with Sop-de-Bottom boasts:

Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be. Dat’s de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it. Ah wouldn’t be knockin’ her around. Ah didn’t want whup her last night. Ah didn’t whup Janie ‘cause she done nothin’. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turner who is boss. Ah heard dat woman tell mah wife Ah ‘m too black fuh her. She don’t see how Janie can stand me. (EWG, 112)

Tea Cake displays all the traits a man supposes 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” (EWG, 86), he exhibits plenty of other negative masculine traits as well: “fist fighting, getting slashed with a knife after a gambling win, hitting Janie, hostility toward her greater economic power, taking Janie’s two hundred dollars without permission and not inviting her to the party he throws with it, and so forth” (Bloom, 2008: 190). Like Starks and Killicks, Tea Cake is sexually jealous of Janie, commanding her to “keep [Mrs. Turner] from round dis house” (EWG, 110). “Out of fear that Janie might succumb to Mrs. Turner’s unflattering comparisons of Tea Cake with her brother” (Bloom, 2008: 190), Out of sexual jealousy, Tea Cake beats Janie in order to “[reassure] him in possession” and “show he was boss” (EWG, 112). As if Tea Cake’s masculinity needs emphasizing, “Hurston drags before the reader the pitifully effeminate” (Bloom, 2008: 190). Mr. Turner with his “powerless laugh,” a “vanishing-looking kind of man as if there used to be parts about him that stuck out individually but now he hadn’t a thing about him that wasn’t dwindled and blurred” (EWG, 111, 110). Based on these quotations Tea Cake is another man who oppresses and tries to subjugate Janie even more than Killicks and Joe. Bloom explains that Tea Cake tries to define Janie through binary opposition of man/woman, and tries to dominate her in order to prove that man is stronger than woman.

CONCLUSION

The ill-treatment of black women, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, constitutes one of the most important aspects of all critical considerations of Hurston’s novel. As far as the question of black woman in fiction is concerned one needs to be more cautious in dealing with this question because it should be approached through a close examination which elucidates its depth. Through being exposed to the colonial experience by the whites’ invasion of Africa or through forcibly been introduced to the American culture by forced migration to serve white people as slaves the black man experienced only one traumatic and painful aspect of colonialism which was his degradation because of his skin color.

But for the black woman the colonialism or forced migration which encountered her directly to show that the white racist culture was a much harder and more excruciating experience; since in the case of black woman her identity as a woman was also exposed to the violence of the male-dominated culture both in white and black society. Therefore, the notion of gender was added to the concept of race and the black woman was oppressed because of her gender and her race; she was doubly silenced and colonized. On the one hand the colonial discourse in its definition of white and black has exploited the binary opposition to define itself as the source of all positive and life-giving qualities; on the other hand, black people have been defined in terms of all negative and life-spoiling forces. Through this way of defining identity and selfhood the whites justified their exploitation of black people everywhere in the world. This is one aspect of black woman’s oppression. Equally important is the definition of womanhood in the male-dominated society. Woman has always been explained in opposition to man from the unknown time in ancient up to now; this definition and description of woman has been based on the critically

unfounded assumption that women are much weaker than men which has brought about their colonization and subjugation throughout the history. This is the reality for a black woman to fight against this idea in the colonialist situation.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, women such as Nanny, Leafy and Janie are exposed to the harsh reality of being exploited both in terms of their gender and their race. White man thinks of them as objects of watching and sexual enjoyment; he has no respect for their identity as a black woman or as a woman. Being a black woman makes Nanny and Leafy an easy target for being raped. Black woman is not defined in terms of a normal person to possess a self or identity for herself in the presence of white man; Nanny's real name is not mentioned in this novel since she is called this name by the white people. Janie also experiences a long period of namelessness in the presence of whites in the household of Washburn; or at best she is called by many names including 'Alphabet' by white children. Objectification and generalization is one of the recurrent techniques the white people use in their treatment of black female. The force and intensity of the white male's discourse devastates Nanny; she expresses this severity through the metaphor of broken plate. Leafy disappears as the result of what the white man had done to her mind and body.

Janie does not feel better in her three successive marriages to three black men named Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, and Tea Cake. In each of these marriages Janie experiences all sorts of oppression and objectification; each one of these men struggles to dominate her and silence her voice; they even beat her if they want to without any particular reason. What connects all the three men is that they all aim at defining Janie as selfless being whose identity should be shaped by them and not by herself; through her marital relationship with the patriarchal black society Janie is further colonized and subjugated.

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