

Reclaiming Identity and Voice: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of African American Womanhood in Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God"

Mohammed Al Awdi¹

¹Hunan Normal University. E-mail: mohammedalawdi716@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through the theoretical framework of postcolonial criticism to investigate the construction of African American womanhood. By analysing the protagonist Janie Crawford's evolving journey toward self-identity, autonomy, and narrative agency, the study elucidates how Hurston reclaims and reconstructs African American female identity amidst intersecting structures of racial and gender oppression. Situated within the historical context of the Harlem Renaissance, this research foregrounded key themes including resistance to hegemonic power, gender dynamics within African American communities, and the affirmation of cultural heritage. Employing both postcolonial and feminist lenses, Hurston's narrative emerges as a critical medium challenging dominant oppressive ideology and asserting the cultural selfhood of black women. The novel's portrayal of Janie's complex subjectivity highlights the interrelation of race, gender, and history, thereby offering a nuanced contribution to the discourse on postcolonial literature and African American cultural identity. This study further enriched scholarly understanding of black women's representation and empowerment in literary tradition and social praxis.

1. Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a main work in African American literature, celebrated for its rich narrative and profound exploration of African American womanhood. The novel, written by Zora Neale Hurston and published in 1937, is a seminal work in African American literature during the Harlem Renaissance, centers on Janie Crawford's journey of self-discovery and empowerment in a deeply racialized and patriarchal society. The novel in an English literature class and was fascinated by the story of a woman, the protagonist Janie Crawford, a woman of mixed black and white heritage, searching for her authentic self and real love. She engages in three relationships with men that affect her personal development throughout her life in different ways.

Hurston's portrayal of Janie's quest for autonomy and voice resonates with postcolonial themes, making it a fertile text for analysis through postcolonial literary criticism. This study situates Janie's evolving identity within the larger context of resistance, cultural heritage, and the reclamation of silenced narratives. Postcolonial criticism and feminist theory provide the frameworks for examining how Hurston critiques the colonial legacy that has historically marginalized African American women. It considers the intersection of race and gender, exploring how African American women navigate their identities in a society shaped by both racial and gender-based oppression.

The significance of reclaiming identity in this context refers not only to personal development but also to the assertion of cultural and historical selfhood. By presenting Janie as an agent of resistance and growth, Hurston offers a counter-narrative to dominant representations, thereby redefining what it means to be an African American woman in literature and society.

Recent studies continue to explore the intersection of race, gender, and voice in African American women's literature. For instance, Jackson and McFarlane (2021) examine the linguistic agency of black female protagonists in modern literary narratives, arguing that reclaiming voice is central to resisting cultural erasure. Similarly, Lewis (2020) highlights the evolving portrayal of Black womanhood in contemporary reinterpretations of Hurston's legacy. However, while existing research emphasizes voice and identity, fewer studies have employed a postcolonial feminist framework to analyze *Their Eyes Were Watching God* within the context of cultural resistance and narrative self-authorship.

This study addresses this gap by offering a dual-theoretical analysis that integrates postcolonial criticism and Black feminist thought, with specific attention to how Hurston situates Janie Crawford's story as a counter-narrative to hegemonic ideologies. By focusing on the mechanisms through which Janie reclaims cultural and personal identity, the present research adds a new dimension to the ongoing scholarly conversation on African American female subjectivity. In this study, the researcher explained the historical and cultural context of Hurston's work to analyze Janie's journey of self-discovery and explored themes of voice, autonomy, and cultural heritage. By situating *Their Eyes Were Watching God* within the postcolonial framework, the author aimed to highlight Hurston's contribution to redefining African American womanhood and her critique of societal norms that have historically marginalized and silenced Black women.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Postcolonial Literary Criticism Theory

Postcolonial literary criticism emerged in the 1970s within Western academia as a powerful framework for analyzing the cultural, political, and ideological consequences of colonialism. It critiques the lingering effects of imperial domination on former colonies and marginalized groups. Central to this theory are concepts such as cultural hegemony, identity, hybridity, resistance, and the power of representation. This broad discourse encompasses various issues, including culture and imperialism, colonial discourse and the West's representation of the East, cultural resistance in the Third World, globalization and national cultural identity, as well as the intersections of race, class, and gender.

According to Professor Zeng (2024), postcolonialism is anchored in the historical experiences of European colonialism and the evolving mechanisms of cultural domination, especially through "cultural colonization", a subtle yet persistent form of control that promotes dependency on the colonizer's culture. As noted by Zeng the term "post-colonial" emerged post-World War II, signifying not the end of colonization but rather a new form of colonization following traditional colonial practices. This new form, termed "cultural colonization," does not rely on military conquest or territorial expansion. Instead, it employs culture as a peaceful envoy to induce reliance on the colonizer's culture among the colonized. This "victory without fighting," representing a cultural invasion and is achieved by prioritizing Western norms while marginalizing indigenous cultures.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) plays a foundational role in postcolonial theory by exposing how Western discourse constructs the East as exotic, inferior, and "other." His integration of Foucault's discourse theory with anti-colonial politics influenced generations of scholars. Homi K. Bhabha expanded the discourse by introducing ideas such as "ambivalence," "mimicry," and "hybridity" in *The Location of Culture* (1994). These concepts reveal the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial contexts and challenge essentialist notions of culture and self. Bhabha's approach emphasizes the negotiation of identity within cultural intersections.

Hutcheon (1989) clarifies the distinctions between the aims and political agendas of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. While postmodernism and poststructuralism critique the unified humanist subject, postcolonialism seeks to undermine the imperialist subject. Hutcheon argues that, for postcolonial and feminist discourses to affirm denied or alienated subjectivities, critiques of the unified humanist subject must sometimes be temporarily suspended. However, this approach risks confining non-Western cultures and women to subjectivities shaped by Western liberal-humanist ideologies, thereby reinforcing hegemonic frameworks. As a result, "colonial subjects" may remain positioned within Western epistemological structures. The rise of postcolonial criticism has paralleled debates on postmodernism, offering a critical awareness of power dynamics between Western and "Third World" cultures. Unlike the often parodic and self-reflexive nature of postmodernism, postcolonial criticism exposes the repressive ethnocentrism of Western literary and philosophical traditions.

Canonical figures such as Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Homer, Dante, Flaubert, and T. S. Eliot have dominated intellectual discourse, marginalizing non-Western voices. Homi K. Bhabha adopts a poststructuralist framework to explore postcolonial identity, incorporating Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Klein. His concepts of hybridity and ambivalence in *The Location of Culture* (1994) illuminate how marginalized identities navigate cultural boundaries. These critical perspectives are essential in analyzing Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, particularly in how Janie Crawford's self-discovery reflects a larger postcolonial and feminist reclaiming of identity and cultural affirmation.

Feminist postcolonial critics, like bell hooks, Toril Moi, and Hazel Carby, further examine how gender, race, and class intersect under colonial and patriarchal power structures. While Moi (1985) discusses a "stage two" feminism that shifts focus from fixed gender identities to an awareness of these identities while recognizing their false metaphysical nature. This

perspective aims to deconstruct the social constructions of gender, traditionally seen as binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. Hooks, in *Talking Back*, emphasizes the importance of speech and self-definition as acts of resistance for Black women. She argues that Black (2002) women were never truly silent, but their voices were historically unacknowledged or dismissed. Literary theory plays a practical role in examining attitudes and behaviors towards women in literary works, demonstrating that literature has always been crucial to the women's movement. Postcolonial criticism, therefore, is not limited to geographic colonies but extends to all marginalized identities shaped by systemic power.

2.2 African American Literature

African American literature refers to the body of literary works produced by writers of African descent in the United States. This literature encompasses a rich tradition of storytelling, resistance, and cultural affirmation. From the 18th-century slave narratives to the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and the political fiction of the civil rights era, this body of literature reflects the lived experiences, struggles, and aspirations of African Americans. During the Harlem Renaissance, figures like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston revolutionized Black artistic expression by celebrating cultural pride and challenging racial stereotypes. Hurston's work stands out for its authentic use of African American dialect and folkloric storytelling, giving voice to communities often excluded from mainstream literature.

Their Eyes Were Watching God, published in 1937, is a landmark text that explores Black womanhood through Janie Crawford's internal and external journeys. The novel defies traditional narratives by centering a Black female protagonist's search for self-definition, love, and freedom, elements often denied to her by both white and Black patriarchal structures. This literature is not merely artistic; it is political. Writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker continued Hurston's legacy, using fiction to confront systemic racism, gender-based violence, and the erasure of Black history. Morrison's concept of "rootedness," for example, emphasizes the importance of ancestral and communal identity in African American writing.

Hurston's novel functions within this tradition as a radical act of cultural reclamation. Janie's story is emblematic of countless African American women's quests for voice and selfhood. By aligning Hurston's work with postcolonial theory, the study reveals the broader function of African American literature: to assert agency, challenge oppression, and preserve cultural memory.

In the context of postcolonial criticism, "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" can be seen as a reclamation of African American identity and culture. Hurston's depiction of Janie Crawford's journey of self-discovery and empowerment challenges the dominant narratives that sought to marginalize and silence Black voices. By presenting a Black female protagonist who actively seeks to define her own identity, Hurston disrupts the oppressive structures of race and gender, asserting the importance of individual and cultural autonomy. The novel's exploration of African American womanhood is a critical aspect of its contribution to African American literature. Janie's story reflects the broader experiences of African American women who have historically faced multiple layers of oppression due to their race and gender.

Hurston's narrative not only highlights the struggles of these women but also celebrates their resilience and strength. Through its themes, characters, and cultural references, "Their Eyes Were Watching God" offers a profound commentary on the complexities of African American identity. The novel serves as a testament to the power of storytelling in reclaiming and redefining cultural narratives, making it a cornerstone of African American literature.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in literary analysis. The aim is to explore how Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reclaims African American female identity through a postcolonial and feminist lens. The methodology focuses on a close textual reading, supported by theoretical frameworks, scholarly interpretations, and intertextual comparisons.

The subject of analysis is the protagonist Janie Crawford, whose life narrative unfolds within a socio-cultural matrix of racism, patriarchy, and resistance. This study does not involve human participants; instead, it analyzes the character's development and symbolism in the novel. The sample text is *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, supplemented by critical works from scholars such as Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, Patrick Bernard, Deborah Clarke, and Hazel Carby.

The primary instrument is the theoretical framework combining postcolonial criticism (as developed by Said, Bhabha, Hall) with feminist literary theory (hooks, Moi, Carby). Analytical tools include thematic coding, interpretive commentary, and comparative discourse analysis between the novel and secondary sources. This triangulation ensures a rich, layered understanding of identity, voice, and cultural heritage within the novel.

Data was analyzed through thematic analysis of narrative structures, character arcs, and linguistic choices in the novel. Key passages were identified that reflect Janie's evolving identity, resistance to societal norms, and ultimate self-assertion. Quotations were cross-examined with critical interpretations to contextualize findings. Secondary literature was synthesized to map out how Hurston's text functions as both personal and political testimony, challenging dominant cultural narratives.

4. Findings

4.1. Janie's Journey of Self-Discovery and Identity Reclamation

Janie Crawford's life unfolds as a layered narrative of becoming, a journey that reflects the complex interplay of gender, race, power, and personal freedom. Across her three marriages, Janie transitions from a silenced, objectified figure into a woman who actively reclaims her voice and identity. Identity in Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God," the concept of identity is intricately linked to the protagonist, Janie Crawford's, journey. The novel explores Janie's evolving sense of self as she navigates various relationships and life experiences. Janie's quest for identity is marked by her struggle against the societal and patriarchal constraints imposed upon her. Throughout the novel, she seeks to define herself on her own terms rather than conforming to the expectations of others. This journey of self-discovery is not just about finding her voice but also about asserting her autonomy and reclaiming her identity from the roles that society attempts to impose on her. The struggle against sexism involved African American women being

deprived of self-realization and self-affirmation, which encompasses recognizing and valuing one's dreams and desires.

In the early 20th century, the African American community, dominated by male values, imposed significant restrictions on women's self-actualization. These restrictions included parental control over marriages to ensure social advancement and protect against sexual assault by white men.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's concept of the "politics of respectability," introduced in *Righteous Discontent*, articulates the strategies employed by Black women to gain social legitimacy. She writes that such politics "emphasized cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity", which often required Black women to internalize bourgeois norms to counter racist stereotypes (Higginbotham, 1994, p. 187). These imposed values constrained Black women's ability to define themselves outside white moral expectations. Similarly, Hawkes (2003) explores the complexity of Janie's self-actualization, arguing that "Hurston presents Janie's journey not merely as rebellion, but as an evolving confrontation with social expectations deeply embedded within Black communities" (p. 281). This reinforces the idea that resistance must navigate both external oppression and internalized community values.

African American women were particularly judged by these standards within their community to counter scientific claims of white racial superiority, thus linking worthiness for respect to propriety and decorum. As discussed in Hawkes' article, "An African-American Woman's Journey of Self Discovery in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," the central question is what a woman of color needs to achieve self-realization in a male-dominated society, and how elder females, like Nanny, enforce these restrictive values. Additionally, it raises questions about the diversity of African American women's experiences and whether all adhere to the politics of respectability.

The theme of reclaiming identity is central to Janie Crawford's journey in "Their Eyes Were Watching God." Throughout the novel, Janie grapples with societal expectations, patriarchal constraints, and racial oppression as she seeks to define and assert her own identity. Hurston uses the image of the tree throughout Janie's relationships to show the progression of Janie's self-realization and affirmation. In her marriage to Killicks, the tree is a stump with no fruit or foliage. In her marriage to Starks, the tree is a strong oak, which does not bear fruit. The difference between the two is that Janie is placed into her marriage with Killicks; there is nothing about that marriage which Janie desires. However, with Starks Janie receives some type of living plant, although the plant is not fruit bearing since Starks treats her as a subordinate. However, Janie makes the choice to run off with him. The muck, where she lives with Tea Cake, provides the fertile soil for a blooming Janie. Her journey is marked by a series of relationships and experiences that challenge her to reclaim her voice, autonomy, and sense of self.

In Logan Killicks, Janie is forced into a loveless marriage that symbolizes security and social compliance. Her grandmother, Nanny, arranges the union to protect Janie from sexual violence, echoing the historical trauma experienced by Black women. Yet Janie's emotional and intellectual dissatisfaction becomes the catalyst for her search for something deeper. In her marriage to Joe "Jody" Starks, Janie gains material comfort and social visibility, but at the cost of her autonomy. Jody silences her voice in public and reduces her to an

ornamental wife, evident when he tells her, "You aren't got no business cutting' up no raw stuff." Her eventual resistance, especially her public defiance of Jody, is a pivotal moment of self-assertion.

While Tea Cake, Janie experiences her most fulfilling relationship. While not without challenges, this partnership allows Janie to explore mutuality, love, and playfulness. It is here, in the muck, amidst the laboring Black community, that Janie begins to flourish. Tea Cake's eventual illness and Janie's decision to shoot him to protect herself is the final step in her emotional and existential journey. She proves that her love does not compromise her autonomy.

Janie's journey of self-discovery is not just personal but also a reflection of the broader struggles faced by African American women in reclaiming their identity amidst the oppressive forces of racism and patriarchy. Hurston's use of rich symbolism, dialect, and cultural references further enhances the novel's postcolonial dimensions, offering insights into the resilience and complexity of African American female identity. By the end of the novel, Janie's reclamation of her identity stands as a testament to her resilience and strength, symbolizing the broader quest for self-realization and empowerment among African American women.

4.2. Themes of Voice and Silence

Voice and silence are recurring themes in "Their Eyes Were Watching God," symbolizing Janie's struggle for self-expression and autonomy. Throughout the novel, Janie's ability to speak and be heard evolves, reflecting her journey toward self-realization. Initially, Janie's voice is suppressed by the expectations of her grandmother, her first husband Logan, and her second husband Jody. Each of these relationships imposes constraints on her, silencing her desires and opinions. However, as Janie matures, she begins to assert her voice, challenging the limitations imposed on her.

The narrative structure of the novel itself, framed as Janie's recounting of her life story to her friend Pheoby, signifies her reclaiming of her narrative. By telling her own story, Janie not only asserts her voice but also validates her experiences and perspectives. This act of storytelling becomes a powerful tool for self-empowerment, highlighting the importance of voice in reclaiming identity.

Throughout the novel, Hurston aims to expose the internal consciousness of each character, uncovering the purpose behind the male voices and examining how these voices affect Janie. As Sandra Gilbert notes, women often had "the graceful obligation of silence," and it is with this silence that the whole meaning rests. Racine argues that passion and control directly correspond to voice and silence, epitomized by the four men in Janie's life, three of whom are her husbands. In each relationship, Hurston carefully integrates the men and women of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to parallel Janie's growth and achievement: Logan Killicks and Joe Starks represent control, while Tea Cake Woods and Johnny Taylor represent passion.

In *Talking Back*, bell hooks introduce the concept of "talking back" as a form of resistance: "talking back is speaking as an equal to authority... it means daring to disagree and speak one's mind" (hooks, 2015, p. 5). This reclaims power through speech and positions voice as central to Black feminist resistance. Hooks emphasizes that Black women have always had

voices, yet “these were often the monologues not acknowledged or heard” (hooks, 2015, p. 6). Thus, the struggle was never about attaining speech, but about creating a speech that could not be ignored. Developing this speech, hooks argue, is not merely symbolic, it is essential to survival, resistance, and the reclamation of identity.

While silence in feminist contexts often indicates submission to patriarchy, hooks argues that black women have never been silent; their voices have simply been monologues not acknowledged by others. Therefore, their struggle is not about breaking silence but about creating compelling speech that is heard. Through “talking back,” women transition from objects to subjects, gaining a liberated voice (hooks, 2015, p. 6). As hooks grew up, she learned that resistance is essential to protect and nourish one’s spirit against oppressive forces. Developing a voice is a form of resistance against domination, allowing for healing from trauma and facilitating new growth (hooks, 2015, p. 9).

The journey to finding an authentic self, it is crucial to understand that the self exists in relation to others. Hooks describes the self not as a single entity but as a combination of many identities. It embodies the collective reality of past and present, family, and community. Discovering our true self involves reclaiming all the silenced collective voices throughout history, seeing oneself anew, and no longer being solely defined by domination (hooks, 2015, p. 31).

Ending gendered oppression requires self-transformation from both the oppressor and the oppressed. Hooks refers to this as self-recovery through subject-to-subject speech, meaning equal communication. She emphasizes the importance of not ignoring the self or the desire for self-transformation, advocating for conditions of wholeness reflected in both individuals and social and political realities (hooks, 2015, p. 32).

She draws inspiration from the vocal black women in her community, highlighting that their voices have always existed but were often ignored. Hooks argues that their struggle is not about breaking silence but making their speech compelling and heard. Developing a voice is an act of resistance that protects the spirit, promotes healing, and encourages growth. She emphasizes the importance of understanding the self in relation to others and reclaiming silenced collective voices. To end gendered oppression, hooks call for mutual self-transformation and equal communication between oppressors and the oppressed. The novel, with its unique characteristics, provides a rich environment to explore the concepts of voice and silence with various layers of meaning. On one level, it presents a minority culture of African Americans in contrast to whites, though more crucially, it focuses on Janie, a black woman, within the context of her relationships with men, highlighting the issue of marginalization.

4.3. Cultural Heritage as Resistance and Empowerment

Hurston’s portrayal of African American cultural heritage is integral to “Their Eyes Were Watching God.” The novel is rich with elements of folklore, language, and traditions that reflect the cultural identity of the African American community in the rural South. Hurston’s use of dialect and storytelling techniques immerses readers in the cultural milieu of the characters, emphasizing the significance of cultural heritage in shaping identity. Janie’s connection to her cultural roots is evident in her interactions with the community, her participation in communal activities, and her embrace of traditional values. Hurston’s

depiction of cultural practices, such as the storytelling on the porch and the communal work in the fields, underscores the resilience and solidarity of the African American community in the face of oppression. Through Janie's journey, Hurston illustrates the importance of cultural heritage in resisting systemic racism and asserting identity. Janie's ultimate realization of her self-worth and autonomy is deeply intertwined with her cultural roots, highlighting the role of cultural heritage in empowering individuals to reclaim their identities.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore how *Their Eyes Were Watching God* functions as a profound literary space where the complexities of African American womanhood are articulated through the intertwined lenses of postcolonial and feminist theory. Janie Crawford's journey is emblematic of a broader cultural and ideological resistance to the structural oppressions of race, gender, and class. Through Hurston's narrative design, Janie emerges not merely as a fictional protagonist but as a symbol of reclamation and transformation.

From a postcolonial perspective, Janie's story can be situated within the framework of cultural resistance and identity negotiation. The power hierarchies she navigates, embodied in familial expectations, marriage institutions, and social discourse, mirror the colonial systems that historically disenfranchised Black identities. As Homi Bhabha asserts in *The Location of Culture* (1994), identity is constructed in the "in-between" spaces of cultural conflict, where mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence become tools of survival and subversion. Janie's experiences resonate with this idea, particularly as she moves through spaces defined by dominance but reclaims them through personal agency. Janie's relationships represent both literal and metaphorical colonization's of the self. In her marriage to Killicks, Janie is commodified; in her union with Starks, she is silenced; and only with Tea Cake does she engage in dialogic partnership, albeit not without complexity. Her trajectory thus mirrors the postcolonial journey from oppression to assertion, from objecthood to subjecthood.

Feminist literary theorists such as bell hooks and Hazel Carby have argued that the intersectionality of race and gender places African American women in a doubly marginalized position. This is evident in Nanny's endorsement of the "politics of respectability" as a form of survival, a stance that inadvertently perpetuates patriarchal control. Janie, however, challenges these values. Her story critiques these internalized forms of oppression and reorients the narrative toward female empowerment and emotional authenticity.

Moreover, Hurston's stylistic choices, particularly her use of Black vernacular, oral storytelling, and symbolic imagery, are acts of cultural affirmation. The novel rejects the dominant linguistic and aesthetic norms of the white literary canon and instead draws on African American traditions. This cultural reclamation is central to postcolonial discourse, as it challenges epistemological erasure and asserts the validity of alternative ways of knowing and being. Janie's final act of telling her story to Pheobe is particularly significant. This storytelling moment reclaims narrative authority from the male-dominated public sphere and locates it within female intimacy and solidarity. It reflects what bell hooks terms "talking back", a radical act through which marginalized voices assert identity and

knowledge. Thus, the novel does not present Janie's identity as fixed or final. Rather, it emphasizes the fluidity of the self, shaped by memory, desire, and resistance. Hurston thus resists essentialist constructions of Black womanhood, offering instead a nuanced, evolving subjectivity.

6. Conclusion

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers a deeply layered narrative that reimagines African American womanhood through the lens of postcolonial and feminist criticism. Janie Crawford's journey from silence to voice, from submission to agency, serves as a literary articulation of identity reclamation amidst intersecting systems of oppression. This study has demonstrated how Hurston uses symbolism, cultural vernacular, and narrative structure to explore themes of identity, resistance, voice, and autonomy. Janie's relationships serve as both personal and political texts, each one marking a phase in her transformation and resistance to imposed roles. Her eventual storytelling to Pheobe is more than a narrative device; it is a radical act of reclaiming authorship, challenging the colonial and patriarchal codes that seek to define her.

Viewed through a postcolonial framework, the novel critiques not only historical colonization but also the cultural and gendered oppressions that persist within American society. Hurston's depiction of Janie offers an alternative model of Black female subjectivity, one grounded in self-knowledge, emotional freedom, and cultural continuity. The novel affirms that self-realization is neither linear nor purely individual, but interwoven with collective memory, cultural heritage, and structural power. Janie's ability to "pull in her horizon" symbolizes the culmination of her identity journey, a reclaiming not only of her voice but also of her right to define herself on her own terms. Hurston's depiction of Janie's reclamation of her voice and identity serves as a testament to the resilience and strength of African American women, highlighting the importance of literature in challenging and redefining societal norms. Therefore, Hurston contributes not only to the canon of African American literature but also to global postcolonial discourse. Her work challenges literary, cultural, and ideological boundaries, affirming the enduring relevance of Black women's voices in the ongoing struggle for liberation and recognition.

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