

THE QUEST OF SELF-AWARENESS IN THE BLACK WOMEN'S IDENTITIES: THE ANALYSIS OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

Siyahi Kadın Kimliklerinde Kendi Farkındalık Arayışı: Zora Neale Hurston'ın *Gözleri Tanrıyı Seyrediyordu* Adlı Eserinin Analizi

Gamze AR*

ÖZET

Afrikalı Amerikalı edebiyatı, farklı kültürel ve tematik deneyimlerle büyük bir sanatsal alan oluşturmaktadır. Tarih boyunca Afrikalı Amerikalılar, çeşitli alanlarda ırkçılık ve ayrımcılık gibi birçok sorunla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Ancak edebiyatları, tarih boyunca yaşadıkları tüm sorunlara karşı önemli bir direniş göstermiştir. Pek çok farklı yazar ırkçılık, din, kölelik ve aidiyetlik gibi temaları eserlerinde kaleme almıştır. Bu yazarlardan biri de Zora Neale Hurston'dır. Hurston siyah bir kadındır ve hem ırk hem de cinsiyet açısından sosyal statüde en alt tabakada bulunur. Bu bakımdan, romanı ırkın yanı sıra siyah feminist hareketini de desteklemektedir. Bu çalışma, Hurston'un edebiyattaki önemini ortaya koyacak ve diğer ünlü Afrikalı Amerikan yazarların makaleleri ve açıklamalarıyla desteklenecektir. Bahsedilen roman neden bu kadar önemlidir? Afrikalı Amerikalı edebiyatına hangi perspektiflerden katkıda bulunmuştur? Neden Hurston'un romanı *Gözleri Tanrıyı Seyrediyordu* çoğunlukla eleştirilmiştir? Siyah feminizm alanında önemli bir yere sahip olan bu roman, siyah kadınların hem ırk hem de cinsiyet eşitsizlikleriyle dolu hayatını incelemiştir. Bu çalışma, Zora Neale Hurston'un otobiyografik romanı *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (1984), *Gözleri Tanrıyı Seyrediyordu* (1937) ve Alice Walker'ın "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (1975) makalesinden örneklerle bu soruları cevaplamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrikalı Amerikan Edebiyatı, Zora Neale Hurston, *Gözleri Tanrıyı Seyrediyordu*, Irk, Cinsiyet, Kimlik.

ABSTRACT

African American literature establishes a great artistic field with diverse cultural and thematic experiences. Throughout history, African Americans have experienced many troubles, such as segregation and discrimination in various areas. However, their literature shows a significant resistance to all the troubles in history. Numerous writers and artists explore themes such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, and a sense of homelessness, one of whom is Zora Neale Hurston. Besides her race, she is also a woman, so she is both a woman and a colored person at the bottom of the social ladder. Thus, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not only a source of race but also gender. This paper sheds light on the importance of Zora Neale Hurston in African American literature, and the study will be supported by other famous Afro-American writers' articles and statements. Why is she so important? From which perspectives did she contribute to African American literature? Why was her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* mostly criticized? This novel, being important in the field of Black Feminism, concerns the hardships of black women racially and sexually. This study will answer these questions with examples from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical novel *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (1984), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and Alice Walker's article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (1975).

Keywords: African American literature, Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, race, gender, identity.

* Öğretim Görevlisi, Bartın Üniversitesi, gamzear@bartin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-8918-2124

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Introduction

African American literature is a significant reflection of the experiences of Black individuals regarding social and cultural issues of identity. The literature encompasses various themes, such as racism, black segregation, and slavery. The slave narratives marked the beginning of African American literature, highlighting enslaved individuals' harsh and brutal experiences. The Harlem Renaissance was a critical period in constructing Black cultural awareness. African American literature can be broadly defined as the embodiment of the works written by people of African descent living in the United States. It examines the role of African Americans in the larger American society and the concept of American identity. The African American presence has always been a case for the nation's history of freedom, democracy, equality, and inclusiveness. African American literature explores themes such as freedom and equality, African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, segregation, migration, and feminism. For McKay, African American literature is "a post-emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation that ensued after the nation retreated from Reconstruction" (McKay, 2014, s. 5).

From a broader perspective, African American literature can be defined as writings by people of African descent living in the United States. African American literature has generally emphasized the role of African Americans in American society and it is crucial to consider the identity question and belongingness. At that point, Americanization with the assimilation and its ultimate results created a problem for the Blacks. Princeton University Professor Albert J. Raboteau also points at the African American studies and extends as follows: "African American religion speaks to the deeper meaning of the African American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, and the inclusiveness of all" (Raboteau, 2014, s. 1).

Zora Neale Hurston was a significant figure in African American literature, and her works shed light on the Black South. She was the first Black American to collect and publish African American and Afro-Caribbean folklore. Although Hurston wrote fourteen books, her work fell into obscurity until the 1970s when Alice Walker's article, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," revived her literary legacy. This study examines the importance of Hurston's works from the racial and gendered aspects of African American literature. The analysis will focus on Hurston's essential works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road, An Autobiography*. *Dust Tracks on a Road, An Autobiography*, manifests Hurston's personal experiences and contains sections of her intimate confessions regarding love and religion. Her style is authentic and involves personal intimacies with shocking effects. Overall, her unique literary style and invincible spirit create an intellectual style in literature. Zora Neale Hurston was a scholar whose ethnographic research made her a pioneer writer of folk fiction about the Black South. The fate of Zora Neale Hurston, a southern black woman writer who emerged in the limelight of black artistic circles in the mid 20's when the Harlem Renaissance¹ was in full swing as the turning point in the development of Afro-American culture, is an example of what happened to many women writers.

¹ The Harlem Renaissance is the period between 1910s through the mid-1930s in Harlem, New York City and called as the golden age for African Americans because black culture was celebrated on the peak level with its music, art, and literature in this period. African Americans created their own identities with the construction of literature and art. There were included diverse artists and writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Louis Armstrong and so on. It affected and shaped the Black Arts Movement which encompasses in 1960s and 70s, but Black Arts Movements is more like political. Both enrich the cultural celebration in Black tradition.

This study highlights Zora Neale Hurston's importance in African American literature and her perspectives in writing her works. It focuses on Hurston's significant literary works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*, which expresses Hurston's personal experiences.

Throughout her autobiography, Hurston states that she tells folk tales and repeated anecdotes in addition to her introspective experiences. Her work of art is more like performances for the benefit of the public than private commentaries for relieving the souls. Her style mainly involves her original actions, and she entertains her readers with personal intimacies consisting of shocking effects. Her authentic style within the invincible spirit constructs an intellectual style in literature. Her unique literary expressions reveal the beauty of blacks, the cornerstone of black and black women's histories. As a result of her heightened tone, her autobiography takes mythic proportions, and Hurston correctly emphasizes the climactic events in her life with personal stories from her birth. She also combines her search for identity with an artistic quest.

In her quests, she sophisticatedly presents her blackness with the mythic descriptions. For instance, in childhood, she read stories about whites as the main characters. Later, in high school, she experiences a more sophisticated encounter with a teacher at the night high school in Baltimore, who encourages Zora to write stories. She expresses her memories as follows:

There I met the man who was to give me the key to certain things. In English, I was under Dwight O. W. Holmes. There is no more dynamic teacher anywhere under any skin. He radiates newness and nerve and says to your mind, "There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. (Hurston, 1984, s. 154)

Hurston also has an intimate relationship with her grandmother, an essential figure in her life as she is an ancestor and wisdom figure. However, because of being grown up in patriarchal practices, she is oppressed by the male domination in her life. Hurston mentions her grandmother as follows:

My relations with Godmother were curious. Laugh if you will, but there was and is a psychic bond between us. She could read my mind, not only when I was in her presence, but thousands of miles away. But the thing that delighted her was the fact that I was her only Godchild who could read her thoughts at a distance. Her old fingers were cramped, and she could not write, but in her friend Cornelia Chapin's exact script, a letter would find me in Alabama, or Florida, or in the Bahama Islands and lay me by the heels for what I was thinking. "You have broken the law," it would accuse sternly. "You are dissipating your powers in things that have no real meaning," and go on to lacerate me. "Keep silent. Does a child in the womb speak?" She was just as pagan as I. (Hurston, 1984, ss. 183-184)

Hurston always has a close relationship with her grandmother Potts because her grandmother is an ancestral power and reminder of the past. Thus, her identity is integrated with her childhood memories. Earlier, as she was beginning to search for an identity, she writes of her childhood visions and dreams: "No matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know... For instance, I had stifled longing. So, I was driven inward, I lived an exciting life unseen" (Hurston 1984, 44-48). Her search for self is also combined with her artistic desires. Her great curiosity about nature brings her closer to the art. Her language here indicates how she sees herself inside the fairy tale with her childhood experiences:

In a way this early reading gave me great anguish through all my childhood and adolescence. My soul was with the gods and my body in the village. People just would not act like gods. Stew beef, fried fatback and morning grits were no ambrosia from Valhalla. Raking back yards and carrying out chamber-pots, were not the tasks of Thor. I wanted to be away from drabness and to stretch my limbs in some mighty struggle. I was only happy in the woods, and when the ecstatic Florida springtime came strolling from the sea, trance-glorifying the world with its aura. (Hurston, 1984, s. 64)

The language of *Dust Tracks* reflects Hurston's self-identity with her own experiences told firsthand. So, it is an authentic primary source to understand her life and outstanding writing skills better. Her resistance to the dominant white hegemony and racist practices is also the projection of her African American identity.

The Image of Independent Black Woman in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The miserable lives of black women have been reflected in many works of American literature. Black women lived at the bottom of society and suffered from the oppression of sexuality and racial discrimination. Zora Neale Hurston's masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is taken as one of the Black American literary classics and one of the most crucial works in modern literature of black feminism², which focuses on women's quest for rights and dignity. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1973. Not only is this novel appreciated by African Americans for its rich Black culture and dialect, but it is also of interest to a wide range of feminists because of females' self-awareness. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is directly related to Hurston's political understanding of blackness and femaleness. In her works, the protagonists continuously search for their self-identities, like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The novel asserts that from the very beginning to the last sentence of the novel, Janie's selfhood undergoes many changes and transformations. As a colored woman in America, Janie experienced gendered and racial injustices, and she tried to construct her own identity.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is also regarded as the first African American work that describes the awakening of African American women. Black feminist critics analyze the works of black female writers from a feminist or political perspective, and it is seen as a reading of race, gender, and class in modes of cultural expression. The declaration of the black feminists of the Combahee River Collective in their manifesto of April 1977 is as follows: "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. As Black women, we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face." (271). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also centers a Black heroine's sensuality in a way uncommon in American literature at its publication. For instance, the protagonist Janie Crawford's desire for nature is narrated with a romantic mood:

It was a spring afternoon in West Florida. Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the backyard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. (Hurston, 1937, s. 10)

² Black feminism also known as Afro-feminism focuses on the rights and social justices of African American women, who suffer from many hardships in the white dominated American society. It engages in both race and sex under the definition of intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality shows each identity should be free sexually and racially, and because of examining not only also race sex, it is intersecting various issues such as race, sex and so on.

Within this experience, Janie's nature is integrated with love and sexual relations. The blooming symbolizes the changes from girlhood to womanhood. These motifs indicate how Hurston uses diverse images to enrich the story's vividness. Janie is exemplified by her innocent life; however, her grandmother represents old traditions, and she really wants Janie to live up with her husband, as she knows she will die in the story. The grandmother is opposed to Janie's relationship with John Taylor, who is a neighbor boy. That is why she insists Janie will marry a man with a job. Hurston's narrative focuses on the journey of Janie. At that point, Janie's curiosity in sexual life is limited by her new husband, whom her Nanny finds as the embodiment of the old patriarchal set of minds. Nanny here tries to protect Janie from poverty, so Logan Killick and Janie marry. As clearly seen, manhood represents the breadwinning and authority in the story. This marriage is security for Janie, and Killick behaves like an animal as they are in the farm business. Janie runs away from his inhumane behavior, but her second husband, Joe Starks, is another trap for her. Stark represents patriarchy, and he sees Janie as an object. The first marriage makes her an animal, and the second materializes her. With both, Janie sees the marriage and manhood as unequal institution. After the death of Joe Starks, Janie marries Tea Cake as her third marriage. Unlike other marriages, Cake behaves Janie as a human being and invites her to play the game. This invitation shows her approval of her identity in the story. Moreover, Cake combs Janie's hair, revealing how he sees her feminine identity, unlike her first husband Killick. However, Tea Cake is not a perfect husband because he beats her, which emphasizes the corruption of society. These examples present a society that is totally patriarchal and racist. Black women are seen at the bottom of society with these examples.

The novel also exemplifies how free black women try to survive in a patriarchal and racist society. The following expression reveals being a woman in the eyes of Hurston: "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember and remember everything they don't want to forget." (Hurston, 1937, s. 1). It shows the obedient nature of women with their loyal character, and it is an excellent manifestation of the self-revelation of women, especially blacks, who are seen as weak human beings in the patriarchal society. Hurston also creates black humor with dilemmatic word choices. She states that her desire to love is integrated with the pear tree, which is an essential projection of Janie's meaning of love:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. (Hurston, 1937, s. 11)

Janie integrates nature and marriage in this quotation, and it is a desire to find an independent identity and an escape from the oppression coming from the gendered world. The pear tree is the symbol of love and lust together. The flying bee symbolizes the idealized depiction of her freedom in life. Nature itself indicates its eternal atmosphere, and in this eternity, the tiny bee's actions reveal the idea of productivity and life with its practices. Furthermore, the gendered and racist points in the novel depict Nanny: "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (Hurston, 1937, s. 14). These descriptions involve the subjects of racism and gender in slang language. Nanny recognizes that some taboos in society burden women, especially blacks. The women are seen as mules in this expression, and it is an inferior statement to explain why Hurston appeals to feminism in her works.

The novel has many characters, and the most significant is Janie Mae Crawford, a mixed-colored girl. She married three times in her life, and each attributes diverse development in her identity. She is mainly seen as an energetic and lovely woman trying to find real love and marriage in her life. She is a curious character and loves to observe everything around her. However, she came across many discriminations because of her gender and race. Her grandmother Nanny is the first instructor her, and the following quotation reflects what marriage means and Janie's feelings towards this situation:

Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. Janie felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn't seem so destructive and mouldy. (Hurst, 1937, s. 20)

According to Nanny and ancestral people, love comes after marriage. Especially for black women, love expectation is getting low because of hard circumstances in life. Janie's reflection occurs after she reluctantly agrees to marry Logan Killicks. She isn't attracted to him, but she naively believes what Nanny says is true, that she will fall in love with him after the marriage. Unlike some who marry purely for security, Janie marries purely for love. Unfortunately, her lack of relationship experience means she is easily misled. Janie does not fall in love with Logan, who sees Janie as a workforce.

The first husband of Janie Logan Killick is the embodiment of the capitalist system of America from the perspective of an agrarian background as he is always working, and he also sees Janie as a mule. The following quotation clearly summarizes Logan's worldview:

Janie got up with him the next morning and had the breakfast halfway done when he bellowed from the barn. "Janie!" Logan called harshly. "Come help me move dis manure pile befo' de sun gits hot. You don't take a bit of interest in displace. 'Tain't no use in foolin' round in dat kitchen all day long." "You don't need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo' place and Ah'm in mine." "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick." (Hurst, 1937, ss. 29-30)

Logan is seen as the outcast in the white hegemonic society, and he reveals his anger while pushing other human beings like Janie. Therefore, this system is like a restricted area for African Americans. Another character is Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, an ambitious and consummate businessman. Joe sees Janie as a sexual object and uses her beauty as a prestige for himself. His expressions stated below show his thoughts towards Janie:

[Joe to Janie:] "You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you." (Hurst, 1937, s. 28)

Joe dreams of being a great and influential man and sees Janie as a pretty doll baby. He views women differently than Janie's first husband, Logan Killick. Joe here sees Janie as a valuable object. This differs from Logan, who also considers Janie an object. For Joe, women are objects to look at; for Logan, they're objects to be utilized. This issue can also be commented on from the feminist perspective with American social theorist and writer Murray Bookchin's quotation. Bookchin indicates the pressure of humans on other humans in a feminist approach as follows: "the very idea of the domination of nature by man comes from the very real domination of human by human" (Bookchin, 1998, s. 1)

Her third husband is Tea Cake, who is younger than Janie, and he treats Janie as a human being. For example, he wants to play with her. This moment is so crucial for Janie that she feels her own self with being recognized by Tea Cake. The following statement clearly explains this situation:

He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, overpadded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice! (Hurston, 1937, ss. 91-92)

Tea Cake is also the first real love for Janie, and he provides that Janie achieves her identity search. He encourages her growth toward independence by teaching her skills such as using the gun. Ironically, she kills Tea Cake with this gun. It is a significant irony in the story. She must kill him because of rabies. At that point, the superiority of nature is emphasized with the use of illness as a disaster. Unlike Logan and Joe, Tea Cake treats Janie with her state of being. Her hopeful and strong behavior can be commented on as her creative personality because she has some opportunities in her life.

Zora Neale Hurston is the perfect projector of the African American lifestyle from the feminist approach. In the novel, many themes show the essence of African American experiences, such as love, the local language, faith, race, and gender. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not merely a tragic love story, but it is also a skillful representation of race, gender, and class issues in American society of the time. More importantly, the work combines two central themes from Hurston's life: her search for independence and fulfillment and her love for Black folk culture. The first of these themes is reflected throughout the novel in Janie Crawford's search for freedom and fulfillment. This search is integrated with the theme of love because Janie is searching for real love. In the novel, the real love between Janie and Tea Cake is seen in how Tea Cake saves Janie from the aggressive dog for the sake of dying. This situation is stated in the following expression:

Janie achieved the tail of the cow and lifted her head up along the cow's rump, as far as she could above water. The cow sunk a little with the added load and thrashed a moment in terror. Thought she was being pulled down by a gator. The dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge. Tea Cake split the water like an otter, opening his knife as he dived. The dog raced down the backbone of the cow to the attack, and Janie screamed and slipped far back on the tail of the cow, just out of reach of the dog's angry jaws. (Hurston, 1977, s. 157)

This scene is realistically depicted with Hurston's masterful narration, and Tea Cake's self-sacrificing reflects love because he takes a risk and saves Janie. Another scene about love and recognition of identity is when Tea Cake combs Janie's hair, which is a feminine symbol. This would reflect both sexual desires and encouragement for the spirit of womanhood. However, in some parts of the novel, Tea Cake beats her or lies to her, but these are not the embodiment of his anger, but his desperation in love as Janie is both older and richer than him. Thus, it reveals his anxiety and anger from the side of masculinity. Equally important is Hurston's use of black folk culture. Much of the beauty of the novel's language comes from Hurston's reproduction of the idioms and the figures of the southern Black local dialect. Characters speak in the folk idioms—"Gal, it's too good! You switch a mean fanny round in a kitchen" (Hurston, 1937, s. 5). Hurston herself incorporates the rhythms and idioms of black speech in her descriptions: "Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart" (Hurston, 1937,

s. 16). Hurston also celebrates the story with the narrations of contests, storytelling, and folk humor.

Hurston emphasizes the lives of African Americans in the Southern black dialect to show localism in its context. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered a fundamental text due to Hurston's selection of her authorial voice and her appreciation of the vernacular dialect used in the Southern black community. Gray (2004) also agrees that Hurston's use of dialect "shows how a small group of people ground themselves" (515). Awkward (1990) argues that Hurston's narrative strategy "gives a voice to the voiceless" community (20). White Americans have criticized African Americans because of their "inability to master standard English" (Lester, 1999, s. 21), and Hurston's use of the "negro" dialect confirms their ability to establish their own speech without having to use standard English. She proves the Southern black dialect is as expressive as the white American dialect. Hurston argues that black language can convey diverse emotions and ideas. By doing so, she asserts that black people are their society's best representatives. Another theme that constructs the most significant background for the novel is race itself. Being an African American has been a problem throughout history, and Hurston reveals the concept of race with diverse experiences, especially in the eyes of African American women. In terms of this aspect, it is an excellent embodiment of real-life issues. The novel has many racial expressions, but the most obvious example is Mrs. Turner, who symbolizes racism for African Americans. The following statement expresses the inferiority of black people from a racist point of view:

Mrs. Turner, like all other believers had built an altar to the unattainable - Caucasian characteristics for all. Her god would smite her, would hurl her from pinnacles and lose her in deserts, but she would not forsake his altars. Behind her crude words was a belief that somehow, she and others through worship could attain her paradise - a heaven of staighthaired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs. The physical impossibilities in no way injured faith. That was the mystery and the mysteries are the chores of gods. Beyond her faith was a fanaticism to defend the altars of her gods. It was distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door. Oh, for an army, terrible with banners and swords! (Hurston, 1937, s. 139).

This is the cruelest aspect of Mrs. Turner's fanatical dream. She thinks she can attain whiteness by good deeds as if whiteness is salvation. Because of being a Caucasian, Mrs. Turner resents the black African American. It is the most obvious reflection of racism, even among African Americans. Morrison (1989) once notes: "Certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose" (11). Even the black folks are seen as racists in the eyes of Janie because of living hardships, and it shows the blacks in her eyes are even hostile, especially when she is facing a murder accusation. The first thing she does after the trial is to visit and thank those kind whites. "The white women cried and stood around her like a protecting wall, and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away" (Hurston, 1937, s. 280). This scene symbolizes Janie's isolation from the black community because of her clinging white identification, like a wall preventing her from embracing her identity. Janie's vague black identification suggests that racism is so horrible and destructive that it makes Janie a marginal stuck between two identities. Without Wright's protesting strategy, Hurston successfully created a work of racial politics.

Alice Walker is a significant literary figure known as a writer exploring black African American life and culture with the celebration of blackness. At that point, Walker examined Zora Neale Hurston's life in her scholarly works, such as her article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." This article symbolizes African American women and their self-independency from the restrictions of white patriarchal society. Walker's

central thesis reflects Hurston's impact in describing black individuals as "undiminished human beings" (Walker, 1983) in Walker's own literary works. Both Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston shared a strong belief in black feminism, and so Walker felt closer to Hurston and analyzed her works. It is a political and feminist revelation that gender is always a critical issue. Thus, Walker supports the idea of intersectionality with the issues, especially gender and race. Walker also contributed the greatest expressions to the field of black feminism. The legacy of Hurston has a highly influential impact on African American literature. Alice Walker's artistic appreciation shows Hurston's ability to shape the cultural heritage of African Americans. The feminist evolution of African Americans is manifested with Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker together, and both are the projection of black women's struggles in history, which is full of injustices and inequalities.

Conclusion

Zora Neale Hurston is one of the most significant African American writers, especially in feminism. Although she is mainly criticized by some black writers such as Richard Wright or Ralph Ellison, Hurston masterfully represents racial and gender issues. Because of being both black and a woman, she reveals the hardships and experiences of African American women's identities with her novels and stories. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* embodies black women's spiritual salvation by giving them an identity. In the novel, Janie explores herself with three different male characters. All of them are socially constructed handicaps in front of her development.

Her fellow black male writers harshly criticized her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Richard Wright, the author of *Native Son* (1940), provided the most critical commentary on Hurston's novel. He stated it lacked a theme, message, or significant thought. Gates (2000) comments on the antithetical difference between Hurston and Wright by arguing that "no two authors in the tradition are more dissimilar than Hurston and Wright" (75). Wright wrote more aggressive and angry novels than Hurston. Even though the novel does not provide a direct furious protestation against racism, it portrays its impact on black society as effectively as any other black contemporary literary work that focuses on racial violence imposed on African Americans.

Hurston acknowledges in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, that the circumstances of time and place have impacted her life and work. Hurston remained secretive about the time, telling readers she did "get born." However, Hurston was never secretive about the place and the significance of growing up in Eatonville, Florida. More importantly, the work combines two central themes from Hurston's life: her search for independence and fulfillment and her love for Black folk culture. Moreover, Alice Walker is a significant figure who reflects the unknown sides of Hurston's life with her article. The most common feature among these writers is the black feminism. Alice Walker discusses how Zora Neale Hurston's ability to portray black people as "undiminished human beings" shaped her as a writer. This is evident in *The Color Purple*, which, like Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, blends the lyrical speech of the South with other kinds of prose.

A few years after Zora's death, Walker read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which sets her on the path of researching Zora Neale Hurston's life and work. Walker admired how Hurston embraced Black culture through her literature. The two authors share in their writing style that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (and other works) and *The Color Purple* (1982) use the Black southern vernacular in their characters' dialogue. In her essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," Alice Walker explores Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, Florida, and apprehends that the place immensely influences her

works. There are some statements from other American writers such as Langston Hughes, Robert Hemenway, the writer of Zora Hurston and the Eatonville Anthropology, Arna Bontemps, etc. While using these writers' expressions about Hurston, Alice Walker creates richness in her article. Langston Hughes' quotation about Hurston is stated in the article as follows:

But Miss Hurston was also clever – a student who didn't let college give her a broad “a” and had great scorn for all pretensions, academic or otherwise. That is why she was such a fine folklore collector, and she could go among the people and never act as if she had been to school at all. Almost nobody else could stop the average Harlemit on Lenox Avenue and measure his head with a strange-looking, anthropological device and not get bawled out for the attempt, except Zora, who used to stop anyone whose head looked interesting and measure it. (Hughes, 1942, ss. 22-23)

Langston Hughes praises Hurston's intelligence and resourcefulness as a folklorist and anthropologist, noting her ability to connect with people without acting superior. He also highlights her ability to capture the culture of the African American community in her writings, mainly through her use of black vernacular language. Hughes also notes that Hurston's work has had a lasting impact on the community, as evidenced by the annual arts and humanities events in her honor. Overall, Hurston is recognized as one of the most significant African American writers of her time, and her contributions to African American literature are celebrated for their cultural richness. The masterful pen of Hurston exemplifies racial pride in African American culture, and she is seen as a significant figure in black feminism.

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