



Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

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Abstract

This study is about the African American Harlem Renaissance star Zora Neale Hurston and her link to this movement. She was perceived negatively by some central male figures in this movement because she didn't follow the trend of "propaganda" for "race lifting." She was accused of presenting a very negative image of African Americans. This image matches the stereotypical white views of the black. They believed such an image must be suppressed or marginalized in favour of something more urgent that serves the black as a whole. Others found in this approach an attempt on Hurston's part to reach and make her voice heard for the white and her interests with white publishers. In fact, she was a folklorist and anthropologist dedicated to preserving the African American heritage. She transcended the "race people" for an objective and scientific representation of her people. She examines the relationship between Hurston's text and culture as a text, her role as outsider/insider in telling the black folktales, occupying an anthropologist job that is classified as exclusively masculine and done by the white.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary movement located in Harlem and resulted from the South's black migration associated with urbanization and industrialization. Harlem became the black capital in the USA and the heart of black life. The beginning of this movement as a literary one is inaccurate, but most critics mark the publication of Jean Toomer's *Cane* in 1923 as the start of the Harlem Renaissance. (Huggins, 2007, p. 13) A year later, Alain Locke's book *The New Negro: An Interpretation* laid down his views on the emerging Harlem Renaissance. It included a collection of fiction, graphic arts, poetry, and critical essays on literature, art, and music produced by black people. However, defining the movement's time, space, and period is very complex. Harlem was not the only location for this movement. The visual arts and music started earlier than 1924, and some were not originated in Harlem, like Jazz and the blues. Both come from the South of New Orleans, Memphis, and Saint Louis before spreading to Chicago and then to New York before WWI in 1905. They became very popular in clubs, orchestras, and on Broadway in black musical comedies like *The Chocolate Dandies* featuring these new musical kinds. Visual arts like painting and sculpture emerged later in Harlem after Aaron Douglas's arrival in 1925.

Another complexity emerges in defining the relationship between Harlem and the Renaissance. "Harlem" meant conflicting images for black Americans during the first half of the 20th century. Was it the land of refuge, of hope, or the land of emerging slums and black

ghettos? It was the land of dreams in Rudolf Fisher's "The City of Refuge." For Langston Hughes, it was also a refuge. James Weldon Johnson's book *Black Manhattan* represented Harlem as a perfect place, "a phenomenon, a miracle straight out of the skies." In his article "A Decade Of Urban Tragedy: How Harlem Became A Slum," Gilbert Osofsky, a Harlem Historian, said that the big change the city witnessed in the twenties was "its emergence as a slum." Within a decade, Harlem moved from a rich, prosperous "ideal community to a neighbourhood with manifold social and economic problems called 'deplorable.'" (Osofsky, 1965, p. 135) In short, the day-to-day realities that most Harlemites faced differed dramatically from the image of Harlem life presented by James Weldon Johnson. Harlem was beset with contradictions. While it reflected the self-confidence, militancy, and pride of the New Negro in his or her demand for equality, and it reflected the aspirations and creative genius of the talented young people of the Harlem Renaissance along with the economic aspirations of the black migrants seeking a better life in the north, ultimately Harlem failed to resolve its problems and to fulfil these dreams. It was a symbol rather than a sole location during the 1920s and 1930s. It drew from, extended to, and influenced African American communities all over the country.

This movement emerged out of the social and intellectual upheaval of the African American community after WWI. It has no ideological or stylistic standard to unify its figures and define the movement. All its figures refused black or white efforts to categorize or put their production within one frame. In fact, it was in search of identity more than ideology or a literary or artistic black school. Its figures were committed to giving a voice to the African American experience. In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes argued that:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If coloured people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes, 1994, p. 694)

This was a call for independence from the stereotypes of how white people view blacks and their literary production, as well as from how black leading figures and critics view black writers and their works. This stand did not appeal to other figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, who answered Hughes in his article "The Criteria of Negro Art," saying:

All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (Du Bois, 1926)

Du Bois and the followers of his stand were concerned about the political costs that result from a such a realistic representation of black life. It goes with the white racism and stereotypical expectations by showing the less appealing elements of black people. Hughes and Claude

Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

McKay used the ghetto as a setting for his novel *Home to Harlem* to explore life in Harlem. Both of them, with other writers like Rudolph Fisher and Wallace Thurman, were accused of representing crimes, sexuality, and other negative aspects of ghetto life in Harlem and other urban centers to feed the desires of white readers and publishers.

In addition to these two contradictory stands, other leading figures, such as Zora Neale Hurston took another route by trying to recapture the African American past represented by its rural southern roots and African heritage. This was due to the rise of pan-Africanism in African American politics, a point of interest for Du Bois in the 1920s.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research has been conducted in light of many related studies. Zora Neale Hurston was both praised and condemned by her contemporaries for her literary attempts as well as for the way of life she led.

In her book *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, biographer Carla Kaplan (2002) asserts that this counter-culture stand was the cause of marginalizing her among her contemporaries and the decline of her status into quick oblivion, and what set off the campaign by strong political arms to relegate her to the perimeters of the collective voice of the movement.

In "Resurrecting Zora," Chris Danielle (1999) argues that Alice Walker was amazed by Hurston's writing and language, by the representation of blacks as "complete and complex individuals undiminished by the negative stereotypes or characterizations depicted by society."

Hurston problematized and destabilized African American history, culture, folklore, and identity by deconstructing them from a very modern perspective. She analyzed folklore and its fluidity. For her, African American folklore and identity are not a matter of "being" but of "becoming," belonging as much to the future as it does to the past and present.

Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," speaks of two concepts of identity: the first is of "Oneness," of "being" where we share one culture and similarities, and the second of "becoming," which includes similarities and differences among a group of people/ immigrants.

Nathan Irvin Huggins' book *Harlem Renaissance*, though it goes back to the early 1970s, builds on the multiple constituents of black identity as well as the white one from the perspective of cultural studies and postcolonial theory. However, they had not yet emerged in the crystalized way we use them today.

3. ZORA NEALE HURSTON THE CONTRARIAN

Zora Neale Hurston was a folklorist and anthropologist from Eatonville, Florida. Her exploration of black southern tribes and history was the basis of her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in addition to other works like *Mules and Men* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*. She was dedicated to the preservation of this heritage, travelling to some of the most remote places of the southern United States in the early part of the twentieth century to collect and interpret songs, stories, and the folklore of rural blacks. This work was absolutely unheard of at the time for any woman, especially a woman of colour. Being a product of the rural south, Hurston was not interested in going with the time's political agenda. Her interest lay in

presenting the folk life of the men and women she grew up listening to and inspired by them. Hurston's ideology complicated the paradigm of the new black cultural identity.

Hurston was critical of the black leadership of the Harlem Renaissance because of their "pandering to the popular palate." However, she was close to its main personalities like Alain Locke, Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson as well as she also accepted white financial support as a good number of her contemporaries in the Harlem Renaissance era. With the eye of the folklorist and anthropologist, Hurston gave us a different view of the rural South. She glorified it and transcended the "race people" and the propagandist in favour of an objective and scientific representation. Being a black female anthropologist was out of the historic context for both the black male and the whites. Giving an objective and positive view to a certain extent of the black identity in the south became the symbol of the kind of cultural stagnation the Harlem Renaissance leaders rejected. Carla Kaplan suggests that this counter-culture stand was the cause of marginalizing her among her contemporaries and the decline of her status:

This was a risky move esthetically, and it was a risky move politically because it ran foul of the main aesthetic and political tenet of the Harlem Renaissance. Most of her contemporaries, which is to say also most of her dear friends in the Harlem Renaissance, were absolutely dedicated to the notion that the literary arts were the single most important way that blacks could achieve civil rights. They would do so by showing white America that blacks were really no different, which meant that the theatre and the fiction that was considered most important in the Harlem Renaissance were those cultural representations that showed blacks looking like mainstream ideas of white culture, which is to say Northern, urban, middle class, professional blacks. Hurston wanted to do something altogether different. She wanted to show white and black culture, a group of black Americans they had probably never heard of. So she wanted to go down into the deep south, into the sub-working class, and document the lives of what she called the 'Negro farthest down.' (Kaplan, 2002, p. 7)

So the emerging black cultural identity and political stand meant a new black aesthetics of versatility, modernism, progressive intellectualism, and racial pride expressed in various artistic expressions, dismissing the resented stereotypes of the South. Hurston was against this illusionary ideal progressive black identity because it didn't exist.

Hurston wrote to Eslanda Robeson as a result of the criticism against her work, saying: "I tried to be natural and not pander to the folks that expect a clown and a villain in every Negro. Neither did I want to pander to those 'race' people who see nothing but perfection in all of us" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 299). Being a controversial writer, Hurston has been criticized by some critics during her life by names like Richard Wright and Wallace Thurman for her thorough description of black people's activities as well as their dark side to the white people to the extent of identifying her with the white people who suppress the "weaker" race because of their "chauvinistic taste" (Kaplan, 2002, 216) which Hurston known how to satisfy and please as Wright stated, especially after she wrote her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This criticism took another direction (maybe additional) that it was mostly by black male writers who criticized this novel because of its rebellious character, Janie Crawford, who was completely different from the typical black women perceived in the society: a housewife,

Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

second to her husband, submissive and unopinionated, as Franklin and Alfred argue in their book *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African American* (291-293). Wallace Thurman, the founder of Fire magazine and Hurston's contemporary too, ridiculed her in his satirical novel *Infants of the Spring*, which Nathan Irvin Huggins considered "an obituary of the Harlem Renaissance" (Huggins, 2007, p. 191) in his book *Harlem Renaissance*. Thurman used his novel to give his views of the movement and its figures in disguise. Hurston was presented as a calculating short story writer who is "a pagan that pleased her white friends. . . . using white folks to get what she wanted" (Huggins, 2007, p. 130). Huggins quoted from the novel:

It's like this... I have to eat. I also wish to finish my education. Being a Negro writer is a racket and I'm going to make the most of it while it lasts. Sure I cut the fool. But I enjoy it, too. . . . And the only way I can live easily until I have the requisite training is to pose as writer of potential ability. Voila! I get my tuition paid at Columbia. I rent an apartment and have all the furniture contributed by kind hearted o'fays. I received bundles of groceries from various sources several times a week. . . . Thank God for this Negro literary renaissance. Long may it flourish. (Huggins, 2007, p. 131)

He considered Hurston a "ribald wit and personal effervescence than for any actual literary work" (qtd. in Huggins, p. 130). He believed that she tricked her white admirers without their notice "with tongue in cheek." Thurman said that Hurston was a master of dialect and a great storyteller, but her great weakness was carelessness or indifference to her art" (p. 131). So, she must have developed her talent and depended on herself rather than satisfying her white audience and their wishes.

Moreover, the accusation and Hurston's imprisonment for molesting a mentally retarded boy destroyed her name and fame. Though the accusation was baseless and Hurston could prove her innocence, her reputation was damaged among people, and she thought of committing suicide. She didn't recover from the influence of this devastating event which led her life away from literary events, except for writing few articles in some magazines and newspapers. Such a disastrous incident paved the way for a new wave of criticism to arouse.

This famous Harlem Renaissance star faded into oblivion. Most Harlemites created a type of literature concerned with racial protest, violence, cruelty, and injustice committed against black. The majority were engaged in superficial and distorting images and descriptions of black African Americans and their culture. Hurston wasn't interested in writing about those issues. Her horizon was wider and more profound. She was interested in approaching the understanding of the black's inner world and their way of life. Maybe, this could enhance a better understanding of the black by the white. Her poor black characters were not acceptable to the majority of black authors who believed in literature as "propaganda." This version of her works, in general, her approach, was not acceptable or authentic. Their approach was to fight for the equal rights of the black. They didn't have in mind the common black people. The black in their books relate to the middle class, remote from the common or the masses (the ordinary) because they cared about the addressed, the educated white.

Something else attributed to her marginality was the English used. Black writers wanted to eliminate the use of African American Vernacular English and specific black idioms to show that the English used by African Americans was the same one used by white

Americans. Henry Louis Gates argues that this linguistic approach on her part made those Harlemites critics condemn her, something celebrated these days. Dialect was regarded as inappropriate, vulgar, and undesirable to use in writing, especially since it refers to the language of the poor blacks, different from the standard American English of the white. So the Harlemites wrote to impress the white; Hurston wrote to reveal and introduce black people, culture, and art to the white as well as to captivate her own people.

In “Resurrecting Zora,” Chris Danielle argues that Alice Walker was amazed by Hurston’s writing and language, by the representation of blacks as “complete and complex individuals undiminished by the negative stereotypes or characterizations depicted by society” (Danielle, 1999). She discovered her when Walker was writing a story on voodoo and gathering materials. She came through Hurston’s *Mules and Men*. She was so excited to the extent that she shared it with other people who came to realize that they knew and heard of those stories but just forgot about them. She considered Hurston’s stories “warm and folksy.” They made her remember “racial health” among blacks. Walk’s argument had to do with Zora’s admiration of her culture to identify with it. This relates to how Zora tried to eliminate the importance of colour from her life, although it had an enormous influence on everything she did. Walker wrote “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” and later “Looking for Zora.” In her essays, she goes to Eatonville, Florida, to find out more about Zora, masquerading as her niece and inquiring about the cause of her death and what kind of life she lived. She narrates her journey to reflect for the reader her emotional journey to know about Hurston. In Walker’s essay, she emphasizes that Hurston didn’t necessarily identify with one race, white or black and didn’t have a good relationship with her own family. Walker’s argument had to do with Zora’s ability to identify with cultures beside hers. In fact, when it comes to race, Hurston had very little understanding of race or what is meant by “colored” until she became adolescent, 13 years old. She didn’t let race speak for her or character. In her essay “How it Feels to be Colored Me,” she rejects to let race define her because it is a state of mind, it is constructed and it is not a reality but it is also something that should be embraced. She didn’t believe that she is the color of her skin. Blacks were the victims of their skin color and faced racism and discrimination for generations, Hurston refused to be “tragically colored,” and she didn’t identify with “the sobbing school of Negrohood” who “weep at the world.” She would not blame the world for her shortcoming. It “fails to register depression with her when she is reminded that she is “the granddaughter of slaves.” Maybe, she is fortunate that she wasn’t the direct product of slavery as her ancestors were. That is why she was not affected by it, or she didn’t carry feelings and sentiments that pertain to her. Moreover, she believed that her ancestors struggled through hard times to have her on a path destined to be great. They paid very big price to make her rise and be successful. Hurston embraces the past and how far her skin color weighs on her, but she doesn’t let it draw her future.

Hurston details her childhood in Eatonville, saying that it was exclusively “a coloured town” (Hurston, 1928, p. 1). The race wasn’t an issue for being surrounded by people who looked and carried themselves the same way she did. The only people she had contact with were the white ones who “passed through the town going to or coming from to or coming from Orlando.” Her “queer exchange of compliments” (Hurston, 1928, p. 2) with them was not enough to make her feel coloured. However, she became “a little coloured girl” when she went to school in Jacksonville, a diverse city where she had to encounter the concept of race, but she

Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

felt that she could transcend it like the flip of a light switch. When she was on Seventh Avenue in the Harlem neighbourhood, she believed herself to be the "Cosmic Zora," a being of the universe, instead of being a coloured woman in America (Hurston, 1928, p. 3-4). It is not that Hurston believes that she is better off without her race, but she wouldn't allow the thought of colour to affect her inside.

Though it likes to ignore race, she admits the difference between racial cultures and celebrates them. There may be similarities between cultures, but there will be factors that differentiate them from each other. In Hurston's case, it is music she feels herself intoxicated and charmed by the Jazz music at The New World Cabaret with white men. Its "tempo and narcotic harmonies" make moves to the full. Her white friend stays "motionless in his seat, smoking calmly." Jazz is originally black music that goes back to slavery. When Hurston's pulse is "throbbing like" a war drum from dancing widely, it represents her connection with her roots. Music is part of her culture, and she embraces it. Hurston believes there is nothing wrong with embracing one's culture, but it doesn't define one's individuality and identity.

Things set races apart but make them each different and unique in their own way. (p. 3) The race is a very complex issue. In fact, it divides and unifies America. Hurston saw race as limiting in organizing groups on its basis as some Harlemites did. Politically, it may unify them, but on an everyday basis, it eliminates individual differences. Hurston knows she is a black woman but wouldn't let this point mark whatever she does or how she understands the world. Back again to her idea that race is a state of mind, it is an ideology constructed.

In fact, Hurston's deteriorating status among the so-called "race people" was also due to her radical independence. She wanted to be herself, different from the other members of the movement, by challenging what the others tried to impose, though she shares the aim of creating the New Negro. She has her own perspective. She didn't care for the criticism, and her works were published like *Mule and Men* (a collection of African American folktales), followed by *Tell My Horse*, a Voodoo study from her Haiti research. Her novels continued.

Cornel West's article "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" gives more credit to Hurston, though his criticism is directed toward the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s. He suggests that their cultural constructions were:

Courageous yet limited Black efforts to combat racist cultural practices. First, they proceeded in an assimilationist manner that set out to show that Black people were really like White people- thereby eluding differences (in history and culture) between Whites and Blacks. Black specificity and particularity were thus banished in order to gain white acceptance and approval. Second, these Black responses rested upon a homogenizing impulse that assumed all Black people were alike- hence obliterating differences. (West, 1993, p. 262)

That is what Hurston tried to reveal in her writings by really deconstructing the assumed homogeneity among even the black. Maybe this is due to her upbringing in Eatonville, where the city was totally populated by only black people; she did not experience a sense of difference, racism, and inferiority. Eatonville was "not the Black backside of a white town," as Hurston wrote in her autobiography. She was proud of her southern native culture and its

folklore. Hemenway, the first writer of her biography, analyzed her position in an interview with him, saying that being black in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, you have to experience the race problem:

But Hurston's point was that there's so much more to life as a black person than just the race problem, and that's the way whites tend to define black people, tend to define black people in terms of what's their position on the race problem, how are they interacting with the White world. Hurston was less interested in how somebody was interacting with the white world than she was in how people were just plain living their lives. Hurston was writing about the black community from within. She wasn't writing protests as some black writers of the time were doing. The conflicts that she ran into about her own work tended to be conflicts over why wasn't she writing a protest novel like Richard Wright's *Native Son* or why was she just talking about people having a good time when we're living in a country where full citizenship rights to black people were being denied... where black people in the south could lose their lives if they impacted on the white community in the wrong way." (Hemenway, 2007)

Another important point about Hurston's representation of her native culture is by showing its complexity. In fact, she could see farther than her Renaissance contemporaries by approaching culture differently. Carla Kaplan argues in her article "Zora Neale Hurston: Folk Performance and the 'Margarine Negro'" that Hurston considered folklore "the life and colour of my people." (Kaplan, 2007, p. 222) However, she suggests that Hurston saw it differently, far from what is called roots, originality, and authenticity. For her, authenticity is inherent in self-expression and faithful transcription. "What was self-expressed and transcribed, in her view, could be complete invention, as long as these two conditions were met" (qtd. in Kaplan, p. 223). Hurston believed that folklore's power lies in being "still in the making."

Black folklore is not a thing of the past. "It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man" (p. 223). The scholar cannot dig deep to revive it. It is what "people create," which is why certainty is denied. Hurston concluded that "what we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas . . . the exchange and re-exchange of ideas" (p. 224). She connected authenticity with cultural authority, not original sources, and treated folklore as a performance rather than static timeless sayings and acts.

This approach helps us to see "race" in this light. Blackness or negroness is no longer a static, unchanging entity. It is always fluid and in flow, subject to every day, every position, every location, and endless reinvention and plays. In fact, Hurston problematized and destabilized African American history, culture, folklore, and identity by deconstructing them from a very modern perspective. Her contemporary male Renaissance figures were essentialists or classical humanists in dealing with the issue of blackness. This lady was far advanced for her age. I see the modern concept of identity in the way she analyzed folklore and its fluidity. African American folklore and identity are not a matter of "being" but of "becoming," belonging as much to the future as it does to the past and present. They undergo a constant transformation, especially in the light of movement and relocation. As Hurston said, they are "still making" and constantly shifting. Instead of thinking of them as accomplished facts, they are a product of, never accomplished and never complete. They are always in process in the

Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

light of two main waves of immigration: the first from Africa (enslavement) and the second from the South to the North of America.

This diasporic experience sutures or fractures any real sense of definite identity, heritage, or community. Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," speaks of two concepts of identity: the first is of "Oneness," of "being" where we share one culture and similarities, and the second of "becoming," which includes similarities and differences among a group of people/ immigrants. He associated identity with culture. Immigrants always have a culture or belonged to one. He connects the second concept of identity with the trauma of immigration. The question becomes "what we really are?" and "what we are becoming?" in the process of shifting and transformation. They are no longer fixed in the past. They face the constant game of power, culture, and history. Searching for the past is not going to make him recover it. It would not protect the immigrant's sense of self or give him a sense of and position in the past. Any search for the past would give a sense of an "imaginary coherence" and "imaginary reunification."

Hall presents another point, building on Frantz Fanon: what is the nature of the "profound research" by generations that are far from the great grands after they were all subject to oppression, to disfiguring and distorting their culture and past to turn them into obedient slaves. In this case, what is left from the past? What is the relation between identity and history? Are there hidden continuities that can be unearthed to bring people together? In fact, "Not an identity grounded in archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past" (Hall, 1990, p. 224). This is the result Hurston reached. Her folklore collections become what Hall calls "an act of imaginary reunification" of "fullness or plentitude" (p. 225). He suggests that the past keeps talking to us, but it is no longer the simple factual past. "It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth." (p. 226)

Nathan Irvin Huggins' book *Harlem Renaissance*, though it goes back to the early 1970s, builds on the multiple constituents of black identity and the white one from the perspective of cultural studies and post-colonial theory. However, they had not yet emerged in the crystalized way we use them today. I agree with him when he located the movement in its historic context and analyzed the power relations and their influence on the black intellectuals within a white dominant ideological context. In fact, the powerless cannot stand alone. He has to depend on or derive from the ideology of power to have a voice and to reach. This keeps them enslaved to the forms and values of the powerful. That is what some leading figures in the Harlem Renaissance did: they adopted two contradictory approaches, one derived from white American values while simultaneously wanting to restore their African heritage. Huggins suggests that "white Americans and white American culture have no more claims to self-confidence than the black" (Huggins, 2007, p. 9). They are "provincial people," conscious of being a society in the making, and their heritage is European in spite of independence. How can the black intellectual of the New Negro Renaissance lead a movement built on foreign tools which are not related to the fabric of blackness? Does this step lead to a failure and a division in the main body of the movement, or is this appropriation inevitable to assert their own agency? Is it a matter of racial identity crisis that started with the American and moved by necessity to the black people who want to create their sense of self-assertion and self-definition

in this historic context where they are at the bottom and look to the top of the upward-mobility escalator? Is it a crisis or not?

I would like to go back to Hall's second definition of identity at this point. He describes it as a matter of "becoming" of "shifting" borders, especially in the case of immigration and diaspora. It becomes a mixture of "being" and "becoming." Immigrants are always seen as others in foreign countries. They can't get rid of their previous identities and have to face difficulties and adopt new identities to maneuver and adapt to the new environment to maintain their continuity. That is why it is built on "unstable points of identification, or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but 'positioning.' Hence, there is always a politics of identity, politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin.'" (Hall, 1990, p. 226)

The forced immigration of black and slavery with all its consequences in terms of different skin color tones and multiple African American cultures distorted as a result of enslavement over at least two hundred years do not maintain something called "African" or even "African American". So the attempt of the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals to restore something vague with no clear characteristic is futile. In fact they are nominally related to it. Frantz Fanon talked about the futility of such an effort: "passionate research . . . directed by the hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us" (qtd. In Hall, p. 223). The point is: what is discovered? how is it identified? Hall asks "what Africa has 'become' in the New World, what we have made of 'Africa': 'Africa'-as we re-tell it through politics, memory, and desire" (p. 232). What we have is the reflection of broken mirrors, or what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities" in his book of the same title. It is the discovery of the New World which led to the creation of this condition, to the creation of multiple identities through the diaspora.

Moreover, in following the steps of their progressive white brothers in being "committed to reason, truth, and enlightened democracy to bring about desired change" (Huggins, p. 48), they were imitating and assimilating white ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving to integrate with that class at the expense of suppressing characteristics associated with blackness or negritude. This move is dangerous to the aim of the movement and obliterates a lot of the causes which led to its emergence. The Negro can never become truly white, and he will not be accepted in white society. It is a sort of internalized racism. This is on the political level. However, culturally he is a mixture of African, American, and European traces. He is what Homi Bhabha calls "the mosaic figure" in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." The mimic adaptation of what is American, and what is white will create a "camouflaged" personality. He will be "in-between;" no longer black, not white. This will produce a "mottled" identity. Bhabha argues that "mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126). Mimicry "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (p. 129) that is why this process is very threatening to "negritude", to the "New Negro", to the Renaissance of what?! "Mimicry repeats rather than re-present" (p. 128). As I mentioned earlier, mimicry on the political level, is to a certain extent futile within the power relation of

Zora Neale Hurston's Controversial Relation to the Harlem Renaissance

historic context built on the superiority of the white and the inferiority of the black saturated with racism, segregation, and discrimination.

On the cultural level, mimicry is a normal process associated with or the result of immigration and diaspora. It is an everyday process of giving and taking, where all binaries of race, class, gender, nationality, and culture collapse. That what creates a fragmented or multiple identities being associated with the mobility. This mimicry functions for both the white (to a certain extent) and the black. Jazz appeals to the white and the minstrels to the extent that the white joined the black in performing it too. This fragmented or multiple subjectivity and urban alienation became characteristic of western modernism.

4. CONCLUSION

I see the movement revealed a lot of what it really intended. Zora Neale Hurston was ahead of her time. Her anthropological approach to studying and analyzing the so-called African American heritage, identity, folklore, and the decisive role of narrative contributed a lot to the way we understand the Other. Maybe her academic training plays a role. Her approach is very modern if we take it within its historic moment. That is why she was not appreciated by her contemporaries and was marginalized. Their stand was more political elitist that was after one goal, which is to reach the top of this class and race hierarchy, but on a human level, excluding other factors like gender, calling for unified efforts to uplift the race, knowing not that this identity fragmentation is the result of this very big European colonial project of discovering and colonizing the New World and this racial binarism is a mere political construction and a necessity for the white. The white were also entangled culturally in this project, but holding power within their hands made them believe in their difference, superiority and oneness. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said put it very simply in what he called “intertwined histories and overlapping territories”, describing the European colonial expansion, the multiplicity and hybridity which it generated.

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