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**The Quest for Identity and Individuality in Zora Neale
Hurstons' *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

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for a Master Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

“Every day, I like to wake up and remind myself to be grateful of the simple things.”

Miranda Kerr

I am grateful for every help I received. I am grateful for the help I gave too because it opened my eyes on mistakes I personally made.

The list is long, the heart is full, and the way is simple and short: Thank you ALL.

To Yasmine Levy who inspired me to keep going all the way long.

My mother, my mother-in-law, and my father, thank you for being here.

My gratefulness is oriented especially to my caring husband for his positive attitudes and spiritual support.

Mamma MENAGGUER

Dedication

I dedicate my achievement to the light of my eyes: my father and my mother.

I am thankful to the light of my heart: my husband for his encouragement and love.

Thanks go to my unique sister Chahra and my three brothers.

I am also grateful to my friend Mamma for her help and patience.

Ouafa DJEBNOUN

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Abstract

This dissertation attempts to investigate the theme of identity and individuality in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Janie, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes a long journey of self-realization through three marriages to recognize her identity in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, the current study has two main goals. First, it points out the most significant stages of the African American literature as well as the roots of the identity issue within the African American literary tradition. Secondly, it aims at analyzing the psychological journey of the heroine in search for her identity and individuality looking for the driving forces that contribute to the achievement of Janie's stability. In doing so, this research endeavors to spotlight the novel from a psychoanalytical lens. For its framework of analysis, the study draws on psychoanalytical approach. As for the findings, the study reveals that Janie's success to define her identity and individuality at the end of her journey is due to her perseverance to overcome the various obstacles that impede reshaping her real identity.

Key Words: African American Literature, Identity, Individuality, Patriarchal Society, Psychoanalytical Approach.

Table of contents

Dedication.....	I
Dedication.....	II
Acknowledgments.....	III
Abstract.....	IV
Table of Contents.....	V
General Introduction.....	1
Background of th Study.....	1
Previous Studies.....	1
Significance of the Study.....	2
Aim of the Study.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Research Methodology.....	3
Structure of the Thesis.....	3

Chapter One: African American Literature: An Overview

Introduction.....	6
1. The Development of the African American Literature.....	6
1.1 African American Literature and Slave Narratives.....	7

1.2 Post-Slavery Era.....	10
1.3 The Harlem Renaissance.....	11
1.4 Modern Literature.....	13
2. Identity Issue in the African American Literature.....	15
Conclusion.....	21
Endnotes.....	22

Chapter Two: A Quest for Identity and Individuality in Zora

Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Introduction.....	28
1. Plot Summary of <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	28
2. Janie’s Search for Identity.....	29
2.1 Nanny’s Character Impact on Janie’s Self-Maturity.....	30
2.2 First Marriage and the Beginning of Maturity.....	32
2.3 The Second Marriage and Joe Starks.....	34
2.4 The Third Marriage and Tea Cake.....	37
3. Individualism in <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	40
3.1 Janie’s Request for her Individuality.....	40
3.1.1 Janie’s Psychological Conflict with her Grandmother.....	41
3.1.2 Janie’s Decision Making.....	42
3.1.3 Janie’s Power of Speech.....	43
3.1.4 Janie’s Self-Achievement.....	44
Conclusion.....	49

Endnotes.....	50
General Conclusion.....	53
Works Cited.....	56
Appendix A: الملخص.....	60

General Introduction

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Background of the Study.....	1
Previous Studies.....	1
Significance of the Study.....	2
Aim of the Study.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Research Methodology.....	3
Structure of the Thesis.....	3

General Introduction

The history of African Americans in America is a long journey of racial struggle. The black minority in America witnesses a crisis of affirming their identity as an integral component in the American society. The theme of identity as common issue is strongly present in various literary works. The identity crisis has been a subject of interest for African American writers. Among those writers appears Zora Neale Hurston as one of the most influential figures of the African American literary tradition with a variety of valuable literary works: *The First One* (1927), *Mule Bone* (1930), *Mules and Men* (1935), and *Tell My Horse* (1938). Among these literary works comes her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) to be Hurston's best work. Best known for her depiction of the racial struggle of the African American minority in America, Hurston attempts to reflect the preoccupation of black females. Through her novel, Hurston incorporates the racial struggle of the black female in a patriarchal society. The novel has been a good area of inquiry for many researchers.

Their Eyes Were Watching God has been a fertile area of study. Thus, many academic studies have been conducted to explore different facets of the novel. *Ethics and Aesthetics Democracy and Difference in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a thesis that investigates the relation between egalitarianism as well as how the novel conveys the African American culture through a combination of postcolonial ethics and aesthetics. The theme of identity as the center of the novel has been explored from a feminist approach in a thesis entitled *The Quest for Feminine Identity in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Feminist Perspective*. The latter tends to inspect the quest for feminine identity of a black woman, Janie Crawford, the protagonist of the novel. *Zora Neale Hurston and Their Eyes Were Watching God: The Construction of an African American Female Identity and the Translation Turn in Brazilian Portuguese*

is another thesis in which the construction of the female identity of the heroine is analyzed. Also, the thesis studies the translation of the novel "*Seus Olhos Viam Deu*" to Portuguese.

Notions of selfhood, self-construction, and self-realization are core themes in the journey of Janie as she is exposed to difficult social conditions and experiences. Hurston goes beyond the social boundaries that submitted the black female to picture the successful model of Janie at the end of her journey who is able to take right decisions. The novel narrates Janie's struggle in racial environment along with three marriages on which she attempts to build a sense of self-perception. At the end of her journey, Janie acquires the capacity to be successful self-dependent woman capable of perceiving her selfhood as independent woman. The quest for identity and individuality is certainly the center of the novel. Although various contributions have been made to analyze the novel, the current study is an attempt to explore the themes of identity and individuality as they are the target goals of the protagonist in her journey of self-exploration.

The motivation behind the selection of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is that it reflects Hurston's intention to break down the racial boundaries between the blacks and the whites in America. On that ground, the novel is harshly criticized by many African American writers accused of devaluing the black minority. Hurston is criticized of underestimating the blacks by presenting an oversimplification of the black image in her novel. Hurston's deviation from the conventions of the New Negro Movement raises the attention towards the novel.

The current study aims at investigating the journey of the heroine Janie. In addition to that, it seeks to define the driving forces that lead Janie to liberation at the end of the novel. Besides, it provides a detailed analysis of the heroine's character as well as certain characters who are recognized important in the course of Janie's journey.

Three questions arise from the current research to be answered:

1- How does Janie's instability guide her to reach self-liberation?

2- How does Janie's resentment at social traditions assist her to realize her identity?

3-To what extent do Janie's three marital experiences contribute to the achievement of her individuality?

To come up with a deep analysis of the novel, the research adopts the psychoanalytical approach. The dissertation is divided into a general introduction, two chapters, and general conclusion. The first chapter traces back the historical development of the African American literature. It also investigates the roots of the identity crisis as an important theme in the African American literary traditions. The second chapter provides a literary analysis of the novel from a psychoanalytical perspective. It also uncovers the driving forces that assist the protagonist in her journey of self-realization.

Throughout the analysis of Janie's psychological journey, the study reveals that Janie's character and the conditions in which she grew up are important in shaping her personality. The feeling of missing the warmth of the father and the mother results in turbulent personality which is turned into an urgent need to find stability. Janie's resistance to the social traditions shows her self-determination towards finding the true way of listening to her own voice beyond the social boundaries. The three experiences of marriage contribute to a large extent to reshape her identity. With her first husband "Logan", she is treated as an object not as wife who needs to feel love and gentility. The second marriage with Joe Starks, Janie is under the supremacy of male arrogance. With Tea Cake, she has love and respect, but the marriage ends with the tragic murder of Tea Cake.

Chapter One

African American Literature: An Overview

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Introduction.....	6
1. The Development of the African American Literature.....	6
1.1 African American Literature and Slave Narratives.....	7
1.2 Post-slavery Era.....	10
1.3 The Harlem Renaissance.....	11
1.4 Modern Literature.....	12
2. Identity Issue in the African American Literature.....	15
Conclusion.....	21
Endnotes.....	22

Chapter One

African American Literature: An Overview

Introduction

Over the years, Literature has been the reflection of the human experiences. For African American writers, literature is the weapon of self-liberation, dignity, and freedom. Since the early beginning of its emergence, the African American literature has been the means of questing identity. Thus, this chapter provides a comprehensive coverage of the most significant stages that the African American literature has witnessed. As it tackles the identity as a focal point, this chapter investigates the roots of the identity crisis associated with the African American literature.

1. The Development of the African American Literature

The emergence of the African American literature dates back to the late of the eighteenth century. The arrival of the Africans to America as slaves to work in cotton plantations marks the beginning of the early literary works of African Americans and marks a painful experience of displacement and slavery for Africans. Many of them prefer to express themselves and depict the harsh livings they are exposed to every day under slavery. The marginal status that the African Americans suffer takes a major part in motivating them to produce the blacks' literary tradition. In his book *The Origins of African American Literature*, Dickson D. Bruce Jr. describes the harsh conditions which Africans encounter and states that "at various times and in various places, Africans in North America faced systems of slavery and freedom that were both oppressive and permeable, often at the same time. They were encouraged to think of themselves as part of

a larger American colonial society but as people expected to remain at that society's margins"¹.

The African American literature passes through significant stages. Each stage reflects the ongoing events in which this literature was produced. Thus, African American literature has been in a process of continuous progress. When tracing the historical development of this literature, it is notable that the writers' concerns and themes shift simultaneously with the concerns of the black community:

The African American literature is still a process of evolution, with its subjects being closely related to the slavery, the struggles and lives of the African Americans through history, race problems, literacy and new forms of verbal expressions. The fact that a lot of texts written have been lost somewhere along the way, presents a challenge, but new acquisitions and insights are constantly appearing.²

So to come out with a full understanding of African American literature, it would be better to trace back the most significant stages the African American Literature goes through.

1.1. African American Literature and Slave Narrative

Slavery is the darkest and the most painful experience Africans witness in America. Black writers find their refuge in literature and start to depict their personal experiences under slavery. They introduce accounts which narrate their stories as slaves. These accounts become to be known as "slave narratives". Philip Gould views slave narratives as "The "free" story they tell recounts both the physical journey from slavery to freedom and also the more subtle struggle to write independently, especially in light of the prevailing racial attitudes in antebellum America that might distort black authorship"³.

Slave narratives portray the inhuman practices of the white masters due to slavery impact in America. The emergence of this genre of literature launches the start for the

production of the African American literary works. In her thesis "*African American Literature: Slave Narrative*", Milevoj defines slave narratives as follows:

Slave narratives, either passed orally or written by the slaves themselves, are the accounts of their lives during the slavery and after or during their fugitive period. They present the most dominant and significant part of the African American literary tradition. The first narratives, that is autobiographies, started appearing between the year of 1760 and the end of the Civil War. After the year of 1865, when slavery was finally abolished, many of the former slaves devoted their lives to writing their stories and publishing their work. (13)

The enlightenment period has a profound effect on the emergence of early African American literary works and slave narratives. Since the enlightenment era is the period of liberty and natural rights, the debate over the independence of the colonies is on its extreme. These spreading ideas stimulated black writers to address slavery and question the status of the blacks in the American society.

Gould argues that there are certain reasons behind the appearance of early black writings. For him, early black writings were influenced by natural rights philosophy, sentimentalism⁴, affective forms of Christianity, and philosophical debates over the nature of race.(40)

In the same book, Gould goes on explaining the above reasons. He starts by exposing the effect of natural rights philosophy on black writers. Gould views that this philosophy gives black writers the humanitarian evidence to question their position in the American society:

The development of natural rights philosophy during the long eighteenth century provided black writers with an ideological foundation for arguing the terms of their own humanity. Rooted in a number of important, early modern philosophers, including Samuel Pufendorf, Emer de Vattel, Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, and, most importantly, John Locke, natural law philosophy generally undermined the traditional, Christian explanation for chattel slavery as the natural extension of the "slavery" of human sin. (40)

The culture of sentiment is another factor that Gould recognizes its influence on early black writings. Sentiment culture directs the attention toward the suffering of the Africans in America which in turn assist the black writers to gain sympathy through their writings:

Secondly, the rise of the cultures of sentiment was crucial to the humanitarian argument and affective appeal of early black writing...This new secular moral philosophy posited the existence of an innate “moral sense” in all human beings that governed the natural human affinity for beauty and virtue...This provided black writers with another important ideological resource for addressing the universal category of “humanity.”... The very idea that sympathy was the touchstone of human morality, and human happiness, provided much of the ideological foundation for black writing’s ability to argue for African humanity and against the African slave trade. (42-43)

Religion is another reason contributes to the production of early black writings. Gould sees that the changes of Christianity in the eighteenth century push black writers to produce indigenous writings:

The third major ideological resource for early black literature came from eighteenth-century evangelical religion. Indeed the sentimental appeal of black writing was often framed in religious terms. This was largely due to important changes that were taking place in Protestant Christianity during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ... Evangelical Christianity affected black print literature in primarily two ways. One was the influence that new denominations like the Methodists and Baptists had on the publication of black writing ... The second was more thematic and rhetorical. (44)

From a historical perspective, the three mentioned factors provide a strong evidence for the blacks to question their situation in America. Although they are written randomly by writers who are not unified under a black establishment, early African American writings and slave narratives signal a raising awareness among Africans to lessen the suffering of their black community in America. These writings can be viewed as the initial steps toward the formation of a black identity. Africans in America at that period were not granted a political identity as well as they were lost between their indigenous culture and the new circumstances they were living in America. Thus, the feeling of marginalization creates an urgent need to display the various forms of discrimination and inferiority. Slave narratives pave the way for the Abolitionist Movement and the Post-Slavery Era.

1.2. Post- Slavery Era

The Americans of African descent collaborate to abolish slavery and racism through different forms. These efforts are unified under “The Abolitionist Movement”. The later helps to put an end to slavery. Moreover, the section 1 in the 13th amendment which was passed by Congress January 31, 1865, and ratified December 6, 1865 supports the Abolitionists’ works and achieves their objectives since it states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”⁵. Consequently, African Americans start to publish non-fiction works which are known as Post-Slavery literature.

Among many celebrated works emerged are those of W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Du Bois was the leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)⁶ in 1909. He insisted on the equal rights of the Blacks in terms of living conditions. On the other hand, Washington was the leader of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (Tuskegee University)⁷. He asked for the compliance with the Whites’ laws in the Atlanta Compromise⁸. However they were seen as the leading figures of the abolitionist literature, Du Bois and Washington clashed together over the best methods towards the issue of equality and racial uplift:

...In his speech, Washington stated that African Americans should accept disenfranchisement and social segregation as long as whites allow them economic progress, educational opportunity and justice in the courts...Du Bois criticized Washington for not demanding equality for African Americans, as granted by the 14th Amendment, and subsequently became an advocate for full and equal rights in every realm of a person's life...In his essays, Du Bois presents comments on T. Booker Washington as he states: "does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions and opposes the higher training of our brighter minds”⁹.

With the end of slavery and after the Civil War, African American writers shift their writings towards a new aim which is rebuilding their cultural heritage and questioning their identity in the North of America.

1.3. The Harlem Renaissance

After the struggle over slavery which ends the long period of black sufferance, African American writers 'attention is directed towards the formation of African American identity. After the Great Migration of Africans from the rural South to the urban North, Harlem neighborhood in New York City becomes the City of Refugee which launches an explosion among black intellectuals in various fields mainly art, music, and literature. This explosion is known as "Harlem Renaissance". Therefore, black writers are unified under this movement to revive the lost African heritage. Hence, they consolidate their voices to celebrate the black race:

It was W.E.B. Du Bois who paved the way with his essays and his magazine *The Crisis*, but the Harlem Renaissance was mostly a literary and intellectual movement whose best known figures include Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer. Their work ranged from sonnets to modernist verse to jazz aesthetics and folklore, and their mission was race propaganda and pure art. Adding to their visibility were famous jazz musicians, producers of all-black revues, and bootleggers.¹⁰

Harlem Renaissance is considered the Golden Age of the blacks art. It knows many black Writers such as W.E.B Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Alain Locke, Alice Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston who show the high spirits by producing the most influential literary works. Their objectives are to change their living conditions and to build a union that is compatible with modernity¹¹.

Under Harlem Renaissance, African American writers share the view of addressing race as the main issue. Their interest was to display the true image of the blacks in America.

Also, women writers, in particular, hold responsibility of portraying gender crisis of women in patriarchal societies:

Among the most prominent writers of the period were a poet, novelist and short story writer Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, who worked in a great variety of genres, poet Countee Cullen, fiction writers Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen, fiction writer and poet Jean Toomer. In their work they reconsidered Black history and Black identity, explored Black folklore, the dialect forms of language, oral tradition. They attempted to explore the theme of Black experience using a new – modernist experimental and novel – artistic form ...¹².

As it is mentioned before, W.E.B Du Bois is one of the most prominent figures of Harlem Renaissance. He is best known for his notion of “Double Consciousness”¹³ introduced in his collection of essays “The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches in 1903”. According to Du Bois, double consciousness “is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity...” (“Double Consciousness”)¹⁴. Du Bois explores the identity crisis and the feeling of segregation that the Americans of African descents face in America.

Harlem Renaissance movement provides the opportunity to African American women writers to express their bitter experiences. They suffer double mistreatments for being black and female. The African American Women, who express their conditions through literary works, speak out loudly to quest their own rights. For this reason, “the decades from the 1880s to the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance are called the Black Women’s Era, a term coined by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the foremost African American intellectual who both preceded and shaped this period”¹⁵.

Some scholars believe that the Harlem Renaissance comes to an end due to various factors mainly the Great Depression in 1930. On the other hand, it is asserted that even

though the Great Depression reduces the publications' opportunities, there are different views about the movement's end. In this context, Dickson-Carr argues:

George Hutchinson asserts as well that "the New Negro Renaissance did not end in 1929," although "most of the creative writers of the 1920s and 1930s felt there was a distinct shift roughly coinciding with the turn of the decade, a shift announced by new satirical treatments of the New Negro by such authors as Wallace Thurman, George Schuyler, and Langston Hughes – authors who properly belong to both decades" .¹⁶

The end of the Harlem Renaissance marks a turning point in African American literature as well as in life in general. This period undergoes a radical shift in the way of thinking, writing styles and themes. This new change is labeled as the Modern Fiction.

1.4. Modern Literature

The emergence of modernism has a strong effect on African American writers. They get familiar with the new techniques introduced by modernism. The African American writers embrace many of the new forms of the modern era. In this sense, Craig H. Werner and Sandra G. Shannon state: "African American writers, musicians, and visual artists, equally aware of black vernacular traditions and European American modernism, forged distinctive forms to impart the social and spiritual meaning of black lived experience at a time of accelerating change"¹⁷.

In fact, writers of this era are originally Harlem Renaissance writers. They create new forms to the pre-written works about their life, rights, and post-reconstruction situation during the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem movement gives voice to African American female writers to express the race and gender submission which raise the awareness among those writers to ask freely and openly for equality and justice:

Between the end of the Civil War and the opening decade of the twentieth century there were roughly two generations of women writers who undertook the task of presenting the hardships, injustices, and wrongs committed against their race and their gender. Taken together, they formulate a theory of race literature; they write about slavery, its abolition, and its aftermaths of violence in their contemporary period; they rewrite traditional stereotypical images of manhood and womanhood and modify the generic

boundaries by mixing melodramatic, sensationalist, utopian, detective, political, romantic, and evangelical forms. (Wallinger 193)

Accordingly, women's literature addresses mainly race issue. They insist on their rights to express their own stories. This period is, for them, the period of their voice and their expression. The steps they take towards modernity inspire many other women to start their literary life. In this context, Keith Byerman and Hanna Wallinger state: "Much like other realist writers, African American women insist on their freedom of expression, their right to depict violence, lynching, and the often cruel legacy of slavery, however unliterary their subject might seem to an audience divided between negrophobia and a taste for local color, the exotic, and a sympathy for African American issues" (194).

On the contrary, men consider that women are created to be at home. Their husbands and children are their duty in life. As an opponent to this view, women decide to fight for their rights and to prove their existence to be as equal to men through literature. Thus, the most influential modern literature is presented by women writers through which they express their real objectives in life. Pauline E. Hopkins's essays are the best examples of women literature of this period as they explain the women's high spirit and willingness to fight against social discrimination as quoted by Keith Byerman and Hanna Wallinger in "The "Fictions" of Race":

Pauline E. Hopkins captures the spirit of this age in two essays about literary women published in 1902: ...She acknowledges that the element of race puts an additional stress on women, but is optimistic and hopeful: "Why is the present bright? Because, for the first time, we stand face to face, as a race, with life as it is. Because we are at the parting of the ways and must choose true morality, true spirituality and the firm basis of all prosperity in races or nations – honest toil in field and shop, doing away with all superficial assumptions in education and business".¹⁸

Different from the previous forms of literature, African American modernists apply new forms and styles in their works. They create three main techniques to distinguish their

writings from the other types of literature. In the same book, Byerman and Wallinger explain the strategies the African Writers apply in their modern literary works:

... First, they change the existing mode of the well-rounded novel by introducing didactic elements... when and where possible...Second, they issue a call to arms against prejudices and discrimination, and third, they advocate a retreat into the private and religious... Torn between the conflicting images of the loose woman, the mammy or servant, the beautiful heroine of mixed-racial origin, and the modern middle-class and educated woman, these writers intend to alert their audience that these stereotypes and expectations are flawed. (194)

On the top of that, one of the most distinctive techniques in African American modernism is defined as “crossroads modernism”. This trope is coined by the Professor of English and African American Studies Ed Pavlic by which he intends to “mark the point of intersection between “horizontal” (social, political) experience and vertical (psychological) experience...The distinctive aspect of African American modernism is its insistence that these two modes be brought into contact with one another” (246).

Even though the African American literature differs from period to period, it has the same principle which is unifying the Blacks under one voice. It is also directed towards the cultural resistance in order to rebuild their heritage and to achieve a status in the American societies. The African Americans either freed slaves or free blacks seek to gain their identities and to attain their individuality through literature.

2. Identity Issue in the African American Literature

The forced migration of Africans to America and their enslavement for multiple decades reinforce the emergence of the African American literature. It is unquestionable that the various forms of the African American literary works produced from the eighteenth century until the modern era share the theme of identity issue either in racial America or after the abolishment of slavery. In the beginning, writers assume their responsibility to display the real status of their black community under the submission of

slave owners. Then, their target aim was oriented towards the formation of black identity in industrialized society. Soma Das, an assistant professor in the department of English, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam in India and the author of an article named “Quest for Identity: A Major Concern in the Life and Literature of African-Americans”, comments on the struggle of Africans in America as follows: “The African-Americans in their passage through slavery had to struggle to establish a sense of identity, to find a voice, and to claim a political and cultural space in the United States of America. This murderous transit formed and reinforced an autonomous sense of black identity”¹⁹.

The oppression of the black community in America from the 18th until the 20th century preoccupies African American writers. The identity crisis of the blacks becomes a fertile area of discussion among African American writers. Many literary works approach the identity issue from different perspectives. The period after slavery abolishment and the establishment of “Harlem Renaissance” witness the appearance of fictional works dealing with the identity dilemma:

All the generations with all their movements and streams had one common aim –the effort to picture their view of the world in which they try to find themselves. As with new blood comes new spirit, generations varied in their ideas on the world and relations covered under its lid. The majority of the black who escaped slavery felt hatred and wanted to forget this part of their people’s history. Generations after sought back though. They realized that the time of slavery must not be forget, because of the influence it has on contemporary society.²⁰

Das regards that the fiction produced in that era was: “The African-American fiction came to be seen as dominated by the struggle for freedom from all discriminations and also striving to establish one's identity as an African-American” (86).

Both male and female writers agree upon addressing the identity issue; however, their access to this issue is different. Women have been always neglected even in literature. They are presented as unfavorable characters:

The male writers also portray the African-American male protagonists engaged in a quest for identity through an alternating pattern of withdrawal from and involvement with the community, and the female characters as stereotypical one dimensional figure. They remained concerned only with the black male psyche and at times even branded their women with a negative image. (Das 87)

“Harlem Renaissance” gives birth to female writers’ voice. By 1960, the wave of black feminism was on its extreme. Black female writers revolt against the typical portrayal of women within the black community and the American society in general. The enhancement of the female self-image is a priority for many women writers. Black women have to suffer twice. First, as women and secondly as oppressed black women in the white community. The exposure to slavery, sexual harassment, patriarchal submission of male give raise to many female writers to quest their identities from a feminist perspective. The idea of women autonomy attracts female writers to produce fictional novels on which female protagonists are portrayed on journeys of self-liberation, and actualization of oneself.

Although female and male writings go in parallel to each other, female writers access the issue of gender from a different perspective. The impact of slavery limits women image to a particular stereotype depriving them of developing a notion of the self. Women think that neither slave narratives nor later day writings were able to portray correctly the notion of a complete woman. Yet the Negro life underwent various changes, contemporary writings carry on presenting negative images of women. Therefore, African-American struggled in terms of race and class. They also struggle in another level to change the wrongful image of women in their real life and in literature. They seek to make great efforts to be socially involved by designing a strong status of the African American women. (Das 87)

The feminist beliefs among female writers become strong enough to encourage the open narration of the true life of the black women in society affected by the heritages of

racism. The seventies and eighties are the periods of the revolted writers against the submission and marginalization. In her teaching aid “The African-American Literary Tradition”, Diana Miniotaite explains how female writers integrate into the issue of identity in their literary works:

In the 1970s women began to express openly their experience as both suppressed women and members of minority groups. The black women writers of the period...explored the issues of their problematic position and struggle for liberation in a racial and mainstream culture. Their work marked a significant shift in African-American literature. As Catharine R Stimpson states, black women writers also claimed for the rejection of male power over women, the deconstruction of dominant images of black women, and the need for women to construct their own experience, history, and identity. (43)

Talking about the reasons behind the identity crisis in the African American literary works will inevitably lead to the historical context in which this crisis evolved. In his article, Das explains in details the reasons behind the African struggle to reach an identity that characterizes their existence as an integral component of the American society:

They were hurled into a new land, strange and hostile, where, for a second time they felt the slow, painful process of a new place and as a result of this confronted a concerned attack on a stable sense of identity. They could neither call themselves Africans nor Americans...In the New World the Negro, not only lost his culture but his very personal name. He was either given a Christian name or the surname of his master so that he could be easily identified that, he belonged to a particular master. The Negro, in this process lost his very personal indicator of identity. (83)

The black race and physical appearance are the centers of the identity issue for African Americans. The attitude spreads in America since their arrival there caused Africans a difficult life. The unjust judgment of Africans in America based on racial grounds hurts their dignity. In the same context, the discrimination the Africans living every day in racial America gives them the evidence to address the issue of race in their literary works:

The color of the skin “is the most obvious outward manifestation of race” and so “it has been made the criterion by which men are judged irrespective of their social or educational attainments” (Burns.p-16). In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema, where, the common remark made by the white was “Look a Negro” or “Mama, see the Negro I'm frightened” (Fanon.p-110). Along with the color of the skin, the physical features like hair, stature also made the life of a Negro miserable. (Das 84)

According to Das, religion is another motivating factor pushes the African Americans to quest their identity. During the journey of their dislocation, Africans lose their religion and convert to Christianity. In so doing, another unifying factor among Africans was left in the motherland:

The Africans, transported to this New World also lost their primitive religion. The religion which had helped them together was snatched from them and they were given the new religion of Christianity. The Blacks, to some extent responded as fervently as did the rest of mankind to the exhortations of the Quakers in their call for liberty, equality and fraternity, to the expressed conviction that all men are equal in the eyes of God. But soon they were disillusioned. Their captivity under Christendom blasted their lives, disrupted their families, reached down into the personalities of each one of them and destroyed the very images and symbols which had guided their minds and feelings in the effort to live. (Das 84)

Africans in America are exploited by European masters. Their physical conditions are suitable for investment in America to make wealth. The society views them as machines who are brought to fulfill economic goals. They were deprived of having their rights mainly education. Accordingly, Das states: “The African-Americans were also denied education. Their black bodies were regarded as good tools that had to be kept efficient for labour and hard work. Therefore, when schools were built, it was decided that the Blacks must not partake of the teaching in the schools” (85).

Historically speaking, the identity crisis of the Africans in America is mainly the result of the racial attitude towards Africans. What has been mentioned above sets the ground for African American writers to address the ongoing situation of their black community in the ethnic country. The identity crisis originates from the subjugation of the black community. This major group in America is denied its rights. As a result, writers reflect on their community concerns in their literary production.

The examination of the development of the African American literary tradition points out that the theme of identity is present from the emergence of the African American

Literature. Slave narratives as recounts of slaves' journeys during the period of slavery introduce the theme of black identity under the racial supremacy of the whites. Slave Narratives describe the physical and moral conditions that the slaves were exposed to. From that point, the need to share the experiences of slavery and its expression in literary works proves that black writers desire to establish a black identity through the recounts of their bitter reality:

A casual observer of the development of African American literary traditions...standing out as a major component in the vast array of cultural productions that deal with the issue of this identity politics. From Frederick Douglass' narrative (1845) to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), and from Langston Hughes' *Big Sea* (1940) to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and many more, autobiographical discursive practices are at the critical crossroads of the theoretical, cultural, and historic implications of the writings. At the core of each of these writings, especially the autobiographies, is the question of the subject and the "first- person" speaking position.²¹

It is argued that slavery has shaped the collective identity under which all blacks are unified. It is the collective memories of that era which help them to manifest their sense of belonging. In this context, Ron Eyerman states that "...slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a "primal scene" which could, potentially, unite all "African Americans" in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa. Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory..."²².

It is unquestionable that the effect of slavery, even though legally abolished, lasts for a long time. In this regard, black intellectuals represent their experiences as former slaves in their literary works through which their identity as African American has been shaped. Although, slavery is abolished still its impact on the subject of literature presents itself as a priority for black writers. The need for a common sense of unity is transformed in the production of literary works:

The notion of an African American identity was articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of black intellectuals for whom slavery was a thing of the past, not the present. It was the memory of slavery and its representation through speech and art works that grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909. (Eyerman 2)

The identity crisis of the African Americans in America gives rise to the emergence of fictional works produced by woman writers. The exceptional status of black women pushes toward the appearance of generation of black female writers. The violation of women under hard social conditions varied from sexual harassment, slavery and male supremacy leads toward the quest of their identity embodied in many novels. Hájková states that “All the generations with all their movements and streams had one common aim –the effort to picture their view of the world in which they try to find themselves” (23).

The themes of self-construction, motherhood, the formation of women identity are the centers of many fictional novels like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker:

The literature of former and recent African-American women writers provides a comprehensive view of Black women’s struggle to form positive self definitions in the face of derogatory images of Black womanhood. African- American women’s experience of internalized oppression has been the prominent theme in African-American women’s writing. (43)

Conclusion

For over 200 years the African Americans struggle for achieving their identities in the multi-ethnic country. The suppressed memories of the former slaves affect their new life. Hence, they see the urgent need to prove that they deserve to be equal to the whites. Thus, literature is the voice to which they resort for racial uplift. Although African American literature passes through different stages and the blacks’ literary works witness different features, styles, and techniques, the identity crisis of the black community is the central theme for all of them. As a result, black writers succeed to shape a unique African American identity through their literary productions.

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Chapter Two

**A Quest for Identity and Individuality in Zora Neale Hurston's
Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)**

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Introduction.....	28
1. Plot Summary of <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	28
2. Janie's Search for Identity.....	29
2.1 Nanny's Character Impact on Janie's Self-Maturity.....	30
2.2 First Marriage and the Beginning of Maturity.....	32
2.3 The Second Marriage and Joe Starks.....	34
2.4 The Third Marriage and Tea Cake.....	37
3. Individualism in <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	40
3.1 Janie's Request for her Individuality.....	40
3.1.1 Janie's Psychological Conflict with her Grandmother.....	41
3.1.2 Janie's Decision Making.....	42
3.1.3 Janie's Power of Speech.....	43
3.1.4 Janie's Self-Achievement.....	44
Conclusion.....	49
Endnotes.....	50

Chapter Two

A Quest for Identity and Individuality in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Introduction

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) is a literary masterpiece written by the African American anthropologist and folklorist Zora Neale Huston. In this novel, Hurston tells the story of a black woman called Janie Mae Crawford. From the beginning of her childhood, Janie shows a strong personality and ability of self-expression. Although this novel is highly criticized by African American male writers such as Richard Wright, it is considered as Hurston's most influential work. Janie shows internal as well as external conflicts throughout her journey. Those conflicts contribute to her identity and individuality attainment. For this reason, this chapter analyzes the psychological journey she goes through. Accordingly, the psychoanalytical theory is applied to manifest the identity and the individuality of Janie.

1. Plot Summary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In her novel, Hurston depicts the life of a mulatto little girl called Janie Mae Crawford. Janie is the daughter of a black woman called Leafy who is raped by her school teacher. Leafy is a girl of a slaved mother who is raped by her white master too. Janie never sees her mother because she escaped after she gave birth. Janie, the protagonist of the novel, is raised by her Nanny in a white house where she works as a maid. The novel opens with Janie telling her story to her friend Pheoby Watson after her return to Eatonville. As Hurston writes about a woman self-determination and self-achievement, Janie starts her journey with her Nanny's decision to arrange her marriage to Logan Killicks who is an old man with properties to secure her. In her search for love and life, Janie runs away with Joe

Starks who seeks to control her and treats her like a possession. After twenty years, Joe dies and Janie finally meets her true love “Tea Cake Woods”. Although Tea Cake is twelve years younger than her, they marry and live together for a year and a half. Unfortunately, Janie struggles a fateful decision. Tea Cake goes mad because of a bite of a rabid dog during the hurricane. During one of his epileptic seizures, she forcibly shoots him to protect herself. After her trial, Janie is announced not guilty. She comes back to Eatonville with gratefulness to Tea Cake for making her testing the true unconditioned love which she requested her entire life.

2. Janie’s Search for Identity

Since its emergence, African American literature serves as a fulfillment of an urgent need to affirm the black identity. The circumstances that surrounded the life of African Americans as a subjugated minority in America and the white supremacy they were exposed to create a crisis of identity within the black community. The identity crisis compels black writers to introduce the theme of identity as a central issue in their works. Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is recognized as a best example picturing the identity crisis within the African American literary tradition. The novel centers on the depiction of an evolving character of an ambitious woman named “Janie”. The heroine is presented through the novel in a journey of self-realization despite the fact of the severe social conditions. Although “Janie” is raised in a patriarchal society, she from the beginning of her life shows a resistance to the values inherited by the society and decides to follow her desires.

The self-dependence that the protagonist has achieved is due to her perseverance toward stability. The strength the protagonist acquires at the end of her psychological journey is indeed the result of three marital experiences. Socially speaking, these three

marriages are an utter failure except the last one which witnesses warmth and love; however, “Janie” manages to make a sense of self-realization. She is able to get rid of social boundaries that value female reliance on man. The journey of self-construction articulates a progressive awareness of the hero decision making. The desire for true love pulls “Janie” to challenge the taboo and exceed the red lines of the society searching for her identity. In fact, she demonstrates the ability to listen to her inner voice and wins the battle against the internal conflicts she lives through her journey. In the end, Janie is a strong self-autonomous woman who is able to face her community after a twenty-year journey of self-exploration.

2.1. Nanny's Character Impact on Janie's Self-Maturity

Janie’s mother escaped after she gave birth to her. The mother was raped by her teacher. She gave birth and fled leaving her baby to her mother “Nanny”. Janie’s first experience with the fact that she is the fruit of racially mixed race shows her self-realization at the age of six when she discovered her blackness in the picture as it is told in the novel: “Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!”¹. In their article “A Quest for Identity in Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zahra Mahdian Fard and Bahman Zarrinjooee comment on the moment of Janie's recognition of her blackness:

What is highly significant about this statement is that it reveals a great deal about Janie’s character. Words such as “me” and “Ah” which have been repeated three times in a short sentence show that she is extremely in favor of her own identity as a Black girl. Immediately after that short sentence she uses the word “colored” which introduces her as a black female. This sense of knowing her own self and announcing it in a clear way continues as the narrative focuses on Janie’s experiences.²

As it is introduced in the novel, Nanny is also another victim of rape and slavery. Nanny through the novel is presented as the angel who seeks Janie's protection from the hellish experiences of rape, white racism, and subjugation she lived with her daughter. Sustained

with the memories of rape and slavery, Nanny attempts to save her granddaughter by arranging a marriage to “Logan Killicks” certainly after Janie's notable sexual desire. The event of bees' marriage "Janie" witnessed under the pear tree³ signals Janie's first contact with the meaning of what sex is. This event is crucial in Janie's life as it marks the activation of the libido on Janie's character, the sexual part of the human personality: “She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid...” (Hurston 13).

Immediately after this incident, Janie's wish to experience what she has just seen becomes a need for her. Actually, Janie was caught by Nanny kissed. The kiss with Johnny Taylor indicates the internal changes Janie lives. Stimulated by her libido, Janie tries consciously the experience of being loved. That transformation points out the new stage of Janie's life. It also shows the emergence of new features in Janie's character: the desire to love as it is stated in the novel: “That was the end of her childhood” (Hurston 25).

So, Nanny arranges a marriage that assures economic security as well as protection from being exposed to any sexual harassment. The impact of slavery upon the grandmother contributes to Janie's journey of self-realization. Nanny's narration of her past meant to open Janie's eyes to the dangers she might encounter. Thus, Nanny's intention telling her story to her granddaughter insights Janie's about what the black women suffered and justifies her fears to save Janie. The view of the grandmother in a way or another contributes to Janie's raising awareness of the evils of men mainly the white ones. The grandmother's depiction of her past is a recognizable factor in Janie's self-construction. In this context, Mahdian Fard and Zarrinjooee analyze Nanny's speech as follow: “what is

striking about Nanny's stories is that she recounts them in a way which further emphasizes Black agency and self-construction ...”(93).

The objection Janie shows to this marriage is a sign of her desire to live an experience of marriage full of love, not a marriage that guarantees economic protection. Yet, the grandmother's decision of marriage is based on her memories and the impact of slavery with two painful experiences of rape. Based on the Freudian theory⁴, the ego is the part of the personality that assists humans to make wise judgments based on the realities they live. What the grandmother manifests in the novel is the ego side of her personality: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fah it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!”(17).

On the other hand, this ego decision is refused by Janie's id, the part of the mind that motivates decision-based on desires and wishes suppressed on the unconscious. The conflict between the Nanny's decision and Janie's desire is the first mark of Janie's maturity. Yet, she gives up and accepts to get married.

2.2. First Marriage and the Beginning of Maturity

Janie's complaint becomes much more noticeable after her marriage. Janie's marriage to Logan is considered a turning point when she struggles with her id and superego. First of all, she convinces herself to get married under the pressure of her grandmother despite the fact of her wish to marry after an experience of love. Secondly, she struggles with her husband, older than her, who treats her as a worker, not as wife. Logan needs a wife who is strong and looks after his farm. Janie needs a loving husband who meets her dreams and satisfies her sexual and emotional desires: “Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you situnder a pear tree and think. Ah . . .” (29).

Now, Janie's decision to escape Logan becomes an appealing idea which is strengthened by the appearance of Joe Starks. Joe is presented as a handsome attracting man to a girl in the age of Janie. Her frequent meetings with Joe reinforced her desire to escape the boring marriage with Logan. Janie's Id now is much more active and "the pleasure principle" to satisfy her id motivates her thoughts towards another experience of love with Joe Starks who seems much more better than Logan.

One day, after a quarrel with Logan who hurts her claiming the favor of marrying her. Janie at that point reaches significant transition in her life. Janie decides to escape Logan. After a struggle with her superego, Janie's Id wins the battle and determines to begin a new life: "A feeling of sudden newness and change" (38). In his article "It Ends Where It All Started: Mobility and Circularity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" Kouadio Germain N'Guessan argues: "Unfortunately, her first try with Logan Killicks is disappointing because she does not love him. This disappointment reveals as the first step in the circularity of her mobility"⁵.

Janie's refusal of Nanny's insistence of marriage regardless her granddaughter desire and escape leaving her husband is the first step of her journey in self-exploration. Janie's first step toward self-liberation starts from her refusal to Logan's submissive manners toward her. In her article, "The Tapestry of Living: A Journey of Self-Discovery in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", Janice L. Knusden explains Janie's view of her marriage to Logan by stating: "He cannot mirror Janie's idealistic, youthful ideas about love and marriage...Their brief marriage isolates Janie from anything which might act as a self object"⁶.

2.3. The Second Marriage and Joe Starks

After their arrival to Florida, Jody's ambitions for wealth and politics becomes higher and higher. After the approval to be named the mayor of the town, Jody masculine power grows more to be a source of suppression to Janie. Janie now is the wife of the mayor and that demands new requirements she must be aware of to suit her husband elegance and high social status. As his power grows more, his suppression to Janie grows much more than his power. Restriction on her speech and clothing imposed by Jody. Janie is a prisoner of her husband's desire and should follow his dictations on the ways she acts in social events. On the welcome day of their store, Jody holds all the talking, although Janie is invited to make a speech. Jody immediately responds on behalf of her refusing any speech she might address: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (51).

The above quotation shows the clash between Jody's superego and his ideal view of what speech must be and Janie's Id desire of being socially involved since the speech is the main component of one's personality and "self". Accusing her of being incompetent to make a speech suppresses her Id desire to be an active member of her society rather a passive one to fit Jody's superego morals and view of etiquette. This incident as a form of patriarchal suppression opens Janie's eyes to the fact that her identity was absent.

Another way of Jody's subjugation is his order to Janie not to get outside the store in fear of interacting with others. Also, having her hair to be covered deprived her of her femininity. The hair as an identical component in woman's personality and pride of beauty becomes a source of disturbance to Jody.

The expectations she builds upon Jody's promises diminish and fade away gradually as their relationship becomes colder. Kouadio Germain describes the relation between Janie and Joe: "Another illustration of Joe's sexist behavior relates to the fact that after his refusal to let Janie make a public speech, his attitudes toward her turn into injunctions. Particularly, they become master/slave, dominant/dominated or colonizer/colonized relations" (1302). Their marriage is getting much more complicated:

So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush. The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never went back inside the bedroom again. So she put something in there to represent the spirit like a Virgin Mary image in a church. The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired. (84)

Janie's psychological conflict with Joe persuades her to gain a sense of selfhood. She is no longer in communication with him neither physically nor emotionally. The accident of the dinner puts Janie's desires aside and rational thoughts take the place over. In fact, the slap opens her eyes to things which she never recognizes before that accident. Janie's repeated abuses of her husband insights her guiding towards another change in Janie's perception of herself as it is described in the novel:

... It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about... (Hurstons 85)

Janie's identity is blurring day after day under Jody's arrogance and masculine supremacy. Jody operates as the superego who demands Janie to be his obedient wife with no complaint. On the other hand, Janie's self is no longer present under the pressure she lives almost every day. The more Jody's superego demands the more Janie's Id is

suppressed. Janie chooses to be silent to face the usual harsh remarks of Joe. Yet, silence paves the way to recognizable change in Janie's journey of self-construction.

The silence that accompanies Janie in the store has been broken one day by a significant incident and breaks another part of her relationship with Joe too. One day on the store, Janie has cut the chewing tobacco imperfectly. This event has angered Joe saying: "I god amighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don't stand dere rollin' yo' pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees!" (92-93).

Janie's holds no more and responds aggressively for the first time since her marriage with Joe: "Stop mixin' up mah doings wid mah looks, Jody. When you git through tellin' me how tuh cut uh plug uh tobacco, then you kin tell me whether mah behind is on straight or not" (93).

The above quotation points notable transformation in Janie's relation with Joe. Janie has gathered enough power to face Joe's suppression. Now, she has the power to talk, to react and to defend herself. The fear from Joe fades away. New Janie comes to birth. Janie is able to defend herself in front of the crowd and argues with Joe. She frees her Id to be active again. Janie's fear has been replaced with a strong desire to face Joe's superego. The ability of defending herself proves Janie's maturity toward self-construction after a long period of Joe's supremacy. Janie reaches the state of balancing between her emotion and her thought. Janie recognizes the right of defending herself.

Joe and Janie's conflict intensified after their arguing inside the store. Joe's separation and illness in another room show another stage on the couple relationship. Janie is prevented from visiting her husband according to his demand of not seeing her. She is strong enough to face that harsh decision. But, Joe's health is getting worse. Janie is

informed that her husband days were handful. The moment of confession is inevitable to Janie before her husband's death. She goes to his room telling him what she has held in her heart for twenty years:

Ah knowed you wasn't goin tuh lissen tuh me. You changes everything but nothin' don't change you—not even death. But Ah ain't goin' outa here and Ah ain't goin tuh hush. Naw, you gointuh listen tuh me one time befo' you die. Have yo'way all yo' life, trample and mash down and then die ruther than tuh let yo'self heah' bout it. Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after hedied. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me. (Hurstons 102)

The death of Joe is the birth of a new woman with an experience of pain and maturity. Janie finds a new sense of the free self. She learns from that moment that her life is much more worth a marriage. The following section is the moment of Janie's liberation after Joe's death. She uncovers her hair as a sign of freedom she was deprived: "The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again" (Hurstons 103-104).

Fard and Zarrinjooee explain the moment of Janie's liberation saying that:

One can approach and examine it as Janie's deliberate attempt to fashion and praise black female self and a sense of self love or narcissism on the part of a black female. This black female refers to herself through words such as 'handsome, 'and 'glory.' Janie's forceful and powerful character is vividly shown in them. What is even more noteworthy is that Janie has learnt to look at herself, to see herself. To see is to love, to praise, to know one's self and even others. Janie has acquired the power to see, to enjoy and to understand, in this case her own self which can be a female black self and a female self or rather loosely herself as a human removed from femaleness or blackness. (95)

2.4. The Third Marriage and Tea Cake

After Joe's funeral, marriage proposals began to appear, but Janie refused all of them until her meeting with another man called "Tea Cake". The third experience of marriage with Tea Cake is different from the former ones. Janie finds love and the romanticism she looks for. Although he is younger than her, Janie finds on Tea Cake what satisfies her desires, wishes, and dreams of a loving husband who will fulfill her femaleness. Janie's excitement and joyfulness shine with her third husband. Tea Cake is able to let her live the true sense of being a woman. A sense of femaleness arises through Tea Cake deeds. A moment when he combs her hair touches Janie's emotions unbelieving that men could do what Tea Cake does. This feeling of being valued on the grounds of womanhood reinforces her independence and frees her from the harsh experiences of Logan and Joe: "Why, Tea Cake? Whut good do combin' mah hair do you? It's mah comfortable, not yourn" (Hurstons 115).

Janie's relation with Tea Cake sets the grounds for rumors. People thought of Tea Cake as a cunning man who runs after Janie's wealth. Advice to Janie to get rid of this relation from her friend Pheoby also demonstrates Janie's awareness of her self-dependence and decision making: "So us is goin' off somewhere and start all over in Tea Cake's way. Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine" (Hurstons 126).

The above response of Janie suggests her ability to balance between her ego and Id ignoring the superego judgments of her friend. Janie's determination to carry on that relation signals a degree of maturity the protagonist reaches. The criticism she directs to

her Nanny's ideals about the security of woman under the umbrella of marriage marks Janie's resentment at the society values about the way a woman should live.

Life with Tea Cake is the perfect dream Janie is looking for; however, the accident of the dog bite Tea Cake is exposed to turns things upside down. Tea Cake's behaviors change. He desires to possess Janie. His illness pushes him to attack Janie different times. Janie survives more than once but at the last, she is forced to shot him. Janie kills her love in defense of herself. The moment Janie manages to kill Tea Cake proves her entire maturity. L. Knudsen sees the murder of Tea Cake as the moment of Janie's independence: "... she is a better shot than her husband; and she has become confident in her ability to make sound deciscions"(227). According to Mahdian and Zarrinjooee, "In this last marriage to Tea Cake her search for identity which is accompanied by her self-protection and self-vitality leads to her decision to kill Tea Cake rather than being killed by him "(97).

Janie is able to make the right decision based on her experience and wisdom not on her heart. Janie reaches the level of awareness that enables her to make right decisions. She becomes certainly a matured woman and achieves the security she looks for her entire life. She finds the true Janie after a long journey of self-exploration. The three marriages construct the protagonist's personality. Through her experiences with three different men, Janie is able to draw a complete vision of how she should live her life:

Janie had a hard time finding her identity. Through her childhood, her marriage to Logan, then Joe, and then finally Tea Cake, Janie has always hoped to have an identity independent of anyone else. Hurston's model for twentieth century women is a very defined model. One which holds freedom, an identity, and an equal level of stature to men, all of which Janie strived to have. Overall Janie's end identity is one that many women in the twentieth century strive to behold.⁷

3. Individualism in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In her depiction of Janie's life, Zora Neale Hurston aims at expressing the will of Janie to achieve her individuality in a male-dominated society. Janie requests her rights to express her feelings. Her need to find a loving man is the most challenging issue for her. After passing through four experiences three of them are marriages, Janie finally comes to understand the real meaning of love and independence.

3.1 Janie's Request for her Individuality

Hurston breaks the masculine social boundaries by depicting Janie as a strong black woman. This later is neither a tragic heroine nor a weak victim. As quoted in May Kadhim Al-khazraji's article "The Power of Silence and Voice in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", Andrea Rushing states: "... was not pathetic, wasn't a tragic mulatto, who defied everything that was expected of her, went off with a man without bothering to divorce the one she left and wasn't broken, crushed, and run down" ⁸.

Accordingly, the uniqueness of Janie's character helps her to learn from every experience she goes through. She becomes well acquainted with how to control the path of her story. She survives the hurricane to recount her story powerfully:

Janie Crawford is able to retrace her steps, disembark from her own ship, come home, and remember, because she has been close to death but has lived a very full life. So in spite of the judgmental voices that greet her upon her return, in spite of the "mass cruelty" invoked by her prodigal status, Janie has earned the right to be the griot of her own tale, the heroine of her own quest, the "member" of her own remembering. (Hurston xii)

We can notice from the quotation above that from the beginning of her life, and at a very young age, Janie is segregated in a way or another. in the white folks' house Janie used to be called different names. "Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names..." (11). Although Janie has no proper name, her

individuality is obvious when she clearly states that she is colored. The high consciousness she mentions is a sign of power.

3.1.1 Janie's Psychological Conflict with her Grandmother

When Janie is sixteen, she shows sexual growth and mental understanding of the things around her. Her Nanny horrifically decides to protect her from the same destiny of her mother. She repressed Janie's emotions towards Johnny Taylor. She declares that "Whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britchies, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on" (Hurston 15).

As a consequence, Janie's sexual development is suppressed due to her first kiss with Johnny Taylor which marks a turning point in her life. In his book *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Harold Bloom argues:

She leaves this scene of the pear tree looking for "an answer seeking her" and finds that answer in the person of Johnny Taylor who, in her rapturous state, looks like a golden glorious being. Janie's first sexual encounter is observed by her grandmother and she is summarily punished.⁷To introduce such a sexual scene at the age when Janie is about to enter adulthood, to turn it into romantic fantasy, and to make it end in punishment certainly limits the possibility of any growth resulting from that experience.⁹

In the above quote, Janie's sexual development appears through the noticing of the pear tree, she is facing a painful stage of her life. Through her grandmother's eyes, Janie is no longer a little girl. She becomes a woman who needs to be financially secure. On the other hand, Janie's perception of security is different from her Nanny's view. (Kadhim Al-Khazraji. 17-18)

Unfortunately, the Nanny's repressed memories of being raped have its psychological effects on Janie's sexual desires and her entire life. As an individual, Janie goes through sorrowful judgment from the society. Her Nanny's reaction ascribed to the effect of being used is the first control over Janie's life:

You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. You can't beat nobody down so low till you can rob 'em of they will. Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn't mah will for things to happen lak they did. Ah even hated de way you was born. (Hurstun 19)

3.1.2 Janie's Decision Making

With the obedience to the grandmother's request, Janie enters into a nightmarish experience. Logan treats her as an object. For him, Janie is a machine to plant the potatoes. Janie's relationship with Logan witnesses neither sex nor love. She is in an internal conflict with how love finds its way to her:

Cause you told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don't. Maybe if somebody was to tell me how, Ah could do it..." "You come heah wid yo' mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love..." "But Nanny, Ah wants to want him sometimes. Ah don't want him to do all de wantin'. (Hurstun 27)

The suppressed sense of love makes Janie looks for a new relationship in which she finds true love. She enters into a conflict with Logan. She thinks of their relationship. She seems to take her decision according to his answer. She expresses her feeling to him by stating that "You ain't done me no favor by marryin' me. And if dat's what you call yo'self doin', Ah don't thank yuh for it. Youse mad 'cause Ah'm tellin' yuh whut you already knowed" (Hurstun 37).

After a period of time, Janie fails to be satisfied with Logan. She is driven by her needs to love. This later helps her to attain a voice by which she expresses her rejection of her Nanny's control. This becomes Janie's first step towards achieving self-knowledge and self-awareness. Janie's decision to leave Logan makes her experiencing "...A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned

south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good” (Hurstun 38).

In a male-dominated society, Janie is silenced different times in crucial moments. In the meantime, Janie develops the skill of oral speech which makes her superior to other women. She communicates her feeling due to her power to face the society with a strong personality:

Janie Crawford is able to retrace her steps, disembark from her own ship, come home, and remember, because she has been close to death but has lived a very full life. So in spite of the judgmental voices that greet her upon her return, in spite of the “mass cruelty” invoked by her prodigal status, Janie has earned the right to be the griot of her own tale, the heroine of her own quest, the “member” of her own remembering. (Hurstun xii)

3.1.3 Janie’s Power of Speech

Due to Janie’s failure to relive the sense of love which she experiences with Johnny Taylor’s kiss, she runs away with Jody Starks. Joe plays on the sensitive tendons as he speaks about “change and chance” (Hurstun 35). He draws a blooming life for her to reinforce her decision when he states: “You behind a plow! You ain’t got no mo’ business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain’t got no business cuttin’ up no seed p’taters neither. A pretty doll baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo’self and eat p’taters dat other folks plant just special for you” (Hurstun 34).

Unfortunately, what Janie realizes is that Joe is another version of Logan with some differences. He treats her like a possession. He suppressed her voice publicly by not letting her to make a speech during his appointment as a mayor by stating that “mah wife don’t know nothin’ ’bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in de home” (Hurstun 51).

However, Joe diminishes her in front of the community by defining her role as a housewife; Janie's prominent character appears to reach an ability to utter a powerful speech. The folks in the porch introduce their admiration about her speech when she eulogizes Joe for his freeing the mule. They finally discover that Janie "is uh born orator, Starks. Us never knowed dat befo'. She put jus' de right words tuh our thoughts" (Hurstun 68-69).

On the top of that, Joe humiliates Janie both physically and mentally. On the one side, he reckons that he understands things better than she does: "When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" (84). On the other side, he criticizes her looks: "Whut's de matter wid you, nohow? You ain't no young girl to be gettin' all insulted 'bout yo' looks. You ain't no young courtin' gal. You'se uh ole woman, nearly forty" (Hurstun 93).

3.1.4 Janie's Self- Achievement

After Joe's death, Janie becomes a good prey for the men in Eatonville. She is a very beautiful woman with a long hair. But the most important thing is the wealth Joe leaves it for her. Janie is aware of the black folks' intentions towards her. The protagonist raises a sense of knowledge about the prerequisites of living in that society. Consequently, she is more prudent with her choices:

When Janie emerged into her mourning white, she had hosts of admirers in and out of town. Everything open and frank. Men of property too among the crowd, but nobody seemed to get any further than the store. She was always too busy to take them to the house to entertain. They were all so respectful and stiff with her, that she might have been the Empress of Japan. They felt that it was not fitting to mention desire to the widow of Joseph Starks. You spoke of honor and respect. And all that they said and did was refracted by her inattention and shot off towards the rim-bones of nothing. (Hurstun 110)

Janie goes through internal conflicts and suspicion about Tea Cake. She doubts the truthfulness of his intention. She expects that he would be playful. She thinks that “Maybe this strange man was up to something! But it was no place to show her fear there in the darkness between the house and the store. He had hold of her arm too. Then, in a moment, it was gone. Tea Cake wasn’t strange. Seemed as if she had known him all her life. Look how she had been able to talk with him right off!” (Hurston 118).

In the above quote, Janie’s ability to talk to Tea Cake is the core issue for her due to her inability to do so with Joe. She feels safe because of that. But even this does not last long as she enters again into a conflict with her psyche. Her superego manifests through her fear of social judgment because Tea Cake looks younger than her:

Janie wanted to ask Hezekiah about Tea Cake, but she was afraid he might misunderstand her and think she was interested. In the first place he looked too young for her. Must be around twenty-five and here she was around forty. Then again he didn’t look like he had too much. Maybe he was hanging around to get in with her and strip her of all that she had. Just as well if she never saw him again. He was probably the kind of man who lived with various women but never married. (Hurston 119)

After struggling with herself, Janie “... couldn’t make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God” (Hurston 126).

The folks begin to make judgments on Janie because she chooses Tea Cake instead of one of the well-known people. The repressed memories from Joe Starks encourage her to save her feeling for a man she feels safe with. “It was after the picnic that the town began to notice things and got mad. Tea Cake and Mrs. Mayor Starks! All the men that she could get, and fooling with somebody like Tea Cake” (Hurston 230).

Sometimes, Janie thinks out loud of her relation with Tea Cake. She likes being with him doing things that never been made with neither Logan nor Joe. She is like a child enjoying playing with forbidden stuff. "It was so crazy digging worms by lamp light and setting out for Lake Sabelia after midnight that she felt like a child breaking rules. That's what made Janie like it" (Hurston 121).

For Janie, Tea Cake is the real love. He is the man who knows how to treat her. He teaches her to express her feeling. Her voice is freely heard now. Although she chooses not to speak with Joe and Logan and sometimes her voice is suppressed, she is more conscious of when to voice out. She expresses the sense of independence by freezing her hair to start a new life. (KadhimAl- Khazraji 25)

Like Logan and Joe, Tea Cake's fear of losing Janie is crucial in the novel. He expresses this emotion by slapping her after only one week of marriage. Janie's character allows her to gain her individuality by not voicing out again. She rather uses her voice at the appropriate time when he gets sick to console him. She shows her empathy to help him feel secure as she says: "Whut's de matter, honey?" She soothed and soothed. "You got tuh tell me so Ah kin feel widja. Lemme bear de pain 'long widja, baby. Where hurt yuh, sugar?" (Kadhim Al- Khazraji 27).

Hurston puts Janie in a difficult challenge. So Janie has to choose between saving her love or her life. As Janie and Tea Cake raising guns against each other, Janie reaches the highest level of self-fulfillment by shooting the man she loves to protect herself. She was fighting for her life begging a miracle to happen. The psychological conflict ends with his head in her lap:

Janie saw the look on his face and leaped forward as he crashed forward in her arms. She was trying to hover him as he closed his teeth in the flesh of her forearm. They came down heavily like that. Janie struggled to a sitting position and pried the dead Tea

Cake's teeth from her arm. It was the meanest moment of eternity... A minute before she was just a scared human being fighting for its life. Now she was her sacrificing self with Tea Cake's head in her lap. She had wanted him to live so much and he was dead. (Hurst 216)

As an individual, Janie conflicts with community members in different events. She has a superpower to face the situations she immersed in. Unlike other black women, Janie's superego encourages her to put her husbands each in her right place. Firstly, the conflict with Logan is emotionally rather than physically. He accused her of her mother and grandmother. Consequently, she "had put words in his held-in fears. She might run off sure enough" (36). Her treatment to Joe is not different from that of Logan. When she conflicts with him in front of the folks, she knows how to defeat him by hitting his dignity. His unconsciousness of her feelings leads her to hurt him. Joe's "vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing" (94). For Tea Cake, the humiliation even not clear is deeper. He feels abandoned in bed. Thus, he admits: "Janie, Ah done went through everything tuh be good tuh you and it hurt me tuh mah heart tuh be ill treated lak Ah is" (Hurst 215).

In her article "The Quest for Self-Identity in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" Res.Ass. B. Ayça believes that even though Tea Cake is no longer exists, Janie accomplishes a sense of independence by refusing to marry again. She realizes that the real happiness is not related to men. She is now experiencing freedom. Being free from the oppression of men is the new experience Janie goes through¹⁰.

On the top of that, the heroine's relationship with Tea Cake helps her to gain stability that allows her to return to Eatonville ignoring the murmurs from the folks standing on the porch. Her uniqueness in terms of making speeches influences her friend Pheoby as she

recounts her journey to reach this level of self-fulfillment. In this sense, Laurence W. Mazzeno in his essay "*Their Eyes Were Watching God* - Critical Evaluation" states: "Tea Cake and the crew down on the muck help to give Janie the confidence that she needs to live and tell her own story. By the time that she returns to Eatonville, Janie has acquired the ability to become the narrator of her own story; Pheoby comments that she has grown simply from having heard Janie's story"¹¹.

In the end, she asked Pheoby to pass the story to the other women. She understands how the others see things and react upon them. So, Janie's intentions are oriented towards women self-awareness because she knows and understands the impact of it on women's life. She seeks to let them realize the meaning she gets during her journey:

"Now, Pheoby, don't feel too mean wid de rest of 'em 'cause dey's parched up from not knowin' things... 'Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuhdat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mouth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. (Hurstun 226)

At the end of her journey, Janie proves the ability to be an extraordinary black woman. She displays a powerful personality against her husbands to maintain her individuality. "Now, in her room, the place tasted fresh again...Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (Hurstun 227). On the other hand, Janie's individuality is maintained with her ability to understand the circumstances:

She rises above her circumstances. Saddened but not defeated at the end of her tale, Janie tells her old friend Pheoby not to judge harshly the neighbors who gossiped so cruelly upon her return to Eatonville: "Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves." Janie finds out about livin', and she is at peace. (Laurence W. Mazzeno)

At first, her decision making when she left Logan Killicks is a point of power. Then, her public humiliation to Jody Starks as a rebellion against his demission expresses her speech ability. Finally, shooting her lover to save her life is the most powerful step towards reaching her identity and individuality¹².

The mulatto protagonist breaks all the rules of being a subservient woman. She is regarded as an independent African American woman who has a strong ability to influence other women to start thinking of their lives as Pheoby states: “Lawd!”... “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mah self no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin’” (Hurston 226).

Conclusion

Janie's journey of self-exploration starts from childhood where she recognizes her black race. Then, Janie undergoes through three experiences of marriages. Her journey is an intention of searching true love. The three experiences of love are progressive stages of Janie's maturity. The impact of Logan, Joe and Tea Cake as three distinguishing male figures shapes the path for Janie to achieve the stability she misses since her childhood. At the end of her journey, Janie is a self-constructed woman with a female pride. Janie becomes the wise woman who is able to make right decisions depending on her ego perspective.

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General Conclusion

General Conclusion

For over 200 years, African American literature was the reflection of African Americans' struggles against slavery and racial issues. Those two factors were the driving forces that led them to quest their rights in the racial society. For this reason, we spotlight the historical development of African American literature and the reasons behind the identity crisis in African American literary traditions. Thus, the quest for identity and individuality was the main theme that the African American writers introduce in their writings. Among those writers comes the novelist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston to explore the above-mentioned issue from different perspective.

In our research, we aimed at establishing an image of how African American Women shift their intentions towards realizing their identities and individualities in a racist patriarchal society. The fact that Zora Neale Hurston depicts the life of African Americans during the twentieth century in a different way encourages us to carry out this study. In her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston describes the Protagonist "Janie" not as a tragic mixed race woman but rather a powerful one who is on her journey towards self-liberation and self-discovery.

This research investigated how the psychological instabilities of the protagonist assist her in attaining a voice in a male-dominated society. From a very young age, Janie shows psychological conflicts against the social traditions. This age, according to Sigmund Freud, is the age of identity formation through sexual desires. For this reason, the psychoanalytical theory is applied to analyze the driving forces that lead Janie to reach her sense of self. In addition to that, the marital experiences were under investigation. The conflicts with her husbands impart, to a great extent, to affirming her identity. The

challenges she struggles during her journey make her profoundly realize herself and discover a new sense which is independence.

Unlike many other writers who reinforce the image of women as slaves to their husbands, Hurston goes beyond the stereotypical image of African American women. She depicts the protagonist as an independent woman. Thus, she fights against being dismissed in a male-dominated society. Consequently, she addresses women to quest their identities. By depicting Janie as a strong mulatto woman who seeks to achieve her identity and individuality, Zora Neale Hurston emphasizes the idea of being free individuals. She simultaneously addresses the blacks and the whites to show that black women can survive their own ways. In doing so, Hurston inspired African American women to freely express their needs and quest their rights.

This study intended to explore the themes of identity and individuality in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It also investigated how Janie, the protagonist, realizes herself and finds her way towards happiness without men. The struggle between the parts of the psyche and the motivation Janie receives from her mind helps her to fulfill her goals. Hence, Janie succeeds to gain a voice which allows her to tell her story to her friend Pheoby. Her goal is to transmit her story to other women in the community in order to start thinking of their lives and quest their rights and their identities as she has done.

Unlike African American women writers who used to express their bitter experiences, display the impact of slavery on their character, and the subjugation they were exposed to, Zora Neale Hurston goes beyond the stereotypical image of women by depicting the mulatto protagonist as an impressive woman in a journey of self-liberation and self-discovery. In this matter, Hurston rejects the negative image of women imposed by both the white and the black men.

This research is conducted to maintain the idea of the blacks' self-realization. It opens the doors for further studies. It also investigates Zora Neale Hurston's view about women uplift. Further researches can be oriented towards the stylistic features Hurston uses in the novel which contribute to the identity achievement.

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الملخص

تسلط هذه الأطروحة الضوء على موضوع الهوية والفردية في رواية زورا نيل هارستن "كانت أعينهم تترقب السماء" (1937) حيث تعيش بطلة هذه الرواية "جاني" رحلة طويلة لتحقيق ذاتها وهويتها في مجتمع أبوي من خلال ثلاث زيجات. ومن هنا، فإن الدراسة الحالية لها هدفان رئيسيان: أولاً، ارتأينا الإشارة إلى أهم مراحل الأدب الإفريقي الأمريكي بالإضافة إلى جذور قضية الهوية ضمن التقليد الأدبي الإفريقي الأمريكي. ثانياً، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحلي لرحلة البطلة النفسية بحثاً عن هويتها وشخصيتها كما تسعى للبحث عن القوى الدافعة التي ساهمت في تحقيق استقرار جاني. لهذا، قمنا بتحليل شخصية البطلة بتطبيق منهج التحليل النفسي وقد توصلنا إلى أن نجاح جاني في تحديد هويتها وفرديتها في نهاية الرواية يعود إلى مآثرتها في تحدي العقبات المختلفة التي تعوق إعادة تشكيل هويتها الحقيقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الإفريقي الأمريكي، الهوية، الفردية، المجتمع الأبوي، منهج التحليل النفسي.