

**MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE
SCIENTIFIQUE**

*UNIVERSITE MOULOUD MAMMARI DE TIZI-OUZOU
FACULTE DES LETTRES ET DES LANGUES
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جامعة مولود معمري – تيزي وزو
كلية الآداب و اللغات
قسم اللغة الانجليزية



**Domaine : Lettres et Langues.
Filière : Langue Anglaise.
Spécialité : Arts Dramatiques et Lettres Anglaise.**

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in English

***Performativity, Subversion and Gender role in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes
Were Watching God (1937)***

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Promotion: November, 2017

N° de série:.....

N° de série:.....

Acknowledgments

We would like to show our deepest gratitude and sincere thanks to our teacher and supervisor Dr. Arezki KHELIFA. We have been honoured to work with him. We would like to thank him for his moral support and guidance. We have been so lucky to work under his supervision.

We want also show our deepest gratitude to our teachers and members of panel examiners for their guidance, comments and encouragements.

Dedication

To

My beloved parents;

My beloved brothers: Brahim, Hakim, Yahia, Hocine, Ahcene.

My beloved sisters: Lynda, Hassiba, Ouerdia.

All my friends and relatives.

Sadia

To

My beloved parents:

My beloved brothers and sisters

And all my friends

Imane

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Dedications.....	ii
Contents.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
I. Introduction.....	1
a. Literature Review	1
b. Issue and Working Hypothesis.....	4
c. Methodological outline.....	4
II. Methods and Materials.....	6
1. Methods.....	6
a. Summary of Jdith Butler’s performativity andsubversion.....	6
2. Materials.....	8
a. Biographical background on Zora Neal Hurston	8
b. Summary of the novel.....	9
c. Historical Background of the novel.....	10
III. Results.....	13
IV. Discussion.....	15
Chapter One: Nature and Society and Gender Roles Attribution.....	15
I. Social Factors in Janie ‘s Gender Roles Attribution Within the AfroAmerican Society	15
II. Natural Factor (Man) in the Attribution of Janie’s Gender roles in the Afro American society.....	24
chapter two: From Revision to Performativity and Subversion.....	33

I.	Definition of Gender Role.....	33
II.	Revision or Questioning of Old Gender Roles.....	34
III.	Prformativity from Passivity to Rebellion.....	36
	a. Loosening and Relaxation	36
	b. Janie’s Rebellion.....	37
	c. Janie’s Subversive (Actions, Trouble and Deviation).....	41
V.	General Conclusion.....	49
VI.	Bibliography.....	51

Abstract

This dissertation tries to study performativity subversion and gender role in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937). The purpose is to shed light on the cultural construction of gender roles in the novel and how the black female character challenges and resists the gender role attributed to her. It explores the way the Afro-American society attributes specific gender roles to Hurston's black female character. Therefore, this research relies on Judith Butler's theory 'Gender Trouble' in which the two main concepts of 'Performativity' and 'Subversion' are borrowed. It has been through Janie's rebellion and deviation that we came to understand the credibility and the efficiency of Butler's claims of performativity and subversion. Our research includes two chapters divided in two sections. The first deals with the social and natural attribution of gender role. The second shows and discusses the performativity and subversion of Janie. As major result, this study reveals that a noticeable correspondence between Butler's definition of subversion and Hurston's protagonist's rebellion against her patriarchal society. This work concludes that Zora Neale Hurston has contributed to detach women gender role within the Afro-American society from the masculine naturalness assumption. She demonstrated that black women of 1930s America can act and perform their gender roles according to their own will.

General Introduction

In all over the world, women were considered as a subject of subordination, discrimination and oppression. Patriarchy and colour represent obstacles against women's movement towards emancipation. Women have been deprived of their human rights and forced to live in hostile worlds. Thus, many of their rebellions and insubordination are narrated in different literary works. And this work is concerned with the study of woman's struggle in the Afro-American society in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).

Through the present research paper, we will present women as the subordinate and the oppressed, and then investigate the forms that their emancipation takes. It is concerned with the period of the Harlem Renaissance and how the image of women is depicted during this period of time. The work portrays women in a dual state between emancipation, oppression and subordination. The female character of this work is fighting in different ways to achieve freedom, equality and liberation.

Thus, the main task is to study Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) for the purpose of showing the resistance of the black women gender role. To reach this analysis, we have relied on Judith Butler's theory of *Gender feminism and subversion*. This feminist perspective seeks to achieve a new black women identity which is going to be explored in this research

Feminism is one of the literary movement that have gained a huge amount of critic. The feminist thinker, Luce Irigaray, suggests in her work entitled *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985) that the total of what we have come to know about women and men sexuality has always been known within masculine vision. She argues that men's dominion is omnipresent practically in every field of life and stressed on the

scientific domain like “research” and “discoveries” Thus, she advises women to “rediscover” themselves that means to destroy the negative image contributed by men and “rediscover” their bodies without using men’s perspectives, she asserts: “However, in order for woman to reach the place where she takes pleasure as woman, a long detour by way of analyzing of the various systems of oppression brought on to bear upon her is assured necessary” ¹ According to what is stated before, we understand that women behaves and acts according to rules created and imposed by men through which *Luce Irigaray* encourages women to break the limits imposed by men.

Another feminist view is argued by John Stuart Mill in his article entitled ‘*The Subjection of women*’ (1869) where he says,

Let us consider... the conditions the laws of this and all other countries annex to the marriage contract. Given that marriage is the destination assigned to women by society. The prospect they are brought up To, and the objective they are intended to pursue (except for those who aren’t attractive enough to be chosen by any man as his companion), one might have expected that everything possible would have been done to make this condition one that they would like enough to have no cause for regret that they were denied the option of any other. Society has moved to a fairer approach in some of relevant matters –e. g, slavery and service the navy –but in this one matter of marriage laws society has persisted right up to today in getting what it wants by foul means rather than fair. The means used today are not as bad as they used to be. Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband. Until fairly recently the father could dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers. ²

Mill focuses on the idea that marriage and bearing children is a task which is given to women by society. The main reason of the exclusion of women from the public life is not their intellectual inferiority but rather the interest of society or in other word ‘men’. Mill declares that women are then obliged to follow the patriarchal rules imposed on them making reference on how women were earlier where they are sold

by their own father to their husband. He supports the idea that women are not only made for the domestic sphere.

As for the black feminist thinker *Patricia Hill Collins* in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) she says:

As an historically oppressed group, US black women have produced social thought designed to oppose oppression. Not only does the form assumed by this thought diverge from standard academic theory. It can take the form of poetry, music, essays, and the like. But the purpose of black women's collective thought is distinctly different. Social theories emerging from and on behalf US. Black women and other historically oppressed groups aims to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice in the United State for example, African –American social and political thought analyses institutionalize racism, not to help it work more efficiently, but to resist it. Feminism advocates women's emancipation and empowerment.³

Patricia hill Collins assumes that “the social thought” as assemble of literary productions, arts are produced by the black women, and contribute hugely to their emancipation against the social oppression that they undergo by a patriarchal black society.

Besides, Collins, Michael Awkward is another critic of Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. He remarks:

Hurston creates the essential illusion that Janie has achieved her voice.... But the tale undercuts much of this not because of its content..... But because of its not because of its narration. Hurston's curious insistence on having Janie's tale..... told by an omniscient third person , rather than a first person narrator implies that Janie has not really won her voice and self after all⁴

From the above quotation, Awkward asserts that Hurston has designed the prominent illusion to make Janie reach her voice. He states that the story cuts much of it not because of the content but because of its recounting and narration. Awkward argues that because the tale is narrated by an omniscient point of view, Janie has not succeeded to realize her self-fulfillment and establish a voice of her own.

As for Benjamin Orina Ondieki he has explored in his dissertation the novel from the radical and feminist and Marxist perspective He has depicted the Hurston's

novel as being against the capitalism system. He provides an illustration by assuming that:

Janie's three oppressive marriages, her support at trial from white women, and the feminist significance of the catastrophic hurricane at the end of the novel, this natural phenomenon, I intend to argue, is symbolic of a feminist anti capitalist revolt which powerfully articulates Marx 's theory with regards to capitalism's appropriation of women and nature for purpose of exploitation⁵

Another study by Ben Hmeida Mohamed Ala Eddin has contributed to explore the quest of feminine identity. The research has explored the harsh fight of the protagonist, Janie, to affirm herself as a black woman not a subjected creature.⁶ He claims:

The novel is not only an account of Janie's struggle for a meaningful life, but also a mirror that reflects the dark reality that challenges black women to achieve a voice in patriarchal society. Looking for that feminine voice and therefore her identity, Janie has to search for herself throughout her marriages and against patriarchy that is rooted in her society.⁷

It appears from this review of literature that Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* received a great deal of criticism but they did not offer deeper insight on the evolution of women from subordinated and oppressed to being rebellious and subversive in the Afro-American literature, which is the major purpose of this study.

In order to explore the theme of feminine performativity and subversion, we will divide our dissertation into four sections. The first will be devoted to the general introduction. The second will be devoted to methods and materials. In methods, we will provide an overview of Judith Butler's theory of *Performativity and Subversion* as developed in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Whereas in materials, a short biography of Zora Neale Hurston and short summary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1837) will be inserted with the historical background of the work. The third

section will be the 'Results'. The discussion section contains two chapters. The first chapter will analyze the attribution of the Afro- American society in Janie's gender role. The second chapter will be devoted to analyze the attribution of the Afro- American men in Janie-s gender role.

End Notes

¹Irigary, I. *This Sex Which is Not One*. Cornell University Press, 1985.

²Mill, John Stewart. *Subjection of Women*. Chapter 2 , [https:// 49-Mill –John-Stuart-Subjection of Women, Pdf 17 :49, 17,1869](https://49-mill-john-stuart-subjection-of-women.pdf).

³Collin, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. Routledge, New York and London, 9,1990.

⁴Awkword, Michael..*New Essay on Their Eyes Were Watching God*.Combridge University Press, New York, 13, 1990.

⁵Benjamin orinaondieki. *The Denunciation of Patriarchy and Capitalism in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of master and arts Wichita state university, 2008, VII.

⁶Ben Hmeida Mohamed Ala Eddin*The Quest For Feminine Identity in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God : Feminist Perspectives*, in *Partial Fulfilment for the Degree of Master Degree* Mohamed Kheider University,Biskra 2015, 10.

⁷Ibid, 10.

Background Chapters

1. Method and Materials

Method: Judith Butler's Theory

Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has influenced political philosophy, in her theory *Gender Trouble : Feminism and Subversion*. The central argument in this theory is that gender and sexuality are culturally constructed. She asserts:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontology's....will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate..... those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.⁸

From what is mentioned, we understand that gender is what men and women do and perform by which this performance and behaviours are considered as being socially created roles in other word some behaviours and feelings are for women and others are for men. Butler writes “gender anthologies” we understand that anthology is the study of a being in its essence independently from the existence. Here, Butler ties gender with anthology to say that gender is independent the created social roles.

In fact, focus will be devoted mainly to explore some concepts relevant to our issue. We will see the two major concepts performativity and subversion. One of Butler's central points of performativity is based on actions performed in a repeated way by the two categories “man and women” which becomes a fixed role for them. Concerning the concept of subversion is about the way of destroying or deviating the norms of roles and behaviors fixed for the two categories.

In her theoretical book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler defines gender “as a corporeal style, an “act”⁹ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning”.¹⁰ In other words, gender is not a fact but a set of repeated actions or performances which are public, temporal and collective. Butler adds that acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative and the gendered body is performative. According to Butler, without these acts there would be no gender at all. Butler claims that gender attributes, are “not expressive but performative”, since gender acts, whereas the way a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative.¹¹

[] The action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this “action” is a public action. There are temporal and collective.¹²

She also adds that gender depends on two essential parts: the performer and the performance itself, because the anatomy of the performer should correspond to his gender. For instance the action of staying at home by women repeatedly makes them as their legitimate role which is in reality fixed by society.

But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance.¹³

Butler focuses on the difference that exists between gender and sex, since sex refers to the biological form male and female. It is defined by the reproductive

sexual organs whereas gender refers to socially created roles in which some behaviors are appropriate for women and other are appropriate for men.

As far as 'Subversion' is concerned, Butler assumes that, "If subversion is possible, it will be subversion from within the terms of the law".⁶ It is defined as a way to deviate from law. In case of a woman, she may tend to deviate from the paternal law, which oppresses her freedom and reduces her ability to perform in her society. Butler explains that this male domination is due to a culturally constructed prejudice about woman's body. She also attracts our attention to the obligation to deliver the female body from the constraints of biology to look for new ways and possibilities for women to be act;

The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation. In order to avoid the emancipation of the oppressor in the name of the oppressed, it is necessary to take into account the full complexity and subtlety of the law and to cure ourselves of the illusion of a true body beyond the law. ...The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities.¹⁴

Butler uses the term "subversion" to emancipate the role fixed for women by society. She says "to cure ourselves from the illusion" it means destroying the limits imposed on them by society to specific roles and go further to achieve their freedom

2. Materials

a. Zora Neale Hurston's Biography

Zora Neale Hurston(1891-1960) was an American folklorist and author associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Zora was the fifth of eight children of John Hurston and Lucy Ann Hurston. She was born in january7, 1891, Notasulga, Alabama, US.

Her father was a Baptist preacher and her mother was a school teacher. When Zora was three she moved with her family to Eatonville. Mrs Hurston died in 1904 when Zora was thirteen.¹⁵

Zora Neale Hurston graduated from Morgan College in 1918. She attended Howard University from 1921 to 1924. In 1925 Hurston was offered a scholarship at Bernard College. For a short time, Hurston became one of the leaders of the literary renaissance happening in Harlem. She produced the literary magazine Fire with Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman.

Hurston is considered one of the pre-eminent writers African-American literature of the twentieth century. She has influenced many writers such Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison. Hurston provided her novels with folkways and folk stories such *Mules and Men* (1935) along with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). She wrote a considerable amount of works, she began with *Color Struck* (1925) which was published in *Opportunity Magazine*, a year later *Sweat* (1926). In 1934, she published her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In (1937), she published her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God, Tell my Horse* in (1938) and in (1942), she published her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road...* Hurston spent her last decade as a writer for newspapers and magazines. She worked as substitute teacher and in a library in Cape Canaveral in Florida. Hurston entered St. Lucie County Welfare Home, where she suffered a stroke and died of heart disease in January 28, 1960.¹⁶

b- Summary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) is a famous feminist novel of the twentieth century. The novel tells the life of Janie Crawford, a girl of mixed black and white heritage. It follows the experience of the main character Janie throughout her three marriages.

Janie's first marriage to farmer Logan Killicks is planned by her grandmother Nanny. Unfortunately, things do not go well; Janie leaves her first husband for Joe Starks. Joe takes Janie to Eatonville, Florida where he becomes mayor. Joe degrades Janie and does not allow her to express her opinions in Eatonville. Joe grows older and accuses Janie of acting too young for her age. After Joe's death, Janie lives happily as a single woman until she meets a younger man called Tea Cake with whom she finds the true love she has dreamed of all her life. She moves with him to Everglades to work in the field. Tea Cake encourages Janie to express herself freely.

At one crucial moment in the story, Tea Cake saves Janie from a ferocious dog; however, he gets rabies. At the end, she has helped him die. Janie. Though she is put on trial for murder, she is pronounced innocent. After Tea Cake's funeral, Janie returns to her home in Eatonville. She meets up again her old friend Phoebe Watson and tells the whole story.¹⁶

c. Historical Background

Our concern in this part is to highlight the cultural features of 1920s in America. Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) at the period of Harlem Renaissance. It was the period of great cultural production and innovative activities among African- American artists, writers, poets and novelists in the field of literature, art, dance and music. During 1920 and 1930, Harlem was a place of cultural awareness, self discoveries and political activism for African-Americans. It

is recognised as one of the most important cultural activity and innovation among African-American artists and writers in the history of the American literature.

The Harlem Renaissance coincided with two most prominent movements the Roaring Twenties and the Jazz Age. These two movements have had a great impact on the African- American community and have also an impact on American culture. During the Harlem Renaissance, a new emphasis was given to presenting African-American contributions to American history. Contributing factors to this cultural and literary renaissance included the great migration of African-Americans from the Southern cities to the Northern cities of New York seeking for jobs and better life conditions. Blacks began to strive for civic participation, political, equality, economic and cultural self-determination.¹⁷

As far as the literature of that time was concerned, in the first half of the 1920s Harlem literature was mainly dominated by the male writings. Indeed, the themes that were tackled were by Harlem literature was related to the social, political and economic upheavals of that time. The novels published at that time were protest novels and they were political. Male writers centred their attention on the relationship between blacks and whites in a white dominated society.

However, female literature was marginalized and women were rose stereotyped in the novels. For this reason, many female writers raised against their male peers of the Harlem literature through overcoming all the stereotypes and the literary convention of the time such Zora Neale Hurston and Anna Bontemps.¹⁸ Their main purpose was to focus on the gender problems rather than the social struggles and conflicts. Primary aim was to expose the position of the black women in society. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is one of the most famous literary work example of this age.

Moreover, during that period African- Americans produced immense talent writers Zora Neale Hurston, Claude Mckay, Jean Tome, and Langston Hughes who wrote novels, poetry, short stories and memoirs. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) collaborated to the change of the mainstream themes of the Harlem Renaissance by emphasizing women's issues.¹⁹ In addition to this, many artists were raised like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, musicians such as Bessie Smith and Duke Ellington and activists like Marcus Carvey and A. Philip Randolph.

End-Notes

⁸Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990, 177.

⁹Ibid, 177.

¹⁰Ibid, 179.

¹¹Ibid, 179.

¹²Ibid, 175.

¹³Ibid, 119

¹⁴Ibid, 119

¹⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Routledge New York: Virago Modern Classic, Preface,1937.

¹⁶Sparknotes, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, viewed 10 Mai2017 < [http://www. Sparknotes.com/free-pdfs/uscellular/download/eyes.pdf](http://www.Sparknotes.com/free-pdfs/uscellular/download/eyes.pdf)>, 4.

¹⁷ GriffordNinna. *The Harlem Renaissance*. US: University of California Los Angelos (1996), 2-3

¹⁸ Ibid, 4

¹⁹Elmore Alyssa. *The Harlem Renaissanceand the Purpose of Negro Art*, US :Ohio State University, 2011. 1-13

III. Results

This dissertation has explored gender, *performativity* and *subversion* in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). This analysis is centred on the theme of women's rebellion against patriarchal society as it is portrayed in the work. We have chosen the theory of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion* (1990), by leaning on her two main concepts "*performativity*" and "*subversion*"

The major findings of this piece of research we have found are: In the first chapter, we have seen women's subordination in the Afro-American patriarchal society. We have shown how Zora Neale Hurston's main character Janie is portrayed by her husbands and Afro-American society as being oppressed and possessive. This state of domination and oppression of Hurston's female character fits Judith Butler's assertion that women's gender is not a natural truth; however, it is a social constructed fact. Therefore, Janie's actions are reduced to domestic sphere due to the strict society standards she lived within and the old patriarchal values.

In the second chapter, we have demonstrated Hurston's female character "Janie" reaction and subversion against her social domination by the guide of Judith Butler's concept of performativity. We have found that Hurston's main character may represent Judith Butler's designation of the "subversive woman". She wants to be taken as a model by all other women since Janie rebels against the restricted norms imposed by the patriarchal society. Thus, she challenged the boundaries which was imposed by her Afro-American patriarchal society and subverted at the end to become what she wanted to be, an independent woman. We conclude by the emancipation of woman shown through Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were*

Watching God, Janie has succeeded to be a free woman who acts with her own will disregarding all masculine oppressive cultural restraints.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: Society vs. Nature and Gender Roles Attribution

In this chapter, our focus is to explore and analyze the influence of men and society on Janie, in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Our study aims to depict how these two elements determine the role performed by Janie as a black Afro-American woman.

I) Social Influence in Janie's Gender Roles Attribution within the Afro-American Society

From the beginning of the story in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main woman character, Janie, is really bad seen by her surrounding after her coming back to Eatonville. The reason is that she has married several times. This act of remarrying many times is not accepted by the black Afro-American community for women as it is well illustrated in the following extract from the novel:

What she doin' coming back here in demoverhalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in? where all tdat money her husband took and died and left her? _what dat ole forty year ole'omandoin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal?_ where she left dat young dat of a boy she went off here wid?_ Thought she was going to marry?_ Where he left her?_ What he done wid all her money? Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain't even got no hairs_ why she don't stay in her class?¹

In the above quotation, Hurston demonstrates the position of black women in the black patriarchal society. They are depicted passive, obedient and their liberties are always restricted. The accepted roles for women in society are staying at home as housewives and pleasing their husbands. Indeed, the fact of transgressing these social norms, Janie has been criticized. Hurston shows that society intervenes to dictate which role she has to perform as a woman. So, her performance should correspond to her patriarchal social norm. From the beginning of the story, Janie is criticized for

her deviation from her social norm. Her surrounding mocks about her age, since she is forty years old and about her relationship with a young man. They wonder about her young boy friend and where is the wealth that her second husband left to her. This means that the inhabitants of Eatonville refuse to accept the idea that a woman can trace her way of life alone, and marry several times. As a woman, she is considered as a child, needing the protection of her parents.

According to Judith Butler, this imposed performance by society subordinates and reduces women's activities. This performance is just a convention established by society, Butler claims:

When the relevant "culture" that constructs gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such case, not biology but culture, becomes destiny²

From this, we can understand that there is no existing norm to confirm that some roles are given especially to men or to women. It is just a matter of social convention that built a set of rules to follow. She compares them to destiny.

Hurston writes: "Women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly"³The horizon here symbolizes the dreams that Janie and the other black women wanted to achieve, and her desire to overcome herself and her social chains. She wants to believe on love and freedom. She allows herself to kiss her neighbor Johnny Taylor. Thus, Hurston illustrates that Janie's dream has ended when her grandmother caught her kissing Johnny. This act does not correspond to the Afro-American women activities. Consequently, she is obliged to get married with an old man even if she has only sixteen. As Hurston says "That was the end of her childhood"⁴ Nanny told her: "Janie, youseuh'oman, now, so_"⁵.The

author reveals that the decision of Janie's grandmother is a result of her slavery heritage. She was a slave who was abused and raped by the white men at a young age. Black women were considered as dolls for sexual pleasure. Nanny said: "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see"⁶ This heritage has terrorized Nanny, so she wants to prevent Janie from undergoing the same fate. Hurston depicts how black women are scared of their black patriarchal society. They are not allowed to push the boundaries which limit their liberties. The novelist provides an illustration about that through Nanny's story. She tries once to challenge her patriarchal society and to live in peace with her illegitimate daughter Leafy. She wants to educate her child in school in order to become a literate woman. However her patriarchal surrounding prevents her from doing so. Nanny's daughter undergoes a terrible rape by her white teacher, "Dat school teacher had done hide her in de woods all night long, and he had done rape mah baby"⁷.

From what is mentioned earlier, Hurston highlights the boundaries imposed by a patriarchal society where women submit themselves to men's dominion. So we understand that if women try to move from their limited sphere, or house, they are immediately threatened by violent practices like rape as Butler illustrates, "Those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished."⁸ Women's practices are shaped by the authority of their patriarchal society in which the passivity of women is transmitted from generation to generation.

The patriarchal atmosphere paralyzes women's freedom since Nanny is scared of her previous experience with the white men. She thinks that by making an arranged marriage for her granddaughter, she makes, "And, Janie, maybe it wasn't much, but ah done de best ah kin by you."⁹ Here, Hurston depicts the patriarchal dominance of the cultural thought since Nanny prevents her granddaughter, to go to school in order to study, since she is scared by her previous experience with her daughter Leafy. She

says, “you wouldn’t have to stay in de white folks’ yard and tuck yo’ head befo’ other chillum at school”¹⁰ Here we understand that black women rights to study is vanished by the patriarchal social conditions. Janie’s mind is restricted by this patriarchal atmosphere, Hurston writes, “Janie had had no chance to know things”¹¹. So Janie finds herself obliged to accept her destiny. Thus, she is convinced by her grandmother’s decision. Hurston writes, “She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so.”¹² From this, we notice that Janie’s surrounding have the last word on her life and her acts. This patriarchal society teaches her that marriage signifies always security and promises her that this arranged marriage will bring her love.

The novelist puts, “Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that what marriage meant.”¹³, so this patriarchal thought reduces Janie to obedience and simply forces her to accept this imposed marriage despite herself. In addition to that, women are thought that they are scared by loneliness. They are also thought to have a weak mind and spirit so that they could not live alone and the presence of a husband in their life is too curial; Hurston writes “She wouldn’t be lonely anymore”¹⁴

A common view is contributed to women in a patriarchal society that their survival is tied with men, so the presence of men in their life is inevitable. This is the reason that pushes Janie to accept. Deviating from the straight line traced by society for women is considered as unethical; Nanny has hoped that what is she doing is the right one, “Ah been prayin’ fuh it to be different wid you”¹⁵ Therefore, the harsh social conditions make her marry an old man of sixty. And this is why Nanny, her grandmother, decided to marry her to an old wealthy man called Logan Killicks in order to ensure all Janie’s needs and provide her a social protection. Nanny has opened possibilities to Janie to have a good life Judith Butler writes:

One might wonder what use “opening up possibilities” finally is but no one who has understood what is it to live in the social world as what is “impossible”, illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate.¹⁶

Butler means that the social world creates the conditions that one might perform and play within society.

Due to her social conditions, Janie is reduced to an inferior creature, who could not survive without man’s protection. Hurston has expressed this idea at the beginning of the story. Nanny, her grandmother, tries to persuade and transmit to Janie the necessity of submitting herself to man’s authority and of accepting to get married with Logan Killicks, even if he is an old man of sixty years old. The novelist shows how women are reduced to objects. The later, was the main cause that obliged Janie to accept this marriage. Nanny went further in convincing Janie to accept, because this marriage will bring her protection even if she did not agree. She said:

If you don’t want him, you shooughta. Heah you is with the onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo’parlor. Got a house bought and paid for sixty acres uh land right on de big road and...Lawd have mussy! Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on.¹⁷

Through Janie, Zora Neal Hurston depicts how the black American society limits the role of women to marriage and excluding them from the romantic life and the dreams of love. Janie’s marriage with Logan Killicks brings her only sadness and a sorrow. Even if she is not happy, but she does not want to disappoint her grandmother, “She didn’t say anything to match up with Nanny gladness either”¹⁸ Here, even though she is asked if there is any problem, but she still continue to deny it. Neale Hurston pictures the way in which patriarchal society influence the way that women act and and think. In this sequence Janie is put in a total obedience, following just the instructions suggested by Nanny. The latter follows the patriarchal rules, so Janie’s will as a woman totally neglected. The writer shows through her narration

that women are deprived of acting and feeling according to their own wishes but rather reduced to follow the patriarchal rules traced by their society and forget about their existence as a being. Janie's grandmother persuaded her to accept her domestic duties as a wife, telling her: "Everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worrin' me' bout love."¹⁹ By this, Janie's role as a woman is reduced to that of maid. This social atmosphere oppresses her and obliges her to follow the traditional patriarchal roles traced for black women.

Butler argues in this following short quotation, "For part of what is so oppressive about social forms of gender is the psychic difficulties they produce"²⁰ Here, she focuses on the obstacles and difficulties produced by this patriarchal way of thinking. Through Janie's grandmother, Zora Neal Hurston expresses the view that marriage is an institution and a protection for black women. But in reality, such ideas prevent woman to achieve equality and freedom with man in society. Hurston shows that black women's way of thinking is under men's dominion. She claims that black women's position is very low. She asserts in the novel:

Maybe it's some place way off in the ocean where the black men is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white men throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womanfolks²¹

The social atmosphere does not favor black women to exist; they are considered as subjects without feelings. They are not given any choice to refuse orders which are given to them. They undergo double authority, by white men and by black men. This is why Janie's husband Logan Kellicks expects a total obedience from her as a wife. He thought that by marrying her; he makes her a great favor, and then forced her to labor in his farm. Hurston advances the idea that the black patriarchal society gives the right to men to decide which role woman has to perform. Logan has learnt from

his surroundings that a woman is man's property and this is transmitted from generation to generation.

Thus, from what is mentioned earlier, the Afro-American society contributes to encourage the way that men affirm their superiority and domination over women. So, the social instruction about women's role favors men to subordinate them. This creates the distinction among the position and the role of women. Butler asserts in this quotation below:

The distinctions among the above positions are far from discrete, each of them can be understood to problematize the locality and meaning of both the "subject" and "gender" within. The context of socially instituted gender asymmetry²²

That is to say that the role of women is asymmetrical which means that there is a difference between the two sides, and they are not identical in the central line and they lack symmetry. Butler uses the term asymmetry to draw the difference that exists in gender role which is instituted by society which favors men over women.

Hurston informs us that she was an Afro-American slave woman, who was hurried from slavery; she tells her story of life to Janie. When she was still young girl, she worked hard in the plantation near the Savannah and revealed her that she was savagely raped by the white men. Angela Davis in his article writes this:

Via this path, we return to the African slave woman: in the living quarters, the major responsibilities "naturally" fell to her. It was the woman who was charged with keeping the "home" in order. This role was dictated by the man supremacist ideology of white society in America; it was also woven into the patriarchal traditions of Africa. As her biological destiny, the woman bore fruits of procreation, as her social destiny, she cooked, served, washed, cleaned house, raised the children. Traditionally the labor of females domestic work is supposed to complement and confirm their inferiority"²³

From what is mentioned above, black women are doubly subjected. They are subjected by the black men and by the white men.

Judith Butler thinks, “Social taboos institutes and maintain the boundaries of the body as such”²⁴This means that women’s weakness is a taboo which is socially constructed, so it is imperative for Nanny to find the right husband for her granddaughter in order to avoid her the misery she underwent ,and also to support her needs and provide her protection. This is well-illustrated in Huston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* mainly in Nanny’s conversation with Janie:

You know honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and makes things come around in queer ways you in particular. Ah way born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman ought to be and do²⁵

Furthermore, Nanny is considered as a traditional black woman, who adopts the values and norms of her patriarchal black society. It can be argued that she works as an agent that controls and establishes these values established by the Afro-American society in accordance to the body of women. Judith Butler says about body: “The body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meaning by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body.”²⁶She focuses on the influence of behaviors on individuals.

Nanny wanted to transmit these values to Janie her granddaughter. She also taught her that any challenge or deviation from the patriarchal Afro-American norms are not allowed within the black American community .So, Janie finds herself chained by the boundaries of hersociety and her fate is determined and traced by her grandmother who guides her. Gender role is controlled by her society.

Moreover, we may say that black women are subordinated and deprived from their liberties and their gender roles depend on their environment. The black women are subordinated due to their sexual hierarchy. it is argued by Judith Butler:

Stopped as an attribute of a person, sex inequality takes the form of gender moving as a relation between people, it take the form of sexuality, gender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women. In this view, sexual hierarchy produces and consolidates gender²⁷

According to this view, Butler focuses on the idea that the biological characteristics of men favor them to dominate women, and this hierarchy creates gender roles. So the subordination of Janie is caused by the social construction of the idea that she is physically weak which reduced her to submission.

So, we can say that her society is a crucial element that determines her gender contribution as a woman as Butler states, “The meaning of women’s social function from their biological facticity, but also it subscribed to the primary signification of women bodies.”²⁸ So women are prepared to do only what patriarchal society expects from them to do and to perform. Their bodies are used to justify their gender role attribution.

Throughout the novel, it has also been apparent that society has made a great distinction and created gender differences between men and women. Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* gender role attribution can be depicted by referring to the character: Joe. For instance, he is presented as the more masculine figure which should have the complete control over his wife. Male gender dominance prevents Janie from practicing her natural rights and keeps her within a traditional oppressive milieu, doing what Joe wants her to do. Therefore, Janie is affected by the gender roles which reduce and restrict her liberty in whatever she wants to do. To conclude, the gender role fixed by patriarchalism has treated women like male property; they are expected to rely on their husbands.

II) The Influence of Man in The Attribution of Janie's Gender Roles in the Afro-American Society: The Case of her First and Second Marriage

From the beginning of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an outlook about the black American women within their society and their position is given. Hurston writes, "Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon".²⁹ Hurston uses the word 'horizon' to refer to freedom by which this horizon is partially determined by men.

Therefore, Women are just obliged to follow the line which is determined by men. In other words, they have to forget about their existence, desires, and hopes. Hurston provides us, through the two first marriages of Janie, a good illustration on how Logan Killicks her first husband and Joe Starks her second husband have been determinant to her gender role as an Afro American woman. He treats her always as his servant, who executes all his orders and desires in the house and also in the farm. He reduces her into a hard worker, as if she is an animal. Janie is used by Hurston as a sample which represents the issue of oppression of women's gender roles that the most of the Afro-American women suffer from. Logan Killicks uses her to facilitate his daily work in the farm. As it is demonstrated in the following quotation:

Now, Ah needs two mules dis yeah. Taters is goin' tuh be taters in de fall. Bringin' big prices. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im.³⁰

From the above quotation, we deduce that the role of women is not limited only to the domestic sphere but it is extended to work outside home in the farms. Obviously, Janie's role is directed by her husband, who becomes her boss. So, she works both inside and outside as it is illustrated in the following quotation:

He had ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it. Six months back he had told her to, 'if' ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuhyuh, look lak you oughta be able to tote it inside. Mah first wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow. She'd grab dat ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten.³¹

Additionally, Logan Killicks links her role to a passive servant without any right to complain, He told her: "Come help me move dis manure pile before the sun gits hot. You don't take a bit of interest in dis place. Tain't no use in foolin' round in dat kitchen all day long"³² Through what is mentioned earlier, we understand about Logan's view about Janie. Her only place and position is what he wants to put her in. She has no right outside of what her husband wants her to be or to go, Janie could not emancipate she is totally under man's dominion. In addition to her domestic duties at home, Janie is forced to go to the fields to work since her husband asked her to chop the wood as his first wife did. She is deprived from her gender identity as woman.

At the end of Logan Killicks' section, Janie Crawford wants to change her destiny and decides to run away with another man, Joe Starks, her second husband. Hurston demonstrates that men view always women as their subordinate. This is seen through Joe Starks speech when he met Janie for the first time. He told her "you married? You ain't hardly old enough to be weaned. Ah betcha you still crave sugar-tits, doncher?"³³ Here, he compares her to a child that needs affection. Hurston focuses on this view to show how women are thought weak emotionally and need men's affection.

In fact, this thought advantages men to control them and guide their activities. The novelist expresses black men's thought about women position outside the house

through Joe Starks when he told Janie, “You ain’t got no business cuttin up no seed p’taters neither.”³⁴ From this quotation, we notice that women are totally excluded from the public sphere. Another illustration about that is with the same character when he told Janie, “A pretty doll baby”³⁵ Here, he compare her to doll, which means an object to manipulate and to put. He uses also the word “baby” to show her dependence to him like a baby with her mother who could not survive without his mother’s protection. Furthermore, Joe says, “You ain’t knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady, and Ah wants to be de one to show yuh.”³⁶ From what is stated here, Joe Starks will treat Janie according to what he sees suitable to her. He is the one who decides which treatments are good for her and which is not good.

After his marriage, Joe has gained an important status within his society in Eatonville and become its mayor. Joe has appropriated the total rights to dominate Janie because he is a man. In addition to that, Janie’s life is controlled more and more by her husband, even with her way of dressing. He imposes her to dress up according to his style and obliges her to stand up all a long day, “Jody told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening.”³⁷ Not only this, but he forbids other women to stay with her, because for him she is the wife of the future mayor. He treats her like a domestic animal. She is reduced to passivity and obedience without having the right to oppose to his orders. Hurston points out, “She must look on herself as the bell- cow.”³⁸ She denounces also that women’s feeling are greatly ignored by men. She writes, “But anyway, she went down the road behind him that night feeling cold.”³⁹ From what is mentioned, we understand that women are not given any importance as human being; their feelings are not taken into consideration. Joe Starks does not care if she agrees to do what he wants but rather he obliges her to do tasks that she does not master and even dislikes. He told her, “Janie Ah’ll git hold uh somebody tuh help out in de store and yo kin look after things whilst Ah drum up

things otherwise.”⁴⁰ We deduce that women are considered as being like machines to execute men’s orders. We can claim that women’s role depends on what men want or need. Hurston provides us a concrete example on the way that men manipulate the role played by women in society through her narration. Men prevent them from achieving their feminine identity but rather they undergo oppression.

Hurston illustrates that Joe Starks has not given much importance to his wife as she expected. He has preferred to exclude her from the outside world. For him, the Mayor's wife should not make speeches and should stay away from his intellectual sphere. He does not give her a chance to say anything. He deprives her rights and he limits her freedom of speech. He married her just to be his own. Therefore, Joe wants to control Janie and makes her a passive woman. This quote takes the independence from a woman. It tells a woman what she can do. The woman becomes a woman to take care of the house. She is not allowed to work anywhere else but only to stay at home. According to Joe, the husband marries his wife because of her good work in the house. Therefore, woman's best place is in the house. In addition to silence, giving orders is another aspect that show dependency. This is shown in the following quotation:

And now we’ll listen tuh uh few words uh encouragement from Mrs Mayor Starks’. Think yuhfuhyo’ complements, but mah wife don’t know nothing ‘bout no speech-makin’, ah never married her for nothing bak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home.⁴¹

Joe does not want to give her a voice to give some encouragement for him, because he considers that as an unusual act. She is inferior to him intellectually and physically. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues that structures in societies with a heterosexual characterization, an obligatory system has been established by which the right and the authority of speech, expressing opinion and ideas, are given exclusively to males, where females are totally excluded. She puts, “There are

historically contingent structures characterized as heterosexual and compulsory that distribute the right of full and authoritative speech to males and deny them to females.”⁴²

Hurston depicts Joe Starks as a patriarchal husband and domineering man. Janie is depicted inferior and her opinions are not as important as it is stated in the following passage: “Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge...”⁴³ According to Joe Starks the stories which are appreciated by his wife Janie are considered to be useless, as he affirms, “They’s just some puny humans playing ‘round de toes uh time.”⁴⁴ It means that, Janie’s opinion is not respected by her husband, so he reduce her role to the one he wanted. He imposes his masculinity on Janie,

But then when Lige or Sam Walter or some of the other big picture talkers were using a Sid of the world for a canvas, Joe would hustle her off inside the store to sell something. Look like he took pleasure in pleasure in doing.⁴⁵

Through this quotation we grasp that Janie as a woman and as Joe’s wife must show a total obedience and dependency despite the fact that she is totally against Joe’s orders. Moreover, Janie’s possession is clearly shown when her husband orders her to tie up her hair even though she does not agree, but at the end she does it. It is asserted as follow: “He ordered Janie to tie up her hair around the store...”⁴⁶ Joe Starks denies the idea of being competed by his wife in his functions as a man and a mayor of the town, because she has no right to give any speech. In another section, Joe asks Janie to fasten the store, he told her: “I god, lum you fasten up this store good befo’you leave, you hear me?”⁴⁷ He makes her understand that she must do what he wants because he is a man.

Furthermore, he considers that his physical superiority and the fact of being biologically born with a male sex gives him the right to control and dictate which

role she has to play. Joe's is raised in a patriarchal society, which gives him the authority to dominate Janie. Butler states that:

Man or women, for, as Beauvoir established, no such nature "exists": one must understand that men are not borne with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every moment appropriate by men. It does not happen, it must be done. Perpetrated by one class against another⁴⁸

The inequality between man and women is a product of social practices which favors every man to dominate women due to his biological structure. For Butler, the physical strength of man does not justify their dominance over women. It is the same case with Joe, who appropriates the total rights to dominate Janie. A fact of being a woman, Janie is obliged to satisfy her husband, who clearly exploits her. He is given the right to dominate, simply because he is born a man.

According to Butler, women are not subordinate from birth, for being biologically weak, but rather it is due to the patriarchal world which reduces her to submission. Butler adds:

Collectively considered, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created this appearance of natural division ...The naming of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an utilized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive perpetual construction of bodies in accord with principals of sexual differences⁴⁹

The fact of naming this difference in sex between man and women attributes to a set of gender roles appropriate for women which legitimates their submission by men.. The oppression of Janie from her husband Joe can be explained also by his desire for power:

We ain't natural widone'nother. You's always off talking and fixin' things, and I feel lakah'mjus'marking time. Hop it soon gits over. 'Over, Janie? I god ah aint even started good. I told you in the very first beginnin'dat Ah aimed tuh be a big voice. You oughta be glad 'caused at makes uh big woman outa yo, 'A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely⁵⁰

From the above quotation, we understand that Joe wants to become a big voice and to gain much more authority and power.

According to Judith Butler, women's passivity and obedience are not natural but rather an imposed role. She encouraged them to overthrow this imposed role and encourages them to perform their own will. She states:

The task for women, Butler argues, is to assume the position of the authoritative, speaking subject –which is in some sense their obligatory grounded right-and to overthrow both the category of sex and the system of compulsory heterosexuality⁵¹

To sum up, Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has revealed the social impact on black women's gender role attribution through the main woman character, Janie. Her gender role as a black woman has resulted partly from her black and white society. She is trusted by her grandmother into a forced marriage with an old wealthy black man, Logan Killicks, in order to ensure her protection from the white men because of her slavery heritage. With that marriage Janie is reduced to a passive and a hard worker inside home and outside. She is limited to domestic tasks. Hurston has also revealed the impact of nature(men) in her gender roles attribution. .

Endnotes

- ¹ Hurston, Zora Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, (Routledge: New York 1937), 2
- ² Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), 12
- ³ Hurston, Z, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 1
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 16
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 17
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 21
- ⁷ *Ibid*, 26
- ⁸ Butler, Judith, *Performative Acts*,522
- ⁹ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 27
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 27
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 28
- ¹² *Ibid*, 28
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 28
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, 28
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, 21
- ¹⁶ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), VII
- ¹⁷ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 31
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 29
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, 31
- ²⁰ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), XXV
- ²¹ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 19
- ²² Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 15-16
- ²³ Davis, Angela
- ²⁴ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 167
- ²⁵ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 21
- ²⁶ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 165
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, XII
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, 129
- ²⁹ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 1
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 36

³¹ Ibid, 35

³² Ibid, 41

³³ Ibid, 38

³⁴ Ibid, 39

³⁵ Ibid, 39

³⁶ Ibid, 40

³⁷ Ibid, 54

³⁸ Ibid, 55

³⁹ Ibid, 58

⁴⁰ Ibid, 58

⁴¹ Ibid, 57

⁴² Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 147

⁴³ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 45

⁴⁴ Ibid, 45

⁴⁵ Ibid, 72

⁴⁶ Ibid, 72

⁴⁷ Ibid, 80

⁴⁸ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 143

⁴⁹ Ibid, 147

⁵⁰ Hurston, Zora, Neal, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.(Routledge: New York 1937), 62

⁵¹ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:New York 1990), 147

Chapter Two: From Revision to Performativity and Subversion

In this second chapter, our task will be devoted to show, through the writing of Zora Neal's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, The performativity and subversion of her main female character. Thus, we are going to illustrate Janie's deviation from a passive and obedient women to rebellious and a subversive one.

I. Definition of Gender Role

The concept of gender role is linked with a set of behaviors and the tasks which are achieved in the society with either women or men. In other words, people come to believe that this set of behaviors are crucially associated with one gender but not with the other. Men and women have a specific role corresponding to their characteristics and ability. As it is Common, men's areas of influence include work and outside whereas women's areas include home and bearing children. The two areas are totally different. This opposition is the basis of the social view toward gender used as a norm to measure masculinity and feminist.

This distribution of roles in society favors always men's authority because women are stereotyped of being too weak in comparison to men. So they are given specific roles that they should accomplish which go with their weakness.

All over the world women undergo a harsh discrimination and have an invaluable life in comparison to men. They are always excluded from the outside life including the economic or the political domain. They are also excluded from making important decisions since they are seen biologically and psychologically inferior. So the only role that they are welcomed to play is passivity and obedience and obedience.

The common tasks which are generally associated to women are always linked with the domestic sphere like childbearing, staying at home, pleasing their children. So they are encircled within the domestic sphere. They are not trusted to accomplish roles outside the house. Whereas men's role is associated to work outside with a valuable activities .¹

As far as black women's gender role is concerned, the main task of Afro-American feminist writers is devoted crucially to emancipate themselves through their writings in order to gain a voice and to exist within the Afro-American society. In fact, Afro-American women have savagely suffered from slavery and racism. Thus, to surpass their misery underwent through their heritage of slavery. The Afro-American women are inserted in their literary works it is the case of Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes were Watching God*. Our coming analysis will depict her feminine main character as a rebellious and subversive woman.

II. Revision or Questioning Old Gender Roles:

Their Eyes were Watching God highlights the sense of questioning of the old gender roles. Hurston succeeds to question and to revise the old gender roles. In fact the novel itself encompasses the aftermath of slavery. Black men receive orders from the whites and these orders are transferred to the black women. So they undergo **double oppression**. The writer provides with an illustration about the questioning of the submission of the black women's gender role. We understand the sense of women's submission through the word presented in the novel "mule" which refers to the black women. They are given the qualities of an animal. Black women at that time are given this name to refer to the role that they play in their society. They do all what is told to them without having the right to refuse and they Therefore, these old gender roles are

much more revised in the second marriage of Janie. Throughout mainly this section, we notice that Hurston exposes and questions the old tradition of Janie's gender roles. By the old gender role, we mean the traditional view of women reducing them to the domestic sphere ie cleaning and cooking. Indeed, Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, is portrayed as being a patriarchal husband and domineering man. His wife Janie is depicted as an inferior creature in comparison to her husband. Obviously, her opinions are not respected or even accepted by her husband, as it is illustrated in the following passage: "Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge..."²

It is worth mentioning that Hurston's female protagonist Janie puts into question the traditional roles into which women were forced by escaping from her first husband with a stranger. By doing so, Janie tries to free herself from the domination and enslavement of her husband who makes her work like a mule in his farm in order to reduce her to the state of an inferior position. So, Janie represents all the black American women suffering from discrimination and racism. As we have already mentioned in the biographical section, the novelist Hurston resembles Janie in many ways. Like her protagonist, Janie, Hurston lived in Eatonville and she even worked as a maid in a hotel. This is to show that, the story is inspired from the novelist's personal life.

To be more explicit, these old gender role are showed in Nanny's decision to marry her granddaughter to a wealthy man Logan Killicks, because she is haunted by the horror of her rape and even Janie's mother who becomes mad. We should also mention that Nanny is an old woman, so she represents the old generation standing for traditions and conventions. So, we can say that Janie puts into question her grandmother's way of thinking.

Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has succeeded to revise to revise and to question the old gender role attributed to the afro-American women which reduces them to obedience and also challenges the image of the mule attributed to them. The latter is seen mainly through Janie's third marriage. Indeed, the writer depicts her feminine character as a rational individual who can enjoy life and share the same pleasure as men. Hurston puts

They fought on 'you done hurt mah heart now you com wid uh lie tuh bruise mah ears! Turn go mah hands! Janie seethed. But Tea Cake never let go. They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their cloths had been torn away; till he hurled her to the floor and held her to there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion. The next morning Janie asked like a women, 'you still love ole Nunkie? 'naw never did, and you know it too. Ah didn't want her ' 'yeah you did' She she didn't say this because she believed it. She wanted to hear his denial ³

From this love scene, we understand that the Afro-American women's feelings and pleasure are the same with those of men. Janie enjoys her intimate moments and succeeds to find the true love with her beloved man "Tea Cake"

III. Performativity from Passivity to Rebellion

a. Loosening and Relaxation:

In the above analysis, we have dealt with Janie as a subordinate woman, and the way her surroundings have attributed to her specific gender roles. However, Hurston depicts her as a rebellious woman. Through our reading of the novel, we notice that Janie has passed from different phases and undergone a radical transformation. At the beginning of the novel, Hurston pictures her as a passive woman obeying her husband but she transforms into a rebellious and daring woman.

Thus, the story is told in the third person, which means that Janie has no voice. Indeed, her first phase of transformation starts with loosening and relaxation

which are clear in abandoning her fate and life in the hands of her grandmother who chooses for her a husband. In addition to her total submission to her two husbands Killicks and Starks, she works in her husband's farm like a slave. Janie's rebellion starts when she accepts Joe's offer of marriage.

Her first husband introduced his wife to Joe as an object, since she has no right to say her word or expose her opinion in front of her husband. The following conversation demonstrates the way she starts planning for a new life and the way she wonders what will be her husband's reaction if she decides to leave him alone. The latter answers her that she is unable to survive without him considering her a weak creature dependent on her husband to live.

“S’posin ‘Ah wuz to run off and leave yuh sometime ‘
There! Janie had put words to his heid in fears. she
Might run off sure enough .The thought put a terrible
Ache in Logan’s body. but he thought it best to put on
Scorn
Ah’m getting ‘sleepy ,Janie .Let’s don’t talk no mo’
Taint’t too many mens would trust yuh, knowinyo’
Falkslakdey do’
‘Ah might take and find somebody dat did trust me
And leave yuh
‘shucks! Taint no mo’ foolslakme. A whole lot of
Mens will grin in yo’face ,but dey ain’t gwine tuh work
And feed yuh .You won’t git far and you won’t be long,
When dat big gut reach over and grab dat little one,
You’ll be too glad to come back here ‘
‘you don’t take nothin ‘no count but sow belly and
Corn bread³

From the above conversation, Hurston describes Janie's determination to leave her husband Logan even if he does not agree. Joe tries to persuade her that no one can take care of her, since she is a weak creature. But, she is still thinking to escape and leave him. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts us a change in the way of life within the black American society, since the Harlem Renaissance is a period where black intellectualism and writers fought and asked for change. Women are of

course included in their vindications. Indeed, women's identities and role in society is put into question, Accordingly, Butler argues that:

“hence, as a strategy of survival ,gender is a performance with clearly Punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed ,those who fail to do their Gender right are regularly punished ”⁴

.It means that women who dare to subvert the gender role fixed by their culture are certainly to be punished. It is the case of Janie's society in which the role of either a woman or a man are defined and imposed by the culture and conventions of that society. By kissing her neighbor, Janie performs outside her gender role, since this is considered an evil in her society.

b) Janie's Rebellion:

Hurston 's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is written during the period known as The Harlem Renaissance, this period has known a great intellectual movement introduced by a new category of black people called “New Negro”. Women are included by great figures like Alain Locke and others. It is a period where new roles for women are introduced. Zora Neale Hurston has introduced a new model of black Afro-American woman who has challenged her black patriarchal society. Indeed, Janie is depicted as a rebellious black feminine character who challenges the authority and the rules of her patriarchal society. Janie's first rebellion act is seen when she has left her first husband, the old wealthy farmer Logan Killicks. She decides to run away with another man, Joe Starks, hoping to have a better life as it is well illustrated in the novel, Hurston says:

A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good .The morning road air was like a new dress .That made her feel the apron tied around her waist .she untied it and flung it on a low bush beside the road and walked on, picking flows and making a bouquet.

After that she came to where Joe Starks was waiting for her with a hired rig. He was very seldom and helped her to the seat beside him; ⁵

From the above quotation, we understand that Janie is enthusiastic with the change that she is performing. By doing this she is rebelling against her black heritage. Nanny has warned her, but she has decided to leave her source of protection. She prefers to find her freedom; despite she is not given this right to free herself from the dominance of her patriarchal husband, Logan Killicks.

In fact, she believed that Joe will treat her as a lady and respect her. She prefers to engage in adventure with a stranger instead of submitting herself to her rude husband. It means that she is conscious that her marriage to Killicks strangles her and makes her a mere maid in his house. In her theory of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler has expressed the full right of every individual to perform its gender roles, in spite of the social boundaries. She proposes the unnaturalness of gender roles and she provides us a strong argument by asserting:

The gendered body is performative suggest that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggest that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body. The gender border control that differentiates inner from outer⁶

From what is mentioned above, we can say that society has a strong impact on women gendered identity. Additionally, she suggests that the acts which are played by them are not a standard truth; however, it is rather a result of social construction which determines their limits and how they should be. Janie has rebelled against her husband and even marriage as an institution, since she is aware if she abandons her life and fate to an old farmer who is supposed to ensure her social protection is not a natural role, but rather an imposed one. Her marriage is based on materialism not love or respect, this is why even this promise of comfortable life is a social lie to

which her family collaborated. By accepting Joe's offer she is seeking protection and love.

Accordingly, Janie is a rebellious woman who wants to free herself and to get rid of her husband. She wants to fulfill her dreams. One night in the store, she got angry with Joe; she insulted him in front of people's town. Hurston says:

'Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo'but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'taint nothin'to it but yo'big voice. Humph talkin' bout' me lookin old. When you pull own yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life⁷

This is apparent from this extract that Janie continues to break the patriarchal norms since she affirms her femininity. She acts differently to what she used to be; thus, she is no more Joe's possession. Therefore, Janie has a strong will to get freedom

Moreover, another rebellious act of Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is displaying her real thought about him. In fact, before Joe's death, Janie has reacted against her husband's maleness as the following passage shows:

Ah knowed you wasn't gointuh lissentuh me. Yuh changes everything but nothin'don't change you –not even death. But ah ain'tgoin'outa here and Ah ain't hush. Naw, you gointuh listen tuh me one time befo' you die. Have yo'way all yo' life, trample and mash down and then die rather than tuh let yo'sself heah' bout it. Listen Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut'sleft after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me.⁸

From what is mentioned above, we notice that Janie uses an unusual tone with her husband, Joe. Her act is considered as a rebellious one, since the Afro American woman should not contradict and raise voice before husband. Janie's performance is

against her gender role as attributed by her black patriarchal society. In other words, she is deceived by her husband who does not give her the life that she expected from him. This is why she informs him that he is not the man she left her first husband for, he becomes a stranger to her.

After Joe's death, Janie is expected from her society to stay at the house of her dead husband with the wealth he has left to her, but she does not. Meanwhile, she has met a young man, Tea Cake, and has started to have a serious love relationship with him and get married with him later. Indeed, this act is against her gender role, because a woman in a black patriarchal society should not marry several times, but Janie has dared to do so. In her community widows should weep their dead husband and wear black clothes. This is why people around her point her with their fingers, since she is making herself beautiful.

In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1999), Judith Butler encourages all women over the world to act on their own wishes, not according to the social norm. She claims that, "Woman need not to be the cultural construction of the female body."⁹ In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie starts to enjoy her life and starts to perform a new gender role in contradiction to what she is expected to do. By having a love relationship, she is considered as a subversive feminine character. Butler suggests a subversive mode of performing and asserts that, "Framework which asserts that subversion, destabilization, or displacement requires a sexuality that somehow escapes the hegemonic prohibition on sex."¹⁰ In fact, Janie has deviated from the line traced by her society to rebel against this hegemony which prohibits sexual love relationship between a widow and a young man within the black patriarchal Afro American society. All Butler's characteristics fit Janie's mode of life. Since her life is unstable, she marries Killicks and divorces from him. Later, she leaves Killicks to

marry Joe and finally she marries a young man. According to Zadie Smith, Janie's three marriages may mean that the choice one makes between a man and a woman is not based on romance. He also adds that Janie's life with Logan Killicks is without doubt very different from her life shared with Joe Starks or even Tea Cake Woods.¹¹

c- Janie's Subversive (Action, Trouble and Deviation)

Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts Janie as a subversive feminine character. Indeed, Janie has deviated from the old traditional gender roles. She is portrayed as new model of woman who performs new gender roles. Judith Butler supports the idea that the gender roles which are performed by women are socially constructed and not naturally constructed¹².

Janie's deviation from her old gender roles is not welcomed by her society, because it does not correspond to the conformity of her society of her black Afro American society. Janie's deviation starts after the death of her second husband Joe Starks. Her mind starts to be aware about her feminine existence. She begins to put herself apart from the rest of women and starts to enjoy her freedom. The following quotation will demonstrate this,

Besides she liked being lonesome for a change. This freedom feeling was fine. These men didn't represent a thing she wanted to know about. She had already experienced them through Logan and Joe .She left like slapping some of them for sitting around grinning at her like a pack of chessy cats, trying to make out they looked like love¹³

Janie affirms her existence as a woman. She expresses herself as a free individual. She detaches completely her feminine thoughts and feelings from the old and imposed patriarchal strict rules, where women are not trusted to stay alone without men's protection. But rather, she starts to to appreciate seriously her freedom in

contrast to what is dictated to her by her society. Like Beauvoir, Butler believes that a woman becomes inferior because of the social conventions of the society.

Simone De Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* that, “one is not born but rather becomes a woman,” the phrase is odd, even nonsensical, for how can one become a woman if one wasn’t a woman all along? And who is this “one” who does the becoming? Is there some human who becomes its gender at some point in time? Is it fair to assume that this human was not its gender before it becomes its gender? ¹⁴

According to this view, Judith Butler focuses on the influence of the traditional doctrines of society on gender roles performed by women. She handles the way by which gender role is socially constructed through a repetition of acts and activities like staying at home for women and bearing children. Judith Butler claims that these activities are not naturally attributed to women but rather socially given.

According to Judith Butler’s view, Janie is not naturally born to fulfill her domestic duties at home. But rather, it is her black afro American patriarchal society which imposes her gender roles, because these social conventions and rules are invented by men to dominate women.

The following excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* show that Janie is acting in subversive way:

Less us go fishin’.
‘fishing’ Dis time uh night?
‘Unhhunh, fishin’. Ah know where the bream is beddin’seen’em whene ah come round de lake dis evenin’. Where’s yo’ fishin’ poles? Less go set on de lake’.
It was so crazy digging worms by lamp light and setting out for lak Sabelia after midnight that she felt like a child breaking rules ¹⁵

In this scene, Janie is fishing in the lake a good time with a young man. Indeed, this act is not accepted by her community and does not correspond to her traditional gender role. Janie starts to enjoy her new subversive performances with the company of Tea Cake. By her new performance, Janie aims to escape her

passivity which is imposed on her. By doing this activity, she is seeking for equality with men. It means that she is eager to go outside her role at home, in order to discover man's world. Jill Johnson advises women to fight and escape passivity:

All women are more or less passive. Passivity is the accommodation of the woman to her oppression at the every level of the ... male defined society. Passivity is the index to a woman's proper behavior as a role playing feminine counterpart to the aggressor. Passivity is the dragon that every woman has to murder in her quest to fore independence.¹⁶

In this view, Johnson encourages women to fight against passivity which is imposed by society that is ruled by men. She compares passivity to a dragon by which women must kill in order to free themselves from the the patriarchal old roles attributed to them. In the similar context, Judith Butler argues that women can act freely and contrary to what they are imposed by society. She states,

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style .¹⁷

Butler sheds the light on the fact that women can act in a different way since her gender identity and role are not naturally determined. Now with Tea Cake, she is helped in her daily domestic tasks. As Butler suggests, the deviation of the normative vision of life imposed by society will make a good change for individuals. She states: "I want to suggest that, however, the positive normativeversion of this text suchas it is, does not and cannot take the form of prescription "subvert gender in the waythat I say, and life will be good."¹⁸In fact, Janie's deviation makes her life better than the one she had with her previous husbands. Hurston gives us a textual illustration in her novel:

Tea Cake and Janie gone hunting. Tea Cake and Janie gone fishing. Tea Cake and Janie gone to Orlando to the movies. Tea Cake and Janie gone to a dance.

Tea Cake making flowers beds in Janie's yard and seeding the garden for her. Chopping down that tree she never did like by the dining room window. All those signs of possession. Tea cake in a borrowed car teaching teaching Janie to drive. Tea Cake and Janie playing checkers; playing coon can ; paying Florida flip on the store porch all afternoon a if no body was there.¹⁹

In this excerpt, Hurston depicts the deviation and non conformity of Janie toward her society since she acts contrary to what she is expected to be, and act within her afro American patriarchal society. Thus by hunting, fishing, travelling, dancing, Janie deviates her traditional gender role and starts performing a new one. It is only with Tea Cake that Janie freed herself from men's domination. "if he said anything at all, she'd take the opposite side and hit him..."²⁰.

In other words, she is freed from her role as a house wife in order to choose and trace her own life without the assistance of a man who will manipulate her and kill her dreams and hopes. Janie realized her dreams that are not allowed to women in her community. Obviously, Tea Cake respects and loves Janie this why he helps her in her duties at home, sharing with her all the work.

Butler asserts:

Only if a paternal law is understood as a rigid and universal determinism which makes of "identity" a fixed and fantasmatic affaire. Even if we accept the content of identity, there is no reason to assume that the law which fixes the terms of that fantasy is impervious to historical variability and possibility²¹

From what is mentioned above, Butler argues that the paternal law should not be determined universally as the authority which fixes the gender identity, because this identity varies and change, since it is not a natural one. As far as Janie is concerned, she subverts her paternal law and acts according to what she is convinced to do. Furthermore, Janie's desire for freedom is shown after Joe's funeral when she came home, Hurston argues, "She burnt up every one of her head rags and went about the house next morning with her hair in one thick braid swinging well below her waist.

That the only change people saw in her" ²² Janie's hair is a symbol that shows her fulfillment of freedom, she burnt all what makes her remember to be Joe's submission. She feels that she is born again to enjoy her life far away from men's domination. She rejects what her grandmother transmitted to her by breaking her marriage twice. For instance, She is criticized by her neighbors for her clothes. When she is asked to show respect for her dead husband Joe, because she wore colored clothes, she answered that she does not care of what others think since her beloved Tea Cake loves her in a blue. "Ah ain't grivenin' so why do Ah hafta mourn? Tea Cake love me in blue, so Ah wear it." ²³ We understand here that Janie has decided to get rid of her ancient way of living and old traditional patriarchal roles which tie her gender roles into specific and limited acts. She decides to launch herself in a new performance of her gender role. She has got married for the third time. She considers her marriage with Tea Cake to be an opportunity that she must not miss. Hurston has provided us with an evidence,

Tain't so big euh chance as it seem lack, Pheoby Ah'm older than Tea Cake , yes. But he done showed me where it's de thought dat makes the difference in ages. If people thinks de same they can make it all right. So in the beginnin' new thoughts had to be thought and new words said. After ah got used tuh dat, we git "long jus" fine. He done thought me de maiden language all over. ²⁴

Moreover, Janie is consciously subverting her Afro-American patriarchal society and deviating from imposed gender role, so she is going to be punished as explained by Butler; but rather she has destroyed these limits and boundaries which are imposed by her patriarchal society which reduces her acts and being to a passive woman, no more than an object. Janie's consciousness is much more developed. She has succeeded to overcome the chain of her patriarchal society and becomes a free woman who acts according to her own will. Similarly, Janie's murder of her third

husband Tea Cake is another important process of her rebellion. Once Tea Cake himself becomes rabid and attacked Janie, she is forced to defend herself. Hurston claims:

The pistol and the rifle rang out almost together . The pistol just enough often he rifle to seem its echo. Tea Cake crumpled as his bullet buried itself in the first just over Janie's head. Janie saw the look on his face leaped forward as he crashed forward in her arms. She was trying to hover over him as he closed his teeth in the flesh on her forearm. They came down heavily like that, she is striggled to a sting position and pried the dead Tea Cake's teeth from her arm ²⁵

From this quotation, Janie is forced to kill her husband to save her life, the fact that she has murdered Tea Cake she becomes ready to enjoy the freedom of life. She has a new sense of identity. After that she returned to Eatonville alone, but free from domination. She claims:" So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah, Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now "²⁶ and oppression. She is described as an independent woman who will fully enjoy a new life without chains.

To sum up we can say that Janie is a model of the new woman suggested by Butler who wants every woman to be a subversive one. She has rejected the traditional perception of women of her society assuming that a woman is just for home. She must show obedience to her husband who is given by the society all the authority to command his wife. In the case of Janie, she experienced a total transformation who is able to impose her ideas on her husband instead of being humiliated and insulted by her two husbands who never succeeded to make her happy in her life. This is due to the fact that they considered her with an inferior position.

End notes:

¹ Reeves, Hazel, Baden, Sally. Gender and Development: Concepts and Definitions. Prepared for International Development (DFID) for its Gender Mainstreaming Intranet Resource:University of Sussex, 2000) 4-2.

² Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 71.

³ *Ibid*, 41.

⁴ Butler, Judith, *Performative acts*, 522.

⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 43- 44

⁶ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), 173.

⁷ Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, (Routledge: New York 1937), 106.

⁸ *Ibid*, 115.

⁹ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge: New York 1990), 142.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 39.

¹¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), XII.

¹² Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), X.

¹³ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 121.

¹⁴ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), 141.

¹⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 136- 137.

¹⁶Jonston, Jill. *Lesbian Nation: The feminist Solution*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1973), 154.

¹⁷ Butler, Judith, *Performative acts* 530.

¹⁸ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), XXI.

¹⁹ Hurston, Zora Neal. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 147

²⁰ *Ibid*, 182.

²¹Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge:Newyork 1990), 85.

²², *Ibid*, 119.

²³ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 150.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 153.

²⁵ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,(Routledge: New York 1937), 246.

²⁶*Ibid*, 257.

V. General conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we have come to conclude that our work entitled *Gender, Performativity and Subversion in Zora Neale Hurston Their Eyes Were Watching God*, tries to examine and explore the role attributed to women within the Afro-American community. We have shown through the main female character of Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* that women's acts and liberties in their gender role are mainly determined by two important factors which are society and men. Through our analysis, we have depicted that the roles performed by women are not natural but rather a construction of society and men women's gender role is a result of patriarchy and man's domination. We have also put on evidence the harsh struggling of Janie against this boundaries imposed on her by her patriarchal society. To shed light on the way this woman is portrayed in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we relied on the theory of *Gender Trouble* (1990). This theory explained the different ways on which women rely in their subversive struggle against men. It has allowed the examination of issues such as performativity, rebellion and subversion in relation to the traditional patriarchal gender grip.

Accordingly, this study can be thought to have demonstrated that the portrayal of Janie, which is presented by Hurston as a new model of women may correspond to how Butler would like women to live. Janie has been able to destroy and defy the social taboos and the patriarchal rules which restricted her liberty as a woman and which has reduced her to be passive and possessed. As a result to the analysis of Janie's deviation as carried out in this work, it may be deduced that the old patriarchal gender roles imposed by society are not standard, constant and fixed. They can be questioned and revised via feminine resistance.

All in all, the novelist has represented the different ways the heroine rebels against the oppressive society in order to reach equality and independence. Therefore, women's subversion is the result of the oppression exerted by the dominant society. Through time, Janie has gained most of her rights and individuality. She has achieved her independence and constructed a new feminine identity by opposing society and breaking out the imposed cultural rules.

Yet, the scope of this memoir prevents us exploring the whole issues related to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. So, we invite students and researcher to deal with interesting topics such as slavery, and the cultural image of blacks within the American society during the first half of twentieth century.

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