

Reading Heterotopia as a Site of Resistance in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988)

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Abstract

This article uses Foucault's concept of heterotopia to explain Gloria Naylor's metaphoric spatial representation of resistance in *Mama Day* (1988). It seeks to read Willow Springs, a fictitious island lying outside the U.S borders, as a resistant locus that presents a subversive spatio-temporal paradigm as it suggests a possibility for transformation from isolation and marginalization to agency and potential liberation. Heterotopias emphasize the critical potential of space to challenge the hegemony of dominant discourses and give voice to peripheral positions. These spaces, according to Foucault, address discourses of resistance effectively through counter-sites. In *Mama Day*, then, we argue that Gloria Naylor molds the fictional island of Willow Springs as a heterotopic space, a counter-site where black groups contest the dominant discourses of race and gender. Therefore, this article concludes that in her portrayal of a heterotopic space with an inverting character, Naylor transforms a physical place into a site of agency where the subversive yet productive dynamics of heterotopia interrupt and deconstruct the existing ideologies of mainstream culture.

Keywords: African-American literature, dominant discourses of race and gender, heterotopia, *Mama Day*, Michel Foucault, periphery, site of resistance

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1. Introduction

One of the most remarkable talents currently illuminating the American literary scene is Gloria Naylor. She, like her contemporaries: Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, and others, are continuing a rich and long legacy of talented Black women writers. These women, many of whom have to overcome enormous obstacles, have nonetheless produced some of the most poignant and enlightening literary works American literature has seen. These works have established a powerful literary tradition that has brought the wealth of Black women's creative imaginations to the attention of the American public.

Indeed, their voices have primarily emerged to put the American public on notice that a long and neglected segment of American society had unique and inspiring stories to tell. Abraham Chapman, who is the editor of the *New Black Voices: Anthology of Contemporary African American Literature* (1972), describes 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. (as cited in Cook et al., 2008, p. 261)

Gloria Naylor (1950-2016), we believe, fits squarely into this new breed of writers with her brilliant and original articulation of the black experience in America. This unique articulation, we argue, forms the genesis of her literary power that compels her to expose the dark lacunas of American history and throw light on the richness, complexity and, beauty of black lives. One of the most provocative fictions that affirms her imaginative power as a black woman writer is *Mama Day* (1988). Our choice falls upon this novel because it offers a unique and acute representation of the black experience of peripherality, as Naylor's story renders this experience even more gripping and worth contemplating.

Contemporary Black literature reveals, in the most profound ways, how it feels and what it is like to live peripherally in a dominant white society. As a response to this predicament, it articulates the cultural richness and diversity distilled from the black experience in the United States. It also expresses the anxieties and aspirations of Black people and at the same time, probes the vast complexities of their multifaceted experiences. We suggest, therefore, that no more accurate and inspiring example of this extraordinary richness and diversity exists than in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*.

For Naylor, the act of reconciling her literature with a Black history that is abounded by a multitude of peripheral interstices was not an easy task. Among many Black women writers such as Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Naylor used the novel as a creative medium to come to terms with their ancestors' traumatic past and subvert their historically peripheral condition in America,

especially that of the Middle Passage. In *Mama Day*, she resorted to a different and unique way of rethinking this dark past as she chose to base her narrative on a magical heterotopic setting that does not really belong to America yet connects to it in many respects.

Set partly in the mythical island of Willow Springs, the story concerns mainly Naylor's probing into the dark spaces that have long been marginalized by hegemonic accounts. This novel, accordingly, has garnered the attention of many researchers due to its powerful implications. It led several reviewers, including Sanchez (2002), Sandin and Perez (2013), and Yavaş (2014) in this stance, to align Naylor with the magic realist tradition while others, like Erickson (1993) and Fowler (1996), highlighted Shakespearean overtones in the story as they compared *Mama Day* to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with its similar themes of reconciliation, magic, and spirituality. However, Brondum (1991) and Montgomery (2010) focused their attention on situating the novel within postcolonial and historical contexts as they focused on the notions of home and the Middle Passage in informing Naylor's critical standpoint.

This article, nevertheless, suggests a different interpretation of Naylor's work. It seeks to highlight the significance of reading *Mama Day* through a spatial perspective, especially that it concerns itself most with issues of resistance and asserting one's place in a racist society. Since Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopia defines this space as a resistant locus, the premise of our analysis shows that Naylor's resistance to a prescribed and circumscribed peripherality is revealed through a construction of a heterotopic island.

2. Foucault's Heterotopia as a Space of Different Order

Foucault talked about the concept of heterotopia that underlies my analysis of *Mama Day* 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). In his definition of heterotopias, Foucault contrasted these spaces with utopias as 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". (Foucault et al., 1998, p.178)

Utopic spaces, as Foucault indicated 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" (Foucault, 2002, p.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. (Foucault, 1984, p.3)

However, similar to utopias, heterotopias can reflect and reverse other places yet “they are actually localizable” (Foucault et al., 1998, p.178). Through these sites, Foucault proposed a new spatial dimension that encompasses a new order different from the one already mediated through and represented by utopias. In this, he suggested 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. However, 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 foundation of societies. In this context, Foucault (1984) assumed 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. (pp. 3-4)

Lacking a clear-cut meaning, Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, therefore, opens a wide intellectual space for new discussions, interpretations, and applications of this concept. Nevertheless, one consensus concerning defining heterotopia seems to perceive of this site as a spatial entity that challenges 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 (1984) 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. (p. 3)

2.1. Heterotopia and Heterochrony

It is Foucault’s (1984) conceptualization 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” (p. 3) that informs my reading of Gloria Naylor’s depiction of Willow Springs as a heterotopic space. In his attempt to provide a perspicuous description of what he calls “heterotopology” (p. 4), Foucault (1984) suggests 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 which Foucault calls “heterochrony” (p. 6). This principle identifies heterotopia as “a slice in time”, 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” (p. 6), Foucault considered heterotopias not only as places for the affirmation of difference but also as mediums for possible resistance and defiance.

2.2. *Heterotopia, Periphery, and Resistance*

In addition to their intricate spatio-temporal peculiarity, heterotopias are viewed as spaces of ambivalent dimensions. In his provocative elaboration on the function of heterotopic spatial relations, Hetherington (2003) commented on the ambiguity 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” (p. 49). This ambivalence, we suppose, arises from the very marginal position these spaces occupy. According to Foucault (1984), 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 indicated, expresses “an alternate ordering of society through its contact with the society that it despised” (p. 6). Seemingly, Hetherington shares with Foucault’s assumption that heterotopic sites do constitute a different order, which contrasts with the ordering of society. Besides, by referring to these places as “Other or marginal places” (p. 8), Hetherington delineated heterotopia as places of otherness, which provide either an unsettling or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations. The following passage describes how Hetherington associated the notion of ‘Other places’ with counter-hegemonic resistance:

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. (p. 7)

We find that, while highlighting the marginal quality of heterotopias, Hetherington (2003) drew upon the relationship between these sites and an agency to produce acts of resistance. 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 Harvey’s (2012) thought into heterotopias when he defined them as “liminal social spaces of possibility where something different is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories” (p. xvii). However, this argument arises from Lefebvre’s (1947/1991) belief that space has historically evolved through four different phases: absolute space, historical space, abstract space, and differential space. By absolute space, Lefebvre meant the natural space that “was made up of fragments of nature” (p. 48). By fragments, he meant mountains, caves, rivers, and the like. The historical space, however, is the politicized space that evolves out of the absolute space and which Lefebvre used 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” (Lefebvre, 1947/1991, p.370). According to Lefebvre, this space is not initially homogenous, but the fact that

it has “homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, and its ‘lens’...it renders homogenous” (p. 287).

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” (p. 287). The main objective of such spaces, hence, is to impose homogeneity, order, and transparency “everywhere within the purview of power and its established order” (p. 330). However, the contradicting nature of these spaces makes them fall prey to contain within themselves the seeds of a different space that is destined to question the contradiction inherent in abstract spaces. Hence, abstract spaces lead to the emergence of what Lefebvre called counter-spaces or differential spaces, which are produced mainly to highlight and reflect the limitation and vulnerability of spaces of power.

Within this spatial consideration, Lefebvre (1947/1991) characterizes the periphery as a differential fragmented space that opposes to the power inherent in global spaces. He explained 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” (p. 356). He further pointed 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 (p. 386). It is in this sense, thereof; Lefebvre’s counter-spaces intersect with 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.

3. The Historical Context of the Novel’s Heterotopic Setting

Within mainstream history, the experience of slavery in the transatlantic space is one that is replete with gaps or lacunas. Several black female authors, mainly Gloria Naylor in this stance, have responded to this historical dilemma by dredging up and re-inscribing their narratives to historicize this experience. They have used their fictions to fill up these lacunas, especially those concerned with and left by the Middle Passage. Their fictions thereby become tribunes to negotiate and reclaim the transatlantic event of the Middle Passage that prompted the problematic arrival of black people to America. We, therefore, argue that Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* represents a cunningly aesthetic endeavor to historicize the marginal spaces occupied by black people in American history, especially the Middle Passage.

Although this transatlantic event is not forthrightly accented or addressed in the novel, the Middle Passage can be assumed to serve as a historical reference upon which Naylor models the heterotopic setting of her fictional text. Naylor constructs the novel’s distinctively fictive spatiality against the backdrop of a real place, the Sea Islands, that is located off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. Historically speaking, the geographical landscape of these islands features dimensions of isolation and resistance. While commenting on the peculiar history of these islands, Brondum (1991) 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. (p.153)

Brondum (1991) further pointed to how isolation helped the community of this place, the Gullahs, succeeded in forming distinct African cultural traditions and retained their unique culture against external influences. She commented, “Isolated from the mainland, the Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African captives, here created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African American Culture” (p. 153).

Tucker (as cited in Fowler, 1996) is among the scholars who speculated about the origins of the Gullahs. Tucker indicated that the ancestors of the dominant ethnic community that was formed by the descendants of freed slaves were 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” (p. 93).

Apart from their historical peculiarity, the Sea Islands feature a heterotopic quality in the sense that their roots are steeped in both of America and Africa yet belonging to neither place. Since Foucault (1984) described heterotopias as “places ...outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (p. 4), the placelessness of these islands, in this regard, renders them heterotopic. Besides, and as mentioned before, this place 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, 1991, p. 102).

4. Naylor Constructing a Place of Different Order:

In light of previous theoretical discussions, Gloria Naylor’s novel appears to have created a space that shares resonances with the concept of heterotopia. Molded on the rebellious historical site of the Sea Islands, Willow Springs articulates Naylor’s spatial metaphor of resistance to mainstream American ideology by reclaiming and inscribing a unique version of a silenced black history. Moreover, we 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, places of a different order. The narrative unfolds that through tropes of geography, magic, characterization, and time Naylor’s heterotopia stands strong against places of otherness that had long defined the peripheral status of blacks in the American historical landscape.

4.1. Subverting the Periphery: Willow Springs as a Resistant Heterotopia

Similar to Foucault’s heterotopia, Naylor (1988) creates a place outside of all places, a place that is impossible to locate on a map. As one of the novel’s main characters, George, discovered when he was preparing to visit it, Willow Springs does not appear on any map, and 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 . . .where was Willow Springs? 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 country claimed it? Where was the nearest interstate highway, the nearest byroad?
(p. 174)

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 place. The reader immediately understands that the novel concerns itself most with geography and asserting one's place and power over historical maps.

As a fictitious island lying outside the national borders of the United States, Willow Springs expresses its geographical independence, as an all-black-owned space, by being located somewhere between 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, 1988, pp. 4-5). Besides, its inhabitants refused to succumb to the mainland's administrative attempts to take over the island and make it visible on the American map. Besides, the island's community 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" (p. 6).

Furthermore, they secured the land against the plans of real estate developers which aimed at morphing the place into a vacation paradise and people like, Mama Day and Abigail, 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" (p. 6). Therefore, these defiant acts emphasize a counter-hegemonic discourse to the socio-economic order these states plan to impose on the island, and it becomes clear for the reader that exerting any kind of external influence on Willow Springs' community was 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" (p. 63). Apparently, Naylor (1988) not only creates a community that escapes the white conventions, but a community that reverses white conventions through maintaining distinctive cultural traditions. Here, we may recall Foucault's very definition of the concept of heterotopia in relation to culture. Foucault (1984) 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 simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (p. 3). Naylor, in this vein, relies on the unique creativity of Foucault's concept to create a space outside the parameters of dominant cultural norms. To achieve this, she deliberately structures the story around a set of contrasts between New York City and Willow Springs. In her representation of a resistant heterotopic island, we argue that Naylor casts her narrative into

opposing spatial and temporal metaphors.

4.1.1. A Magical Matriarchal Space Vs. Rational Patriarchal Space

Before we proceed to explain the conflict inherent between these spaces, it is worth mentioning that Naylor opens her book with facts about the genealogy of the island as she preceded her story by three symbolic documents, including the map. Interestingly, however, is that one of these prefatory documents is about the Day family tree. 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, 1996, p.94); while showing that the community of Willow Springs are descendants of the mythical matriarch, Sapphira Wade. Even though the name of this matriarch “is never breathed out of a single mouth in Willow Springs” (Naylor, 1988, p.4), this legendary former-slave woman is introduced to the reader as a mythical character who Naylor presented 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” (p. 4). Through this introductory exposition, we see that this legendary woman serves as a locus for exploring the magical and matriarchal nexus out of which Naylor’s heterotopic world evolved.

It is important to note that Willow Springs is not only an all-black but a black-owned place too. Significantly, only the reader 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, 1988, p. 3), Naylor abandons “what can be considered cliché” (Sandín & Perez, 2013, p. 264) in American literature. She deployed the legend of an iconoclastic Sapphira Wade to subvert the stereotypical image of a slave woman as compliant and weak. In this, we may assume that Naylor’s heterotopia inverts hegemonic representations of slave women by drawing on the rebellious Gullahs to create this character. Naylor, furthermore, recasts this character into an “archetypal subverter” (Fowler, 1996, p. 95) 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” (p. 95). This twist, of course, could not happen in American states since they prevent slaves from owning land, but in Naylor’s heterotopic world, such a twist is made possible for Naylor knows that land gives people a strong sense of power and place. Nevertheless, it is Sapphira Wade and her granddaughter Mama Day, the matriarchs of the island, who possess and use their magical powers to heal and free their people (Naylor, 1988, p. 3).

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. We must then shed the assumption that what helped us read Naylor’s 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. There is only one thing that seems to connect these different realms, which is what Naylor describes as a “shaky wooden bridge” (Naylor, 1988, p.175). 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 a rational patriarchal New York, encounters Willow Springs, a

place with a powerful, dazzling magic aura.

One of Naylor's most significant accomplishments in this novel is a use 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, 1988, p.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, 2001, p.89). He mentioned:

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, 1988, p. 175)

He immediately realized that the knowledge he acquired while he was in New York would be of no use in this heterotopic world. His attempts to understand the otherworldly cosmology of Willow Springs according to western empiricist rationality proved futile and elusive and Naylor (1988) unfolds this rationality as unavailing the moment George failed to locate the island on the map:

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 . . . Where was Willow Springs? 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 country claimed it? Where was the nearest interstate highway, the nearest by road? (p. 17)

Indeed, for a "dislocated urbanite" (Montgomery, 2010, p. 155), "practical-minded engineer" (Wilson, 2001, p. 90) with "a practical upbringing" (p. 88) and "modern urban modes of knowing"

(Dubey, 2003, p. 180), it was hard for George to believe in the existence of a place that doesn't show on a map and this will definitely upset any rational mind:

George Andrews, a black orphan raised and educated in a government shelter for boys in the values of the white world, constantly fails to grasp the true nature of Willow Springs. A "white" urban professional sophisticate, George is the epitome of Western rational, empiricist worldview, who relentlessly struggles to impose an all encompassing and logically consistent narrative upon the sounds, people, customs, and myths of Willow Springs. (Yavaş, 2014, p. 250)

With his mind imbued with Western rationality, George relentlessly struggles to impose his empiricist way of thinking, based on "his solid grounding in analysing problems of conflict" (Wilson, 2001, p. 210), upon a realm that transcends human understanding, a world where, as his wife Cocoa cautions him, "his maps were no good" (p. 177).

Nevertheless, the epitome of western rationality faced a conundrum when he failed to embrace the real essence of the island's heterotopic character. First, George found it difficult to believe in the legend of Sapphira Wade, and second when his wife, Cocoa, fell ill because of conjuring. On the one hand, George, who attempts to impose a Eurocentric order on Willow Springs, could not believe in such a thing as a community that rooted back to a woman whose existence is legendary:

The whole thing was so intriguing. 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: deeds of sale for his slaves. Where had his home been on this island? Did he have a family? Who erected his tombstone? (Naylor, 1988, p. 218)

On the other hand, he could not accept the fact that his wife was conjured, and Mama Day, who is believed to have inherited magical powers from her great grandmother Sapphira, has to perform some rituals to save her. This loss of connection between George and a matriarchal magical heterotopia is symbolized in the destruction of the only bridge that relates Willow Springs to New York. So, it is not until he relinquishes Western epistemology and put faith in Mama Day's wisdom that he can save his wife and ultimately reconcile with his rootedness that steps deeply into the mythical history of the island.

However, the ambiguous scene that involves George's death at the end of his twisting journey into this heterotopic world 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 community's occult lore, he dies because of an overwhelmingly uncanny incident, "because 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, 2010, p. 164). His death makes the question of his entry into the heterotopia more complex, yet, we may infer two opposing interpretations: his burial in the Day family cemetery presents a symbolic entry into a heterotopic community or an ultimate expulsion from it.

4.1.2. *Willow Springs and Heterochrony*

The ways Naylor's characters, the inhabitants of Willow Springs, relate to and conceptualize time are also crucial to explore the notion of resistant heterotopia. By presenting Willow Springs as a heterochronic site, Naylor invites readers to consider how this imaginative island addresses an ambiguous complex of space and time to defy the mainland's traditional spatio-temporal experience. This ambiguity, as Hetherington (2003) states above, lies in the liminality this island assumes between Africa and America and between past and present. Associating *Mama Day* with a narrative discourse of liminality, Lenz and Isensee (2017) read Naylor's book as:

A novel of black Africans in the diaspora, of the radical contrast between living in New York City and on an island in the Gullah Islands that is a liminal space, "another world," not belonging to any of the Southern states, set in a liminal time where the common distinctions of past and present do not apply. (p. 166)

Harvey's (2012) description of heterotopias as liminal social spaces also proves pertinent here as he, like Hetherington, connected heterotopias with a state of liminality. However, when placed in the historical context of the Sea Islands as a liminal social space, blacks were liminal both in the sense of not belonging to their ancestral homelands and also in the sense of not fully belonging to America. Therefore, inhabiting such ambiguous state of in-betweenness, or what Hetherington characterizes it as the threshold, black subjects underwent a liminal phase in which the sense of time and place was pendent. In this vein, it is important to note that Willow Springs functions as a mediating space between Africa and America, which suggests the liminality of this island.

In addition to the historical significance of the Sea Islands in informing about the liminality of Naylor's imaginary place, we may also connect the liminal space this place occupies in relation to the Middle Passage:

Within the context of the transatlantic slave trade, the Middle Passage operates as an archetypal liminal space; as a geographical area, it was not relegated to the 'edge' but rather suspended in the middle of a triangular threshold between the continents of Europe, Africa and the Americas. (Boyle, 2008, pp. 8-9)

Indeed, the experience of the Middle Passage marks a huge hole in black history and this predicament has kept haunting and shaping the literature of blacks for decades for the mere reason that the Middle Passage emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial continuum between Africa and the Americas (Diedrich et al., 1999).

In this sense, we may argue that Willow Springs presents an imaginative revision of the Middle Passage since it represents a space of liminality that primarily emphasizes a spatial continuum between Africa and America, more specifically, between a rural space (Willow Springs) and an urban space (New York). To consolidate this idea, Lenz and Isensee (2017) likened Willow Springs to the Gullah Islands as both places mark physically and metaphorically a liminal space that is "set in a liminal time where the common distinctions of past and present do not apply"

(p. 166). Indeed, in *Mama Day*, the spatial continuum between the island and the mainland is disrupted by a liminal time that interrupts the succession between the past and the present. Naylor demonstrates this disruption in the way she makes a linear and sequential time becomes foreign to the inhabitants of Willow Springs:

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. (Naylor, 1988, p. 160)

Moreover, the heterochronous liminality of Willow Springs is primarily characterized by a discrepant temporality, as it ironically features fluid and static time frames. This temporal incongruity well reflects Naylor's wit understanding of the ambivalence surrounding black historical experience as the latter neither makes a good sense of the past nor establishes a good meaning of itself in the present. Reema's boy is the best character to exemplify this ambivalent predicament. When Reema's son, an anthropologist "from one of those fancy colleges main side," started to do some research on the island's central myth, that of the very mythical date of 18&23, he was surprised at the fact that this number refers to the lines of longitude and latitude marking off the place where Willow Springs locates:

You see, he had come to the conclusion after "extensive field work" (ain't never picked a boll of cotton or head of lettuce in his life-Reema spoiled him silly), but he done still made it to the conclusion that 18 & 23 wasn't 18 & 23 at all-was really 81 & 32, which just so happened to be the lines of longitude and latitude marking off where Willow Springs sits on the map. And we were just so damned dumb that we turned the whole thing around. (Naylor, 1988, p.8)

Therefore, the symbolic narrative of heterochrony is framed within a magical time and place setting where "Only at Willow Springs a year could be more than 365 days, and only here, this landmark year signifies the exact longitude and latitude of the island (that is, if it was on a map)" (Buehler, 2012, p. 185). Naylor, in this sense, makes Willow Springs a magical setting that transcends the limits of time and space. Reflecting on this idea, Yavaş (2014) notes that the magical reality of this island is embedded not in a static, unchanging, passive, nostalgic past; it is constantly re-articulated and adapted to temporal and social changes" (p. 248).

We may deduce that in *Mama Day*, Naylor creates an autonomous black community that experiences a heterochronic sense of time. In so doing, Naylor challenges the traditional hegemonic logic that perceives time as occurring in a linear sequence that is present, past, and future. Problematizing and reversing the mainland's experience of time, Naylor demonstrates varying yet contradicting time experiences on Willow Springs. Indeed, what seems to feature Willow Springs' community experience of a heterochronous time is the very year 1823. On its most basic level, Willow Springs exhibits a time frame that destabilizes that of white authority. According to the traditional hegemonic logic of time as occurring in a linear sequence, the

following passage cannot be believable:

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, 1988, p. 3)

It is hard for people like George or Reema's boy, for instance, to believe this story for it is impossible to have a woman, Sapphira Wade, marrying Bascombe, bearing him seven sons, persuading him to deed Willow Springs to her and then killing him all in one year. Through this magical year, we understand that Naylor transcends and challenges the mainland's conception of time. Besides, as expressed in this passage, Willow Springs' community experience of time resists the nature of temporality that occurs according to the logic of the dominant white culture by stressing a uniquely magical time of both fluid and static character. 1823, then, is not a normal year. It is the year that marks the creation as well as the heterochrony of the island.

5. Conclusion

This paper came to the conclusion that the richness and complexity of works by Black women writers make them prolific mediums for investigation and interpretation. Indeed, reading Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* using Foucault's concept of heterotopia proves rewarding in understanding and appreciating the novelist's genius in representing the multifaceted and complicated experience of Blacks in America. In our analysis of *Mama Day*, we found that the distinctiveness of Naylor's literary endeavor is reflected in two stances. First, her wit response to the sheer fact of othering Blacks in a hegemonic white community with constructing a medium where it would be possible for her to generate what Foucault termed as places of otherness or heterotopias. Second, her literary genius in transforming a physical place into a site of agency where the subversive yet productive dynamics of heterotopia interrupt and deconstruct the existing ideologies of mainstream culture.

It is further deduced that, according to Naylor's fictional insight, spaces like heterotopia are of great potential in unsettling and challenging the way the dominant cultures look into marginalized groups. In the novel, Naylor's heterotopia was a magical and matriarchal island set outside the borders of America. If we inferred anything, it would be that Naylor's heterotopia presented an imaginative articulation of spaces of a different order. Spaces that exist outside the logic and parameters of American hegemonic discourses.

Because of its inherent potential of resistance, heterotopia provided a perfect analytical tool for our interpretation of Naylor's main concern in *Mama Day*, that of disturbing dominant discourses of race and gender. As she placed her heterotopic imaginative island in contrast with America, we understood that Naylor drew readers' attention to the fact that in a society where marginalized groups found it difficult, if not impossible, to tell their own stories, there would always be a way to do so. Yet they must never give up the quest.

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