

(رواية "عيونهم كانت تراقب الرّب" للكاتبة زورا نيل هيرستون: رواية احتجاجية)

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المُلخَص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى إثبات روح الاحتجاج التي تسود العديد من جوانب رواية "عيونهم كانت تراقب الرّب" للكاتبة زورا نيل هيرستون. تختلف رواية هيرستون عن معظم الروايات الأمريكية الأفريقية الأولى التي تركز على العلاقات العرقية وتدين المواقف والتحيزات تجاه السود. ووضاً عن ذلك تتناول الرواية قيد الدراسة حياة السود والصراعات التي تحدث ضمن سياق حياتهم وعلاقاتهم مع بعضهم البعض. يمكن النظر إلى تمجيد الرواية لحياة السود والقضاء على الوجود الفعال للبيض على أنه تأكيد واضح على الاحتجاج والاستكار. تعرض الرواية صرخة احتجاج أخرى من خلال انتقاد العلاقات بين الرجال والنساء والعلاقة غير المتوازنة بين السود والتي يهيمن عليها الرجال. يسعى هذا البحث إلى دراسة تمجيد هيرستون لبيئة السود ولغتهم وأسلوب حياتهم الذي يكشف عن الروح الحقيقية للاحتجاج والتمرد في الرواية؛ أو بعبارة أخرى سعي الرواية لتأكيد هوية السود في مواجهة هيمنة وسلطة البيض.

الكلمات المفتاحية: زورا نيل هيرستون، "عيونهم كانت تراقب الرّب"، أدب الاحتجاج، تمجيد حياة السود وقيمهم.

تاريخ الإيداع: ٢٠٢٣/١١/٢٠

تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٤/٠٢/٢٧



حقوق النشر: جامعة دمشق -
سورية، يحتفظ المؤلفون بحقوق
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Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Protest Novel

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to prove the spirit of protest that pervades many aspects of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Departing from most early African-American novels which focus on race relations and condemn the attitudes and prejudices towards black people, Hurston's novel tackles the black life and the struggles that take place within the black context. The novel's celebration of the black life and elimination of the white effective presence are a clear assertion of protest and disapproval. It further suggests another cry of protest through critiquing male-female relationships and the unbalanced male-dominant black relation. This research paper offers a close examination of Hurston's celebration of the black setting, language and lifestyle which uncovers the real spirit of protest and rebellion in the novel; the novel's quest of affirming the black identity in opposition to the white dominance and authority.

Received: 20/11/2023

Accepted: 27/02/2024



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Key Words: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Protest literature, Celebration of the black life and values.

In his review of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Richard Wright argues that "Characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see Negro lives: between laughter and tears."^{§§} Wright went on in condemning the novel of having "no theme, no message, no thought." It is essential here to remember that Wright's reputation as the 'king' of protest novel was established after he published his novel, *Native Son* in 1940. According to Wright, literature should reflect the deterministic nature of individual-society relationship, where black men are presented as the inevitable outcome of their societies' values, hence, depicting blacks as oppressed victims of white society. Hurston's *Their Eyes*, thus, does not comply with Wright's standards of protest fiction. On the other hand, June Jordan sees that in *Their Eyes* the "affirmation of black values and lifestyles within the American context is, indeed, an act of protest."^{§§} The current research paper aims to prove the spirit of protest that pervades many aspects of the novel. As Jordan points out, the novel's celebration of the black life and elimination of the white effective presence, except in few unimportant occasions, are a clear assertion of protest and disapproval. Moreover, the novel suggests another cry of protest through critiquing male-female relationships and the unbalanced male-dominant black relation.

Unlike most early African-American novels which focus on race relations and condemn the attitudes and prejudices towards black people, Hurston's novel tackles the black life and the struggles that take place within the black context. In her autobiography, Hurston writes: "What I wanted to tell was a story about man, and from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the race problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color."^{§§} Accordingly, Hurston's novel shows the social and economic conditions that govern the life of both black men and women. Hurston successfully expresses her belief that black people can laugh, love, and tell stories in addition to their ability to tear, hate, kill, and work very hard. She believes in the power of her people and that they are human beings with a mixture of feelings and motives. This line of protest was later adopted and further developed by later African American writers, most obviously Alice Walker who recognizes and advocates Hurston's embracing of black culture through literature.^{§§}

Most of the characters in the novel are presented as talking and being indulged in story telling. However, the book itself is framed within the heroine's, Janie, narrating her own story. This can be in line with African American tradition of storytelling, particularly the lyrical aspects of the prose which embrace black storytelling traditions, meant to symbolize the survival of the African spirit and to spur action, prompt sympathy, or convey anger as forms of protest literature. Moreover, the porch talks in Eatonville and particularly the 'mule talk' which occupies an essential and popular theme for the people who see the mule as "next to the Mayor in prominence"^{§§} and later the gatherings and talks in the house of Janie and her third husband, Vergible 'Tea Cake' Woods in the Everglades are signs of the communal nature of the black people. The novel provides a vivid picture of black people while working and enjoying their time especially in the muck where Tea Cake and Janie spend their day long "romping and playing ... behind the boss's back. ... It got the whole field to playing off and on." (*Their Eyes*, p. 199).

Many characters reflect the hedonist way of life which some black people in America might have chosen. Several scenes in the novel show acts of gambling, fighting, and enjoying life whatever the conditions are. Hurston refers to this in her essay, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" when she writes: "Every phase of

^{§§} Wright, Richard quoted in *Wrapped in Rainbows* by Valerie Boyd, (Virago Press: 2003) p. 306.

^{§§} Jordan, June quoted in *Wrapped in Rainbows*, p. 306.

^{§§} Hurston Zora Neale, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), p. 171.

^{§§} Walker even took on herself the mission of rediscovering the works of Hurston. For more detail on this, read "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (first published in *Ms. Magazine* in 1975.).

^{§§} Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, [1937], (London: Virago, 1986), p. 85. Further citation from the book will refer to this edition and will occur parenthetically in the text.

Negro life is highly dramatized. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned.”^{§§} According to Hurston's view of the nature of black people, the novel offers an amazing example in the mock funeral and burial of the mule in which all the women and men, including the Mayor, attend. All the people there enjoy their time, and at the end of the mock ceremony the Parson asks the people:

“What killed this man?”

The chorus answered, “Bare, bare fat.”

“Who'll stand his funeral?”

“We!!!!”

“Well, all right now” (*Their Eyes*, p.97).

It is noteworthy that the Parson is actually the lead buzzard whose own ceremony follows the people's. The mule, however, holds an important role in the novel besides its occupation of a big part of the porch talks. It is a popular legend in the folklore of Eatonville and it stresses the relation between black people and mules as the doers of the hardest work even after emancipation. This adds to the black identity of the novel's characters in opposition to the white culture.

A significant factor in the black-identity affirmation in *Their Eyes* is the use of the Afro-American dialect of the rural south in addition to the Standard English. This is firstly an indication of Hurston's celebration of Black English which is seen by Benesch as having: “an aesthetic quality of its own, worthy of preservation and cultivation.”^{§§} Reading *Their Eyes* takes its reader to live with the blacks in their fears, dreams and ambitions. Through the combination of the “king's English as well as the Eatonville's Ebonics”, to use Boyd's terms,^{§§} Hurston achieves a truthful precise expression of her people with their experience, wisdom, beauty and complexity. Benesch also argues that the abundant use of Black English is heavily emphasized throughout the conversations and speeches which constitute the meaning and content in the novel at the expense of the Standard English authorial voice which, at times, comes only to introduce the characters' voices.^{§§} Benesch illustrates his argument by a very good example from the novel:

Some of them thought Starks ought not to have done that. He had so much cane and everything else. But they didn't say that while Joe Starks was on the porch. When the mail came from Maitland and he went inside to sort it out everybody had their say. Sim Jones started off as soon as he was sure that Starks couldn't hear him. “It's uh sin and uh shame runnin' dat man from here lak dat. Colored folks oughtn't tuh be so hard on one 'nother.” “Ah couldn't see it dat way at all,” Sam Watson said shortly. “Let colored folks learn to work for what dey git lak everybody else. Nobody ain't stopped Pitts from plantin' de cane he wanted tuh. Starks give him uh job, what mo' do he want?” ... “You kin feel a switch in his hand when he's talkin' to yuh,” Oscar Scott complained. “Dat chastisin' feelin' he totes sorter gives yuh de protolapsis uh de cutinary linin'.” “He's uh whirlwind among breezes,” Jeff Bruce threw in. (*Their Eyes*, p. 77-8).

The power of the language of *Their Eyes* is an effective way that strongly ties the text to a specific cultural background. Mary Helen Washington believes that: “the black frame of reference is achieved in three ways: 1. the language is the authentic dialect of black rural life; 2. the characters are firmly rooted in black culture;

^{§§} Hurston, Zora Neale, “Characteristics of Negro Expression”, quoted in Wall A. Cheryl “Mules and Men and Women: Zora Neale Hurston's Strategies of Narration and Visions of Female Empowerment”, (1989), p. 664.

^{§§} Benesch, Klaus, “Oral Narrative and Literary Text: Afro-American Folklore in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1988), WWW documents.

<<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0161-2492%28198822%290%3A36%3C627%3AONALTA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>>, (20/04/2005), p. 629.

^{§§} Wrapped in Rainbows, p. 303

^{§§} Benesch, p. 228.

3. Janie's search for identity is an integral part of her search for blackness"^{§§} As Washington highlights, the focus on the life of the blacks within the black community rather than their reaction to the white prejudices and oppression is another strategy by Hurston to rebel against the white attitudes. She intends to explore what black people think, say and do after they banish the white man from their minds and turn their thoughts to things that interest them more. The novel opens with people sitting on their porches to talk and watch for themselves: "These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone. So the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and other things." (*Their Eyes*, p. 9-10) Hurston believes in the power of her people and this is why she refuses to portray them as helpless humiliating victims wrapped by racial oppression. The novel, thus, strips the White Man of his potency by denying him all-powerfulness in black people's lives. Hurston's method of protest is not confrontation but affirmation. This is achieved in the novel by examining the lifestyles of the rural blacks, painting graphic pictures of town life and using the exotic dialect spellings in the speech of the characters and in their inner thoughts.

Thus the self-sufficient spirit in the novel is represented in the release from the race-conflict tradition which is achieved by the focus on the Eatonville all-black town which could stand by itself without white interference. The experience of an independent black community proves to be successful by the return of Janie to Eatonville after her journey of self-realization. Janie prefers to spend what remains of her life in the town which carries her unhappy memories of her second husband. She tells Pheoby that she is: "satisfied tuh be heah." (*Their Eyes* p. 285) and chooses Eatonville to be her last destination where she can find the peace and security she seeks. "Here was peace" is the novel's conclusion which means that Eatonville, the place where Janie is mistreated by Joe and misjudged by both men and women, wins over the community of West Florida where Janie is brought up and the community of the Everglades where she spends her happiest time with her last husband, Tea Cake.

Far from the race-conflict and the reaction to external white forces, *Their Eyes* deals with the opposition to various forms of repression which are more generally human. Hurston's praise of blackness does not silence her protesting critical voice as she confesses that: "The Negro race was not one band of heavenly love. There was stress and strain inside as well as out. Being black was not enough. It took more than a community of skin color to make your love come down on you."^{§§} In *Their Eyes*, Hurston shows a scorn and an attack on those black people who hold white values along with a celebration of black people and the emphasis placed on the black setting of the rural south and its language. This combination effectively expresses the novel's strong spirit of protest and objection. Challenging the white oppression is illustrated through presenting white oriented black characters facing a frustrating end. The three characters discussed in this research paper are associated with decay, loss and disappointment.

The first character which is motivated by the white morals is Janie's grandmother who dooms Janie into her first miserable marriage to Logan. Nanny's awful experiences in slavery lead her to a strong belief in the white potency and moral values. Giles argues that Nanny is the "chief spokesman for prosaic materialism".^{§§} Nanny sees that the white woman's respectability relies on her husband's economic status and stability. This is why she longs to see in Janie the dream she can not achieve for herself or her daughter Leafy. She tells Janie in her narrative of slavery: "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me ... Ah said Ah'd save de text for you". (*Their Eyes*, p. 32) Nanny's dream does not come to reality in Janie's first marriage, but in her status as mayor's Starks wife. Janie explains to her friend Pheoby how she "done lived grandma's way" by getting "up on uh high chair and

^{§§} Mary Helen Washington, quoted in Benesch, "Oral Narrative and Literary Text..." p. 629.

^{§§} *Dust Tracks on a Road*, p. 190

^{§§} Giles James R. "The Significance of Time in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", (1972), (08/04/2005), p. 52

sit [ting] dere". (*Their Eyes*, p. 171-2) Contrary to the high expectations of Nanny, Janie suffers, and as she summarizes it: "[Nanny] didn't have time tuh think whut tuh do after you got up on de stool uh do nothin'. De object wuz tuh git dere ... Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere." (*Their Eyes*, p. 172) The result of Nanny's materialistic moral judgement shakes these white values and proves their unreliability.

The second and prominent representative of those who adopt the white values is Joe Starks. Joe first appears in the novel with three hundred dollars that he saves after "workin' for white folks all his life". (*Their Eyes*, p. 47) His ambition and great desire to be a big voice lead him and his wife, Janie, to the 'baby' all-colored-folk town. His money grows with the town to become the richest and most important man: its mayor, landlord, postmaster and big voice. He knows that he ought to build things if he wants to crow over them. Forgetting himself and his young beautiful wife while leaping for his "far horizon" (*Their Eyes*, p. 50), Joe ends powerless, weak and stripped of his self-confidence on his sickbed. Before he dies, signs of decay and consumption appear over his whole body. In the last confrontation with Joe, Janie realizes that "she must talk to a man who was ten immensities away." (*Their Eyes*, p. 130) Joe's personal failure and his loss at the end stress the fatal and destructive results of living according to the white moral values.

The third character that holds the white moral standards is Mrs. Turner, owner of an eating house in the Everglades where Tea Cake and Janie move for a season of bean-picking. The novel presents through Mrs. Turner the type of Negroes whose prejudices are directed towards the black people. Her consciousness of her milky black complexion and white features puts her away from the black people in the Everglades community: "Her nose was slightly pointed and she was proud. Her thin lips were an ever delight to her eyes." (*Their Eyes*, p. 208) Her pride and color-prejudice result in her hate for Negroes as she tells Janie: "Ah can't stand black niggers. Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' 'em, 'cause Ah can't stand 'em mahself. 'Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid 'em. Us oughta class off." (*Their Eyes*, p. 210) The novel's critique and scorn of Mrs. Turner come through characters like Tea Cake and the working men of the Glade. This comes to a climax in the episode in her restaurant and the mess done intentionally by the black workers after they discover her prejudice. Mrs. Turner's end as being driven out of the community exemplifies the failure of those white-oriented blacks.

In contrast to those three characters who live according to the white values and end intentionally with frustration and loss, Hurston presents Tea Cake as a symbol of a pure black way of life. According to Bone, Tea Cake is associated with the "folk culture."^{§§} He represents the life of the Negro who seeks pleasure in every aspect of his life and cares very little about money. We first meet Tea Cake in the novel at Janie's store in Eatonville proposing to play checkers with her and laughing about things they know and others they do not. After marrying Janie, Tea Cake's hedonist way of life manifests in many incidents and ways like the party he makes in Jacksonville using Janie's two hundred dollars and the act of making his house at the Everglades a gathering place for the black workers to gamble, laugh, talk and have any kind of fun. However, despite the purity and loving nature of Tea Cake, his utopian life with Janie comes to a tragic end by his death as a result of a fatal bite by a rabid dog when he tries to protect Janie during the destructive hurricane that attacks the muck. This tragic end is the novel's answer to the mistaken trust of Tea Cake in the white knowledge ignoring all cautions of nature and some colored people: "De white folks ain't gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous." (*Their Eyes*, p. 231) Hurston's sacrifice of Tea Cake is intended to denounce the white imitators' beliefs and existence.

Hurston uses the contrast between the two kinds of mentality in the novel; that of the white imitators and the other of those who represent the folk culture, in order to present a solution and a compromise, far from the racial considerations, through the character of Janie. Janie is Hurston's cry of protest that transcends the barriers of colour and race.

^{§§} Bone Robert A. *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1966), p. 130.

The survival of Janie at the end of her struggle can be interpreted as a result of her compromising character. Janie's appeal for self-fulfilment and identity is not based on racial nor materialistic grounds. She does not belong to either poles of the extremes, namely that of Joe, Mrs. Turner and Nanny on the one hand, and that of Tea Cake on the other. Janie learns through the novel the importance of money as a source of security. She ends in Eatonville with nine hundred dollars in the bank to live in peace and assure herself that she will not be a victim of any kind of exploitation. However, she is not like Joe whose money and fortune master him and lead to his isolation and destruction. Unlike Mrs. Turner who thinks that her white features are a blessing on her, Janie reasons very thoughtfully her situation and reaches to an agreement between her passionate nature and the reality around her. Being raised by her grandmother among the White Washburns for whom her grandmother works, Janie's consciousness of the white culture and of her Caucasian characteristics, embodied in her "coffee-and-cream complexion and her luxurious hair" does not lead her to hate the blacks as does Mrs. Turner. She says to Mrs. Turner that "Us can't do it. We'se uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks. How come you so against the blacks?" (Their Eyes, p. 210) Instead of classing off herself from the black people on the Glades, Janie receives them in her house and partakes in all their activities of laughing, talking and listening to stories. Still Janie is different from Tea Cake in her awareness of the importance of money. When she follows him to Jacksonville, Janie brings two hundred dollars and hides them from Tea Cake in a little cloth purse under her clothes. Although she does that to satisfy her friend Pheoby's cautions and insistence, this act shows Janie's mature knowing character and her fears and mistrust. Janie also survives at the end because she decides to live her way of life after living her grandmother's way which proves to be unsuccessful.

In this light, it is imperative to highlight the relation between the black men and women in the novel. *Their Eyes* explores this relation in terms of marriage. Hurston provides her critical assessment of the male-female relationships through Janie's different relationships with her three husbands. Three types of marriages shape and define complex, economic, emotional and social codes of behaviour according to which black men and women deal with each other. The novel stresses the fact that both black men and women struggle with different degrees of success to define their lives according to their own terms. It corresponds to S. Thompson description of a "foolish marriage of old man and young girl pattern."^{§§} The second type of marriage is of a young wife and a white-oriented 'wife-stealer' husband. The third is the marriage of an adult forty-year-old woman and a younger hedonist man.

In her first marriage to Logan Killicks, Janie represents the sixteen-year-old girl whose illusions of love are to be shattered on the harsh rock of reality. According to her grandmother, the ex-slave who has horrible memories of slavery, Logan is "de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks ... Got a house bought and paid for sixty acres uh land." (Their Eyes, p. 41) Barbara Smith states that "Hurston is fully aware of the fundamental oppressiveness of traditional marriage, yet she has a deep understanding of what the institution represents to women who were enslaved."^{§§} However, the economic security and social status that Nanny seeks for her granddaughter by marrying her to Logan have a big price. Janie knows that Logan wants to turn her to a figurative mule in return. Such protection is what led to a high increase in the marriage rate of young women (14-16 years) to old men. Many families see that by the "May-December" marriage, to use Ferguson's words, they protect their daughters from a heritage of adultery and abuse and a future of economic exploitation.^{§§} Contrary to these optimistic expectations, many women, including the novel's

^{§§} Thompson, quoted in Ferguson, Sally Ann, "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (1987) WWW documents < <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0148-6179%28198721%2F22%2921%3A1%2F2%3C185%3AFMAFGI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0> > (07/04/2005), p.185.

^{§§} Smith, Barbara quoted in *All the women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* : Black women's studies, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, N.Y. : Feminist Press, c1982), p. 183.

^{§§} Ferguson, p. 186.

Janie, become vulnerable to violence and abuse by their husbands. Karen Anderson discusses men's abusive behaviour: "The age gap common between black husbands and wives and the young age at which some black women married increased men's marital authority."^{§§} Anderson sees that young black women did not know the meaning of marriage. Their understanding of marriage was very naïve like Janie's thought that: "Husbands and wives always loved each other and that was what marriage meant." (*Their Eyes*, p.38) To old Logan, on the other hand, marriage means wife's submission and work to increase her husband's profit.

Janie's reaction to this kind of relationship comes as a rebellious refusal to be the beast of burden that her husband demands of her. She challenges Logan and the whole system he represents both verbally and in practice. Early after marrying Logan, Janie tells him: "Ah don't mean to chop de first chip." (*Their Eyes*, p. 45) When words fail Janie and she finds that her husband's oppressiveness increases, she chooses to leave him and run away with Joe. This radical reaction of Janie can be seen as a way black women choose to fight back and escape oppressive marriage. It can also testify to what Anderson explains about: "black men's domestic power [being] neither ideologically nor economically secured".^{§§}

The novel examines, through Janie's second marriage to Joe Starks, the violent and sexual oppression of the black woman. From the beginning and before marrying him, Janie realizes that Joe: "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees." (*Their Eyes*, p. 50) Yet, she knows that: "the change was bound to do her good." (*Their Eyes*, p. 54) The change comes true with Joe who promises to treat Janie as a 'lady' but according to his own definition of the word. Becoming the "Mayor's wife" does not only have the privileges of silken dresses, high rank or sleeping "with authority" as the people in the town assume, but it also makes the wife-husband relationship unnatural as Janie tells Joe: "Now Jody, it looks lak it keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother." (*Their Eyes*, p. 74) The novel shows that even in the middle class family wife-husband relationship is not balanced especially when the tensions result in killing the couple's sexuality as the case with Janie and Joe:

He wanted her submission and he'd keep fighting until he had it. So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush. The spirit of marriage left the bedroom and took living in the parlor. ... The bed was no longer a daisy-field to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired. (*Their Eyes*, p. 111).

However, Janie's spirit of fight and challenge does not leave her for long. She uses the death of her sexual relation with Joe as an effective weapon to end his abusive treatment and to hush his "big voice". Joe sees Janie as the sexualized symbol of his power and status and that is why he orders her to cover her long abundant hair and isolates her from the community. So that, stripping Joe of his "irresistible maleness" (*Their Eyes*, p. 123) publicly finds one reaction by Joe: "So he struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store." (*Their Eyes*, p.124) This stresses that the problem of wife-abuse stems from the inability of men to establish the kind of dominance and authority they expect. Anderson argues that "Many black men expected to be able to dictate the household division of labor and to enforce a double standard in marital norms regarding sexuality. For some, violence served as a tool of last resort, the weapon for whom material, political, and ideological dominance were not fully available."^{§§§}

The problem of using violence against black women in marriage escapes to Janie's third marriage to Tea Cake. A debate is raised concerning the act of whipping Janie by Tea Cake. According to the Feminist point of view, Hurston does not forgive Tea Cake for that and she punishes him by a bite from a mad dog. Far from this reading, I think that Hurston gives another reason for women abuse in marriage which is jealousy. Anderson reports that "couples who had established stable unions reported that they had successfully placed

^{§§} Anderson, Karen *Changing woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 164.

^{§§} Anderson, p. 170.

^{§§} Anderson, p. 184.

jealousy behind them.”^{§§} Not only Tea Cake shows his jealousy of Mrs. Turner's brother, but also Janie expresses her anger towards her husband's playful encounters with the little girl, Nunkie. Hurston gives her heroine the right to fight and protect her marriage: “She cut him short with a blow and they fought from one room to the other, Janie trying to beat him and Tea Cake kept holding her wrists and wherever he could to keep her from going too far.” (Their Eyes, p. 205) This reflects the equality Hurston provides for Janie as well as the conditions of wife-husband conflict even in a marriage based on love.

If one compares the three types of marriage in the novel, it becomes clear that they all share several similarities. Albeit Janie's three marriages are to three men who hold different mentalities and that Janie enters each marital relationship with new views and experiences, she represents the black woman who is required by her husband to work inside and outside home. Logan summarizes this as saying to Janie: “You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need you.” (Their Eyes, p. 52) Joe's attitude towards woman's work seems contradictory. When they first arrive at Eatonville he says: “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” Yet, later on, he asks her to work in his store. Hurston criticizes the economic racial conditions that shift work responsibilities to black women in the famous words of Nanny: “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” (Their Eyes, p. 29) Thus, work is an issue that black men and women disagree on. Many women prefer to work at home and look after their families with the insistence of their husbands on the necessity of the wives' contribution in breadwinning. This, as Anderson believes, creates a tension within the black family and leads to conflicts in which men resort to violence.

Hurston's *Their Eyes* attacks the use of physical violence and abuse against women in the institution of marriage. In her three marriages, Janie faces different kinds of oppressive treatment. This is in fact what Hurston foreshadows very early in the novel through Nanny who shows her familiarity with the unpleasant reality of married black women and their abuse by their husbands: “Ah know dat grass-gut, liver-lypted nigger ain't done took and beat mah baby already!” (Their Eyes, p. 40) Yet, Janie resists the abusive mistreatments of her husbands and finds ways of defending herself. She simply leaves Logan to find herself again in a marriage that entails a definite obedience and passivity. The oppressiveness of Joe and his attempt to turn Janie into a kind of property give birth to a rebellion inside Janie who sees that the authority of the black man is an illusion: “It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens.” (Their Eyes, p. 117) Hurston also gives voice to some men in the novel to comment on the use of violence in marriage by discussing and mocking Mrs. Robbins who is used to beg although her husband provides for her:

“If dat wuz mah wife,” said Walter Thomas, “Ah'd kill her cemetery dead.” ... “Ah could break her if she wuz mine. Ah'd break her or kill her,” said Cooker ... “Tony won't never beat her. He says beatin' women is just like steppin' on baby chickens. He claims 'tain't no place on uh woman tuh hit.” Joe Lindsay said with scornful disapproval, “but Ah'd kill uh a baby just born dis mawnin' fuh uh thing lak dat.” (Their Eyes, p. 115-6).

Hurston's stress on the association of women with chickens as a symbol of weakness can be seen in her autobiography: “Papa used to shake his head and say, “What's de use of me taking my fist to a poor weakly thing like a woman? Anyhow, you got to submit yourself to 'em, so there ain't no use in beating on 'em and then have to go back and beg 'em pardon.”^{§§§} The violence in Janie-Tea Cake relationship is inherent as Marks argues.^{§§} Although this may be justified as caused by jealousy and mad love, it is still seen by

^{§§} Anderson, p. 169.

^{§§} Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, p. 14.

^{§§} Marks, Donald R. “Sex, Violence, and Organic Consciousness in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” (1985) WWW documents <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0148-6179%28198524%2919%3A4%3C152%3ASVAOCI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>> (08/04/2005), p. 156.

Feminists as a kind of men's abusive behaviour towards women in marriage. Anderson writes: "Much of the violence in these households stemmed from dispute over the degree of masculine authority, especially in establishing norms for sexual conduct."^{§§}

Thus, the novel presents many reasons that lead to the harsh reality of male-female relationships; starting from the constant demand on women's work and the different forms of oppression they face in marriage to the exploitation of wives by their husbands. Hurston's protest and rejection comes through her heroine's strategies of fighting back and by her survival at the end. Boyd states that "Marriage, Hurston seems to say, is a deadly proposition: someone has to give up his or her own life. In most cases, it would be a figurative giving up, with the woman subordinating her life to the man's."^{§§}

It is true that at first glance, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* appears as a novel that has nothing to do with the black people's cry of protest against the racial, economic and social difficulties they face in America. Yet, a close examination of Hurston's celebration of the black setting, language and lifestyle uncovers the real spirit of protest and rebellion in the novel. This can be understood in the novel's quest of affirming the black identity in opposition to the White dominance and authority. The critique of the black man-woman relationship in marriage is another picture of rejection that the novel manages to present.

Funding information:

this research is funded by Damascus university-funder no (501100020595).

^{§§} Anderson, p. 169.

^{§§} Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, p. 304

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