White Supremacist Capitalist Ideology and Feminism in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Toni Morrison's Beloved

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of white supremacist capitalist ideology and feminism in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. It analyzes the literary work of both authors and the reasons why they are deeply concerned with the consequences of slavery and its influence on the African American society. The elements of white supremacist capitalist ideology are the objectification through the control of visual imagery, naming and the suppression of voice. The result of the objectification is the development of double-consciousness within the black community, which prevents the construction of their identity. Hurston and Morrison depict female characters who struggle against being defined within the frames of white patriarchal notions of gender roles. Both authors address the dangerous side-effects of slavery and racism and emphasize the need for construction of the African American identity which is not based on racist, supremacist ideals.

Keywords: Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, white supremacist capitalist ideology, feminism, objectification.

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Introduction

This paper analyzes the role of white supremacist capitalist ideology and feminist theory in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Their elements are interlaced within both novels and serve as the means of addressing the issues of racism and slavery and their influence on the black society.

Chapter 1 explains the theoretical notions of white supremacist ideology and feminist theory in Hurston's and Morrison's literary work. It discusses their main features and explains why both authors felt the need to address the issue of slavery, white supremacist capitalist ideology and racism and its aftermath. It also explains the ways in which literary paths of these authors are interconnected and how this connection has reflected on the general purpose of their work.

Chapter 2 discusses the literary methods and techniques which are used in *Beloved* and *Their Eyes*[1] to portray the influence of white supremacist capitalist ideology on the African American society and the construction of black people's identity. It gives us an insight into the theoretical background and the function of objectification, visual imagery and naming in both novels. Chapter 2.1 explains and exemplifies the elements of white supremacist capitalist ideology in *Beloved* and *Their Eyes* and the ways in which both authors have incorporated the issue of this ideology in their novels.

Chapter 3 opens a discursive space on the reasons why these novels are considered to be the most prominent works of black feminism. It thoroughly explains the methods used to integrate feminist theory and to address the issue of phallocentric black masculinity birthed in slavery. Chapter 3.1 focuses on the position of women in these novels and identifies the role of domestic violence, misogyny, sexism and objectification in construction of female characters. It analyses the ways in which both authors have managed to portray strong, independent African American women and their resistance to be subjected to conventional gender roles assigned by the white patriarchy.

[1] Subsequent references for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* will be given as *Their Eyes* in the text.

1. White Supremacist Capitalist Ideology and Feminism in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison

Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison represent the most acknowledgeable writers of the African American novel. All of their works are deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery and serve as the literary reminders of racial discrimination, generational trauma and segregation of African Americans within the dominant, white-supremacist capitalist world. bell hooks defines the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" that is visible in Hurston's and Morrison's novels as:

> a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (1)

Both authors have managed to subtly interweave this ideology into their novels in order to address its devastating influence over black men and women, but also over the black community in general. Hurston and Morrison express their concern about the ways in which the white culture has managed to indoctrinate the black society to believe in their inferiority in relation to the white society. According to Maryemma Graham, the purpose of their novels was "the continuous need to explain and 'inscribe the self' in a world which has historically denied the existence of that self gives both focus and intensity to the act of writing a story about black life" (5).

Precisely because of that need for "re-inscribing," both Tony Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston construct their novels around the strong black female characters, yet in different ways. Hurston's Janie is a mulatto who is learning how to love herself and her appearance and who is constantly fighting against the social roles and beauty standards which are prescribed to her by the Anglo-American, Eurocentric, society. Unlike her, Morrison's Sethe faces her traumatic memories of slavery and infanticide which are materialized through the ghost of her two-year-old daughter. Their fight against racism through the depiction of strong and independent black women makes them the most important representatives of black feminism. Alice Walker defines black feminism as "womanism" and explains it as "the way black women draw attention to their racial selfhood, identity and energies" (qtd. in Kohazadi et al. 1307).

According to the contemporary feminist theory, the rise of black feminism is considered to be connected to the 1920s and Harlem Renaissance, and Zora Neale Hurston is one of its major contributors. Hurston is best known as the author of the novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939). She also published two folklore collections, *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* in 1938, as well as several essays and short stories which describe African American culture and heritage. Nowadays, her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* represents one of the fundamental works of black feminist thought. Unfortunately, that was not a popular opinion when the novel was first published in 1937. Sarah M. Corse and Monica D. Griffin claim that

> in the 1930s, African American literature that ignored the relationship between races was understood as both "untruthful" and as pandering to white sensibilities. Currently, such literature can be understood as both more "authentic" and as a vital component of an independent African American cultural history and life. (185)

Hurston's use of the African American dialect and her representation of an emancipated black female character were misunderstood at the time and thus severely criticized. Hurston was trying to portray Janie's life and her liberation from white patriarchal dominance that was incorporated within the black male characters. Literary theory that was dominant after the Civil War was unable to recognize the message which the novel conveyed. One of the most ruthless critics of the time was Richard Wright, who claimed that *Their Eyes*

> carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which ... evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race. (qtd. in Corse and Griffin 178)

What Wright fails to recognize is that Hurston is not internalizing the white supremacist ideology and celebrating its influence over the African American society but rather warning against it. Alice Walker defends Hurston's work from such unflattering criticism by claiming that

> Zora's pride in black people was so pronounced in the ersatz black twenties that it made other blacks suspicious and perhaps uncomfortable (after all, they were still infatuated with things European) . . . Zora grew up in a community of black

> people who had enormous respect for themselves and for their ability to govern themselves . . . In her easy self-acceptance, Zora was more like an uncolonized African than she was like her contemporary American blacks, most of whom believed . . . that their blackness was something wrong with them. (qtd. in Corse and Griffin 190-191)

Hurston's work remained largely unrecognized during the Black Arts movement and the rise of the protest literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Her novels, essays and short stories became popular in the 1970s as a result of the rise of feminist theory and black studies, which was led by Alice Walker, Robert Hemenway and, later on, Toni Morrison. Thanks to the women's liberation movements, Hurston is now seen as one of the pioneers of black feminism who has created a self-governed, emancipated female character that would later on, become a cornerstone for the writings of Toni Morrison and many other prominent feminist writers.

Morrison is one of the most notable writers of the 1980s and 1990s, who has published five prize-winning novels and in that way secured high position in the African American literary canon. Unlike Hurston, Toni Morrison has been widely accepted and praised for her literary achievements. Carby explains the difference in reception by suggesting that

> Afro-American cultural and literary history commonly regards the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in terms of great men . . . [Now there is] a new 'black women's renaissance,' the contemporary discovery and recognition of black women. (qtd. in Corse and Griffin 186)

Toni Morrison has never acknowledged or denied her connection to Zora Neale Hurston's work, yet, there are undeniably a lot of interconnections between their works. Morrison gives us an explanation of this phenomenon by saying that

> [people] who are trying to show certain kinds of connections between myself and Zora Neale Hurston are always dismayed and disappointed in me because I hadn't read Zora Neale Hurston except for one little short story before I began to write. . . [The] fact that I had never read Zora Neale Hurston and wrote *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* anyway means that the tradition really exists. You know, if I had read her, then you could say that I consciously was following in the footsteps of her, but the fact that I never read her and still there may be whatever they're finding, similarities and dissimilarities, whatever such critics do, makes the cheese more

> binding, not less, because it means that the world as perceived by black women at certain times does exist, however they treat it and whatever they select out of it to record, there is that. (qtd. in Unger and Litz 966)

Morrison clearly claims that even though she has never considered Hurston's work as an inspiration for her own novels, she cannot overlook the similarities between their writing styles, specifically because all of those novels stem from the same tradition and heritage and serve as witnesses to the great social and racial injustice that was exercised upon black community. Their novels depict the psychological trauma that comes as a result of internalized racism and African American's belief in white superiority. The way in which the mechanism of the internalized racism operates is best described through her novel *The Bluest Eye*, where Morrison

> specifically addresses the psychological and political implications of black people's commitment to a standard of beauty (the blood-haired, blue-eyed ideal) and order (the life described in the Dick and Jane primer) that is unattainable. (Unger and Litz 968)

Just like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison is also worried about the representation of black female characters that were often misunderstood and misinterpreted by literary criticism. Morrison's and Hurston's female characters are encapsulating the horrors of slavery and are portrayed as victims of rape, bodily labor, sexism and infanticide. Toni Morrison has managed to represent their traumatic experiences and struggles through her prize-winning novels, which were instantly accepted by the wide audience. Her literary work also includes the novel *Beloved*, which was published in 1987 and which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction a year after its publication. Morrison has also received the National Book Critics' Circle Award for her novels *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*. When it comes to her literary work in general, Unger and Litz suggest that

> in each of her novels Morrison boldly reveals the silences and undermines the presuppositions, assumptions, hierarchies, and oppositions upon which Western, hegemonic discourse depends and which legitimate the oppression of people of color, women, and the poor. (968)

This struggle against the Western capitalist, patriarchal ideology is particularly visible in the novel *Beloved*, where her main character Sethe kills her own child in order to save her from becoming sexually and physically exploited by the white slaveholders. Her infanticide represents

slave's protest "against rape and the work of breeding" which "was as central to the struggle against slavery in the nineteenth century as it might yet be to the struggle against contemporary biocapitalism" (Weinbaum 440). Wienbaum implies that black feminism has occurred as a response to the long history of "racialized reproductive exploitation" (439) and sexual violence that was exercised over black females and which resulted in deeply rooted psychological trauma which was generationally inherited. Morrison's and Hurston's female characters turn readers' attention from the objectified (African Americans) to the ones who are objectifying them (Western culture) and in that way they affirm their racial identity, celebrating their heritage and fighting against the racist presumptions. Sacvan Bercovitch notes that these female characters reveal

> the championing of black womanhood and its corollary, respect for black manhood; an attack on lynching; the recognition of the ways that race, for black folk, has been made to stand in for a permanent low-class status; and the affirmation that poor whites are not, at least materially, any better off than their similarly deprived black neighbors. (297)

2. White Supremacist Capitalist Ideology in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Morrison's *Beloved*

The following chapters will thoroughly analyze the ways in which white capitalist ideology is embedded within the novels *Beloved* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The analysis will show the narrative and stylistic methods which the authors have incorporated in their novels in order to depict the devastating influence of slavery on the African American society and to explain the causes of black infatuation with Western culture.

Both *Their Eyes* and *Beloved* represent an attempt to release black people from the traumatic and self-destructive view of themselves as the "Others," as those who do not belong and who are not good enough. The objectification of the black subject is the dominant procedure which is used to enlighten the problem of African American subordination accomplished through naming:

> The objectification of slaves is a well-documented method used by slave owners to distance themselves enough from their slaves to treat them as non-human. The namer has the power; the named is powerless. In order to break away from this sense of powerlessness, Afro-Americans have historically "unnamed" or renamed themselves. (King 58)

Names represent the bond to our identity and without our names we lose our connection to our heritage, culture, family and community. Hurston and Morrison use the method of naming to depict the ways in which the white capitalist society has robbed African American people of their identity, and therefore of their power to free themselves from being defined, modeled and repressed by the Anglo-centric society. Barbara Rigney claims that "to be female, as to be black is most often to suffer the oppression a being named by another" (61).

Being named, constructed and identified by the white culture has caused perpetual trauma within the black subjects. They have been separated from their own culture and rejected by the white society, which caused the separation in the first place. This traumatic experience has generated, according to W. E.B. Du Bois, a feeling that being an African American is like being

> a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others [whites], two unrecognized strivings […and] longing to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (qtd. in Schreiber 5-6)

Beloved and *Their Eyes* portray the devastating effects of the double-consciousness on the black community and its efforts to encompass the process of being defined and constructed by white supremacist culture. bell hooks describes this process of self-definition as the "contradictory longing to possess the reality of the Other, even though that reality is one that wounds and negates" (qtd. in Schreiber 18). Hurston and Morrison did not use these issues to describe an interracial conflict between African Americans and white people. They used them to address a much bigger problem, and that is the African American infatuation with the white man's culture. This infatuation caused them to look upon their own race as inferior and to internalize negative aspects of white supremacist ideology. Evelyn J. Schreiber describes this process of internalization of the negative images of the black society in the following way:

> The paradox of belonging to a marginalized culture within a larger culture creates conflicting cultural aspects of individual subjectivity. At the same time, members in the larger, dominant culture maintain their identity by rejecting a suppressed group and must accomplish this distance through an emphasis on difference. The dominant culture distances itself from marginalized groups largely through projection of its negative aspects outward onto others. (22)

This points us to another method of objectification and that is the objectification through visual imagery. By positioning the visual images of blackness in a subordinate position in comparison to the images of whiteness, white people have secured their reign over the African American society. bell hooks argues that

> long before white supremacists ever reached the shores of what we now call the United States, they constructed images of blackness and black people to uphold and affirm their notions of racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave. From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination. (2)

Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison have recognized the power of visual perception and used it to warn the future generations against "the seduction of images that threatens to dehumanize and colonize" (hooks 5). *Beloved* and *Their Eyes* suggest that the possibility of defeating those destructive images lies in the strength and unity of the African American community, in their power of subverting that grip over the perception of their bodies and minds. According to Barbara Rigney,

> identity is always provisional; there can be no isolated ego striving to define itself as separate from community, no matter how tragic or futile the operations of that community might be. Individual characters are inevitably formed by social constructions of both race and gender, and they are inseparable from those origins. (55)

Community, as well as family, plays a significant role in both novels. Both Morrison's and Hurston's heroine reaffirm their racial and individual identity through their social interactions with the members of community. In this way, the authors show that no one is capable of constructing their own identity without integrating and associating him or herself to a larger group identity. Furthermore, Schreiber determines that

> personal memory shapes and is woven [into] group memory… the fact that getting in touch with the "collective past means getting in touch with the individual experience of abandonment ... Remembering and mourning become signs of the subject's agency and recovery." (31)

2.1 Elements of White Supremacist Capitalist Ideology in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Beloved*

The influence of white supremacist capitalist ideology is visible in its power to control and subjugate the characters in these novels. The psychological manipulation of the black society is achieved by the means of objectification, naming and control of the visual images.

From the beginning of Hurston's novel we can see the ways in which visual images eradicate people's sense of identity. We can see that, from her early childhood, Janie is defined and subjected through the eyes of the white man. She is described as an object, a woman in a racist, patriarchal culture:

> Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, "Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?" Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said: "Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!" (Hurston 21)

Janie is unable to recognize her own image and therefore she is deprived of her identity from the early childhood. The visual objectification of Janie's body is seen even within her own society. When she returns to Eatonville all of the men see her as an object of sexual desire: "firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume" (Hurston 2), while other women resent her and hope that she will "fall to their level someday" (Hurston 2). It seems that Janie's white features have a mesmerizing effect over black men and provoke hatred among other black women. In that way, men objectify her body and see her as a thing rather that a person, while women deny her the identity of a black female. The reason for that may be in the fact that white features in black community are seen as sexually desirable. Other black women are clearly threatened by her looks because they find their own skin tone less desirable: "Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish" (Hurston 2).

It is visible that white people have constructed these hateful images of blackness in order to ensure their idea of racial superiority. This internalized loathing of black features within African American women has caused Janie's alienation from their society. She is rejected

because of her physical appearance and her improved social status – because of the fact that these traits make other black women feel less worthy.

Hurston's Janie is not the only one who is isolated and rejected by her own community because of the color of her skin. In Morrison's *Beloved*, the local teacher, Lady Jones, also suffers insults such as "white nigger" because the rest of the community feels envious and threatened by her. In this case, they are not threatened only by the white features in her physique, but also by the fact that she is educated, and they are not. By saying that "all that yellow gone to waste" (Morrison 247), they imply that it is a shame that her white features are suppressed by the black ones. They prove the fact that they have subconsciously internalized white ideals of beauty and discarded the black ones. She represents all of those things that are unattainable and thereby they feel the need to discriminate her.

This privileging of the white people's attributes over black ones is especially visible in Mrs. Turner's case. She is a black woman, yet she bears some Caucasian characteristics, just like Janie. She is infatuated with the notion of whiteness and idolizes those features. She gives us a very disparaging image of the black people by saying that "'If it wuzn't for so many black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin' us back'" (Hurston 210). By referring to the black people as "niggers" she belittles her own appearance and rejects her African American heritage. She also uses this expression to provide herself with a feeling of superiority over black people. Mrs. Turner shows us that the depiction of the black female body bears a shameful context, because she, as well as other women of the black community, sees the Caucasian characteristics as more desirable:

> All gods dispense suffering without reason. Otherwise they would not be worshipped. Through indiscriminate suffering men know fear and fear is the most divine emotion. It is the stones for altars and the beginning of wisdom. Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers. Real gods require blood. Mrs. Turner, like all other believers had built an altar to the unattainable — Caucasian characteristics for all. (Hurston 215-216)

The mesmerizing effect of the unattainable white physical features is also depicted through Daisy, a girl in Hurston's novel with whom all of the black boys seem to be infatuated with:

> She's got those big black eyes with plenty shiny white in them that makes them shine like brand new money and she knows what God gave women eyelashes for, too. Her hair is not what you might call straight. It's negro hair, but it's got a kind of white flavor. Like the piece of string out of a ham. It's not ham at all, but it's been around ham and got the flavor. It was spread down thick and heavy over her shoulders and looked just right under a big white hat. (Hurston 105-106)

The boys on the porch are trying to court her, but Daisy ridicules them, and they do not mind it. The boys are dazzled by her "white flavor," which leads to a conclusion that most of the men in the novel are dazzled by the white man's culture. They associate it with power, money and prestige and they succumb to it, despite their hatred towards white supremacy.

Morrison and Hurston use characters like Mrs. Turner to warn the African American society about the dangers of fostering such humiliating and abominable images of themselves. What they are trying to prove is that the oppressors have no real power unless the oppressed believe in the power of their dominance. They are trying to depict a different aspect of racism, and that is the one that does not come from outside but from the inside of our minds. The reason why the white dominance remained intact for such a long period of time lies in the black people's belief in white supremacy. From this perspective, it is visible that Hurston has managed to look upon the problem of racism from a different angle by recognizing the blame in the black community. White people created the supremacist ideology and African Americans unconsciously internalized it. Coker in *Their Eyes* recognizes this problem by claiming that "Us colored folks is too envious of one 'nother. Dat's how come us don't git no further than us do. Us talks about de white man keepin' us down! Shucks! He don't have tuh. Us keeps our own selves down" (Hurston 63).

Morrison also recognizes how cruel and destructive envy can be within her own race. In *Beloved*, she puts a part of the blame for Sethe's bloodshed on the African American community. White people have managed to brainwash them, to make them look down upon their own friends and neighbors and feel contempt:

> The others, ahead and behind them, would think she was putting on airs, letting them know that she was different because she lived in a house with two stories; tougher, because she could do and survive things they believed she should neither do nor survive. (Morrison 47)

The influence of white supremacist ideology and its dazzling effect over black community is best portrayed through the character of Jody[2] Starks in *Their Eyes*. We can recognize the features of the white supremacist ideal in his appearance at the beginning of *Their Eyes*, where he is described as

> a cityfied, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going. He was a seal-brown color but he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that to Janie. (Hurston 47)

Janie is not the only one who is blinded by illusion of Joe's superiority. From the moment of his arrival, Joe treats people of Eatonville as his own personal slaves. Joe immediately notices that "Dis town needs some light right now" (Hurston 72). In that way, he infers that it needs a touch of the white man's culture. He symbolically positions himself in the center of Eatonville, so that he can have a better hold on his property. Joe even uses a catchphrase "I god," thereby referring that he is an all-knowing, superior man. His appearance and attitude made townspeople obey him because it irresistibly reminds them of the white slaveholders:

> There was something about Joe Starks that cowed the town. It was not because of physical fear. He was no fist fighter. His bulk was not even imposing as men go. Neither was it because he was more literate than the rest. Something else made men give way before him. He had a bow-down command in his face, and every step he took made the thing more tangible. Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with bannisters and such things. The rest of the town looked like servants' quarters surrounding the "big house." And different from everybody else in the town he put off moving in until it had been painted, in and out. And look at the way he painted it—a gloaty, sparkly white. (Hurston 75)

What made them bow down to Joe was his attitude of a white man. That attitude made them admire him and believe that he knows better and that he is better than them, because of that they agree to "bend which ever way he blows" (Hurston 78). Joe's power does not come from his intelligence but from people's willingness to obey and to believe in his authority. Even

[2] The name Jody is also used to refer to Joe Starks, one of the main characters in Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

though these people were aware of his power over them, they were not able to resist. As Hurston puts it,

> it was bad enough for white people, but when one of your own color could be so different it put you on a wonder. It was like seeing your sister turn into a 'gator. A familiar strangeness. You keep seeing your sister in the 'gator and the 'gator in your sister, and you'd rather not. (77)

The features of whiteness and blackness also bear another function in the novels. They serve as a constant visual reminder of sexual abuse of the African American women and the heritage of slavery. Due to that heritage, African Americans consider themselves as inferior to white people. Even Nanny in *Their Eyes* indicates the devastating influence of that heritage by placing the black women on the bottom of the power hierarchy, saying that

> de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world. (Hurston 29)

Here we can see that Hurston introduces a symbolic connection between mules and African Americans by equating their function as humans with the function of service animals. By doing so, she identifies the demeaning position that some African Americans ascribe to themselves. They see themselves as an expendable workforce of the white capitalist society.

Likewise, Morrison's novel also shows the ways in which white people belittle African Americans through a disgraceful image of the statue at Bodwin's house. As Sethe's daughter Denver walks out of their home, she notices

> a blackboy's mouth full of money. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words "At Yo Service." (Morrison 255)

This statue portrays the subservient position of black people which was generated by the dominant American capitalist society. Morrison's Sethe refuses to let the white man assign this

inferior position to her children, she refuses to allow them to be sexually, physically and psychologically abused and dehumanized. Instead, she decides to kill them out of the paralyzing fear that they would one day suffer like she did:

> *She* might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter. And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. Maybe Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused—and refused still. (Morrison 251)

Visual images are not just representing the internalized self-hatred and fear within the black community; they are also the signals of deep psychological trauma. In Morrison's novel, Beloved returns as a materialized projection of her mother's emotional distress caused by the murder of her infant daughter. From the beginning of the novel we have very little knowledge of what really happened to Sethe because her memories are fragmented and embellished. She refuses to remember her past and the retelling of particular events is, therefore, delusional. For instance, she relates the scars on her back to the chokecherry tree, refusing to identify them for what they really are:

> After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her beloved eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still. (Morrison 16-17)

Sethe lives in the world of denial and refuses to appoint and name the horrible things that happened to her with their true names, instead, she describes them through metaphors. Therefore, she calls scars from the whipping a "chokecherry tree," a name bestowed by the white girl called Amy, and the rape committed by the Schoolteacher's nephews is defined as the "taking of the milk." These scars represent the generational trauma which was born during slavery and which marked slaves as white man's property:

> "Yes, Ma'am," I said. "But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me, too," I said. "Mark the mark on me too." Sethe chuckled. "Did she?" asked Denver. "She slapped my face." "What for?" "I didn't understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own." (Morrison 61)

Beloved appears as a mirror which reflects Sethe's and Paul D's traumas, she lifts the veil in order to identify their true nature, so that the process of healing and recuperating can take place.

Naming is another form of addressing the problem of white supremacist ideal within the African American society. Names are powerful links to our identity, heritage and family. Many slaves were deliberately re-named by their masters in order to prevent them from getting in touch with their friends and family if they were to escape. Therefore, re-naming was a powerful weapon of claiming dominance and ownership. In addition, most of the slaves were separated at the early age from their mothers and fathers and did not have an opportunity to experience the nurturing environment that only family could provide. Baby Suggs compares this human trafficking to playing a game of checkers:

> What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. (Morrison 23)

Both texts demonstrate the necessity of concealing biological relationships among slaves in order to disable them from forming any kind of affectionate relationships with their families. Many black women were separated from their children in order to nurse babies for their white masters. By subduing their maternal role within the black family, white masters managed to evoke an identity crisis. They blurred their connection to their families so that they could treat their children as merchandise: "Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (Morrison 209).

As a result, slave parents learnt not to love anything in hope to alleviate their sense of loss. In that way, white people were alienating slaves from their society and constructing their authority. By robbing the slaves of their sense of selfhood through social isolation and renaming, white masters were establishing their regimentation. Paul D is the one who realizes that when you are denied of your name, you are denied of your identity and dignity, as well as your freedom:

> Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. (Morrison 72)

Paul D sees himself as a victim of the demeaning classificatory act of naming. His real name is eradicated, he has no dignity or sense of identity and he believes that he is inferior even to an animal. Even a barn animal possesses a name while he, as a human being, is denied of it. The lack of name is present throughout both novels. Paul D's name is chosen according to an alphabetical order by his previous owner, while Janie in Hurston's novel was named Alphabet. In a similar way, Sixo in *Their Eyes* was probably named according to a numerical order. In contrast to them, Stamp Paid's slave name was Joshua, but he decided to change his name in order to indicate his freedom from the chains of slavery. In that way, he rejects the white man's possession of his body and refuses to be identified as someone's property. Similarly, Sethe's mother recognizes the importance of owning your name and therefore she gives her "the name of the black man" (Morrison 62). By giving her a male name, she hopes that her daughter will not experience the sufferings of the female slaves. She hopes that she will evade being used for labor, reproduction and sexual molestations by her white masters. Yet, unfortunately, Sethe suffers a similar destiny.

Names can also indicate the absence of family or any foothold to tie your identity. For instance, when Mr. Garner asks Baby Suggs about her name, she says that her name is "Nothing" and therefore suggests that she has no family or history to connect herself with. At the same time, members of her community call her Baby Suggs, the name that her husband gave her. The fact that she did not give up that name suggest that she still has hope that her husband will one day find her. The similar function of the name appears in *Their Eyes* when Nanny claims that she "ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave" (Hurston 34). By identifying themselves with nothing they affirm the white man's sense of appropriation and dominance over them.

Mr. Garner sees that the power of giving names clearly belongs to the superior ones, so he suggests to Baby Suggs: "if I was you I'd stick to Jenny Whitlow. Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro" (Morrison 142). For the rest of the Kentuckian community he is a good slaveholder, he does not torture, rape or kill his slaves and his plantation is seemingly a utopian world. Yet, it is actually far from utopia. By giving them a false sense of safety and selfhood, Mr. Garner exercises his power over them. He prides himself with the fact that he calls his slaves "men" and it gives him a feeling of complacency: "my niggers is men every one of em. Bought

em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one" (Morrison 10). Mr. Garner clearly ascribes himself the divine role of creating human beings and being in charge of their manhood. In that way, he shows that they are not in possession of their own identity and that they represent nothing but a capital, a good investment. The person who reminds them of their position in the hierarchy is the Schoolteacher who asserts that the "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (Morrison 190). He objectifies slaves by the means of personification, by lowering them to the level of animals. This is particularly evident when he asks Sethe "to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right" (Morrison 193). He believes that Sethe's personality is no different than that of a barn animal, so he rebukes his nephew for raping her by telling him:

> to think — just think — what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert—bite your hand clean off. So he punished that nephew by not letting him come on the hunt. (Morrison 149)

It is evident that names serve as signals or markers of the institution of slavery and white supremacist capitalist ideology within the black community. Those signals are even present in the names of places and therefore Sweet Home and the irony of its name indicate their inability to have a real home, whereas Eatonville comes from the name of Captain Josiah Eaton, a white slaveholder who was executing his authority over a small black community. Likewise, Joe Starks exercises his power over Eatonville's community, he even says that "De man dat built things oughta boss it" (Morrison 48).

Moreover, names also serve as markers of physical and sexual abuse of black female slaves. For example, Ella in *Beloved* calls her white master and his son "the lowest yet" and she connects that name with a severe psychological trauma that they have caused. She claims that "it was 'the lowest yet' who gave her a disgust for sex and against whom she measured all atrocities. A killing, a kidnap, a rape — whatever, she listened and nodded. Nothing compared to 'the lowest yet'" (Morrison 256). By referring to them as "the lowest yet," Ella refuses to identify them as human beings because she believes that humans are incapable of exercising such immoral and ignoble actions.

Similarly, the name Beloved comes from the seven letters on the headstone of Sethe's daughter which she was forced to pay through sex. It is evident that names designate the absence of identity as well as slaves' inability to have control over their lives. They show us the unacceptable side of white capitalist ideology which was denying them their heritage and thereby ensuring their servile position in the American society.

3. Feminism in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Morrison's *Beloved*

This chapter will in depth analyze the ways in which Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison have incorporated the feminist theory into their novels. Feminism and white supremacist ideology are undoubtedly deeply connected and, therefore, the writers use similar narrative strategies while shaping the female characters in their novels.

The first issue that both of the writes address is the issue of destructive visual imagery of the black female body imposed by the white society. Zora Neale Hurston's Janie is a mulatto, a visual reminder of rape, while Morrison's Sethe reclaims the ownership over her own body through infanticide. Clarke argues that such behavior "challenges dominant theories about the power hierarchies embedded in sight, long associated with white control, with Plato's rationality and logic, and, from a Freudian perspective, with male sexual dominance" (148).

White features within black female body evoke a sense of insecurity and fear in men. They associate the Caucasian characteristics with white slaveholders and they feel as if they need to exercise their dominance in order to prove their masculinity. Clarke explains that

> the female figure, beyond providing pleasure for the looker, also implies a certain threat: "her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure . . . Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of the men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified." (155)

Hurston and Morrison use this imagery as a weapon for reclaiming power over black female body, which was objectified by both white and black society. Sigrid Kind implies that black women have experienced a "double dispossession." He sees the source of this dispossession in Lorraine Bethel's assumption that "the codification of Blackness and femaleness by whites and males is contained in the terms 'thinking like a woman' and 'acting like a nigger'" (qtd. in King 59). This means that both Morrison and Hurston had to create powerful and independent female characters in order to withstand the demeaning, sexist view of black men and women which spawned from the white supremacist society.

Both novels deal with patriarchal, sexual dominance of black men over women. On the one hand, Janie's husbands seem to be threatened by her body and her self-confidence and,

therefore, they exhibit some form of violent behavior to remind her that they are superior. On the other hand, Paul D is threatened by Sethe's inner "animal" which refuses to be contained and exploited by white men. As hooks explains it,

> this work conveyed the message that black masculinity was homogenous. It suggested that all black men were tormented by their inability to fulfill the phallocentric masculine ideal as it has been articulated in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. (89)

The men in both novels are represented as violent, insane and dangerous and their insanity "is informed by their inability to fulfill their phallocentric masculine destiny in a racist context" (hooks 89). These novels are trying to depict the ways in which black men are trying to suppress the dominance of women by muffling their voice and even their appearance, just because

> they wanted black women to conform to the gender norms set by white society. They wanted to be recognized as "men," as patriarchs, by other men, including white men. Yet they could not assume this position if black women were not willing to conform to prevailing sexist gender norms. (hooks 92)

The objectification and racial violence toward black females do not come only from men but from the whole community. Alice Walker sees the cause of that in their traumatic experience of slavery. She implies that

> at the root of the denial of easily observable and heavily documented sexist brutality in the Black community . . . is our deep, painful refusal to accept the fact that we are not only descendants of slaves, but we are also descendants of slave owners. And that just as we have had to struggle to rid ourselves of slavish behaviors we must as ruthlessly eradicate any desire to be mistress or "master." (qtd. in Fulton 86-87)

Both Janie and Sethe are excluded from their communities because their self-sufficiency and independency are seen as something unnatural and threatening, because this is not perceived as "normal" behavior in the eyes of the white society. Therefore, the black woman is "oppressed almost beyond recognition – oppressed by everyone" (Kohazadi et al. 1307). Hurston and Morrison fight against the derogatory position of black females by discarding the sexist, patriarchal views of their position within the American society. bell hooks reaches the

conclusion that since the community's vision of black masculinity is in agreement with the patriarchal role of men in white nuclear family, "they do not threaten or challenge white domination, they reinscribe it" (98). This is why their violent behavior manifests itself almost like an innate defense mechanism. The experience of slavery has emasculated them and made them aspire to prove their manliness through abusive repression of women and in that way irreversibly jeopardized the position of black women in the African American community.

3.1 Elements of Feminist Thought in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Beloved*

Feminist theory and its elements play a significant role in Hurston's and Morrison's novels. The authors portray the lives of two African American women as well as their position within the black community and American society in general. By doing so, they fight against the demeaning sexual, familial and social roles which are assigned to them by the white patriarchal vision of womanhood. The position and experience of an African American woman is examined through visual sphere by demonstrating that black women are objectified as a result of men's insecurities, but also because of the internalized ideal of white nuclear family where the man is the provider and the woman is the nurturer.

The novels are particularly concerned with patriarchal, sexual dominance of black men over women. In *Their Eyes* Janie's husbands seem to be threatened by her body and her self-confidence and, therefore, they exhibit some form of violent behavior to remind her that they are superior; whereas in *Beloved* Sethe is abandoned by every man because of their inability to dominate her and their lack of manliness. Both novels convey the message that black men are mentally handicapped by their incapacity to fulfill the phallocentric ideal of masculinity. This ideal is deeply rooted in the white patriarchal ideology and it was transferred onto black men through the traumatic experience of slavery. The men in these novels are represented as violent, insane, dangerous or generally incompetent. All of them are in some way failures and their insanity comes from their inability to formalize the phallocentric masculine view of themselves that was generated through racism. As Morrison describes it,

> It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (198)

Furthermore, the strength of the male oppression in this novel is most visible in the narrator's voice. Both novels are written in the third person voice that by the end of the novels becomes a blend of the third and the first person voice. The mixture of different voices is particularly present in *Beloved*, where we have an exchange of several different narrators. This

exchange has caused the fragmentation of the storyline, which has been very popular in the period of postmodernism. It is a signal of internal conflict and self-criticism present within the main character; it is a marker of Sethe's psychological trauma. This presence of the third voice in the novels may as well represent Janie's and Sethe's struggle to tell their story in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. In contrast, the presence of the first person voice at the end probably suggests that they have won the battle against that kind of oppression and became a paragon for all of the black women who have successfully established their own individuality in spite of the oppression of their social and cultural environment. Yet, the path toward emancipation was not easy for Janie and Sethe.

During their whole life, Janie and Sethe learn how to accomplish their individuality despite the constant opposition of men, but also of the other women. For example, in Hurston's novel Nanny is the one who undermines Janie's perception of marital roles and love. She makes her marry the man she does not love because she "don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on" (Hurston 27). Nanny believes that there is no such thing as marriage based on love, at least not for slaves. The only purpose of marriage is, in her view, financial security and enviable social position. The fault for that can be seen in her dolorous memories of the years she spent in the bondages of slavery. That horrific experience has made her believe that all men are emotionally detached and unable to see themselves as women's equals as a result of their "nature":

> "Humph! don't 'spect all dat tuh keep up. He ain't kissin' yo' mouf when he carry on over yuh lak dat. He's kissin' yo' foot and 'tain't in uh man tuh kiss foot long. Mouf kissin' is on uh equal and dat's natural but when dey got to bow down tuh love, dey soon straightens up." (Hurston 40-41)

In this way, Nanny poses the idea that the views of masculinity are not socially constructed but rather imposed by another agent, in this case, by white patriarchal culture. This culture has modeled the repressed vision of the woman as the one who subjugates to her husband, and not vice versa.

The issues of black femininity and masculinity are implemented throughout both novels, yet the authors use different approaches. Hurston addresses these issues through the description of men's violent outbursts and misogyny, while Morrison portrays her men as cowards and emotional cripples who feel threatened by women and their independence. Morrison's vision of black men and African American community is best comprised in Baby Suggs opinion that

> they encouraged you to put some of your weight in their hands and soon as you felt how light and lovely that was, they studied your scars and tribulations, after which they did what he had done: ran her children out and tore up the house. (Morrison 22)

This statement expresses the author's vision of black men which she will portray through Paul D's and Halle's relationship with Sethe. The way in which men were psychologically damaged by slavery is introduced at the beginning of the novel when Morrison describes Sweet Home men as "all in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl—the one who took Baby Suggs' place after Halle bought her with five years of Sundays" (11).

It is visible that slaveholders were not just in property of black men's freedom and body, but they were able to limit and control their sexual life as well. This de-masculinized them and prompted them to strive for the masculine ideal which was prescribed within the white patriarchal society. The process of de-masculinization was particularly devastating for Paul D because it robbed him of any sense of humanity, individuality or manliness. This is particularly evident in the following passage:

> Paul D hears the men talking and for the first time learns his worth. He has always known, or believed he did, his value—as a hand, a laborer who could make profit on a farm—but now he discovers his worth, which is to say he learns his price. The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future. (Morrison 226)

The fact that white men could determine his value made him believe that he could never be a man enough. Consequently, he adopts the patriarchal model of behavior in order to establish his manhood and determine himself as an autonomous human being. Moreover, the patriarchal vision of masculinity required suppression of women and their identity. The female subjugation was necessary for men to feel self-accomplished. Their oppressed position during the enslavement caused the absorption of sexist views of male-female gender roles. Those views caused Paul D's jealousy of Sethe's ability to establish her life without the help of men: "All by yourself too." He was proud of her and annoyed by her. Proud she had done it; annoyed that she had not needed Halle or him in the doing" (Morrison 8). His need for dominance over Sethe is evident from the moment of his arrival at Sethe's home. He realizes that Sethe already has material security, so he sees his opportunity for domination by offering her emotional security

through the exorcism of the ghost. Once he drives away his only rival, Paul D decides to closely evaluate his property: “He was not judging her—or rather he was judging but not comparing her. Not since Halle had a man looked at her that way: not loving or passionate, but interested, as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality” (Morrison 25).

He mimics the behavior of the white slaveholders and visually evaluates Sethe’s physiognomy and in that ways turns her into an object. Paul D does not use physical or verbal abuse to oppress Sethe, he merely pushes her away from himself because he is afraid to share his emotional burden with her:

> Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn’t get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose now in front of this sweet sturdy woman, for if she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart bright as Mister’s comb beating in him. (Morrison 72)

This seems to be the prevailing pattern of behavior among Sethe’s men. Both Paul D and Halle are insecure and feel ashamed for not being able to prove their manhood and protect her. Therefore, they decide not to reveal their emotions. Paul D projects his feeling of shame onto Sethe by making her count her feet when he finds out about the murder of her daughter, while Halle disappears after witnessing Sethe being raped as an act of self-preservation but also shame from not being able to protect her:

> “He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?” “Hey! Hey! Listen up. Let me tell you something. A man ain’t a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can’t chop down because they’re inside.” (Morrison 69)

Paul D creates a false identity for Sethe and Beloved is the one who unmasks it and forces him to face his true self. She revives his feeling of insufficiency through copulation and confronts him with his insecurities. Paul D tries to conceal that mistake by telling Sethe that he wants to have a child with her:

> So, when he saw the diminished expectation in her eyes, the melancholy without blame, he could not say it. He could not say to this woman who did not squint in

> the wind, "I am not a man." "I want you pregnant, Sethe. Would you do that for me?" "Think about it," he said.[...] And suddenly it was a solution: a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell—all in one. (Morrison 128)

The reason why he feels the need to "document his manhood" is because of the fact that he wants to deny his true feelings, as well as to hide his acts. His behavior represents a typical patriarchal, phallocentric response which appears as a result of the lack of identity and self-confidence. Yet, unlike Hurston's men, Paul D realizes that the only possible way of healing and retrieving your sense of self is by acknowledging a woman as your equal, as the one who will not denigrate your masculinity, but strengthen it:

> Her tenderness about his neck jewelry—its three wands, like attentive baby rattlers, curving two feet into the air. How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next to hers. "Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow." (Morrison 273)

Morrison's novel suggests that black women and men need to see each other as equals, not enemies because that is the only way of overthrowing the destructive, patriarchal views of gender and black femininity. Mutual appreciation and support is the only possible way of establishing one's sense of satisfaction and identity.

Hurston approaches this issue in a different way. *Their Eyes* also depicts the ways in which Janie's husbands were threatened by her self-sufficiency and Caucasian features and, therefore, felt the need to objectify her. Yet, unlike Sethe, Janie establishes herself as an independent, self-sufficient woman who does not need a man to feel fulfilled. Hurston depicts the ways in which she defies traditional sex roles imposed by white patriarchal society. Janie's fight against gender subordination is particularly evident within her marriage with Joe Starks. Unlike her first husband, who followed Nanny's doctrine and assigned Janie the role of a "mule," Joe needed Janie as a means of exercising his sense of control, power and domination. We can see his intentions from the moment they first met, when he describes Janie as a woman whose "place is in de home" (Hurston 69). Yet, instead of placing her in the house, Joe confines Janie to the area of the store. His patriarchal bigotry is particularly evident in his opinion that women are feeble-minded and incapable of being men's equals by saying that "somebody got to

think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves" (Hurston 110).

Joe exercises his patriarchal domination over Janie by not allowing her to speak in public or to socialize with other people from Eatonville. He insists that the townspeople call her Mrs. Mayor Starks because it signifies his power over her and his superior position in the community. Joe explains it in the following manner: "She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang" (Hurston 66). To ensure his power and Janie's place within his organization he uses restrictions, insults and control. The first thing that Joe notices is the way in which other men see Janie. Her straight hair and Caucasian characteristics make her an object of every man's desire and therefore his masculinity feels threatened, as Hurston explains: "It was hard to love a woman that always made you feel so wishful" (174).

Janie's autonomy and her physical attractiveness awaken his phallocentric response and because of that he belittles and humiliates Janie in front of others. Joe feels insecure about his physical appearance and, as a result, he feels the need to regulate her physique by making her wear head-kerchief:

> This business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store. It didn't seem sensible at all. That was because Joe never told Janie how jealous he was. He never told her how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it as she went about things in the store. (Hurston 86-87)

The only person who recognizes Joe's amour-propre as the reflection of his weaknesses and insecurity is Janie. After he mocks her physical appearance in front of everyone by calling her an old lady, she decides to fight back. She refuses to let him destroy her willpower and female identity and emasculates him with her own words in front of everyone. Janie makes him see his own shortcomings and in that way turns him into a victim: "Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing" (Hurston 123).

It is visible that Joe wanted to confine Janie to the gender roles that were established in the white bourgeois society. Once he is robbed of his sexual power and masculinity in front of everyone, Joe dies because he is unable to deal with the loss of his dominant, patriarchal position

over Janie. However, Janie is not the only woman in this novel who performs a verbal castration of a man. This act is also visible when Mrs. Turner implies that her husband is not a man because he did not defend her during the fight in their restaurant: “What kinda man is you, Turner? You see dese no count niggers come in heah and break up mah place! How kin you set and see yo' wife all trompled on? You ain't no kinda man at all” (Hurston 226). By urging her husband to become “a man,” she is asking him to strive for the ideal of masculinity that was developed within the frames of patriarchy.

The patriarchal model of behavior which is imposed on the African American men is also recognizable in Janie’s third husband, Tea Cake. At first, he seems as a different man, a man who respects a woman and gives her an opportunity to be his equal. They play cards together, he teaches her how to use a gun, how to fish and gives her an opportunity to socialize with townspeople. But later on we find out that he is not so different from Joe Starks. Her Caucasian features seem to cause insecurity in their minds because other men start to recognize the beauty of their property. Joe Starks made Janie hide her beautiful, straight hair, while Tea Cake uses physical violence to ensure his power over her. Their actions are actually evidence of their powerlessness and their fear of woman’s dominance. Therefore it is evident that her Caucasian characteristics represent a white man’s power which both of them crave for and want to dominate.

Tea Cake’s violence manifests itself when he overhears Mrs. Turner’s advice that Janie should be with a Caucasian man such as her brother. The white features of Mrs. Turner’s brother make him a white rival to Tea Cake and remind him of his oppressed position in the American society. He feels threatened by these characteristics because, whether he would like to admit it or not, he finds them more appealing because he associates them with power. Due to that, it is possible to claim that Tea Cake beats Janie out of sexual jealousy, in order to prove to himself that he is a man and that she is his property:

> When Mrs. Turner's brother came and she brought him over to be introduced, Tea Cake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior 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 218)

This patriarchal and sexist thinking is also visible in Sop-de-Bottom’s implication that Joe is a “lucky man” because Janie bruises are visible, unlike those on black women:

> “Dat's de reason Ah done quit beatin' mah woman. You can't make no mark on 'em at all. Lawd! Wouldn’t Ah love tuh whip uh tender woman lak Janie! Ah bet she don't even holler. She jus' cries, eh Tea Cake?” “Dat's right.” (Hurston 147-148).

His remark confirms the notion that black men feel the need to prove their supremacy through physical violence and sexist behavior. Their sexist view of black women triggers phallocentric response within all of them. It causes constant mistreatment and objectification of women to a level where they are no longer seen as human beings but as things and commodities.

Another thing that Tea Cake and Joe Starks have in common is that they want to prove their manliness and potency to their community but also to white men. Unfortunately, that is not possible without the existence of susceptible, submissive women. This is why they want to turn Janie into an obedient wife – into their property. Joe has done that by impersonating the white slaveholders through his oppressive behavior towards Janie and the other members of the community and by showing off his material superiority over them. Tea Cake, on the other hand, has done that by showing that he valued the white man’s opinion more than anyone else’s. We can see that when he refuses to run away from the hurricane, as the Indians have suggested, because “De white folks ain't gone nowhere. Dey oughts know if it's dangerous” (Hurston 231). He does not question or challenge the white man’s domination, he confirms it with his behavior because without the white man’s protection he feels “lak uh motherless chile” (Hurston 255-256).

As we can see, racism deeply affects masculine identity and its visual power objectifies women in the African American society. The notion of patriarchy within the black community reflects the power hierarchy that is born in and inherited through slavery. The reason why black men and women in these novels fail to recognize the influence of this heritage is because they do not want to appertain to slavery. Due to that, Morrison and Hurston stress the importance of “re-memory,” of recognizing the past for what it was in order to heal. Through the process of remembering, the authors try to prove that the oppressors have no real power unless the oppressed believe in the power of their dominance. The internalized racism is the most destructive form of discrimination because it causes self-hatred and the perception of your own skin color as undesirable and both Morrison and Hurston indicate the need for its prevention.

Conclusion

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* are some of the most representative novels of the black feminist thought and African American novel in general. Both authors have embedded the issues of white supremacist capitalist ideology and black femininity in their novels in order to address the problem of racism in the American society. They have successfully depicted the post-Civil War period when the ex-slaves and their descendants had to overcome the traumatic experience of slavery in order to form their identity outside of the racist context.

Beloved and *Their Eyes* examine the ways in which white supremacist capitalist ideology indoctrinated black people to believe in their inferiority, worthlessness and in that way made them lose their sense of autonomy. These novels describe how the imposition of white supremacist ideology has caused irreversible psychological damage to African Americans. Furthermore, they show us how naming, objectification and the control of visual imagery were used to instill slaves with a sense of perceiving themselves as expendable merchandise.

Both novels depict the lives of autonomous, sturdy women who fight against the predominant patriarchal views of gender roles which demand their oppression. Their independence and visual features make black men and women feel threatened because of the negative perceptions of their physical appearance which originated from white supremacist ideology. Hurston and Morrison see the necessity of unveiling and destroying internalized racism and self-hatred which appeared in the African American society as a result of enslavement. Their novels document the consequences of intra-racial violence, sexism and misogyny and in that way they examine the racial problems that are current in the present-day society.

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