Afrofuturism in Zora Neale Hurston's Novels *Their Eyes Were Watching God and Moses, Man of the Mountain*

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Introduction

Their Eyes Were Watching God and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* are purposively selected because they meet the objectives of this study. Although both have different structures and thematic preoccupations, both texts possess parallels for the critical understanding of the utopianism that underpins Afrofuturism. In *Their Eyes*, there is Janie who clings to the hope of a better future from beginning to end, while in *Moses* the Israelites also possess similar hope for a better future in the Promised Land. The symbols of utopia are rooted in being situated in the right place and being free from slavery. In *Their Eyes*, the symbolic place is both geographical and psychological (the right marriage or being in love with the right man); in *Moses* symbolic place typifies geography – the freedom from slavery in Egypt and the hope of the Promised Land. I explore these tendencies by drawing parallels between Janie's journey from her first marriage to that of Tea Cake and the Israelites' journey from Egypt through the wilderness.

Discussion

Moses depicts the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt under the vanguard of the title character. Hurston's rewrites Moses' arc based on the "tales of the powers of Moses and great worship of him and his power…and THAT MIGHTY HAND" (Hurston 10, Author's Introduction). Moses "stands in the long tradition of adaptations of the Exodus narrative" (Zeppenfeld 45) and attracted contradictory reviews including from her biographer, Robert Hemenway, because "of how Hurston treated the Biblical figures" (Morris 312). Moses' provenance is interrogated and ambiguously narrated as multiracial. Hurston subverts the race in Moses and reifies the patriarchal authority that undermines Miriam's power. Moses is portrayed as the son of the Pharaoh's daughter, who marries an Assyrian Prince who dies later. Moses is significant in the African American tradition because he frees the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and the Pharaoh's oppression, and he transcends race, which this study will contend as afrofuturistic of a time when race will not be essential. The term "Afrofuturism" was coined by Mark Dery in 1994 (Daylanne K. English) to refer to

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a cultural aesthetic whereby the speculative art form is used to "reboot black identity, challenge white supremacy, and imagine a range of futures in full color" (Lavender III and Yaszek 1). Lavender and Yaszek define Afrofuturism as an "aesthetic practice that enables artists to communicate the experience of science, technology, and race across centuries, continents, and cultures." It constitutes an attempt by Blacks to creatively envision their future in defiance of the inherent racism in speculative fiction, especially the erasure of Blacks in the utopian future of speculative fiction. Afrofuturism offers a vision of the future that expands and includes the Black experience, challenging narratives that see blacks as outsiders or marginal members of society. In short, it recovers the past, asserts it in the present, and projects an egalitarian future for Blacks. Hurston describes the Pharaoh's power as overbearing to the extent of controlling Hebrew women's wombs, so Mark Thompson designates the killing of Hebrew male newborns as "penetrating the Hebrew womb" (395). Hurston casts a shadow on Moses' racial origin and ascribes it to Miriam being asleep while watching her brother. Miriam prevaricates that her brother has been taken by the Pharaoh's princess. Julia Zeppenfeld posits that "Hurston's Moses avoids clear-cut identification with the Israelites" (50) and appears as a messenger of God. Moses grows up in the palace, learns folk stories from Mentu, and becomes a gallant soldier. He also takes an interest in the oppression of the Hebrews and intervenes by killing an Egyptian, which leads to his voluntary exile. He meets Jethro, learns more hoodoo from him, and marries Zipporah. Hurston represents Moses as a hoodoo, another word for magic, practitioner who can chat with a lizard on Mount Nebo. Robert J. Morris contends that Moses' hoodoo is used trivially on Mount Nebo. However, his reflective conversation with the lizard does not signify triviality (313). On Mount Horeb, he encounters God who directs him to free the Israelites and lead them to the Promised Land. Gradually, he rekindles his love for the Israelites and returns to Egypt. He meets Aaron and Miriam, and they become part of the leadership structure of Israel. Moses eventually leads the Israelites out of Egypt after the demise of the Egyptians' firstborns. Hurston syncretizes Moses' hoodoo with the Judeo-Christian God's power and fictionalizes how Moses wields his power to awe and terrorize his opponents, such as Miriam. Moses, however, dies without leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. He subtly hands over the leadership mantle to Joshua. I will use afrofuturism to examine how race is subverted and how place serves as a source of utopia. Despite these achievements, Hurston's depiction of Moses' power tacitly questions any power that excludes womanhood from its being. Hurston uses Moses' treatment of Miriam to critique absolute patriarchal power.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is Hurston's best-known book. It is one of the classics of the Harlem Renaissance. It was first published in 1937. It centers on Janie Crawford, a middle-aged African American woman newly returned from

burying her younger husband, Teacake. The story explores how Janie seeks to find a place of joy for herself.

Janie arrives home in Eatonville to find a group of people sitting on a porch. These people are curious about her life in her time away and maliciously gossip about her. Her friend, Pheoby chides them. She pays Janie a visit during which Janie tells her life story. She begins her account from her initial naiveté, her grandmother's lofty aspirations for her and her life with her three husbands. She ends with Tea Cake's death. He proves to be the one true love of her life, who also facilitates her full self-actualization.

Their Eyes was not well-received by other prominent writers of the Harlem Renaissance, who criticized Hurston for racial naivety. In his review titled "Between Laughter and Tears," Richard Wright condemns *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, dismissing it for what he terms "facile sensuality" and for voluntarily continuing the minstrel technique (25), which trivializes the black race as a source of entertainment. Along with Wright, Ralph Ellison and Alain Locke heavily criticized her "portrayal of blacks as common folks working in the field" (Spencer 17). However, since its rediscovery, the work has been lauded as one of the most important books of the century. Hurston's thematization of Janie's search for place naturally yields studies on race, place, and womanhood. In Eatonville (place) and in her first and second marriages (place), place undermines joy and a desire for hope, while she seeks to transcend the sadness that is associated with Black women which connects race and stereotypical feelings. She seeks to transcend being the "mule of the world" that bears the world's burden and struggles referring to the way Black women are burdened by both race and gender oppression yet persist in seeking agency and self-fulfillment; this is the futurism that her character evokes.

Critical Review of Afrofuturism: Race, Place, and Womanhood

Afrofuturism is one of the concepts that underpin this study, and it is deployed to examine the futuristic tendencies that Hurston's works embody and how those inclinations connect with race, place, and womanhood. Despite these convergences, Hurston, in some cases, questions these issues, which denote the ambivalence in her works. Mark Dery introduced the term Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism has thrived because it has become a flourishing space for Black people confined to the periphery due to their race, gender, and place. Dery's inquiry on why few African Americans write Science Fiction (SF) evinces the centrality of race in Afrofuturism. He compares the world of speculative fiction to the real world where African Americans are perceived as the other by the American white. He conceptualizes Afrofuturism as speculative fiction that explores "African American

themes and concerns in twentieth-century technoculture—and…African American signification that appropriates the images of technology" (180) within an imagined future. Afrofuturism, according to Adriano Elia, similarly draws parallels between slaves, aliens, and robots. However, Afrofuturism is broader and more heterogeneous than Dery's technocultural paradigm would suggest. Beyond Afrofuturism's 1994 formal incarnation, its aesthetics began many decades ago until it emerged as a philosophical study (Womack; Lavender). Afrofuturism presents a space for Blacks to envision a future devoid of structural racism "to contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy" (Taylor 2) and to wield diverse aesthetics to speculate and loop the past with the present and claim the Black future that is free from white supremacy. This Black future aligns with Hurston's intra-racial politics in that her works embody and centralize Black joy as an anti-abolitionist paradigm (Stewart). Her depiction of Janie's quest for the horizon envisions a Black future, especially for Black womanhood, which does not contend only with racism but seeks a better horizon. Afrofuturism is a gamut of artistic expressions, in terms of visual arts, films, music, and literature. Taylor avers that Afrofuturism is now in its plural form as Afrofuturisms to amplify the heterogeneity.

Afrofuturism has attracted remonstration too. Nnedi Okorafor, for example, has debated the purview of Afrofuturism as a concept. Okorafor, for example, proposes Africanfuturism because she opines that the term Afrofuturism captures the African American rather than African experiences at large. This belief is traceable to "etymological history", according to Sofia Samatar (175), because Afrofuturism as a term was coined by Mark Dery, an American, and it is delineated as African American speculative fiction. Samatar, however, proposes "a history of Afrofuturism unrestricted by a North American origin story…to do justice to its Pan-African influences, practices and claims" (188) and encourages a planetary approach to Afrofuturism within a broader perspective in time and space. In the same vein, Jade Taryne Taylor proposes the term CoFuturisms and conceptualizes it as the convergence among "the various forms of futurisms by people of color and Global South" (1). Rather than confining Afrofuturism to its science fiction-related implications, I also apply this term in its broader sense when exploring Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (*Their Eyes*) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (*Moses*) as Afrofuturist texts from the perspective of Black joy, also interpreted as a form of Black utopia.

Afrofuturism started to emerge centuries ago from the futuristic works of early Black writers. Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek trace Afrofuturism to "literary experiments…of eighteenth-century poet Phyllis Wheatley and nineteenth-century abolitionist, soldier, and journalist Martin Delany" (3), and the Afrofuturistic

trends continue in the works of W. E. B. Du Bois, George Schuyler, Pauline Hopkins, Zora Neale Hurston, Octavia E. Butler, and, more recently, Nnedi Okorafor. Afrofuturism extends the recovery of Black works and promotes Black artistic expressions as formidable and futuristic. Afrofuturism later transitioned from a predominantly aesthetic mode to a critical paradigm that Alondra Nelson instituted in 1998 by creating the "first Afrofuturist online community…and the first publication of the first scholarly collection on the subject in a 2002 issue of the journal *Social Text*" (Lavender III and Yaszek 4). Equally, Afrofuturism has birthed different concepts such as steampunk and Astro-Blackness and has been elevated to Afrofuturism 2.0, which is conceived as "twenty-first-century technogenesis of Black identity" (Anderson and. Jones x). Afrofuturism 2.0 transcends the 1.0 counterpart because of the sophistication of contemporary technology and life. Isiah Lavender III in *Afrofuturism Rising* contends that Afrofuturism is a moment and movement because of its different connotations. It is also a reading practice that explores the "race-inflected…optimisms and anxieties framing the future imaginings of black people" (Lavender III 2) and denotes the primacy of race in Afrofuturism. The corollary is that Afrofuturism can be a narrative/aesthetic practice or an interpretive engagement that investigates Afrofuturistic aesthetic modes.

Afrofuturism as a hermeneutic practice has varying tenets. Lavender III theorizes Afrofuturism tenets as black networked consciousness, the hope impulse, and the trans-historical feedback loop. In this attempt, I employ this hope impulse to explore the utopian tendencies that the selected texts represent and how they invoke joy. This hope impulse and its accompanying joy in *Their Eyes*, for example, subvert the sorrow and sadness that is connected to the black race, but transcend race in *Moses* by emphasizing hope as pervasive among the oppressed. He conceives black network consciousness as the "interactive connections…a sustainable communal web of love…while also allowing for betrayals, rivalries, and miscommunications" (6). It is shared consciousness which signifies the communality of black consciousness from the past to the present and then to the future. This consciousness occludes the white gaze and entrenches the black communal space as an alternative space of comfort. This communal space "generates hope", according to Lavender III, and this hope breeds Black joy that Stewart philosophizes as an anti-racial trope in Hurston's works. The black networked consciousness and the hope impulse generate a trans-historical feedback loop in readers/critics to transcend the dominant racial narratives for alternative ones that embody Blacks as subjects with agencies. These three tenets are intertwined with Afrotechnocultural metaphors imbricated in vernacular tradition and afro-root religion, but Afrofuturism from a broad perspective does not rely only on Afrotechnocultural metaphors. From

a broad perspective, Afrofuturism unearths the futuristic tendencies or symbols that permeate black works. These are circulated afro-symbols like the Sankofa bird, which prioritizes retrieval for an optimal future, and the linguistic coding in black vernacular. YTasha Womack identifies parallel Afrofuturistic tenets that comprise reclamation of the "missing history of people of African descent and their roles in science, technology, and science technology" (17), revision of the past, aiding "equal access to progressive technologies" (17), appropriating "African diasporic mysticism" (110), centralizing feminine narratives and depicting the "transformative power of love" (110). Lavender III also advocates the reading of *Their Eyes* as an afrofuturist romance that utilizes science fiction theory to delve into "an exploration of a utopian horizon that takes the reader…into something new—an afrofuturist condition wherein folklore and futurity are at the center of black imaginings" (108). This Afrofuturist condition is connected to the transformative power of love as a central trope in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Black womanhood is another space that Afrofuturism reclaims. The reclamation evolves in Pauline Hopkins' works and persists in Hurston's works. Womack delineates afrofuturism as a "free space for women…a literal and figurative space for black women to be themselves" (100-101). Afrofuturism undercuts the gender barrier by giving black female writers the imaginative and mythical latitude to create females as protagonists/heroines that retrieve the past and create their future in diverse Afrocentric alternative spaces of different imaginings. Black women writers can examine the prejudices associated with blackness (race) and womanhood "to define blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier" (Womack 101). Black women authors, like Zora Neale Hurston, not only identify the patriarchal problems associated with black womanhood, but also redefine black womanhood as a space of self-assertion and mutual love for futuristic exploration. Womack argues that Afrofuturistic works by women authors are designated "uncategorizable" (101) because the works modify and transcend the stereotypical male-approved frames. This argument valorizes the harsh criticism that Hurston's works received from her contemporary male authors and critics, and Stewart also exposes this politics. Hurston's male counterparts did not discern the proto-Afrofuturistic patterns and representations in her works. Sheree Thomas adds that Afrofuturism also helps form "black women's agency and aesthetics in a world that denies the existence of both" (37). These women writers created the foundation for Afrofuturism through their unceasing aesthetical experimentation.

Hurston is a formidable figure, who has been linked to the emergence of Afrofuturism because she proposes changes that "bring hopes for African Americans' future" (Kaplan 30). Kaplan observes that Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a proto-Afrofuturistic work that deviates from utilizing the technological

tropes, but adopts decolonized alternative spaces, body, and language to project the Black future. Similarly, Lavender III reads retroactively Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as an Afrofuturist text. He explores comprehensively the latent Afrofuturist arc in *Their Eyes* under the rubric of a utopian horizon of possibility, networked consciousness, vernacular technology, and a black future. He unearths the Afrofuturist possibilities that Hurston contrives in *Their Eyes*, which critics like Richard Wright did not discern. First, Hurston makes Janie search for "an alternative world other than the one that African Americans were living in at the time" (Lavender III 113) and this quest for an alternative world aligns with the tenets of Afrofuturism. The alternative world also reifies the networked interconnectedness that Eatonville represents, "a parallel black world coexisting with the larger universe that is the United States" (Lavender III 115) which is "free of the white oppressive gaze" (Lavender III 116). The shift from inter-racial discourse to intra-racial discourse that Lavender III observes in Hurston's *Their Eyes* coincides with Stewart's argument about Hurston's aesthetic politics that focuses on black joy.

Lavender III also examines the vernacular technology that Hurston inscribes in *Their Eyes*; he contends that Hurston appropriates folk elements to depict Black southern society, by capturing oral knowledge "in print, thereby standardizing past cultural practices and preserving them for the future" (117). The porch dialogues are interspersed with "vernacular technology" (Lavender III 117) that has been harnessed by Black writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Lavender III also reads *Their Eyes* within the technogenesis metaphor of being alien and couples it with the transformative love that Tea Cake and Janie share. He views Janie as a "creator of Southern black historical consciousness" (125) who resists oppression by activating a trans-historical loop and surpasses the "tragic mulatta convention" (126). However, despite Lavender III's argument, he overlooks the black feminist refusals that presage contemporary Black feminism that underpin Hurston's depiction of Janie as resisting patriarchal oppression and simultaneously searching for transformative love. I will expand these feminist refusals and her womanist quest for transformative love as Afrofuturist tenets in Hurston's works implying a search for an alternative world that promotes gender parity. This depiction alludes to the utopian horizon of the hope impulse that Lavender III conceptualizes as an essential Afrofuturist tenet.

Thomas expands on the Afrofuturistic discourse in Hurston's works by crystalizing "the future she did 'wrassle up' and the incredible treasures of the past she uncovered" (41). Some of Hurston's literary works comprise Lavender III's trans-historical feedback loop that preserves the past, critiques the present, and foresees an egalitarian future. Hoodoo, for example, favors a nonhierarchical

world, which is a trope in Hurston's works such as *The Sanctified Church* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. This African and African diasporic spirituality continuously colors contemporary speculative fiction by intertwining fantasy, folklore, and spirituality. It features in the practice of healing the sick, rootwork, conjuring, and prophesying the future.

Hurston's work, like *Barracoon,* also connects Afrofuturism with feminism and race. Piper Kendrix Williams notes the concatenation between Afrofuturism and feminism in her reading of *Barracoon* and *Their Eyes*. She contends that Hurston presents the porch as "sites of alternative realities separated from a world of oppression and white supremacy" (628) and that Nanny and Janie are futuristic characters. The argument about Nanny and Janie as characters of the future requires further exegesis, especially as their futurity intersects with feminist geography and womanism. Williams observes that Hurston loops time and space and projects Afrofuturistic feminist prose through Nanny's sermon and Janie's porch. However, Janie's resistance to Logan and Joe Starks signifies feminism, while her paradoxical attachment to Tea Cake, despite his excesses, represents an accommodating drive that is womanist.

Significantly, the concept of Black utopia that corresponds to Lavender III's hope impulse is inevitable in Afrofuturism. Alex Zamalin connects utopia to hope, a "future to come, a society yet unrealized but transformative in its vision" (5). I contend *Their Eyes* and *Moses* embody black utopia and the transformation it prefigures. Black utopian texts or Afrofuturist texts, according to Zamalin, "both revise history and imagine impossible trajectories of black freedom" (10). However, these roles may be latent in texts and may require critical attention to unearth them. Hurston's works aptly represent this latent, Afrofuturist topography and demand new interpretation. This new approach connects Afrofuturism to visions of gender equality in diverse spaces that are commonly dominated by men and links women to places formerly appropriated by men. Afrofuturist texts project women as resisting and refusing patriarchal oppression from both Blacks and Whites in different spaces. These refusals are connected to Stewart's Black Joy, which theorizes refusals of abolitionists' appropriation of Black tragedy as Hurston's rejection of the masculinist representation of blackness during her time.

Black Utopia and Transformative Love in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God and Moses, Man of the Mountain*

Black utopia emerges as a distinct Afrofuturist dimension in Hurston's texts that requires deeper exploration to grasp its futurist significance in her oeuvre. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for instance, the ship and the horizon symbolize Black

utopia. Hurston employs the horizon to suggest Janie Crawford's quest for a future free from oppression. This parallels Lavender III's argument of Janie's alternative imagining of Black life which makes her quest for the bloom she discovers under the pear tree. Hurston critiques the institution of marriage to highlight the gender oppression and inequality that women endure, even in intra-racial relations. While race is a prominent theme in African American literature, including the Harlem Renaissance, with its specific racial politics shaped by male intellectuals, such as W.E.B. DuBois and his circle, Hurston turns her back on "racializing." Instead, she envisions a black utopia by revising the image of womanhood in *Their Eyes* as an agency of imagining alternatives and seeking transformative love conducive to liberating women. This Afrofuturist vision seeks Black joy that liberates Black American women from gender oppression, even in intra-racial marriages.

Janie's first marriage to Logan Killicks is contingent on Nanny's dream, a dream that perceives "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (*Their Eyes* 47). Janie's marriage to Logan is an old dream of marriage that objectifies a woman as a mule and desecrates the pear tree – Janie's symbol of Black Joy and utopia in wedlock. Janie's first marriage inhabits the old vision of marriage that "she would love Logan after they were married" (*Their Eyes* 53), Hurston's portrayal of Janie's wedlock to Logan signifies a relationship devoid of the utopian love that makes womanhood joyful. Hurston does two things in this depiction: she prefigures the Black feminist movement and Alice Walker's womanism and creates Janie as a character of the future that transcends her local place. These layers are premised on Janie's quest for the bloom, a symbol of Black utopia, in love and marriage. The Black feminist temper in Janie makes her resist Logan's bid to objectify her and turn her into a mule: "Ah'm just as stiff as you are stout. If you can stand not to chop and tote wood Ah reckon you can stand not to git no dinner. 'Scuse mah frivolity, Mist' Killicks, but Ah don't mean to chop de first chip." (*Their Eyes* 57).

Janie's second marriage to Joe Starks is not different from the first one. Hurston uses Joe to allegorize rich Black men who silence women; Joe declares "Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place are in de home" (*Their Eyes* 78). The silencing of Janie undercuts the Black joy and utopia that amplifies gender parity for a transformative love. Hurston's *radical* projection of black utopian aesthetics embraces "radical equality and resisting of gender and sexual domination" (Zamalin 140). This portrayal is manifested in Janie's marriage to Tea Cake to prefigure the possibility of a marriage devoid of patriarchal oppression and domination. Although Hurston is realistic in portraying the few skirmishes between Janie and Tea Cake, she portrays their marriage as that of Black joy, which is Afrofuturistic. Tracy Bealer contends that Tea Cake "sporadically performs the same dominative masculinity" (312) and that, despite the ambivalence of Tea

Cake's character, Janie's glorification of Tea Cake, even after his demise, celebrates "liberatory possibilities of egalitarian love" (312) and how racism and sexism can undermine any heterosexual relationship. Equally, Lavender III recasts *Their Eyes* as an "Afrofuturist romance" (108) and contends that Hurston appropriates *Their Eyes* to directly tap "into black people's desire for a better life and a better future and thus provides an essential urge to challenge oppression" (109).

Hurston employs the institution of marriage to portray black women's quest for Black utopia and to indicate that gender oppression transcends race. Hurston's Black utopia cannot be disconnected from the hope impulse that troubles Janie in her first and second marriages. Janie, during her troubled years with Joe, keeps hope alive: "Sometimes she stuck into the future, imagining her life different from what it was" (*Their Eyes* 116); the envisioning allegorizes the hope impulse that characterizes African American lives during a troubled present. Hurston deploys free indirect speech to valorize a communal hope that is usually Afrofuturistic: Janie's thoughts are communal and signify Black women's desire for utopia in their marriages. That is, utopia has a nexus with Afrofuturist love, that disconnects from the patriarchal-favored love, which Nanny embodies and forces Janie into. Janie is the connection between the past and the future and Tea Cake represents the Afrofuturist male figure that makes a Black woman "listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to" (*Their Eyes* 117). Despite the racial and marriage tension. Hurston in her trickster mode does not present Tea Cake and Janie's marriage as total perfection; she depicts the excesses of Tea Cake like stealing from Janie's money. This paradox is undercut by Tea Cake's ability to recognize Janie as a woman who has a voice and should be listened to. The recognition of Janie's agency is absent in her marriage to Logan and Joe Starks. The Afrofuturist male figure is not without some excesses like Tea Cake's slapping of Janie to feel like a man, but he recognizes the woman as possessing an agency.

A similar transformative love envisioning utopian hopes permeates Hurston's other novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain,* but this time with a male character in focus that ambivalently undermines the agency of womanhood represented by Miriam. Hurston adapts the story of Moses, the most prominent prophet of the Bible's Old Testament (who is also the most frequently mentioned name in the Quran). Moses' love for the Hebrews' freedom is both transformative and futuristic, despite his ambivalent relationship with them. Although this novel is usually interpreted as an allegorical representation of how Hurston imagined the Africans' experiences in American slavery and afterward, the text itself undermines this reading: it subverts the canonized interpretation of the Bible regarding Moses' Hebrew origin at a crucial point when she "calculated a maximum of narrative ambiguity" (Johnson 128). While Miriam, the baby's sister, was supposed to look

after the newborn when he was set afloat in a basket on the Nile, she neglected her duty. Later, she informs her mother, Jochebed, and others that the baby was taken by the Egyptian princess, the Pharaoh's daughter. This fact is not corroborated by Hurston's text, as Miriam did not actually see the princess pick up Moses. Miriam was most probably lying to her mother to save herself, "Goshen never gave up their belief in the Hebrew in the palace" (*Moses* 35). The Hebrew in the palace is an example of utopian proclivities that saturate Hurston's works, a tendency that liberty is possible within any oppressive situation, and the Promised Land is entangled with this hope impulse. The Promised Land throughout *Moses* remains a symbol of hope that Moses wants to lead the Israelites despite their ambivalence, which Johnson describes as the small-mindedness of Hebrews like Blacks "unwilling to face the responsibilities of freedom" (131). Conversely, Johnson contends that "Hurston's Egyptian Moses stands for the cultural dead father or mother: Africa, the source of the repressed traditions carried to the Americas by the slaves" (130). The corollary is that Hurston depicts Moses ambiguously as Egyptian and African, an African that frees slaves. Moses' undying wish for and commitment to the Israelites to enable them to reach the Promised Land made him lead them from Egypt through the Red Sea and in the wilderness until he died.

Moses' love for the Israelites is transformative and analogous to the love between Janie and Tea Cake, although with ambivalence. I characterize Moses' love as transformative because it seeks to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and take them to the Promised Land. Like the fits of jealousy between Janie and Tea Cake, Moses also experiences diverse rebellious acts on the part of the Israelites, but these acts did not weaken his dedication to lead them to the Promised Land. When he kills an Egyptian overseer, to protect a Hebrew, he is hurt when an Israelite accuses him of trying to be their boss: "For a moment Moses stood hurt at the lack of appreciation of his behavior and of the motives that prompted him" (*Moses* 62). Despite abdicating his position in Egypt, he returns to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses' transformative love for the Hebrews demonstrates significant utopian characteristics when he is represented as a beacon of hope for enslaved people. Ruthe T. Sheffey, who interprets Hurston's novel as a manifesto on the imperatives of Black leadership, observes that Hurston in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* interrogates the Biblical tradition that represents Moses as a Hebrew and adds that Hurston's novel itself is proof of "the frequent recourses to the Moses story in the Afro-American tradition" (210). The portrayal of Moses as an ambiguous Egyptian challenges racism and leadership and demonstrates that collaboration to free a people from oppression may be spearheaded by anybody. Hurston intentionally represents Moses' origin as multiracial to transcend the limiting politics of racism that permeates the leadership choice. Moses' transformative love

cannot be divorced from his love for folklore and the folkways that underpin his relationship with Mentu, "who tended the horses" (*Moses* 37), and how he makes Mentu enjoy royal life by smuggling food out of the kitchen for him. Equally, Moses transcends racial categorization as Johnson, in "Moses and Textuality" avers, suggesting that Hurston puts "into play and crisis the very notions of race and ethnicity" (Johnson 131). This indirectly invokes the question of whether it is compulsory for the rescuer (Moses, for example) of an oppressed people to be an insider in the oppressed people's ethnic or racial circle. Although Hurston's introduction tries to limit the readers' perspective to the terror of Moses' rod which she describes as "the terror he showed before all Israel and to Pharaoh, and THAT MIGHTY HAND" (xxii), there are many nuances that Moses' character presents that need to be deconstructed beyond Hurston's magisterial direction. One of such complexities is Moses' epitome of leadership within the folkway that evokes power, terror, and love. Still, that terror is mobilized for the people's liberation rather than oppression. Hurston accentuates Moses' power and the terror of his rod because of her ardent belief in Hoodoo and root work, which is a tenet of Hurston's Black Joy. However, Moses wields this power and terror to free the Israelites from slavery and oppression, and this cannot be divorced from his love for them, which started to be reified with the killing of an Egyptian that was punishing an Israelite. This type of love is transformative because it is deracialized and denationalized and aids the liberation of oppressed people. The transformative love epitomized by Moses as a utopian figure, is a utopian impulse that transcends racial boundaries. However, Hurston's revising of Moses occludes womanhood, she aligns with the Judeo-Christian tradition of describing "the women characters in blatant misogynistic terms" (Johnson 137). Johnson observes this subversion of womanhood in *Moses* which is a reversal of the Janie—Tea Cake relationship in *Their Eyes*. This reversal valorizes Hurston as a paradoxical writer who employs trickery to confound her readers and to achieve her literary goals.

Moses signifies the powerful force of a leader in guiding the oppressed to the Promised Land, which symbolizes utopia. Utopia signifies freedom from racial enslavement, systemic racism, and racial oppression. This unifying force is isomorphic with Hurston's depiction of Tea Cake as a motivation for freeing Janie from the shackles of gender oppression and domination. Moses and Tea Cake symbolize freeing the oppressed from oppressive geographies. The Israelites offer to make Moses their king "but he went on to say that he wasn't sure that people ought to have Kings at all. It's pretty hard to find a man who wouldn't weaken under the strain of power and get big and overbearing. He might not be any better than nobody else if he had the chance" (*Moses* 214). Moses believes that power raises oppressors and wants the Israelites to be "free and be a fine nation of folks"

(*Moses* 214). Hurston mobilizes Moses to set the agenda of a non-hierarchical society, a kingless nation, that prioritizes people's happiness, unlike Joe Starks in *Their Eyes* whose demeanor in Eatonville parallels former White slave masters. Such a society is a utopian society that subverts racial inequalities and gender disparity but amplifies a new humanism of equal co-existence. Hurston pursues a similar thematic thrust in *Their Eyes* by deploying Tea Cake as a futurist figure that promotes (preaches) equal gender co-existence in marriages. Tea Cake considers Janie as his equal.

Moving from one place to another is a trope in Afrofuturism that Hurston explores in *Their Eyes* and *Moses* and coalesces with questing utopia. The Israelites' movement engenders the Black imagining of an alternative place that purveys joy rather than remaining abstract. Afrofuturism captures movement from one space to the other to attain utopia. It amplifies questing for a better place whether within the same planet or in an inter-planetary context. Hurston deploys the trope of questing for utopia to illuminate how that quest coalesces with moving from one unhappy place to a place where joy is experienced. In *Their Eyes*, Janie moves from West Florida to Eatonville and then to Everglades/the Muck where she experiences Black Joy that characterizes the "ships at a distance", the horizon that she quests, (*Their Eyes* 32) and recounts the experience to her friend Pheoby. Janie's movement is twofold: the first is psychological, while the second is spatial. Janie's first marriage to Logan Killicks disenchants her; the quest for a better place – a place of joy – starts psychologically. Logan's place "was a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been" (*Their Eyes* 53) and Janie's heart expects "a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time" (*Their Eyes* 57) but does not get any. Hurston makes Janie desert a space psychologically (which is the imagining) before moving to another space (place); this connects Janie's womanhood with place and joy. Unsurprisingly, the Afrofuturist space for Janie is usually the gate. The gate is an Afrofuturist space of expectation of utopia: "when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things" (*Their Eyes* 57). She becomes a woman when she realizes that "marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (*Their Eyes* 57). Hurston connects womanhood to space and to love (joy). Moving from one place to another is essential when a space lacks love for the fulfillment of womanhood. Janie moves to Eatonville with her second husband (Joe Starks) in search of joy and Black utopia, but she is disappointed. Joe has only acquired her as an ornament that he will display as a symbol of status. Joe's agenda for Janie is for "her place to be in de home" (*Their Eyes* 78) and not to make any speech. Whenever Janie is discontent with her present state, Hurston places her in the future. Janie's experience of gender oppression and domination

in her second marriage makes her travel to the future: "Sometimes she stuck out into the future…now and again she thought of a country road at sun-up and considered flight?" (*Their Eyes* 116). Lavender III's drawing on Delany's concepts about science fiction accentuates "reading Janie's travels as a version of planetary romance" (110). Joe Starks' demise allows Janie to make another escape to another space with Tea Cake. In this odyssey to utopia - Everglades, Janie eventually catches up with the bloom and relishes the joy she covets. Everglades is Janie's utopia: she discovers her subjectivity and becomes an epitome of futurist womanhood that subverts patriarchal domination to get her desires. In Everglades, she joyfully works in the field beside Tea Cake, which contrasts her unwillingness to work with Logan. Everglades transforms her from a silent woman, gives her agency, and makes her savor Black joy. Hurston depicts Janie as an alien or outsider in West Florida and Eatonville; the Everglades is the only place where she feels fulfilled. Janie's journey parallels the fabula of traveling to alternative spaces in science fiction as such migration is always aimed at obtaining a precious object or achieve a desired passion. Janie's migratory escapades are "Afrofuturism in action" (Lavender III 125) and present her as the embodiment of afrofuturist womanhood that transcends the limitation of a place.

Hurston deploys a similar migratory trope in *Moses* to denote the quest for utopia. Egypt represents a space of slavery and oppression, like a ship or spacecraft, that the Israelites abandon. The quest for utopia underlines the Israelites' migration from Egypt to a futuristic Promised Land that flows with milk and honey. The fabula of migration in *Moses* signifies futurism and the quest for utopia. Joshua Pederson notes that African Americans have appropriated the Exodus stories in various cultural expressions and that "African Americans cast themselves in the role of the Israelites, enslaved but chosen by God for a glorious freedom, oppressed but selected for a divine destiny" (439). Pederson argues unconvincingly that Hurston disowns Moses and the Hebrews in *Moses* because the homology of the Israelite and African American history "can no longer serve as a positive model for blacks" (443) and avers that Hurston is ambivalent about Moses. Although Hurston is ambivalent about Moses, the narrative also suggests the futuristic tendencies that Hurston emphasizes with the symbol of the Promised Land. While Hurston depicts Moses' patriarchal power that undermines womanhood (Miriam especially), Moses' musing about Miriam that she contributed to the story is Hurston's subliminal remonstration of misogynist tendencies that underpin both the Hebrew and Black cultures. Hurston deploys the journey as a crucial trope of discovering utopia both in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Reading the two works as afrofuturistic reifies the journey as an essential part of achieving utopia. The Israelites' movement from Egypt to the Promised Land is analogous

to Janie's trans-spatial migration, the disjuncture is in the Israelites' ambivalence that contrasts Janie's readiness to catch the next flight to utopia. Another level is to connect Janie's utopian quest with Moses' hopeful search of the Promised Land for Israel. Moses' mountain is a futuristic space or height as well as a bridge to utopia where he goes to imagine the future. The mountain as a symbol of utopia parallels Janie's gate and porch for expecting and catching a flight to the future. The mountain and the gate are symbols of places for imagining the future and in the case of Janie as a space of escape to a place of joy. Hurston subliminally represents the concatenation between place and joy and how it affects womanhood, especially in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; she preaches utopia as a necessary human dream and questing for it – whether psychologically or geographically through trans-spatial migration – is an indispensable precept to achieve a desired Afrofuturism.

Symbols, Place, Joy of Black Womanhood in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

Hurston's commitment to Black joy possibly makes her unrelentingly portray her characters as searching for better spaces (places). She appropriates certain symbols in her narratives as spaces of the future, they are spaces of joy or dreams for the future. In *Their Eyes,* Hurston sets the gate as a crossroads for revelation and escape to utopia. Janie's epiphany is under the pear tree, the transformation of the pear tree from "barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds…stirred her tremendously" (*Their Eyes* 42). The pear tree is a symbol of epiphany, of the discovery of Black joy, that should characterize Black womanhood, especially in marriage. The rhetorical question "Where were the singing bees for her?" (*Their Eyes* 43) echoes a desire for joyful womanhood that Hurston sets as an agenda that Janie should pursue. The gate is her space of first blooming – her first kiss – and becomes a peering glass into the future of Black womanhood, that is free from gender oppression and domination. The gate reveals and serves as a place of flight to achieve her dream of joyful womanhood, an existence of transformative love and ontological fulfillment. Hurston integrates the various spaces of Afrofuturism in *Their Eyes* in nuanced and dynamic ways that they interact and embody the contradictions of these spaces. The pear tree, Janie's first space of epiphany, leads her to Nanny's gate where her entanglement with Johnny Taylor produces the first kiss of her life. The contradiction of Nanny's gate is her forced marriage to Logan, which culminates in nothing but discontentment. The contradiction that Afrofuturist space offers permeates *Moses*. Moses' mountains represent a futurist height, a hybrid and symbolic place, they are comparable to the numerous symbolic Afrofuturist spaces in *Their Eyes*. Moses' epiphany occurs on Mount Horeb when he encounters "the

bush…burning brightly but its leaves did not twist and crumple and they did not fall as ashes beneath the charred limbs as they should have done" (*Moses* 104). Moses realizes the possibilities of power and the syncretism of hoodoo with the Judeo-Christian supernatural power. While Janie's epiphany is linked with joy and the possibilities of Black womanhood, Moses' manifestation is that of a messianic call to lead the Israelites to a future space/planet. Moses' previous liberatory efforts that exile him connect the past to the messianic request to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. Janie's pear tree discovery symbolizes the onset of the joy of womanhood, while Moses' contact with the God of the mountain commences the demands of black leadership for emancipation and a journey to utopia. Janie's pear tree leads her to Nanny's gate and then to Logan's gate and her porch at Eatonville.

Janie's porch at Eatonville is also an Afrofuturist space where she loops the past with the present and the future. Janie narrates her joyful odyssey into womanhood to Pheoby, her friend. Williams dissects Janie's porch as subverting time and "her thinking back and telling forward becomes a kind of Afrofuturistic loop" (635) that entrenches the bonding between the two friends. Two narrative objectives are achieved here. The bond between Janie and Pheoby reflects Afrofuturist and womanist ideals. Their friendship represents strong connections between Black women. This also symbolizes the real-life connection between Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker. The sisterhood they share on the porch in Eatonville foreshadows a future where Black womanhood thrives. It suggests a vision of growth, joy, and empowerment for Black women, much like planting trees that blossom in the future. *Moses*, however, is deficient in this Black womanhood perspective; nevertheless, Hurston recruits Jethro to plant the seed of black leadership that motivates oppressed people to envision a utopia on a distant planet, the Promised Land. The Promised Land allegorizes a different planet, as in science fiction metaphors, where utopia exists. As the porches and the gates serve simultaneously as the bridge and peering axis to Afrofuturist womanhood in *Their Eyes*, the mountains perform parallel functions in *Moses* and proffer a height to Afrofuturist leadership that routes a major colonial power. This Afrofuturist leadership is evident in *Black Panther,* but it is limited to the patriarchal domain in *Moses*.

Everglades/the Muck and the Promised Land also symbolize futurist spaces of joy. Hurston projects the Everglades as an Afrofuturist space where an alienated Janie savors the joy of womanhood. Lavender III avers that Janie lives "an alien life because Joe forces his own whitewashed vision on her" (122) and harnesses the alien metaphor to explore Janie's life in disparate spaces until she reaches the Everglades. Everglades is a space of inter-racial connection, artistic displays, and equal work terms between Janie and Tea Cake. Janie discovers her agency in Everglades, the joy of her being as a woman and experiences fits of jealousy – an experience that

she does not have outside the Muck. Everglades contrasts Eatonville in terms of Black women's agencies, Everglades signifies the utopian Black place where gender parity is entrenched. Conversely, the Promised Land in *Moses* remains remote, but Hurston maintains its futurist evocation as a utopian space free from oppression and slavery. The Promised Land is a metaphor for African Americans, an Afrofuturist place that is devoid of colonial hegemony and slavery, a place of milk and honey for the generality of the people. Albeit *Their Eyes* reifies the concatenation of place, joy, and womanhood, *Moses* is limited to the futuristic imagining of a utopia that transcends race but may not necessarily encompass gender equality.

CONCLUSION

Although Afrofuturism as a metatheory was not formally articulated until long after Hurston's time, it is particularly telling of how Hurston and her politics of joy and refusal were distinctly futuristic. Reading *Moses* and *Their Eyes* through the lens of this metatheory centralizes the peculiarities of Black womanhood, celebrating the associated joy and heroism as Black people navigate their own paths toward freedom, social life, belonging, and the pursuit of hope.

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