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Breaking Silence and Freeing the Voice: The Poetics and Politics of Resistant Geographies in the Fiction of Contemporary Black Women Writers

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Dedications

To the memory of my beloved brother Ibrahim,

To my **PARENTS**,

To my Husband,

To my Sister and Brothers

and the apple of my eye, Mohamed,

with Respect, Gratitude and Love Forever**...**

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Abstract

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary investigation of the ways in which contemporary black women writers, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Octavia Estelle Butler, affirm marginality and resistance as fundamental for the definition of the black female experience in the United States. More precisely, it focuses on their fictional geographies to explore each writer's distinctive rendition of the intersection between the black female subject, the margin, and resistance in their respective novels, *Paradise* (1998), *Mama Day* (1988), and *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). As the space of the margin had long informed about the position black women writers held within the American literary canon as well as their place within the American community at large, I contend that the selected writers craft black heroines who not only dwell in the margin, but even more importantly, they complicate it by recasting it into a site of resistance against multiple forms of oppression. My conceptualisation of the margin as a site of resistance engages various spatial perspectives from different disciplines, including Patricia Hill Collins's and bell hook's theorisation of the margin as a space in which black women forge a culture of resistance, the notion of liminality as explained by Victor Turner, Homi Bhabha, and Shmuel Eisenstadt, Michel Foucault's heterotopia, and Donna Haraway's figuration of the border subject, the cyborg. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that while their novels aim at breaking silence surrounding the complexities of black women's lives, Morrison, Naylor, and Butler construct, respectively, a critical geography of liminality, heterotopic geography, and a speculative geography of a cyborg subjectivity to enable their black heroines enact resistance against and assert agency over oppressive forces embedded in dominant discourses.

Keywords: Black female experience, Border, Contemporary black women's fiction, Cyborg subjectivity, Heterotopia, Liminality, Margin as site of resistance, Resistant geographies.

General Introduction

> RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY! it says in huge block letters. There is a roar as if the world cracked open and I flew inside. I am no more. And satisfied.
>
> —Alice Walker.

Since its early beginnings in the eighteenth century, black women's writing in the United States has been primarily regarded as an act of breaking silence and freeing the voice about black women's lives and realities. From early literary figures like Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley, and Harriet E. Wilson, black American women writers have been very much engaged in a collective, creative, and critical project of bringing black female creativity to the forefront of public consciousness at a time when imagining and theorising about black women's lives were still invisible to the vast majority of academics. This task, however, has involved both the creative writer and the critic, and often times one person serves both functions.

Though the community of black women writers, which has been formed and fostered mainly by its novelists, constitutes diverse and rich voices within the broad spectrum of the American literary landscape, they have not achieved this considerable prominence overnight. Notwithstanding the remarkable literary qualities of their narratives, early literary foremothers have been condemned to silences in white as well as black literary and academic circles, leading to the invisibility and absence of a black female voice in the diversity of discourses shaped by these circles and, therefore, an expulsion from the American cultural and literary scenes of that time.

Ironically, the silencing of such burgeoning black female literary tradition has been fundamentally inflicted by the black intellectual community whose ideological strands have been woven into a long-standing black patriarchal discourse that privileged masculine interpretations of the black experience in U.S. Indeed, in his anthology, *The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers* (1990), Calvin C. Hernton appropriates a lengthy section to the history of critical and literary lynching of the writings of black women by black male authors who used their pens to dismiss the creativities of their female counterparts for obscurity, specifically those whose stories challenged the normative fabric of patriarchal black supremacy. In this book, Hernton also argues that part of what black male writers and critics have been reacting against in the texts of black women was the latter's audacious endeavour to inscribe themselves into history as, "black men have historically defined themselves as sole interpreter of the Black Experience" (41). Besides, Claudia Tate explains in her introduction to *Black Women Writers at Work* (1989), which is an anthology considered by many reviewers as one of the most pivotal works about black women authors, that black women writers have been condemned to silences in black literary circles because they have openly challenged the dictates of both black community and black literary tradition. Tate also makes the point that it was the black male literary scholars who marginalised the ingenuities of black women writers and suppressed their voices, because for them, black women writers resisted the positions and roles structured by conventional images of black femininity. To underscore her argument, she discusses the sore historical fact that, even if they have succeeded in getting their works published, black women have been unable to gain the same academic attention and support as their black male counterparts, which has led to a lack of critical attention devoted to their writings.

Not only early black women writers' voices have been suppressed, the chorus of literary voices emanating from more contemporary writers, like Zora Neale Hurston, have been met with many vitriols leading to the stigmatisation and ostracization of black women writers by black writing community. According to the black feminist critic, Deborah E. McDowell (1995), for instance, black women's literature's vitriolic critiques and reviews have been fundamentally instigated by what black male authors and critics alike viewed as a betrayal to a common literary cause that should be structured around issues of family, kinship, and community rather than expressing a deep concern with the question of black women's struggle for, "self-realization, wholeness, and autonomy in a racist and sexist society fundamentally antagonistic to individualism and the ideal of autonomy for women and blacks" (xii). Eventually, these sharp criticisms have embarked on calls for censorship and attempted to demand that black women writers ought to, "meet a representational ideal in the name of creating racial unity and wholeness" (xv-xvi). Hence, because black women writers have failed to meet the dictates of a largely black male-dominated writing community, they were eventually "read and loudly proclaimed to be threats to a unified black community, healthy and whole" (xvi), which, of course, has fuelled the stigmatisation and ostracization of their thoughts and voices.

Yet, black women authors have in no way remained silent about the obfuscation of their talents by their very community of letters which marginalised their voices. From the 1970s onward, something has started to move at the margin. A new breed of black women writers has emerged. This was the signal for an unprecedented outpouring of black women's writing in the U.S. which has given rise to a phenomenon known as Black Women's Literary Renaissance. One of the most succinct yet perceptive descriptions of this renaissance is offered by Andrée Nicola McLaughlin (1990) who would tantamount the upsurge of black women's literature in the second half of the

twentieth century to a renaissance of a resistant black female spirit: "The literary upsurge by Black women . . . unveils a renaissance in the spirit inspired by those who have refused to surrender. Those who have resisted their oppression. Those who have undertaken to remake the universe to own their future" (xxxi). It is actually this resistant black female spirit which has caused the abundance in contemporary black female writing. It is also important to note that this spirit has been ushered in by the publication of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), and also Maya Angelou's autobiographical work, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969); three major works with explicit articulations of formerly unspoken about black woman-centred issues like abuse, violence, and rape which permeate white as well as black communities in America.

In fact, along with the emergence of new black female literary voices and themes, black women literary theorists and critics have helped break the silence surrounding black women's literature by legitimising the field of black literary studies and providing numerous sources like the anthology, the collection, introductions, prefaces and essays. These sources have constituted paradigm-shifting works that encompassed the full range of writing by black women and helped define the architects of the literary renaissance in black women's literature. Perhaps the most evident sign of this, however, was the appearance, in 1988, of the thirty-volume *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*, published by Oxford University Press. This series brings together a bunch of distinguished scholars, most of whom are black women of course, including Hazel Carby, Mary Helen Washington, Gloria T. Hull, and Valerie Smith. Each of these scholars writes an introduction to one of the individual volumes which includes the works of many black women writers.

One of the sources that has been credited with sparking the vigour of the black women's literary renaissance is, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970). This landmark anthology includes a collection of essays, poetry, and short fiction by contemporary black women writers who seem to be driven by an enormous desire to write themselves into, "the national consciousness" (*Changing* 1). Their writings focus on the construction of black female selves and identities that engage in a meaningful resistance to the oppression and limitation of racial and gender subordination. Describing the creative and intellectual efforts assembled in the anthology, Cade Bambara argues: "We are involved in a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative control of a corporate society; liberation from the constrictive norms of "mainstream" culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation)". ("On the Issue of Roles" 1). Most revealing, the anthology displays black women writers as political agents willing to call attention to the multiple oppression of black women living in a white male-dominated society, while acknowledging the objectification, brutalisation, and dehumanisation of black women within the black community itself. In doing so, the newly emerging community of black female authors, Bambara asserts, begin the process of artistic creation by answering a call to reveal the truths and the various facets of the black women's existence.

It is, therefore, the portrayal of the black female experience and its complexities which constitutes the impetus behind this renaissance, and the rise of Black Women's Studies in the 1960s can be understood as responding to the critical need for underscoring the very idea that black women writers compose from the vantage point of, one must speak for oneself if one wishes to be heard. One of the most distinguished intellects of this field is Farah Jasmine Griffin (2009) who

observes that the explosion in black women's creative writing in the 1970s has engendered powerful narratives that not only attended to black women's lives but dared to expose the specificities of the black female experience (Griffin 338-339). Besides Griffin, a number of black female critics and theorists have taken on themselves the task of interpreting black women writers' representation of the unique experiences of black women in America, as Black and Women's Studies failed to acknowledge them. On the latter point, the black female critic Mary Helen Washington asserts in *Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women* (1975) that what is most important about the black woman writer is "her special and unique vision of the black woman" (qtd. in *Changing* 4), that's why no one can understand or promote the black woman writer's literary creativity better than a black woman. Here, Washington is also referring to the gap between white feminist criticism and black criticism into which any discussion about issues related specifically to black women have disappeared, and paradoxically, out of which the plurality as well as the peculiarity of the black female experience has to articulate itself. It is thus this complex multiplicity which seems to challenge any simple approach or response among black women writers and critics to the black female experience.

Interestingly, it has been fiction, more than any other literary genre, that records and reflects most black women writers' profound engagement with the specificity of black women's experiences. Inasmuch as the black female subject has been of paramount concern for contemporary black women's fiction, a great body of scholarship has followed in the wake of a strong appeal toward reading black women novelists' special and unique visions of this subject matter. Early scholarly works such as Mari Evans's *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation* (1984), Eliott Butler-Evans's *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker* (1989), and Cheryl A. Wall's

Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women (1989), include essays on the significance of the multiple and dynamic intersections of gender with race and class in the formation of black female subjectivities and identities in black women's fiction. Even in more recent studies like Sandra Caona Duvivier's "Mapping Intersections: Black women's Identities and the Politics of Home in Transnational Black American women's fiction" (2014) and Dana Christine Volk's "Passing: Intersections of Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality" (2017), one can still easily observe that they focus primarily on examining the intersections between race, gender, and class and their significance in defining the distinctive peculiarity of the black female experience portrayed in narratives by black women writers.

In her influential work, *Quicksand and Passing* (1986), Deborah E. McDowell justifies this interpretive framework by demonstrating the way that an absence of critical attention to the intersection of race, gender, and class, which, she asserts, constitutes such a fundamental feature of black women's lived experiences in America, has led to one-dimensional, flat reading of black women's fiction. Yet, it was Barbara Smith who in her pioneering 1977 essay, "Toward a Black feminist Criticism", has laid the ground of a reading approach that is mainly attentive to the intersections of gender, race, and class in the writings of black women novelists like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

Notwithstanding Smith's reading strategy has influenced several intersectional analyses whose aim was to promote the artistic individuality of the black woman author as well as the specificity of the black female subject matter, this reading strategy seems in a way to miss yet another axe which this dissertation attempts to render as crucial as race, gender, and class, that is the space of the margin. It is important to highlight the fact that the current research doesn't underestimate the significance of intersectional analysis as set by the black feminist theorist,

Barbara Smith, or the other intersectional analyses that consider tropes like home and desire, but it tends to suggest a different interpretative framework that seeks to explore, instead, the intersections of the black female subject with space and resistance in the construction of contemporary black women's fiction. I chose to call this intersection 'geography'. The latter arises out of my own appropriation of Katherine McKittrick's use of the term 'black geographies' in her recent book, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007), where she employs it to refer to those places in which black subjects and communities suffer from and resist matrices of domination and oppression.

My interest in choosing the previously suggested interpretative framework is stimulated by my belief, which is also similar to that of Mclaughlin (1990), that contemporary black women novelists have been driven by a strong spirit of resistance to speak out against the strictures that have rendered their writings mute and relegated their literature to a marginalised status. Hence, it is argued that these writers did not resist being marginalised, but tended to embrace such a position and used the margin to deploy different strategies of resistance in order to address, what I consider, two main preoccupations: to break silence surrounding their creativities and make their voices heard within the American literary community; to write stories about black women who challenge the unilateral representations, hegemonic constructions, and derogatory depictions that have ignored and marginalised the intricate elements constituting their experience in America.

Hence, this dissertation seeks to break new grounds in terms of understanding how it is out of a position of marginality that contemporary black women writers conceive of their ability to view black women lives and shape, through their own gaze, powerful stories featuring defiant black heroines who navigate critical geographies in which they enact resistance to multiple forms of domination and assert multiple acts of agency. By 'resistance', here, I mean the black female

character's deliberate thoughts and practices meant to oppose and challenge the status quo, whereas I employ the term 'agency' to refer to the character's ability to initiate and perform action by her own will. However, the term 'resistant geographies', as indicated in the title of the dissertation, is intended to stand for the fictional geographies of the novels chosen for this study, and which signify the authors' varying constructions of alternative realities for their black heroines, to enable them recast spaces of marginality into potential sites of resistance.

Besides filling a gap in the existing literature by identifying and examining the intersection of black female subject, space, and resistance in contemporary black women's fiction, another significant contribution of this dissertation lies in its providing meaningful insights into the diversity of theoretical perspectives on the margin as a site of resistance. In addition to the black female experience, the margin is the other important concept that this research focuses on, because the space of the margin has not only defined black women writers' position in the literary canon, but it also refers to space that is mainly occupied by black women living in America. It is thus safe to assume that black women writers have experienced twofold marginalisation: as a black woman living in a white male-dominated society and as a writer writing outside the gates of mainstream literature. Such complicated experience, I argue, gives contemporary black women writers a peculiar vantage point from which to employ their literary production as an instrument of resistance to the diversity of black women's experiences of oppression that has forced them into situations of multiple marginalisation.

Cheryl A. Wall (1989) is among the first black female scholars to invite the community of black women writers and critics to think of and embrace the margin as a space where they can have their voices heard and carve their own niche in the academy and literary community, declaring: "The position or place we are assigned on the margins of the academy informs but does

not determine the positions or stances we take. From the margins various strategies may be deployed" (*Changing* 2). Black feminist thinkers like bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins have taken Wall's words as a point of departure to explore the ways in which black women develop, on the margins, a culture of resistance. Bell hooks (1990) observes that the margin should be regarded as "more than a state of deprivation". For hooks, the margin rather represents a site of "radical openness and possibility, a site of resistance" (22). Collins (1990), on the other hand, redefines the margin as a potential source of empowerment for black women to forge new understandings of their lives and develop an oppositional consciousness of resistance against the multiple oppressions they have experienced.

The conceptualisation of the margin as a site of resistance is not exclusive to a black feminist discourse. This issue has been at the heart of several discussions, emanating from different fields of study. The anthropologist Victor Turner (1974-1977) employs the notion of liminality to refer to the marginal spaces whence individuals not only run counter to, but liberate themselves from the restrictive values, customs, and conventions underlying the normative mainstream of the societies that push them to the margin. The ideas of the postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha (1994) on the liminal are also of important consideration. He describes the liminal as a marginal space that exists on the threshold of two different cultures, and, where hybrid entities emerge to create a disruptive site of resistance which, for Bhabha, "makes the claim to a hierarchical purity of cultures untenable" (Ashcroft et al. 108). Shmuel Eisenstadt's (1995) perspective on the liminal is quite different from those of Turner and Bhabha. He thinks that some societies tend to create a liminal situation in which individuals acquiesce to an imposed marginality. In such a condition, Eisenstadt argues that liminality becomes more of a restrictive space, because a certain social and cultural structure is to be constructed and foisted rather than being transgressed.

In addition to being identified as a liminal space, the margin can also be conceived of as heterotopia. It is the spatial thinker, Michel Foucault (1966-1967), who appropriated the term 'heterotopia' in order to address marginal spaces that exist outside of all places. According to him, heterotopias represent counter-sites established through a different order that is meant to resist the normalised, dominant order of spaces to which heterotopias connect. Following Foucault's outline of heterotopia, several scholars have attempted to chart the rhetoric of resistance that marks heterotopic sites. In *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (1997), Kevin Hetherington, for instance, provides a sociological reading of heterotopia that associates this space with marginality, otherness, social order, and resistance. He claims that the inherent dimension of 'otherness' embedded in heterotopias, makes them the perfect space for marginalised subjects to raise their voices and devise a different order whose aim is to counter the dominant ordering of society. For Margaret Kohn (2003), however, heterotopia is examined from a socio-economic perspective. She points out that heterotopias represent resistant spaces that function as counter-sites to challenge existing economic and social hierarchies.

From a feminist poststructuralist standpoint, the margin is addressed in the guise of the border. In her celebrated 1985 essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", Donna Haraway introduces the concept of 'the cyborg' which becomes one of the most influential feminist metaphors of difference, contradiction, and resistance to certain hierarchical dualisms that have pervaded Western thought and which have been used to oppress women. She claims that she develops her cyborg theory in relation to women's experience in the last decades, and writes that: "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 149). For this feminist poststructuralist thinker, the cyborg is a potent

subjectivity dwelling the border as a site of resistance, to deliberately challenge the discourse of the traditional universal self that implies a fixed and monolithic essence to female subjectivity that is reduced to a uniform and consistent representation. Haraway asserts that what inspires such a theorisation is the liminal, marginal spaces occupied by women of colour. According to her, there is a compelling parallel between cyborgs and women of colour in the sense that both dwell in spaces that allow them to displace themselves from the position of the 'Other' and negotiate alternative forms of subjectivity that articulate partial identities and contradictory standpoints. Here, what Haraway wants us to fathom is that the border represents yet another facet of the liminal, marginal space.

In this dissertation, I will draw heavily upon these diverse viewpoints as I ultimately seek to investigate how the margin is recast into a site of resistance in contemporary fiction by black women writers. The novels chosen for discussion are Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998), Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). The reason I have chosen these books is that the theme of the black female experience figures prominently in them as they remarkably feature defiant black female characters who seem to dwell in different marginal spaces that afford them the power to demonstrate various acts of agency and resistance against multiple forms of oppression. While Morrison creates liminal spaces for her edgewomen and her black female liminar in *Paradise*, Naylor's *Mama Day* places its black matriarchs within the fictional island, Willow Springs, which is a marginal place akin to a heterotopia. As for Butler's speculative fiction, the Parable novels, the margin is represented through the space of the border to enable the black female protagonist articulate a potent cyborg subjectivity.

In considering the dissertation's main purpose, a number of questions should be addressed: How does the space of the margin inform about and shape the politics of contemporary black women's writing and thought? How is the margin recast into a site of resistance in the fiction of contemporary black women writers? How is the space of margin read as a site of resistance according to different spatial perspectives? How is liminality presented in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, and to what extent does this space empower Morrison's edgewomen to form a *communitas* enacting resistance against an oppressive, patriarchal structure? In *Mama Day*, how does Gloria Naylor's envisioning of a heterotopic place reflect her deep concern with issues of black female experience and resistance? How does cyborg subjectivity help Octavia Butler construct her speculative vision of black women, difference, and resistance in her Parable novels?

In order to address these questions, an interdisciplinary approach will be adopted. By undertaking such an approach, it will be possible to draw meaningful insights from as well as connections between several perspectives belonging to different fields of research. Among these are spatial studies, anthropology, sociology, black feminist criticism, feminist poststructuralism and postcolonial studies. One can argue that such diversity of insights attends mainly to the profundity of the chosen novels and, of course, the complexity their resistant geographies demonstrate in addressing the intersection between the black female subject, space, and resistance.

Besides, the interdisciplinarity of this research will help explain the assumptions this dissertation rests on and which encompass the following: By embracing space of the margin, it is suggested that contemporary black women writers and intellectuals alike not only have broken silence surrounding a powerful literary tradition, but have developed a unique, critical perspective on how complex black women's lives are. In addition, it is presumed that the margin accentuates a multifaceted poetics of resistance as it is viewed as a site of resistance by different spatial

perspectives. Moreover, it is hypothesised that Morrison's *Paradise* presents liminality as a discrepant space to highlight the contrasting experiences taking place in two opposing places: the all-female Convent and the all-black, patriarchal town of Ruby. Such contrast, I think, makes possible the demonstration of liminality as a space with resistant and liberatory possibilities to Morrison's edgewomen, and debilitatingly restrictive to the patriarchs of Ruby. This study also assumes that heterotopia provides Naylor a critical medium to imagine a black female world with a different order that resists the dominant ordering of America. Making a black female heterotopia with a contesting nature enables Naylor contemplate subversive potentials for her matriarchs to articulate a sense of agency over derogatory descriptions of black women. Besides, I put forward the effectiveness of speculative fiction as a remarkably promising genre for a black woman writer seeking to envision an alternative reality beyond the confines of racial and sexist oppressions. I presume Butler's Parable novels are very much concerned with this kind of envisioning, as the novelist constructs a black heroine who articulates a cyborg subjectivity that speaks out a utopian vision of a world free of oppressions based on racial and gender differences.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned assumptions, it seems plausible and convenient that I organise the dissertation into five chapters. My first chapter, "What Moves at the Margin: The Politics of Black Women's Writing and Thought", explores the historical and intellectual backgrounds of contemporary black women's literature as I undertake to trace the journey black women writers have underwent from a contrived form of silencing to an eventual liberation of their voices and literary talents. The main focus of the second chapter, "Mapping the Margin Through Different Spatial Perspectives: A Multifaceted Poetics of Resistance", is however to emphasise the idea that the space of the margin is tackled as a site of resistance in different fields of study, including black feminist criticism, anthropology, spatial studies, postcolonial theory, and

feminist poststructuralism. The third Chapter, "Mapping Geographies of Liminality and Black Women's Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998)", consists of a discussion regarding the presentation of liminality as a transformative, emancipatory, and resistant space in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Besides, the fourth chapter, "Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) and the Making of a Resistant Black Female Heterotopia", concerns Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and its peculiar representation of a black female heterotopia. Finally, fifth chapter, "Resistance Reimagined: Cyborg Subjectivity and Difference in the Speculative Geography of Octavia Butler's Parables (1993-1998)", explores the potential speculative fiction creates for the black feminist science-fiction writer, Octavia Butler, to envision a cyborg subjectivity that holds the potential of subverting dominant discourses on black women and black motherhood.

One final clarification needs to be made concerning my choice of subject and Butler's speculative novels. First, instead of being driven by personal motives, it has been my academic pursuits which have introduced me to contemporary black women's writing, as I have been interested in this field since my magister dissertation. Besides, I think it worths mention that including a black woman science-fiction writer within my discussion is but an attempt to capture, even if partially, the multiplicity of voices and creative ingenuities displayed in the fiction of contemporary black American women writers. Also, I believe that the significance and value of Octavia Butler's literary work can only be fully understood if it is examined as part of a black female literary tradition, for although a critical response to Butler's writing has been that she is only consumed with the idea of incorporating a black woman's voice within the genre of speculative fiction, my reading of her literature convinces me that her main preoccupation is with the black female experience.

Chapter One

What Moves at the Margin: The Politics of Black Women's Writing and Thought

I.1. Introduction

I.2. Tracing the Emergence of a Tradition: A Historical Contextualisation

  2.1. Vicious Attacks and the Silencing of a Tradition

  2.2. The Black Female Aesthetic and Black Arts Movement

  2.3. The Contemporary Black Woman Writer and the Black Female Experience

I.3. Black Women Thought: An Intellectual Conceptualisation

  3.1. Breaking Silence: The Emergence of Black Women's Studies

 3.2. Black Feminist Criticism: An Enabling Perspective

   3.2.1. The Black Female Experience: A Multiple Jeopardy, a Multiple Consciousness

   3.2.2. The Outsiders Within: A Peculiar Marginality, Contradictory Locations, and Resistance

I.4. Conclusion

> I see greater and greater commitment among black women writers to understand self, multiplied in terms of the community, the community multiplied in terms of the nation, and the nation multiplied in terms of the world. You have to understand what your place as an individual is and the place of the person who is close to you. You have to understand the space between you before you can understand more complex or larger groups.
>
> —Alexis DeVeaux.

I.1. Introduction:

The concept of the margin does indubitably and necessarily intervene in any discussion about black women and literature. It is a pivotal consideration because it is out of a marginal position and consequent absence that an understanding of black women's vision in written expressions arises. By margin, I mean the absence of the black woman writer's voice and text, and the absence of a particularly black female position on major social and cultural issues such as race, gender, oppression, and black female experience. By margin I also mean silence; or, the incapacity to articulate what Cheryl A. Wall would call, "a critical positionality" (*Changing* 1) in dominant discourses. The margin also denotes vociferation that remains unheard.

In a more pragmatic context, however, the margin is featured by black women writers' lack of access to critical discussions as well as exclusion from the critical dialogue. Understanding the margin pushes one to call into question the scarcity of the black woman's literary presence before the period of the 1970's. This further explains the absence of critical attention to such presence. The current chapter then is an exploration into the intellectual history which constitutes the genesis of contemporary black women writers. The 'Politics' in the title of the chapter refers, therefore, to

those creative and challenging endeavours which have brought a critical sensibility among contemporary black women writers. This sensibility is assumed to have given new ways of reading the literature produced by these writers. The word 'Politics' also informs the fact that these female writers have brought their rich and diversified writings to the forefront of public consciousness at a time when theorising about and imagining black women's experiences were still invisible to the vast majority of academics.

I.2. Tracing the Emergence of a Tradition: A Historical Contextualisation:

Even though it is contemporary black American women writers like Toni Morrison who have won recognition for their literary achievements in awards ranging from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the National Book Critics Circle award, the American Book Award, the Lillian Smith Award to Zora Neale Hurston Award, the Langston Hughes Medallion, the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize, black women's literary tradition is not a recent phenomenon. The focus of this section is therefore to trace those early endeavours that have marked the birth of a distinctive black female literary tradition and aesthetic.

It is important to mention that the section does not attempt a chronological sweep of black women writers or the writers selected for discussion. The aim however is to examine the historical context of their development. It also seeks to explain the cultural circumstances and political conditions that had enabled the community of black women writers to break silence and free their voices.

2.1. Vicious Attacks and the Silencing of a Tradition:

Black women's literature in the U.S. is not a recent phenomenon. From Lucy Terry, who penned the first known work of literature by a black American woman: "Bar's Fight", a poem

composed in 1764 but not published until 1855, to popular contemporary writers like Terry McMillan and Bebe Moore Campbell, black women have been, "telling their stories for centuries" (Beaulieu x). There have been remarkable literary endeavours among black American women ever since Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley, and Harriet E. Wilson in the eighteenth century. Astoundingly, these endeavours existed even before black women have been allowed their right to literacy. In fact, what merits mention is that most of early black women's literary activities, like their creators in general, have been kept secret in the shadows of, "attic trunks, hidden away from the world by both choice and fortune" (Tate xxv).

According to Claudia Tate (1989), many of the early black female authors have chosen to remain silent. They have not even demonstrated courage to share their stories, reflections, and profound thoughts with the world for the mere reason that they have simply sensed, "their efforts were too private or that they might be misunderstood". Yet, another camp of these women writers has thought that their literary expressions exceeded the obligations of social decorum and transcended the boundaries of conventional moral propriety, or of, in the words of Tate, "acceptable racial content" (xxv). Still others have been just apprehensive about facing the antagonistic criticism that would be levelled against them by white male-dominated press, or even worse, by those trenchant commentaries coming from their black male counterparts. In this sense, we may say that the literary tradition established by those black literary foremothers[1] has been silenced either by personal choice or by an outer authority.

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[1] One of the most interesting descriptions of black literary 'foremothers' is penned by Joanne M. Braxton in "Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance". She declared that, foremothers, usually refer to the female ancestors, those who have preceded and who have gone on, but by definition, ascertains Braxton, foremothers can also signify those who have gone in front, those who have been leaders, and particularly those who "have stood at the foreground of cultural experience". "They were ordinary women of courage", explains Braxton (xxv). For black women writers and critics, however, these women remain, "sources of consciousness and personal strength: models of independence, self-reliance, perseverance, and self-determination" (xxv). Contemporary black women writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are strongly connected to those who went before first and foremost by, "the mother

Notwithstanding the racist and sexist strictures, and as it has kept evolving into a more visible activity by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, black women's literature becomes clearly saturated with strategies by which writers could overcome, "every conceivable obstacle to personal evolution and self-expression" (Birch 10). With the powerful literary expressions of women like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Jesse Fauset, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Nella Larson, and Zora Neale Hurston, writing by black women can be understood as a direct response that resists stereotypes of black women as, "mammies, primitive exotics, and tragic mulattos" (*Black American Women Novelists* 2), which have been inscribed in most of white-male texts and served to solidify and justify racial attitudes. They also liberate themselves from the images assigned to them in the writings of black men, where, portrayed as what Stephen E. Henderson (1983) stipulates, "[Q]ueens and princesses, or as earth mothers" ("Introduction" xxiv). Both ways, black women writers found black women depicted as unrecognizable individuals, and the process of correcting these images has received hostile criticism from both whites and blacks, which has led to the exclusion of black women presence from the canons of American and, with a few exceptions, African American literatures.

This exclusion is inevitable as most early reviews have failed to take into consideration the cultural circumstances in which black women produce their literary works. White reviewers, for instance, working on the premise that these novelists have been attempting to write the same type of novels as their white contemporaries, come to the conclusion that black women writers have

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tongue". In the words of Temma Kaplan: "Often in the most oppressive situations, it is the memories of the mothers handed down through the daughters that keeps a community together. The mother tongue is not just the words or even the array of symbols available to a people to resist its tormentors. The mother tongue is the oral tradition. And through the oral tradition, women acting as mothers create political possibilities for new generations" (qtd. in Braxton xxvi). The mother tongue and the collective spirit of Americans of African descent gave birth to authentic products of culture and consciousness including spirituals and shouts, work songs, and the blues Braxton xxvi).

simply failed to, "live up to the aesthetic standards of their time" (*Black American Women Novelists* 2). Ironically, black women novelists have received rougher and harsher commentaries from their black counterparts who thought that the images of the black man were presented unfairly or in too superficial a manner in black female texts. In "Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance", Joanne M. Braxton (1990) observes that even some black male writers and critics, "express alarm over the images of black men presented in works by black women", they should not pronounce their disagreement over this inappropriately. She writes: "I appreciate the sensitivity and indeed the security that some Black men feel, but the hostile tone taken by a few of the most influential is almost intolerable. Because when we disagree, we must disagree in love" (xxii-xxiii).

Braxton's observation has not arisen in a vacuum. Pioneering black male writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, who were supposed to be sensitive enough to be aware of the problems of race and invisibility, have delivered vicious attacks on one of the most distinguished black literary foremothers, Zora Neal Hurston. Consistent in their belief that the subject matter of Black literature must confront racist constraints, both of Wright and Ellison could not see the beauty of Hurston's aesthetic craft. While Wright condemns Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for "perpetuating minstrel stereotypes", Ellison denounces her *Moses, Man of the Mountain* as a, "calculated burlesque" (qtd. in *Black American Women Novelists* 3). In this regard, June Jordan, an influential black female poet and a passionate activist, understands that black male scholars have been exercising the same racial attitudes, that have excluded and precluded them from achieving popularity in mainstream literary circles, over their black female contemporaries, concluding that it is the, "binary thought structures originating outside but maintained within the

black community", which constitutes, "the fundamental source of distortions that plague black women novelists" (qtd. in *Black American Women Novelists* 3).

Deborah E. McDowell (1995) also discovers that black males' attacks on black women writers and, "the reading prerogatives blurred beneath them" have depended on an, "enfeebled black nationalism . . . which, like other nationalist rhetorics, was bound up in masculinist anxieties and gendered ideologies of dominance and control" (*"The Changing Same"* xv). According to this black feminist critic, this critical clamour was fundamentally instigated by what black male authors and critics alike have viewed as a betrayal to a common literary cause that should be structured around issues of family, kinship, and community rather than expressing a deep concern with the question of black women's struggle for, "self-realization, wholeness, and autonomy in a racist and sexist society fundamentally antagonistic to individualism and the ideal of autonomy for women and blacks" (xii). Eventually, these sharp critiques have embarked on calls for censorship and have attempted to demand that black women writers ought to, "meet a representational ideal in the name of creating racial unity and wholeness". (xv-xvi) Hence, because black women writers have failed to meet the dictates of both black community and black literary circles, they have eventually been "read and loudly proclaimed to be threats to a unified black community, healthy and whole" (*"The Changing Same"* xvi), which has caused the expulsion of their literary creativities from the broad spectrum of the American literary imagination

In her introduction to *Black Women Writers at Work*, a text regarded by many as one of the most significant anthologies, Claudia Tate explains that black women writers, "of whatever quality, who step outside the pale of what black writers are supposed to write about, or who black writers are supposed to be, are condemned to silences in black literary circles that are as total and as destructive as any imposed by racism". Tate adds, "This is particularly true for black women

writers who have refused to be delineated by male-established models of femininity" (xxv). Here, Tate is making the point that it is black male literary scholars who have marginalised the ingenuities of black women writers and condemned them to silences, especially those women who resisted the positions and roles structured by conventional images of black femininity. Tate further discusses the sore historical fact that, even if they succeeded in getting their works published, black women have been unable to gain the same academic attention and support as their black male counterparts, which has led to the invisibility and absence of a black female voice from the American cultural and literary scenes of that time. She accordingly declares, "[E]ven when their works are published, these writers still remain obscure since they seldom receive the same marketing attention or support of the academic community their male counterparts do" (xxv).

In his anthology, *The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers* (1990), Calvin C. Hernton appropriates a lengthy section to the history of critical and literary lynching of the writings of black women by black male authors who used their pens to kill the creativities of their female counterparts, specifically those whose stories defy the normative fabric of patriarchal black supremacy. Part of what black male writers and critics were reacting against in the texts of black women, Hernton puts forward, was what these male artists saw as black female authors' audacious endeavour to inscribe themselves into history as, "black men have historically defined themselves as sole interpreter of the Black Experience" (41). During the periods of the New Negro Movement and the Black Arts Movement, black women were placed backstage in an almost sacrificial effort to give space to the masculinist presence of black male writers to predominate. The much-spoken-of story of the Civic Club dinner arranged in 1924 to honour the black female novelist Jessie Fauset for the publication of her debut novel, *There Is Confusion*, is but one case taken to demonstrate this effort. The dinner ended up being a gathering for disclosing the New Negro project. Fauset

was eventually moved from the lights of the event while the young black male artists, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen, to mention but a few, dominated the event and stepped forward to represent the font and facade of the Harlem Renaissance.

2.2. The Black Female Aesthetic and Black Arts Movement:

The concept of 'the Black Aesthetic' has been essentially related to the Black Arts Movement that has emerged in the mid-1960s as the artistic reflection of the Black Power Movement. Yet even at the acme of that movement, there has not been a consensus on the meaning of this term. In his preface to one of the focal documents of the movement, *The Black Aesthetic* (1971), Addison Gayle observes: "The Black Aesthetic, then . . . is a corrective, a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism, and offering logical, reasoned arguments as to why he [sic] should not desire to join the ranks of a Norman Mailer or a William Styron" (xxiii). According to Gayle, the Black Aesthetic represents an ideological panacea that helps black people achieve cultural liberation as well as resist white hegemony by outlining and defining the cultural conditions and political concerns that distinguish the black experience in the United States.

The Black aesthetic is, by definition, a site of resistance and self-assertation marked by an imbrication of black creative expressions and politics to articulate a peculiar black experience. Melvin Dixon, who is a fervent proponent of the Black Arts Movement, claims that the concept of 'the Black Aesthetic' is a site where black artists and intellectuals, males and females, produce a distinct art that, "exists primarily for black people". "It is an art" (qtd. in Collins and Crawford 189), he explains, which "combines the social and political pulse of the black community into an artistic reflection of that emotion, that spirit, that energy" (qtd. in Collins and Crawford 189). The

aim of the Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic, in this sense, is directed towards the advancement of black people in U.S.

In "The Black Arts Movement" (1968) Larry Neal uses the concept of the 'Black Aesthetic' to direct black writers' attention toward producing texts that should speak directly to, "the needs and aspirations of Black America". For Neal, black writers cannot achieve this purpose unless they envision a, "radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetics" in order to create their own literature in their own terms. What he means here is that black writers should consider a separate tradition that entails, "separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology", because, for him, the Western aesthetic, with its decaying structure, "has run its course" (29). This separate literary tradition of which Neal speaks, is intricately bound up with what Elliott Butler-Evans (1989) would identify as a counter-discourse of Black consciousness. Butler-Evans views black literary text as central to the appropriation of, "the experiences that undergirded ordinary Black life", and the construction of narratives about, "a mythical Black nation" (20).

Responding to the cultural revolution heralded by the fervent advocates of the Black Arts Movement, Black aestheticians such as Addison Gayle, Amiri Baraka, and Ron Karenga have stood against the racism of white academic approaches to black culture. Part of an outpouring of cultural activity directed specifically to the freedom of black community, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), widely held as the father of the Black Arts Movement, became "the foremost among the leaders who linked the fate of the black freedom movement to the political momentum generated by the African American urban uprisings of the 1960s" (Woodard 43). In his 1966 essay, "Black Is a Country", Baraka attempts at politicizing the creative energies of black individuals in order to overthrow White supremacy. He also makes an explicit call for the creation of a sperate state, in which blackness sovereigns. Ron Karenga, in "Black Cultural Nationalism" (1971), has set off

various themes of lasting importance when he approaches black art as an extension of communal and pragmatic African aesthetics. Besides asserting the need for the existence of a specifically black sensibility and tradition, Karenga expresses his idiosyncratic political agenda as he postulates that black art should, "expose the enemy", "praise the people", and "support the revolution" (33-34).

Though the Black Arts Movement was defined as the spiritual sister of the Black Power Movement (Gayle 29), it has been however accentuated by a black male dominance. For instance, *Black Fire: An Anthology of African-American Writing* (1968), is one of the first anthologies that introduced the term Black Aesthetic and had elaborated on this male domination to a great extent. Edited by two black male poet-critics, Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, the book disregards the several contributions of black women in poetry, and whose voices were heavily overshadowed and debilitated by the anthology's exclusive commitment to underscore issues related to Black masculinity and supremacy.

In this context, Margo Natalie Crawford explains the male dominance of the movement as a reaction to, "castrate white power and render it feminine". And in the process of so doing, black women have become, "objectified as the embodiments of black beauty" that has been envisioned as the representative of, "the motherland, the receptacle for the black (male-dominated) nation". This black motherland has therefore become an equivocally gendered site between, "the male position in the Black Arts ethos) and feminized whiteness" (154). Thus, the femininity of black women at that time was a subject of a critical clamour that involved different viewpoints but those of black women.

The notion of Black Aesthetic with its robust political philosophy, seemed to hold promises of liberation and self-definition only for black male artists whose leading position at the front of

the movement has overshadowed any contribution that black women artists did or could bring to the revolutionary spirit of the movement. Black women writers like Nikki Giovanni and Toni Cade Bambara, in particular, invited the entirety of black women artists to emasculate the Black Arts Movements by enunciating the various facets of black female aesthetics and promote its legitimacy. In *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment* (1970) and *The Black Woman* (1978), both of Giovanni and Bambara, respectively, stress on the importance of developing a separate black female consciousness in order to initiate a dissidence, or what Stephen E. Henderson would describe as a, "revolution within the Revolution" (xxiv), that should focus on reclaiming and sustaining their identities as black women individuals. Such acute awareness should shed light on the social, economic, and political strictures that have influenced and shaped black women's experience in the U.S.

At this juncture, it is necessarily imperative to call attention to the visionary, dissident thinking of Toni Cade Bambara who continues to have a powerful impact on black women's black feminist thinking. So, for Bambara, she believes that feminist movement should not be narrowly focused only on the evils of patriarchy but rather on eliminating all oppressions including those experienced by the colonised, third-world, indigenous and poor people in the white America. With his eloquent observation, Louis Massiah captures well Bambara's transgressive sprit, a spirit that we think applies to all black women writers: "She made revolution irresistible, her bold unwavering feminist commitment to liberation and her hard hitting incisive and witty prose inspired a new generation of warrior women which is why we speak her name and honour her memory" ("Interview of Toni Cade Bambara" 2).

Of paramount importance to the rise of these dissident voices, especially by the end of the 1960s, echoing what Cade Bambara defines as black female revolutionary selves (*The Black*

Woman 133), has been the dismissals and limitations of the black female voice within the scope of the Black Aesthetic Movement. These strictures have been related directly to the sexist ideology of the movement. In *Black American Women Novelists: An Annotated Bibliography*, Craig Hansen Werner (1989) attributes these dismissals to black male artists' chauvinistic commitment to, "the recovery of "black manhood"" (4). Indeed, we can trace this concern in some writings by black men like Eldridge Cleaver, a black aesthetician and a fervent political activist who was one of the early leaders of the Black Panther Party. Some critics like Calvin C. Hernton concludes that the intensity of antagonistic feelings like sexism and patriarchy reaches its zenith in Cleaver's novel, *Soul on Ice* (1968), which justifies rape, hatred, and the battering of black women (46). However, unintentionally, such negative attitudes toward black women have served to fragment the Black Arts Movement; as Amiri Baraka acknowledges in his autobiography, "The sexual chauvinism of the Black Arts Movement, combined with a tendency to confuse rhetoric with political action, subverted the valuable core of its agenda" (qtd. in *Black American Women Novelists* 5).

2.3. The Contemporary Black Woman Writer and the Black Female Experience:

Before the 1970s, black women writers occupied a marginal position within the spectrum of American culture and literature. However, from the late 1960's onward, in a time of social and political activism and intellectual questioning, new voices belonging especially to black female critics, theorists and creative writers have emerged to put the American public on notice that a long and neglected segment of American society had special and inspiring stories to tell. Abraham Chapman, who is the editor of the *New Black Voices: Anthology of Contemporary African American Literature* published in 1972, depicts these emerging black voices thusly:

Today, we are witnessing … "new breed" of black writers who accept their blackness thoroughly, organically, and naturally, and have gone beyond some of the original premises

of the Black Art's movement of the sixties. They reject any prescribed definition of blackness, they opposed dogmatism and attempts at the institutionalization of blackness in any particular movement or organization, which were trying to tell the black writer how he or she should write or what he or she may write about. They stressed the importance of the individuality and originality of the black artist. (31)

By asserting their black and female individuality, I argue, contemporary black women writers fit squarely into this new breed of black artists.

One of the most succinct descriptions of this flowering 'new breed' of black women writers is offered by Andrée Nicola McLaughlin who would tantamount the outpouring of black women's writing in the second half of the twentieth century to a renaissance of the black female spirit. In a series of questions delivered in a startled tone, McLaughlin underscores the position of black women writers at the vanguard of contemporary American letters, declaring:

Who would have believed that the "Kidnapped African" would be the architect of a literary renaissance in a foreign land? Who would have expected that thrice within a margin of one hundred years after slavery's abolition, the descendants of slaves -for whose forebears reading and writing were against the law-would produce some of the most widely read writers in the modern world? Who could have known that, following in the steps of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, the "daughters of captivity" would become leading spokespersons of their own causes with international constituencies? The literary upsurge by Black women in the second half of the twentieth century unveils a renaissance in the spirit inspired by those who have refused to surrender. Those who have resisted their oppression. Those who have undertaken to remake the universe to own their future. (McLaughlin xxxi)

Following the rise of these new literary voices, a host of anthologies and numerous works of black feminist literary criticism and critical theory have contributed to the definition of the architects of this literary renaissance in black women's literature. Perhaps the most evident sign of this, however, was the appearance, in 1988, of the thirty-volume *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*, published by Oxford University Press. This series, edited by Henri Louis Gates, brought together a bunch of distinguished scholars, most of whom were black women of course, including Hazel Carby, Mary Helen Washington, Gloria T. Hull, Valerie Smith, and William Andrews. Each of these scholars wrote an introduction to one of the individual volumes which included the works of many black women writers.

Of course, many reviews have accordingly appeared to comment on the *Schomburg Library* and its featuring of the genesis of a literary tradition that has been primarily forged by black women in America. Writing in *New York Times Book Review*, Eric Sundquist maintains that the *Schomburg Library*, "will dramatically change the landscape of Afro-American literature and American cultural history . . . What the *Schomburg Library . . .* demonstrates is that black women have never hesitated to grasp the pen and write their own powerful story of freedom". Marilyn E. Mobley in *The Women's Review of Books*, goes even further to argue that The *Schomburg Library*, "corrects the erroneous assumption that black women were not writing; it also corrects the assumption that they were not reading". (qtd. in "Afra-American Culture" xxiv). Thus, the dynamism that underlies anthologies like *Schomburg Library* makes it clear that a distinctive intellectual history started to be written.

Another anthology, which has been credited with instigating the black women's literary renaissance, is Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. This landmark anthology includes a collection of essays, poetry, and short fiction by black women writers who seem to be

driven by an enormous desire to write themselves into, "the national consciousness" (*Changing* 1). Their writings focus on the construction of black female selves and identities that engage in a meaningful resistance to the oppression and limitation of racial and gender subordination. Describing the creative and intellectual efforts assembled in the anthology, Cade Bambara argues: "We are involved in a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative control of a corporate society; liberation from the constrictive norms of "mainstream" culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation)" (Bambara 1). Indeed, the anthology maintains a critical stance against any attempt to ignore incisiveness and sensitivity to the specificities of black women's lives and work. Similar to the remarkable influence Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925) has had in mapping out and shaping the Harlem Renaissance, Bambara's anthology also sets the stage for emerging black women writers to introduce and examine themes and concerns that have been left unvoiced, obscure, and unspeakable within the vast majority of white as well as black communities.

The anthology displays black women as political agents willing to call attention to the systematic oppression of black women living in a white male-dominated society, while acknowledging the objectification, brutalisation, and dehumanisation of black women within the black community itself. Resisting for liberation on several fronts, these black women writers began to speak against the silencing of the past and rejected to submit to the debasement of the black woman in black patriarchal social and political projects like those often associated with the Black Power Movement. In doing so, these women began the process of artistic creation by answering a call to expose the truths of the black woman's existence.

Commenting on the dissident voices included in the anthology and voices of other contemporary black female authors, Barbara Christian composed, in 1985, *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*, to provide a broad overview of the distinctive features of the burgeoning black female literary tradition. Christian states that black women's literary texts have been all united by the common theme of the black female experience as they have shown a great, "commitment to self-understanding and how that self is related to the world within which it is situated" (172). She explains that this commitment is intimately linked to the role of the black female self which has become so central to black women's writing. Mary Helen Washington also asserts in *Black-eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women*, that the contemporary black female literary tradition, especially that of fiction and autobiography, has at its core the life experiences, "thoughts, words, feelings, and deeds of black women" (xxi). In "My Statue, My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women" (1990), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese claims that, although the black female self has been commonly defined by axes like race and gender, the specificity of the black female experience should be situated in a specific context if it is to be captured adequately. She further adds that the "common denominator" of black women's literature, "derives not from the general categories of race or sex, but from the historical experience of being black and female in a specific society at a specific moment and over succeeding generations" (179).

I.3. Black Women Thought: An Intellectual Conceptualisation

Any discussion about the contemporary literature of black women writers should involve and consider a discussion about the collective intellectual endeavour that responds to and emphasises its uniqueness. This consideration helps us as scholars trace how these writers develop from being marginalized, silenced, uncredited for, and dismissed to eventually become and make

what Toni Cade Bambara has identified as the revolutionary self that transcends silence to build a widely-acknowledged literary tradition.

3.1. Breaking Silence: The Emergence of Black Women's Studies

Black Women's Studies has emerged out of the critical need for underscoring the idea that one must speak for oneself if one wishes to be heard. Indeed, this field was created as some brave black women started realising that no one else can or will say what a black woman has to say, and that silence would forever subject the silent/silenced to persistent misrepresentation and negligence. The acclaimed black poet, Langston Hughes honoured this effort in verse, and his words can appropriately be understood as fittingly reflecting the spirit of contemporary black female protagonist as well as her creators and critics:

[S]omeday somebody'll

Stand up and talk about me,

And write about me- (long dash)

Black and beautiful-

And song about me,

And put on plays about me!

I reckone it'll be

Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.

This dissertation originates in this belief, that no one can understand or promote the black woman writer's literary creativity better than a black woman.

The expression 'Black Women's Studies' is, "an act charged with political significance". It is used to designate a discipline that makes the statement that "black women exist and exist positively" (xxvi). The inception of this discipline marked out a critical position that can be understood as expressing a, "direct opposition to most of what passes for culture and thought on the North American continent". Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith assert that the mere fact of choosing and employing the name 'Black Women's Studies', and performing it in a white-dominated country, is itself an act of, "political courage". The scope of this discipline has been initiated and instigated by a search for an analytical perspective that is completely adhered to a, "total commitment to the liberation of black women and its recognition of black women as valuable and complex human beings" (Hull and Smith xxi). Then, one is able to comprehend that this discipline emerged, to a great extent, to challenge the views that could not or didn't want to acknowledge black women as complex beings leading complicated lives. It is a discipline initiated by an act of resistance.

On a historical level, the emergence of Black Women's Studies might be directly rooted in three notable political movements of the twentieth century. These were the struggles for Black liberation and women's liberation, which themselves have consolidated the development of the discipline, and the more recent black feminist movement, which has just begun to exhibit its strength. Black feminism has indeed created, if not carved out, a place for Black Women's Studies to exist and, "through its commitment to all black women, will provide the basis for its survival" (Hull and Smith xx). Actually, one may observe that notwithstanding the uniqueness of each movement, they are however interlinked. The Black movements of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s have occasioned unprecedented social and political change, not only in the context of Black people's realities, but for all Americans. Indeed, the early women's movements drew inspiration from the

Black movement as well as an, "impetus to organize autonomously both as a result of the demands for all-Black organizations and in response to sexual hierarchies in Black – and white-male political groupings". As were working-class women of all races in America, black women constituted a vital part of that early women's movement. Nevertheless, for several reasons, including the growing participation of single, middle-class white women, who often had more free time to dedicate to political activities, the racist campaigns of the white-male media generating internal divisions and conflicts between black and white women as black women lost visibility because white women are the ones who received mainstream attention, and, more precisely, the movements' general failure to understand and tackle racism, the women's movement "became largely and apparently white" (Hull and Smith xx).

In this sense, Black Women's Studies grew out of, and in response to, a deep sense of disappointment with the several attempts at suppressing black women's voices. Furthermore, black women intellectuals like Gloria T. Hull, Barbara Smith, and Barbara Christian, to mention but a few, became increasingly frustrated with the insensitivity of Women's studies to issues like race, class, and ethnicity. One of the most trenchant critiques of this insensitivity comes from the pioneering work of the black feminist theorist, bell hooks[2], who proclaims in "Feminism and Black Women's Studies" that the collective work of these black women scholars:

> made it possible for individuals active in the feminist movement to demand that Women's
> Studies courses acknowledge that they claimed to be talking and teaching about women,
> when the actual subjects of study were white women. This was an important breakthrough,
> which has had and continues to have profound impact on the feminist movement and
> feminist scholarship in the United States. However, the insistence on recognizing

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[2] It is this black feminist critic who preferred to have her name written in lowercase.

differences among women and of ways the intersection of race, sex, and class determine the nature of female subjectivity, has not sufficiently altered hierarchical structures within Women's Studies and feminist scholarship. Most programs continue to focus central attention on white women, as though they represent all women, subordinating discussions of Black women and other nonwhite groups. (54)

Because the field of Women's Studies focused primarily on white women's experiences and addressed them as representing universal female experience, it failed to recognise and tackle the distinctive experiences of black women adequately. Thus a few black women scholars like Beverly-Guy Sheftall, Linda McDowell, Barbara Christian, Hazel Carby, among many, challenged this notion of a universal female experience, because they simply thought that it has marginalised the experiences of non-white women, whether intentionally or not, and took the initiative to create the field of Black Women's Studies in order to, "provide a conceptual framework for moving women of color from the margins to the centre of Women's studies" (qtd. in Stanlie M. et al. xiii), and, more particularly, to respond to the "false universalism that long defined critical practice and rendered Black women and their writing mute" (*Changing* 2).

Hence, these black female scholars attempted to bring to their work a "critical self-consciousness" about black women's positionality, "defined as it is by race, gender, class and ideology" (*Changing* 1). Only by doing that, asserts Cheryl A. Wall, could the community of black women writers and critics carve their own place in the academy. Addressing the marginal position of herself as a black woman scholar and other black women writers, Wall declares: "The position or place we are assigned on the margins of the academy informs but does not determine the positions or stances we take. From the margins various strategies may be deployed . . . Making our positionality explicit is, rather, a response to the false universalism that long defined critical

practice and rendered Black women and their writing mute" (*Changing* 2). Wall's words attest to the power of their marginal position and its potentiality to generate radical views of their work as black writers and critics.

Cheryl Wall's work is but one among many sources on which black women intellectuals depended heavily to make their voices heard within the academy. So, sustaining Black Women's Studies are sources like the anthology, the collection, introductions, prefaces and essays which have constituted paradigm-shifting works that have helped define the particularities and intricacies of black women's positionality. Moreover, they also helped identify a sense of common themes, concerns, and intersectional analyses of black women writers as well as present a community of writers in conversation and sometimes in debate with each other. But one has to highlight the fact that black women scholars depended more on anthologies as they helped them define the complexities of the black female experience. According to Francis Smith Foster, anthologies are "historical narratives" that help black women "define who we think we are, where we believe we come from and where we imagine we can go". Foster also adds that anthologies, "especially those we read as historical or authoritative, carry cultures, order experiences and share visions. Anthologies refute, defend and recommend" (qtd. in Stanlie M. et al. xix).

3.2. Black Feminist Criticism: An Enabling Perspective

What is generally known as black feminist criticism can be understood as a sharp response to the richness and complexity of the creative work written by black women in the United States specifically and across the black diaspora in general. It is important to say something about this critical approach by exploring the intellectual genesis from which it emerged, because it is the diversity of perspectives and critical efforts made by black feminist scholars which have recovered,

defined, defended and revaluated black women's literary tradition. Without making an attempt to trace its history, I will only highlight a few of its informative and, of course, transformative stances.

Among the first critics to identify a distinctive talent in the writings of black American women is Mary Helen Washington with her pioneering essays "Zora Neale Hurston: The Black Woman Search for Identity" and "Black Women Image Makers", and the preface to her first anthology, *Black-Eyed Susans*. In the latter, the black female critic asserts that "what is important about the black woman writer is her special and unique vision of the black woman" (qtd. in *Changing* 4). Washington's assertion transmits her appreciation for the complex depiction of the black female character in the writings she examined. Writing for *Black World*, a journal that was mainly aimed at the diffusion of positive images about black people and black women in particular, Washington argued for the importance of constructing complex images in countering whatever stereotypes of black women still prevailed. Washington also cautions black women writers against being too much consumed by stereotypes, for to do so is to keep looking backward. This black female critic rather urges black women writers to keep their focus on positioning themselves and their works at the centre of critical discourses since most writing by women in America has been marginalised or overlooked at that time. Commenting on the work of Mary Hellen Washington and other black feminist critics, Cheryl A Wall asserts that, "if white feminists were apt to locate themselves on the margins of discourse, Washington and other black feminist critics in the 1970's and early 1980s tended to position themselves and the writings they addressed at the centre. It proved to be an enabling perspective" (*Changing* 4).

In her landmark 1977 essay, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" Barbara Smith offers the critical perspective a name and a clear definition. She describes it as "Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and

class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity" (170). In this essay, Smith writes furiously about the exclusion of black women writers from white feminist critical discourses as well as the dismissal and condemnation of fictional endeavours by black women in criticism generated by black men. Yet, Smith stresses that the point she is emphasising in her essay is that black feminist criticism is not simply reactive. Rather, black feminist critics and theorists, "should work from the assumption that Black women writers constitute an identifiable literary tradition" (264) that can be understood only in the context of their employment of "black women's language and cultural experience" (Smith 174).

Barbara Smith's outline of what many black feminist critics view as the black feminist project that has been theorised to develop a new mode of critical thought about and reading of black women's texts, has indeed remained influential. In her 1980 pioneering essay, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism", Deborah McDowell is one of those critics who elaborated on Smith's project. While Smith had to argue for recognition of black feminism as a distinctive perspective by demonstrating the inadequacies of critical viewpoints by white critics and black commentators who could not take black women's literature seriously, McDowell wanted to assume the viability of the black feminist project and thus devoted her critical insights to defining the importance of black feminist critical discourse for the reception of texts by black women writers. One of these receptions is demonstrated in the way McDowell calls for a critique that combines a consideration of context, both historical and political, with "rigorous textual analysis" (193). Like Smith, she would undertake the task of defining a black woman's literary tradition that has been neglected by black male critics and white feminist critics.

3.2.1. The Black Female Experience: A Multiple Jeopardy, a Multiple Consciousness

In 1988, the black feminist sociologist Deborah King uses the terms 'multiple jeopardy' and 'multiple consciousness' to construct an integrated theoretical approach to the experiences of black women in America. Instead of an image of abject oppression and debilitation, King refers to race, gender, and class as interactive categories that both position and constrain experience at the same time as these categories work alongside each other to constitute a unique perspective on culture and society. According to King, black women experiencing 'multiple jeopardy' suggests a heterogeneity of perspectives that gives rise to 'multiple consciousness'. This 'multiple consciousness' empowers black women to fashion a multifaceted critique of oppression and its various forms as well as to consider strategies directed at social change. Therefore, against overwhelming experiences of brutalisation, helplessness, marginalisation, and victimisation, King's 'multiple consciousness' offers a safe space for black women to develop a complex context for resistance and self-actualisation.

Deborah King suggests that expressions like double jeopardy and triple jeopardy often overcast the dynamics of multiple forms of discrimination. She points out:

Unfortunately, most applications of the concepts of double and triple jeopardy have been overly simplistic in assuming that the relationships among the various discriminations are merely additive. These relationships are interpreted as equivalent to the mathematical equation, racism plus sexism plus classism equals triple jeopardy . . . such assertions ignore the fact that racism, sexism, and classism constitute three interdependent control systems. An interactive model, which I have termed multiple jeopardy, better captures those processes. (297)

From a sociological standpoint, King discusses the significance of black women's consciousness with regards to the entire community. She provides an interactive model, first, to address and account for "the evidence that the importance of the multiple discrimination of race, gender, ad class is varied and complex" and, secondly, to demonstrate that, "the relative significance of race, sex, or class in determining the conditions of black women's lives is neither fixed nor absolute but rather dependent on the socio-historical context and the social phenomenon under consideration" (298). Here, King shares with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, discussed in (2.3) section, the idea that race, gender, or class are not the sole determinants of the black women's experience of oppression, as black women have been oppressed, both socially and historically, in varied and complex forms because of these categories.

In this sense, King's interactive model is deeply rooted in the belief that what has really defined black women's experience is not 'double jeopardy' but a form of 'multiple jeopardy', shaped by the complicated interrelationship between racism, sexism, and classicism which constitutes a complex form of interlocking oppressions. Yet, what is crucial about this model is that King, as a black feminist sociologist, helped redefine black women's resistance, asserting that black women are able to form multiple consciousness and breed resistance even out of matrices of domination.

3.2.2. The Outsiders Within: A Peculiar Marginality, Contradictory Locations, and Resistance:

It is black female scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1990) who described black women as the 'outsiders within' for they take up positions that are enormously different from those assumed appropriate for white women, within the structure of American society. Describing these positions

as, "contradictory locations", Collins wants to distinguish them as the genesis of, a peculiar marginality that catalyses a "special African American women's perspective". She elucidates that:

> Black women's position in the political economy, particularly ghettoization in domestic work, comprised another contradictory location where economic and political subordination created the conditions for Black women's resistance. Domestic work allowed African-American women to see white elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men and from these groups themselves. (*Black Feminist* 11)

While on the one hand these stories of domestic work underscore the fact that black women felt, according to Collins, a "sense of self-affirmation" by "seeing white power demystified", they also acknowledge on another level the fact they could "never belong" and hence, "would remain outsiders". Not only is such realisation a source of deep frustration. From Collin's standpoint, this position results in an outsider-within stance, a peculiar marginality that, "stimulated a special Black women's perspective" (*Black Feminist* 11).

More interesting, however, is that Collins uses this special black women's perspective to account for the peculiar marginality black women intellectuals embrace and in which a culture of resistance was taking shape. This black feminist critic suggests that black women intellectuals are "nurtured in this larger Black women's community", which has forged "the outsider-within stance", by a deep interest in and a profound awareness of, "the economic, political, and ideological dimensions of Black women's oppression" (*Black Feminist* 12) in the U.S. It is such interest and awareness that, according to Collins, have stimulated "a more generalized Black women's culture of resistance" (*Black Feminist* 12).

In her autobiographical essay "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", bell hooks explains the unique vantage point that the outsider-within status can generate. Recounting her painful childhood experience growing up in a small segregated town in Kentucky, hooks notes: "[L]iving as we did-on the edge-we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside and in from the inside out . . . we understood both". What her claim implies here is that black individuals existing as marginal subjects are afforded agency as the 'edge' becomes a centre for the production of a counterhegemonic discourse. She explains:

> Understanding marginality as a position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom that one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression. That struggle not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated colonized community and family. I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as "pure." I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance". ("Choosing the Margin" 150)

Here, hooks suggests that the lived experience of black people is not only an experience of marginality, deprivation, and vulnerability but also an experience of agency in the form of resistance to forms of oppression and victimisation.

The margin, according to hooks, represents a creative space of empowerment and a site of resistance as she indicates, "I made a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance-as location of radical openness" (153). Hooks (2015) gives the margin a strikingly different meaning as she offers a distinction between an imposed marginality and a marginality that one chooses as a source of resistance and inspiration. Being located in the margin, hooks asserts, subjects experience a potentially radical transformation as they make "a radical creative space which affirms and sustains [their] subjectivity" (153).

I.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to explain the politics of contemporary black women's writing and thought. I have attempted to trace the journey black women writers have undertaken from a contrived form of silencing to an eventual liberation of their literary voices. Having done so, I have considered two main contexts, historical and intellectual, which seem to complement each other.

Within its historical context, the politics of contemporary black women's literature has to be understood as the outcome of a long history of struggle against the silencing of their literary tradition and marginalisation of their authorial talents. Behind this history, lies the black male authors' and critics' refusal to acknowledge the role and importance of black female authors in the establishment of a distinctive black literary tradition. In fact, I have found that this refusal provokes intense criticism from black male reviewers and writers, who have claimed that black women writers fail to produce texts of critical appraisal, because, instead of treating issues that directly relate to their black community as a whole, they focus their literary attention on depicting the different facets of black women's lives and concerns. This intense criticism has actually been

aroused by the common belief that black women authors seek to challenge the masculinist rhetoric defining the black experience.

The intellectual conceptualisation of black women's writing and thought has also helped to demonstrate that, although the late 1960's and 1970's witnessed a literary upsurge by black female writers, it is the early efforts of black women critics and black feminist theorists which in fact have brought the range of contemporary black women's literary works to the forefront of public consciousness at a time when composing stories about black women realities as well as theorising about their lives and experiences were still invisible to the vast majority of academics. With the emergence of Black Women's Studies, however, texts by black women writers are no longer kept captive in the margin of mainstream literature, as they begin to gain more stature and recognition. The founders of this field or some brave black women critics, scholars, and theorists who have sought to affirm the critical and undeniable positionality of black women writers in shaping the black literary tradition. Indeed, the great number of studies and examinations collected in the several books and anthologies, which happen to be edited also by black women, seem to call attention to the singularity of a black female literary tradition, the diversity of its subject matter, and its rich complexity in rendering peculiar representations of the black female experience.

Also, the idea of black women writers' marginalisation has influenced the rise of a new approach to reading their texts. Black feminism, however, emerges not only to explain and sustain black women's unique writings, but it also seeks to emphasise that black women's position on the margin is indeed empowering. With the theorisations of black feminist thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins, Deborah King, and bell hooks, black women writers, and black women, in general have started to look at their marginality as a peculiar site of multiple consciousness and resistance, in which they may forge what Collins terms as a culture of resistance against the multiple jeopardy

they have encountered, and which have relegated them into a seemingly a perpetual state of marginality.

Chapter Two

Mapping the Margin in Spatial Studies: A Multifaceted Poetics of Resistance

II.1. Introduction

II.2. Liminality and its Creative Potentials

  2.1. Liminality, Limit, and Transgression

  2.2. Power and Structure in Eisenstadt's Approach to Liminality

  2.3. Victor Turner on Liminality, Communitas and Resistance

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II.3. Reading Heterotopia as an Emplacement of Resistance

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II.4. The Border, Oppositional Consciousness, and the Cyborg

  4.1. Conceptual Border Vis-à-Vis Geopolitical Border

  4.2. Subjectivity in Feminist Poststructuralism

  4.3. Donna Haraway's Cyborg as a Potent Subjectivity

II.5. Conclusion

As soon as there's a relation of power there's a possibility of resistance. We're never trapped by power: it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy.

—Michel Foucault.

II.1. Introduction:

With the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences[3], the space of the margin starts to gain more attention as it becomes, according to different spatial perspectives, largely addressed in various guises. Because of the negative connotations that have been long ascribed to this space, as implying a state of outsiderhood, inferiority, and victimisation, spaces like liminality, heterotopia, and the border, though belonging to different disciplines, have emerged as spaces which address the potential of the margin to harbour resistance. Therefore, by emphasising the dynamic and subversive potential of marginal spaces like liminality, heterotopia, and the border, theorised respectively by Victor Turner, Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway, this chapter seeks to survey the multifaceted poetics of resistance as implicated in these spaces.

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[3] Though the expression 'spatial turn' is first discussed in Michel Foucault's lecture "Of Other Spaces" (1967), where he predicts that: "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the meaning glaciation of the world . . . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" ("Of Other Spaces" 22), it is actually the American urban geographer Edward Soja
who coined this expression in his 1989 book, *Postmodern Geographies*, to refer to the increasing preoccupation of academics in social sciences mainly, with the notion of space. He also explains that this preoccupation reflects "the uneven development of historical versus spatial discourse" and hence constitutes "fundamentally an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations" ("Taking Space" 12). Accordingly, many scholars from diverse disciplines have since begun considering the centrality of space as a dynamic category in rethinking human experiences.

II.2. Liminality and its Creative Potentials

The concept of liminal space holds different meanings and applications across a wide range of disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, social theory, and postcolonial studies. Yet it voices a similar concern, which is the juxtaposition of a dominant idea with a marginal discourse that seeks to produce alternative ways of being through challenging commonly accepted norms and traditions. That being the case, however, the different evocations I selected to define liminality share a common perspective that acknowledges this space as a marginal site in which, as Victor Turner affirms, normative[4] and hierarchical[5] structures lose their grip:

> Action can never be the logical consequence of any grand design . . . because of the processual structure of social action itself . . . in all ritualized movement there was at least a moment when those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative demands, when they were, indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgements in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen. In this interim of "liminality," the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements. (*Dramas, Fields* 13-14)

In light of Turner's elaboration, I argue that it is because of its interstitial nature, the liminal space holds the potential to liberate those dwelling it from the restrictive values underlying normative mainstream cultures, which not only suppress individuals but also push them to the margin.

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[4] Long-standing set of norms and expectations of behaviour within a certain society.

[5] In Dramas*, Fields and Metaphors*, Victor Turner explains that hierarchy should be viewed as a defining feature of a given structure in a society, and this hierarchy, is the basis of the hierarchy of 'values' i.e., the norms of prescribed behaviour.

Etymologically, liminality is derived from the Latin word '*limen*' which refers to the spatial term 'threshold'. From the anthropological perspective, liminality means being on a threshold. It also refers to the marginal stage of a ritual where the initiates, also known as liminars undergoing a rite of passage, are governed neither by their previous or subsequent social statuses, but exist in a kind of social limbo. Although my theorisation of the notion of liminality is not firmly grounded in the anthropological study of Arnold Van Gennep on rites of passage, I will first discuss briefly his contribution which sets the stage for subsequent studies on liminality, and especially the works I chose in order to define this notion.

As Victor Turner and many others have mentioned (R. Tally (2016); Drummond (1996); Hetherington (1997)), the concept of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in his book, *Les Rites de Passage* (1909). After conducting an ethnographic field research among members of a Kabyle tribe, van Gennep proposes a three-phase mechanism, which Turner also defines as the paradigm of tripartite movement (*Dramas, Fields* 13), for the sake of analysing ritual performances[6] that mark the transition to a different status in life such as birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, and death. The first stage is separation, when the person undergoing the ritual is separated from the group; followed by the phase of the margin or limen, which is characterized by the paradoxical position of the individual in relation to the preceding and forthcoming social structure and when the transformation from one state to another takes place; the final stage is reaggregation, when the person is reintegrated into society with a newly acquired status. Sometimes, van Gennep simply refers to these phases as preliminal, liminal, and postliminal.

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[6] As understood in the context of rites of passage, Gennep defines them as the rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.

Since van Gennep's introduction of liminality in his seminal study on rites of passage, this notion has gone beyond the boundaries of a ritualistic context and has attracted a great deal of scholarly interest mainly due to what Robert Tally (2016) describes as the sophisticated definitional rhetoric. The latter derives primarily from the inherent ambiguity attached to this term. Drawing on Siegfried Kracauer's perspective on liminality, Tally comes to the conclusion that it is the very aspect of ambiguity that renders liminality something similar to 'terra incognita':

> Ambiguity is of the essence in this intermediary idea. A constant effort is needed on the part of those inhabiting it to meet the conflicting necessities with which they are faced at every turn of the road. They find themselves in a precarious situation which even invites them to gamble with absolutes, all kinds of quixotic ideas about universal truth. These peculiar preoccupations call forth specific attitudes, one of which appears to be particularly fitting because it breathes a true anteroom spirit . . . It points to a Utopia of the in-between a terra incognita in the hollows between the lands we know. (qtd. in R. Tally xii)

Using Kracauer's viewpoint on ambiguity, Tally encourages and strongly calls for future researches to explore this 'terra incognita' without claims to exhaustiveness. He further goes on to distinguish this ambiguous landscape as a "utopia of the in-between" (R. Tally xiii) where the meaning of the liminal cannot be adequately captured by any simple monolithic definition and, therefore, it opens a space for scholars to disclose its creative potentials and possible articulations. Though he reveals the dilemma one encounters while attempting to express the meaning of the liminal, Tally invites others to embrace and rely on the unique porosity and openness[7] of liminality

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[7] Here, R. Tally refers to Doreen Massey's characterization of liminal spaces as places with an inevitably unfixed identity. See her work, *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) for further details on this idea.

and to cross over into different domains, where creating new meanings for the liminal would be possible (R. Tally xiii).

While associating liminality's ambiguity with openness and porosity, Turner offers a particularly evocative description of the dynamic potential of such association which can be expressed through a multitude of diverse symbolism. Since it is a "betwixt and between" (*The Ritual Process* 95) condition, this however doesn't imply a paralyzing indeterminacy. Instead, this space, which derives its transformative power primarily from the attribute of ritualization, allows threshold people, or as Turner also tends to call them 'liminal personaes', to "elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space." In this regard, he demonstrates that liminal entities are may be seen not merely as passive initiates in the process of transition, but as sites of interpretive necessity. In other words, liminal personaes must be read differently according to their symbolic spatial position. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate features should be expressed through, "a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (*The Ritual Process* 95). In the context of such transformative medium, liminal subjects may acquire new identities and this medium ultimately becomes "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Drummond 72).

II.2.1. Liminality, Limit, and Transgression:

Any perception of the different meanings of liminality requires an understanding of its relation with two important concepts, limit and transgression. In this context, one of the discussions that informs my reading of liminality as an experience that involves a dialogue between transgression and limit is Michel Foucault's thought on the transgressive. In fact, it is Foucault's argument in "Preface to Transgression" (1977) that draws my attention to the dynamic relationship

between limit, which he also refers to as boundary, and its transgression. Actually, I am more interested in how Foucault reveals transgression of limits as a difficult, if not an inconceivable space in which there must be always boundaries that are transgressed without being obliterated, as well as an unstable space where limits are both enabling and constraining.

Though Foucault's work on the transgressive is more engaged with religious[8] and ontological[9] discourses, I have found it feasible and relevant with regard to the ambivalent nature of liminal spaces: being neither liberating nor restrictive, but both at once. While Foucault gives no explicit attention to liminality, I have discerned parallels between this concept and transgression as both can make possible a transformation of the subject. Besides, both can be seen as limit-experiences[10] since they are associated with an edgework that assesses the limits of ordered reality.

In this case, it is worth spending some time explaining the concept of transgression as Foucault presents it. What transgression refers to for Foucault, in a philosophical sense, is the behaviour or action that necessitates the existence of a limit. He elucidates:

> Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses . . . The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be

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[8] It is important to note here that Foucault's discussion of transgression is immensely influenced by the work of Georges Bataille whose writings centre on religious questions and theological issues as related to the themes of eroticism and transgression.

[9] Foucault's concern with the theme of transgression and critical ontology is well elaborated in his essay, "What is Enlightenment?" in which he analyses the limits of our being.

[10] In his seminal work, *The History of Madness* (1961) Foucault expresses his fascination with the idea of a limit-experiences that he uses to investigate a culture in which divisions are instigated and imposed.

pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. ("A Preface to Transgression" 33-34)

In light of this definition, Foucault highlights a relationship of reciprocal dependency of limits and transgression that implies neither is ever to exist without the other. They are connected in a way that both create and obliterate each other constantly and simultaneously. Yet, it is important to mention that they do not relate as opposites.

Transgression, however, relates to the limit in the form of inexhaustible spiral as it "carries the limit right to the limit of its being" and "incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it". It is, therefore, a never-ending process of crossing and re-crossing a line that is primarily propelled to achieve a particular purpose. Moreover, taking into consideration the different motives underlying this process, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to assign definite functions to limits as whether enabling or confining. Furthermore, Foucault ascertains that the dialectic inherent in this process is resolved by revealing the power of transgression, which demonstrates that no limits are absolute. In this connection, he maintains that all forms of transgression force the limit "to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes" ("A Preface to Transgression" 34).

II.2.2. Power and Structure in Eisenstadt's Approach to Liminality

In his work *Power, Trust, and Meaning: Essays in Sociological Theory and Analysis* (1995), Shmuel Eisenstadt offers a unique prism through which he associates liminality with two major themes: power and structure. His conception departs significantly from the traditional anthropological perspective that strictly bounds liminality to the marginal phase in a rite of passage within the context of tribal societies. He arguably asserts that in every society there exists a liminal situation (*Comparative Civilizations* 180). This assertion, however, renders liminality a ubiquitous

phenomenon existing in all human societies. Indeed, he explicitly indicates that the whole idea of his study begins with, "the recognition of the ubiquity of liminality in human societies" (*Power, Trust,* 309).

In addition, it is worth noting that Eisenstadt's approach to liminality differs considerably from Turner's and Bhabha's, whose ideas will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. His study takes on an oppositional stance since he understands liminality as a restrictive rather than liberating space. In his view, certain societies produce and enter a state of liminality where, as opposed to Turner's and Bhabha's considerations, a form of a social and cultural order is to be constructed instead of being transgressed. It is in this context that we can understand the perspective by which he looks at liminality as a space of power and structure.

According to Eisenstadt, liminality is used as a tool to create limits and impose a certain social structure. In fact, it is also important to mention that he defines such a liminal situation as comprising a set of socially and culturally constructed symbols[11] that serve as a means to guarantee stability in the face of potential conflicts. On account of this situation, he points out the fact that, "all societies construct such a social and cultural order designed in part to overcome the uncertainties and anxieties implied in these existential givens". These societies cannot do so unless they construct limits which Eisenstadt explains them as the "symbolic boundaries of personal and collective identity" (*Power, Trust* 310).

Also relevant for my study is Eisenstadt's assumption that, in an effort to deter transgressive behaviours, societies under such liminal situations attempt to convince their members that the specific condition in which they live is the correct one (*Power, Trust* 310). In

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[11] Eisenstadt refers to myths and folktales as examples of socially and culturally constructed symbols.

this sense, a transmission of a particular value system[12], which is sustained by the creation of symbols and construction of symbolic boundaries[13], makes society members feel responsible for preserving a social structure that provides the limits necessary to its purity. It is important here to recognize the fact that this system develops a liminal phase or rather, a form of social power characterised by a hierarchical and exclusionary tendencies which stress, "the purity of the world inside, the pollution of the world outside, and the need to remain within". On this premise, Eisenstadt centres his argument around the idea that such a regulation of power, which establishes itself firmly in an ideology of polarisation that emphasizes the binary opposite of inside good/outside bad, manipulates people to consider their own social structure the ideal one. Moreover, most importantly, it creates within them: "the fear of stepping outside the boundary" (*Power, Trust* 310) or gaze beyond the confines of their society.

II.2.3. Victor Turner on Liminality, *Communitas* and Resistance:

As discussed previously, liminality originates in the work of the socio-anthropologist Arnold van Gennep whose theorisation of the concept and its inherent feature of ambiguity has resulted in its multiplicity of meanings and applications. Although van Gennep is credited with laying the foundations for my initial understanding of liminality, it is, however, Victor Turner's critical appropriation of van Gennep's ideas that has popularised the term and led to my considerations of the concept.

Turner's appropriation of the liminal has resulted in pathbreaking and provocative social and cultural criticism as he focuses his attention mainly on discussing the liminal phase of rites of

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[12] OLD defines it as a set of connected principles that describe what people think is important and the correct way to behave.

[13] By 'symbolic boundaries' I mean the social experience that creates a sense of insiders and outsiders through imposing conceptual lines of inclusion and exclusion.

passage in order to consider its implication for the study of anti-structure and resistance in a larger sociocultural context. In fact, his analysis of the creation of *communitas* (the Latin word for community) during liminality is of central importance to elaborate ideas about such implication. Turner ultimately discusses his analysis of *communitas* with relation to a viewpoint that foregrounds liminal subjects' experiences of resistance and agency[14] as shaped by liminality. According to this perspective, Turner acknowledges that this state serves not only to highlight the importance of in-between periods, but also to identify the ways in which the use of liminality as a resistant and emancipatory tool provides a new lens for elucidating the experiences of the oppressed and socially marginalised subjects. Thomassen Bjørn (2014), on this matter, reveals that Turner himself contributes immensely in reading liminality as a space of liberation; then he continues saying, "One of his most read essays ever, The Anthropology of Performance (1988), opens with a dream-like wish: 'For years I have dreamed of a liberated anthropology'" (9).

What is particularly interesting in Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1977), is that he approaches liminality not in exclusively symbolic terms but as an expression of what he terms *communitas*. According to Turner, the creation of *communitas* by marginalized or socially-excluded members of society, affords an opportunity for social critique and resistance, in addition to functioning as a mechanism for exercising agency through social solidarity. Indeed, *communitas* disrupts society from its margins as it suspends structured social hierarchies: "Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority" (128). While he acknowledges that he uses the term *communitas* to refer to any condition outside or on the

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[14] In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, agency is defined as "the ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed" (6).

periphery of structure, Turner signals a strong relation between *communitas* and structure. As a matter of fact, his argument about *communitas* is that *communitas* should be defined as comprising an anti-structure phenomenon; a moment when structure is resisted.

However, the strongest argument forwarded by Turner is raised to contemplate the dialectical relationship between structure and *communitas*. Typically, the liminal stage of a ritual implies questioning and critiquing the dominant social structure, a subversion of its rules as Turner observes, "[L]iminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action . . . a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (*The Ritual Process* 167). During the liminal phase of a ritual, the logic of one system, or what Turner describes as structure, is suspended, whilst the liminal subject attempts to access a state that Turner describes as 'protostructural' or 'antistructural', or simply a latent system of potential alternatives that might be found in *communitas* (*From Ritual* 56). It is, hence, apparent that Turner understands liminality, as conducive to *communitas*, in terms of the binary opposition of antistructure/structure.

Moreover, Turner views human condition in terms of a tension between structure and *communitas*. He claims that no society can function without these contrasting social experiences. According to him, structure refers to a formal allocation of "positions and statuses" (*The Ritual Process* 131), while *communitas* has a "spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature" (127) and represents a realm of those who, "enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination" (128). He further notes that structure is intrinsic for orderly functioning of a society while *communitas* sustains and complements structure by creating bonds and providing alternate spaces for expressive tendencies.

In addition, Turner highlights the distinction between structure and *communitas* through the metaphoric description of immortal antagonists. He claims that, whereas structure represents "all that holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions" (*Dramas, Fields* 274), *communitas* is created by means of establishing bonds that are essentially "anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, nonrational (though not irrational)," (46-47) and which ultimately prompt in "I-Thou or Essential We relationships" (47). In this sense, we may assume that liminal moments constitute essential expressions of anti-structure that are based on and formed by a connection of solidarity forged between liminars who are brought together by "fully, unmediated communication" (*Dramas, Fields* 46). A human bonding of this dimension, I argue, only occurs in the liminal state where social structure is resisted and people are rid of their social restraints and limitations. Therefore, *communitas* "emerges where social structure is not" (*The Ritual Process* 126) and brings a crucial sense of agency into even the most constrained circumstances.

Underlying his conception of *communitas* is a form of agency that is enacted in social relationships and which "arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances" and, by which, liminal entities are "liberated from conformity to general norms" (Turner and Turner 250). In fact, the three elements that incite the formation of *communitas*, according to Turner, are basically "liminality, outsiderhood, and structural inferiority" (Turner, *Drams, Fields* 231). From these positions, *communitas'* members are able to make a space of potentiality, "an open society" (*The Ritaul Process* 112) where they can collectively call into question the whole normative order (*Dramas, Fields* 268). It is noteworthy to mention here that, while Turner links *communitas* with resistance and agency, and structure with obligation and constraint, he explicates that: "*Communitas* must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to

be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions" (*The Ritual Process* 109). In a similar fashion, Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) has asserted the relationship between liminal beings and danger, arguing that notwithstanding their powerful performances, liminal beings are likely viewed as potentially polluting and dangerous (Douglas 130). Like Douglas, Turner also points out that liminal beings are, "particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in spacetime of structural classification" (*Forest* 97).

II.2.4. Homi Bhabha on Liminality, Hybridity, and Cultural Identity:

The postcolonial thinker and critic Homi Bhabha outlines his theory of liminality in his ground-breaking text, *The Location of Culture* (1994). In this work, Bhabha focuses his attention primarily on the role of hybridity, identity, and culture in delineating a new area of meaning and representation, to essentially address the issue of liberation from colonial oppression. Specifically, Bhabha postulates that these notions occur in what he calls a 'Third Space' that he defines as a liminal space of transgression, of potential change, of negotiation, and of creativity; a space where colonial knowledge[15] is challenged and new subjectivities are allowed to emerge.

In the introduction to this seminal collection of essays, Bhabha draws on the image of the staircase as an in-between space to question the control and influence of power hierarchical structures which have undergirded colonial authority in shaping knowledge about identities. He

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[15] In Philip Wagoner's words, it denotes those forms and bodies of knowledge that enable colonisers achieve domination over their colonised subjects (783).

claims that, rather than being merely celebratory, hybridity[16] is a liminal site of transformation and change; a space where hybrid identities are constructed to problematise the boundaries that underline coloniser-colonised relationship:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (*The Location of Culture* 4)

In Bhabha's view, liminality is an enigmatic space lying between fixed identifications where identity is constantly in flux. The primary impetus behind this critical observation is, however, Bhabha's critique of colonial discourse[17] as a system that is essentially based on principles of exclusion and binary epistemology.

An insistence on devising binaries like self/other, us/them, and centre/periphery, Bhabha argues, serves colonial hegemonic discourses to perpetuate a cultural politics of difference. The latter exerts its power by crafting exclusionary interpretations of the 'Other' where, "a mediator or metaphor of otherness must be found to contain the effects of the difference" (*The Location of Culture* 31).This will eventually supress the articulation of agency and reduce it to a debilitating,

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[16] At the outset, Bhabha formulates his theory of hybridity by translating Bakhtinian concept of double-voice to highlight the inherent instability of meaning in colonial discourses.

[17] It is worth mentioning here that it is the postcolonial critic Edward Said who popularizes this term within the context of postcolonial theory. Said's consideration of the term is immensely influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as an emphatically vehement tool to inquire into the ways in which colonial discourse functions as an instrument of power.

often crippling, condition in the sense that when those in the subordinate and inferior side of the binary try to reclaim their identity, there is a danger of their trying to envision identities beyond an essentialised frame that eludes hegemonic politics of polarity. Therefore, driven by the constant awareness of how precarious the balance of power is, the colonial logic of divisive binarism implicitly operates to make the other lose, "its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire", to ultimately become unable to "establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse". For Bhabha, it is the location of the 'Other': "as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of representation, that has a decisive role in the reproduction of relation domination (*The Location of Culture* 31).

In a similar way, Stuart Hall (1990) acknowledges this critical colonial situation that defines power-ridden relations between oppressor and oppressed while he addresses the problem of identity paralysis in relation to an essentialist view. He points out that cultural identity, "is not a fixed essence" as it is constantly in shift and transformation. He goes on to argue that identities are not "an essence but a positioning" that originates in a realm where, "cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (226). In other words, identity should be defined by reference to the intersectionality of cultural influences and biological determinants such as race, ethnicity, and gender.

Bhabha also builds on this idea of positioning when he suggests that, "each position is always a process of translation and transference of meaning. Each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure; each political object is determined in relation to the other, and displaced in that critical act" (26). In this sense, it is this process of displacement

that makes progress possible, for displacement creates a necessary ambiguity that opens a space for interpretation. Bhabha calls this area of ambiguity a 'Third Space of enunciation'.

Within this zone of 'Third Space' that exists between the binaries of colonial/colonised, white/black, and self/other there is a moment where meaning does not exist, as such, but is subject to interpretations related to an ambivalent in-betweenness that is engendered by the colonial relationship. While commenting on Bhabha's 'Third Space', Steve Pile (1994) reads Bhabha's theory as a call for challenging and surpassing the oppositions inherent in dualistic epistemologies. For Pile, Bhabha points to the emergence of a new politics in which meaning is relocated through "a space which avoids the politics of polarity and enables the construction of new radical allegiances to oppose structures of authority" (271).

An important point of Bhabha's theory of liminality is that it is precisely the marginal, interstitial space, though elusive and "unpresentable", that makes any existence of meaning possible. Because it stands as a moment of collusion instead of division, Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation' engenders a creative experience that has the potential to change meaning outside the rigidity of a binary logic. In this respect, Bhabha maintains that "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (*The Location of Culture* 37).

In this way, Bhabha's idea of an interstitial cultural space echoes a moment of resistance against colonial domination that legitimizes the fixity and unity of cultural symbols and meanings. According to him, the essence of hybridity emanates in this space as ambiguity precipitates a moment in which neither the colonial nor the colonised culture should be regarded as unified or pure, but instead implicates both and is something wholly different at the same time. For this

reason, Bhabha's argument culminates in the assertion that hybridity is that space where "all cultural statements and systems are constructed" (*The Location of Culture* 37) in the context of a relationship of interdependence and mutual construction between coloniser and colonised.

Perhaps the most influential account of Bhabha's theory of liminality is his concern with the way hybridity offers up a powerful and disruptive liminal site of resistance in which "cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space", which for Bhabha "makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity 'of cultures untenable" (Ashcroft et al. 108). This space appears to enunciate an emancipation of cultural difference where a process of constant hybridization is propounded as an alternative to the monolithic and pre-determined view of identity. Furthermore, cultural hybridity, which is formed in a space of in-betweenness and liminality, enables its bearers to problematise the notion of hierarchical purity of cultures and transgress the boundaries defining colonial/colonised relationship by rejecting constructed images that operate within an ideal of Manichean[18] binarism. As a result, hybrid subjectivities emerge to transcend the stifling effects of Manichean division to eventually produce a space where race, gender, and culture no longer perform as determinants of subjectivity. The resulting hybrid lives fostered by embracing the liminal, therefore, forge new ways of existence:

> The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original movements from which
> the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the 'third space' which enables other positions to
> emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures
> of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received

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[18] Following a view he adopts from Aristotelian logic, Frantz Fanon uses the Manichaean metaphor that underlies colonial discourses to highlight the sharp demarcation between coloniser and colonised. Fanon writes, "The two zones [of the colonized and the colonizer] are opposed, but not in service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both followed the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous" (38-39).

wisdom . . . The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to a something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (*The Location of Culture* 211)

II.3. Reading Heterotopia as an Emplacement of Resistance:

Michel Foucault's work on 'heterotopia'[19] in his famous lecture "*Des Espaces Autres*"[20] that he gave to a group of architects in Paris in 1967, has triggered wide-ranging scholarship on the subversive implications of this emplacement. The lecture opens with a succinct but sweeping argument maintaining that while the nineteenth century seems to be fascinated with time, the present epoch seems more engaged with space, "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history . . . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" ("Of Other Spaces" 1). Since its first usage in the 1960s, Foucauldian heterotopia has provoked many interpretations and applications across a range of disciplines as varied as architecture, urban studies, cultural and critical geography, arts, and literary studies; each illuminates a slightly different perspective and approaches heterotopia from a different critical stance.

In this dissertation the aim, however, is not to find appropriate definition to heterotopia, but to investigate in what terms they are viewed as emplacements[21] of resistance. Therefore, it is worth highlighting the fact that my research is particularly interested in the way heterotopias are

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[19] It should be noted, however, that the term 'heterotopia' is not actually a coinage of Foucault's, but an adaptation of a relatively obscure medical term denoting "parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien" (Hetherington 42).

[20] The lecture has been translated into English as "Of Other Spaces" (in the journal *Diacritics* in Spring 1986 translated by Jay Miskowiec) and "Different Spaces" (in the collection *Aesthetics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984* translated by Robert Hurley).

[21] Foucault uses the terms site, space, place, and emplacement interchangeably to designate heterotopia. However, it seems like he prefers the description 'emplacement' most as he mentioned it over twenty times in his lecture. To Foucault, 'emplacement' is a critically important term which, "has the sense of placing in a certain location. Usually referring to archaeological sites, the term makes explicit the action of marking out a position" ("Unravelling Foucault" 77).

interpreted as marginal counter-sites where there is a possibility of resistance either against, "forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious) . . . or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)" ("The Subject and Power" 781). Besides, my consideration of heterotopia as a site of resistance stems primarily from Andrew Thacker's[22] (2003) and David Harvey's (1989) descriptions of heterotopia. Following Foucault, Thacker maintains that these spaces represent "sites of resistance to the dominant ordering of socio-spatiality, found in marginal places and locations" (29), whereas Harvey ascertains that heterotopias carve out "spaces of resistance and freedom . . . from an otherwise repressive world" (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 213). Since both present their ideas in a sketchy fashion, I will therefore draw on a number of theoretical insights that share similar assumptions with Thacker's and Harvey's in order to make sense of the complexities this space assumes in relation to periphery and resistance.

II.3.1. Foucault's Heterotopia as a Space of Different Order

Foucault presents his ideas on heterotopia in three instances: in the preface to his work, *The Order of Things* (1966), in a radio broadcast that same year, and his lecture "Of Other Spaces" (1967). With respect to the latter, he suggests that all societies, and by implication cultures, constitute heterotopic spaces of different order and which embody, "those singular spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others" ("Space, Knowledge" 252). Elaborating his theory of heterotopias, however, Foucault never

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[22] Andrew Thacker's perfunctory discussion of heterotopia in the prefatory chapter to his *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2003) seeks to reaffirm the crucial role that experiences of space and movement play in studying modernist literature. Thacker mentions Foucault, along with thinkers such as Bachelard, Lefebvre, and De Certau, as one of the thinkers who have provided him with the terminology required to carry his project out. Thacker describes Foucault's heterotopia, as an effective way of merging material and symbolic senses of space and identifies its inherent literary quality in the depiction of the ship as the greatest reserve of the imagination in modernity (22).

affords a clear and satisfactory account of what he means by these spaces. Instead, he illustrates heterotopias through a bewildering array of examples including: museums, cemeteries, brothels, gardens, asylums, prisons, and ships, to name but a few. According to him, these spaces are heterotopic in character in the sense that they represent "other places" that "interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space" and "inject alterity into the sameness, the commonplace, the topicality of everyday society" (Dehaene and De Cauter 4).

Though Foucault's lecture falls short of adequately providing a clear definition of heterotopia he, nonetheless, left his readers with what he calls 'heterotopology' which he also describes, in a radio session, as 'science in the making'. By 'heterotopology', Foucault refers to a set of principles that loosely helps him outline his ideas with regard to the peculiarity and distinctiveness of heterotopias as marginal spaces with different order. Moreover, heterotopology is used as a method of analysing sites that manifest heterotopic features. Therefore, it is necessary to have a brief discussion of Foucault's thinking about the heterotopic space and the six principles of heterotopology.

Firstly, heterotopias are universal as they happen to exist in all cultures, albeit in diverse forms: "There is not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias" ("Of Other Spaces" 4). Foucault explains the second principle in relation to cemeteries where he states that "each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society". Put another way, he presents heterotopias as culture-bound spaces that function only in a culturally-specific manner. The third principle, which is the most complicated and confusing of them all, renders heterotopia an emplacement that is able to juxtapose in a single space several incompatible spatial elements: "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6). Foucault's fourth principle addresses heterotopia's

connection to what he calls 'heterochrony'[23]. Using libraries and museums as illustrations, he asserts that heterotopia functions only when, "men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (6). In this sense, museums and libraries display a kind of spatio-temporal intensity as they accumulate time that "never stops building up and topping its own summit" and establish a sort of general archive where, "the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages". The fifth principle concerns, "a system of opening and closing" (7) through which heterotopias can imply an equivocally ambivalent system that, "both isolates them and makes them penetrable". Lastly, heterotopias have a specific function in relation to other spaces. This function "unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space . . . Or else, . . . to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Of Other Spaces" 8). Whereas he refers to the first as heterotopia of illusion, Foucault calls the latter type heterotopia of compensation.

It is significant that Foucault concludes his lecture with illuminating a distinctively important aspect of heterotopic emplacements, which is their disruptive quality wherein the dominant social order is unsettled. Typically, he attributes this disruptive potential to the site of the ship which he describes as a site representing an extreme type of heterotopia, or as he puts it, "the heterotopia par excellence" ("Of Other Spaces" 9). Here, we have a space that assembles and embodies all the disruptive features of heterotopia both within itself and in relation to other spaces. It is a substantially ambivalent space that is akin to the evocative image of the mirror in that it

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[23] This notion is described in more detail later in the chapter (see the section entitled "*Heterotopia and Heterochrony*").

stands as an enclosed and at the same time open "placeless place" (4); it is a "boundless expanse of the ocean" ("Different Spaces" 185). Commenting on Foucault's fleeting but poignant picture of the ship, Peter Johnson (2006) infers that Foucault suggests a relational aspect of heterotopias since these spaces seem to form relationships both within the site and between sites: "The ship not only visits different spaces, it reflects and incorporates them" ("Unravelling Foucault" 80).

In this vein, Edward Soja's (1989) thought about the relational aspect of heterotopias is particularly noteworthy, stating that Foucault's heterogenous and relational space of heterotopias "is neither a substanceless void to be filled by cognitive intuition nor a repository of physical forms to be phenomenologically described in all its resplendent variability" (17). Nevertheless, Soja proclaims that Foucault's heterotopias constitute spaces of alterity that are, "actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices" (18). Here, Soja is reflecting on how Foucault's theory of heterotopia is concerned with the spatiality of life, or more importantly, the actual lived social world as a complex of sites and the relations between them.

That being said, I may point out to Soja's explicit allusion to Henri Lefebvre's notion of lived space in Lefebvre's seminal work, *The Production of Space* (1991). While Soja likens Foucault's heterotopia to Lefebvre's lived space, he argues that both represent a space of, "radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle, a space of multiplicitous [sic] representations", which "can be mapped but never fully captured in conventional cartographies; it can be creatively imagined but obtains meaning only when practiced and fully lived" (276). I will come back to this point later in the chapter where I shall try to highlight the point of intersection between Foucault's heterotopia and Lefebvre's lived space.

3.1.1 Heterotopia vis-à-vis Utopia

Besides his heterotopology which identifies a provocative interpretation of the spatio-temporal intricacies heterotopias feature, Foucault draws on another major theme to enable his readers to form a proper understanding of his thought on heterotopia. In fact, he devised his essay, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", to shed light on the conceptualisation of heterotopia in contrast with utopia[24]. With respect to this theme, he comments:

> There are . . . real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places "heterotopias". ("Different Spaces" 178)

Utopic spaces, as Foucault indicates above, are distinguished from heterotopias in that, unlike heterotopias, utopias do not represent real spaces in society for they represent images of societies that can never be achieved and, "they have no real locality" (*The Order of Things* xix). Utopias, according to Foucault's philosophical insight, are sites with no real place: "They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" ("Of Other Spaces" 3).

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[24] In fact, etymologically speaking, 'heterotopia', is derived from the Greek *heteros*, meaning 'another', and *topos*, referring to 'place', is used within a broad typology to distinguish these emplacements from 'utopia'.

However, similar to utopias, heterotopias can reflect and reverse other places yet, "they are actually localizable" ("Different Spaces" 178). Through these sites, Foucault proposes a new spatial dimension that encompasses a new order different from the one already mediated through and represented by utopias. In this, he suggests that heterotopias are places whose presence is contingent upon their relationship of difference with other sites. This difference may assume varying forms like reflection, representation, inversion, juxtaposition and, contestation, depending on the nature of the relationship these spaces have with other real places surrounding them.

Nevertheless, as sites that do not embody or serve a fixed meaning or social function, heterotopias can refer to those places that exist in contrast to other real sites that form the very foundation of societies. In this context, Foucault assumes that heterotopias represent unsettling places that, "do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" ("Of Other Spaces" 3-4).

Lacking a clear-cut meaning, Foucault's heterotopia, therefore, opens a wide intellectual space for new discussions, interpretations, and applications of this concept. However, one consensus concerning defining heterotopia seems to perceive of this site as a spatial entity that challenges and contradicts any form of a coherent pattern. In this regard, heterotopias fail to serve as homogenous spaces. Accordingly, while expressing a different order, heterotopias embrace heterogeneity rather than homogeneity in that the former seems to describe consistently the world we live in. Foucault writes:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. ("Of Other Spaces" 3)

3.1.2. Heterotopia and Heterochrony

It is Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopia as a counter-site that relates to all other sites, but "in such a way to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect" ("Of Other Spaces" 3), that informs one of my critical readings of heterotopic space. As discussed previously, Foucault attempts to provide a perspicuous description of what he calls 'heterotopology' by suggesting six principles that address the complexity of heterotopic spaces. The fourth principle explains a distinctive quality of heterotopias through the complex of time and space and which Foucault calls 'heterochrony'. This principle identifies heterotopia as "a slice in time" (6), a counter-site that makes a rupture with the traditional experience of time and temporality. Hence, heterotopias are heterochronic in the sense that they demonstrate distinctive time frames, different from the ones occurring within the logic of hegemonic spaces. Accordingly, since heterochrony renders heterotopia as a space that "begins to function at full capacity [only] when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (6), Foucault considers heterotopias not only as places for the affirmation of difference but also as mediums for possible resistance and defiance.

II.4.2. Different Perspectives Charting the Rhetoric of Resistance in Heterotopias:

Since its inception in spatial studies, approaching Foucault's heterotopia seems no easy task, and the proliferation of interpretations and definitions of this notion only attests to its elusiveness. However, Foucault's statements that heterotopias are "like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 3) as well as, "those singular spaces to be found in some given spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others" ("Spaces, Knowledge" 252) which carry the tenor that heterotopia might be interpreted as a space that harbours a possibility of resistance. Making a similar inference, Peter Johnson (2006) emphasises the fact that heterotopias have been persistently linked to forms of resistance. He further asserts that they have been used to identify spaces of marginality that "act as postmodern spaces for resistance and transgression" (81). The following perspectives are then purposefully selected on the basis that they deliver supportive arguments on the issue of heterotopia as a site of resistance.

4.2.1. Heterotopia, Periphery, and Resistance:

Kevin Hetherington's *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering* (1997), which provides a sociological reading of heterotopia, has been particularly influential in developing a critical approach that associates heterotopia with marginality and resistance. His underlying argument presents the difference of heterotopias as constituting an "alternate ordering that marks them out as Other" (viii). He also assumes that, in addition to their intricately complex spatio-temporal idiosyncrasies, heterotopias are viewed as representing incongruous sites that disclose different modes of ordering which demonstrates either an unsettling or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations (51). This incongruous condition, which renders

heterotopia "confused, contradictory, ambivalent and decidedly different from the society that surrounded it" (19), is most likely explained by the fact that heterotopia is not about resistance or order but can be about both because, "both involve the establishment of alternative modes of ordering" (51).

In his provocative elaboration on the idea of a world of heterotopic spatial relations where ambivalence is of central importance, Hetherington reflects on the ambivalence these relations imply as follows, "Heterotopia are a major source of ambivalence and uncertainty, thresholds that symbolically mark not only the boundaries of a society but its values and beliefs as well" (49). This ambivalence, he supposes, arises from the very marginal position these spaces occupy. According to Foucault, heterotopias are delineated as other places that exist in the margins of society. Indeed, in its literal sense, heterotopia means a place of otherness that, as Hetherington indicates, expresses "an alternate ordering of society through its contact with the society that it despised" ("Of Other Spaces" 6).

Seemingly, Hetherington shares with Foucault's assumption that heterotopic sites do constitute a different order which contrasts with the dominant ordering of society. Besides, by referring to these places as "Other or marginal places" (8), Hetherington perceives of heterotopia as places of otherness which provide either an unsettling or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations. Indeed, it is from this very "otherness" that heterotopias stem their ability to offer critical perspective on other spaces. In very much the same fashion, Foucault describes heterotopic spaces as those which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect ("Of Other Spaces: Utopias" 332).

Though Smaranda Spanu (2020) seems to overlook the 'otherness' of heterotopia. She rather emphasises the paradoxical or contradictory character of this spatial metaphor, considering

it as a site of opposition and construction. Taking her cue from Hetherington's definition of heterotopia as an incongruous site, Spanu elucidates the spatial and social relations of which Hetherington speaks as constituting a 'relational system' that constantly connects heterotopia to the society it reflects through a dynamic and diverse nexus of ambivalent relations:

> The heterotopic space is perceived as a paradoxical site, one that opposes the dominant order of society (or norm, normality) but at the same time contributes to its fabrication and proliferation; the heterotopic space is not found outside society or of dominant order, completely severed from it, but exist as an integral part of it, continuously connected through an active and varied network. (Spanu 397)

Understood amidst the dialectics of such paradoxical situation, heterotopias, thus, are spaces in which the dominant ordering of societies is both resisted and reproduced through an alternate organisation of space. Hetherington, in this regard, recognizes the view that it is this discrepant 'relational system' which allows heterotopia to be situated outside the centre of social and political order yet not totally disconnected from that centre.

While highlighting the marginal quality of heterotopias, I find that Hetherington draws upon the relationship between heterotopic sites and an agency to produce acts of resistance. He associates the inherent dimension of 'otherness', which Foucault's heterotopia suggests, with counter-hegemonic resistance; he writes: "In effect, margins have come to be seen as sites of counter-hegemonic resistance to the social order. 'Other places' have become the space of Other voices. In marginal spaces, people not only raise their voices to be heard but are seen to live different, alternative lives, openly hoping that others will share" (7). As they happen to exist on the fringes of political and social societies, heterotopic spaces permit resistant, transgressive, and

deviant behaviour to be enacted. In this sense, we may account for David Harvey's[25] thought into heterotopias when he defines them as "liminal social spaces of possibility where something different is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories" (*Rebel Cities* xvii).

However, it is worth noting that Harvey's theory of heterotopia as spaces of resistance is remarkably influenced by Henri Lefebvre's (1991) discourse of critical spatiality. Lefebvre assumes that space has historically evolved through four different phases: absolute space, historical space, abstract space, and differential space. By absolute space, Lefebvre means the natural space that "was made up of fragments of nature" (48). By fragments, he is referring to mountains, caves, rivers, and the like. The historical space, however, is the politicized space that evolves out of the absolute space and which Lefebvre uses to define the space of global capitalism as the most authoritative historical space that triggers the emergence of the abstract space. The latter is defined as "the tool of domination, asphyxiates whatever is conceived within it and then strives to emerge" (370).

According to Lefebvre, the abstract space is not initially homogenous, but the fact that it has "homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, and its 'lens'" (287) it renders homogenous. Moreover, what is worth pondering according to Lefebvre, is the contradiction and deception the abstract space carries. This space is indeed deceptive in the sense that it strives to conceal its transparent nature, and "the secret of illusion lies in the transparency itself" (287). The main

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[25] David Harvey is a distinguished professor of anthropology at the City University of New York Graduate Centre. He is widely acknowledged as one of the most innovative and influential geographical thinkers. His works: *Explanation in Geography* (1969), *Social Justice and the City* (1973), and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) are recognized by many critics as a significant contribution to critical urban studies and which establish Harvey as a leading Marxist geographer.

objective of such spaces, hence, is to impose homogeneity, order, and transparency "everywhere within the purview of power and its established order" (330).

However, the contradicting nature of abstract spaces makes them fall prey to contain within themselves the seeds of a different space that is destined to question the contradiction inherent in these spaces. That being so, abstract spaces lead to the emergence of what Lefebvre calls counter-spaces or differential spaces, which are produced mainly to expose and reflect the limitation and vulnerability of spaces of power. Within this spatial consideration, Lefebvre characterises the periphery as a differential fragmented space that opposes to the power inherent in global spaces. He explains that the opposition between these spaces is inevitable, and it results from "the contradiction between the global and the subdivided [which] subsumes the contradiction between center and periphery" (356). He further points out that in spite of being dominated and ravaged by spaces of power, counter-spaces always find a way to reconstitute themselves and generate new differences (Lefebvre 386). It is in this sense, thereof; Lefebvre's counter-spaces resonate Foucault's heterotopia as both enclaves stand as sites of resistance to the dominant culture; a realm where transformation is possible and power is reconfigured.

4.2.2. On Margaret Kohn's Heterotopia of Resistance:

One other interpretation that has particular relevance for the discussion here comes from Margaret Kohn[26] who has provided significant insights into my understanding of heterotopia as a site of resistance. In her 2003 book, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*, Kohn ostensibly makes a very cogent and one of the strongest arguments which has been adduced to identify heterotopia as a space of resistance that functions in non-hegemonic conditions.

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[26] Margaret Kohn is a professor at the University of Toronto whose primary research interests include political theory, critical theory, global justice, and urbanism.

Unlike many receptions and interpretations of heterotopia whose preoccupations have been primarily informed by defining this Foucauldian notion in contrast to utopia, Kohn focuses her attention on examining this emplacement as a socio-economically resistant space which represents "a real countersite that inverts and contests existing economic and social hierarchies" (91). In this respect, heterotopia's function, according to Kohn's definition, is closely related to, "social transformation rather than escapism, containment, or denial" (91). Expressed differently, heterotopia, according to Kohn, constitutes an essential context in which socially-conscious action against a dominant order or system can occur.

I think, while she describes heterotopia against the notion of 'escapism', Kohn wants to challenge Harvey's understanding of Foucault's heterotopia as fundamentally about the theme of escapism, when he writes: "The theme of 'escape' underwrites Foucault's essay" (*Spaces of Hope* 183). Kohn, instead, gives a quite different picture of heterotopias and provides a seemingly cogent critique evident in her suggestion that heterotopias are not spaces of 'escape' but "the basis (or at least the inspiration) for struggle against existing forms of domination" ("The Power of Place" 508). So saying, Kohn makes evident that heterotopias are basically created to set up arenas that mediate a political project motivated by diverse experiences. These arenas, therefore, would become: "safe havens" that "foster oppositional practices by sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities" (Kohn 129).

Besides, in her attempt to theorise the relationship between heterotopia and politics, Kohn further avers that heterotopias are countersites constructed to destabilise and challenge normative conventions of dominant societies and can carry within them loci of struggle against normalisation (45). In building this critical argument on heterotopias, Kohn suggests that she places a particular emphasis on Foucault's claim that heterotopia is intrinsically "a principle of political

emancipation, a model for social transformatio" (91). By referring to the principle of political emancipation, Kohn thereupon makes a subtle remark highlighting Foucault's distinctive association of heterotopia with 'counter arrangements':

> There also exists, and this probably true for all cultures and civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is localizable. (qtd. in Kohn 91)

In the quote above, Foucault's point is useful in holding at bay any argument that would strip heterotopia of its resistant and subversive qualities. The 'counter-arrangement' of which he speaks refers to the unique capacity of heterotopias to manifest a different social and spatial ordering that articulates an alternative arrangement where resistance organising can induce the generation of agency. In the latter case, heterotopias would presumably enable opportunities for liberatory thoughts and allow conditions for emancipatory actions[27].

II.5. The Border, Oppositional Consciousness, and the Cyborg:

> A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its essential unfolding.*
>
> —Marti Heidegger, emphasis added.

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[27] See David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* (2000), 182-89, for a more thorough discussion of heterotopia as a locus of emancipation.

My aim in this section is to examine the arguments of the feminist poststructuralist theorist, Donna Haraway, whose figurations[28] of multiple feminist subjectivity[29] and the cyborg metaphor offer a critique of the notion of the 'universal subject' that insists upon the homogeneity and uniformity of all subjects. Drawing on Haraway's cyborgism, I gesture toward highlighting her emphasis on retaining a female subjectivity that is essentially viewed as non-unitary, multiple and constantly informed by social and cultural discourses that are themselves continuously in flux.

What Haraway attempts to offer is a novel form of subjectivity that is not constructed in the context of the hierarchical and binary systems which have worked to oppress women by keeping them in fixed and unchangeable positions. This new form of subjectivity, however, deploys the border, which has undergirded and justified hierarchical binary structures (like self/other, us/them, male/female, white/black) constructed and upheld by Western epistemological canon, as a site of critique that cultivates a differential form of 'oppositional consciousness' against the ideal notion of the universal subject. The latter, according to Harway's feminist perspective, maintains itself through a logic of domination that flattens out and excludes any different subject that does not conform to the dominant paradigm of the universal subject. Therefore, it is the acts of blurring, crossing, and transgressing boundaries that transform the border from an interstitial marginal space into a figurative site of critical resistance to rigidity and fixity.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed: Theory out of Bounds* (2000), Chela Sandoval argues that the differential oppositional consciousness, which has been enacted by U.S. third world feminists for the sake of generating ideologies and identities in response to different configurations

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[28] According to the feminist theorist, Rosi Braidotti, whose concept of the nomadic subject along with Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg share an emphasis on retaining a female subjectivity that is inherently multiple and fluid, a figuration is "a style of thought that evokes or expresses ways out of the phallocentric vision of the subject" (1).

[29] It is important to note here that notions of self and subjectivity, though having different meanings in the psychoanalytic context specifically, are mainly used synonymously in feminist poststructuralist discourses. Therefore, we'll be using them synonymously henceforth.

of power, implies a new kind of subjectivity that rests not on dualistic oppositions, but upon a multiplicity of subjectivities that depart from the dominant notions of subjectivity as unified and stable. In Sandoval's words:

> Differential consciousness requires grace, flexibility, and strength: enough strength to confidently commit to a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self-consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power's formation require it; enough grace to recognize alliance with others committed to egalitarian social relations and race, gender, sex, class, and social justice, when these other readings of power call for alternative oppositional stands. (Sandoval 59)

From this definition, one is able to deduce that oppositional differential consciousness, then, suggests that female subjectivity should be conceptualised differently as a resistant strategy that contrasts with the rigid classifications of female identities evident in hegemonic discourses. Haraway, arguably, responds to Sandoval's differential consciousness by rendering the border into a site that enables her subject, the cyborg, articulate an oppositional consciousness conceived as having the ability to enact personal agency and enunciate its differences through multiple subjectivities. This form of oppositional consciousness, I assume, is grounded firmly in the belief that borders not only limit agency by reducing definitions of self, but also can be transformed from a space of limitation into a site of transformation and resistance.

Even though it is not explicitly present in her theoretical discussions, it seems that, Haraway, while moulding a border subjectivity that would become a strategy to subvert the traditional universal self, builds on Homi Bhabha's concept of border lives and his idea of the border as a figurative site of critical resistance. The border, according to Bhabha (1994), is a place

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of "exploratory, restless movement", in which the subject finds itself in a moment of transit, "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (*The Location of Culture* 1). Accordingly, Haraway conceives of the border as a space where female subjects produce complex figures of difference whose common objective is to resist the set of representations embedded in the discourses of the traditional universal self that implies a fixed and monolithic essence to female subjectivity.

By positioning border subjectivities in the foreground of her theories, this feminist critic, therefore, has assumed multiple critical stances toward female subjectivity in which she argues that essentialism results in a gross misreading of the nature of difference. In so doing, she reimagines the female subject as a place of differences and site that marks out a multiplicity of complex sets of experience which cannot be reduced to a uniform and consistent representation. That is, the female subject envisaged here becomes, "the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference, and others" (Braidotti 4). Since, as Kathy Ferguson (1993) puts it, the mestiza[30], the cyborg, and the nomad[31] are the embodiments of "mobile" subjects who "trouble fixed boundaries . . . create new possibilities for themselves . . . they are ambiguous, messy and multiple, unstable but persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things . . . They are politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim" (154), I will explore more fully, in the ensuing sections, the possibilities of the cyborg subjectivity whose

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[30] In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), the chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa uses the term 'mestiza' to theorise the fluidity and contradictory social experiences of what she calls a "border woman" existing between two cultures (20).

[31] According to Rosi Braidotti (1994), the metaphoric figuration of the nomad stands for subjectivities formed by a constant process of formation, dissolution, and reconstitution.

desire for difference urges it toward resisting relations of domination based on binarism, hierarchisation, and rigidity.

5.1. Conceptual Border *Vis-à-Vis* Geopolitical Border:

Besides Bhabha's theorisation of 'border lives', I develop my argument of the border as a site of resistance by focusing on Jessica Elbert Decker's and Dylan Winchock's idea of conceptual or metaphorical border in "Borderlands and Liminality Across Philosophy and Literature" (2017). Decker and Winchock have made a distinction between the idea of the geopolitical border as presented by Josiah Heyman and the conceptual border which is more than just a physical limit. According to Heyman, any proper analysis of borders "comes only in the form of the physical, geopolitical border between nations". For him, metaphorical interpretations of borders will only lead to obfuscate, "the very real political and economic issues that emerge and manifest at the concrete border". Here, Heyman is specifically referring to the geopolitical border between Mexico and the United States whose metaphorical use, he contends, spawns a "reproduction and reinforcement of the binary oppositions of "Mexico/U.S., illegal/legal, poor/rich". Heyman further suggests that the scholarly interest which centres on the conceptual image of border reifies the hierarchical distinctions between the two sides of the border instead of making genuine critiques (Decker and Winchock 2).

In responding to such a claim, Decker and Winchock asseverate that the border represents also the limit of ideas: "It is the line we draw with words through definition, sketching out the edges of a concept, as well as the edges of the categories we use to contain the world around us. It is the oppositional line drawn between good and evil, true and false, white and black, male and female, dominant and subordinate" (1). Rather than underpinning the binary, as Heyman suggests, the metaphorical images of the border and conceptual Borderlands, Decker and Winchock assume,

"call into question the validity of the binary and its inscribed structures of power" (3). Decker and Winchock do not, of course, confute the importance of the geopolitical border, but they call for an inclusive analysis that looks across disciplines and perspectives, "understanding that with each narrative trajectory explored, a more complete picture of a phenomenon may be revealed" (3).

5.2. Subjectivity in Feminist Poststructuralism:

Simone de Beauvoir's trenchant remark, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. *He is the Subject, he is the Absolute— she is the Other*" (16; emphasis added), explains the pivotal importance of subjectivity for feminist thinkers and its emphatic recurrence and presence in feminist debates. Becoming increasingly aware of the fact that being defined as the Other implies being treated as a non-subject and, therefore, a non-agent, feminist poststructuralists, in particular, aim at defining the experience of being a woman by appropriating new concepts of female subjectivity.

According to Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987), feminist poststructuralism combines both feminist and structuralist perspectives to primarily investigate the issue of subjectivity as related to 'the female self'. Such combination is made possible due to the deconstructive potential inherent in both perspectives, and which suggests that both are "deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, *the self*, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture" (Flax 401; emphasis added). This signals a substantial departure among feminist poststructuralists from accepting the views of the female self as constructed and dictated by dominant discourses of Western culture, to recognise multiple standpoints which would enable them to consider women's subjectivities as, "discursively

constructed and multiple" (Nicholson 4-5). The model of subjectivity in feminist poststructuralist discourse is, in this sense, contingent and open to change, and it fundamentally insists on different forms, "produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them". In such a context, the female individual becomes the site of different forms of subjectivity.

For Chris Weedon, the different, and sometimes conflicting, forms of feminist subjectivity are the result of "the conscious thoughts and feelings of the individual, her sense of self and, in psychoanalytic and post-structuralist contexts, it encompasses unconscious meanings, wishes and desires". The female subject, in this sense, will be constantly in process, and whose access to a stable, fixed subjectivity, will be denied. Weedon argues:

> individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society. Social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. Where other positions exist but are exclusive to a particular class, race or gender, the excluded individual will have to fight for access by transforming existing power relations (91).

With this definition, Weedon is seemingly calling for deconstructing the exclusionary essentialist view of subjectivity, which has been deeply-rooted in humanistic tradition that postulates subjectivities as intrinsically unitary, coherent, stable, and fixed, in order to carve out spaces to devise alternative discourses in which feminists may offer non-hegemonic and non-essentialist representations of the female subject.

Weedon also argues that, despite the fact that the female subject has been constituted and shaped by hegemonic discourses, she is still able to enact "resistance to that subject position" (112), since she still exists as "a thinking, feeling and social agent capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices" (125). According to this argument, Weedon claims that opening up new possibilities for positioning the female self as fragmentary and contradictory will provide "a contextualisation of experience and an analysis of its constitution and ideological power" (125) in addressing women's historical and cultural specificity. Feminist poststructuralism, according to Weedon, should thereby:

> recognize the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality. It should not deny subjective experience, since the ways in which people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society. Theory must be able to address women's experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them…In this process subjectivity becomes available, offering the individual both a perspective and a choice, and opening up the possibility of political change. (8–9)

In this context, feminist theories of subjectivity respond to Weedon's claim by creating a different standpoint in which resistant subject positions, also known as multiple feminist subjectivities, share a common tenacious motif, to deconstruct the universal subject.

Since, as I have mentioned earlier, the universal self maintains its authority and sustains its power through a binary logic which marks absolute difference between binary poles like self/other, subject/object, and male/female, feminist theorists, including Donna Haraway in this stance, have attempted to figure out new feminist subjectivities which seek primarily to articulate the specificity and multiplicity of female experience against such dualisms that place them in the inferior part of

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the binary. These new subjectivities, therefore, resist the rigidity and stiffness of the binary logic through producing border subjects that "share a preference for border transgression and a critique of binary thinking" (Baccolini 35).

5.3. Donna Haraway's Cyborg as a Potent Subjectivity

In their several attempts at deconstructing the universal self, feminist poststructuralists construct other, more complex and diverse, and sometimes mythic figures that open up possibilities for new formulations. The formulation that I will consider here is Donna Haraway's the cyborg. In fact, it is in her celebrated essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (1985), that Haraway introduces the concept of 'the cyborg' which becomes one of the most influential feminist metaphors of difference, contradiction, and permeable boundaries. Though it was Manfred Clynes and Nathan Klyne who first coined the term 'cyborg' in 1960 to refer to "the enhanced man who could survive in extraterrestrial environments" (*Modest_Witness@* 51), it is Haraway, however, who is mostly credited for popularising the term in a feminist context.

Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 149). Thus, Haraway's figuration of the cyborg that emerges out of the human-machine interface, becomes one of hybridity instead of integrity (163). From this perspective, René Munnik (1999) observes that cyborgs are adverse to notions of wholeness, integrity, and purity and, thus, can be identified as perverse beings (105) designed to fulfil the role of the "avatar of boundary blurring" (106). With this figure, we witness a literal combination of what has previously been regarded as separate and inviolable: human/nonhuman. Through this melding that suggests a blurring of boundaries, Haraway wants to deliberately counter and challenge the essentialism inherent in the notion of the

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unified and coherent subject that reflects a "totalization" produced by "Western patriarchy itself" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 159).

To refute this tendency towards totalising ways of viewing subjectivity, Haraway imagines a hybrid creature while deploying a border rhetoric manifest in her discussion of cyborg's symbiotic life on the border between humanity and technology. Notably, Haraway's theorisation of the cyborg as a border subject is highly evocative of the liminal, marginal spaces occupied by women of colour (*Simians, Cyborgs* 155). Such deployment, Haraway ascertains, provides a framework to break down "certain dualisms" which "have been persistent in Western traditions", and which "have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour . . . in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self" (177). Therefore, for Haraway, there is a compelling parallel between cyborgs and women of colour in the sense that both are constructed as other beings bearing a kind of a fractured identity that arises out of "otherness and difference" (155). On a similar account, Anne Balsamo critically points out that Haraway unequivocally maps the subjectivity of women onto the image of the cyborg, and further arguing that Haraway's cyborg theory is intrinsically meant for investigating "how women live permanently partial, to discover what cultural meanings are taken up, how they are resisted, and in the process, ultimately transformed" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 34).

However, for Paddy McQueen, the figure of the cyborg becomes increasingly an appealing and provocative concept that is useful for thinking through female subjectivity as it offers an alternative account to the Cartesian subject by stressing that "we are always in-process, devoid of an inner or authentic self and formed through multiple, potentially contradictory discourses of identity" (91). Both of cyborgs and female subjects, according to McQueen, are situated at the intersection of "multiple, potentially contradictory, axes of discourse, identity and difference" (90).

This situatedness, she proposes, rejects conventional identity politics and, instead, reflects a cyborg politics that resists the allure to "render one or more of these axes foundational". This, in fact, supports Haraway's formation of cyborg politics whose ultimate purpose, according to Haraway, is to construct a model of political subjectivity which embraces, "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 157).

More specifically, Haraway equates this model of subjectivity with Chela Sandoval's concept of 'oppositional consciousness' when she asserts that the cyborg stands as a form of oppositional consciousness for women of colour, "born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class" (155). Besides, Haraway more pointedly posits that women of colour may be understood as "a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 174). Sandoval, in turn, acknowledges that Haraway's "cyborg textual machine represents a politics that runs parallel to those of U.S. third world feminism" ("New Sciences" 412).

From these critical feminist perspectives, which grounds the cyborg in the context of women, we may understand that this figure functions as a metaphor to embody boundary transgressions, otherness, and subjectivities which reflect "permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (*Simains, Cyborgs* 154). It is these metaphoric extensions that render the cyborg as a perfect political tool for women to displace themselves from the position of the Other and negotiate alternative forms of subjectivity that speak directly to the complex web of power relations into which their experiences of race, class, and gender are embedded. Indeed, a recognition of how the cyborg functions on a metaphorical level has allowed feminist critics and theorists alike to take up this metaphor and look at its potential in telling us about "various

definitions of the human subject and about the fears and anxieties surrounding a given society's Others" (Cornea 275).

Significantly, Haraway claims that she develops her cyborg theory in relation to women's experience in the last decades, and writes that: "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 149). Such theorisation, Haraway explains, has been directly inspired by the works of black feminist science fiction writer, Octavia E. Butler whom Haraway describes, along with other science fiction authors, as "theorists for cyborgs" (173), approaching science fiction as a "political theory'' (*How Like a Leaf* 120). Patricia Melzer (2006) elaborates on this point further, noting that feminist science fiction using cyborg figures can be understood as, "a tool of domination as well as of imagination and resistance" (*Alien Constructions* 25) since the cyborg, which is critically about "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 154), undermines the seemingly stable categories of identity constructed around gender, race, class, and becomes a means of resisting definitions of otherness, and in so doing, "reconstituting subjectivity and identity in a non-totalizing way" (Wolmark 26).

II.6. Conclusion:

The theories discussed above constitute the multifaceted poetics of the margin as a site of resistance. Each of the theories I have selected to sustain this discussion, acknowledges the fact that the margin is much more than a space of oppression and deprivation. It is however a site of possibility that itself contains an inherent radical potential of resistance. With the emergence of spatial studies, most spatial theorists have focused their attention on marginalised groups and the spaces they occupy within their societies, and more importantly, the relationship arising out of the

contact between these spaces and the spaces of power and domination. The spaces considered in this chapter are liminality, heterotopia, and the border.

Though it is actually Arnold van Gennep who has first introduced the concept of liminality to the field of anthropology in his book, *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), as tool to analyse ritual performances that characterise a person's transition to a different status in life such as birth or death, it is Victor Turner's contribution and critical appropriation of van Gennep's analysis that has popularised the term within and even beyond anthropological studies. Turner's contribution gives birth to significant and provocative social and cultural criticism, as he discusses the space liminality in relation to marginality, anti-structure, and resistance within a sociocultural context. He ultimately acknowledges that liminality represents a resistant and emancipatory space that offers a new lens to consider differently the experiences of the oppressed and socially marginalised subjects. The postcolonial thinker, Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, tends to focus his attention on the relationship between liminality, cultural hybridity, and resistance. For Bhabha, those who are marginalised because of their cultural hybridity and difference should embrace their state of liminality as a site of resistance against and emancipation from colonial domination which legitimises the fixity and unity of cultural symbols and meanings. However, in his work *Power, Trust, and Meaning: Essays in Sociological Theory and Analysis* (1995), Shmuel Eisenstadt's study of liminality departs significantly from Turner's and Bhabha's in that he links this space with two aspects, power and structure. According to him, some societies undergo a liminal experience in which a form of a social and cultural structure is to be constructed through certain social and cultural symbols and limits that serve as a means to guarantee stability in the face of potential conflicts. So, instead of being a resistant liberatory space, liminality for Eisenstadt is a

repressively restrictive space where subjects fear stepping outside the boundaries of such imposed structure.

The chapter also considers the wide range of perspectives that have read heterotopia as a site of resistance. Since Michel Foucault presents his ideas on this unique emplacement in his famous lecture "*Des Espaces Autres*" (1967), to refer to those spaces whose function seem to resist the dominant ordering of societies and culture, heterotopia has since started to receive serious scholarly attention and examination. The range of studies resulting from this increasing interest share the argument that heterotopic spaces are marginal spaces with a strong potential to become sites of resistance. Perhaps Kevin Hetherington's *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering* (1997), can be regarded as the most perspicuous in expounding the relationship of heterotopia with marginality and resistance. He argues that it is the very character of 'otherness' that endow heterotopias the ability to offer critical perspective on dominant spaces. In 2003, Margaret Kohn attempted to provide a different study that looks into heterotopia as representing a countersite that resists economic and social hierarchies undergirding dominant societies.

Moreover, in this chapter I have gestured toward understanding how feminist poststructuralism perceives of the border as a marginal site of resistance in which marginal subjectivities shape an oppositional consciousness against the notion of the 'universal subject' that emphasises the homogeneity and uniformity of all subjects, and, more importantly, justifies the oppression of women. I have precisely drawn on Donna Haraway's figure of the 'cyborg' to discuss her ideas on a novel form of female subjectivity that deploys the border to develop a form of hybrid subjectivity that challenges and escapes the rigidity of Western binary logic as it essentially voices its difference by constructing itself as non-unitary and multiple. The blurring of boundaries seems to suggest the cyborg's ultimate act of transgression. It is this act of blurring that

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Haraway wants to emphasise most as it gives her the opportunity to challenge the essentialism inherent in the notion of the unified and coherent subject that has been promoted by Western patriarchy.

Chapter Three

Mapping Geographies of Liminality and Black Women's Resistance in Toni Morrison's Paradise (1998)

III.1. Introduction

III.2. Power and Structure: Ruby's Liminality Straddling an Ideal Past and a Precarious Present

III.3. Patricia Best Cato Performing the Role of the Liminar

III.4. Ruby's Structure Reversed: The Hybrid Convent Quilting an Anti-Structure Communitas

II.5. Conclusion

Some people are embarrassed about . . . [being used as an ancestral medium]; they both fear and distrust it also; they don't solidify and recreate the means by which one enters into that place where those people are. I think the more black women write, the more easily one will be able to talk about those things. Because I have almost never found anyone whose work I respected or who took their work that seriously, who did not talk in the vocabulary that you and I are using; it's not the vocabulary of literary criticism.… And it's not taught. People speak, of course, of the muse and there are other words for this. But to make it as graphic a presence or a collection of presences as I find it absolutely to be, it's not even a question of trying to make it appear that way—that's the way that it appears.

—Toni Morrison, "A Conversation," with Gloria Naylor.

III.1. Introduction:

This chapter offers a new critical reading of Toni Morrison's acute, spatial depiction of the black female experience in her 1998 novel, *Paradise*. By situating the novel within a new context that takes up liminality and resistance as key paradigms in redefining black women's experience of marginality, I suggest that Morrison addresses the complicated nature of this experience as being distinguished by a state of liminality that is characterised by an empowering and liberating potential. To highlight this potential, Morrison creates two different yet conflicting spaces, the Convent and the town of Ruby. Hence, this chapter aims at examining the vast discrepancy between a patriarchal oppressive structure as represented by the town of Ruby and a resistant *communitas* as quilted and performed by the edgewomen of the Convent. It also seeks to discuss how Morrison's 'liminar' black woman destabilises, form the margin, Ruby's master discourse.

III.2. Power and Structure: Ruby's Liminality Straddling an Ideal Past and a Precarious Present:

The story of *Paradise* is set mostly in the 1970's in an all-black township called Ruby, which is a place founded by descendants of formerly-enslaved men, now known as the "Old Fathers". After the downfall of Haven, the town the Old Fathers have built, the twin brothers Steward and Deacon Morgan along with a group of fifteen families abandoned the place to make and reclaim a new haven. Indeed, it has not been hard for the twins "to persuade other home boys to repeat what the Old Fathers had done in 1890" (*Paradise* 16), and they have eventually succeeded in founding New Haven, which has been renamed later as Ruby after the name of a woman who could not withstand the hardships of the trip. It is against this background that we will be able to understand how Ruby occupies a liminal space between an ideal past and a precarious present.

Ruby patriarchs are chuffed by the fact that their all-black town is a "unique and isolated" place (8) with "nothing for ninety miles around", "nothing at the edge" (9) or beyond its boundaries, for "neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anyone but themselves" (13). Only the convent, which has been there long before Ruby is settled, stands seventeen miles away, and Ruby's townsfolk has first thought about it as "a true if aloof neighbor" (10) whose inhabitants seem "strange but harmless. More than harmless, helpful even on occasion" (11). To Ruby patriarchs, especially Deacon and Steward, isolation and being cut off from the rest of the world are the sole means by which they can maintain a "place of all places . . . a town justifiably pleased with itself" (8). Actually, even in modern times, precisely in the year 1976, Ruby has still had no paved road connecting the town to other places, because they simply "liked being off the county road, accessible only to the lost and the knowledgeable" (*Paradise* 186).

With a town incessantly plunging itself into isolation, Ruby patriarchs seek to build and maintain a black utopia, a "dreamtown" (5) akin to that of their grandfathers', yet hoping their community won't suffer the same collapse and ruin as Haven. The story of Haven has started when a group of black freedmen began their quest to found the perfect place where they could create an idyllic community unhampered by racial oppression. After enduring and surviving the hardships of the Civil War, "Nine large intact families who made the original journey" (*Paradise* 188) led by Zechariah Morgan, Deacon and Steward's grandfather, have experienced a painful yet edifying journey when none of the other black towns have accepted them within their communities:

> On the journey from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to Oklahoma, the one hundred and fifty-eight freedmen were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from already established Negro towns (*Paradise* 13).

For instance, when Zechariah and his fellowmen sought to join the people of the new black township of Fairly, Oklahoma, they have been "thrown out and cast away" (188) on the grounds of both their poverty and their deeply dark skin. Zechariah could not see such a reaction coming from blacks for they used to be discriminated only by whites and "the sign of racial purity" (194) he had long believed in "had become a stain" (*Paradise* 194).

Through this incident, Morrison depicts a different and even more dangerous form of racial oppression which is implied in the oppositional binary of light-skinned/black as she maintains, "Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had no struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves" (*Paradise* 14). One of Zechariah's man was stung into

confusion because of a dismissal coming from Negro towns, "Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?" (14). The rejection, "the aggressive discouragement they received from negro towns" (13) has been remembered and recounted as the "Disallowing" which "Came from fair-skinned colored men. Blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits. They were kind, though, as the story went. Gave them food and blankets; took up a collection for them; but were unmoving in their refusal to let the 8-rocks stay longer than a night's rest" (*Paradise* 195).

This is how the town of Haven has come into existence, and the Disallowing, which has remained chiselled and seared deeply into the memories of the Old Fathers, ushered in the inception of a new exodus, as they have taken, "each other and their uncorruptible worthiness and walked to the "Run." Walked from Mississippi and Louisiana to Oklahoma and got to the place described in advertisements carefully folded into their shoes or creased into the brims of their hats only to be shooed away" (194). Morrison charts the Old Fathers' journey from slavery to freedom to an eventual mastery by making them follow "the signs God gave to guide them" (*Paradise* 14). Besides, the stories they used to recite are powerfully invigorating for Ruby men. The way they have acted toward the land and the way they have tamed a wilderness remained impressive, replenishing Ruby patriarchs' souls with pride:

> At suppertime, when it was too dark for any work except that which could be done by firelight, the Old Fathers recited the stories of that journey: the signs God gave to guide them—to watering places, to Creek with whom they could barter their labor for wagons, horses and pasture; away from prairie-dog towns fifty miles wide and Satan's malefactions: abandoned women with no belongings, rumors of riverbed gold. (*Paradise* 14)

Still hankering after the ideality of the Old Fathers' story, which they have turned into a sacralised history, Ruby elders build and cherish what they feel compelled and proud to remind younger

generations as "the one all-black town worth the pain" (*Paradise* 5). That's why it becomes especially necessary and important for the Morgan twins and other Ruby men, for whom "past heroism was enough of a future to live by" (Bauman 161), to opt for making a "free and protected" place that must harbour what they snugly aspire as a, "quite, orderly community" (*Paradise* 8).

Holding too tightly to their extraordinary history, lofty goals, and hefty aspirations, Ruby "becomes an imaginative location, a space created by longing and nostalgia for an original place, complete with an affective investment by idealized notions of wholeness" (Yoon 70). This very idealisation nevertheless compels Ruby patriarchs to produce, and make their community enter a state of liminality where a form of a social and cultural order is to be upheld, and which every member of the community must endorse without question. Ruby's liminality is arguably created the moment its elders have decided and concurred to build a utopian place that resembles their grandfathers' Haven in terms of maintaining the sacred laws of isolation and racial purity. It is in this context, therefore, that we can understand the way Ruby represents Shmuel's Eisenstadt's liminal space of power and structure.

On account of Eisenstadt's definition of liminality as implying a form of social power imposed by a certain society's adoption of hierarchical and exclusionary tendencies that stress, "the purity of the world inside, the pollution of the world outside, and the need to remain within" (*Power, Trust* 310), Ruby elders have worked hard to create and transmit a value system that is essentially based on the belief that their community's retreat from the exterior world is necessary to preserve its idealness and racial purity. On this premise, we find Ruby structuring its existence according to a regulation of power that establishes the town firmly in an ideology of polarisation which emphasises the binary opposite of inside safe/outside hostile. In the following passage, Morrison provides a keen portrait of how Ruby stresses the necessity of setting boundaries:

Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became

unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when

and where it chose—behind any standing tree, behind the door of any house, humble or

grand. Out There where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your

very person could be annulled; where congregations carried arms to church and ropes

coiled in every saddle. Out There where every cluster of whitemen looked like a posse,

being alone was being dead. (*Paradise* 16)

As indicated above, the narrator alludes to how Ruby can offer a secure life to its inhabitants by

being indoors. This again takes us back to Eisenstadt's argument that communities undergoing

liminal phases manipulate their members to believe that the imposed structure is the ideal one, and

more importantly, they create within them, "the fear of stepping outside the boundary" (*Power,*

Trust 310). This can be sensed in the narrator's cautionary allusion to the dangers lurking 'Out

There' or, in other words, the perils of trespassing Ruby's limits. Thus, it is only in making the

residents of Ruby succumb to such imposed structure that Ruby can exert its power and define

itself as "protective, God-loving, thrifty but not miserly" (*Paradise* 160) town that seeks to

reinforce its communal unity by "placing boundaries and delving into the past for internalized

origins" (Yoon 71).

It is also necessary to note that this value system, Ruby leaders seek to implement, is used

to help foster and solidify a fierce sense of communal identity that is intrinsically nurtured by the

collective memory of the 'Disallowing', "whose worthiness was so endemic" (193), and which

Morrison aptly describes as the, "disbelievable words formed in the mouths of men to other men .

. . in ways too confounding for language" (*Paradise* 189). Here, we can think of the Old Fathers'

traumatic experience of the 'Disallowing' in terms of what Eisenstadt explains as the "symbolic

boundaries of personal and collective identity" (*Power, Trust* 310). Transmitted from one generation to another, Ruby patriarchs, especially the Morgan twins, turns the story of the 'Disallowing' away from shame into a story that evokes pride in Ruby men's hearts. In a recasting of the dishonourable image of this experience, the men of Ruby convert the memory of the Disallowing into a political tool, a controlling narrative to pass down a history that insists on "isolation and its desire to keep family lines and racial stock pure" (Davidson 364). *Paradise* highlights this fact in its opening section:

> The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened-things they witnessed and things they have not.... And they have never forgotten the message or the specifics of any story, especially the controlling one told to them by their grandfather . . . A story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves. (13)

More importantly, the incessant haunting nature of these "powerful memories" make Ruby prone to refrain from shaping and telling its own story: "Over and over and with the least provocation, they pulled from their stock of stories tales about the old folks, their grands and greatgrands; their fathers and mothers. But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on" (*Paradise* 161). In *Ethics and Aesthetics in Toni Morrison's Fiction* (2018)*,* Mariangela Palladino describes the Disallowing as a dangerous memory which drags Ruby into an "obsessive relation with the past", and "the meticulous iteration of its stages" aggravatedly "block ruby into an unliveable present" (54). Rob Davidson (2001) similarly emphasises this point, claiming that Ruby's blind commitment to the dangerous memory of the Disallowing can be explained as a tactic for retaining power and establishing what he would prefer to call a "perpetual "state of emergency"" (359) which allows Ruby patriarchs "any measure

of terror or violence so long as it defends (what they deem) the town's common interests" (Davidson 360).

Given the implications of what both Palladino and Davidson consider as a dangerous memory, I align my argument with that of Palladino's and Davidson's to add that this memory not only deprives Ruby from making its own history and establishing a good sense of its present, but worse than that, the perils this memory holds are projected in Ruby's absolute intolerance for anything that might ostensibly pose a threat for its authority. The latter, I presume, is dependent on a structure of power comprising of three major keystones: patriarchy, racial purity, and a dominant discourse embedded in the town's Oven. I would further claim that these keystones are designed to overcome what Eisenstadt identifies as unexpected uncertainties and anxieties while serving as a means to guarantee stability in the face of potential conflicts (310).

In *Paradise*, what makes Morrison's depiction of a patriarchal Ruby worth consideration is that she draws a strong connection between patriarchy and domesticity in controlling and protecting the community. Readers will be startled when they learn that Morrison metaphorically rests the responsibility of domestic works upon the men of Ruby, not the women. However, the kind of domestic work Ruby patriarchs are engaged with is not the usual one that takes place in houses and generally performed by women. The context of their domesticity is the town. Readers will find that Ruby' s males are the ones who have taken on themselves the task of 'cleaning up' anything that might threaten their community with desecration. The novel foregrounds such task through certain cleaning tropes in its opening pages: "And at last they will see the cellar and expose its filth to the light that is soon to scour the Oklahoma sky" (*Paradise* 3). In choosing terms like "filth" and "scour", Morrison is directly linking Ruby's patriarchs' eager desire to 'clean out' their community with an overarching moral imperative to protect a "social order governed by . . . the

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principle of male dominance" (Wyatt 77). Jean Wyatt argues that such desire, which reflects Ruby patriarchs' great obsession with housekeeping, stems from the fear of being threatened by "something in their women they cannot put their finger on . . . Women out of control" (*Paradise* 78). Therefore, applying the metaphor of housekeeping to the running of their community is regarded as an effective way for Ruby men to deal with deviant behaviours, especially those allegedly instigated by women.

Thus, charging Ruby patriarchs with such gripping, metaphoric domestic task resonates significantly with Eisenstadt's critical reflection on how communities under certain liminal situations may resort to the construction of symbolic boundaries whose aim is to deter any transgressive behaviour (*Power, Trust* 310). Since, as Patricia Best Cato, one of *Paradise's* major female characters, admits, "everything that worries them must come from women" (*Paradise* 217), Ruby's patriarchal control necessitates protecting its women from defilement. We found that the Morgan twins relates Ruby's safety and purity specifically with the protection of its women. The inhabitants of Ruby, when in the confines of this space, are:

> free and protected. A sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road. No lamp and no fear. A hiss-crackle from the side of the road would never scare her because whatever it was that made the sound, it wasn't something creeping up on her. Nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey. She could stroll as slowly as she liked, think of food preparations, war, of family things, or lift her eyes to stars and think of nothing at all. (*Paradise* 8)

We can notice that Morrison's deliberate transition of narrative from the inhabitants of Ruby as being "free and protected" to "a woman", demonstrates that the concern for the security of Ruby is inextricable from the apprehensions about women.

So, being "virtuous obedient" (Wyatt 72), "faithful to the patriarchal patterns" (73) and compliant with "the limits imposed from above" (74), would be the ideal and 'safest' position a woman is expected to hold in Ruby, since women for the men of Ruby "fall into two categories: the angel of the house and the worthless" human being (J. Tally 76). From the perspective of a patriarchal Ruby, it is only in such dictated domestic space that women can be safe and protected from being vulnerable to outside influences, particularly those which might distort their gender role conformity. In this sense, we may understand that Ruby's patriarchal ideology is not different from that of white supremacist patriarchy, in that both attempt to confine black womanhood to the ideal image of the 'mammy': "the faithful, obedient domestic servant" (*Black Feminist* 72), who was created to, "explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service", and to represent "the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behavior" (72). Indeed, one of the novel's characters, Billie Delia, acknowledges that what the Morgan twins, Deacon and Steward, relentlessly quest for is to fill Ruby with properly obedient women, and she speculates about "the real battle" between genders in the town as one between controlling and obedience. The narrative voice, accordingly, asserts: "But to Billie Delia the real battle was not about infant life or a bride's reputation but about disobedience, which meant, of course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals" (*Paradise* 150).

Moreover, through the eyes of Deacon Morgan, readers may observe how a woman's life that is restricted to the domestic space is satisfactory and reassuring for Ruby men: "Quiet white and yellow houses full of industry; and in them were elegant black women at useful tasks; orderly

cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness; linen laundered and ironed to perfection; good meat seasoned and ready for roasting" (*Paradise* 111). However, what might trigger attention about Deek's description is his use of the words "quiet", "orderly", and "perfection", which might not only suggest a strong connection between Ruby men and domestic tropes, but also to the interesting fact that quietude, order, and perfection are all dependent on their women, in the sense that these attributes cannot be maintained unless women stick adherently to the roles and spaces their community prescribe for them.

Nonetheless, Ruby patriarchs' fear of witnessing their community morph from a "quiet, orderly community" into an uncontrolled space is unequivocally entangled with the fear of unrestrained female spaces, and both of those fears collide in the Convent, a place out of Ruby's dominion. In *Paradise*, Morrison evokes such fear through these lines: "Yet here, not twenty miles away from a quiet, orderly community, there were women like none he knew or ever heard tell of" (8). Also, Morrison reveals such deep apprehension through a character called Lone DuPres who succinctly voices these twisted fears as she puts, "So…the fangs and the tail are somewhere else. Out yonder all slithery in a house full of women. Not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a convent but a coven" (276). The Convent which houses only women, among which there is a white girl, is seen as a virulently threatening place which ostensibly stands in sharp contrast to the controlling patriarchy and racial purity of Ruby. A further discussion of how the Convent projects Ruby men's fears will be reserved until later in the chapter where I will explain how this space emerges as an anti-structure *communitas*.

Seemingly, a multiracial place like the Convent seems threatening and frightening enough to a community that has long cherished and defined itself proudly and haughtily according to its

unique blackness and "racial purity" (*Paradise* 194) that is firmly grounded in "dogmatic racist and patriarchal terms that simply reverse the hierarchy of the racism they themselves suffered by excluding all who are not so dark as themselves" (Michael 648). In the novel, Morrison chooses her female historian, Patricia Best, to dig through Ruby's history and to eventually explain the reasons behind Ruby's pride in its blackness. She realises that such pride is rooted in the Old Fathers' dark skin, what she calls "8-rock". She relates: "8-R. An abbreviation for eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no "sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them" (*Paradise* 193). Erik Dussere (2003) eloquently demonstrates that Patricia's evocation of, and by extension Morrison herself, "deep-down coal signifies nicely, veins of coal standing in for blood veins containing pure black blood" (105).

Therefore, another concern seems to surface the narrative, which is keeping the racial bloodline of Ruby pure. Transgressing this symbolic boundary by marrying an outsider or anyone who does not descend from Ruby's original families, is simply unacceptable. For instance, when one of Ruby's man, Menus Jury, returns from the Vietnam war with a pretty light-skinned, "redbone girl" (278) he has fallen in love with, the community collectively has forced him to "give back or return the woman he brought home to marry. The pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia", and Menus eventually, "lost (or was forced to give up) the house he'd bought for her and hadn't been sober since" (195). Thus, by fixing what they regard as a transgressive act, it is possible to infer that "the blood rule" (*Paradise* 199) represents another symbolic limit that gives Ruby the authority to protect its purity at any cost. In "In the End is the Beginning: Toni Morrison's Post-Modern, Post-Ethical Vision of *Paradise*" (2011), Johnny R. Griffith writes:

Publicly, the patriarchs accredit Menus' drunkenness to his experiences in Vietnam, but, as Patricia indicates and the patriarchs themselves know, Menus' drunkenness is merely his attempt to drown his desperate but hopeless love for the girl he has abandoned and to blunt the pangs of regret he feels for having stayed on in Ruby, allowing the patriarchs to fix his future within their rigid prescriptions of racial purity and social conformity. (587)

Also, Patricia's father, Roger Best, has married a woman outside the "blood rule" (199), whom he met at an "AME Zion picnic . . . The one held for colored soldiers stationed at the base in Tennessee" (200), but Ruby's patriarchs have never forgotten or forgiven him for that. They have even despised him for taking a wife, "of sunlight skin, a wife of racial tampering" (197). Patricia recalls the horrible memory of her mother's death during childbirth because Ruby's townsfolk would rather watch her bleed to death than invite a white doctor into the town to save a woman with lighter complexion, "All of the excuses were valid, reasonable. Even with their wives begging they came up with excuses because they looked down on you, Mama, I know it, and despised Daddy for marrying a wife with no last name" (*Paradise* 197). For the rest of the following time, Patricia and her father have been forever shunned and marginalised for the mere reason that her father has violated Ruby's sacred racial boundaries.

Accordingly, Patricia concludes with a significant remark about Ruby's great obsession with maintaining an untainted lineage, narrating that: "The generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too . . . Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their deal. For Immortality". "In that case", writes Morrison, Patricia has thought, "everything that worries them must come from women" (*Paradise* 217). Therefore, we may deduce the fact that, for Ruby men, the only way to keep their racial line pure is to make certain that no interracial marriages would happen. In other words, women of

impure racial quality should not be brought into the community and, perhaps more importantly and according to a patriarchal ideology, that women who are racially pure are not impregnated by men who are not. So, for the patriarchal fathers of Ruby, they know that they cannot achieve this unless they rule the female body by controlling the sexual actions and desires of their women. This is, however, particularly evident when Deacon Morgan comes to call the women of the Convent: "bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (*Paradise* 18). Deacon's description emphatically places Ruby patriarchs' reductive and bipolar view of women as "either sinful Eves or the embodiment of a virginal feminine ideal" (Genzale 53). Shirley A. Stave (2013) mentions, "Prior to the founding of Haven, then, the men were already engaged in the project of policing the sexuality of their female companions and barring their participation in decisions affecting the entire group" ("Separate Spheres?" 25-26). Stave's allusion to the men's position toward women prior to the founding of Haven affirms the persistent paternalistic privilege the men assumed within their community.

Morrison explicitly shows the overarching power of Ruby's paternalistic discourse over their women's bodies and minds through Deacon Morgan's wife, Soan, who seems to embrace the feminine ideal, Ann M. Genzale has spoken about previously, neatly and complacently. After she learns that her husband has been having an extramarital affair with one of the Convent women named Consolata, Soan's reaction, instead of being overcome by rage and anger, seems, oddly enough, calm and acquiescent. This is particularly so evident when she has imperturbably told Consolata, "Listen to me. He can't fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are doing something" (*Paradise* 240). Here, we may figure out that Ruby community ingrains a strong sense of collective commitment and responsibility amongst its members, especially women, towards the success of its structure, which ultimately supresses the articulation of any individual agency, would

it be mental or bodacious. Soane is among Ruby's members who have been extremely committed to the imposed structure, stating that "nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain" (*Paradise* 5).

Of course, none of the symbolic boundaries discussed earlier places Ruby in a precarious situation, since Ruby's imposed patriarchal and racial limits presumably fasten its isolationist structure and solidify its power. It is the communal Oven, however, which exposes ruptures in Ruby's authority and generates rebellious oppositions against its dominant discourse. Yet, it is important to mention here that the first dissident voice actually emanates from an outsider, Reverend Richard Misner. Misner, whose vocation as a preacher has been the only thing that allowed him into Ruby, explains to Patricia the sterility of living in a place that is cut off from the surrounding social world: "We live in the world, Pat. The whole world. Separating us, isolating us—that's always been their weapon. Isolation kills generations. It has no future" (*Paradise* 210). However, Misner's private conversation with Patricia will not remain so, as the youngsters of Ruby become increasingly aware of the changes occurring in the world. In an interview, Morrison explains why such awareness will shatter Ruby's utopian image of itself as it won't be able to withstand the winds of change:

> Isolation carries the seeds of its own destruction because as times change, other things seep in, as it did with Ruby. The 50's, that was one thing; the 70's, that was another, and they refused to deal with the changing times, and simply threw up their gates, like any gated community, to keep everything away. And, in fact, that was the necessary requirement for the destruction of their paradise. (Denard 156)

Of course, as time passes by, Ruby patriarchs find themselves unable to hold back younger generations from pronouncing a fervent desire to look beyond the confines of their 'gated

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community'. This definitely stirs up the wrath of Ruby elders, for whom Ruby is more than just a safe place, it is rather a town where a whole community works together to thwart the consolidation of any ideas that may effect change and distort the town's ideal dominant structure.

Morrison uses the symbol of the Oven to succinctly emblematise this emerging tension between Ruby's elders and youths; a tension that happens to also allegorise a struggle over who will control the discourse. Morrison makes this struggle visible in the clash caused by the many interpretations that some Ruby members attribute to the words inscribed at the base of the Oven's mouth. As the initial letters of the inscription have faded out, Ruby elders purportedly read them as "Beware the Furrow of His Brow", based on the oral testimony of Miss Esther Morgan's "finger memory", while the youngsters, who "had not suggested, politely, that Miss Esther may have been mistaken; they howled at the notion of remembering invisible words you couldn't even read by tracing letters you couldn't pronounce", think the words read like "Be the Furrow of His Brow" (*Paradise* 83). Ultimately, each strand seeks to deduce and impose certain meanings from these words. Morrison presents this discrepancy in the following debate between the young Destry Beauchamp and the elders, Nathan DuPres, Reverend Pulliam, Harper Jury, Sargeant Person, and Steward Morgan**:**

> Destry, looking strained and close to tears, held up his hand and asked, "Excuse me, sir. What's so wrong about 'Be the Furrow'? 'Be the Furrow of His Brow'?"
>
> "You can't be God, boy." Nathan DuPres spoke kindly as he shook his head.
>
> "It's not being Him, sir; it's being His instrument, His justice. As a race—"
>
> "God's justice is His alone. How you going to be His instrument if you don't do what He says?" asked Reverend Pulliam. "You have to obey Him."

"Yes, sir, but we are obeying Him," said Destry. "If we follow His commandments, we'll be His voice, His retribution. As a people—"

Harper Jury silenced him. "It says 'Beware.' Not 'Be.' Beware means 'Look out. The power is mine. Get used to it.' "

" 'Be' means you putting Him aside and you the power," said Sargeant.

"We are the power if we just—"

"See what I mean? See what I mean? Listen to that! You hear that, Reverend? That boy needs a strap. Blasphemy!"

As could have been predicted, Steward had the last word—or at least the words they all remembered as last because they broke the meeting up. "Listen here," he said, his voice thick and shapely with Blue Boy. "If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake". (*Paradise* 87)

The clash over the right wordings and meaning of the Oven's inscription, culminates in Steward Morgan's open threatening to change in any form, whether through addition or reduction. And rounding off what the patriarchs consider as a futile debate with the word "snake", reveals Ruby patriarchs' fear of the multiplicity of interpretations the communal oven seems to invite. For them, any interpretation that goes against the one they have propagated, becomes like a snake slithering its virulent ways into their paradisiacal structure.

Indeed, for this community the Oven stands as something more than a utility. It is another symbolic boundary that Ruby must protect by repressing the different interpretations of its inscription. It is highly regarded as a historical monument, "on which the community's founding fathers inscribed their exceptionalist aspirations" and "paradisiacal promise" (Dalsgård 239).

When Ruby men have moved the Oven from Haven, they "wanted to transport the entire structure" (J. Tally 53) to their newly-founded place. This somewhat leads us to suppose that the Oven serves as a reservoir of Ruby's memory and history, "a solidification of a remembered past" (Akoma 92). That's why, the patriarchs are so adamant about any change at all: "Nobody is going to mess with a thing our grandfathers built" (*Paradise* 85). Johnny R. Griffith (2011) relates such apprehensive inclination to, "the powerful presence of these words" in Ruby which, according to him, "monumentalizes the founding of the original Haven in a quite literal way and buttresses patriarchal hegemony within the community" (590). Indeed, Deacon Morgan asserts that the Oven "already has a history. It doesn't need you to fix it" (*Paradise* 86). Here, Deacon's association of the Oven with history is not accidental and deserves consideration, especially that he observes 'chinks' and 'cracks' in this monument, which Morrison is probably inviting us to think of them as fractures in Ruby's master discourse:

> And just as Big Papa foretold, if they stayed together, worked, prayed and defended together, they would never be like Downs, Lexington, Sapulpa, Gans where Colored were run out of town overnight . . . Except for a crack here, a chink there everything in Ruby was intact. There was no need to wonder if moving the Oven had been a mistake; whether it needed its original soil as foundation for the respect and wholesome utility that was its due. (112)

The following section, therefore, will attempt to explain Ruby's endeavours to transmit a master discourse about the community's history, and how a patriarchal historiography is resisted and superseded by a female version accentuated by a liminar who dwells in the very margin of the community.

III.3. Patricia Best Cato Performing the Role of the Liminar:

In a 1998 interview with James Marcus, Morrison explains, "mythologizing can end up hurting more than helping. These people have an extraordinary history, and they were sound people, moral people, generous people. Yet when their earlier settlement collapsed, and they tried to repeat it in Ruby . . . well, the modern generation simply couldn't sustain what the Old Fathers had created, because of the ways in which the world had changed". According to Morrison, Ruby's entrapment between a glorious past and a degrading present has been too tenuous that it has become so palpable when some young dissident voices have started calling for change as they have simply refused repeating a history that seems, as Morrison suggests earlier, "hurting more than helping". In this context, Morrison is far from offering a single discourse about Ruby. In *Paradise*, the novelist creates a narrative structure that juxtaposes a master discourse based on the Morgan twins' recollections of the Disallowing with a counternarrative made up by a liminar woman, Patricia Best Cato.

In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Victor Turner argues that the liminar exists in a state of "outsiderhood, referring to the condition of being either permanently or by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behaviour of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system" (233). Turner's definition of the liminar particularly holds true for Patricia whose father's, "The one nobody admitted existed" (*Paradise* 195), transgression of racial boundaries renders both of them outsiders who, by ascription, have been set outside the structural arrangements of Ruby. More importantly, it is Morrison's construction of this female character, who has voluntarily set herself apart from the subservient role women of Ruby usually play and who has taken upon herself a different role-playing which, "became unfit for any eyes except her

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own" (*Paradise* 187), that makes us draw strong parallels between this character and Turner's very definition of the liminar.

Patricia Best Cato, whose name Morrison uses to entitle a section of *Paradise* that cunningly displays a complex counter-reading of Ruby's patriarchal historiography, seeks to offer an alternative account whose construction is based on some other records that have been too personal or even shameful about the Disallowing. Earnestly desirous to resist the infinity of Ruby's history, Patricia wants to practice what Toni Morrison would term, 'the reappropriation of the past'. In light of this idea, Morrison states: "I know I can't change the future, but I can change the past. It is the past not the future, which is infinite. Our past was appropriated. I am one of the people who has to reappropriate it" (Taylor-Guthrie xiii-xiv). Patricia, accordingly, demonstrates a similar obligation to reappropriate the story behind the rebuff by Fairly's townspeople which, she believes, constitutes the great cornerstone of her town's structural arrangements and definition of itself, since "[e]verything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (*Paradise* 189).

Referring to the story of the Disallowing as "that one", Patricia is deliberately pointing to how the singularity of this memory turns it into a controlling narrative. Accordingly, she appoints herself as the community's genealogist and historian to privately investigate the gaps, which will turn out to be premeditated omissions, that have been left by Ruby's official history of "that one rebuff":

The town's official story, elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches, had a sturdy public life. Any footnotes, crevices or questions to be put took keen imagination and the persistence of a mind uncomfortable with oral histories. Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match the stories, and where proof was not

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available she interpreted-freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required emotional distance. (*Paradise* 188)

As suggested above, Patricia wants to collect a counternarrative based on other recitations to undermine the Morgan twins' personal recollections of the Disallowing. Patricia, in the process of so doing, seems to undertake a historical project similar to that of her creator, for "if *Paradise* is Morrison's counternarrative of America, Patricia's genealogy is the counternarrative of Ruby" (Gauthier 399). *Paradise* affirms this argument as it presents a character performing what Morrison calls 'literary archaeology'. The latter, according to Morrison, can be carried out "[o]n the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply". In fact, Toni Morrison herself has reckoned upon "the remains- in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth" ("The Site of Memory" 112). Cast as a literary archaeologist, Patricia shows her determination to embark on a journey to the site of the Disallowing to see what relics have been left behind and to reconstruct a different account, an alternative truth about what she regards as Ruby's mythologised story; a story that is made out of "constructions based on specific desires and needs, not as reflections of historical fact" (Li 101).

Throughout her journey, Patricia realises that there are no written documents recording the founding of Haven and it is only remembered and recounted orally and in mythic parts. It also comes as no surprise to her and to readers alike that this history is exclusively told from the subject position of one of the Morgans, Steward, who, "remembered every detail of the story his father and grandfather told" (95). Patricia has eventually undertaken "her history project" (*Paradise* 187) as an attempt to accumulate proportions from different subject positions. Actually, this historical project has initially begun as an extensive genealogical research into Ruby's family trees to

"supplement the branches of who begat whom" (*Paradise* 187). At first, such endeavour has been widely received as,

> a gift to the citizens of Ruby—a collection of family trees; the genealogies of each of the fifteen families. Upside-down trees, the trunks sticking in the air, the branches sloping down. When the trees were completed, she had begun to supplement the branches of who begat whom with notes: what work they did, for example, where they lived, to what church they belonged. Some of the nicer touches ("Was Missy Rivers, wife of Thomas Blackhorse, born near the Mississippi River? Her name seems to suggest . . ."). (*Paradise* 187)

Soon later, what "used to be a history project" becomes "nothing of the sort now". In other words, what has been once regarded as a gift to the community, is now conceived as a source of hassle as Patricia starts gleaning from "her students' autobiographical compositions", thinking that they might help her delve into the secret recesses of Ruby families. Of course, Ruby residents have not liked to have their children being asked to "gossip, to divulge what could be private information, secrets, even". After that, most of Patricia's notes have been gathered from "talking to people, asking to see Bibles and examining church records . . . letters and marriage certificates" (*Paradise* 187).

After accumulating information from different sources, Patricia's genealogy presents the sacred history of Ruby as ironic, disturbing the myth of a community that defines and perceives itself according to its racial and moral purity. This private female historian uncovers a complex history of incestuous marriages that have been accepted into the rigid structure of Ruby because many 8-rock men, unlike her own father, have, "shunned temptation or any thought of looking outside the families" (*Paradise* 197). She finds out that, "Since Bitty Cato married Peter Blackhorse, and since her daughter, Fawn Blackhorse, was wife to Bitty's uncle, and since Peter

Blackhorse is Billy Cato's grandfather—well, you can see the problem with blood rules" (*Paradise* 196). Considering what the 8-rock patriarchs take pride in as a problem, serves as a clue for readers to actually constitute, "a true story embedded in, between, and outside of Ruby's official story" of the Disallowing (Gauthier 408).

In addition, Patricia unravels another skein of the Disallowing story. While investigating the Morgan's Family Bible, she finds a heavy ink blot next to the name of Zechariah, the Morgan twins' grandfather. As Morgan patriarchs have refused to say anything about this, Patricia resorts to Ruby's older women like Dovey, Soane and Lone DuPres who have "hinted the most while saying the least". These women's testimonies, though incomplete, have led Patricia to discover that the inkblot has been purposefully made to cover up the name of Zechariah's brother, and Soane, Deacon's wife, explains the reason for this by stating, "Oh, I think those brothers had a disagreement of some kind" (*Paradise* 188).

Yet, this does not seem to quench Patricia's inquisitiveness and thirst for truth. Despite the fact that it is not Morrison's female historian who actually discovers the real cause behind crossing out the name of Zechariah's brother in the Morgan family bible, it is her incessant, tenacious effort which has propelled her friend Reverend Misner, who also happens to exist in a state of outsiderhood, to make Deacon confess about it:

Few knew and fewer remembered that Zechariah had a twin, and before he changed his name, they were known as Coffee and Tea. When Coffee got the statehouse job, Tea seemed as pleased as everybody else. And when his brother was thrown out of office, he was equally affronted and humiliated. One day, years later, when he and his twin were walking near a saloon, some whitemen, amused by the double faces, encouraged the brothers to dance. Since the encouragement took the form of a pistol, Tea, quite reasonably,

accommodated the whites, even though he was a grown man, older than they were. Coffee took a bullet in his foot instead. From that moment they weren't brothers anymore. Coffee began to plan a new life elsewhere. He contacted other men, other former legislators who had the same misfortune as his—Juvenal DuPres and Drum Blackhorse. They were the three who formed the nucleus of the Old Fathers. Needless to say, Coffee didn't ask Tea to join them on their journey to Oklahoma. (*Paradise* 302)

This passage discloses a contradiction between Deacon's confession and the sanctioned version of Ruby history. According to the community's master narrative, Zechariah has been shot "by whom or why nobody knew or admitted" (189). But Deacon's account offers different historical details which the family has kept secret. His narrative shows that when Zechariah and his twin brother, whose original names were Coffee and Tea respectively, have been forced to dance for some inebriated white men, Coffee has refused, that's why he has taken that bullet in his foot, whereas Tea, "quite reasonably, accommodated the whites" (*Paradise* 302).

In this context, for the Morgans, the manipulation of these historical details, which have culminated in just another form of disallowing wherein they have blotted out their great-uncle's name, seems quite justifiable as long as it presents the Old Fathers as those proud ancestors who have never bowed to anyone. According to Patricia San José Rico (2019), this subtle form of historical manipulation leads to self-delusion as the Morgans and the community at large, "would very much prefer to believe the ritualized version of their traumatic history rather than face the truth hidden beneath which would impede their ability to convert the shared trauma into the basis for their collective identity" (73).

Furthermore, Ruby's master narrative conceals another story related to their sacred patriarch, Zechariah. Represented as the most proud and righteous man among the founding

fathers, Coffee- Zechariah has been subject to newspaper articles and some people's taunts which have accused him of malfeasance in office during the period of the Reconstruction. He has since been an "embarrassment to Negroes and both a threat and a joke to whites. No one, black or white, could or would help him find other work" (302). Of course, these shameful, embarrassing disallowings should rather be repressed and superseded by what Patricia refers to as "that one rebuff" (*Paradise* 189).

In fact, the work of Morrison's literary archaeologist doesn't seem to stop here. Patricia unearths another omitted fact from Ruby older women's gossip, which will show readers the incongruity of the community's master narrative. The authorised version of the Disallowing presents the people of Fairly, those who "were unmoving in their refusal to let the 8-rocks stay longer than a night's rest" (*Paradise* 195), as cruel. However, what this version chooses to leave behind is the fact that the town of Fairly has provided Zechariah and his fellowmen plentifully with provisions and money to assist them in their journey. Of course, Zechariah, in his pride, has asked his followers not to take anything that has been offered to them and to continue the trip, otherwise they would forever suffer shame and disgrace.

But Deacon's wife, Soane, while engaging in a gossip-talk, states that her grandmother, Celeste Blackhorse, "sneaked back and got the food . . . secretly passing it to her sister Sally Blackhorse, to Bitty Cato and Praise Compton, to distribute to the children" (*Paradise* 195). In these women's version, the survival of their children is above feelings of pride and shame, and once readers get this information, it becomes intelligible that this is a rupture of the dominant

narrative, caused by a story that has remained silenced. According to Morrison, this silence[32], however, still has the potential to disrupt Ruby's controlling narrative.

III.4. Ruby's Structure Reversed: The Hybrid Convent Quilting an Anti-Structure *Communitas*:

In writing *Paradise*, Morrison claims that she, "was interested in the kind of violent conflict that could happen as a result of efforts to establish a Paradise". "Our view of Paradise", she explains, "is so limited: it requires you to think of yourself as the chosen people-chosen by God, that is. Which means your job is to isolate yourself from other people. That's the nature of Paradise: it's really defined by who is not there as well as who is" (qtd. in Marcus). Morrison's closing words reflect her intention to fictionalise two different senses of paradise, in which she gives a greater priority to that meaning which seems to be constructed by the marginalised outsiders.

In the novel, the violent conflict, Morrison speaks about here, emerges as Ruby begins to lose its grip on its dominant patriarchal structure, and the "[o]utrages that had been accumulating all along" (*Paradise* 11) have taken shape as evidence. In this sense, Ruby turns into an uninhabitable abode, in which:

A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common. And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed . . . the

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[32] In the *New Yorker*, Hilton Als talks about Morrison's deep engagement with the trope of silence, saying that Morrison demonstrates the fact that what has been driving her to write "was the silence — so many stories untold and unexamined".

one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women. (11)

Therefore, as they become increasingly aware of the discrepancies and problems which have begun afflicting their town, the vacuous Ruby patriarchs do not want to assume responsibility for this deteriorating situation, and need a scapegoat. So, instead of taking the blame for these troubles, Ruby elders have decided to redirect it to whatever lies beyond its limits, and the Convent just happens to be there, epitomising every single problem that allegedly violates or poses a threat to Ruby's invisible, but ubiquitous boundaries.

In regard to this latter point, Morrison writes: "[W]hen the men spoke of the ruination that was upon them—how Ruby was changing in intolerable ways—they did not think to fix it by extending a hand in fellowship or love. They mapped defense instead and honed evidence for its need, till each piece fit an already polished groove" (*Paradise* 275). Indeed, what becomes even clearer next is that for these patriarchs, defence turns out to be equivalent to aggression. And so, the opening statement of Morrison's *Paradise*, "They shoot the white girl first" (3), is the result of defending an idiosyncratic construction of a utopian place, that is deeply inculcated in Ruby's patriarchal and racially-pure structure, against the Convent, the place Ruby townsfolk consider as the dizzying amalgam of whatever is going wrong within Ruby.

A possible interpretation to be drawn at this point is that the novel's opening line would also make us fathom yet another reason behind Ruby's precarious liminality. As mentioned previously in the first section of this chapter, the Ruby men put all of their concerns in the terms of racial purity and protection. They are protected as long as Ruby remains an all-black town. However, by juxtaposing Ruby with a place that houses a white woman, Morrison wants to demonstrate that the tenuousness of Ruby's liminal state of existing on the borders of black/white

colour line is particularly evocative in the way how the community dangerously balances itself between outside and inside. It is a balance that patriarchs of Ruby are ultimately unable to manage and they eventually plunge into an act of violence. In this sense, killing the white girl first is but another means for Ruby to retain its stability. And, the Convent becomes an epitome as well as a site of Ruby's impure remainders: "But the target, after all, is detritus: throwaway people that sometimes blow back into the room after being swept out the door. So the venom is manageable now. Shooting the first woman (the white one) has clarified it like butter: the pure oil of hatred on top, its hardness stabilized below" (4).

Yet, it is important to note that although some interpretations tend to associate the beginning of the novel with a racialized discourse, what is worth contemplating, however, is that Morrison's intention is far beyond raising questions about race. On the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, she states that she wants to "signal race instantly" with the precursory sentence of her text and then "to reduce it to nothing" (qtd. in Aubry 357). Since the novel is not meant to deal with racial issues, one might wonder, then, why would Toni Morrison open her book with such violent scene that harrows most readers? As a matter of fact, Morrison has once proclaimed that she considered *War* as the most evocative title to reflect the story, but her publishers would not agree. She has also mentioned that she "wanted to open with somebody's finger on the trigger, to close when it was pulled, and to have the whole exist in that moment to kill or not" (Mulrine).

Hence, by saying that she seeks to write a story where she can "have the whole exist in that moment to kill or not", Morrison makes lucid her intention to problematise the very beginning of her book and place both characters and readers within a discomfort liminal zone. But it is readers' discomfort that intensifies the moment they read the opening line of *Paradise*. They even become haunted by a feeling of an overwhelming unknowability which seems to perpetuate throughout the

narrative for Morrison has deliberately left the question of who the white girl was unresolved. I may postulate, then, that with framing this moment of violence as a complex liminal space, Morrison compels us to look into the way in which this discomfort zone shapes her fictional work that itself is permeated by hostility and aggression. Reading the book, we find that it is only when Ruby men feel their liminality becoming undeniably precarious that they have thought about and planned a violent attack on the Convent. Accordingly, we are left with these questions: what has been wrong with this place to deserve such hostility from Ruby? Why do the female dwellers of the Convent become Ruby community scapegoats?

To begin with, Ruby, the isolated town, happens to be about seventeen miles from an old and obscure Convent that houses five female characters, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, Pallas, and Consolata. These women are outsiders who come to Ruby from various parts of the country and have sought refuge in the Convent. Before it becomes a Convent, the narrator observes, "this house was an embezzler's folly. A mansion where bisque and rose-tone marble floors segue into teak ones" (*Paradise* 3). This description strongly suggests that this place has been pervaded by a distinctly masculine aura that is about to vanish as soon as the Convent turns into a space of female resistance and liberation.

Certainly, for an exceedingly patriarchal community like Ruby, a place that is permeated with what Pallas, one of the five women dwelling the Convent, astoundingly distinguishes as a "blessed malelessness" (*Paradise* 177), constitutes an essential version of a structure that opposes and challenges Ruby's. On a similar account, Belinda M. Waller-Peterson (2016) argues that Morrison's *Paradise* explores the ways in which "self- directed, woman-centered" spaces, which can be created "without the authorization or validation of men", might ultimately harbour "subversive activity that must be contained and terminated to re-establish patriarchal rule"

(Waller-Peterson 148). The Convent, nonetheless, is subversive not simply because of its blessingly dominating femaleness or woman-centredness, but, more importantly, it is the resistant anti-structure this place represents and nestles which appears to accentuate a subversiveness that Ruby would eventually deem as necessitating containment and termination.

What is really worth noting here is the intriguing, stark similarities between the Convent and Victor Turner's very concept of anti-structure *communitas*. While relating *communitas* with resistance and agency, and structure with obligation and constraint, Turner asservates that, "*communitas* must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions". By the same token, Mary Douglas (1966) has recently contended that "which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous"" (*The Ritual Process* 109). For Ruby men, the "polluting" and "dangerous" character of the Convent, where women are "[n]ot locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a convent but a *coven*" (*Paradise* 276; emphasis added), is what renders it an anarchical place that has to be hedged around.

Cast as a site of danger and defilement by the master discourse of Ruby's patriarchy, the Convent rather represents a space that constitutes the "sacred ideal of human community" (*The Ritual Process* 177), precisely because it is comprised of 'edgewomen'[33], whose liminality is not only defined by their being outside or on the periphery of Ruby's structure, but, who are nevertheless regarded as liminal subjects in terms of their shared experience of existing in a liminal

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[33] It is Victor Turner's idea of 'edgemen' which inspires me to use this term. In his seminal work, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* Turner indicates that: "Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen," who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the cliches associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure" (128).

space that is, unlike Ruby's, bonding and liberating. As a liminal space, the Convent undermines Ruby's structure in many ways. One of these ways can be explored through Morrison's treatment of the interplay of music and healing in *Paradise*.

In the novel, Morrison's edgewomen are haunted by traumatic memories, which have eventually led them to the Convent where they have formed a healing community together. To assuage the sorrows of the past, the women of the Convent usually resort to the power of music. For instance, Mavis, the first Convent woman introduced to the reader, recalls a scene with Bennie, a woman she picked up when she was escaping from the torment of her abusive husband and the agony of her children's death, who kept singing all the way:

> Not a talker, small or big, Bennie sang. Songs of true love, false love, *redemption*; songs of unreasonable joy . . . Mavis sang along once in a while, but mostly she listened and in one hundred and seventy-two miles never got tired of hearing her . . . The quiet Bennie left in the Cadillac was unbearable. Mavis kept the radio on, and if one of Bennie's songs came on, she sang too, mourning the inferior rendition. (*Paradise* 34-35; emphasis added)

Even though ephemeral, Bennie's songs can mitigate and redeem the pain inside Mavis, for whom, drawing tears is but a "deliberately silly" (*Paradise* 34) rendition.

Another Convent woman who experiences the healing and rejuvenating power of music is Gigi. This woman carries inside her the memory of "the boy spitting blood into his hands" after he has been shot during a Black Panther demonstration in Oklahoma (*Paradise* 64). Like Mavis, Gigi tastes the transient, deadening relief brought through music:

> Gigi had found her station and was dancing the radio over to the open back door for better reception. She danced back to the table then and poured herself more wine. Eyes closed,

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hips grinding, she circled her arms to enclose the neck of a magic dancer. The other women watched her as they finished the meal. When last year's top tune, "Killing Me Softly," came on, it was not long before they all followed suit. Even Mavis. First apart, imagining partners. Then partnered, imagining each other.

Wine-soothed, *they slept deep as death* that night. (*Paradise* 179; emphasis added)

Here, Gigi is transmitting this transient sensation of relief onto the other women of the Convent, who are so pleased to join her in what appears as a gratifying collective dance. Also, Morrison's choice of the song's title, "Killing Me Softly", to which the women dance, is worthy of attention here. It serves as an allegory of how the damages caused by their harrowing past experiences are being lessened by the effect of music. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, the oxymoronic implication embedded in the title of the song, as killing can never be soft, emblems the women's entanglement between the aching memories that never cease to haunt them, and a joyfully melodic, present moment. What Morrison wants us to fathom here, is that these female characters are still unable to comprehend the emancipatory potential of their liminalities, for those memories make them captives of a meaningless ambivalent state of liminality. Another important remark in this scene is Gigi's creation of an imaginative partner where, "she circled her arms to enclose the neck of a magic dancer" (*Paradise* 179). Here, the Convent can be said to represent a catalytic realm for Gigi, and the other women who later joined her, allowing her to enter into the world of *communitas* where she is brought into closer, "vital relations with other men in fact or imagination" (*The Ritual Process* 128).

According to Ruby community, music, among other things, is regarded as filthy, sinister, and repulsive. Reverend Cary contemptuously describes things like, "[t]elevision . . . Disco . . . filthy music" as "ungodly . . . evils disguised as pleasure" (*Paradise* 274-275). With the word

'filthy', Morrison makes clear to us that the relationship between the town of Ruby and music is not as harmonious as it is midst the women of the Convent. Moreover, from Ruby's vantage point, music is an "ungodly evil" because it is sacrilegious, defiling the sanctity of the community's most righteous place, the Oven, where the townspeople congregate "to report on what done or what needed; on illness, births, deaths, comings and goings". Morrison explains this perspective through the "cold, rheumy eyes" of Deek Morgan who observes: "The Oven whose every brick had heard live chords praising His name was now subject to radio music, record music—music already dead when it filtered through a black wire trailing from Anna's store to the Oven like a snake" (*Paradsie* 111). Unlike the Convent women who seem to embrace the deadening effect of music so as to heal their agonies, for Ruby men, music is "already dead", implying its absolute futility and absence. Besides, by comparing it to a snake, Deacon is alluding to the venomous effect brought by music into their virtuous community.

In *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists* (2001), Richard J. Douglass-Chin points out that, "[t]he women . . . embark upon a number of healing rituals that culminate in a spontaneous, sacred, and sensual dance of self (re)membering" (194). Indeed, the Convent, with its music, is a healing catalyst for its dwellers. It also provides the women with what Turner puts as, "a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action" that take place in Ruby, as well as, "a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (*The Ritual Process* 167). This has definitely rendered the Convent women latent yet potential liminal subjects.

However, another ritual process seems to occur within the Convent and among its women. Turner argues that the ritual process functions to mitigate the "differentiated, segmented, often hierarchical system of institutionalized positions," which he refers to as "structure" (*The Ritual*

Process 96). Likewise, Morrison's novel invokes the ritual process as essential for the women to resist their appointed positions at the margins of Ruby's structure, and to help alleviate the rigidity of the town's cherished hierarchy. Moreover, in order for these women to mitigate the impact of Ruby's tight restriction, a strong sense of *communitas* must be forged. According to Turner, *communitas* is typically symbolised "by matrilateral ancestors, especially by mother images" (Turner 116). Indeed, Morrison's *Paradise* features a leading female character, Consolata, who serves to bring about the Convent women conversion to *communitas*.

Consolata, the green-eyed woman with "tea-colored hair" and "smoky, sundown skin", has been brought to the Convent by Mary Magna, who has saved her from the "shit-strewn" Brazilian city, when she was nine years old (223). After her arrival, Consolata spends many years as the devoted servant of the Convent and Mary Magna. Emerging from such immense spiritual background, Consolata, after the death of her mentor, will make of the Convent an 'antistructure' locus where a sense of *communitas* is to be established in order to suspend the confining structure of Ruby. By allowing four strange women to stay in her place, Consolata is deliberately inverting the rigid exclusionary discourse and practice of Ruby. Indeed, unlike Ruby, the Convent "took people in—lost folk or folks who needed a rest" (*Paradise* 11). For Katrine Dalsgård (2001), "the endless comings and goings" of the Convent inhabitants suggest the place's almost complete "lack of structure" (243). This lack of structure, I argue, is what essentially distinguishes *communitas* from structure, as the former is more prone to have, "spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature" (*The Ritual Process* 127).

Of course, Ruby men won't let the image of the 'loosely-spontaneous-open place-lacking-structure', "which is to say not a convent but a coven" (*Paradise* 276), to affect their people in any way, claiming that this image "was all a lie, a front, a carefully planned disguise for what was

really going on" (11). It is, therefore, important to highlight, again, that Ruby's exclusionary practice is but a duplication of the master discourse that has once excluded and marked them as outsiders: the double exclusion their Old Fathers have initially experienced from the whites, then when they have sought to join other black communities. Now, Ruby patriarchs are disallowing all those who are, "the needy, the defenseless, the different" (12), as they happen to have nothing to serve "a traveler: no diner, no police, no gas station, no public phone, no movie house, no hospital" (*Paradise* 12).

Though, at most times, the Convent is thoroughly assumed to mirror a chaotic, unruly place totally lacking any sense of order or regulation, it, oddly, provides shelter for Ruby people. The Convent's unruly quality is projected onto its very female dwellers who dance wildly at parties, swirling and joggling. They also get into fights on the side of the road, intertwining with and marring each other's bodies; some of them even try to tempt Ruby men into prohibited sexual interludes in the depths of the Convent. It perhaps makes sense, then, that these women are described by Deacon Morgan as "bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (18). Unlike Ruby women who have been denied access to as well as the articulation of any form of bodily agency, the Convent girls, affirms the narrator, are publicly "dancing; throwing their arms over their heads, they do this and that and then the other. They grin and yip but look at no one. Just their own rocking bodies. The local girls look over their shoulders and snort" (*Paradise* 157). In the last sentence, the narrator hedges about precisely how Ruby women's bodacious agency is submerged beneath a false pride that is about to vanish soon.

Indeed, that false pride vanishes as the Convent offers the women of Ruby a space of agency where they can assume some sort of control over their own bodies. So, they start going to the Convent when they seek a place to have an illegitimate child, an abortion, or a momentary

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sanctuary from their abusive families (*Paradise* 101). Ironically, even the men of Ruby find themselves unable to withstand the arcane lure of the Convent, as they go there, albeit frequently, to have adulterous affairs with the women residing there. But, as the narrator recounts from the subject position of Lone DuPres, the Convent has been always the destination of wayward and damaged women instead:

> [I]t was women who walked this road. Only women. Never men . . . Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost . . . dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. Sweetie Fleetwood had walked it, Billie Delia too . . . They had walked this road from the very first. Soane Morgan, for instance, and once, when she was young . . . Many of the walkers Lone had seen; others she learned about. But the men never walked the road; they drove it, although sometimes their destination was the same as the women's. (*Paradise* 270)

Lone DuPres is the only Ruby woman who can see clearly how the Convent is becoming more of a free cathartic space where her community women are able to give vent to their sorrows and heal their souls' scars. It is this accurate understanding that impels her to, howbeit unsuccessfully, dissuade Ruby men from attacking the Convent and killing the women there. Moreover, Lone's understanding leads us to envision the Convent as the archetypal embodiment of *communitas* that, as Turner explains, brings a crucial sense of agency into even the most constrained circumstances (*The Ritual Process* 126).

Another feature underscoring the anti-structure character of the Convent is its distinctive hybridity. For Ruby, Consolata's Convent not only represents a locus of obscenity, but, also, a site of wickedness, "letting evil have its way" (*Paradise* 273) into Ruby's pure community. Such

evilness is manifested in the hybridity of the Convent after Consolata shelters a white woman into her all-black place. Since it tolerates and authorises the perpetuation of only one shade, that of the "8-R", the structure of Ruby doesn't adhere to, "racial tampering" (197) which will definitely cause a "visible glitch" in its pure bloodline (*Paradise* 196). For this reason, with housing a white individual, the Convent and its residents are deliberately transgressing one of Ruby's most dignified, symbolic boundaries: the racial purity implied in their dogma of 'the blood rule'.

In the novel, though Morrison introduces her readers to the names and even stories of the Convent women, she, however, never reveals the identity of the white girl mentioned at the beginning of her text. Commenting on this authorial strategy, Morrison explains that she adamantly blocks racial markings in portraying her characters so that readers will know, "everything, or almost everything, about the characters, their interior lives, their past, their faults, their strengths, except that one small piece of information which was their race" (qtd. in *Signifying without Specifying* 45). She further states that she wants, "the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way . . . race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It's real information, but it tells you next to nothing" (qtd. in Sanna 34). In so doing, Morrison wants to underscore the irrelevancy of race, with the implicated notion of purity, in the Convent, and more importantly, authenticate the ideal hybridity of this place. Here, as readers are not given hints about the race of the female characters, except for Consolata, Morrison wants to place the women of the Convent within an interstitial cultural space, which of itself is ambiguously elusive and, "unrepresentable" (*The Location of Culture* 37). In this sense, we may be able to suggest that the Convent emerges as Homi Bhabha's liminal space that features a resistant cultural hybridity.

In the context of Bhabha's theory of liminality, the exclusionary structure of Ruby can be validly interpreted as representing a colonial hegemonic discourse that seeks to perpetuate a politics of difference through crafting exclusionary interpretations of the 'Other'. In other words, for Ruby to identify its cherished structure, and even more importantly, exert its authority within the limits of this structure, a metaphor of otherness must be created "to contain the effects of difference" (*The Location of Culture* 31). Ruby refuses to recognise difference within its own community because it purportedly poses the utmost danger to its very idea of paradise. Peter Widdowson (2001), in this regard, writes that "separatism is not a solution—for blacks and whites . . . But Ruby . . . immorally frozen in its own stasis . . .the town is ideal because it cannot change, and it cannot change because it is ideal" (329). Thus, Ruby needs to create images of 'otherness' so that it can handle troubles emerging against its ideology of separatism, and address difference beyond its boundaries. Accordingly, the Convent aptly conveys this metaphor of otherness. Yet, becoming regarded as affording sanctuary to some of Ruby's townsfolk, the Convent signifies Bhabha's liminal space in that it challenges and surpasses one of the most long-standing oppositions inherent in Ruby's master discourse: Inside safe/Outside dangerous.

In addition, the endless comings and goings of the Convent people make of this place a "Third Space of enunciation", for it enacts resistance against Ruby's hierarchical system that legitimises cultural statements of unity, purity, and fixity dictated by the isolationist and exclusionist admonitions of the Old Fathers. With all that being said, the subversive cultural identity of the Convent, where difference is enunciated "without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (*The Location of Culture* 5), enables its dwellers to forge new ways of existence, in which hybridity offers them a disruptive liminal site that makes "the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of culture untenable" (Ashcroft et al. 108). In "Hybridizing the "City upon a Hill" in Toni

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Morrison's *Paradise*", Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos (2003) draws our attention to the fact that Ruby's endeavours and final resolution to kill the women in the Convent are precipitated by the purpose to rid the community of the evils of hybridity that have started to find their way into the core of their paradisical structure. She argues: "Resolved to defend their view of a homogeneous and hierarchical nation, they decide to destroy difference by attacking the women in the Convent. Their move, however, only precipitates havoc and accentuates the split within their own community, exposing even more clearly the hybridity at its core" (5).

This way, we may even say that the real threat posed by the Convent women is manifested in their quilting of a different kind of paradise, a paradise that defies Ruby at the very core of its idyllic structure. The hybrid Convent, in this sense, materialises Morrison's vision of an earthly paradise that moves the very conception of paradise, "from its pedestal of exclusion and to make it more accessible to everybody" (qtd. in Reames 61).

Impressively, the atrocious massacre of the women in the Convent doesn't take place until the women come to realise the empowering essence of liminality. It is Consolata, whom Morrison describes as the one woman who can see, "best in the dark" (241), who uses her spiritual ability of "stepping in" other people's souls, "to find the pinpoint of light. Manipulating it, widening it, strengthening it", in order to heal them. Consolata asserts her spiritual agency when she appoints herself as the healer of the Convent community, and demands absolute obedience from the women: "do what I say . . . And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (262). Cast as a "new and revised Reverend Mother" (265), she teaches the women that, "scary things not always outside. Most scary things is [sic] inside" (*Paradise* 39). With such statement, Consolata deliberately subverts Ruby's vision of a perilous outside world.

Consolata teaches the women, who have been leading a life devoid of any sense of spirituality, to voice their painful memories and rise above them, through what Morrison chooses to call 'loud dreaming'. Morrison describes the women's loud dreaming as a space of a collective sharing of pain, where:

> monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again . . . With Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother, feeding them bloodless food and water alone to quench their thirst, they altered. They had to be reminded of the moving bodies they wore, so seductive were the alive ones below. (*Paradise* 264-265)

In this moment, the Convent emerges as a ritualistic female space *par excellence*, in which every woman undergoes a rite of passage, marking her transition, or, rather, redemption, from an agonising, crippling past to a liberated present. Each woman is no longer afraid to share her own story as she is seemingly able to, "step easily into the dreamer's tale" (*Paradise* 246) and listen carefully to the confessions of the other women.

Thus, through the ritual process of the 'loud dreaming', the women of the Convent succeed in what Ruby fails. Instead of suppressing the diversity of discourses, the women merge their different stories to quilt one meaningful shared history: "That is how the loud dreaming began. How the stories rose in that place. Half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles. And it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning" (246). Therefore, it is no coincidence, then, that, it is only after completing the rite of passage, after liberating themselves from the spectres of the past, or as Morrison puts it "they were no longer haunted" (*Paradise* 266), only after they

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transform their liminality into an empowering ritualistic female space, that they are conceived of as a real threat to warrant destruction.

II.5. Conclusion:

In contemporary black women's fiction, one of the novels that displays poignantly and blatantly the interplay between the black female subject, the margin, and resistance is Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Though some critics like Rob Davidson (2001), for instance, have read the work as a historical novel, noting that Morrison has been very much interested in excavating repressed histories that were blotted out by dominant historiography, my reading of this text through the lens of Victor Turner's, Homi Bhabha's, and Shmuel Eisenstadt's notions of liminality, has shown that Morrison's interest in rethinking the black female experience in relation with marginality and resistance has been as deeply evocative as the theme of history.

One of the striking things about this novel, is that it manages, while explicitly and emphatically addressing black women's experience of resistance, to offer a critique of the oppressive structure of patriarchy and racism that have worked to marginalise black women using discrepant liminal geographies which are aptly represented by two opposing places: the all-black town of Ruby and the all-female place, the Convent. The discrepancy between these two places has drawn our attention to Morrison's particularly dazzling skill in demarcating the opposite possibilities of the liminal space, as it can be both restrictive and liberating.

Depending on Eisenstadt perspective on the liminal, I wanted to show that Morrison constructs the liminal geography of Ruby as an oppressively rigid structure barely straddling its existence between a dangerously idealised past and a palpably tenuous present. The idea of making a town; or, a second haven similar to that of their Old Fathers and retaining their legacy of pride and retreat from the outer world, transforms Ruby from a 'dreamtown' into an uninhabitable

abode. The main reason of their failure is that Ruby men have been unable to make sense of their liminality. So, instead of undergoing a healthy transition from an enlightening past into a comprehensible present, Ruby becomes just trapped within an ambiguous state of liminality that requires them to impose a certain form of structure in order to conceal its tenuousness. For the imposition and maintenance of such structure, Ruby elders have resorted to make their town subject to certain patriarchal and racial limits that presumably function to fasten its long-cherished isolationist structure and solidify its power.

However, explaining Ruby's structure according to Eisenstadt's thought on the liminal has demonstrated that this restrictive structure carries the seeds of its own destruction. For instance, Morrison uses the Oven to succinctly emblematise how the town's symbolic boundaries are turning against their creators, in the sense that, the increasing tension between Ruby elders and its youth because of the oven's inscription is meant to reveal the cracks in ruby's structure and the ruptures in their dominant discourse. As for the latter, I found that it is actually Morrison's black female liminar, Patricia Best Cato, whose historical project, undertaken on the very margins of Ruby, which destabilises the master discourse of the Morgan twins as Patricia unearths repressed narratives, by black women mainly, about the Disallowing.

Resisting Ruby's structure is the Convent which Morrison has devised to criticise the racial and patriarchal limits that turns Ruby into a restrictive space. Using Turner's and Bhabha's notions of the liminal to explain Morrison's geography of black women's resistance and liminality has led me to discover that, unlike Ruby's liminality which becomes an overly restrictive experience for its townsfolk, the experiences of women dwelling in the Convent make the place a potent site of resistance and liberation. We have understood their resistance in the way Morrison envisions the female community of the Convent as quilting anti-structure *communitas* that undermines Ruby's

structure in many ways. While the men of Ruby consider music as something profane, it, however, enables the Convent women, who were all haunted by traumatic memories, to begin a healing process and exhibit a strong affinity and bonding towards each other. The bodacious agency articulated by these women, which Morrison depicts in the way they dance wildly in public, also challenges the black feminine ideal dictated by the patriarchicality of Ruby. Besides, the apparent hybridity of the Convent seems to transgress yet another boundary that Ruby views as sacred, which is racial purity. In addition, Morrison subverts Ruby's master discourse, "that one rebuff" (*Paradise* 189), by highlighting the multiplicity of her female characters' stories. With the help and guidance of the beautifully-powerful black woman named Consolota, the women of the Convent have eventually been able to share in what Morrison calls 'loud dreaming': a space of a collective sharing of pain. Perhaps, only after they transform their liminality into an empowering ritualistic female space, as they no longer are haunted by the spectres of the past, that they are conceived of as a real threat to warrant destruction.

Chapter Four

Gloria Naylor's Mama Day (1988) and the Making of a Black Female Heterotopia

IV. 1. Introduction

IV. 2. The Middle Passage, the Sea Islands, and Mama Day's Heterotopic Setting

IV. 3. Naylor's Heterotopia: An Unlocalizable Place Speaking for itself

IV. 4. Resistant Black Matriarchs Conjuring an "actually realised utopia"

VI. 5. Willow Springs and Heterochrony

VI. 6. Conclusion

> [Miranda] finds herself in a vast space of glowing light.
>
> Daughter. The word comes to cradle what has gone past weariness. She can't really hear it because she's got no ears, or call out because she's got no mouth. There's only the sense of being. Daughter.
>
> —Gloria Naylor.

IV. Introduction:

In this chapter, I'll be using the concept of heterotopia to explain Gloria Naylor's complex spatial representation of black women's resistance in her novel, *Mama Day* (1988). The chapter attempts to read Willow Springs, a fictitious island lying outside the U.S borders, as a black female heterotopia that displays, in an intriguing way, a subversive spatio-temporal paradigm. This paradigm allows Naylor's black matriarchs exercise agency through creating and retaining an all-black matriarchal community that resists, from the margin, a dominating white culture. I will draw on a diversity of perspectives that emphasise the critical possibility of heterotopia as a space in which oppressed peripheral subjects can be given voice to challenge dominant discourses. Therefore, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that Naylor, in her portrayal of a black-female heterotopic place with a resistant character, transforms a marginal place into a black female site of agency and resistance, where the subversive yet productive dynamics of heterotopia interrupt and deconstruct mainstream American constructions of black women and black culture.

IV. 2. The Middle Passage, the Sea Islands, and *Mama Day*'s Heterotopic Setting:

Rhapsodic, seductive, and justly celebrated, the prologue of Gloria Naylor's novel, *Mama Day* (1988), invites readers into a fictive cosmos that in its history, locality, culture, and beliefs is

a cosmos elsewhere. However, the 'elsewhereness' of this fictional world is not a pure product of the female author's imagination. This world is nonetheless based on a factual historical information, which Naylor infuses it with dazzling imaginative stretch. Bell hooks explains such strikingly literary endeavour, which Naylor herself would call, "psychic revelations" (qtd. in Whitt 8), as evoking a kind of, "emotionality, that emotional psychic universe, and not necessarily the historical universe" (Dash 34). It is right that, in writing *Mama Day*, Naylor has been as concerned with giving a microcosm of the black female experience in the United States, as she has been with celebrating the profound emotionality of this experience. She, therefore, uses a marginal location, the imaginary island of Willow Springs, that seems to be situated at the intersection of the real Sea Islands/the novel's fictive cosmos to mirror and represent this profound experience.

In *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (2008) have explained that heterotopias' location at the intersection of the axe of 'real/imaginary', makes these emplacements "into mirroring spaces" (Dehaene and De Cauter 6). Burdening the setting of her novel with such elusive power, as it manages to balance itself between the real and the imaginary, Naylor, I suppose, seeks to make reference to those historical spaces of 'Otherness', which, according to Vernon Reid (1999), are elusive themselves, because they lie somewhere between, "reality and myth . . . dream and nightmare . . . image and memory" (177). With this description, Reid has been referring to the experience of the transatlantic passage that has been 'othered' by the official map of mainstream American culture.

The 'historylessness' of the Middle Passage, argues Laura G. Yow (1992), has been infamously propagated by V. S. Naipaul who, after a voyage he has made through the Middle Passage to the Caribbean, sarcastically remarked that, "the history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told . . . History". Naipaul went on with his cynical remark to conclude that the

Middle Passage and the small islands of the Caribbean exhibited, "no historical part of the world"; they just happen to be another part of the world, "with no movement or development to demonstrate" (339). Naipaul's recorded and written-about vision has been since held to fuel a hegemonic myth whose construction of the Middle Passage's 'historylessness', renders the place 'othered' by and displaced from historical records.

In *Black imagination and the Middle Passage* (1999), however, editors and contributors demonstrate that the space of the Middle Passage has been reclaimed by black imagination, particularly that of women writers, heralding "a spatial and temporal continuum of a Middle Passage sensibility . . . that extends from the interior of Africa across the Atlantic and into the interior of the Americas" (8). This powerful black female imagination have sought to fashion a counter-discourse that intrinsically works to subvert the hegemonic myth, previously mentioned, and its othering mechanism that has ostracised the space and experience of the Middle Passage, "outside of history". Nonetheless, though Maria Diedrich et al. come to associate this Middle Passage sensibility to Homi Bhabha's idea of a space in-between by looking at the Middle Passage as a, "phenomenon of constricted space and limited time" (Diedrich et al. 9), we argue that this space may also be looked at as a heterotopia.

I find it worth mentioning that Andrea Strolz (2010) is among the scholars who posit the space of the Middle Passage in another dimension of 'thirdspace', a dimension that is different from that of Bhabha's. She claims that the Middle Passage should be interpreted as a heterotopic space because it not only represents, "a real place on the historical timeline", but, also, reflects that "unreal (eternal or atemporal) place in the imagination, in cultural memory" of black communities (263). That being said, Strolz's keen observation seems to adhere with Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopia as a space of ambivalence and contradiction, as she underscores heterotopia's ability

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to underline the significance of merging the real with the imaginative in defining the space of the Middle Passage.

Despite the fact that this transatlantic experience is not forthrightly accented or addressed in Naylor's novel, this event can be assumed to serve as a historical reference upon which the female writer structures the heterotopic setting of *Mama Day*. In her recent work, *The Fiction of Gloria Naylor: Houses and Spaces of Resistance* (2010), Maxine Lavone Montgomery borrows the feminist critic Bracha Ettinger's term 'matrixial border space' to describe Naylor's appropriation of the space of the Middle Passage and representing it as a, "richly evocative maternal site of becoming and possibility" that marks the entire of her fictional geography. Montgomery also alludes to the overarching presence of the South in Naylor's novels, claiming that, "Because of the forced and voluntary travels defining the black experience, an ancestral home exists only in cultural memory and is inextricably linked with . . . the South" (xv).

Although Naylor was born in New York City, the lure of urban life does not actually affect her oeuvre. She rather focuses many of her novels around the image and life of the South. Margaret Earley Whitt (1999) affirms this point, stating: "Down deep there is something inherently southern in Gloria Naylor", which can be noticed in the way the novelist, "tells a story, paying careful attention to the details of her characters' lives, and in the painstaking meticulousness with which she draws the places where those fictional dwell" (4-5). Furthermore, in an interview with Montgomery, Gloria Naylor comments on how the southern landscape shapes her fiction:

> I think it comes from my background. My parents were Mississippi sharecroppers. My mother and my father . . . before they left and moved to New York, were cotton farmers. And I think it is part of my southern heritage that place has such an important part in my novels. Because as an African American with southern roots . . . as a result of my southern

agricultural roots, people told my family to strive for a little bit of something of yourself. We were encouraged to have just a little bit of place, if you could. If you had a house that was yours, no one could throw you out and make you move. And that is the mentality of sharecroppers-people who were not allowed to own the land they worker. (qtd. in Montgomery 91)

Therefore, one might say that Naylor's evocative sense of southern places definitely comes from such rich, southern background. It also comes from the fact that she invents, "these locales". She explains: "I rarely write about a specific geographical location. The settings that I fashion, such as Brewster Place, Linden Hills, Willow Springs, and Bailey's Café, are all metaphysical situations that I write about. And so, because they are the character-the place is the character-I think I spend a lot of time trying to create it" (Montgomery 91). Accordingly, Naylor invites her audience to consider that her fiction is highly invested in fashioning southern locales, locations, and settings, where place is the character[34].

Other Naylor scholars, however, proclaim that the novelist constructs *Mama Day*'s distinctively fictive spatiality against the backdrop of the Sea Islands, a place that is located off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Historically speaking, the geographical landscape of these islands shares common characteristics with Foucault's heterotopia, in that both feature

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[34] Margaret Earley Whitt highlights the extreme, often meticulous, attention Naylor pays to her fictional places as she asserts that place in Naylor's fiction, "speaks for itself" and all what readers are anticipated to do is to listen. Whitt uses *Mama Day* to elaborate on this idea. She explicates that listening is of paramount importance in the process of reading this novel. (3) Readers have to listen carefully to Willow Springs so that they can fathom the otherworldly quality of this island. Naylor also emphasises the importance of listening when she writes, "Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where. It's August 1999—ain't but a slim chance it's the same season where you are. Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name. You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car—you done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word (10).

dimensions of isolation and resistance. While commenting on the peculiar history of the Sea Islands, Lene Brondum observes that: "Before the Civil War, the Sea Islands off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina were one of the last areas in the United States to see a continued arrival of Africans who had illegally been transported to the United States to be sold as slaves". She further points to how isolation has helped the Gullahs, the aboriginal community of this place, succeed in forming distinct African cultural traditions and retaining their unique culture against external influences. She, in this context, postulates, "Isolated from the mainland, the Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African captives, here created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African American Culture" (153).

It is in her provocative essay, "The Persistence of Tradition": The Retelling of Sea Islands Culture in Works by Julie Dash, Gloria Naylor, and Paule Marshall" (1999), that Brondum addresses the way in which the filmmaker Julie Dash and the two outstanding black women authors Naylor and Paule Marshal employ the setting of the Sea Islands to liberate this location from the morass of history's oblivion. She discovers that the primary concern binding these women together, is to consciously disrupt and revise mainstream history, in order to reclaim and give voice to the rich cultural heritage of these islands and present them as a, "new and unfamiliar trope for the syncretic nature of African American cultures and for the existence of mythic ties to Africa" (102). A bridge between two different worlds, African and American, the Sea Islands is geographically American, yet it vehemently retains a, "genuine cultural syncretism" (Brondum 153) that merges both African and American cultures, creating a distinct set of beliefs, values, and customs which cannot be found anywhere else in the United States.

Speaking about the magical island setting of *Mama Day*, Naylor's larger concerns about the distinct culture of the Sea Islands are made manifest in the history, geography, and, most

importantly, the mythical and magical structure of Willow Springs. In fact, Virginia C. Fowler (1996) argues that the mythical cosmos of *Mama Day*'s setting allows the black female novelist to celebrate the Sea Islands cultural heritage and to, "contrast the values of that heritage with those of the white world" (93). Fowler also compels us to consider the evident parallels between the inhabitants of Naylor's fictional island, and the Gullahs, the people of the Sea Islands in terms of tropes like retreat and resistance. She, thereby, cites Lindsey Tucker who is among the first scholars who have speculated about the origins of the Gullahs. Tucker indicates that the ancestors of the Gullahs, the Sea Islands' dominant ethnic community that has been formed by the descendants of freed slaves, have been presumably brought to the Sea Islands "from the Kongo-Angolan area", and among all other blacks transported across the Atlantic, the Gullahs "were considered the most rebellious" (qtd. in Fowler 93). In addition, the Sea Islands with their peculiar Gullah heritage, makes of this place, "an actual and symbolic African presence", a distinct world, "rich with magico-religious beliefs that ultimately serve as signifying systems" that cast the island into a resistant, isolated "place of myth, as well as a new land" (Tucker 180).

Therefore, apart from their historical peculiarity, the geographical, social, and cultural aspects of the Sea Islands make this place akin to Foucault's heterotopia in the sense that, besides its resistant Gullah heritage, and its location somewhere between Africa and America, their roots are steeped in both worlds yet belonging to neither place. Since Foucault describes heterotopias as "places …outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" ("Of Other Spaces" 4), the placelessness of these islands, in this regard, renders them heterotopic. Furthermore, and as mentioned before, this place, with its distinctive magico-religious culture, stands strong against mainstream cultural domination as it comes to occupy a different "cultural and psychological space "in the middle" between Africa and America" (Brondum 102).

IV. 3. Naylor's Heterotopia: An Unlocalizable Place Speaking for itself

In light of previous theoretical discussions about heterotopia, and which I have presented in the second chapter of this dissertation, Gloria Naylor's novel appears to have created a space that shares striking resonances with the concept of heterotopia. Drawing on those historical realities related to the rebellious, isolated region of the Sea Islands, Naylor creates an imaginative island that is meant to articulate the author's spatial metaphor of black women's resistance to mainstream American ideology by inscribing a unique vision of a black matriarchal community.

Moreover, I argue that the narrative of *Mama Day* that is set on a small and isolated island represents Naylor's critique of mainstream cultural domination. Naylor fashions her critique by constructing an imaginative heterotopic space where she addresses, with a subversive tone, a place of a different order established by a black female intervention. The narrative unfolds that through tropes of geography, conjuring, mental mapping, and time, Gloria Naylor crafts, as the following lines will attempt to demonstrate, a heterotopic world that stands strong against the marginal places of otherness that had long defined the peripheral status of blacks and black women in the American historical and cultural landscapes.

Similar to Foucault's heterotopia, which he defines as constituting those, "real places, actual places, places . . . in which the real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable" ("Different Spaces" 178), Naylor creates a place outside of all places, an imaginary island off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, yet, a place that is impossible to locate on any map. As one of the novel's main characters, the New Yorker George Andrews, discovered when he was preparing to visit it, Willow Springs does not appear on any map. With a strong sense of bewilderment, he states:

It's hard to know what to expect from a place when you can't find it on the map. Preparing for Willow Springs upset my normal agenda: a few minutes with an atlas always helped me to decide what clothes to pack, whether a raincoat would be in order or not, a light pullover for the evenings. Your insisting that the place was exactly on the border between South Carolina and Georgia wasn't terribly reassuring . . . where was Willow Spring? Nowhere. At least not on any map I had found. I had even gone out and bought road maps just for South Carolina and Georgia and it was missing from among all those islands dotting the coastline. What county claimed it? Where was the nearest interstate highway, the nearest by road? (Naylor 174)

When Ophelia, who was born and brought up in Willow Springs, invites her husband George to meet her family and visit her home on the island for the first time in their four years of marriage in New York City, the now Cocoa reveals, "From the moment we crossed over the bridge, you were entering a part of my existence that you were powerless in. Your maps were no good here" (Naylor 177). Through this insightful monologue, Cocoa wants to remind us that the map, which is a "purposive cultural object" rife with, "reasons behind its construction and values associated with its reading" (Pickles 53), do not avail in Willow Springs.

Cocoa's remark leads us to contemplate different interpretations about the Willow Springs-map nexus. On the one hand, as Willow Springs doesn't appear on any map, this makes us fathom that Naylor is linking her imaginary island with the Middle Passage, whose 'historylessness' renders it invisible and othered by hegemonic historical maps. On the other hand, the fact that Cocoa confirms that, "maps were no good" (Naylor 177) in Willow Springs, this however draws our attention to the manner in which this island reflects heterotopia in terms of Naylor's fusion of the real and the unreal in shaping the world of the novel. In fact, the maps Cocoa addresses are the

kind of maps ordinary people consume and which are, "of more immediate use to those with property and power than to those without" (Helgerson 327).

However, in a heterotopic place like Willow Springs, people are nevertheless guided by the kind of mental maps which are infused and shaped by the mysticity of the island. In this sense, those who dwell in or are willing to enter this space, they rather need to make their "mental maps real" (Betsky 66), so that they might become able to mark and define their places. Indeed, Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter argue that the ambiguous and elusive status of heterotopias enable them defy, "the logic of the map" (Deahene and Cauter 2). Therefore, we may say that the elusiveness and ambiguity of Naylor's heterotopic Willow Springs lie in its ability to shun away the ordering of conventional mapping, by foregrounding a different order that is made by what its inhabitants "had in mind . . . about their own land" (Naylor 6). In the beginning of the novel, Naylor employs the community's voice to caution about any attempts to define or locate the island according to traditional spatial mappings instead of mental ones: "Look at what happened when Reema's boy—the one with the pear-shaped head—came hauling himself back from one of those fancy colleges mainside, dragging his notebooks and tape recorder and a funny way of curling up his lip and clicking his teeth, all excited and determined to put Willow Springs on the map" (7).[35]

Thus, in Naylor's heterotopia, it is the dwellers' mental mappings of Willow Springs which count most, not some paper providing the coordinates of its location within the larger world. Such mental mappings are evident in the way the islanders reflect on their land as, "a home space that exists in memory, in imagination, and in its material reality" (Lamothe 156). In this sense, Naylor's complex portrayal of Willow Springs as representing a heterotopia is suggested by the characters'

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[35] In the section titled "Willow Springs and Heterochrony", I will discuss further how Naylor uses the story of the character, Reema's boy, to emphasise the unique aura of her fictional island whose inhabitants experience an unusual sense of temporality.

mental mappings of the place. These mappings definitely render the place heterotopic in the sense that Willow Springs will forever straddle the imagination of its community and its very real existence, making it difficult, if not quite impossible, for readers to decide which side to trust more. In "Gloria Naylor's "Mama Day": Bridging Roots and Routes", Daphne Lamothe (2005) seems to voice that strand of readers who think that Willow Springs exists only as a set of ideas in the minds and imaginations of its black community. Lamothe, in this regard, concludes that a place like Willow Springs no longer exists, "in a contemporary world except through *memory and imagination*" (157; emphasis added). This turbid and obscure existence, in this vein, adds more to the enigma underlying Willow Springs.

Hence, since it presents itself simultaneously in fact and fiction, echoing a sense of ambivalence, we find that Naylor's challenging setting aligning itself with Kevin Hetherington's perspective on heterotopia as representing, "a major source of ambivalence and uncertainty" (Hetherington 89). However, we can also detect that Naylor somehow intervenes to liberate her imaginary island from the enigmatic shroud of mystery that is evoked by its inherent ambivalence and uncertainty. She resorts to the voice of the island's second powerful matriarch, Miranda Day, also known as Mama Day, to invite characters (by implication readers) to just listen to this place as it happens to just speak for itself:

> Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where. It's August 1999—ain't but a slim chance it's the same season where you are. Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name. You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June

peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car—you done

heard it without a single living soul really saying a word. (Naylor 10)

With such eloquent description, we can infer that this island can be anything but a normal place. As the previous lines from the novel suggest, Mama Day reveals that this unusual place is endowed with its own voice to tell its own story, a story that can be, "heard . . . without a single living soul really saying a word" (Naylor 10).

Indeed, the voices emanating from Willow Springs are informative and often revelatory. The wind blowing across its lands is a voice that, "echoes through the empty woods, bouncing off the naked tree branches", so that it might impart some knowledge and wisdom to those, like Mama Day, sensitive enough to listen. Mama Day always tries, "to listen under the wind" as she always finds herself dragged by the mysterious humming, "of some lost and ancient song" (118). Through its breezes, the island also speaks to Cocoa, revealing to her that her marriage with the urbanite George will eventually come to an end, for it is but another skein of a larger story of broken-hearted men[36]: "you'll break his heart" (Naylor 224). The relationship between George, the urban character, with the island's voice however takes a different shape. Whereas it proves softly informative with Mama Day and Cocoa, the voice of the island is more of an awakening admonition for George. The winds of the hurricane that hits Willow Springs impart the mundane, rational, and scientific George a spiritual hearing:

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[36] For example, in "Black Sisterhood in Gloria Naylor's Novels", Larry R. Andrews says of the men in Naylor's novel, "Naylor does show that the women can transcend men and have power of their own, but often at the price of tragic loss for men" (18). Bascombe Wade, Sapphira Wade's owner and later-husband, frees his slaves to prove his love to Sapphira, yet this feeling remains confining and leads to his death. Similarly, Mama Day's father, John-Paul, cries over his wife's severe mental illness wrought by the loss of Miranda's sister, Peace. Like Bascombe, John-Paul refuses to leave her.

I might make a deep breath and say, God help me, really meaning, Let the best in me help me. There wasn't a moment when I actually believed those appeals were going beyond me to a force that would first hear, secondly care, and thirdly bend down to insert influence on the matter. No, I saw the Bible as a literary masterpiece, but literature all the same; and Christianity owed its rules and regulations to politics more than anything else . . . But the winds coming around the corner of that tiny house on that tiny island was God. (Naylor 252)

While he initially regards the Bible as a, "literary masterpiece" and Christianity as a mere frame defined by, "rules and regulations", George's experience of hearing the power of the wind makes him undergo a deep, spiritual awakening that snuffs out his rationalism. Yet, as he later compares this power with the running of, "a nuclear steam turbine generator" that can light up the whole of his New York City (Naylor 251), Naylor wants to demonstrate that this awakening is rather a momentary phenomenon.

While highlighting the meticulous attention Naylor pays to her fictional worlds, Margaret Earley Whitt (1999) asserts that place in Naylor's fictional worlds, "speaks for itself" and all what readers are expected to do is to listen attentively. Whitt uses *Mama Day* to elaborate on this idea, explaining that listening is of paramount importance in the process of reading and understanding this novel (3), whereby readers have to listen carefully to Willow Springs so that they can fathom the mystery behind it.

Moreover, in the previous passage, Gloria Naylor makes it so evident for readers that it is the voice of her black female protagonist, Mama Day, which constitutes a bridge between the reader and the text, and between the people of her community and their land. That's why, one of the great pleasures of reading *Mama Day* is the black female author's play with a diversity of

narrative voices, made manifest in the intermingling of multiple viewpoints whose cooperation to reinforce rather than contradict each other, attempts to signify a communal discourse about Willow Springs, arising from its very black community. In so doing, Naylor is deliberately transgressing, "the limits of modern language and summon the connecting strength of . . . the community's voice" (Fiddyment Levy 278).

Unlike George Andrews, who apparently lacks both maps: actual and mental, readers are presented with a map[37] at the opening pages of the novel. Even though Willow Springs appears unlocalizable for people like George, what seems intriguing about *Mama Day*, however, is that Naylor provides the reader with a map of the southern Sea Island of Willow Springs at the beginning of her narrative so that he does not fall captive to the enigma that lies in the elusiveness of this unlocalizable, heterotopic place. In addition, opening her novel with a map, Naylor makes clear that her story concerns itself most with geography and asserting one's place and power over historical maps. In her "Divergent Paths to the South: Echoes of *Cane* in *Mama Day*" (2001), Anissa J. Wardi underscores the latter point when she links Naylor's text with a, "focus on geography and cultural identity . . . established at the outset of *Mama Day*" (Wardi 58).

As a fictitious island lying outside the national borders of the United States, Willow Springs expresses its heterotopic quality and geographical independence as an isolated, all-black-owned place by being located somewhere between the states of Georgia and South Carolina yet not belonging to either state: "Willow Springs ain't in no state. Georgia and Carolina done tried, though—been trying since right after the Civil War to prove that Willow Springs belong to one or the other of them" (Naylor 4-5). Both of states, Georgia and South Carolina, vie for claiming the island as their own, not because of its unique cultural heritage, but for its prime real estate.

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[37] See annex 1, page:

However, the island manages to evade the legal reaches of both states: "And the way we saw it", the ghosts of the island whisper, "America ain't entered the question at all when it come to our land . . . We wasn't even Americans when we got it—was slaves. And the laws about slaves not owning nothing in Georgia and South Carolina don't apply, 'cause the land wasn't then—and isn't now—in either of them places" (Naylor 5). In the context of Foucauldian heterotopia, Willow Springs represents a place in which the normal laws of Georgia and South Carolina societies are suspended.

Besides, Margaret Kohn's interpretation of heterotopia may also provide us a significant insight into our reading of Willow Springs as a space of resistance that constitutes, "a real countersite that inverts and contests existing economic . . . hierarchies" (91). In the novel, we find that the inhabitants of Willow Springs refuse to succumb to the mainland's administrative attempts, represented by Georgia and South Carolina, to take over their island and make it visible on the American map. Furthermore, the island's community have simply refused to pay taxes to neither state: "Georgia and South Carolina ain't seeing the shine off a penny for our land, our homes, our roads, or our bridge" (Naylor 6). Moreover, the black community of Willow Springs has succeeded at securing the land against the plans of real estate developers who aim at morphing Willow Springs into a vacation paradise. In fact, it is Naylor's black matriarchs, Mama Day and her sister Abigail, who have warned the islanders that, "the only dark faces you see now in them is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass. On their own land, mind you, their own land" (Naylor 6). Naylor writes:

> It weren't about no them now and us later - was them now and us never. Hadn't we seen it
>
> happen back in the 80s on St. Helena, Daufuskie, and St. Jolm's? And before that in the
>
> 60s on Hilton Head? Got them folks' land, built fences around it first thing, and then

brought in all the builders and high-paid managers from main side – ain't nobody on them islands benefitted. And the only dark faces you see now in them "vacation paradises" is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass. On their own land, mind you, their own land (Naylor 6).

Therefore, these defiant acts, which are prompted by black women, express a counter-hegemonic discourse to the socio-economic order these states plan to impose on the island. Besides, it becomes clear for the reader that exerting any kind of external influence on Willow Springs' community is eventually met by resistance.

While reflecting on the theme of resistance in the novel, Sanchez (2002) asserts that the island stands strong as a site of resistance against mainstream cultural domination. He explains that Naylor's story turns on a range of political and magical realist strategies. These strategies, he argues, help her construct an autonomous world, a free territory where, "a community that is deprived of its own culture and alienated in the mainland can escape white conventions and recover its own traditions, myths and way of life" (63). In *Mama Day*, one of these escapes is exemplified by the island's celebration of Candle Walk, a yearly celebration of gifts and lights that takes place on December 22nd, and which ironically bears resemblance to the mainland's Christmas, yet strongly accented by black traditions. Unlike Christmas in which people exchange gifts, the rituality of this event requires each islander to carry humble gifts to be given to those in need.

Candle Walk is a ritual event which celebrates and commemorates Willow Springs' mighty progenitor, Sapphira Wade. Guided and maintained by the wisdom of Mama Day, this celebratory ritual symbolises a bridge between the spiritual realm of the ancestors and the living world of the island. Seemingly, as Candle Walk seems to interrupt the normality of the mainland and inject alterity to the whites' approach to holidays, it therefore renders the island heterotopic in the sense

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that it makes it belong to "other places" that "interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space" and "inject alterity into the sameness, the commonplace, the topicality of everyday society" (Dehaene and De Cauter 4).

Apparently, Naylor not only creates a community that escapes the white conventions, but a community that reverses white conventions through maintaining distinctively independent cultural traditions. Here, we may recall Foucault's very definition of the concept of heterotopia in relation to culture. Foucault mentions that heterotopias represent, "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are . . . contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 3). In this vein, I may argue that, in *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor moulds a space similar to Foucault's heterotopia, since both spaces seem to be deliberately located outside the parameters of dominant cultural norms. To underscore this assumption, a further discussion is needed to demonstrate how Naylor's witting structuring of the story around a set of contrasts between New York City and Willow Springs, helps us explore more affinities between Naylor's mythical island and heterotopia. In addition, I assume that, in her representation of a resistant black-female heterotopic island, Naylor casts her narrative into contradicting, spatiotemporal structures.

IV. 4. Resistant Black Matriarchs Conjuring an "actually realised utopia":

Gloria Naylor's fictional narrative takes place in four worlds. The first on Willow Springs (without Mama Day); the second in New York City where Ophelia and George get to know each other, fall in love, and get married; the third in Willow Springs (with Mama Day) where Mama Day and her sister Abigail, Ophelia's grandmother, have always made their home; and, finally, in Willow Springs as two opposing worlds come together when George, the epitome of a white patriarchal culture, steps his foot on the island.

Before I proceed to explain the conflict inherent between Willow Springs and New York City, it is worth mentioning that Naylor opens her book with facts about the genealogy of the island as she precedes her story by three symbolic documents, including the map. Interestingly, however, is that one of these prefatory documents is about the Day family tree[38]. The document represents a testimony to a long-rooted history that refuses to be wiped off by hegemonic accounts, and it "stands in sharp contrast to the obliteration of . . . history in the lives of most African Americans" (Fowler 94). More importantly, it shows that the community of Willow Springs are descendants of a single woman, Sapphira Wade, who seems unaccompanied by any male intervention. If this is to suggest anything, it will be that Naylor prepares readers to enter a matriarchal world where Sapphira is not only the life giver and great mother of the island's inhabitants, but, perhaps more importantly, the "Logos, the Living word, rather than the dead letter of the text" (qtd. in *Gloria Naylor: strategy* 13). Sapphira is described as such because her mythical, legendary existence is the real mapmaker of an out-of-map Willow Springs. As she happens to tacitly shape every Willow-Springer's mental map, Sapphira, though it had been so long since she passed away, still lives like a ubiquitous presence, dwelling in the minds of the islanders. Mark Simpson-Vos (2001), for instance, associates Sapphira's mythical existence on the island with its omnipresence, "in each resident's consciousness" (32).

Even though the name of this matriarch, "is never breathed out of a single mouth in Willow Springs", this legendary former-slave woman is introduced to the reader in the guise of a mythical character who Naylor presents as, "a conjure woman . . .who could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of the lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot" (4). It is through this introductory exposition

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[38] See annex , page:

that we come to see the very mythicality this black conjure woman incorporates, and which serves as a locus for exploring the magical and matriarchal nexus out of which Naylor's heterotopic world springs.

In *Mama Day*, the motif of 'conjure' is of paramount significance. Tucker asserts that it is the peculiarity of the Gullah cultural heritage, which inspires its very name, spiritual context, and folk beliefs from Gullah Jack, an Angola-born Sea Islander and conjure man, that propels Naylor's interest with this motif:

> [I]mportant to Naylor's novel are Gullah beliefs about the spirit world, beliefs that have their origins in African religion. The island represents a world view in which boundaries between animate and inanimate, secular and sacred-even living and dead-are blurred. For African, and especially BaKongo groups, the afterlife was a reality; death was a journey to the spirit world, which, nonetheless, did not constitute a break with life on earth."1 Therefore, although their world was peopled by both bad and good spirits, ancestral spirits were especially important in the New World and served as guardians of the living. (Tucker 108)

Besides, the conjure offers us the opportunity to understand Willow Springs out of the dominant culture; the world beyond the bridge which is white and male. It also helps us to situate this mythical place among, "those singular spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others" ("Space, Knowledge" 252). Naylor affirms the singularity of her setting by casting light on a clash between two opposing assessments of Sapphira's conjuring powers.

According to a white perspective, Sapphira's unique powers are highly suggestive of her, "delving in witchcraft" (Naylor 2), whereas the communal voice of Willow Springs assures readers

that this black matriarch is, "a true conjure woman" (Naylor 3) who uses her conjuring powers for healing and medicinal purposes: "She could . . . use the heat of lightening in the palm of her hand . . . to start the kindling going under her medicine pot". Here, I may say that, through this clash, Naylor links Willow Springs with a distinctly African tradition. Tucker's discussion of conjuring is critical to this observation:

> Conjurers are said to be closer to their African roots than other, more acculturated African slaves. Also, conjure abilities are found to run in families; the conjure man or woman inherits his/her aptitude and the mantle of power, along with an expertise in herbal medicines. Conjure women often carry the name Mother and hold considerable power within their communities, and conjurers are, almost without exception, especially gifted with psychic abilities, or are known to have second sight. Often they are spoken of as being "two-headed". (176)

The character of Mama Day materialises this description perfectly. A descendant of "the greatest conjure woman on the earth" (Naylor 110), Mama Day inherits the mantle of her grandmother's, Sapphira Wade, conjuring powers. Her name, Mama, is highly indicative of her position as the mother and the great matriarch of Willow Springs. The black feminist critic Mari Evans (1983) notes that contemporary black women writers liberate themselves from the idealised images assigned to them in the literature of their male counterparts by inscribing their writings with "corrected portrayals" featuring characters like, "Big Mommas of superhuman wisdom and strength" (Evans xxvi). Therefore, one might say that Mama Day and Sapphira Wade fit squarely into these corrected portrayals since Naylor endows them with an unusual strength emanating from their conjure skills.

Mama Day exhibits a superhuman wisdom that Naylor makes it accessible to readers through the black female character's keen observation of and deep connection with the island's natural elements. One of the facets of her wisdom can be glimpsed in the way she, for instance, perceives a storm coming before it actually hits Willow Springs: "A storm is coming . . . Are you sure, Miranda? The signs don't lie, Abigail. At least not these signs. It may not hit us head-on. It may not. But it's best to be prepared" (228). To solidify her intuitive belief, Mama Day resorts to natural elements, searching for any possible signs that a storm might happen:

> Miranda looks up at the sky. Clear. Clear as a bell. But the chickens pinned up in wire cages is making an awful racket . . . Miranda shakes her head and takes a final look around her garden before she turns her face to the sky. Gray. The color you'd get from blending a bridal dress and a funeral veil. A netted sheet of clouds is spreading slowly from the southern horizon. Sorta like a web that she knows will get wider and thicker – and much much lower. (243)

Besides, like her grandmother, Miranda is also a performer of some magical, healing powers that transcend the logic of the dominant culture. In the following conversation, Naylor explains to the reader Mama Day's magical skills:

> "You give her anything for the pain?"
>
> "A smidge of choke-cherry bark."
>
> "I'm not familiar with that one."
>
> "The way I gave it to her, it knocked her out. Slows down the pulse."
>
> "I have a feeling I'm going to find myself a sweet little case of ovarian cysts in there. Just hope there's no liver damage."
>
> "There ain't-I checked her eyes". (Naylor 85)

This passage is crafted to feature a dialogue between black folk traditions and a Western culture. The latter views, "conjuration, indeed all black religion, as fetishistic and therefore primitive" (Tucker 175), and qualifies conjuring devilish, associating it with occult practices like, sorcery, necromancy, and witchcraft. It also perceives the conjure as opposed to Christianity and, therefore, the performance of the devil.

Therefore, Mama Day's power to cure, and even save, the woman with a small portion of chokecherry bark, subverts the generally held Western image of the conjurer as devilish. For Kameelah L. Martin (2013), contemporary black women writers like Gloria Naylor privilege the, "conjure tradition and conjure women in ways that directly challenge the notion of the black women victimized other . . . The conjure woman is . . . liberated to walk the literary world in a new body that is free of the stigmatized ideas of her past life" (129). For Naylor, however, it is not only about liberating the 'othered' image of the conjure woman, it is rather about resisting the 'otherness' of the black women experience as a whole. As the outstanding black feminist critic, Barbara Smith observes, black women writers incorporate black folk traditions of, "rootworking[39], herbal medicine, conjure and midwifery into the fabric of their stories" (174) to capture the distinctive experience of black history and community.

Another form of Miranda's conjure power, and which renders Willow Springs a heterotopic place that contests the mainland, is her ability to talk to the dead. Unlike New York cemeteries

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[39] In "The Root of the Matter: Rootwork and Conjure in Black Popular Culture", Kinitra Brooks defines rootwork and conjure as those "intellectual traditions created, sustained, and practiced by black women". According to her, rootwork is a "semiformal manifestation of black folk's practical need for healing through the making of medicines intertwined with the highly theoretical process of world-building and creating an inheritance of knowledge steeped in spirituality". Brooks also provides us with literal and figurative explanations of rootwork. Whereas the former designates the "foundation of pharmaceutical science as black women have ground up roots to put in slaves and steeped leaves to make healing teas", the latter is more of a dynamic side of the "spirit work that informs black women's knowledge practices, used to both heal and harm as a part of system of belief threaded through with traditional African religious practices".

where people go to mourn dead bodies buried in coffins, the connection between the living and the deceased takes on a different dimension in Naylor's book. Miranda Day communes with the spirits of her ancestors whenever she visits the island's graveyard, and everything she needs to know, "coulda been heard from that graveyard". She once takes her niece Cocoa, hoping she can hear to the whispers of their ancestors, whose souls Miranda believes are still hovering over Willow Springs. During their visit, Miranda recommends that they should put some moss on their sandals so that they can "listen" well to the voices emanating from the family graveyard: "She stops and puts a bit of moss in her open-toe sandals, then goes on past those graves to a spot just down the rise toward The Sound, a little bit south of that circle of oaks" (Naylor 10).

Besides showing strong resonances with Foucault's ideas on cemeteries and heterotopia, Naylor's graveyard is definitely not a place of the dead. It is rather a lively space where the living can commune with the dead. Moreover, the fact that it is situated somewhere near a southern water spot that Naylor metaphorically chooses to name, "The Sound" (10), the Day family graveyard is suggested to provide the throbbing nucleus that nurtures the vociferation of Willow Springs, and therefore, its mythical aura.

In addition to the resisting potential that is embedded in the image of the conjure woman, the writer reveals Sapphira's resistance to white hegemony and has foregrounded it in the opening pages of *Mama Day*. It is important to note that Willow Springs is not only an all-black but a black-owned place too. Interestingly, it is only the reader who has access to the third introductory document, which is the bill of sale for Sapphira Wade. By making Sapphira forcing her master, Bascombe Wade, "to deed all his slaves every inch of land in Willow Springs" (Naylor 3), Naylor abandons, "what can be considered cliché" (Sandín and Perez 264) in American literature. She

deploys the legend of an iconoclastic black woman to subvert the stereotypical image of slave women as compliant and weak.

In this, we may assume that Naylor's heterotopia inverts hegemonic representations of enslaved black women by drawing on the rebellious Gullahs to create her powerful black matriarch, Sapphira Wade. She recasts Sapphira Wade into an, "archetypal subverter" who demonstrates, "a self-possession that no amount of brutality could shake and that no bill of sale could revoke, as Bascombe Wade eventually learned" (Fowler 95). This twist, of course, cannot happen in American states since they inhibit slaves from claiming any kind of property, but in Naylor's heterotopic world, such a twist is made possible for she knows that land gives people a strong, deep sense of power and place.

Hence, it becomes evident that the heterotopology of Willow Springs is made manifest by Naylor's emphatic construction of a narrative that involves discrepancies. What interests Naylor most is placing a magical matriarchal community in confrontation with a rational patriarchal America. I must then shed the assumption that what helps us read Naylor's fictive island as a heterotopia is this very act of confrontation. Indeed, *Mama Day* is a novel that takes place in two opposing worlds, Willow Springs and New York City. There is only one thing that seems to connect these different realms, which is what Naylor describes as a "shaky wooden bridge" (Naylor175). The conflict between these worlds starts to take shape as soon as George Andrews, the husband of Mama Day's great-niece, Cocoa, and the epitome of white Western culture, steps his foot on Willow Springs, a place with a powerful, dazzling magic aura.

As already suggested, one of Naylor's most significant accomplishments in this novel is her incorporation of a communal narrative voice that invites readers to consider the fact that magic

has been present on the island since its early existence, and the legend of Sapphira Wade is what marks the birth of such otherworldly place:

WILLOW SPRINGS. Everybody knows but nobody talks about the legend of Sapphira Wade. A true conjure woman: satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She could walk through a lightening storm without being touched; a grab a bolt of lightening in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightening to start the kindling going under her medicine pot: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She turned the moon into salve, the stars into a swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four. It ain't about right or wrong, truth or lies; it's about a slave woman who brought a whole new meaning to both them words, soon as you cross over here from beyond the bridge. (Naylor 3)

According to this description, nothing about Willow Springs can be explained depending on human proportions. In this respect, we may deduce that Naylor's heterotopia constitutes forms of resistance to dominant modes of rationality. This is well evident in the way Naylor conveys the encounter of George Andrews with the island.

Soon after his arrival to the island, George becomes fully aware that Willow Springs is, "another world that is guided by its own rules, mores, and sensibilities" (Wilson 89). He confesses: "My suspicions were confirmed when we drove over that shaky wooden bridge: you had not prepared me for paradise. And to be fair, I realized that there was nothing you could have said that would have made any sense to me. I had to be there and see-no, feel-that I was entering another world" (Naylor 175). Comparing Willow Springs to 'paradise', George compels us to draw yet another connection between this island and the notion of heterotopia. Since Foucault describes

heterotopias as, "actually realized utopias" ("Different Spaces" 178), Willow Springs becomes a kind of a realised utopian place, for utopias are only imaginary and do not exist in reality.

So, readers will immediately realise that the knowledge George has acquired while he has been in New York will be of no use in this heterotopic world. And, they will also notice that his attempts to understand the otherworldly cosmology of Willow Springs according to his Western rationality will prove futile and elusive. Naylor discloses this rationality as unavailing in two instances: the moment George has failed to locate the island on the map. Indeed, for a "dislocated urbanite" (Montgomery 155), "practical-minded engineer" (Wilson 90) with "a practical upbringing" (88) and "modern urban modes of knowing" (Dubey 180), it is hard for a man like George to believe in the existence of a place that doesn't show on any of his maps, which definitely upsets any rational mind. Second, when he wanted to apply a scientific outlook to understand a lightening caused by Mama Day:

there was something *strange* about this lightening. It struck twice in the same place. Theoretically, it is possible, but not probable, for lightening to strike twice in exactly the same place. The first exchange of electrical charges between the ground and the clouds, which in a sense is a strike, causes the negative—charge center up in the clouds to short-circuit and nullify itself. So it would take another exchange of negative electrons from higher in that same cloud the same positively charged spot on the earth to have lightening strike twice. That's rare. Unless, for a scientific experiment someone purposely electrifies the ground with materials that hold both negative and positive charges to increase the potential of having a target hit. No one was running around with that kind of knowledge in Willow Springs, and it was highly improbable that it would happen naturally. Others were there, thinking it unnatural as well, but for very different reasons. This was a deliberate and

definite sign, since it happened to Miss Ruby's house. It seemed that she'd had a host of

sins, going back several years, so the destruction of everything she owned and the burns

on her body was her getting her due. (Naylor 274; italics original)

In a boys' shelter in the urban North, George has been raised by whites to reject any view of life

that doesn't fit into the parameters of rational discourse. There, the boy was completely detached

from all that belongs to the spiritual realm as he was heavily taught to conceive of the world

surrounding him only through facts and rational principles. The following passage reflects quite

accurately George's scientific approach to life: "I hated tiptoeing around the facts of life, probably

because of the way I'd been trained. Mrs. Jackson never catered to the romantic side of the birds

and the bees. There were no cutesy posters hanging up in the rec room where we all had to meet

once a week for hygiene hour; two ugly blow-ups of the skinned male and female anatomy were

taped on blackboard" (Naylor 104).

As long as he remains captive of the Western ideology, George, with his ways of knowing,

will never understand the different order of Willow Springs. Naylor makes hint to this captivity

through George's scepticism about the reality of Sapphira Wade's very existence: "I wondered if

that woman had lived at all. Places like this island were ripe for myths, but if she had really existed,

there must be some record. Maybe in Bascombe Wade's papers: deed of sale for hi slaves. Where

had his home been on this island? Did he have a family? Who erected his tombstone?" (218). Here,

George, the practical man who requires evidence for everything, cannot believe in such a thing as

a community that roots back to a woman whose existence has not been documented.

Besides, his persistent endeavours to accommodate the island to the convictions of white

culture make it impossible for him to come to grips with the essence of its complex nature. Nothing

from his white culture, neither Mrs. Jackson's graphs nor the stories of women's delirium from his

psychology books, can help him explain the matriarchal place he enters. Amused, for example, that all the females in his wife's family are called Days, George jests with Cocoa, asking: "But what, as in your case, if a woman married?" His wife's deep reply has offered a hint George needs to comprehend Willow Springs, "You live a Day and you die a Day". Unable to properly grasp the profound meaning of this remark, George superciliously comments, "Early women's lib". As his wife's simple but acute response, "A bit more than that" (Naylor 218), indicates, George underplays the experiences of black women in the island by attempting to explain them in terms of white women's. As Naylor invites us to understand, neither Sapphira's existence nor Mama Day's wisdom and power can be apprehended by the diminutive epithet, 'women's lib'.

With his Western mind, George relentlessly struggles to impose his empiricist way of thinking, based on "his solid grounding in analysing problems of conflict" (Wilson 210), upon a realm that transcends human understanding; a place where, as his wife Cocoa cautions him, "his maps were no good" (Naylor 177). Naylor captures well George's inability to relinquish the conventions of his white culture and comprehend the heterotopic quality of Willow Springs, when she makes him undergo a test where he is about to confront an intricate conundrum because of his failure to accept completely the laws making the unique order of a black female heterotopia. The conundrum has started when George stopped looking at Willow Springs as a paradise, as the island turned in something like a "godforsaken place" (266) for him. This shift in attitude is provoked by the illness of his wife, Cocoa.

Believing her husband is having an affair with Cocoa has elicited the bitter jealousy of Mama Day's enemy, the spiteful Miss Ruby, whose marriage couldn't ever be made into a "whole picture" (Naylor 57) because of her husband's constant cheating. Thus, driven by intense hatred, Ruby uses her knowledge of black magic to curse Cocoa and render her severely ill. Of course,

the rational George cannot accept the fact that his wife has been bewitched, and tries to focus all of his energy on seeking ways to rebuild the bridge connecting Willow Springs with the mainland so that he can get proper medical help for his dying wife. Perhaps, with Mama Day using her magical powers to induce a lightening that causes a big storm which has brought down the only bridge that relates Willow Springs to New York, Naylor prepares readers to anticipate George's failure to connect with a matriarchal magical heterotopia. Yet, the wise Mama Day still insists that the key to her grand niece's salvation lies in George's belief in the different order of the island's black matriarchal community:

> [S]he needs that belief buried in George. Of his own accord he has to *hand* it over to her. She needs his hand in hers — his very hand —so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before. A single moment was all she asked, even a fingertip to touch hers here at the other place. So together they could be the bridge for Baby girl to walk over. Yes, in his very hands he already held the missing piece she'd come looking for. (Naylor 285)

In *Challenging Realities: Magic Realism in Contemporary American Women's Fiction* (2002), Maria Ruth Sanchez thinks that Mama Day's request reflects her strong desire for reconciling, "the secular with the sacred, the real with the magical" (81). But the practical George, on the other hand, cannot entertain the possibility that his wife has been spelled or can be cured by magic, and even if he cannot fix the bridge, he "would begin to swim" (Naylor 283) rather than forcing himself to believe in something that goes against the grain of his deeply rational view of life. Yet, Mama Day is still resolved to confide in George's inward spiritual conviction and tries to reassure the man, explaining: "I can do more things with these hands than most folks dream of—no less believe—but this time they ain't no good alone. I had to stay in this place and reach back to the

beginning for us to find the chains to pull her out of this here trouble. Now, I got all that in this hand but it ain't gonna be complete unless I can reach out with the other hand and take yours" (Naylor 294).

Indeed, all what it takes to heal Cocoa is George rationalising a spiritual conviction to hand his belief to Miranda, or even more precisely, to a black female heterotopia. This can be adequately understood when Mama Day asks George to travel to her chicken hutch, look for the nest of an old red hen, "search good in the back of her nest, and come straight back here with whatever you find" (295). Instead of following the instructions blindly and accepting Miranda's keen wisdom without questioning, he has drawn himself into a violent conflict with the hen which, after he has dug furiously into her nest, sunk its peak and claws into his hands. Eventually, "Nothing. There was there—except for my gouged and bleeding hands. Bring me straight back whatever you find. But there was nothing to bring her. *Bring me straight back whatever you find*. Could it be that she wanted nothing but my hands?" (Naylor 300; italics original). Although he hasn't found anything in the chicken coop, it is his bleeding hands which Miranda needs most to complete the ritual of her great-niece's healing. Seemingly, after he places them on Cocoa's shoulder, the curse is lifted and Cocoa begins receiving the flow of healing. Shortly after, George Andrews dies of a heart attack. This of course takes us back to the moment when the island speaks to Cocoa through its breezes, revealing to her that her marriage with George will eventually come to an end as she will "break his heart" (Naylor 224).

However, the uncanny scene that results in George's ultimate death at the end of his twisting journey into this black female heterotopia, complicates the reader's understanding of Naylor's choice of such ending. In spite of Mama Day's efforts to convince George to believe in the complex reality of Willow Springs, he dies because of the overwhelmingly obscure incident

inside the hen coop. His death makes the question of his entry into a black matriarchal heterotopia more complex, yet, we can possibly put forth two incompatible interpretations: his burial in the Day family cemetery presents a suggestively emblematic manifestation of allowing him into the Willow Springs community, or an ultimate expulsion from it. Maxine Montgomery seems to align with the second interpretation, arguing that, "[B]ecause the literal-minded engineer is either unable or unwilling to follow Mama Day's coded instructions, death is the penalty exacted for the outsider's failure to decipher the trickster's lore" (Montgomery 164). Yet, one can still think of George's death as a sacrifice, where he not only gives up his life for his wife, but deliberately drops out of Western culture. With that being said, I may align with the first proposed interpretation.

VI. 5. Willow Springs and Heterochrony

Naylor's treatment of the way Willow Springs' dwellers conceive of time is crucial to understand how this marginal island establishes and retains its own heterochronic sense of temporality. Displaying Willow Springs as a black female heterotopia, Naylor invites readers to consider how the experiences of the black matriarchs, Sapphira Wade and Mama Day, forge the complex reality of the island. Given that their conjuring powers and the distinct cultural community they have created are what essentially gives the marginal Willow Springs a heterotopic quality, the heterochronic dimension of the island is imparted by the relationship between the community's first Matriarch, Sapphira Wade, and the very year: 18 & 23. In *Mama Day*, Naylor explains this relationship through the figure of Reema's boy, "The one with the pear-shaped head—came hauling himself back from one of those fancy colleges mainside, dragging his notebooks and tape recorder and a funny way of curling up his leap and clicking his teeth, all excited and determined to put Willow Springs on the map" (Naylor 7). This character, just like

George, is imbued with Western education; however, unlike George who cannot find the island on any map, Reema's boy comes back to Willow Springs with a deep desire to put the island on the map.

In the novel, the community's collective voice chooses to call this character after his mother, which, if it suggests anything, suggests that this man has lost roots in his community and the only thing connecting him to Willow Springs is his mother, Reema. The loss of his roots is brought about by the kind of education and ideologies he has received from the "mainside". Although he has been raised in Willow Springs, Reema's boy now rejects and looks down upon his people's traditions and beliefs. Now he only seeks to see and only wants to know through the perspective of Western man. In his attempt to convince the islanders that the only way to assert their cultural identity and invert hostile social and political parameters is to render Willow Springs visible to the outside world, Reema's boy comes to eventually associate their customs with backwardness:

> Not that he called it being dumb, mind you, called it "asserting our cultural identity," "inverting hostile social and political parameters." 'Cause, see, being we was brought here as slaves, we had no choice but to look at everything upside-down. And then being that we was isolated off here on this island, everybody else in the country went on learning good English and calling things what they really was—in the dictionary and all that—while we kept on calling things . . . backwards. (Naylor 7)

But the community's voice comments in a somewhat sarcastic way upon what he views as an ethnographic research, narrating: "Rattled on about "ethnography," "unique speech patterns," "cultural preservation" and whatever else he seemed to be getting so much pleasure out of while talking into his little gray machine". The island's collective voice even mocks the way he describes

his study as an "extensive field work", highlighting the fact that he, "ain't never picked a boll of cotton or head of lettuce in his life" (Naylor 7). Through this description, Naylor, again, emphasises how Reema's boy is rooted out of his black community, for he has been changed by the White world beyond the bridge. She expresses in a contemptuous tone, "The people who ran the type of schools that could turn our children into raving lunatics—and then put his picture on the back of the book so we couldn't even deny it was him—didn't mean us a speck of good" (Naylor 8).

However, what actually drives this anthropologist back to Willow Springs is definitely neither "asserting our cultural identity" nor "inverting hostile social and political parameters". Reema's boy instead wants to enrich his book about the islanders' lifestyle with what he considers as the most intriguing aspect of their community, the 18 & 23 thing: "He was all over the place—What 18 & 23 mean? What 18 & 23 mean?". And most of the islanders simply reply: "we all told him the God-honest truth: it was just our way of saying something" (7), a metaphoric way of transmitting meaning. The Western scholar cannot process their explanation, for he firmly believes that this number actually represents the longitude and latitude of Willow Springs but apparently in a reversed manner, "really 81 & 32, which just so happened to be the lines of longitude and latitude marking off where Willow Springs sits on the map" (Naylor 8). What makes him arrive at such an extrapolation is his misguided understanding of the way the expression 18 & 23 operates among Willow Springs community and, above all, its history in relation to the community's archetypal mother, Sapphira Wade.

In *Mama Day*, Naylor introduces readers to the temporal expression of 18 & 23 at the beginning of her narration:

It happened in 1823: she smothered Bascombe Wade in his very bed and lived to tell the story for a thousand days. 1823: married Bascombe Wade, bore him seven sons in just a thousand days, to put a dagger through his kidney and escape the hangman's noose, laughing in a burst of flames. 1823: persuaded Bascombe Wade in a thousand days to deed all his slaves every inch of land in Willow Springs, poisoned him for his trouble, to go on and bear seven sons - by person or persons unknown. (Naylor 3)

This story documents the creation of an independent black Willow Springs. It says that the black woman, Sapphira Wade, has married Bascombe Wade, borne him seven sons, persuaded him to deed Willow Springs to her and his slaves, then killed him all in the year of 1823. Readers now understand that the meaning of 18 & 23 derives not from the coordinates of the island on the map, but from the different stories happening in the year 1823, which is looked at as signifying the primordial moment in the history of their free black community. Since then, the number has been turned into the expression '18 & 23' which the islanders insert into most of their vernacular speech: "But ain't a soul in Willow Springs don't know that little dark girls, hair all braided up with colored twine, got their "18 & 23's coming down" when they lean too long over them back yard fences, laughing at the antics of little dark boys who got the nerve to be "breathing 18 & 23" with mother's milk still on their tongues" (Naylor 4). For instance, by referring to little girls as getting their "18 & 23's coming down", the islanders are simply talking about them reaching puberty.

Since "Sapphira Wade don't live in the part of our memory we can use to form words" (Naylor 4), Naylor uses the expression of '18 & 23's' to reveal how the black community of Willow Springs can still invoke the memory of their legendary matriarch even without knowing her name. This way, Sapphira Wade becomes therefore almost constantly present to the community members' minds, shaping what I may refer to as the collective consciousness of

Willow Springs. With such a presence, Sapphira surmounts temporal boundaries as, according to the islanders' unique speech patterns, the past and present seem to merge in their minds. The black matriarch's constant presence also makes it impossible for Naylor's black community to locate itself entirely in the present moment, as the past keeps intervening to place Willow Springs within a heterochronic framework, where making clear distinctions between past, present, and future fade. In other words, as the past expression of 18 & 23 reaches into the present and keeps affecting the way the islanders perceive their lives, Naylor thus presents an experience of temporality that weaves together past and present, making Willow Springs experience a fluid time that resists the Western view of time as linear. Shirley A. Stave (2001) notes that the complexity of Gloria Naylor's novel lies in its skilful binding together of past and present so as to insist that history in Willow Springs is "inseparable part of its people's lives" (31).

Thus, Naylor's fictional island is not only a spatially-complex place, but it also tends to exhibit a complex timeframe as its residents seem to experience what Michel Foucault distinguishes as heterochrony. In Willow Springs, people arrive at a sort of absolute break with the mainland's traditional time. Naylor demonstrates their unique experience of temporality in the way she makes a linear and sequential time becomes foreign to the black community of the island: "Living in a place like Willow Springs, it's sorta easy to forget about time. Guess 'cause the biggest thing it does is to bring about change and nothing much changes here but the seasons. And if we get a warm spring, a slow fall, and a light winter it don't seem like even the seasons change much at all" (160). This description not only suggests that the community's sense of time collapses, but also that time itself is pendent in Willow Springs, "Time don't crawl and time don't fly; time is still. You do with it what you want: roll it up, stretch it out, or here we just let it lie" (Naylor 161).

Accordingly, I may say that what brings meaning to Naylor's heterochronic island is its discrepant temporality as it experiences both a fluid and static sense of time, which adds to the ambivalence inherent in this black female heterotopia. Of course, being indoctrinated by Western education, Reema's boy cannot easily get the meaning of 18 & 23 or establish a clear understanding of the island's heterochronic sense of temporality. The community's voice thusly declares: "If the boy wanted to know what 18 & 23 meant, why didn't he just ask? When he was running around sticking that machine in everybody's face, we were sitting here—every one of us—and him being Reema's, we woulda have obliged him" (8). The voice suggests that all what he needs is to ask properly, listen carefully, and, more importantly, believe in the power of 18 & 23 in forging Willow Springs' entire existence, past, present, and even future, since "It's all happened before and it'll happen again with a different set of faces" (Naylor 163).

VI. 6. Conclusion:

In *Mama Day*, Naylor makes a black female heterotopia. The fictional geography knitted by this novel offers a distinctive representation of the black female experience with marginality. Naylor's story features strong black matriarchs who possess unusual abilities that have morphed the novel's imaginative, marginal island of Willow Springs into a unique realm that rejects and even transcends the mainland's traditional spatio-temporal experience through a demonstration of an ambiguous complex of space and time. Like a heterotopia, Willow Springs is a marginal site where black women are able to problematise the expulsion of a peculiarly black female experience from hegemonic historical landscapes, stressing the significance of black female spirituality in defining this experience, and asserting their agency by retaining distinct black cultural traditions.

Edward Soja has likened heterotopia to a space that, "can be mapped but never fully captured in conventional cartographies; it can be creatively imagined but obtains meaning only

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when practiced and fully lived" ("Thirdspace" 276). In *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor also seems to construct a heterotopia that not only transcends but also resists the laws of conventional cartographies as it can be mapped and fully captured only in the minds of its inhabitants—by extension readers—and whose vividly true meaning can only be grasped when we come to understand the experiences of its black matriarchs which render the marginal Willow Springs a heterotopic place with a resistant, different order showing resistant black female agents who interrupt and defy the ideologies of mainstream white culture which have worked to render black women as passive, marginalised subjects.

From the novel's cover page, with the hands of a black woman trying to receive, or they themselves which provoke a lightening, readers expect being immersed into an unusual world of fiction. Indeed, Naylor's fictional realm is rife with elements that transcend the logical perceptions of reality. One of these elements can be discerned in the way Naylor makes the island an unlocalizable place that is situated in the minds of its dwellers only. We may understand two things here. First thing is that Naylor wants to destabilise the order of those historical maps that have rendered the black experience of the Middle Passage a 'historyless' site, and a second interpretation will be that she seeks to introduce a different order of mapping which results from the dweller's mental conceptions about Willow Springs. Of course, it is the mythicality of Sapphira Wade's existence which shapes these mental conceptions and constitutes the real map to Naylor's unlocalizable place.

What undergirds the heterotopic character of Naylor's marginal island is its otherworldly cosmos that challenges the dominant order of American culture. To emphasise this point, Naylor resorts to confront a distinct black community that is guided by her spiritual black female agent, the wise black matriarch Miranda Day, and the ubiquitous presence of the perennial matriarch,

Sapphira Wade, with a dominant White culture, whose agents are George Andrews and Reema's boy, two men deeply ingrained and affected by Western rational ways of knowing. It is this very confrontation which helps readers understand Naylor's depiction of a place with a subversive spatio-temporality. The story of Reema's boy, for instance, reveals how Willow Springs experience a completely different sense of time that challenges the dominant Western view of temporality as linear. This is demonstrated in the way the islanders experience a heterochronous sense of time that is marked by ambivalence, as it can be both static and fluid. Naylor cunningly associates this ambivalence to the temporal expression of '18 & 23' that evokes the everlasting presence of Sapphira Wade. The islander's insertion of this number into their daily speech shows how they cannot detach themselves from the past. The heterochrony of the island therefore lies in its entrapment within a liminal zone between past and present.

The typically black female spirituality of Naylor' island comes in stark opposition to the mainland's Western rationality. The husband of Mama Day's great-niece Cocoa, is a New Yorker who is raised by whites to reject any view of life that doesn't fit into the parameters of rational discourse, cannot fathom Mama Day's and Sapphira Wade's heterotopia, for he lacks both maps: actual and mental. He cannot understand the island's acts of resistance against the legal claims of Georgia and South Carolina, which accentuate Margaret Kohn's very definition of heterotopia. He also doubts the spirituality of the island's unique event of the Candle Walk, the informative power that is imparted to the geography of the island with its mysterious graveyard, and, above all, Miranda Day's wisdom and conjuring abilities, which leads to his failure to establish a real understanding of and connection with Naylor's black female heterotopia. The kind of spirituality that Naylor conveys here is meant to resist and, more importantly, correct the negative portrayals and conceptions of black conjure women as devilish and black cultural customs as inferior.

Chapter Five

Resistance Reimagined: Cyborg Subjectivity and Difference in the Speculative Geography of Octavia Butler's Parables

V.1. Introduction

V.2. Octavia E. Butler as a Black Feminist Science Fiction Writer

V.3. Butler's Vision of Black Women, Difference, and the Agency of Cyborg Subjectivity

V.4. Butler's Political Utopia and the Metaphor of the Chimera

V.5.The Cyborg and its Complicated Configuration of Black Mother Figure

V.6. Conclusion

I began writing about power because I had so little.

—Octavia Estelle Butler.

V.1. Introduction

It is increasingly accepted that speculative fiction[40] enables writers to imagine alternative realities and oppositional worldviews that ultimately offer them opportunities to challenge and overturn hegemonic power relations and social normative values that are taken for granted by dominant societies and seem difficult to transgress within realist settings. It would therefore seem to be hard for speculative fiction writers, like Octavia Butler, who wish to render such a subject matter, to resist the allure and power of speculative worlds. A branch of speculative fiction, the science fiction genre typically leans towards addressing futuristic technology, space and time travel, and other imaginative concepts, rather than dealing with racism and/or gender issues. In her science fiction works, Butler is able to overcome this frequent avoidance of such issues, and instead explores their impact on future worlds while utilising them as a lens through which to describe dynamic and diverse black female protagonists who defy patriarchal expectations and racist conceptions. This chapter is, therefore, concerned with the way in which Butler constructs a uniquely speculative geography in terms of difference, black-female cyborg subjectivity, and resistance. Driven by a strong black feminist vision as well as a utopian impulse that is grounded on the desire to create better worlds for her black heroines, Butler writes a new chapter in the history of science fiction, into which, she envisions and introduces new possibilities for the configuration of the black female experience.

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[40] As a genre, science fiction is subsumed under the umbrella of speculative fiction which also includes fantastic fiction, horror, supernatural fiction, magic realism, alternative history, apocalyptic and postapocalyptic fiction, utopian and dystopian fictions.

This chapter also seeks to understand Butler's rejection of dualistic epistemologies that shape the notion of the self within Western discourses. I, therefore, will relate Butler's overturning of binary thinking to the works of feminists like Chela Sandoval, Patricia Hill Collins, and Donna Haraway. The speculative geography considered here encompass *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and its sequel, *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which constitute Butler's Earthseed series. These two novels are, in turn, works of speculative fiction that combine the reimagination of black women subjectivity with resistance echoed through political and utopian concerns. Set in the near future, in the time span from 2024 to the early 2090s, the two futuristic novels, mainly framed as the heroine's journal entries, offer a detailed account of Lauren Oya Olamina's journey from a marginalised black woman, because of her hyperempathy syndrome, to a spiritual founder and leader of Earthseed community, who is empowered by a cyborg subjectivity.

V.2. Octavia E. Butler as a Black Feminist Science Fiction Writer:

One of the very few black women to write professionally in the science fiction field, Octavia Estelle Butler (1947-2006) is a Hugo and Nebula Award-winning writer best known for her speculative stories that explore the possibilities for a society open to racial and gender equality. In 1995, Butler was the first science fiction author to ever receive a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant, an award granted only to American citizens who "show exceptional merit and promise for continued and enhanced creative work" (qtd. in Hamilton 16).

"A Black Feminist science fiction writer from Southern California" (qtd. in Boulter 170), Butler declares when asked to describe her literary position. Writing during an era (the 1970s and 1980s) marked by a resurgence of black feminism, black women's writing, and the advent of 'New

Wave' science fiction[41], Butler has produced powerful novels and short stories that have served to bring black women's creative endeavours in science fiction to the forefront of critical attention and have helped redefine black women's role and presence in two major literary canons, African American literature and mainstream American science fiction.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Butler has been the only recognised black female writing within "a male genre, dominated by male authors who create male heroes who control distinctly masculine worlds" ("Octavia Butler and the Black Science" 78). Before the 70s, Butler's literature did not receive much attention and comment from mainstream literary community, mainly because of her marginal race, gender, and genre. For that reason, Butler's work discloses an early self-consciousness of her marginality; she states, "I did a lot of thinking—the same things over and over. Who was I anyway? Why should anyone pay attention to what I had to say? Did I have anything to say? I was writing science fiction and fantasy . . . At that time nearly all professional science-fiction writers were white men" (*Bloodchild* 133). This kind of early consciousness has clearly catapulted Butler into a vortex of new ideas that led her to explore issues of how to resist marginality, racism, and gender-based oppression in ways that have propounded many of the concepts we encounter in black feminist thought.

As Simon Glickman and Ralph G. Zerbonia (2020) comment on this thematic propensity, Butler's imaginative engagement with race and gender has helped put these issues into "the

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[41] With the second-wave feminism that developed in the 1960s, many women started to read and write science fiction that is different from mainstream, or hard science fiction as it tends to pay more attention to social and psychological elements of life. Reflecting on this shift, Joanna Russ, , indicates in a 1975 interview in *Science-Fiction Studies* that, in producing soft science fiction texts, writers like herself and Ursula Le Guin draw primarily from the 'soft' sciences of sociology, ethnology, and psychology rather than the 'hard' sciences (physics, chemistry, and mathematics) that prevail in mainstream science fiction (qtd. in *Being and Race*). Therefore, science fiction women writers in the 1980s, mainly, started to be praised because of the remarkably wonderful literary craftsmanship, manifesting in their complex characterizations and experiments in 'soft' sciences in order to escape a restrictive emphasis on 'hard' science extrapolations prevalent in earlier stories.

foreground of speculative fiction, exploring . . . social and political issues with a developed sense of ambiguity and difficulty. Such explorations . . . were previously absent from science fiction: 'In the '70s, Butler's work exploded into this ideological vacuum like an incipient solar system'". It is no wonder then that Butler populates her fiction with strong black heroines who refuse to be harnessed to traditional ideologies of race and gender. With this view, Booker and Thomas (2009) honour Butler as "one of the finest writers in the field" who "writes from a position of opposition to the ways race and gender have been traditionally represented in SF" (129).

Cast as fiddling in a literary limbo, the only black people one is probably to encounter in science fiction "were occasional characters or characters who were so feeble-witted that they couldn't manage anything, anyway . . ." ("*Visions: Identity*"). Similarly, Sandra Govan (1984) observes that "science fiction as a genre has seldom evoked an authentic African setting or employed non-stereotypical blacks as characters" (83). One may therefore proceed to argue that Butler's science fiction is an indictment of such paucity. In doing so, Butler nonetheless crafts black female characters whose difference demurs at complying with conventional expectations. This is so tellingly palpable in their unusual display of a radically different conception of black female subjectivity that challenges roles like "the traditional literary Earth Mothers or Culture Bearers" (Foster 47), and chooses instead to "exercise direct authority" (47) over its representation.

In her cunning renditions of black female subjectivity, Butler burdens her female protagonists with the task of exacting their differences against a society governed by normative ideologies. Thus, she writes her futuristic black heroines into voice and subjectivity. Seemingly, producing characters who show no reluctance in crying out their difference, a writer should opt for erecting spaces into which no boundaries may preclude or even thwart such a quest. There is no doubt, science fiction occupies the most powerful and privileged position among these spaces. One

reason why Butler has been drawn to science fiction is because this genre offers her unbounded spaces and rich possibilities for exploring liberating alternatives for black women's experiences. As Adam Roberts postulates in *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (2006), science fiction "allows the symbolic expression of what it is to be female, or black, or otherwise marginalized" (30). Moreover, in "Black Scholar Interview with Octavia Butler: Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre" (1986), Butler is interviewed and asked what has interested her about science fiction, she emphatically replies: "The freedom of it; it's potentially the freest genre in existence" ("Black Scholar" 14).

Any attempt to approach an adequate grasp of Butler's oeuvre should involve an acknowledgement of the distinctively intersectional aspect of her stories that reflects what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson (1992) identifies as "simultaneity of discourses" (147). Indeed, one of Butler's literary ingenuities lies in her ability to construct complicated narratives that are embedded within multiple discourses like science fiction, feminist theories, black women's literature, and postcolonial discourses, to name but a few. It is this literary quality which invites me to consider Butler's work as part of the black female literary tradition. Besides, this literary skill resonates aptly with Henderson's notion of "speaking in tongues", which attests to the writer's erudition and ability "to speak in diverse known languages" (149). The experience of reading Butler, therefore, can simultaneously evoke an intriguing sense of wonder about her literary vision. Readers, in this sense, should attend to the complexities and multiple layers of meaning that are presented in Butler's works.

Because of its strikingly hybridised style that is the product of multiple discourses, most of Butler's critics (Miller 337; Hollinger 233; Japtock and Jenkins 8; *Alien Constructions* 39) have noted that her fictional work defies easy genre classification. Yet these critics seem to share the

assumption that the term 'science fiction' is used to designate the narrative form of her fiction. In *Lost in Space, Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond,* Marleen S. Barr (1993) identifies feminist narratives furnishing literary adeptness at using hybrid styles as "feminist fabulation". By the expression 'feminist fabulation', she means "science fiction, fantasy, utopian literature, and mainstream literature". As they produce texts that challenge rigid definitions of literary genres, feminist fabulators, according to Barr, seek to engage in a critique of "patriarchal master narratives" and use a kind of hybridised narratives where they become able to nurture their own definitions (Barr 12).

Marleen S. Barr further argues that feminist fabulation offers, "a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some cognitive way" (11). Infusing her fiction with strong heroines challenging diverse forms of oppression, including patriarchy, I assume that Butler's works evoke comparison to Barr's feminist fabulation. What is worth noting, also, is that Barr bases her argument on literary theorist Darko Suvin's concept of 'cognitive estrangement', while referring to the estranging effect of feminist fabulation. According to Suvin, the cognitive estrangement occurs when the reader comes to recognise similarities between events in the realm of fantasy and those in the real world. In this vein, the aspect of cognitive estrangement renders science fiction a "literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (qtd. in Barr 82).

In spite of the differences in Barr's and Suvin's ideas, one may deduce that there is some propinquity between their definitions of science fiction. Both dismiss science fiction as escapist. Seen from this perspective, Butler's works are far from being escapist. They have the potential "to

open a doorway onto worlds more "real" than those most of us inhabit" (Wetherilt 101). They also seem to constitute a realm through which the author reaches new insights that appear to be profoundly revelatory of the black female experience. In this regard, Larry McCaffery explains in *Across the Wounded Galaxies*: *Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers* (1990), that Butler's fiction, "has its roots in her experiences as a black woman growing up in a society dominated by white people, particularly white men. With the publication of her Patternist novels, she immediately signaled her interest in anthropological, racial, and political themes" (55). Besides, though often situated within the tradition of feminist utopia, Butler removes herself from this tradition as she offers works of fiction that, states AnaLouise Keating (1999):

> contain strong black female protagonists whose wisdom and actions make them agents of change. She deals with complex issues, such as the struggle for power and control …inflected by gender, ethnicity, and class …the politics of survival: and the creation of new communities where peoples of many colors and often different species interact. These hybrid communities …illustrate Butler's radical perspective on "race" . . . she challenges preconceptions concerning miscegenation and racialized identities. (70)

V.3. Butler's Vision of Black Women, Difference, and the Agency of Cyborg Subjectivity

In *Sista Talk: The Personal and the Pedagogical* (2005), Rochelle Brock observes that White supremacy[42] has constantly worked to perpetuate ideological constructs that allow for "visions of Black women as abnormal through dichotomous thinking, which categorizes based on difference" (9). Brock quotes bell hooks on this point as saying, "Dichotomous thinking becomes

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[42] The black feminist critic, bell hooks maintains that the term 'white supremacy' is mostly used to identify "the ideology that most determines how white people . . . perceive and relate to black people and other people of color". She adds: "It is the very small but highly visible liberal movement away from the perpetuation of overtly racist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of black people which often masks how all-pervasive white supremacy is . . . both as ideology and as behavior" (*Talking Back* 191).

the ideological tool used in the domination and oppression of Black women by Western society in which things are defined in terms of their difference: they are fundamentally contradictory entities related only through their definitions as opposites" (qtd. in Brock 10). Drawing extensively on the question of difference, Butler aligns with Brock and hooks in that she bestows, in all of her fictional narratives, a particular attention upon the image of the black woman that is perfectly dovetailed with an intensely black feminist discourse which insists on difference to contest, resist and even transcend binary forms of thought.

With respect to the trope of difference, Butler employs multiple perspectives to "provide readers with nuanced explorations of new ways to mediate and transform difference" (Keating 72). Gregory Hampton (2005) also asserts that: "Octavia Butler consistently marks the bodies of her central characters with difference" (72). He goes on to say that in Butler's fiction difference is presented as "something to be embraced as an advantage rather than a disadvantage" and Butler's writing seems to imply that "to be different or on the margins of several identities at once is a potentially powerful potion to exist in, if one is aware of the possibilities of his/her difference" (72). My reading of the Parable series[43] will therefore examine the ways in which Butler uses the voice of the heroine/narrator, Lauren Oya Olamina, as a collective voice that stands for marginal black women's subjectivities, to prove that being different and located at the margins of fixed conceptions of subjectivities is indeed a potentially powerful space to exist in.

In fact, one of the consistent themes running throughout Butler's fiction and which Butler is so adamant to stress is the construction and assertion of a complex black female subjectivity that voices an awareness of its difference. This difference arguably arises from what Cheryl A. Wall

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[43] Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) are also referred to as the Parable or Earthseed series.

refers to as "a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality" (*Worrying the Line* 6). Hence, one may presume that black women should not be looked at as different because of their race and gender, but their difference, in effect, is the result of holding complex subjectivities that are essentially shaped as well as informed by a diversity of experiences. That's why for black women writers like Butler, black women subjectivities can, in no way, be grasped by or reduced to the unrelenting logic of any form of dualism, or polar oppositions. The remaining part of the section, therefore, will consider how Butler's Parable novels, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), create powerful groundwork for the construction of a complex cyborg subjectivity which holds for the novelist the potential of mapping new territory for black women's subjectivity.

First, my discussion will focus on Butler's imaginative reworking of the cyborg figure which the novelist introduces and treats as a metaphor of difference, and through which she seeks to resist and subvert one of the binary oppositions Western ideology uses to exert and reify its authority: self/other. *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and its sequel, *Parable of the Talents* (1998), tell the story of a young black woman, Lauren Oya Olamina, who is born with a peculiar neurological condition called 'the hyperempathy syndrome'. Even though the condition is delusional (*Sower* 9), it makes of Olamina a 'sharer' who shares other's physical sensations, be it a pain or pleasure. Hyperempathy, therefore, causes Butler's principal character to become a significantly different person living in a horrible world replete with various forms of violence and human cruelty.

Described as a theorist for cyborgs[44] (*Simians, Cyborgs* 173), Butler employs hyperempathy as a trope to present her own vision of cyborg subjectivities, propose new conceptions of difference, and offer new envisioning of the black female experience in particular. Quite interestingly, Lauren's gift and curse, a result of "My mother was taking—abusing—a prescription drug when she got pregnant with me. The drug was Paracetco" (102), renders her the perfect embodiment of a cyborg-figure who transgresses boundaries between self and other. Describing her impairment, Lauren writes: "I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel. Hyperempathy is what the doctors call an 'organic delusional syndrome' . . . It hurts, that's all I know. Thanks to Paracetco . . .the particular drug my mother chose to abuse before my birth killed her, I'm crazy. I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts" (*Sower* 12-13). It is this delusional syndrome, which uncovers a dynamic relationship between Lauren's self and others, that situates Lauren within the space of the border whereby she may acknowledge and understand her subjectivity beyond the binary opposition of self/other.

Like Haraway's cyborg, who questions and challenges fixed conceptions and definitions of subjectivity, Lauren's psychic condition disrupts dominant Western ideologies that have reduced black women's subjectivity to a site of stability. Through Lauren's unique ability, Butler vouchsafes her black heroine a malleable subjectivity that ultimately deconstructs the opposition between self and other, emphasising the shifting and provisional character of the boundaries separating them. Through Lauren's singular bodily sensations, the self shares with the other and the other eventually becomes embodied within the self. Patricia Melzer (2006) writes:

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[44] Haraway writes: "I am indebted . . .to writers like Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delany, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr, Octavia Butler, Monique Wittig, and Vonda McIntyre. These are our story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds. They are theorists for cyborgs" (173).

As a physical mechanism that prohibits the disconnection and alienation from others, sharing represents the painful and pleasurable process of crossing differences and actually experiencing the other's world beyond a mere willingness to understand it. Sharing blurs and shifts boundaries and discloses a stable, autonomous identity to be a myth—sharing becomes a symbol against the binary construction of self and other and thus constitutes a crucial metaphor for re-defining social relations in Butler's narratives. (*Alien Constructions* 11)

Endowing her protagonist with such powerful gift as hyperempathy, Butler allows Olamina to vehemently experience the other's world through a process of sharing that breaks and overcomes the myth of the unbridgeable gulf between self and other.

More importantly, it is while undergoing such experience that Lauren finds herself posited at a border space in which she emerges as a border subject that can neither be detached from her authentic self nor fully immersed in the other. Situated on the boundaries, Olamina would rather become a hybrid being blurring boundaries between self and other, "intertwining and conflating the opposites into a hybrid entity" (Aziz 228). Lauren, in this sense, recalls the powerful image of the cyborg that takes "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 150) to consequently make a "potent fusion" (154). The latter, argues Haraway, leads to a shattered, fragmented unity which resists the essentialising tendencies of a "natural matrix of unity" (157). Situating Lauren in such a position appears to resonate with one of the quintessential political concerns advocated by black feminists, which is the disruption of any notion of 'black woman' as unitary category.

In *Parable of Talents* (1998), Lauren articulates a cyborg subjectivity as a means for possible resistance to unitary subject position. Lauren's resistance to the essentialising tendencies

informing such position is best interpreted in relation to her experiencing multiple standpoints of experiences that give rise to multiple subjectivities. In other words, given that cyborg subjectivity is "multiply positioned" (Cadora 360), Lauren realises that she may not be able to fully understand and come to terms with her cyborg consciousness[45] unless she embraces a fragmented self that empowers her to form multiple subjectivities of multiple selves:

> Self is.
>
> Self is body and bodily
>
> Perception. Self is thought, memory,
>
> belief. Self creates. Self destroys. Self
>
> learns, discovers, becomes. Self
>
> shapes. Self adopts. Self invents its
>
> own reasons for being. (*Talents* 235)

As these lines suggest, Butler demonstrates the black female subject as a place of differences and contradictions. It also represents a site that marks out a multiplicity of complex sets of experience which cannot be represented as unified or stable. Haraway emphasises the agency of this situatedness, while assuming that "there is no 'place' for women . . . only geometries of difference and contradiction crucial to women's cyborg identities". For Lauren, if she learns how to embrace this situatedness and read the "webs of power" that constitute its geometries, she might recognise her cyborg subjectivity away from "a standpoint of 'identification', of a unitary self" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 170). And this is exactly what the former passage from *Talents* attempt to convey. Therefore, in depicting the black woman using the cyborg figure, Butler escapes essentialism

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[45] Drawing insights from what Chela Sandoval calls 'oppositional consciousness', Haraway defines 'cyborg consciousness' as "a kind of postmodernist identity constructed of otherness, difference, and specificity" (197).

through creating an alternative way to figure difference, which encourages readers to view differences and contradictions as an essential part of the 'self' and not something to be marginalised or prescribe limits against.

In fact, these few lines from Butler's *Talents* suggest multifold interpretations, which attests not only to Butler's consummate skill as a writer, but also to her profound exploration of the rich complexity of the black female subjectivity. First, as evidenced by her different and contradictory definitions of 'self', one may be able to discern that at this particular juncture the female protagonist gives up the idea of the complete and discrete self and adheres to Haraway's cyborgian 'knowing self'. Haraway defines the 'knowing self' as "the split and contradictory self . . . the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 193). Lauren's splitting seems to pertain intrinsically to Butler's opposition to the very limited positions black women have been assigned to, throughout their existence in the United States. But perhaps more importantly, it is the reiteration of the word 'self' that implies Lauren's rejection of black women's objectification as 'the Other', and enables her to fully interrogate a system of oppression that, argues black feminist activist Pauli Murray (1987), "draws much of its strength from the acquiescence of its victims, who have accepted the dominant image of themselves and are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness" (106).

Furthermore, cyborg subjectivity implies, according to Haraway, a sense of self that is "partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another" (193). This, of course, makes it impossible for cyborgs to have an immediate, direct, and unmediated form of access to their subjectivities. Accordingly, Haraway maintains that "We are not immediately present to ourselves" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 192). In this sense, while displaying considerably multifaceted ways

of defining her 'self', Lauren symbolises the cyborg as her 'self' is not immediately known to itself. As such, Butler wants to suggest that it is only through a multiplicity of experiences, both internal and external, that a black woman would become truly capable of recognising and cherishing her true, authentic black 'self', including her differences and contradictions. In other words, the lived experience is what black women should attend to as the only means by which they are able to gain knowledge about themselves.

And herein again lies Butler's black feminism. Lauren's prism about her cyborg 'self', though seemingly partial and complex in many ways, constitutes a resistant strategy that appears to share affinities with Patricia Hill Collins's black feminist standpoint theory. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins views Donna Haraway's concept of 'standpoint' or, 'subjugated knowledge'[46], as the most apt in expounding black women's experiences, since she deduces that "a Black women's standpoint is only one angle of vision", a "partial perspective" (*Black Feminist* 234). Put differently, Collins privileges partial views as they relate more to the heterogeneous experiences of black women, and characterises them as the perspective of the oppressed which doesn't yield "absolute truth" (235). She asserts that:

> I present Black in that African-American women have long struggled to find alternative locations and epistemologies for validating our own self-definitions. In brief, I examined the situated, subjugated standpoint of African-American women in order to understand Black feminist thought as a partial perspective on domination. (*Black Feminist* 234)

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[46] In the chapter, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Haraway tends to refer to knowledge produced by views of oppressed groups, especially women and women of colour, as subjugated knowledge, that is marked mainly by situatedness and partiality.

In this context, Lauren's partial view of her 'self' is but an attempt to speak "from its own standpoint" and share "its own partial, situated knowledge" (*Black Feminist* 270). Only here, can she make claim to and translate her lived experiences according to what Haraway would call 'the politics of epistemology', where "partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make . . . claims on people's lives" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 195). In so doing, it becomes evident that Butler, as a black feminist writer, attempts to articulate a clear denouncement of universalist notions and contextualisation of black female peculiarities.

Moreover, Butler prompts readers to consider the fact that, unless Olamina makes sense of the matrices of domination black women experience, can she produce valuable, if not complete, knowledge about the uniqueness of her black female subjectivity. Of course, it's Patricia Collins who coins the phrase 'matrix of domination'. A central claim made by this black feminist concept is that an interlocking web of oppression exists in a form of a 'matrix of domination' in which black women, in particular, not only experience but also resist multiple oppressions. Besides, Collins's concept foregrounds the idea that: "If power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity" (*Black Feminist*, 2000, 203). Given the complexity of Lauren's existence, Butler posits her protagonist in a moment of agency where she is able to resist and carve out her complex being within spaces of power and speak to black women's complex and heterogenous life realities.

In a similar vein, Haraway professes that what actually defines a cyborg existence is its complexity which opens up pluralistic understanding of one's life and subjectivity. She also maintains that, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of . . . permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 154). As the aforementioned lines from Butler's *Talents* demonstrate, it is clear that

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Lauren does indeed belong to a cyborg world in which she is not afraid to embody multiple subjectivities that voice out incompatible points of view: "Self creates. Self destroys" (*Talents* 235). Melzer maintains this argument while asserting that, "Butler conceptualizes multiple subjectivity as an element that has grown from fragmentation, displacement, and loss. In its contradictory makeup and often painful experiences, this multiple subjectivity creates spaces of disjunction that carry the potential for resistance" (*Alien Constructions* 67).

It is therefore safe to say that the peculiar ability of Butler's black female character, which leads her to experience a fragmented existence, is destined to be putatively indicative of and speak to, "the plurality of the black female experience" (Introduction: Public 16). It also accounts for a complex black female subjectivity which is "necessarily formed by multiple kinds of internal and external diversity and fragmentation" (Watkins 167). In this case, Lauren's articulation of a fragmented subjectivity reflects Butler's black feminist concern with depicting the experience of black women in the United States as one that is polyvalent in nature, in order to bear witness to "the simultaneity of oppressions in their lives" (*Changing* 10). On that account, this concern is expressed through a twofold preoccupation: Butler aims at representing the experience of black women as one which is marked by diversity and complexity; furthermore, such representation permits her to engage in a rhetoric of resistance to overturn essentialist implications of universalist conceptions of black women.

Jamaluddin Aziz (2012) also points out that the cyborg figure functions as a metaphor that mirrors the idea of "a destabilized and fragmented subject, i.e., ontologically uncertain, as a transgressive figure". When thinking about Lauren as embodying a hybrid fragmented subject, Lauren's transgressive self "may indicate a change of location of the Other that is also tantamount to the 'Othering' of self, which simultaneously challenges the existential definition of being"

(228). In this vein, the hyperempathic Lauren epitomises a transgressive figure which not only dismantles one of the deep-seated Western binaries, but also posits "the Otherness not outside the human body, but within it" (227). In the novel, there are multiple moments where the other appears indistinguishable from, if not an integral part of, the self. For instance, Lauren says, "I was eleven then, and I still bled through the skin when I saw someone else bleeding" (*Sower* 13). She also talks about another situation where hurting others causes her to hurt herself: "I felt every blow that I struck, just as though I'd hit myself" (*Sower* 13).

Apparently, the use of the motif of the 'hyperempathy syndrome' in Butler's fictional account is highly relevant for the discussion of the writer's treatment of being different and 'other' from the rest. Besides her race and gender, Lauren's hyperempathy is another marker of difference that cuts her off and 'others' her from the hegemonic norms of a patriarchal world which regards her as deviant. Initially unaware of the power of her difference and otherness, Lauren believes herself "the most vulnerable person I know", and chooses instead to remain reticent about her condition. She recites in a grievous tone, "There's a whole range of things we never even hint about outside the family. First among these is anything about my mother, my hyperempathy, and how the two are connected. To my father, the whole business is shameful" (*Sower* 12).

However, against a racist patriarchal system that leaves black women widely 'othered' and unaccounted for, Butler develops Lauren's subjectivity out of a nonbinary model of subject formation to disrupt the line between other/othered, as the black heroine engages in what AnaLouise Keating dubs 'tactical (re)naming', or the construction of a differentially situated subjectivity that deconstructs:

> oppositional categories from within . . . By disrupting the restrictive networks of classification that inscribe us as racialized, engendered subjects, there is an emergence of

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nonbinary models of subject formation, thus opening up psychic spaces where alterations . . . can occur . . . in order to resist self-reification and closure, the challenge has to be taken up every time a positioning occurs. ("(De)Centering the Margins?" 25)

In "Sings taken for Wonder" (1985), Homi Bhabha foregrounds the difference between being 'othered' and being 'other'. For him, whereas the former represents a situation of forced positioning, being 'other' is a space of self-definition and self-assertion. Indeed, Butler chooses to position her heroine as an 'other' to enable her assert her difference and define her subjectivity.

V.4. Butler's Political Utopia and the Metaphor of the Chimera:

As she lives in a dystopic[47] world in which "there isn't much pleasure around these days", Lauren's life becomes mostly overwhelmed by the pain and suffering she has to witness and endure every day. For that, Lauren's "organic delusional syndrome" has become so entirely derogated that even her father, a Baptist minister who would supposedly be compelled by his faith to appreciate empathy, fails to accept and value his daughter's unique difference. At a moment of defiance and distrust, Lauren refuses to submerge her difference into an oppressive adherence to patriarchal standards and looks askance at her father when he tells her, "'You can beat this thing. You don't have to give in to it'". She further adds, "He has always pretended, or perhaps believed, that my hyperempathy syndrome was something I could shake off and forget about" (*Sower* 11). Here we can say that Lauren's father may unequivocally be thought of as an epitome of patriarchal norms which deny and repress difference.

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[47] In "All that you Touch you Change: Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents", Patricia Melzer states that the utopian impulse that underlies Butler's oeuvre stands in dialectic relationship to a dystopian discourse and she asserts that "they are not merely contrasted but constitute each other" (35).

Her father's concern likely stems out from believing that his daughter's dis/ability would bring her, "a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts" (*Sower* 13), and therefore would become a potentially insurmountable hurdle in her struggle to survive a harsh environment where traits like hyperempathy are highly regarded as defective and deviant. Mostly grounded in the context of disability rhetoric, there are many interpretations implying that Lauren's hyperempathy is a "difficult and dangerous disability" (Schalk 175) to carry around because she exists in a dystopian space where "violence, poverty, and chaos have become the norm" (175) and anyone, therefore, can be subject to victimization. After a trip to a neighbouring church outside her "tiny, walled fish-bowl cul-de-sac community" (*Sower* 11), Lauren explains the reason why she avoids seeing the horrific insights she encounters on her way:

> If I don't look too long at old injuries, they don't hurt me too much. There was a naked little boy whose skin was a mass of big red sores; a man with a huge scab over the stump where his right hand used to be; a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs. A woman with a swollen, bloody, beaten face . . . I must have seemed jumpy. I glanced around like a bird, not letting my gaze rest on anyone longer than it took me to see that they weren't coming in my direction or aiming anything at me. (*Sower* 11)

Not only can Lauren's unique sensitivity be viewed as a disability, but throughout the course of the novel this condition proves incredibly transformative, enkindling possibility for more humane interactions during such ruthless times: "[S]he later on considers hyperempathy syndrome as an asset that could help people become more conscious and pay particular attention to the vulnerability and suffering of others". Lauren's vulnerability thereby comes to be "reconfigured as a capability" (Mehnert 210) rather than a problem, leading her to wonder, "But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain?

I've never thought of my problem as something that might do some good before, but the way things are, I think it would help. I wish I could give it to people. Failing that, I wish I could find other people who have it, and live among them" (*Sower* 102).

Significantly, it is the critic Jerry Phillips who, in his essay "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's 'Parable of the Sower'" (2002), understands Lauren's reconfigured capability as communicating a utopian political value. As a hyperempath, Lauren corporeally embodies the possibilities of feeling others' pain and suffering, and argues for the potentiality that hyperempathy "can serve a political and moral good", as she acknowledges "the ethical possibilities of feeling pain" (Wanzo 74). Being a 'sharer', Phillips argues, empowers Lauren to become "a person whose sense of self is phenomenologically bound up with the humanity of the other" (306). Lauren declares:

> If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things. They could kill if they had to, and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it. But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain? I've never thought of my problem as something that might do some good before, but the way things are, I think it would help. (*Sower* 115)

Considering such a realisation, Lauren presents a utopian vision of a radically different reality for a society on the brink of its final collapse. Mathias Nilges (2009) argues that the ideal upon which Lauren founds her utopian vision strongly projects Butler's "extraordinary ability to grasp the social complexities of the present and envision necessary political and social solutions in her narratives of the future" (1334). Indeed, Olamina seems to recognize the fact that by living in a world where sharing others' emotions and suffering becomes a norm instead of deviation, people

will eventually grow more empathic toward each other and will be able to harbour and promote a more egalitarian way of life.

In this regard, Lauren Olamina, and by implication the novelist herself, can be assumed as seeking to promote a life model that is based upon two ultimate norms, empathy and egalitarianism. With respect to such assumption, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu (2006) explains the resisting implications of such pursuit, arguing that "Lauren Olamina follows in the footsteps of Butler's other strong African American female protagonists who courageously seek new perspectives and solutions. These women reject patriarchal worldviews in favor of more inclusive, compassionate, egalitarian models of life" (681). With a slight difference in perspective, Dorothy Allison, in "The Future of Female: Octavia Butler's Mother Lode" (1990), reads Lauren as a mentor whose quest for a better world implies, in its very essence, pedagogical ends (473). Accordingly, we may say that Butler's black female protagonist seems to gain stature among the cult of "Black women mentors" (Shinn 204) who have long stood as "the civilising force in human society—the ones who teach both men and children compassion and empathy" (Allison 473).

In addition to her interesting pursuit and mentorship, Lauren's power is most highly associated with a cyborg consciousness. This is true, as Lauren's power is strongly linked to her brave quest for new perspectives and solutions that substantially correspond with cyborg politics. This correspondence is translated into "dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 154). The political work that Butler's principal character strives to advance is interpreted in her envisioning a reality which would pose a possible threat that might shake off hegemonic fetters. The dangerous possibility of Lauren's cyborg consciousness demonstrates a desire to banish the absolute difference between self and other. As this absoluteness disappears, the 'other' will ultimately cease to exist. In a similar

way, Phillips argues that having hyperempathy as a common trait will not only lead to the absence of the 'other', but will cause the 'other', which has been placed by hegemonic discourses as the opposite of self, to become a real attribute of oneself. Phillips, in this respect, comments, "[I]n a hyperempathetic world, the other would cease to exist as the ontological antithesis of the self, but would instead become a real aspect of oneself, insofar as one accepts oneself as a social being" (306).

It is worthwhile to mention that Butler's approach to utopia is, nonetheless, clearly articulated in her use of the 'chimera'[48] metaphor. It is also interesting to note that the novelist presents readers with a keen correlation that exists between the protagonist and Haraway's utopian notion of 'the chimera', which Haraway describes as "oppositional, *utopian*, and completely without innocence" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 150; emphasis added). Haraway contends that "By the late twentieth century . . . we are all chimeras . . . in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology, it gives us our politics" (150). Therefore, in order for Lauren to exist and perform a chimera politics, Butler envisages her a speculative world in which Lauren's utopian vision of building a community founded upon utopian ideals like inclusion, compassion, sympathy, and equity, combines a commitment to break down racial and gender boundaries with the celebration of diversity and change.

In fact, much of Butler's writing is praised for its unprecedented treatment of issues like gender and race as it reveals the "dynamic interplay of race and sex in futuristic worlds" ("Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine" 78), and unveils "the way in which the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of

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[48] In Greek mythology, the chimera is also presented as a border creature, whose fusion of human and animal parts renders it a hybrid being.

dominance and subordination'' (Wolmark 27). Like Donna Haraway, who discusses the need for a new "ironic political myth" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 149) that includes "the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender" as well as other utopian aspirations for a world without racial and gender-based domination (181), Butler provides in the Parable novels a thought-provoking context in which she introduces a complex futuristic exploration of gender and race and the essential role they play in the survival of her black female protagonist.

Early in *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren realises that her supernatural ability is not the thing that renders her vulnerable. What certainly renders her vulnerable is her gender. Of course, in a dystopian patriarchal society like Robledo, which Lauren considers as "a dying and backward place" (122) where "repression of women has become more and more extreme. A woman who expresses her opinions, 'nags,' disobeys her husband, or otherwise 'tramples her womanhood' and 'acts like a man,' might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out, or, worst case, she might be stoned to death or burned" (*Talents* 55), being a woman is definitely no easy thing to endure. Moreover, Lauren narrates other different acts of cruelty that most of her community's women have to witness as follows: "Some middle class men prove they're men by having a lot of wives in temporary or permanent relationships. Some upper class men prove they're men by having one wife and a lot of beautiful, disposable young servant girls. Nasty. When the girls get pregnant, if their rich employers won't protect them, the employers' wives throw them out to starve" (*Sower* 36).

In particular, Lauren is pointing to Richard Moss, one of Robledo's most distinguished upper-class men, who holds several wives, which to Lauren is but another facet of slavery[49]. Moss

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[49] In *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism* (2018), Shelley Streeby describes this kind of slavery as "sex slavery" (97). Also, Clara Agusti maintains that sex slavery and other forms of sexual exploitation are "inherent tendencies of a system that favors profit at the expense of human well-

has established his own religion inspired by "a combination of the Old Testament and historical West African practices". Moreover, Moss contends that God wants, "men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible … he can afford to pick up beautiful, young homeless women and live with them in polygamous relationships" (*Sower* 36). With kidnap, rape[50], murder, and coercive prostitution swirling and lurking outside the walls of Robledo, life looks even more desolate for women.

After the burning down of her gated community, which has been destroyed by the arsonists, and the murder of her family, Olamina determines to seek a new beginning in a more liberating place; a place "without walls" (*Sower* 51). In order for this to happen, she knows that being female and black will definitely stand against such an aspiration and preclude her opportunities to survive[51] beyond the walls of Robledo as the outside world is getting more perilous day by day. That's why she becomes so obsessed with and anxious about getting as much knowledge as she can about how to survive. As Rebecca Holden (1998) observes, "Butler's black female characters must navigate their survival in societies riddled with complex hierarchies of power, hierarchies based on differences in gender, race, species, and mental strength" (49). Fully aware of such

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being. Lauren Olamina, the female protagonist, slowly unfolds in her diary how society allows for the sexual exploitation of, particularly, black women" (351-352). Through Lauren's description, it is evident that slavery in Butler's future America still exists.

[50] Investigating issues of sexuality and gender in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Patricia Melzer comes to the conclusion that rape is the most prominent form of gender-specific experiences of violence against women. She further adds that Butler understands sexual violence against women as constituting a form of social and political control ("All That You Touch" 39).

[51] It is worth mentioning that, although survivalism is mostly associated with a white male tradition, Octavia Butler's discourse of survivalism in *Parable of the Sower* attempts to address "the conjunction of race, gender, and survivalism in ways that defy narratives which write black people out of this milieu" (Dunning187). Stephanie K. Dunning also observes that Butler's allusions to survivalism share striking similarities with "the tradition of the maroon in diasporic literature". She explains, "wilderness survival skills are a key feature of many escape narratives—from Harriet Tubman to Malidoma Some. Hence, Butler's references to survivalism as enabling an escape from Western civilization allude to the tradition of the maroon in diasporic literature. And successful marronage requires survivalist skills. Thus, I read Butler's novel as excavating a lost history of black survivalism that goes all the way back to slavery and colonialism throughout the diaspora" (187).

complicated hierarchies, Olamina even wants to make sure her followers adopt what she learnt as life-saving skills. Admonishing her childhood friend Joanne to trust her survival strategies, Lauren explains:

> I'm trying to learn whatever I can that might help me survive out there. I think we should all study books like these … I think we should make emergency packs—grab and run packs—in case we have to get out of here in a hurry … I think we should fix places outside where we can meet in case we get separated … Every time I go outside, I try to imagine what it might be to live out there without walls, and I realized I don't know anything. (*Sower* 85)

Yet, she later acknowledges that none of this will avail as long as she wanders California wilderness as a woman, and tells Joanne, "Nothing is going to save us. If we don't save ourselves, we're dead. Now use your imagination" (*Sower* 59).

Indeed, Lauren's relentless imagination rewards her graciously as it allows her come up with a shrewd survival tactic which in return seems to fulfil that Harawayan utopian dream of a world with no gender. In a pretty smart move, she disguises herself as a man. This allows the reader to observe that the vast majority of the oppression Lauren faces is due to her gender. That's why Butler, again, deems it requisite and necessary to explicitly situate her female character in a border space between two opposing genders, male and female. And of course, to a hegemonic worldview that has long worked on policing a strict and unbreachable line between man and woman, Lauren's transgressive act of dressing like a man is openly challenging as it blurs gender boundaries. By hosting a 'chimera' character who appears to be part of Haraway's "utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 150), not only does Butler put her disguised protagonist critically into a stark opposition to the norms of Christian America, but

even more strikingly, Butler's future America seems to suggest that social constructs of normative gender and prescriptive gender roles are no longer authoritative.

For Lauren, however, satisfying Butler's futuristic vision will not happen until the transgression is complete. In other words, in order for her to survive the dystopian world that "despite being far into the future at the time of the novels' publication and displaying advances in areas such as technology and space travel, clearly continues to subscribe to patriarchal gender roles" (Moreno 200), Lauren needs more than dressing like a man. She rather should transcend gender boundaries by passing as male and perform masculinity. As a matter of fact, before she resorts to disguise, Olamina demonstrates an early awareness of the complexities of gender dimensions in American culture, while she asserts her name as "androgynous, in pronunciation at least—Lauren sounds like the more masculine Loren". She also thinks that since she seems "tall and strong", with "man's chest and hips" (*Sower* 195), and her body is "big enough and androgynous looking to get away with it" (*Talents* 337), she might depend on her androgynous-looking appearance to disguise herself as a man. This act, she believes, will undoubtedly decrease the possibility of her being subject to the violence that she might encounter while roaming the dangerous highways north. At this juncture, it is becoming clear that Lauren is identifying her gender in a nonbinary way that expresses a total rejection of the gendered position assigned to her within the patriarchal structure.

Furthermore, before embarking on her journey, Olamina asks Zahra, one of the surviving members of Robledo, to help her "go out posing as a man" (*Sower* 127) by cutting her hair for her. Zahra thinks that her friend's decision is "weird", because she has never encountered or heard of a woman who wants to "play man" (*Sower* 158). With the word "play" here, Butler is not suggesting that Lauren is purporting to be a man, rather she is passing and arguably taking on a

masculine gender identity through these enactments, or what Judith Butler would call 'performance'. According to Judith Butler, gender "is fluid and not monolithic and static. Viewing our gender identity as a performance gives us many ways in which we can "do" and "undo" gender" (qtd. in Battaglia 306). Throughout her journey, we find Lauren 'doing' and 'undoing' gender as a way to survive. Besides, Octavia Butler is certainly making a critical point here as she tends to see gender from a performance perspective that challenges and opposes the essentialist one. She is referring to the idea that gender should be viewed as fluid and not exclusively determined by biological features. In other words, it is the set of 'enactments' or 'performances' which decides gender roles and collapses the gender distinction. Judith Butler further explains this point by telling us that:

> [B]ecause there is no prediscursive self—that is, there is no "true self," no "core self," no "authentic self" that exists outside or prior to the discourse that brings it into existence— and there is no self that is not always already a product of the social, there is then no body that can preexist the cultural inscription of that (gendered) body. In this way, gender (as well as sex) is performed. That is, gender is not something one has, it is not something one is; instead it is something that one does. Gender is something that is enacted; it is an enactment. (qtd. in Battaglia 306)

While disregarding the significance of performance in defining Lauren's gender, Patricia Melzer describes Lauren's strategy as "cross-dress", and maintains that Butler contrives this tactic as a narrative device that critically unveil "the social constructions of gender roles in U.S. society, where being recognized as a woman can be life threatening" ("All That You Touch" 93). Yet, it is Micah Moreno (2020) who interprets the character of Lauren as a 'gender passer', and identifies her behaviour as 'gender passing', asserting that, by resorting to this idea, Butler's Parable novels

attempt to depict gender as "an ambiguous and amorphous human characteristic" to suggest that "the gender binary is an outdated social construction with little relevance in a modern society" (196). Therefore, now that we can say that Octavia Butler's 'chimera' embodies Haraway's utopia dream of post-gender world.

In addition to imagining a world without gender boundaries, Butler's utopian impulse is driven by a desire to transcend racial differences too. This desire, I argue, is implied in the spiritual journey Lauren undertakes as she leads a group of people into what they regarded as their ideal Earthseed community of Acorn on the hills of northern California. Lauren's new belief system, Earthseed, is founded on two motives, change and diversity. Despite all the suffering, personal loss, and deprivation they have endured, Earthseed has been the compass that guides Lauren's followers to trust and "look out for one another" (*Talents* 223), in order to surmount the dangers and hardships of the journey.

Before the onset of their trip, readers discern that Butler's futuristic America is still marked by racial tensions as Zahra, one of the few survivors from the destruction of Robeldo, points out to the complexities that surround interracial relationships in a culture struggling with racial and ethnic problems: "Mixed couples catch hell whether people think they're gay or straight" (*Sower* 157). Despite the fact that racial difference may bring Lauren's group to the verge of destruction, Lauren is still emphasising on diversity as the key to their survival. She promulgates:

Embrace diversity.

Unite—

Or be divided,

robbed,

ruled,

killed

By those who see you as prey.

Embrace diversity

Or be destroyed. (*Sower* 176)

Lauren was only fifteen when she started crystallising her ideas about Earthseed. We find that notions like adaptability, community and partnership are central to the success of this spiritual system whose destiny, hopes Lauren, "is to take root among the stars" (*Sower* 199). Lauren also asserts that, "Earthseed is about preparing to fulfill the Destiny. It's about learning to live in partnership with one another in small communities, and at the same time, working out a sustainable partnership with our environment. It's about treating education and adaptability as the absolute essentials that they are" (*Talents* 322). Accordingly, Earthseed stands, for Lauren, as a moment of resistance to oppressive structures that have torn their people apart, and an opportunity for her followers to gain control over their lives as it turns them into agents of change gathered and empowered by a nurturing sense of community. On this last point, Peter Stillman (2003) explains that Lauren's community members are, ""potential" (*Talents* 361), with all the openness and possibility that word implies. Standard differentiating attributes— race, gender, age, class, sex, religion, marital and familial status, sexual preference, personal history: Earthseed breaks these down, ignores them, reshapes them and breaks them down again" (28).

Through Earthseed and her model of an ideal community that lies in its portrayal of what Jerry Phillips calls "an experiment in enlightened communalism (a communalism that transcends differences in race, class, gender, and sexuality)" (309), Olamina appears to fall squarely within the feminist definition of women's agency that has been set forth by Audré Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (1984). Lorde argues that "The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to

identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (123). In this spirit, we find that Lauren provides her own definition of power[52] through creating the new pattern of Earthseed, whose ultimate goal is not to forge unity through sameness, but openness to difference and otherness. In so doing, Butler's utopian impulse ostensibly retains its significance by anchoring itself within Harawayan tradition of resistance against "the imperative to recreate the sacred image of the same" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 378–379). Describing her multiracial, multicultural community, Lauren echoes such imperative as saying: "We're you name it: Black, White, Latino, Asian, and any mixture at all – the kind of thing you'd expect to find in a city. The kids we've adopted and the ones who have been born to us think of all the mixing and matching as normal. Imagine that" (*Talents* 41).

V.5.The Cyborg and its Complicated Configuration of Black Mother Figure:

Seemingly, Lauren's cyborg subjectivity is subversive and transgressive in subtle, manifold ways. My previous analysis would seem to confirm that Olamina's unique ability of 'sharing' is so intriguing and compelling possibility, which makes it subject to a vast array of

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[52] In "Interview: Author Octavia Butler Talks about Her Books and Her Writing Career," Butler confesses to Juan Williams that, "[O]ne of the reasons I got into writing about power was because I grew up feeling that I didn't have any, and therefore, it was fascinating". She adds, "I find myself still interested in power relationships and still writing about them, not so much any longer because I worry about not having power myself, but just because they are part of what it means to be human". In addition, many critics, including Patricia Melzer in this stance, have celebrated Butler's ingenuity in treating the theme of power through the intricacies of race and gender. Melzer, for instance, argues that what primarily constitutes Butler's fiction is the notion of power which inextricably linked to a utopian desire. In her discussion of how the Earthseed novels represent utopian possibilities, points out that, "the struggle of power relations is at the center of [Butler's] writing and informs the manifestations of the utopian desire that run through her narratives" ("All that you touch" 46). Ruth Salvaggio also describes Butler's narratives as "stories of power" which deal primarily with conflicts between ''enslavement and freedom, control and corruption, survival and adjustment" ("Octavia Butler" 6). In addition, Sandra Y. Govan observes that "the core at which all comes together in Butler's universe is the delineation of power" (82), and highlights the interesting similarities between Butler's representation of the theme of power and Foucault's critical definition of this notion, asserting that: "Power . . . is clearly at the center of Butler's novels. But illuminating that central core are the threads, cords, ropes, and cables wrapped around it. Power relationships are detailed by the pattern of conflicts animating Butler's characters; by their distinctive markings, especially those of her women; by the shaped plots and structural devices; and by the shared thematic concerns connecting all the novels" (83).

interpretations. One of these, I argue, is that the ambivalent experience of feeling both pain and pleasure, that Lauren evokes, fuels a stance highly reminiscent of the complex image of the black slave mother having ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards her white master, who forces their children into a life of bondage. Unable to verbalise or even make sense of her thoughts and feelings, the slave mother finds herself too physically debilitated to resist, or even worse, too emotionally battered and scared to think of flight. She eventually becomes a tragic victim stripped of her agency. However, through her discerning prism, Butler doesn't want to allow such figuration to perpetuate and she, instead, opens a new space for the reader to consider new ways of thinking about the 'black mother figure' and 'black motherhood'.

Interestingly, Donna Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg will, again, provide a medium for Butler to contest such image that is actually a product of racist and sexist constructions of black women and black motherhood in specific. By crafting a black mother character who is attached to her utopian desires, spiritual mission, and her position as a leader of a community of her own creation, more than she is to her child, Butler is presumably approaching motherhood and the function of mothering in opposition to:

1- the set of attributes that have already been delineated by patriarchal culture to define black motherhood, or what Patricia Hill Collins simply calls the controlling images of black womanhood.

2- the absence of the black mother figure and the invisibility of the mother image which "has been so largely absent in Western narrative, not because she is unnarratable, but because her subjectivity has been violently, and repeatedly, suppressed" (Brandt 7).

Reading the books, you will notice that Olamina never exercises her motherhood in terms of a maternal identity that is prescribed by the dominant patriarchal culture, since she fails in

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fulfilling the nurturing role her biological daughter, Larkin Beryl Ifa Olamina, expects her to practice. Indeed, we find that Butler begins her *Parable of the Talents* with the resentful Larkin, later named by her adoptive family as Asha Verre, whose feelings for her mother have been made callous because of her mother's abandonment and neglect. In a grumpy voice, Larkin says:

> THEY'LL MAKE A GOD of her.
>
> I think that would please her, if she could know about it. In spite of all her protests and denials, she's always needed devoted, obedient followers—disciples —who would listen to her and believe everything she told them. And she needed large events to manipulate. All gods seem to need these things.
>
> Her legal name was Lauren Oya Olamina Bankole. To those who loved her or hated her, she was simply "Olamina."
>
> She was my biological mother.
>
> She is dead.
>
> I have wanted to love her and to believe that what happened between her and me wasn't her fault. I've wanted that. But instead, I hated her. (*Talents* 7)

With Larkin carrying such bitter hatred toward her mother, Butler is attempting to provide an unusual account of mother-daughter relationship which can be explained through the subversive potential of the cyborg.

In the light of Haraway's cyborgism, being a woman seems to be "given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 29). Inhabiting the role of a cyborg mother, Lauren, however, rejects that conventional feature of her female self which supposedly excels at mothering with its

metaphoric extensions. She asserts to one of her followers, Grayson Mora, that: "Not if all you know how to do is take care of babies and cook" (*Sower* 50). Then, Lauren shook her head and adds, "You know much more than that" (50). Frances Smith Foster (1982) observes that Butler's black female characters are usually depicted as "healers, teachers, artists, mothers. Yet, they are not the traditional literary Earth Mothers or Culture Bearers. They exercise direct authority. They excel in a variety of careers; motherhood is rarely their major occupation" (47). For Lauren, black mothers know more than just cooking and caring for their children. We may therefore deduce that Butler is offering a different dimension to the meaning of black motherhood which might assume subversive and disruptive possibilities that would not please, and definitely tease, the ideal image of motherhood as established by patriarchal cultural norms.

While focusing on the maternal dimension of *Xenogenesis*[53], Éva Federmayer argues that Butler's fictional cosmos does not secure a "representation of a feminist utopia with nurturing mothers" (104). The same argument can be applied to the Parable novels as Butler uses a cyborg mother who goes against the grain of a body of conventional representations of the ideal black motherhood. According to DoVeanna S. Fulton (2012), a new representation of the character of black mother starts to prevail in contemporary African American literature where literary portrayals of black motherhood does not reflect "the nurturing, supportive, stoic Black mother of American popular imagination" (Fulton 162). Seemingly, Butler's black mother, Lauren, seems to fit into such representation.

From a black feminist standpoint, we understand that Butler is creating a character whose unusual performance of motherhood may indicate a conscious resistance against one of Collins's controlling images of black womanhood. Collins (1990) claims that "the dominant ideology of the

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[53] Also known as *Lilith's Brood*, Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy

slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (70-71). Among these images, which Collins considers more complicated than acting as simple stereotypes, are the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, and the Jezebel. Collins further explains that these intensely negative images have been generated by "certain assumed qualities" which have been "attached to Black women" and how they have been used to "justify oppression". "From the mammies, Jezebels, and breeder women of slavery," Collins (1990) states, "to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, the nexus of negative stereotypical images applied to African-American women has been fundamental to Black women's oppression". (*Black Feminist* 7) In this sense, one is able to infer that Butler constructs black motherhood as site of resistance to the image of "breeder women of slavery" in particular.

In addition, we learn that Butler's cyborg mother drops the role of the biological mother in favour of what she considers as a higher supreme purpose, that of becoming the matriarch of Earthseed community. Patricia Melzer agrees with this argument, claiming that Butler's mother characters are meant to challenge the "white stereotypical ideal of the nurturing, self-sacrificing mother within patriarchal society" ("All That You Touch" 40) and they are; instead, more likely to show commitment to the survival of the entire community, rather than to the survival of their own offspring. This is evidenced in Larkin's scornful attitude toward her mother's strong attachment with Earthseed communtiy as she proclaims: "If my mother had created only Acorn, the refuge for the homeless and the orphaned…If she had created Acorn, but not Earthseed, then I think she would have been a wholly admirable person" (*Talents* 63-4). Being raised in the Christian

American church that ingrains normative gender roles, Larkin is unable to get her mother's purpose and rather thinks that she "sacrifices" her for some sort of a utopian desire. Larkin narrates:

> I'm not entirely sure why I've spent so much time looking at my mother's life before I was born. Perhaps it's because this seems the most human, normal time of her life. I wanted to know who she was when she was a young wife and soonto-be mother, when she was a friend, a sister, and, incidentally, the local minister… She sacrificed us for an idea. And if she didn't know what she was doing, she should have known—she who paid so much attention to the news, to the times and the trends. As an adolescent, she saw her father's error when he could not see it—his dependence on walls and guns, religious faith, and a hope that the good old days would return. Yet what more than that did she have? If her good days were to be in the future on some extra-solar world, that only made them more pathetically unreal. (*Talents* 137-138)

From this passage, we can discern that Larkin's anger and bitterness are mainly caused by the belief that Earthseed deprives her of her mother's presence, and she eventually becomes envious against "the child" that has superseded her in her natural right. In fact, on several occasions, we find Larkin referring to her mother's community of Acorn as "other, best-loved child"; she even reveals to the readers that Lauren imagines names to its members: "like a girl thinking up names for imaginary children that she hopes to have someday. There was a Hazelnut, a Pine, a Manzanita, a Sunflower, an Almond . . ." (*Talents* 156).

What is worth pondering, however, is Larkin's description of her mother's followers as "clones" (*Talents* 156) which allows us to deduce that Butler's configuration of the black mother figure is one that is based on replication rather than reproduction. Thus, according to her unique approach to motherhood, Lauren seems to espouse and perform a "Cyborg replication" that "is

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uncoupled from organic reproduction" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 150). This way, Lauren is like a cyborg who "does not dream of community on the model of the organic family" (151), but rather, as one who dreams of a community which resists hierarchical domination that is implicated even in the family model, and whose members would all be of equal worth. Moreover, it becomes clear that, in imagining a cyborg black mother who prefers to have clones clinging to her belief system rather than having biological children, Butler is rejecting the idea of forced breeding which has been associated with the experience of black slave women. According to Stephanie Li (2010), the perpetuation of enslavement in the United States has depended on the bodies of black women who "were forced to act as mothers to the institution of slavery" through forced breeding (23). In this sense, we may deduce that Butler's cyborg motherhood acts a subversive site of resistance to such remote fact of history.

Dorothy Allison, among others, claims that, in spite of holding strong feminist values and identities, Butler's mother characters seem to be weakened, and their values dampened, by their attitudes toward their children and family. She maintains:

> I love Octavia Butler's women even when they make me want to scream with frustration. The problem is not their feminism; her characters are always independent, stubborn, difficult, and insistent on trying to control their own lives. What drives me crazy is their attitude: the decisions they make, the things they do in order to protect and nurture their children—and the assumption that children and family always come first. (Allison 471)

Despite the criticisms levelled against Butler's fictional mothers, this assertion definitely does not hold true for Lauren whose practice of a different kind of motherhood, cyborg motherhood, enables Butler to counteract and even transcend derogatory, racist ideas about, and images of black

motherhood prescribed by the dominant culture, through elevating her mother character to the position of the matriarch of the Earthseed community.

Moreover, Lauren's choice to practice a cyborg motherhood and become a matriarch of community aligns with a politicised coalitional subjectivity which, "marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" (156). The sense of affinity and political kinship, Haraway speaks of here, denotes that cyborgs find meaning in a politicised coalitional identity which implies that they are not related to each other by blood but by choice (*Simians, Cyborgs* 155). In this sense, it is safe to deduce that Earthseed community members are like cyborgs whose subjectivities emerge out of a 'political kinship' and their alliance offers a concrete example of a cyborg affinity group.

V.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have turned my attention to look into how a black feminist science-fiction writer uses the abundant genre of speculative fiction in rendering the multiplicity and complexity of the black female experience. Different from Naylor and Morrison, Octavia E. Butler constructs a speculative geography that addresses a remarkable reimagination of the black female experience of marginality with resistance through Haraway's cyborg subject, who dwells in a palpable border.

As a black feminist science-fiction writer, Butler asserts, in many occasions, that it has been a big challenge for her to writer in traditionally white male dominated genre. Because most contemporary black women writers tend to write fiction, the interviewers have kept asking Butler about the reasons making her choose science fiction instead of fiction, she simply replies that she resorts to this genre because of, "The freedom of it; it's potentially the freest genre in existence" ("Black Scholar" 14). Like any other black woman, Butler experiences multiple oppressions

mainly because of her race and gender. She reflects on this fact when she once explains why the theme of power dominates her fictional worlds, stating: "I began writing about power because I had so little" (qtd. in Wolmark 29). Indeed, for Butler, marginalisation and oppression strip black women of power, that's why the black science-fiction writer exhibits an early consciousness of such complicated experience to contemplate new ideas that would help her explore issues of how to resist marginality, racism, and gender-based oppression in speculative worlds.

What is actually remarkable about Butler's science fiction is its demonstration of strong black heroines who refuse to be harnessed to traditional ideologies of race and gender. This novelist shapes black heroines who definitely do not conform to conventional expectations. This is so tellingly palpable in the way Butler's Parable novels envision a radically different conception of black female subjectivity that challenges roles like, "the traditional literary Earth Mothers or Culture Bearers" (Foster 47), and chooses instead to articulate agency as well as exercise a kind of a direct authority over its representation.

In an attempt to emphasise the multiplicity of the black female experience and complexity of black women's subjectivities, *Parables* display Butler's refusal to posit a singular and determinate subjectivity for her black heroine. In the process, the black feminist science-fiction author employs Lauren's unique syndrome of hyperempathy to promote her political utopian vision of a world where the black female protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina fulfils the Harawayan dream of a genderless world; a world where gender-based oppression of women doesn't exists; a world where the 'Other' ceases to exist and difference shall be accepted and embraced as integral to the 'self'. We actually find that Butler's black heroine acting like Donna haraway's chimera to eventually find herself posited like a border subject that becomes free of race and gender strictures.

Like a cyborg, Lauren succeeds in transforming the marginal space of the border into a site of resistance and liberation, as she manages to exist between her 'self' and 'other' as well as liberate herself from a unitary, conventional subjectivity, to forge instead a malleable subjectivity of neither one, nor the other. Furthermore, the multiplicity and, sometimes contradiction, of experiences she embodies are meant to challenge and subvert the dominant discourse that reduces the rich complexity of black women's experiences to a site of stability. Also, the making of a new belief system that embraces diversity and change constitutes another act of resistance and liberation that can be understood through Donna Haraway's cyborgism. The multiracial texture of Lauren's community represents a site of resistance to and liberation from, "the imperative to recreate the sacred image of the same" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 378–379).

Besides, by crafting a black female character who incarnates ambivalence corporeally, Butler sheds interesting light on the nature of the historical experience that combines black women slaves with ambivalence and offers an alternative account that disrupts Western expectations of the black woman as indecisive and passive to initiate any action. Through the character of Olamina, Butler introduces us to an entirely different dimension of motherhood as this black female character helps Butler strip the image of the black mother of its passivity to ultimately invest with a new sense of voice and agency. Indeed, her practice of 'cyborg motherhood' goes against the grain of a body of conventional representations of black motherhood. Among these is what Collins puts as "breeder women of slavery" (Black Feminist 7). In Parables series, Lauren doesn't seem to perform the usual role of biological mothers; she instead prefers to align herself with Harway's proposed model of cyborg motherhood by caring for the members of her community instead of her own daughter, Larkin.

General Conclusion

> The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories.
>
> —Aritha van Herk.

In this dissertation I have grappled with the issue of contemporary black American women's fiction as a space of writing that is permeated with resistance against the marginalisation and oppression black women have faced in the U.S. Having done so, I have arrived to the conclusion that, in spite of the enormous, overwhelming pressures to suppress and marginalise their literary tradition, voices of contemporary black women writers like Toni Morrison's, Gloria Naylor's and Octavia Butler's do reach us, impelling us to attend to the singularity and power of their literary imagination as well as their virtuosity in rendering the rich complexity of the black female experience in their narratives.

As the first chapter attempts to discuss, since their writings have been ignored, obfuscated, and generally relegated to a peripheral position, mainly because they have been greeted with intense hostility from black male critics and reviewers, it has been therefore worth paying particular attention to the story of black women writers' experience with the margin in order to understand how this space comes to constitute such a catalytic agent in sparking the birth of a new breed of contemporary black American women writers whose contributions have inevitably helped expand and reshape the American literary canon. I have found that what actually distinguished this new breed of literary voices from their predecessors is that, whereas the latter accepted to remain silent, the former refused to have their works treated as marginally as their lives. Indeed, apart from early black female authors like Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lorraine Hansberry, a few black American female literary figures have been vastly known, for they were doomed to be part of a silenced literary tradition. However, from late 1960s onward,

something really has started to move at the margin of mainstream literature as the American literary scene was being swept by a fervent wave of black women writers who resisted being silenced and created an unprecedented abundance of powerful texts that have made significant interventions in the world of fiction.

Braving the aura of silence constitutes one of the major elements in shaping the politics of contemporary black women writers. Moreover, the intellectual conceptualisation of their writing has also led me to understand that what underlies such 'politics' must be viewed as a collective effort exerted and sustained by black women writers and critics alike. The rich proliferation of black American women's literature in the contemporary period has been hailed, celebrated, and touted by black female critics and theorists, whose rise is equally remarkable and whose comments palpably record a sense of the momentous that mark the newly emerging black female literary tradition. In 1985, Hortense Spillers announced that, "the community of black women writing in the United States now can be regarded as a vivid new fact of national life" (249), and in 1990 Joanne Braxton declared plainly and forthrightly, "Black women writers have arrived" (xxii). According to Braxton, the years leading up to 1990 constituted both a "coming of age" and a "rebirth" (xxi), while Morrison, interviewed in 1985[54], cherished such rebirth as "a marvelous beginning"; "a real renaissance" (Taylor-Guthrie 213). Barbara Christian made a statement that same year that black women have, "revitalized the American novel" ("Trajectories" 185), and Spillers claimed that, "the sheer proliferation of the work" required revision and re-examination of the American literary canon (251). As early as 1983 Stephen E. Henderson affirmed that with

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[54] Morrison was interviewed by Gloria Naylor in 1985 and the interview first appeared in *Southern Review,* then it was reprinted in *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (1994), a book edited by Danille Taylor-Guthrie.

the advent of black-American women's writing, "our literature made a quantum leap toward maturity and honesty" (*Black Women Writers* xxiv).

One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that the intensity of contemporary black women's literary production must be seen, I believe, to reflect the intensity of black women writers' deep consciousness regarding the complex, marginal positionality they have been assigned to within society, the academy, and the literary canon. Indeed, the contemporary period in the history of black women's literature presents a sustained account of the fictional engagement with topics of greater and more authentic concern about their own lives as marginalised black women. What induces such engagement to prevail is the assertion of a distinctive black female literary aesthetic that deliberately focuses on black women's lives and the particularity of their experiences which have been rendered invisible mainly by women's early feminist activism and the Black Arts Movement's masculinist rhetoric. For that reason, a new consciousness has started to unfold and evolve among contemporary black women writers, arising out of a distinctively black and feminine awareness that has emerged primarily to create a new sensibility based on the belief that only a black woman is able to speak out the range of black women issues and represent adequately the black female experience in literary spaces. In this sense, contemporary black women writers have since become so much preoccupied with the acutely self-conscious quest for calling attention to the diversified and specific contexts of black women's lives.

Reflecting upon this acute preoccupation is the body of work of a wide range of black feminists who have devoted considerable attention on the examination of black women writers' multiple responses, generated mainly by a sort of multiple consciousness, to the multiple oppressions that have long been affecting and shaping black women's realities. Having considered the ideas of critics like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, this research seeks to probe how the

space of the margin constitutes the main source from which black women, in general, have created a unique perspective on their experiences and developed, from the darkest corners of this space, an undeniable culture of resistance. This is a culture which, according to Collins, black women have developed to assist them resist the multiple forms of dehumanisation that have arisen out of the multiple oppressions which black women have been forced to encounter.

In this study, I demonstrate that contemporary black women writers have played a significant part in the making of what Collins celebrates as 'culture of resistance'. Indeed, the writers selected for discussion seem to create black female characters who embrace the margin, and they do so with a spirit of resistance. Considering the ways in which they present the different fictional renditions of their black heroines' experiences of marginality and resistance, Morrison, Naylor, and Butler seem to make an unquestionable interference coupled with an undeniable force in shaping that spirit. Indeed, examining the peculiar standpoints of these black women writers on the black female experience of marginality, which they themselves gain from what Patricia Hill Collins dubs 'peculiar marginality', provides the study with a different reading approach that comes to look at the space of the margin as an intrinsic feature of the black female experience in America.

Important to support the aforementioned reading approach is the use of an interdisciplinary research which leads us to understand that, according to the fictional insights of Morrison, Naylor, and Butler, the margin can be viewed as not only a space of deprivation, oppression, and inferiority, but as a space which black women can dwell in and recast into a site of self-assertion, subversion and agency. Using such an approach, I also discover that these black female novelists succeed in creating a unique vintage point afforded and nurtured essentially by the very marginal position they have been assigned to. From the margin, this research demonstrates, Toni Morrison, Gloria

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Naylor, and Octavia E. Butler compose stories, though in different ways, of strong and defiant black women who embrace the margin and, more interestingly, stress on its power as a site of resistance.

Adopting an interdisciplinary study also propels me to infer yet another significant conclusion which this dissertation recommends for further research. Since the explosion of literature by contemporary black American women appears to coincide with the rise of the so-called phenomenon of the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences, as both seem to happen by 1960's onward, the spatial representations of the black female experience displayed in Morrison's *Paradise*, Naylor's *Mama Day*, and Butler's Parable novels, must not be looked at as a coincidence as well. In fact, I strongly believe it is no accident that contemporary black American women writers have become more interested in treating issues related to black women lives from spatially-oriented perspectives, after they might have read or at least heard about works by spatial thinkers like Michel Foucault or Edward Soja, for instance.

The four novels of three contemporary black women writers examined here reveal how they reshape the space of the margin, how they create new definitions of black female women who are not trapped within spaces of oppression and domination, and they even give new meaning to the black female experience. Since the main focus of these black women novelists is placed upon the black female subject matter in relation with the space of the margin and resistance, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand it. In so doing, my primary concern is not to dismiss or overlook the range of creative intersectional interpretations that have studied black women's writings from race and gender oriented critical perspectives, but to accentuate the complex nature of what this research chooses to call black women's geographies that encompass black female experiences which cannot be defined wholly or only in relation to fixed categories.

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This dissertation shows that what Morrison crafts as a liminal Convent, what Naylor constructs as a heterotopic island, and what Butler envisions as a border space, all appear to function as spaces of marginality with an inherent potential of resistance. In the process, a great reliance is placed upon different spatial perspectives to understand each writer's act of transforming these marginal spaces into sites where there are nearly unlimited opportunities afforded to black female characters seeking to define themselves on their own terms. As I have anticipated at the beginning of my research, the interdisciplinarity of the current dissertation offers me the chance to examine the issue at stake by exploring a diversity of spatial perspectives belonging to different fields of study, in order to be able to demonstrate how the space of the margin can be transformed into a site of resistance. This process of exploration leads me to discover that such conceptualisation of the margin is not a typically black feminist appropriation, as I find that the margin is also discussed as a site of resistance in anthropological, spatial and postcolonial studies, social theory, and poststructuralist feminist discourse. Indeed, I come to realise that what the anthropologist Victor Turner, the social theorist Shmuel Eisenstadt, and the postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha term 'liminality', what Michel Foucault defines as 'heterotopia', and what the poststructuralist feminist Donna Haraway views as the 'border', all represent spaces of margin with a great, strong potential to morph into sites of resistance. Having provided the rich tapestry of such diverse theorisations attests, therefore, to the margin's multifaceted poetics of resistance.

Of course, the impetus behind choosing to undertake an interdisciplinary approach to read the novels I have dealt with, responds and attends directly to the complexity of the black female experience as well as the intricacy of the fictional geographies of these novels. Therefore, I can say that this dissertation is, quintessentially, an effort to highlight the complexities in contemporary

black women novelists' literary imaginations which, I believe, spring naturally from the intricacies innate to black women experiences. Having argued that the plurality within the black female experience in America have made it difficult for black women writers and intellectuals alike to create a singular response, I want to show that any simple approach to black women writers' treatment of issues related to this experience falls short of capturing its diversity as well as the range of black women writers' vision of it. That's why, choosing to rather rely on an intricate approach that focuses on the intersection of the black female subject with space and resistance, appears to me as one of the most effective reading strategies one wish to employ in order to shape a poignant perspective of black women writers' complicated renditions of the black female experience with the margin.

To support such an argument, I have selected four novels which tackle the complex interplay between the black female experience of marginality with the issue of resistance in diversified ways just for the sake of asserting that there have been, indeed, a plurality of imaginative responses to the plurality within the black female experience in writings by contemporary black women. The last three chapters of the dissertation have attempted to explore four different novels by three different black female novelists whose main objectives appear to centre around: asserting a specifically black female experience, disclosing the different mechanisms of oppression, and expressing a strong desire to embrace and celebrate the margin as a site of resistance.

Though in crucially different approaches, each of Morrison, Naylor, and Butler constructs a fictional geography in which a brave black female protagonist engages in acts of resistance, in an attempt to affirm that her position of marginality is a source of empowerment and agency. In *Paradise*, Morrison's women of the Convent reside in a marginal place which they turn into a

liminal site of resistance and empowerment, as it allows them become active agents of their transformation and liberation. However, I notice that the experience of Morrison's female characters with oppression is quite different from those depicted in Naylor's and Butler's works. *Paradise* tells a story where black men and black community are the oppressors of black women. With a visionary and caustic criticism, Morrison, in her attempt to dramatize what many black male writers and critics might consider as an audacious account, makes both of her male and female characters undergo liminal experiences in which oppression seems to be doing more harm to those causing it. Such keen insight into one of the more shameful facets of the history of black women's experience compels Morrison to frame a narrative that subverts the traditional view of the marginal spaces occupied by black women as spaces of oppression.

In *Paradise*, Morrison's act of subversion is materialised in the Convent. The novelist creatively reworks this marginal space to become a liminal site that enables her heroines to act like Victor Turner's edgewomen, as they succeed in creating a *communitas* which runs in stark contrast to the oppressive forces underlying the dominant structure of the town of Ruby. This success and their resistance can be discerned from the way Morrison experiments with the discrepant possibilities of liminality, being both restrictive and liberating. Ruby's liminality becomes a debilitatingly restrictive space to its townsfolk. Based on Shmuel Eisenstadt's view of liminal spaces, Ruby exemplifies a geography of power where liminality is a space of confinement and restriction. Ruby's restrictive liminality is the outcome of its upholding of an oppressively rigid structure that barely straddles its existence between a dangerously idealised past and a palpably tenuous present. We become aware of such precarious existence when Ruby's black patriarchs remain captive to the dangerous memory of their grandfathers' 'Disallowing', which turns their

community into a stringent, oppressive place imposing certain patriarchal and racial limits that tenuously provide the operative dynamic of a patriarchal master discourse.

Unlike Ruby, the Convent is endowed with a "blessed malelessness" (*Paradise* 177) and the experience of its women with the past is made healthy. Although each of these women comes to the liminal Convent carrying inside her the spectres of the past, they eventually undergo a collective spiritual transformation and manage to set their painful memories free. This transition is made possible through their quilting of an anti-structure *communitas* that renders the Convent a potent site of resistance and liberation. The essence of Morrison's resistant *communitas* can be grasped through its acts that challenge and disrupt Ruby's structure in many ways. While Ruby's elders like the Morgans, for instance, think of music as something that would defile the purity of their sacred structure, Morrison considers the therapeutic dimension of music which allows her edgewomen to engage in a transient catharsis, enabling them reveal powerful bonding towards each other. Also, the women of the convent assert a bodily agency which Ruby's women are denied access to. This assertion of agency manifests itself mainly in resistance to Ruby's prevalent paradigm of patriarchy and black femininity. Besides, Morrison's *Paradise* constructs a paragon of Homi Bhabha' liminal space of cultural hybridity. Sheltering a white girl into an all-black place underscores the distinctive hybridity of the Convent which disrupts the racially-pure structure of Ruby. The final resistant act is one of subversion and opposition. Morrison subverts Ruby's master discourse of "that one rebuff" (189), by highlighting the multiplicity of her female characters' stories. Whereas the former creates conflicts amidst its community and reveals discrepancies and omissions disclosed exclusively by Morrison's black female liminar, Patricia Best Cato, the latter empowers Consolata's women to become active agents in transforming their ambivalent liminality into an empowering, ritualistic experience that culminates in the epiphanic moment of the "loud

dreaming" (*Paradise* 246). The edgewomen's collective act of the 'loud dreaming' makes of Morrison's Convent a Turninan space of liminality *par excellence*.

The fictional geography of Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* features powerful black matriarchs who, despite dwelling in the marginal island of Willow Springs, can be seen as figures of resistance. Like Morrison's Convent, Naylor's Willow Springs serves as a site of resistance. But, unlike the Convent whose women articulate resistance against an oppressive patriarchal black community, Naylor's marginal place harbours strong black women who express resistance to mainstream American historical, cultural, and racial hegemony, and whose peculiar experiences shape the heterotopic character of their island. To adequately fathom Naylor's intricate fictional geography, I have resorted to diverse viewpoints yielding different perspectives on Foucauldian heterotopia as a site of resistance.

Similar to Foucault's heterotopia, Naylor's Willow Springs is a place that is "outside all places" ("Different Spaces" 178); an imaginary island rendered impossible to locate on any map. Though preceding the story with a map showing the island's marginal position with regards to America, the reader can easily observe that Naylor's map is more of a caricature than representing a real map. This act underscores the novelist's rejection to emulate the hegemonic maps that have kept the history of the black experience at bay, as well as her resolution to create a place defined by a black intervention. However, the kind of maps Naylor seeks to rely on and trust most are those which shun away the logic and dominant ordering of conventional mapping. Indeed, in Willow Springs, the maps of the urbanite George, who is inculcated with White values, "were no good" (Naylor 177). The only maps that function properly in *Mama Day*, and which help the islanders understand the uniqueness of their place and experiences, are those fusing the real and the unreal to shape a collective mental mapping of Willow Springs.

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With such mental mapping, Naylor asserts the heterotopic feature of her marginal island, as heterotopias can be both real and unreal spaces, "juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible" ("Of Other Spaces" 25). Actually, it is the myth of the islander's perennial black matriarch, Sapphira Wade, which makes Willow Springs forever straddle the boundary between a mythical past and its very real present. Sapphira is endowed with such power because it is her mythical, legendary existence which represents the real mapmaker of an out-of-map Willow Springs, offers an interpretative key for understanding Willow Springs as heterotopia, and, perhaps more importantly, resists the exclusion of the black female experience from hegemonic cartography of American history.

In *Mama Day*, Naylor skilfully immerses us in another world, whose different order is dictated by a black female interference that undermines the dominant White culture's perceptions of the black female experience. Sapphira's and Miranda's otherworldly and subversive powers impart the heterotopic cosmos of Willow Springs. Both of Naylor's black matriarchs perform conjuring feats that destabilise the whites' widely held image of the conjurer as devilish, since both practice conjuring for healing and protection purposes. Besides, Mama Day's subversive intervention is well demonstrated in the way she emphasises a distinctive black culture through holding the ritual event, Candle Walk, instead of the White mainland's Christmas. Aligning with Dehaene's and De Cauter's definition of heterotopia, this ritual event turns the island into a site that interrupts the normality of a white dominant culture by injecting alterity to the whites' approach to holidays. Another marker of WillowSprings' heterotopology is Naylor's unusual graveyard. Purposefully named "The Sound" (Naylor 10), the island's graveyard is nothing like the mainland's cemeteries. It is rather a lively space in which Miranda can commune with her ancestors to seek knowledge, guidance, and wisdom.

Ultimately, readers can discern that the singular aura of Naylor's heterotopic place is highlighted through its resistance to the dominant ordering of the mainland. The novelist employs her black female protagonists, Sapphira and Miranda, and two men from the mainland, George Andrews and Reema's boy, to confront two opposing ideological strands: black female spirituality and white rationality. Epitomising White Western culture, which structures its dominant order from threads of rationality, George and Reema's boy are denied access to the different realm of Willow Springs, because both, being indoctrinated by Western education, seek to interpret the heterotopic quality of the island according to their modes of rationality. Whereas Reema's boy fails to grasp the true sense of the island's heterochronic sense of time, expressed through the number '18 & 23', and its deep relation with the myth of Sapphira Wade, the New Yorker George Andrews is reluctant to snuff out his rational ways of knowing and submit to Miranda's spiritual wisdom, which in turn leads to his death. However, I must say that, even if George cannot believe in the otherworldly cosmos of Willow Springs, his partial acceptance of Miranda's keen wisdom to save Cocoa's life secures him a place in Naylor's heterotopia, yet, as a dead man. Thus, Naylor's black matriarchs articulate their ultimate agency through making a black female heterotopia with a resistant ordering.

In the Parable novels, the black feminist science-fiction writer Octavia Butler envisions a speculative geography in which a black woman dwells in an impalpably abstract marginal space that is totally different from the physical places occupied by Morrison's and Naylor's female protagonists. Butler's heroine, Lauren Oya Olamina, is a black woman who is multiply-marginalised, because of her race, gender, and disease: the hyperempathy syndrome. Butler resorts to the abundant genre of speculative fiction in order to draw on and give new insights into the marginalised experience of black women that represents multiple forms of oppressions. She

moulds the hyperempathic Lauren to echo the collective voices of marginal black women; voices that disturb any fixed conception or essentialisation of the black female experience. In *Parable of the Sower* and its sequel, *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren is given a resistant, transgressive agency that not only empowers her to eventually become the spiritual leader of a community of her own making, but, more importantly, attests to the power of the border space as a site of resistance in which she is able to forge a black-female cyborg subjectivity. The latter empowers Lauren to challenge the kind of dualistic thinking that reduces the plurality of black women's experience as well as their complicated subjectivities into a site of stability and marginality.

Lauren's agency shares powerful affinities with Donna Haraway's cyborg as both represent border subjects that emphatically insist on the potential of difference to resist and even transcend the binary logic inherent in Western thought. Lauren's difference is evoked through her unique condition of hyperempathy that Butler employs as a trope to promote her own vision of cyborg subjectivities dovetailed with an assertion of the black female experience as complex. Feeling what others feel, Lauren's psychic condition makes her like a cyborg who exists in a border space between her 'self' and the 'other', taking pleasure in the confusion of the boundary between two opposite entities that constitute a binary so central to mainstream Western thought. Indeed, the powerful gift of hyperempathy reveals a dynamic relationship between the heroine's self and others, leading her to acknowledge and understand her black female subjectivity beyond the binary opposition of self/other which has long marked black women's difference from the universal subject. Butler's intention behind such astute depiction is to affirm that being located at the margins of fixed conceptions of subjectivities is indeed a potentially powerful space to exist in and cry out one's difference.

Also, the hybridity of Butler's black female protagonist and Haraway's cyborg, a state which both experience as a result of dwelling in the border, presents a critique of the notion of 'the universal subject' whose dominant discourse insists upon the homogeneity and uniformity of all subjectivities. Posited on the boundary between self and other, Lauren intertwines and conflates the opposites to ultimately become a hybrid border subject. According to Haraway, this act of conflation represents a potent fusion which enables Lauren to live through a shattered existence which resists the essentialising tendencies that have forced the heterogeneity of black women lives into homogeneity. Lauren's fragmented experience also speaks out the range of black feminist concerns with destabilising the dominant discourses promoting the view of the black female experience as representing a unitary category. In *Talents*, mainly, Butler contemplates the potentialities of this experience by demonstrating the black female subject as a site of differences and contradictions. In this novel, Lauren performs a cyborg subjectivity as she seems to be a multiply-positioned subject who experiences the world from multiple standpoints that, in turn, give rise to multiple subjectivities which cannot be represented as unified or stable. Like a cyborg whose 'self' is not immediately presented to itself, Lauren cannot have an immediate access to her subjectivity unless she becomes truly aware of her complex experience, including her differences and contradictions. In other words, for Butler, it is the lived experience which black women should attend to as the only means by which they are able to gain an adequate knowledge about their peculiar experiences; a knowledge that should be gained through multiple and partial standpoints instead of universalist views.

All of the novels studied here seem to feature black female protagonists who resist oppression one way or another. However, through Lauren's experience, Butler doesn't only criticise black women's oppression, but also reimagines resistance as she envisions a different

reality where her black female protagonist becomes free from racial and gender strictures as well as the position of the 'Other' ascribed to black women by a dominant white discourse. In *Sower*, Lauren performs the role of Donna Haraway's 'chimera' to accentuate Butler's utopian vision of a world in which the other ceases to exist. Living in a dystopic world where she encounters multiple forms of oppression, Lauren Olamina's hyperempathy cunningly communicates a utopian value as it suggests a possibility for the other to constitute an integral and indistinguishable part of the self. Besides, the utopian dimension implied in this condition helps us read Lauren as an agent seeking to promote a life model that is based upon ideals like inclusion, compassion, sympathy, and equity.

Lauren's utopian agency can also be understood through her act of embracing an oppositional cyborg consciousness, which is underscored by her resistance to gender-based and racial differences that have relegated black women to multiple margins. Making her black heroine "play" (*Sower* 158) as a man, Butler seeks to posit Lauren within a border space to allow her identify her gender in a nonbinary way, and express a total rejection of the gendered positions assigned to black women within the white patriarchal structure. It also suggests that Lauren belongs to Haraway's "utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 150), since she is able to transcend gender boundaries and perform a fluid genderless subjectivity that deliberately challenges the essentialist view of gender as determined by biological features. Moreover, Butler's utopian impulse is driven by a strong desire to transcend racial differences. Reflecting such an impulse is Lauren's spiritual agency which manifests its power in the construction of a new belief system that is basically founded on principles of change and diversity. This system culminates in the formation of the multiracial Earthseed community that seems not to forge unity through sameness, but openness to difference and otherness. Thus, Butler anchors

Lauren's spiritual agency and community within Harawayan tradition of resistance against, "the imperative to recreate the sacred image of the same" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 378–379).

The potentialities of this black female cyborg do not seem to end here. Butler also seems to rely on the subversive power of Haraway's figure in her discerning reconfiguration of black motherhood. In Parable series, Lauren practices cyborg motherhood instead of the usually prevalent performance of mothers. Butler assigns her with such performance to counteract and even transcend derogatory racist ideas about, and stereotypical images of black mothers as tragic victims and, what Patricia Hill Collins would identify, "breeder women of slavery" (*Black Feminist* 7). Lauren's cyborg motherhood is understood through her relationship with her resentful daughter, Larkin, and her Earthseed community. We find that Lauren leaves her daughter and drops the role of the biological mother in favour of what she views as a higher supreme purpose, that of becoming the matriarch of her community. Like a cyborg, Butler's black mother resists that conventional feature of her female subjectivity which supposedly excels at, "mothering and its metaphoric extensions" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 29).

For Lauren, black mothers know more than just cooking and caring for their children. With this disruptive envisioning, Butler attempts to provide a resistant dimension to the meaning of black motherhood, which intrinsically conveys subversive possibilities that will not please, and definitely tease, the conventional representation of black motherhood, and the paradigm of motherhood in general, as established by patriarchal cultural norms. Ultimately, to express her total rejection of the oppressive discourse underlying the white stereotypical image of black mothers as 'breeder women of slavery', Butler bases her reconfiguration of black motherhood on "cyborg replication" (150) rather than human reproduction. Butler's black mother represents a cyborg who, "does not dream of community on the model of the organic family" (*Simians, Cyborgs*

151) but rather, as one who dreams of a community which resists hierarchical domination that is implicated even in the family model, and whose members would all be of equal worth. Indeed, the Earthseed community is the very materialisation of Lauren's cyborigian dream, as she succeeds in cloning people who adhere to her belief system and who are connected to each other not by blood, but by what Haraway outlines as politicised coalitional subjectivity which, "marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" (*Simians, Cyborgs* 156). In other words, Lauren's followers are like cyborgs whose collective subjectivity emerges out of a 'political kinship' and their alliance provides a concrete example of a cyborg affinity group.
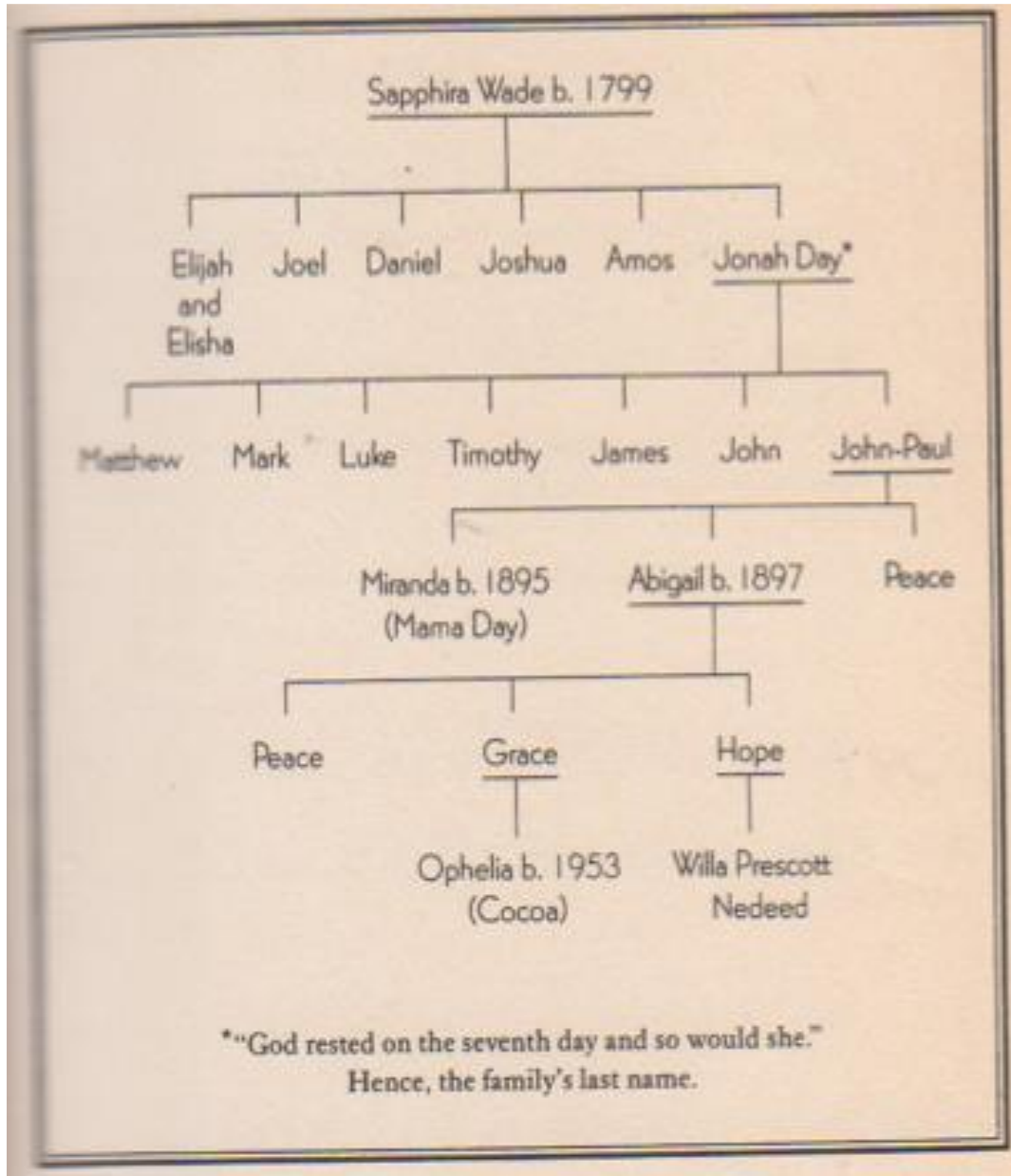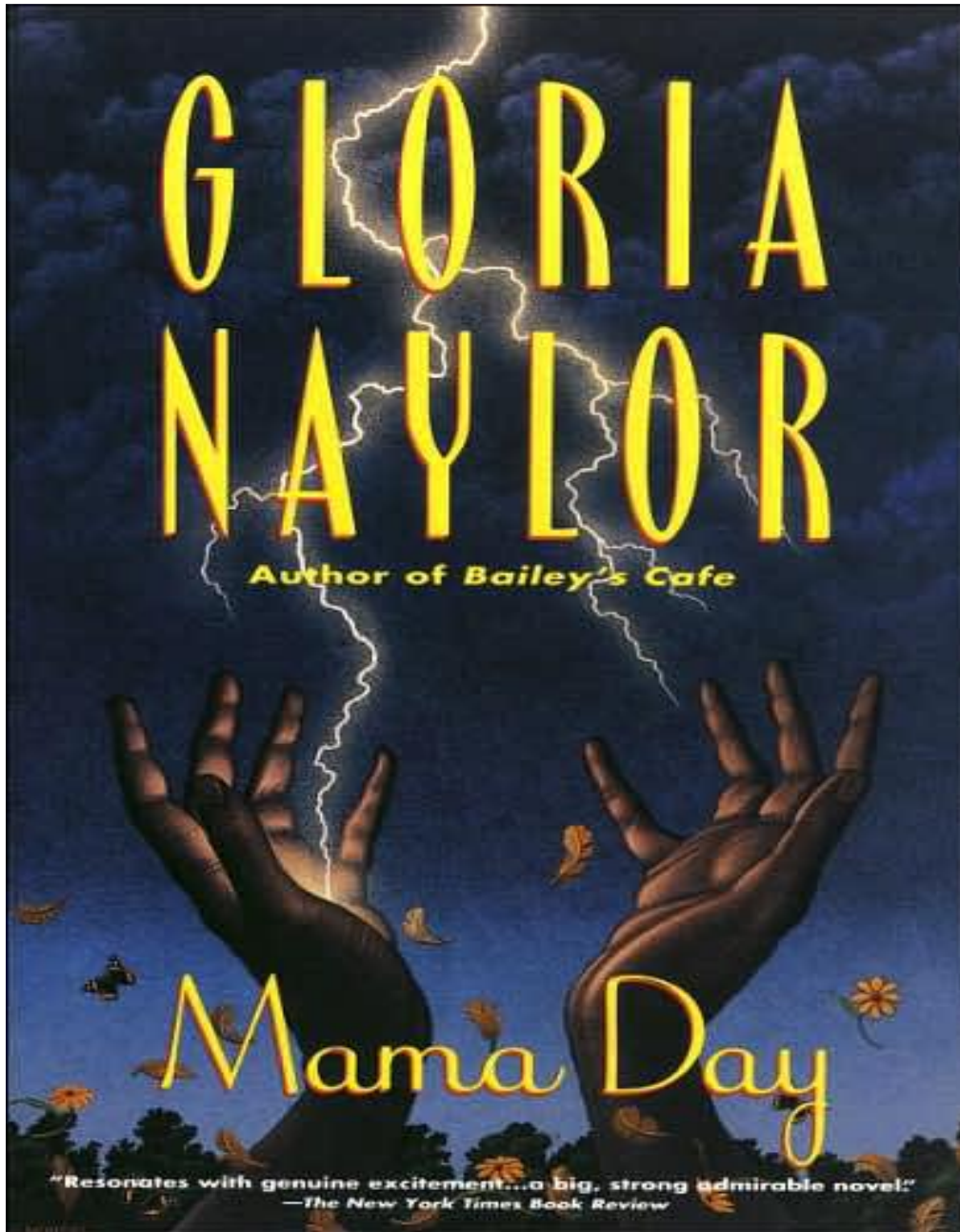
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Appendices

Annex 1:
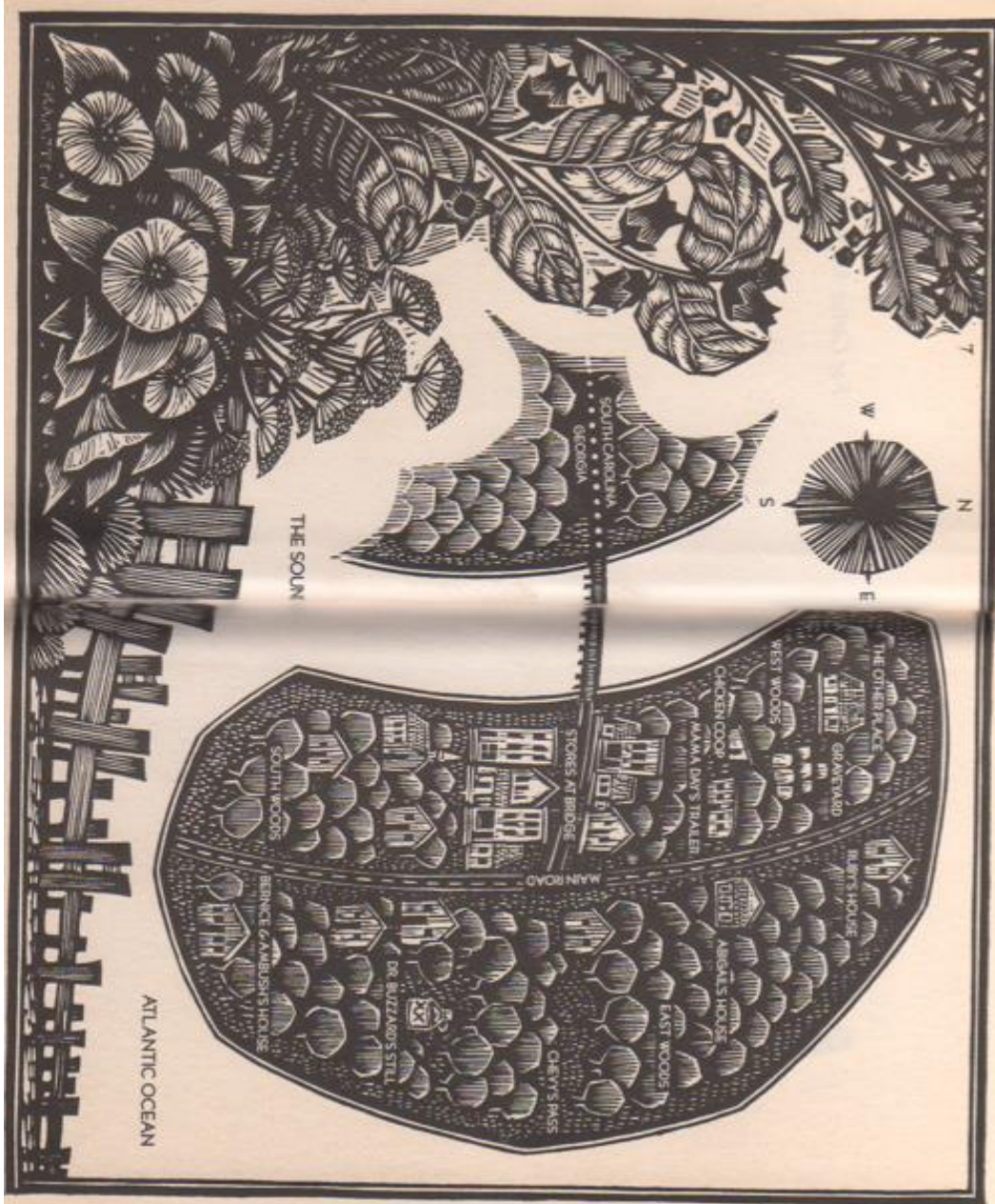
Naylor's imaginative depiction of the map of Willow Springs

Annex 2:

The Day Family Tree

Annex 3:

The cover of *Mama Day*

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ملخص

تقدم هذه الأطروحة دراسة متعددة التخصصات للطرق التي تؤكد بها الكاتبات الأمريكيات السود المعاصرات،

Toni Morrison، Gloria Naylor و Octavia E. Butler، أن التهميش والمقاومة يمثلان عاملين

أساسيين في التعريف بتجربة النساء السود في الولايات المتحدة. يركز هذا البحث على وجه التحديد على

جغرافياتهن الخيالية لتحري العرض المميز لكل كاتبة للتقاطع بين موضوع الأنثى السوداء، الهامش، والمقاومة

في رواياتهن التالية، *Paradise* (1998)، *Mama Day* (1988) *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

و *Parable of the Talents* (1998). نظرًا لكون فضاء الهامش قد حدد منذ فترة طويلة المكانة التي تشغلها

الكاتبات السود في الاتجاه الادبي السائد في امريكا بالإضافة إلى مكانتهن داخل المجتمع الأمريكي ككل، فإنني

أجادل أن الكاتبات المختارات للبحث صغن بطلات يتخذن من الهامش ليس كمسكن لهن فقط، بل أهم من ذلك،

أنهن يعقدنه بتحويله إلى موقع للمقاومة ضد أشكال متعددة من الاضطهاد. تصوري للهامش كموقع للمقاومة

ينطوي على وجهات نظر مكانية مختلفة من تخصصات مختلفة، بما في ذلك مفهوم Patricia Hill Collins

و bell hooks للهامش كفضاء يمكن النساء السود من صياغة ثقافة مقاومة، مفهوم الحدية كما يوضحه

Turner Victor، Homi Bhabha و Shmuel Eisenstadt، فكرة الانتباذ الفضائي أو 'الهيتروتوبيا'

كما يفسرها Michel Foucault، والموضوع الحدي 'السايبورغ' الذي تناقشته Donna Haraway. أخيرا،

تثبت هذه الأطروحة أنه في حين أن الهدف الأساسي لرواياتهن هو كسر الصمت المحيط بتعقيدات حياة النساء

السود، فإن Morrison و Naylor و Butler يركبن، على التوالي، جغرافية حدية نقدية، وجغرافية

هيتروتوبية، وجغرافية تأملية تشمل ذاتية سايبورغ لتمكين بطلاتهن من مقاومة القوى الجائرة الراسخة في

الخطابات المهيمنة و تأكيد قوتهن عليهم.

Résume

Cette thèse propose une étude interdisciplinaire des manières dont les écrivaines noires contemporaines, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Octavia Estelle Butler, affirment la marginalité et la résistance comme des caractères fondamentaux pour la définition de l'expérience de la femme noire aux États-Unis. Plus précisément, elle se concentre sur leurs géographies fictives pour explorer l'interprétation distinctive de chaque écrivaine de l'intersection entre le sujet féminin noir, la marge et la résistance dans leurs romans respectifs, *Paradise* (1998), *Mama Day* (1988), and *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Comme l'espace de la marge a longtemps informé sur la position des écrivaines noires au sein du canon littéraire américain ainsi que sur leur place au sein de la communauté américaine dans son ensemble, j'argumente que les écrivaines sélectionnées façonnent des héroïnes noires qui non seulement habitent dans la marge, mais plus important encore, elles la compliquent en la transformant en un site de résistance contre de multiples formes d'oppression. Ma conceptualisation de la marge comme un site de résistance engage diverses perspectives spatiales de différentes disciplines, y compris la théorisation de Patricia Hill Collins et Bell Hook de la marge comme espace dans lequel les femmes noires forgent une culture de résistance, la notion de liminalité comme expliquée par Victor Turner, Homi Bhabha et Shmuel Eisenstadt, le concept d'hétérotopie de Michel Foucault, et le sujet frontalier 'le cyborg' présenté par Donna Haraway. Finalement, cette thèse démontre que tandis que leurs romans visent à briser le silence entourant les complexités des vies des femmes noires, Morrison, Naylor, and Butler construisent, respectivement, une géographie critique de la liminalité, une géographie hétérotopique et une géographie spéculative d'une subjectivité cyborg pour permettre à leurs héroïnes noires d'ordonner une résistance et d'affirmer leur pouvoir sur les forces oppressives ancrées dans les discours dominants.