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Mapping Geographies of Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998)

رسم جغرافيات المقاومة في رواية جنة(1998) لتوني موريسون

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Abstract :

This paper offers a new critical reading of Toni Morrison's acute historical and spatial conceptualization of the black experience in her 1998 novel *Paradise*. By situating the novel within a new context that takes up spatiality and resistance as key paradigms in defining the black experience of marginality, we suggest that Morrison reconsiders the complicated history of the black people in America through a critical geography that encompasses two main resistant geographies, Haven and the town of Ruby. In associating Haven with mythmaking, Morrison's text reproduces a map that overrides the puritan mythic vision of America as a paradise. Besides, we deduced that the all-black town of Ruby represents a counter-geography that implies locating black identity in relation to place-making. This implication proffers a counterhegemonic discourse that overturns the image of Blacks as peripherally situated and it demonstrates the transformative politics of place-making in asserting black agency.

Keywords :Black experience, Marginality, Mythmaking, Place-making, Resistant geographies, Space.

ملخص :

تعرض هذه الورقة قراءة نقدية جديدة لتصور توني موريسون التاريخي والمكاني الثاقب للتجربة السوداء في روايتها "جنة" (1998). من خلال وضع الرواية في سياق جديد حيث يأخذ المكانية والمقاومة كنماذج رئيسية في تحديد التجربة السوداء للهامشية، نقترح أن موريسون تعيد البحث في التاريخ المعقد للشعب الأسود في أمريكا من خلال جغرافيا نقدية والتي تشمل جغرافيتين مقاومتين أساسيتين،هيفن وبلدة روبي. من خلال ربط هيفن بصناعة الأساطير، يعيد نص موريسون انتاج خريطة تتخطى الرؤية الأسطورية البوريتانية لأمريكا كجنة. علاوة على ذلك، استنتجنا أن مدينة روبي تمثل جغرافيا معاكسة تتضمن تحديد الهوية السوداء فيما يتعلق بعملية صناعة المكان. ينتج عن هذا التضمين خطابًا معاكسا للهيمنة الذييقلب صورة السود ككونها هامشية ويوضح السياسة التحويلية المتمثلة في صنع المكان في تأكيد القوة السوداء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التجربة السوداء، الهامشية، صناعة الاساطير، صناعةالمكان، جغرافيات مقاومة، الفضاء.

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Introduction :

Toni Morrison is one of the most talented and distinguished writers of the contemporary age. Alongside her devotion to rendering issues related mainly to the black experience, her contribution to the black literary tradition has brought a powerful presence into American literature. A particularly compelling aspect of her world of fiction is its intricate historical representation of the black experience of marginality in ways that invite scholars to interpret her works from myriad perspectives.

Scholars often situate and contextualize Morrison's fiction within the framework of revisionist historiography. It is through this revisionist project that she seeks to reclaim a different history for Blacks and deconstruct the peripheral status, which has long characterized their experience in America.Discourses on the historical marginal position of black subjects in American society, therefore, constitute an ineluctably prevalent theme in Morrison's fiction. In Paradise,as with Morrison's other novels, this theme is met with a conscious voice of resistance. However, the peculiarity of Paradise lies in its unique rendering of the margin from a site of passive action into a geography of possible opposition. Emerging from this interest in associating marginality with resistance,authors like Hooks (1990), Fergusson et al. (1990) and McKittrick (2006)pivoted on the potential inherent in this site to assume acts of resistance.

Reflecting on the margin from a historical point of view, Dalsgård (2001) read Paradise through a post-structuralist perspective as she drew upon Jacques Derrida's deconstruction to reflect on the mechanisms of violence and marginalization that inform the individual as well as collective experiences of characters. Dalsgård's post-structuralistinterpretation led her to discover that these mechanisms are at work in counter-discursive national historical narratives as she based her analysis on the idea that Morrison's fictional town of Ruby is mouldedas a critique of American exceptionalism. Although the town of Ruby appears to have close parallels to American exceptionalist discourse of the Promised Land, we however discern that the town of Haven seems also to emphasize Morrison's concern with constructing a revisionary geography that aims at undoing the national myth of the puritans. In this, we contend that Morrison constructs a subversivespace through a narrative of mythmaking in order to redefine the place of black people on hegemonic historical maps.

Moreover, by undertaking a geocritical examination of Morrison's representation of the history of African Americans, a recent study by Beavers (2018) provides a politicalinsight into the overarching power of place in narrativizing black subjectivity and challenging the hegemonic discourses produced in the white supremacist political imaginary. Beavers uses the concept of place-makingto situate black history within a tight space. Since Beavers turns his attention to the tight spacesthrough which characters negotiate their identities and use violence as a means to come to terms with a coherent notion of selfhood, ourresearch, instead, looks into place-making as a liberatingprocess of empowerment and resistance rather than restrictive. It also emphasizes the creative potential of place-making in re-appropriating black history and sustaining black identity.

Actually, what seems to escapeDalsgård's and Bevears'sanalysesis Morrison's contextualization of her novel within the scope of critical geography.Since, the aforementioned researches tackled Morrison's Paradise mainly from historical and

political perspectives, this article neither initiates a deconstructionist interpretation nor does it engage in a geocritical examination of the novel. The present paper, however, considers a different analytical approach that draws uponBell Hook's criticism, human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of place-making and Soja's spatial theory in order tostudy the significance of notions like marginality, space, mythmaking and place-making in constructing and explaining Morrison's resistant geographies.

Therefore, to answer the aforementioned questions it is hypothesized thatwhat defines Morrison's geographies of resistance is her unique spatial conceptualization of black experience in terms of mythmaking and place-making. By investigating the ways in which characters embrace the very peripheral position and regard the margin as a site of radical change and empowerment, we assume that Morrison's Paradiseis informed by a critical geography that communicates an act of resistance. In Paradise (1998), Morrison's geographies of resistance, exemplified by the fictional places of Haven and Ruby, serve as subversive loci fraught with spatial agency that articulates the multiplicity and peculiarity of black subjective imagination.

2. Understanding Toni Morrison's Critical Geography

At the opening of her critical monograph, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), Toni Morrison deliberately associates the art of mapping in the scope of critical geography with two substantial acts, an intention of claiming a voice and a performance of telling a story. She writes:

I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration, as did the original charting of the New World-without the mandate for conquest (Morrison, 1992, p.3).

A space that is fraught with racial marginalization, America in the view of Morrison manifests itself as an oppressive geography that operates according to a rigidly supremacist racial politics. The latter, according to Morrison (1992), produces various accounts of oppression grounded mainly on gender and race as she contends "My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world" (p.4). These discourses derive their meaning and power, or have their authority primarily from their capacity to create centres. However, what Fergusson (1990) asserts is that "The power of the center depends on a relatively unchallenged authority. If that authority breaks down, then there remains no point relative to which others can be defined as marginal" (p. 10).

In this regard, Morrison's vision works from the premise that she cannot relinquish marginality unless she reclaims a challenging attitude towards the authority of the centre. Morrison's task as a black woman writeris then informed by a critical interrogation of ideas and attitudes underlying mainstream discourse around race and racism. Her determination to raise a critical interrogation about America as an oppressive geography that denies space for a black female writer to speak out reflects her 'talking back' mission that destabilizes the line between speaking and silence. In this context, Bell Hooks' discussion on talking back proves informative for she explains it as "speaking as an equal to an authority figure....daring to disagree....having an opinion" (Hooks, 2015, p.5). Hooks further explains that talking back is an assertion of agency since:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that

heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice (Hooks, 2015, p.29).

For Morrison, and other black female writers, the exercise of talking back entails creating and producing a new kind of literature that should assert the centrality and significance of black presence in the understanding of national literary imagination; a literature that essentially communicates an act of resistance to systems of oppression and domination. So, a change in black women writers'language indicates "movingfrom a place of complacency—on the margin—to a siteoutside hegemonic domains of power, or away from the centerof its discourse" (Myles, 2009,p.2). Literature, in this sense, becomes a site where:

Blackwomen create a distinct language that articulates their unique existence. In the process of recreating their histories, African American women writers locate black female realities and affirm new identities in places that broaden their lives rather than sites that restrict them on the margins. (Myles, 2009, p.3)

In this vein, Morrison (1992)insists a contemplation of a black presence that should be "central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination" (p.5). As a black female writer that is placed at the margins of mainstream literature, Morrison attempts to gain agency by embracing this very position of marginality. The margin, according to Bell Hooks (1990), 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" (p.153). Hooks 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" (p.153).

The margin can be regarded as a topography of "something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there" (McKittrick, 2006, p.5). Against this background, Morrison takes the challenge to transform this passively latent topography into a vigorously potent geography. In so doing, she seeks to recast a 'seemingly not there' space into a black geography where the different dimensions of "black history, selfhood, imagination, and resistance are not only attached to the production of space through their marginality, but also through the ways in which they bring into focus responses to geographic domination" (p.6). Morrison's response to such geographic hegemony informs about her literary creation that contributes to an acknowledgement of deep politics and poetics of black geographies.

In Morrison's fiction, black geographies are resistant loci that are replete with spatial agency and authority that articulate the multiplicity and peculiarity of black subjective imagination and discourse. The exchange between Guitar Bains and Milkman Dead in Morrison's Song of Solomon (1977) well reflects Morrison's great concern with denaturalizing American geography that is perceived as a tightly unfair space imbued with various power dynamics (historical, political, social and economic) . These power dynamics are, according to Morrison's fictional insight, work to establish firm impenetrable binary divisions like North/South and us/them, which operate to circumscribe black subjectivity and freedom:

'Gimme the tea ... No geography.' 'No geography? Okay no geography. What

about some history in your tea? Or some sociopolitico- No. That's still geography ... I do believe my whole life's geography ... I live in the North now. So the first question come to mind is North of what? Why, north of the South. So North exists because South does (Morrison, 2004, p.114)

Hence, Morrison's body of writing responds to an imperative to think of a new narrative space that problematizes and challenges hegemonic discourses of race and marginality. Accordingly, and in a spatial conceptualization of black experience, the production of these hegemonic discourses that have enforced a black presence into marginality is ultimately encountered by a counter geography that essentially reclaims its own spatiality and asserts its power against a denial of space for Blacks.

In his discussion of spatiality with relation to power production and domination, Soja (1985) considers that any challenge to a system of oppression must recognize the importance of reclaiming resistant spaces imbued with a consciously authoritative power:

Spatiality is not only a product but also a producer and reproducer of the relations of production and domination, an instrument of both allocative and authoritative power. Class struggle, as well as other social struggles, are thus increasingly contained and defined in their spatiality and trapped in its 'grid'. Social struggle must then become a consciously and politically spatial struggle to regain control over the social production of this 'space'. Soja the spatiality of social life (Soja, 1985, p.110)

Within this spatial consideration, Soja (1985) provides a perceptive theorization of spatial relations that proves pertinent to distinguish the dialectical nature of space as either producer or product. What seems interesting about his vision is an indication of an inextricable connection between spaces of power and spaces of struggle. The latter is not to gain power, Soja suggests, unless it presupposes a conscious resistance to the production and reproduction of spatial domination, as these spaces of struggle seek to create a new spatial discourse that challenges hegemonic assumptions, conceptions and imaginations of space. Soja refers to this spatial discourse as a potent dimension that constitutes the lived spaces of representation. The latter, he argues, are the outcome of:

Combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms….these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance of the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning (Soja, 1996, p.68).

Accordingly, these spaces seem to provide an evocatively critical medium for the writer to intermesh, in his text, the real experience of marginality with the imagined. This endeavour, hence, helps create a counterspacethat basically arises from its very peripheral position.

As she is keenly attentive to the ambiguity and complexity of the black experience in America, Morrison's literary and spatial rendering of this experience in Paradise (1997) extends and amplifies Hook's and Soja's perspectives, giving the tropes of marginality and spatiality her own aesthetic twist. In the novel, Toni Morrison creates different critical geographies of the black community materialized in two symbolic places: Haven and the town of Ruby. Each place seems to aptly embody and articulate a counter discourse that undermines hegemonic conceptions and representations of black community.

3. Haven, Mythmaking and the Poetics of Space

Despite the fact that the town of Ruby appears to have close parallels to the American national myth of the puritans and most research has associated this community with an exceptionalist discourse of the Promised Land, the town of Haven seems also to emphasize Morrison's concern with constructing a revisionary geography. This geography aims at undoing a national myth through a black exceptionalist discourse. According to Dalsgård (2001), Morrison representation of the African American use of exceptionalist discourse implies that "it has a different historical meaning to Blacks than to whites" (p. 237). Morrison's geography of Haven, in this sense, addresses an alternate black history.

In addition, the story of Haven resounds a subversive utopian imagination of an America free of racial problems. This idea is made clear in Morrison's introductory essay "Home" in the collection The House that Race Built (1998) when Morrison expresses a need to contemplate a space "free of racial hierarchy" (Morrison, 1998a, p.3) and which is "usually imagined or described as dreamscape—Edenesque, utopian" (p.3).

On closer inspection, Morrison's novel (1998) unravels a neat conception of space that is free of racial hierarchies and naming it, Paradise pertains to a mythological account of the black experience in light of a utopian perspective. Morrison reproduces a map that is meant to override the puritan mythic vision of America as a paradise. For the puritans, those who arrived in America after 1620 under the double impetus of flight and positive mission and believed themselves to have been divinely chosen to re-establish Christian purity in the unconstrained circumstances of the new world, thought of America as haven and heaven where a sense of communal mission is to be realized. However, Morrison's conception of paradise vividly stands as a counter image to that of the puritans as she moulded it upon the idea of having a black patriarch as the founder of a subversive "dreamtown", (Morrison, 1998b, p.5) where dominance is accentuated by a black presence. The uniqueness of her conception of the idea of paradise lies in looking into the notion of exclusivity through the lens of a black perspective as she elucidates:

It was my meditation… and interrogation of the whole idea of paradise, the safe place, the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But … [paradise is] based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in (Farnsworth, 2008, p.156). Since Blacks have been excluded from the spectrum of national myth, writers like Morrison sought refuge in literature as a perfect medium to articulate and incorporate their own versions of this kind of narrative.

Most black writers, including Morrison in this stance, resort to mythmaking as a resistant narrative strategy that weaves myth with history into a story of making history. Mythmaking becomes an essential act of rethinking and redefining the place of black people on hegemonic historical maps .The story of Haven and the founding of this place, in this sense, represents a utopian impulse to disrupt a national master discourse regarding the conception of America as paradisiacal. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Morrison's novel is a use of a spatial dimension to reclaim the paradise myth. Thereby, Morrison's portrayal of Haven and the circumstances of its establishment denotes a resistant spatialitythatresonates a deft concern with a revisionist mythmaking.

By 1890, Morrison's patriarchs, a group of black freedmen, started their quest for founding the perfect place where they can 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" (Morrison,1998b, p.188) led by Zechariah Morgan, experienced a painful yet edifying journey when none of the other black towns 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 (Morrison, 1998b, p.13).

For instance, when Zechariah and his fellowmen sought to join the people of the new black township of Fairly, Oklahoma they were "thrown out and cast away" (Morrison, 1998b, p.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" (p.194) he had long believed in "had become a stain". 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". 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?" (p.14). The rejection, "the aggressive discouragement they received from negro towns" (p.13) was 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 (Morrison, 1998b, p.195).

Morrison's conception of the margin as a site of empowerment, resistance and radical change is so evocative in the story of the Old Fathers as the rebuff of Fairly's townspeople did not dampen their fervent determination to found their utopian place. Besides, the very marginalization and exclusion they suffered since the beginning of their trip had incessantly provided them with a strong impetus to move westward and build Haven. In this sense, by imagining the movement as a specifically north western exodus, Morrison inscribes Blacks in the American mythic history of westward mobility. However, since the original quest began as finding and not founding a place, the real exodus of Morrison's patriarchs started to take shape after the rejection they had received or as they called it the Disallowing. Because of the Disallowing that this group of men began to cherish their peripheral positioning as they embraced a sense of "uncorruptible worthiness" (Morrison, 1998b, p.194) to build their own community away from "humiliations they did not have to face" (p.93).

This is how the town of Haven came into existence, and the Disallowing, which remained engraved and seared in the memories of the Old Fathers, ushered in the inception of a new exodus, so they took:

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 (Morrison, 1998b, p.194).

Moreover, indicative of Morrison's critical geography is its compelling yet contesting characterization that draws upon one of the main national founding myths, God's chosen people. Morrison rhetorically uses the characters of Zechariah and the founders of Haven to establish a black spiritual paradigm and infuse it within the dominant discourse of salvation in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. While drawing on the Hebrews' escape from Egyptian slavery under God's providence and the Puritans' flight from England, the author elaborates a story in which she cunningly charts her protagonists' journey from slavery to freedom to an eventual mastery as they followed "the signs God gave to guide them" (Morrison, 1998b, p.14). Besides, the stories the Old Fathers used to recite are powerfully revelatory in this sense. The way they acted toward the land and the way they tamed a wilderness share much affinities with the Puritans' encounter with the virgin land:

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 (Morrison, 1998b, p.14).

Their community like the puritan Promised Land was hardly established, yet Morrison's black male characters regard themselves as endowed with God's providence to accomplish their mission. Moreover, while conceiving themselves as "Smart, strong, and eager to work their own land", (Morrison, 1998b, pp.13-14) Morrison casts her protagonists in the archetype of the chosen people story when she comments, "they were more than prepared—they were destined" (p.14).

4. Ruby and the Politics of Place-making

The narrative of Paradise is set mostly in the 1970's in the all-black town of Ruby. After the failure and downfall of Haven, Zechariah's grandsons, the twin brothers Steward and Deacon Morgan along with a group of fifteen families abandoned Haven. After World War II, Haven underwent an economic and social decay what pushed the descendants of the Old Fathers to move further west and reclaim a new haven. Indeed, it was not hard for the twins "to persuade other home boys to repeat what the Old Fathers had done in 1890" (Morrison, 1998b, p.16) and they succeeded in founding New Haven, which was renamed later as Ruby after the name of a woman who could not withstand the hardships of the trip.

As Morrison conceptualizes it in the novel, Blacks perceive of America as a tight space for it obstructs their ability to create and sustain a meaningful connection with place and that is exactly what happened with the inhabitants of Haven. On the same line, Beavers (2018) examines the individual and collective experiences of Morrison's characters within the frame of tight space and which he describes as a site that "signals a character's spiritual and emotional estrangement from community and the way it inhibits their ability to sustain a meaningful relationship to place" (p.6).

Since the black experience is historically marked by displacements, Blacks could not establish a deep sense of connectedness with place for they were either subjected to self-determined or imposed movements. Therefore, despite the efforts they exerted in order to make a utopian place that transcends racial distinctions and discriminatory restrictions, the Old fathers could not maintain a safe place to nurture and sustain a collective black identity. In this regard, place-making and identity

constitute a substantial interplay that informs both our understanding and interpretation of how Morrison dramatizes spatial geographies of the black experience.

Through her effort to write about counter-geographies that speak to the black experience, Morrison takes into account the importance of place-making as it constitutes a form of spatial politics that enables the author to reimagine the relationship between place and identity formation. In fact, cultural and human geographers define place-making as a process whereby humans make bonds and attachments with places. Furthermore, it implies belonging and stability since it stresses the importance of the relationship between place and self. However, in Paradise, Morrison's imbricated treatment of place-making depends on a number of polarities like in/out and us/them, and her characters are to identify themselves only via these polarities.

Beavers (2018)regards place-making as a strategy induced by tight spaces and which "emphasizes individualism, materialism, violence, and abjection as key components of their estrangement" (p. 6). However, human geographer Yi-Fu Tuandescribes place-making as a phenomenon that creates isolated spaces and which occurs basically by setting up boundaries which eventually "gives rise to the polarities of "in" and "out," "us" and "them"" (Tuan & Strawn, 2009, p. 30). He further explains, "Being "in," an insider, is good; being "out," an outsider, is bad" (p.30). In a related vein, the town of Ruby results out of an act of place-making and the relationship between this town and its people seems to fit perfectly in this context. Since the townsfolk opt primarily for making Ruby a place that emphasizes a necessity for setting polarities, locating themselves according to these polarities ensures maintaining what they think a "quite, orderly community" (Morrison, 1998b, p.8). In the following passage, Morrison provides a keen portrait of the importance of locating oneself in terms of outside/inside polarity:

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. (Morrison, 1998b, p.16)

As indicated above, one of the Fleetwood twins alludes to how Ruby can offer a secure life to its inhabitants by being indoors. For them, being indoors resists being placed outdoors. So, we can say that Ruby's people identify themselves against what lurks outdoors. It seems like reading place-making as a means of resistance in Morrison's Paradise will open up as much space for understanding the power dynamics underlying the liberating potential of Morrison's spatialization of resistance through inside/outside polarity.

With her depiction of the town of Ruby as "unique and isolated" (Morrison, 1998b, p.8), "free and protected" Morrison suggests that in order to build a free and protected place, men of Ruby should adopt an isolationist policy founded on the belief that: inside is safe and outside is hostile. Thus, by moulding Ruby's isolationist policy in the cast of one of the nation's founding policies, isolationism, we conceive of Ruby as embodying a counter-geography that bears a disruptive nature which is consigned to empower the black individual and communal agency. What is particularly evocative

in Paradise is the authoritative power of Morrison's counter-geography that implies locating black identity in relation to place-making.This implication proffers a counterhegemonic discourse that overturns the image of Blacks as peripherally situated and it demonstrates the transformative politics of place-making to engage black individuals in resistant acts of self-assertion and definition. In this, we deduce that the singularity of Morrison's appropriation of ideas like isolationism to accentuate the process of place-making rests upon her far-reaching imaginative engagement with concepts like identity and place which make her novel not only different but a creative contemplation of black experience.

Seemingly, Morrison's subversive geography is defined by dichotomies and one of the most eminent dichotomies Morrison uses to map Ruby is violence/peace. The conflict inherent in this binary opposite is best interpreted in and exemplified by Ruby's encounter with the Convent. In order for Ruby to become the ideal "place of all places" (Morrison, 1998b, p.8), every member of this community should adhere to the boundaries that keep their community peacefully safe from anything that might ostensibly pose a threat for its peace and prosperity. One of the ideals defining this community are patriarchy and racial purity. However, seventeen miles from Ruby lies a place called the Convent that is resided by, or as men of Ruby see it, ruled by five black and white women. Patriarchs of Ruby consider these women as challenging their hegemony for they managed to live by themselves without any male intervention. However, this is not the case with Ruby's women, who justify the dominance of men as important to serve the wellbeing of their community. This is evident when one of the Convent's women Consolata asked Soane, Deek Morgan's wife, why she seems calm and acquiescent despite her husband's infidelity and Soane imperturbably replied, "Listen to me. He can't fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are doing something" (p.240). Soane implies that "nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain" (p.5), and all what matters for her community is how deep their communal identity is rooted in Ruby.

Soane's implication deliberately exhibits another facet of Morrison's disruptive geography. Morrison casts Paradise into a story about how a black individual morphs from being an oppressed into an oppressor. What instigates such transformation, however, is when men of Ruby have concluded that what actually defines their collective identity is the very values and convictions that delineate the very town they rule. According to the set of beliefs they established in order to empower their identity and assure their racial purity, Ruby's citizens would not allow any external entity to destabilize what they deem to constitute their communal order. In this sense, the Convent represents what Tuan describes as "being "out," an outsider, is bad" (Tuan & Strawn, 2009, p. 30). Hosting a white woman within the Convent blemishes Ruby's racial purity and threatens its harmony. Accordingly, the murderous attack of Ruby's men upon the convent's women was eventually inevitable and of course, "they shoot the white girl first".

5. CONCLUSION

In our critical reading of Paradise as a narrative that reflects an endeavour to provide a critical geography for the Black voice and experience, we delineated how this novel engages in a fruitful dialogue with resistant geographies. While reflecting on the way Morrison depicts marginality, this article was particularly attentive to the spatial conceptualization of this experience and to the subtle intricacies involved in representing the relationship between space, myth, and identity that Haven and Ruby

address.

The significance Morrison places on an articulation of the relationship between myth and space is revealed through the metaphorical dimensions the town of Haven suggests. This interpretation led us to understand the story behind the establishment of Haven as a subversive utopian imagination of a national myth, the Promised Land. In accordance with Haven's experience of marginality because of the Disallowing, we also understand that Morrison not only demonstrates that mythmaking is pivotal in appropriating black history, but she proves that the margin, as a site of empowerment and resistance, can be expressed through different narrative strategies.

In addition, we deduced that the town of Ruby exemplifies what Soja identifies as counterspace. Instead of reading Ruby as a tight space, we discovered that it represents an effort to contemplate resistant geographies that speak to the black experience. By exploring the formation of this community through the lens of place-making, we found out that Ruby embodies a disruptive geography which implies locating black identity in relation to place-making. This exploration helped us read Ruby as communicating a counterhegemonic discourse that overturns the image of blacks as peripherally situated. It further demonstrated, mainly through the male characters, the transformative politics of place-making to engage black individuals in resistant acts of self-assertion and definition.

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