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Voice and Sites of Resistance

A Woman's Quest for Empowerment and Freedom
through Voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were
Watching God*

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* written by Zora Neale Hurston, 1937. The main focus is how the protagonist Janie uses her voice to subvert patriarchal oppression. In this essay my hypothesis is that she has a voice all along. However, it evolves due to her ability to engage in activities that are subversive to patriarchy. Her journey throughout the novel is a journey where the oppression from her relationships only makes her grow stronger as a woman. During her journey towards self-revelation as an empowered woman, she gradually gains her freedom and her own authentic voice by asserting control over her body and thoughts. The main theoretical terms of this essay are used in direct link to the struggles and achievements of formulating the self in a male dominated society. What I aim to achieve with this essay is to show how Janie emerges as a subject with a voice of her own in Hurston's novel.

Keywords: Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston, voice, subversive, empowerment, freedom, woman, authentic, self

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Introduction

I first read the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in an English literature class and was fascinated by the story of a woman, the protagonist Janie Crawford, a woman of mixed black and white heritage, and her search for her authentic self and real love. She engages in three relationships with men that affect her personal development throughout her life in different ways. Although the novel is fiction, the struggles, and the developments of the characters in the novel are so vividly realistic.

Reading and working with the novel has opened the door of curiosity about feminism. One of many important themes in the book is a woman's search for empowerment and freedom to express herself, which can be used for educational purposes to teach about gender inequality but also used as means to analyse how to end sexism and oppression. I believe that the novel will appeal to adolescents in school as they can relate to the protagonist of the novel, Janie, and her personal struggles and achievements in learning who she is as an individual.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the protagonist Janie's quest in finding a voice. In these studies she often is portrayed as a figure of feminine empowerment. The dominant critical approach has been that Janie gradually achieves a voice, self-awareness, and self-formation by the changed circumstances of her three marriages. In this study I will take on a slightly different approach. My hypothesis is that she has a voice all along. However, it evolves by her ability to engage herself in critical subversive activities, and, as such, her voice serves as a subversive tool in a patriarchal society.

In this essay I will study Janie's voice as a subversive tool using the term "talking back" against the oppression from each one of her three husbands. Talking back, as defined by the African-American theorist bell hooks, is when the oppressed speaks as an equal to an authority figure. The oppression of Hurston's protagonist Janie Crawford will be studied through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. This involves her position as the *Other* and how she is used as an objectified commodity in her relationships. However, I argue that the resistance she encounters only reinforces her to grow as an individual, from an adolescent to a mature woman.

Previous research

As mentioned previously, several studies have been conducted about Janie and her path to gain a voice. Below I will discuss some of these studies and why they can contribute with various aspects in viewing the protagonist's personal developments in gaining a voice of her own.

Christine Levecq suggests in "You Heard Her, You Ain't Blind: Subversive Shifts in Their Eyes Were Watching God" that Janie is a self-determining agent because she is primarily a human being, a woman exercising her authentic potentiality meaning being true to who she is (Levecq 99). With Janie's experiences with her two husbands, Killicks and Jody, she comes to a reflective understanding that she participates in her own oppression if she allows other to impose their beliefs on her (Levecq). Furthermore, Levecq argues that Hurston uses subversive humor in her storytelling to deconstruct any romantic representation of (black) identity. Janie's journey towards selfhood and finding a voice is a complex process of realistic

struggles made up of mistakes and contradiction. Janie's vision of her true self seems to situate her as an individual among other individuals, meaning she is primarily a human being. As the story progresses, she goes back to the foundations of her being to re-create herself independently, recognizing the presence of a jewel" that "most humans" possess originally created by God. Hurston's manifestation of this creation myth seems raceless, sexless, and classless and is evident in how Janie creates her authentic self (Levecq 98).

In "Listening and Living: Reading and Experience in Their Eyes" Maria Tai Wolff argues that Janie finds her true self from her own life experiences. An important theme in the novel is the transformation of the outside world into a personal vision, of "actions" into self-recognitions. Janie creates her own life from the interpretation of reality. As a child she becomes aware that there are two perceptions of self: the intrinsic and the image held by the rest of the world (Tai Wolff 29). Janie's story of several successive scenes of self-recognition can also be used for educational purposes for the readers to re-evaluate their own experiences into a new conscious way of living life more fully. Tai Wolff further argues that it is in the experience of the world one formulates his/her own true self (Tai Wolff 32).

In "The porch couldn't talk for looking: Voice and Vision in Their Eyes", Deborah Clarke views voice in relation to visualization and recognizes its empowering potential as a subversive tool for women to dismantle patriarchy. By controlling vision one can control how to define the world. Visual power is connected to the process of growing a voice since what is seen determines what exists. Janie uses vision to subvert domination by showing her womanhood, meaning she values the

female body as being primarily human and equal to the male body. Clarke suggests that by showing her womanhood it is a different sight than that of men who see their own desires in the body expected to satisfy their gaze. Janie moves away from being the object, by visualizing herself as a woman, primarily a human being, and not fixating on sexual anatomy (Clarke 604). She also sees people as “big picture talkers” which encourages her to enter different relationships in search of what is beyond the horizon. Seeing beyond seeing indicates that vision is a vehicle for female agency (Clarke 600). When she is not content with the constraints in her life, Janie learns to look further and to imagine what is beyond which is a necessary precondition for finding an expressive voice (Clarke 608).

Maria J. Racine has a slightly different view in “Voice and Interiority” on how Janie emerges as subject. She examines how the male voices affect Janie in her own growth of a voice. The domination Janie encounters is progressively empowering in the way that it forces her to choose herself at the end of the story. According to Racine, she gains a voice as the dynamics changes in her three marriages. Janie’s voice is silenced because she has no control over her actions and destiny. As she matures, she gains a voice that associates with the men who have progressively more voice. Gaining a voice allows her to choose when and how to express herself (Racine 283, 291).

In “The Cognitive Construction of the Self in Hurston’s *Their Eyes*” Patrick S. Bernard studies Janie’s growth from a cognitive point such as seeing, thinking, and speaking. The emergence of self is between her inner thoughts and society which is directly related to human living. Seeing and looking are words often used in the

novel and Bernard suggests that seeing allows Janie to “imagine and negotiate the dichotomous nature of her inner and outer self”. She understands the self as an ambiguous doing that changes and grows in relation to others. It enables her to create herself in alternative ways which is not determined by her environment (Bernard 2, 5).

Other critics such as Shawn E. Miller portrays Janie in “Some Other Way to Try: From Defiance to Creative Submission in Their Eyes”, like a calculating woman using submission as a tool to control the men in her life. To gain what she desires she learns that appealing to her husband’s, especially her third, patriarchy can give her what she wants. Miller further argues that submission as a strategy, for the weaker person, is an effective way to gain freedom or more adequately gaining certain rights within the framework of social contract. This argument can be traced back in the American history as a tradition of black activists that used indirect resistance necessary to cope with the oppression from the white people (Miller 86).

Todd McGowan suggests in “Liberation and Domination: Their Eyes and the Evolution of Capitalism” that Janie does not indulge in conflict as a strategy to create a distance to domination. For example, Janie refuses conflict with her second husband Jody Starks because it does not help changing his mind. Thus, she must create a space where she can distance herself from domination. Nonetheless, it is necessary to feel domination as Janie does because it triggers the sense of loss which is a constitutive part of subjectivity. Here McGowan is inspired by psycho-analytic views through the lens of Jacques Lacan. To become a subject, one must be subjected to the symbolic order, the dominant structures of society, in which one’s

imaginary relation to an object, for Janie the pear tree, is lost (McGowan 112). It is paradoxical that she completes her selfhood through her relationship with her third husband, Tea Cake, and yet loses the self because the self only exists where it fails to be fully constituted (McGowan 122).

In “Sites of Resistance: The Subversive Spaces of Their Eyes” Dale Pattison claims that the protagonist Janie achieves a voice and self-awareness, not because of the changing circumstances in her three marriages, but rather her ability to engage herself in critical subversive activities, in particular, Pattison continues, her understanding of the political spaces of Eatonville. In the novel the porch is a symbol in which Janie can exercise her voice and challenge the patriarchy in the “public” front porch that stands for masculinity. Furthermore, Janie also uses her body as a space of performance to subvert patriarchy as will be studied in my analysis. Her search for her own voice is a combination of her inner thoughts and her body (Pattison 15, 16).

In *The Erotics of Talk*, Carla Kaplan offers another view on Janie’s path to self-revelation and gaining a voice. According to Kaplan, Janie never needed to acquire a voice when her voice was there all along. Her path to self-revelation is a journey in search for an ideal listener that she finds in her friend Pheoby whom Janie develops erotic feelings for (Kaplan 103-104). I argue similarly to Kaplan that Janie has a voice all along, however my analysis focuses more on her growing an authentic voice rather than finding a person whom she can have a conversation with on the same terms. This essay will further show the failure and the accomplishment in finding a listener capable of hearing her voice and further respond appropriately

to it. Kaplan suggests that in the first half of her and Jody's marriage, Janie seems to view voice as private and personal (Kaplan 111). My analysis will show that although she possesses a voice and the power to triumph over patriarchal oppression, her voice is not fully conscious from start as Kaplan suggests. Instead, her subjective experiences and experiences with others are mutually constitutive to her authentic self. This process is her way of gaining her voice and the path to freedom from constraints.

Theory

Feminist literary theory emerged as a result of the 1960s women's movement in America. Toril Moi makes it clear in her book *Sexual/Textual politics* that feminism was an important political awakening in the Western World, of the women's struggle toward equality in society as well as civil rights (Moi 21). Moi further discusses a "stage two" feminism that moves the attention from fixed gender identities to being aware of them and at the same time recognizing their false metaphysical nature. Thus, in that sense feminism aims to deconstruct social constructions that have taught us about gender as binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity (Moi 13, 14). According to Peter Barry, feminism and feminist literary theory should not be seen as two different and remote components. Instead, they should be seen as interlaced processes where the literary theory plays a practical role in viewing the conducts and attitudes about women in literary works. Thus, books and literature have always played a crucial role concerning the women's movement (Barry 116).

The Subject and the Other – gender as social construction

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone De Beauvoir unravels and confronts women's subordination throughout history. She argues that men have fundamentally oppressed women by characterizing them in the margin and in terms as the Other and in constant opposition to men whose superiority is named, the Subject. Men have always claimed themselves as the Subject, meaning the one who makes all decisions and whose opinion matters more. Women, on the other hand, have always been identified in relation to men and not considered as an autonomous being. Consequently, by always looking at women in opposition to men and exclusively as the Other, women are considered less than a human, as humanity is male (Beauvoir 26).

Being on the margin, women are also denied her humanity. Women have therefore been portrayed as the weaker one because of her sex. The inequality between the sexes has been, throughout history, defined as biologically fixed rather than socially constructed. Beauvoir also argues how women in each stage of her upbringing has been associated with passivity, inwardness and dependence. Society shapes women as it deprives them of subjectivity and makes her into an object, forcing her and placing her on the margin of society (26).

According to Simone De Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (330). This view was groundbreaking at the time and showed that gender is constructed in society rather than something biologically fixed from the start and has throughout history been influential for subsequent feminist theories. In the process of making gender, women are subjected to ideologies not derived from

reality instead women are categorized with specific attributes that does not allow them to be individuals. We choose our gender within the norms of society, meaning that we interpret already received gender norms and organizes them anew in our own terms (341). Nevertheless, oppressive structures are changeable if we realize them and confront the status quo (819-820).

Women on the market

In "Women on the Market," an excerpt from *This Sex*, 1985, Luce Irigaray analyses the inferior position of women in male-dominated societies through a Marxist lens and explains the commodification of women in "our" society. Our culture is based upon "the exchange of women and women are objects circulated and traded by men to reproduce a male-dominated society" (Irigaray 172-173). In modern society, women are viewed in two ways: as utilitarian objects for different purposes and as bearers of value. "The value of a woman has nothing to do with anything intrinsic to herself; instead, she becomes a mirror of value for and of a man" (Irigaray 177).

Furthermore, Irigaray claims that women are limited to three roles in society: the mother, the virgin, and the prostitute. Consequently, her potential as a human being is limited. In these roles, women are objects of men's pleasure and have no right of their own. As commodities women are pushed to a passive role in the exchange process. Only as a mother, a woman can be excluded from exchange since she is a property of man, enclosed in his house. She is a reproductive instrument through maternity and labor force that maintains the patriarchal social order. She is not more than a product of a man's labor (185-186).

Talking Back

In her book *Talking Back* bell hooks coined the term *talking back* which means the oppressed speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It also means daring to disagree or having an opinion of your own. She was inspired by the rules of everyday life within the home established by black women, men often absent. In the southern community hooks grew up in, women had never been without a voice. On the contrary, they preached about everyday life rules of how to live and how to act. It was in the world of womentalk hooks' desire to speak, to have a voice, and not just any voice, but a voice that could be identified as her own, was established. In this process of making a voice, a woman must hear herself talk – asking questions and making speeches (hooks 5).

Silence, in feminist circles, is often seen as a sign of woman's submission to patriarchal authority but in black communities, hooks continues, women have not been silent. They have had a voice all along. However, it has often been a monologue, a voice simply not listened to. Thus, the struggle for black women has not been to emerge from silence into speech but instead to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard. In the act of "talking back" women can move from object to subject, the liberated voice (hooks 6).

As she grew up, hooks learned that meeting resistance along the path of growing a voice is a necessary strategy to nourish and protect the spirit from forces that would break it. Growing a voice is an act of resistance that challenges the politics of domination that would render women voiceless. Thus, defiance can heal an individual from traumatic experiences and make new growth possible (hooks 9).

On the path to finding one's own voice and authentic self, one must understand that the self exists only in relation to others. "The self not as signifier of one 'I' but the coming together of many 'I's" (hooks 31). It is an embodiment of the collective reality of the past and the present, family and community. To find our true self is to recover all those collective voices that have been silenced throughout history. It is a recovery process of seeing oneself for the first time again but no longer as being shaped or determined solely by the condition of domination (hooks 31).

To end gendered oppression, it requires a self-transformation from both sides, the oppressor as well as the oppressed. Hooks calls this a self-recovery in relation to others through a subject-to-subject speech meaning speaking on the same terms: "It is crucial not to ignore the self or the longing people have to transform the self, that we make the conditions for wholeness such that they are mirrored both in our own beings and in social and political reality" (hooks 32).

Analysis

Below I will analyze the initial stages of Janie growing her own voice before I move on to study each one of her husbands. I will also look at the oppression Janie is exposed to and her development as a subject with a voice of her own.

The initial vision of self

Janie's first perception of the self is when she sees herself in a photograph and discovers that she is black: "Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast where is me? Ah don't see me" (Hurston 11). Growing up with white children, she became aware that the self can be perceived in two possible ways, as Maria Tai

Wolff states: the intrinsic, natural image of herself, and the image held by the rest of the world. The two images do not coincide as she could not recognize herself (Tai Wolff 29). Janie's self as a child has been ground down from the outside world as she did not see herself any different than the white children she grew up with. Not knowing who she is sets the journey to find herself later as she grows up and matures.

Another example of her growing a voice is Janie's first awakening of mental independence when she is 16 years old. This is illustrated as she observes nature and, significantly, the pear tree in her grandmother Nanny's, backyard. The pear tree symbolizes freedom for Janie: "She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers" (Hurston 13). Patrick S. Bernard argues that the early stages of her seeking her freedom are merely psychological yet crucial to her self-liberation. Using nature as a metaphor shows how Janie, not yet fully conscious, awaits the knowledge that will come out of the choices she will make in the future. Observing the nature anchors theories of self and a model of an ideal self (Bernard 4). Janie's emergence of a voice of her own is evident as she believes that nature hears her and gives her the answers she does not receive from her Nanny. As hooks claims, in moving from object to subject a woman must move away from monologue to being heard and listened to (hooks 6). The pear tree provides the visual means to constitute and shape the self and is the basis of growing her own voice.

Conversely, Nanny envisions Janie's life in more restrictive and defined terms. This is clear when she says: "Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah

been able tuh find out. Whereas black women are ‘de mule of de world’” (Hurstun 17). Because Nanny was born into slavery, her view on freedom is to live a good, protected life through marriage. Consequently, she marries Janie off with an old man, Logan Killicks, to obtain wealth and security for Janie, consequently, securing her a higher position in society. This is evident when Nanny says: You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots (...) it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do (...) Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored woman sittin’ on high” (Hurstun 19). Nanny is maintaining the patriarchal structures when pushing Janie into the margin of society as the *Other* without a voice of her own. According to Irigaray, to have a secure life and to be excluded from the exchange as a commodity a woman needs to be private property of a man (Irigaray 185). Thus, while Nanny has good intentions, she also contributes to the circulation of women as commodities with male imposed value, leaving Janie with no voice of her own. Janie is only a product of a man and what he can offer her. It is evident that Janie is conforming to Nanny’s beliefs when she eventually accepts, even if hesitantly, the marriage with Logan Killicks. The urge to learn if marriage automatically leads to love, drives her to accept Nanny’s will.

Logan Killicks

Sixteen years old and forced into marriage with Logan Killicks, Janie soon feels that he “did not speak in rhymes” with her (Hurstun 31). Her initial dream of the pear tree and if marriage leads to love, proved not to be as she had hoped. Logan Killicks, her first husband, wants to marry Janie for her beauty and for her to be his workforce, which is the driving force in his domination. Killicks makes all the decisions in the house as is illustrated in the scene when he is not satisfied with the

work around the house and compares Janie to his first wife: “Mah first wife never bothered me out ’choppin’ no wood nohow. She’d grap dat ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten” (Hurston 31). This quote shows that a woman is simply a commodity that has no value of her own but only in comparison to the man’s “labor” or in this scene, as another commodity, meaning another woman. As Irigaray argues, commodities among themselves have no value unless they are compared by a man and for a man (Irigaray 177). Clarke states that their marriage is based on what Killicks sees. Janie’s body is an object of his desires (Clarke 604). Janie is not of use but is valued only as a utilitarian object for her husband’s purposes and desires, such as physical labor at the farmhouse and obedience. She clearly fails to live up to the qualities of a wife in Killicks’ eyes.

When Killicks calls for her from the barn, Janie uses her voice for the first time to protest. She tells him “Youse in yo’ place and Ah’m in mine” whereas Killicks tells her “You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever I need yuh” (Hurston 37). He has clearly taken the role as a Subject and tries to make Janie the Object. He tries to dominate her by forcing her to obey him. Janie wants her marriage to be like the pear tree but instead they spoke peripherally to one another. Her original dream of the pear tree from her teens fails her as Killicks forces her to labor. Todd McGowan argues that when Janie’s first dream is shattered, it marks her birth as a subject. It is necessary to feel domination as Janie does because it triggers the sense of loss which is a constitutive part of subject (McGowan 112). She experiences her first loss which urges her to act and liberate herself from the status quo: “The familiar people and things had failed her (...) she knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s dream was dead, so she became a woman” (Hurston 30). Here Janie

shows the first sign of not conforming to what is anticipated from her as a woman; instead she feels a need that must be acted upon. Hence, her pursuit of something new. Bernard suggests that her vision enables thinking, which “facilitates reasoning and decision-making, two essential attributes to self-making” (Bernard 5). Her search for answers makes her see that a dream is just a dream if you do not act upon it. She needs to proceed after she discovers a “feeling of sudden newness and change” (Hurston 38) a small growth in independence after her daring rejection to be Killicks’ workhorse. “Youse mad ’cause Ah don’t fall down and wash up dese sixty acres uh ground yuh got. You ain’t done me no favor by marryin’ me” (Hurston 37). Here Janie is not afraid to speak up after the feeling of change within her; this scene foreshadows her ability to triumph over patriarchal oppression in escaping from Logan Killicks (Racine 284). It is illustrated when she says: “Ah wants to want him sometimes. Ah don’t want him to do all the wantin” (Hurston 27). when telling her Nanny that she also wants to be an active part of the relationship, she also shows her capability to construct herself and not conform to Nanny’s and Killicks’ wishes. As such, she does not accept that gender roles are biologically fixed but implies that they are socially constructed, as argued by Beauvoir (Beauvoir 26).

Janie openly shares with Killicks her plans to leave him, which also shows that she dares to say what she has on her mind. Before leaving him she says “S’posin’ Ah wuz to run off and leave yuh sometime (...) and find somebody dat did trust me”. Killicks replies: “Shucks! You won’t git far and you won’t be long” (Hurston 36). She speaks to him as an equal, pushing herself out of the margin and into the *Subject* but she speaks in, what hooks calls, a monologue meaning a person that does not

listen to her (hooks 6). Killicks believes she will not get that far. It is evident that Janie already senses the subversive potential of her voice, although she is not fully conscious of it. She ceases to be the *Other* which is crucial to the forming of herself as a self-determined agent (Beauvoir 341). It is also evident that she lacks someone in her life that would trust her and despite all the attributes women were given, she is able to resist and go against the oppressive forces. This ultimately sets her journey “to the horizon” with her second husband Jody.

Jody Starks

In this passage I will discuss how Janie, as her marriage to Jody gradually deteriorates, takes action to a verbal freedom. In claiming the position of the Subject and becoming a big voice, Jody depends strictly on silencing Janie’s voice and forcing her into the position of the Other. In this analysis it is evident that Janie subverts the oppression by using her voice in critical moments. As a result, she moves towards her freedom as a woman, and, consequently also as a human being.

After leaving Killicks, she starts her path towards a new identity falling in love with another man, Jody Starks. With him, Janie shows that she is already a woman with a voice and capacity to think for herself. It is evident when she says: “He did not represent sun-up pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon” (Hurstons 35). Marriage does not make love, but Jody speaks of the far horizon. For her it means something yet to be discovered. Patric S. Bernard suggests that by violating her own thinking, as Killicks had done, she realizes that there are alternative ways to construct the self. Thinking is the capacity to reason, so, to an extent, she follows the claims of Nanny (and Killicks and Jody) but only to discover invalid inferences that thwart selfhood (Bernard 7). She therefore makes an active choice to follow

him, despite the risk of potential rejection or control: “Even if Jody was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good” (Hurston 38). It is evident that Janie’s active pursuit to change her life shows that she possesses a voice of her own regardless of a man by her side or not. It is not until she meets her third husband Tea Cake that this is to change.

At the beginning of the novel, Nanny tells Janie that “We don’t know nothin’ about what we see” (Hurston 14). This statement shows that Nanny’s understanding is coloured by her own oppression and her worldview which surrenders the determination of self to others. By contrast, Janie gradually becomes more aware of the true meaning behind seeing. Seeing something new is a vehicle for female agency and a driving force in her pursuit of “the horizon”. As Clarke suggests, by controlling vision one can control how to define the world. Visual power is connected to the process of growing a voice since what is seen determines that exists (Clarke 600). Moreover, Bernard suggests that Janie’s curiosity allows her to see that society makes assumptions that she cannot know because she is a woman (Bernard 6). Through the author we learn how Janie feels: “Her old thoughts was going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them” (Hurston 39). Janie is aware that voice and vision come from others, who try to render her voiceless. However, voice is self-constitutive. As she learns from her experience with Killicks, speaking, and not love or protection of a man, is crucial for self-definition.

In the beginning of Jody’s and Janie’s relationship, Jody promises to treat her not merely as a woman sitting in a house peeling potatoes. He makes these promises to

take advantage of her beauty and to gratify his own desire to be the patriarch of the family and to turn her into his property. It is evident when he says to her: “You ain’t got no business cuttin’ up no p’taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on the porch and rock and fan yo’self and eat p’taters dat other folks plant just special for you (Hurstun 34). Thus, as a woman Janie is not expected to have specific qualities of her own. She is a reflection of Jody’s desires to be an important man with his “trophy wife” next to him. This argument is in line with what Irigaray argues that women in modern society are viewed as having no intrinsic qualities of herself instead they are seen as objects pleasing mens’ will (Irigaray 187). With Jody she cannot see reality as is evident by her inability to see through Jody’s facade at the first glance. Still, she is not entirely fooled since he did “not represent sun-up and pollen” (Hurstun 35). Janie thinks that he was the opposite of Killicks and that he would do anything for her but as he gains more power, being elected as the mayor of Eatonville, he becomes increasingly controlling.

Her search for the horizon dies quickly after Jody imposes authority by not letting Janie speak. This happens after the community wanted to hear encouraging words, at the inauguration ceremony of the new town, Eatonville. Through the narrator we learn that Jody deprives her of her own voice. In fact, when he becomes the mayor, he tells the people: “Mah wife don’t know nothin’ about speech-makin” (Hurstun 51). To keep the status quo of the patriarchal social order, he must keep Janie passive because she is his private property. This goes in line with Irigaray that argues about women being used as commodities and pushed to a passive role. Only as a property of a man, enclosed in his home she can be excluded from this exchange. Consequently, it maintains the patriarchal social order (Irigaray 186). In

that moment, she loses herself, her voice and identity as a person with a free will. It is evident that he does not see her as an equal person as he himself claims the position of the *Subject*. McGowan argues that Jody expects her to be quiet, pushed into the *Other* turning her into a thing, his commodity, without a voice of her own. She has to be subservient to his needs, like a trophy wife (McGowan 113). Her desire to be recognized as a person vanishes. This is evident through the narrator: "She had never thought of making a speech and didn't know if she cared to make one at all. It must have been the way Jody spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off things" (Hurston 51). For Janie this means the end of their marriage, but still she stays married to him until his death.

Having previously been in a physical prison with Killicks, she now finds herself emotionally imprisoned with Jody. She must act in accordance with what is expected of the mayor's wife and, thus, to represent a false idea of herself: "Janie soon began to feel the impact of awe and envy against her sensibilities. The wife of the mayor was not another woman as she had supposed" (Hurston 55). She must adapt to a forced image of how one should be or act which Beauvoir describes as a common experience for women as is illustrated in the following statement made by Janie to her husband: "it keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother" (Hurston 54). Her value as a woman is only a reflection of her husband Jody's "labor". Irigaray argues that a woman's value is an imprint of a man's activity (Irigaray 177). Janie realizes that her freedom to be herself is taken away from her because people expect things from authority now that she is one. In her opinion, authority has power over people and is therefore bound to meet hate. Hate kills the

sense of being free in any relationship. Jody wants to control and direct her and through the narrator one can understand that Janie with “plenty of life beneath the surface” (Hurston 90) is a threat to Jody as he wants to keep the status quo of him as the patriarch. Irigaray argues that foundation to keep the patriarchal social order intact is thus the constitution of women as “objects” without any intrinsic qualities of her own (Irigaray 184). Consequently, he forces Janie to wear a head-rag and keeps her away from the community. McGowan states that unlike Killicks’ domination, Jody stresses control, confining her to their home (MacGowan 113).

In her previous marriage to Killicks, she learned that she must speak up to change her situation. On one occasion, Jody tries to place Janie in subordinate position as he makes an allegory about women’s intellectual capacity: “somebody got to think for women, chickens and cows, I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves” (Hurston 83). Irigaray describes above that women are seen as bodies without identities or communicable value like animals endowed with speech, which is an imitation of a man’s production (Irigaray 189). In this moment Janie’s voice is determined and filled with resistance to change the status quo and speaks for the first time publicly at their store. Thus, she answers “Ah knows uh few things, and womenfolks thinks sometimes too!” (Hurston 84). She directs her words to all the men at the store and continues, “how surprised y’all is goin’ tuh be if you ever find out you don’t know half as much ‘bout us as you think you do. It’s easy to make yo’self out of God Almighty when you ain’t got nothin’ tuh strain against but women and chickens” (Hurston 89). In this scene she alters the position and becomes the *Subject*, an equal to men. This is in line with what hooks argues when a human being is *talking back* and speaking on the same terms as authority (hooks

9). It is evident that by *talking back* Janie shows an act of resistance to the domination of men within her community. In this scene it is evident that she is an independent thinker with a voice of her own.

Just talking back in protest is not enough and as time passes by, she realizes the more she acts in protest the stronger Jody's oppression becomes. We learn from the narrator that Janie almost gives up trying to break free from Jody's control: "The years took all the fight out of Janie's face. For a while she thought it was gone from her soul" (Hurstun 90). To cope with the domination from Jody, Janie develops an inwardness, a sort of alienation from oppression: "She had an outside and an inside now and suddenly she knew not to mix them" (Hurstun 85). Todd McGowan argues that Janie alienates herself in the emergence of an inside and outside which gives her distance from domination and control. Even if this distance only exists within Janie's psyche it still is an indication and a vision of her escaping Jody's control (McGowan 121). Kaplan suggests that in the first half of their marriage Janie seems to view voice as private and personal (Kaplan 111). This is evident through the narrator: "Janie took the easy way from fuss. She didn't change her mind but she agreed with her mouth" (Hurstun 84). Janie's silence is a preparation of growing her own voice since every time Jody tries to dominate her a little war of defence starts inside of her. Jody, on the other hand, cannot understand why she is not appreciative of his efforts on "building a high chair for her" (Hurstun 89).

Janie soon realizes that by giving voice to her visions she can free herself from oppression. As Jody ages, he increasingly ridicules Janie's body to draw attention away from his own aging body. One day at the store in front of all the townspeople

he says, “Don’t stand dere rollin’ yo’ pop eyes at me wid yo’ rump hanging nearly to yo’ knees” (Hurston 93) and Janie talks back as she had never done before making it clear that he has not completely dominated her: “Stop mixin’ up mah doings wid mah looks (...) Talkin’ bout me looking old! Humph! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (Hurston 93). Dale Pattison argues that Janie seizes the opportunity to use public spaces, such as the porch of their store, and recognizes its empowering potential to subvert gender roles and the patriarchal controlling system (Pattison 15). She uses her voice, as critic Dehn Kubitschek argues, to battle Joe by his own rules (Dehn Kubitschek 112). Shifting the focus from her by using same ridicule back at him marks a verbal victory for Janie. This is evident when she says: “Ah’m a woman every inch of me. Dat’s uh whole lot more’n you kin say” (Hurston 93). She shows that she is a human being. Clarke argues that Janie moves away from being the “object” by visualizing herself as a woman and not fixating on sexual anatomy. Clarke calls this act as Janie showing her womanhood and is a different sight than that of men who see their own desires in the body expected to satisfy their gaze (Clarke 604).

Carla Kaplan argues that Janie never needs to acquire a voice since the community already sees her as a “born orator” (Kaplan 103), for example, when Jody frees the poor mule of Matt Bonner after he hears Janie complaining about how the townspeople have mistreated it: “Freein’ dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington or Lincoln,” Janie says (Hurston 68). This makes the townspeople react in wonder: “Yo’ wife is uh born orator, she puts jus’ de right words tuh our thoughts” (Hurston 69). Jody eventually develops an envy that results in him hitting her at the dinner table when she does not cook the meal

properly. This incident marks a new stage in the process of growth for Janie and makes her take the position of the *Subject*.

After an incident when Joe slaps her, she is by herself in the kitchen “for unmeasured time and thought” (Hurston 85) and as she has a few moments of awareness, she looks back at her life questioning what her life has become. Here she also shifts her position in her marriage and realizes that Jody is merely an authority only if she lets him. She thinks to herself: “Maybe he ain’t nothing’, she cautioned herself, but he is something in my mouth. He’s got tuh be else Ah ain’t got nothin’ tuh live for. Ah’ll lie and say he is” (Hurston 90). She is the one that has given him power to oppress her by conforming to his beliefs. Here she has a conscious awakening and, as Beauvoir argues, oppressive structures are changeable if we realize them and confront the status quo (Beauvoir 819-820). She realizes that her “mind had been squeezed” from others (Hurston 102). Patrick S. Bernard argues that the mind is voice and when suffocated as Janie experienced, the subject remains voiceless (Bernard 10). Levecq argues that by living a lie, Janie participates in her own oppression; through her own “mouth” she contributes to the construction of her own oppression (Levecq 95). Furthermore, it is an epiphany after years of emotional neglect from Jody that she has been living “between her hat and her heels” (Hurston 52), that is, behind the conformity of the social constraints in the community. In retrospect, Janie understands all the restraints and wrongdoings in the name of love from her Nanny and her two husbands. The picture is clear for her. There are two categories of people: “Some could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scrapes” (Hurston 106-107).

Janie's authentic self has always been determined by others, so she needs to go back to who she is. She examines herself in the mirror: "Years ago she had told her girl self to wait for her...The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place" (Hurston 103). At Joe's deathbed she finally reveals her true emotions telling him that the fate of his life of being a "big voice" only made him lose her and himself too, "You ain't tried tuh pacify nobody but yourself" (Hurston 103). Hooks claims that the authentic self is a recovery process of the past and the present of seeing oneself for the first time, no longer shaped or determined by domination (hooks 31). Janie finds her liberated voice from her experiences by looking at her past, she does a series of "re-readings", and realizes that she hates how some people force their false perception of life on others.

Janie becomes more aware of who she is and how she wants to live her life, liberated from domination. "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" (Hurston 108). Christine Levecq claims that Janie is determined to situate herself as an individual among other individuals, meaning she is a human being and possesses an "internal jewel" (Hurston 107) just like anybody else (Levecq 99). Janie realizes that she is more than what her relationships had given her. She is a human being worthy of giving voice to her vision and emotions, free from restraints, free from people who have nothing to say about her way of living.

She also shows more confidence in herself when talking to her best friend, Pheoby: “Tain’t dat Ah worries over Joe’s death, Pheoby. Ah jus’ loves this freedom. “Pheoby replies, “Sh-sh-sh! Don’t let nobody hear you say dat, Janie. Folks will say you ain’t sorry he’s gone. Let ‘em say whut dey wants tuh, Pheoby. To my thinkin’ mourning oughtn’t tuh last no longer’n grief” (Hurston 111). Janie feels independent and free from what others think of her and, in that sense, she is more conscious of her own self and as a woman. She liberates herself by freeing her hair from the kerchief and looking at herself in the mirror, no longer Jody’s creation but a strong and beautiful individual taking agency of her life, as shown in the phrase: “a handsome woman had taken her place” (Hurston 103). She learns, as Deborah Clarke puts it, to transform her life experiences into one that accepts and values her own image and self (Clarke 609).

Tea Cake

Her first two husbands as well as Nanny define Janie through a role as an object and expect her to conform to this role. By contrast, Tea Cake, her third husband, gives her the possibility to create and formulate her own self, her own true voice (Tai Wolff 31). He is important to Janie in her process of gaining her own authentic voice since she can exercise her voice and formulate herself more freely without domination interfering.

Tea Cake’s first meeting with Janie makes her glow inside: “somebody wanted her to play” (Hurston 114). It is evident that she had found an equal that listens to her and speaks to her as an equal (Kaplan 103). Before Tea Cake, the people in her life have claimed power, which has limited her actions to move forward in her process towards finding herself. Janie shows that she comes to know herself only after

having carefully examined the stories of others and “put them beside” her own perceptions. In *Tea Cake* she has found her equal that could set free all the feelings she had kept buried inside with Jody. *Tea Cake* gives her an opportunity to learn things like shooting with a rifle. If she is with him, she feels comfortable and free to do things as is evident when *Tea Cake* says: “You’se something tuh make uh man forgit tuh git old and forgit tuh die” (Hurston 162). She even becomes a better shot than *Tea Cake* and he does not seem to get jealous as Jody was. Janie and *Tea Cake* speak in subject-to-subject manner, which is important in a relationship where we have a shared obligation to liberate each other so that we can create ourselves freely (hooks 31). *Tea Cake* influences her perceptions of life and advocates respect between partners who are not in a constant state of competition and control. Contrary to her previous marriages, *Tea Cake* likes her hair and compliments her body and makes her feel special. Moreover, he supports the imagery of herself as a “little spark with a shine and a song” (Hurston 123). This feeling is based on a partnership that liberates each other and through the narrator the reader learns what Janie feels for *Tea Cake*: “In the mud that is deaf and dumb she had tried to show her shine and here it is before her after 40 years” (Hurston 107).

Unlike Jody, *Tea Cake* also recognizes that her thoughts have validity when he offers Janie to play checkers with him. Janie does not know how to play but *Tea Cake*’s encouragement for her to learn is evident as he says, “You got good meet on yo’ head. You’ll learn” (Hurston 115). Dale Pattison suggests that together they dismantle unequal gender relations by playing on the porch like nobody was there and once again Janie shows her ability to claim agency by choosing to play with *Tea Cake*. As noted by Pattison the porch is a symbol in which Janie can exercise

her voice and challenge the patriarchy in the “public” front porch that stands for masculinity. She has learned, from her previous experiences, to use her inside and outside ”to challenge patriarchal oppression by using the porch, the public space, as a liberating potential for a subversive performance” (Pattison 16). Janie uses once again the public porch to show that she is a woman, a human being, actively choosing to play on the same terms as man.

Contrary to what has been the case in her previous marriages, Janie chooses to be with Tea Cake because she feels like she is being listened to, and they speak to one another on equal terms. Hooks argues that for gendered oppression to end, self-transformation from both the oppressor and the oppressed, is required. Hooks calls this “a self-recovery in relation to others through a subject-to-subject speech meaning speaking on the same terms” (hooks 32). Tea Cake takes her back to her initial experience of her vision in Nanny’s garden. From the narrator we learn that he does not expect her to act in a specific manner to look good in other people’s eyes. He seems free from people’s opinions and material possessions or success. He expresses love by praising her beauty when he runs his finger through her hair, saying, “It feels jus’ like underneath uh dove’s wing next to mah face” (Hurstun 123). Hooks suggests that when one is free to formulate oneself it initiates a recovery process of seeing oneself for the first time again but no longer shaped or determined solely by the condition of domination (hooks 31). Unlike her experience from the previous marriages, Janie feels liberated to speak and feel without interference of others’ perceptions. She is also loved for whom she is, which is different to what she has experienced in the past.

In the relationship with Tea Cake she is no longer alienated from herself as she was under Jody's control. From the narrator we learn how this freedom feeling for Janie is illustrated: "Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So, her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (Hurston 151). McGowan suggest that through the feeling of "self-crushing love", she attains a wholeness, destroying the inwardness that she developed with Jody (McGowan 121). However, McGowan continues, Tea Cake also makes her forget herself. It is paradoxical that she completes her selfhood through her relationship with Tea Cake and yet she loses herself because the self only exists where it fails to be fully constituted (McGowan 122). This argument goes in line with hooks' view that one needs to feel a resistance to move forward and discover oneself (hooks 8). Janie sees herself in Tea Cake and it reflects the image of the self she wanted to formulate. Clarke suggests that Janie uses her gaze and learns to accept and value herself when she finally understands her life-experiences better in retrospect (Clarke 609). Janie's soul crawling out suggests that with Tea Cake her journey has now taken a more spiritual path in learning to fully know herself when she feels liberated to feel and to speak: "Only here she could listen and laugh and even talk some if she wanted to" (Hurston 164). Janie's search beyond what she sees had taken her to a place where she could express herself more freely.

Although marriage with Tea Cake at first is good, it does not take long before jealousy reveals its cracks as Tea Cake takes the position of the Subject and hits Janie in fear of losing her to their neighbour, Mrs Turner's brother: "Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behaviour justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured

him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (Hurston 172).

Racine identifies male violence as connected to men not knowing how to express their fears verbally, so they take on physical measures (Racine 298). MacGowan suggests that Tea Cake continues a pattern of domination without Janie recognizing it (MacGowan 111). Paradoxically, Janie accepts the act as legitimate expression of her lover’s fear. She understands why he did it and that it was a mistake. Tea Cake restores their relationship by telling everyone, “Ah didn’t wants whup her last night, but ol’ Mis’ Turner done sent for her brother tuh come to bait Janie in take her away from me” (Hurston 173). To feel liberated both the oppressor and the oppressed must transform the self to create conditions of wholeness that are mirrored in their own beings and social reality (hooks 32). Even if this is an excuse, it still indicates that the act is a result of the prevailing patriarchal social reality that Tea Cake must live up to as it is a transformation to end it as Janie suggests above.

One significant moment in Janie’s emergence as an individual with an independent voice is when the hurricane reaches the community of Everglades and Tea Cake gets bitten by a rabid dog as he tries to save Janie. His health deteriorates and Janie must shoot him in self-defence. In contrast to her previous marriages, Racine states, “Janie’s violence is a conscious act of self-defence and a matter of choosing life rather than death” (Racine 291). When married to Killicks and Jody, she had a voice enough to leave the marriages although the latter died and the liberation was more of a spiritual one. As Racine claims, with Tea Cake she physically enacts this freedom where she chooses herself over the dominant society of men (Racine 292).

“A minute before she was just a scared human being fighting for its life” (Hurstun 216). It is evident that Janie claims agency for her life. She shows that she is a human being whose life is worth living, single or married. Tea Cake’s death was inevitable. With great sorrow, she was put to jail. However, during the trial, we learn how effective her voice is. She makes the judges see her story like Janie sees people as “picture talkers” (Hurstun 60). When the verdict comes, she is immediately released as Tea Cake’s death was “entirely accidental and justifiable” (Hurstun 221).

Shortly after the trial, Janie returns home, and she is more content and empowered than ever. After listening to Janie’s story, her friend Pheoby, tells her that “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listening’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’” (Hurstun 226). Pattison argues that not only does she gain her voice and independence, but she also shows the ability to use her story to free others from static conceptions of self or the situation of the dominant society of men (Pattison 25). Racine further argues that she has also planted a seed of change in the community and, thus, Janie uses her voice to speak to one who will speak to many (Racine 290).

After Tea Cake’s death she moves away from the margins of being the *Other* who is passive or dependent on others by a conscious reflective understanding of the past. Maria T. Wolff points out that Janie has a new set of experiences reaching beyond Eatonville, Logan Killicks or Jody Starks. By going back to the past, she can re-evaluate or transform herself into a personal image. The image is the “truth” of her initial dream and Janie’s pursuit of life teaches the reader that nothing can

truly be “taught”. Instead, it comes from one’s own perception and lived experiences (Tai Wolff 33). This is evident when she tells her friend Pheoby: “Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find about livin’ fuh theyselves” (Hurston 227). In fact, Janie’s will to explore life has indeed secured not only her physical but also her spiritual freedom. In retrospect, it is evident for Janie that all her choices along the way have rendered her fully conscious of who she is: “She pulled in the horizon (...) pulled it from around her waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see” (Hurston 227). She has emerged fully as a subject having full agency of her life. According to Racine, becoming a master of your soul is becoming true to your true self (Racine 292).

Conclusion

In this analysis I have focused on how Janie uses her voice to gain her own authentic voice and to emerge fully as a subject. I have further studied how her voice is subversive to oppression. The analysis shows that Janie's voice is a significant tool to subvert patriarchy. Through her journey Janie shows the ability to engage in critical moments to grow a voice and to constitute her authentic self.

The early stages of seeking her own voice are merely psychological; thus, vision is crucial to her self-liberation. Observing the nature anchors theories of self and a model of an ideal self. She knows that beyond what she sees are many opportunities to learn about herself. Nature plays a crucial role in her liberation as she feels that she is being listened to. Nanny, on the other hand, envisions protection over freedom and forces Janie to marry Killicks. She is taking away agency and the freedom to choose her own path in life.

When she marries Killicks, her first dream is shattered. She realizes that marriage does not make love and she experiences her first resistance, which encourages her to change her situation. Killicks wants her to be his workhorse and by trying to dominate Janie, he pushes her to move away from his confinement. This event marks the birth of her as a subject since she refuses to conform to Killicks's will. She is not afraid to speak what she has on her mind which indicates that her voice is subversive. By not conforming she shows the ability to triumph patriarchal oppression. Janie moves towards taking agency of her life when she eventually leaves Logan Killicks.

With Jody she soon learns that she has been liberated into a new kind of domination. She is expected to be by his side, as a trophy wife sitting on high, a commodity in his possession, confined to their home. To escape his domination Janie creates, within her psyche, an inside and outside to alienate herself from his control. Moreover, with Jody, Janie uses her voice and her womanhood to subvert typical gender roles and oppression on the public porch. Engaging publicly at the front porch marks a verbal victory for Janie as the townspeople recognizes her as a born orator. Furthermore, Janie recognizes that Jody's domination over her is due to the fact that she let him take control and reduce her to an object. As a result, her voicelessness preserves the status quo and she recognizes that she contributes to her own oppression. However, patriarchal structures can be changed as they are not fixed. She eventually goes back to her authentic self by going through her experiences to be able to liberate herself. She becomes a woman that feels content with the image of her newly found self.

Feeling liberated to be as she wants, she meets the free-spirited Tea Cake. With him she is liberated to formulate her true voice, free from constraints. Their marriage is based on a subject-to-subject concept which allows Janie to formulate her true self. Her journey is more of a spiritual one where she evolves and discovers her authentic self, coinciding with her initial vision from her teens. From her previous experiences she learns that knowing her true self only comes after she carefully examined other people's stories and "put them beside" her own perceptions. With Tea Cake she uses the front porch to dismantle gender roles by playing checkers, a typical male activity in the town of Eatonville. In this relationship there are no

typical gender roles except from one incident when Tea Cake's jealousy takes physical measures where he slaps Janie.

In retrospect, it is evident to Janie that all the choices she had made along the way have rendered her fully conscious of who she is. In search for her voice and true self, it becomes evident to her that we do not know more than what we learn in life in relation to others and in the context that we live in. The authentic self is an embodiment of the collective voices coming together as one, liberated from domination. She also shows the ability to use her story to free others from static conceptions of self or the situation of the dominant society of men. Once Janie pursues her journey in finding herself, liberation and growth as a woman are irreversible.

As I mentioned in my introduction, I believe that this novel will appeal to adolescents because it is important from a teaching perspective to highlight different voices, perspectives and to learn about feminism. Creating awareness about different voices and perspectives leads to greater understanding and tolerance for other people as it is to learn about yourself as an individual. To learn about feminism is important because it can end gender inequality by challenging pervasive cultural norms about women and men. To achieve gender equality means that women's and men's rights and opportunities in life will not depend on whether they are born female or male. Instead, it implies that their needs and interests are taken into consideration by recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

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