

A NEW GEOGRAPHY: PLACE AND SPACE IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S FICTION

**A NEW GEOGRAPHY:
PLACE AND SPACE IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S FICTION**

By
TERRENCE REID BISHOP, B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Terrence Reid Bishop, August 1996.

MASTER OF ARTS (1996)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: A New Geography: Place and Space in Gloria Naylor's Fiction

AUTHOR: Terrence Reid Bishop, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Donald C. Goellnicht

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 99

Abstract

This thesis involves a study of how place and space interact in Gloria Naylor's novels. Although there has been some discussion of these issues in regards to her first two novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, there has been less on *Mama Day*, and *Bailey's Cafe* has yet to receive any great critical attention. In this work, I will add a theoretical dimension that African-American criticism has not utilized. My use of geographical discourse to define how place and space exist and coexist will provide the basis for my argument. The spatial construction of race, class and gender has the power to socially and literally "place" people. Naylor, however, offers that positive spaces can be developed to counteract the effects of the symbolic spatial order. I also examine why Gloria Naylor's novels have changed so much since *The Women of Brewster Place*. Focusing mainly on *Mama Day* and *Bailey's Cafe* I outline a progression that I see as her novels move from settings in literal places to an almost total disregard of literal place.

In the Introduction, I outline my theoretical approach and then briefly examine similar issues of place and space in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*. Moving then into an examination of *Mama Day*, I explore how Naylor begins to expand her geography, breaking down concepts of literal place and focusing more on positive space. In the chapter on *Bailey's Cafe*, I argue that this is Naylor's boldest manipulation of geography as place turns into psychological, personal and communal space. I also argue throughout these chapters that Naylor's textual strategies begin to reflect the breakdown in place as the novels become psychological, personal and communal spaces. Naylor's novels, therefore, offer a new type of geography that defies social space and the limits of physical place.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Donald C. Goellnicht for introducing Gloria Naylor to me, always pushing me to do better in my work, and for his helpful supervision of this thesis.

This thesis is dedicated to Kristi, who shares my love for African-American literature, who has always been supportive, and who has helped me in this project through discussion and reading of drafts.

I also dedicate this to Halle/Esai, who waited just a little too long to be born.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:

Naylor's Geography: Place, Space and *The Women of Brewster Place*
and *Linden Hills* 1

Chapter One:

Mama Day: Experimenting With Geography 19

Chapter Two:

Bailey's Café: A New Kind of Geography 54

Conclusion:

Naylor's Geographical World 89

Works Cited or Consulted 94


Introduction: Naylor's Geography: Place, Space and
The Women of Brewster Place and *Linden Hills*

In her four interconnected novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), and *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), Gloria Naylor creates a fictional world in which she develops a saga of African-American lives that spans the American landscape and beyond. Brewster Place and Linden Hills are located near each other in a fictional Northern urban place in America. The novels are roughly set in the same time period: *The Women of Brewster Place* in the late 1960s or early 1970s and *Linden Hills* in the 1970s. The setting of *Mama Day* moves from another Northern urban place, New York City, to the fictional Sea Island of Willow Springs during the mid 1980s. *Bailey's Cafe* is set mainly in New York City in 1948 and 1949. In addition, the stories and family sagas narrated in the four novels span the whole range of African-American history.

This thesis is an examination of Gloria Naylor's geography. Like many African-American writers, Naylor is very concerned with the effect of place on character. This theme in African-American expressive culture results from the fact that displacement has been such a significant issue in African-American history. Displacement from tribal life in Africa to slavery in the American South, segregation after emancipation, and migrations from the South to the North, are all part of the struggle African Americans have faced in finding a place of liberation in the American landscape. As Barbara Christian writes, "Because of the consistency of forced displacement in our collective experience, we know how critical where we are is to the character of our social creations, of how place helps to tell us a great deal about who we are and who we can become" ("Geography" 106).

Throughout the history of African America, however, there have been many barriers to the

establishment of place. The effects of racism have been instrumental in shaping and defining the spaces that African Americans occupy. I use the word “space” intentionally here, in order to reflect on another important geographical reality. The relationship between space and place is crucial for an understanding of the geography of African Americans. Places can be defined as literal physical locations within which “a specific set of interrelationships between environmental, economic, social, political and cultural processes” operate (Rose 41). Space, on the other hand, is a different and more complex reality. Geographer Doreen Massey argues that “the spatial is socially constituted. ‘Space’ is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global” (265). Furthermore, space is a “social construction . . . which is a formation of both discursive and non-discursive elements, practices, and processes” (Shields 7). Social space, therefore, is a phenomenon that arises from social interaction between people resulting in a transparent discursive construction by a dominant power that attempts to define who you are and where you belong. White America, in having the institutional power, attempts to define the spaces that African Americans must inhabit. In this way, the idea of place becomes much more complicated. As the defining power of social space is enacted through societal power relations, the dominant discourse has the ability to set African Americans in specific places. The history of slavery and institutional segregation in the American South, as well as locational and institutional segregation in the North, are examples of how the spatial affects the locational. Racist discourse that defines blackness as a negative sign sets African Americans in literal separate places.

 Faced with these tremendous obstacles, African Americans have had to try to create their own spaces to defy the constructed spaces of the dominant discourse that have resulted in limiting physical places. This is evident in the African-American literary tradition. In *Ride Out the*

Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature, Melvin Dixon claims that “Afro-American literature is replete with speech acts and spatial images that . . . endow language with the power to reinvent geography and identity” (2). Dixon suggests that “images of journeys, conquered spaces, imagined havens, and places of refuge” (all of which are prominent in Naylor’s novels) are key in African-American literature (2). Through the creation of literal and metaphorical places, African-American artists have been able to “change the land where they were forced to live into a home they could claim” (3). Passage into “the alternative space is . . . one step toward the recovery of wholeness” (5). Through different spaces or even imagined geographies, African Americans can create psychological, personal and communal spaces of freedom away from the established racist spaces. Throughout Gloria Naylor’s novels, we see characters who are able to create these spaces. Also, Naylor herself is reinventing geography. She is well aware of the confining potential of established place and the spatial relationships that create literal places. Therefore, in a progression through her novels, she begins to break down traditional notions of place and offers space as an alternative. Her different idea of space must be seen as distinct from the concept of social space that I have been discussing. A new notion of space, therefore, must be outlined.

A different kind of geographical discourse sees place and space in a more positive light. Humanistic geography focuses on the human significance of place and the “emotional response of people to places” (Rose 41). Yi-Fu Tuan introduces this different relationship between place and space: “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (3).

Tuan then expands his explanation:

‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value . . . The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible

for location to be transformed into place (6).

This distinction between place and space runs throughout Gloria Naylor's novels. Her specific settings are locational pauses where people relate to one another in place and where power relations develop. Within the pause of these places, however, at times characters can create spaces of freedom. Tuan's idea of space as a non-material entity characterized by psychological freedom and movement provides a good way to define Naylor's positive spaces that are outside the material boundaries and realities of physical place. Whenever I speak of these spaces below, I will be referring back to this definition. These positive spaces, of course, are to be differentiated from the idea of social spatialization, which I will refer to as social space. I am proposing that there are three types of positive space in the novels: psychological space, personal space and communal space. These spaces form strategic escapes from the dominant discursive order that attempts to limit people in physical locations.

This thesis traces the development of Naylor's ideas on place and space through her novels. (Naylor shows how the material nature of literal place is related to the spatial constructions of race, class, gender and sexuality. While place is a necessity and can be a positive force, the boundaries created around place often restrict personal agency. In her third and fourth novels, Naylor begins to break down conventional ideas of place and geography and move toward a non-material conceptualization of place, or space, as literal and literary possibilities for her characters and herself. In these later novels, there is a move away from literal settings and the realistic style of the novels, to a developing artistic vision of metaphysical settings used to reflect on theoretical issues. There are three issues that I wish to focus on in relation to place and space throughout this thesis: history, identity and community.

History is such an important factor in the relationship between space and place since, as

Alisdair Rogers says, "How space is produced depends upon the historical and material circumstances operating" (239). As I have already mentioned, and will expand on further, the establishment of place for African Americans has been shaped by historical and material forces. Slavery, segregation, journeys from South to North, and urban life are all part of the material reality of historical events. Thus, I will use the term "historio-material" when I am referring to these matters. The issues of identity and community are somewhat related. As I will argue, Naylor shows how personal identity and relationships can be shaped by social space and literal place. In the ability to transcend social boundaries and the confines of place, individuals can recreate themselves and form positive communal bonds.

In this thesis I have a very broad theoretical base. Since the issue of place and space is so broad, and because of its great importance in African-American history and literature, there is a wide variety of thought on the subject. My approach is eclectic, including theoretical material from geographical discourse, feminist and poststructuralist thinking.¹ Although my main focus will be on *Mama Day* and *Bailey's Cafe*, I want to introduce my topic by briefly discussing Naylor's notions of place and space in her first two novels. An analysis of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* will provide a preface to some of the issues that Naylor is concerned with in her geographical world.

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor is largely concerned with the historio-material realities of Northern urban place. Susan Willis' Marxist criticism is particularly pertinent for understanding Naylor's first novel. Willis argues that it is the nature of capitalist society to inscribe "time and place within property relationships" and that "those who own property and control the means of production control time and place as well" (36-7). The introduction to the novel describes the political and economic forces at work to create place: "Brewster Place was the bastard

child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company” (1). In their business and political dealings, these men, “[a]s an afterthought . . . agreed to erect four double-housing units on some worthless land in the badly crowded district” (1). Brewster Place is also shaped by the politics of prejudice. Although it “was to become part of the main artery of town,” the surrounding people were “offended by the pungent smells of strong cheeses and smoked meats” of the Mediterranean residents (2). Therefore, “the wall came up and Brewster Place became a dead-end street” (2). This literal and symbolic dead-end is what the generations of African Americans inherit. In the economic necessity for place, therefore, the people must live in these places that have been physically created and shaped by capitalism and prejudice. They are assigned to this marginal place because of their economic and social status; the dominant culture seeks to keep them out of sight.

The historio-material significance of place continues as Naylor begins her running concern with contrasting the American North and South. Susan Willis argues that African-American women writers “portray the difference between South and North as a difference in economics,” (8) while Barbara Christian states that the common characteristic of the women in Naylor’s novel is that “they must live in streets like Brewster Place, that is that they are displaced persons” and that they “are outcasts precisely because they are poor black women” (“Geography” 119). Naylor locates urban Brewster Place in a historical process of displacement from the rural South. The displaced African-American women cling “to the street with a desperate acceptance that whatever was here was better than the starving southern climates they had fled from” (4). This simple statement implicates the racism and segregation of the South that led to African-American migrations to the urban North in search of better economic opportunities. Three major migrations have formed this experience. One was a postbellum migration in 1879 and the other two occurred during and after both world wars

(Franklin 279,340,465). These migrations were a result of the booms in industry in the Northern cities that prompted African Americans to flee their desperate conditions in the South.² In this process of displacement, the establishment of place becomes key for African Americans. (However, there is, ironically, often a continued displacement in the North as the exiles encounter great difficulties in creating place.)

As the first portrait given, Mattie Michael's story can be seen as symbolic of the economic barriers in the urban North to the establishment of place. Mattie cannot create a comfortable place for herself and her child because of the material realities of her world. Reluctantly, Mattie has to leave Basil with a baby-sitter when at work. She longs to be with her son, however: "To save carfare, Mattie would walk the thirty blocks back to the boardinghouse to see the baby during her lunch break. She had just enough time to rush in, pick him up, see if he was wet or marked in some way, and then go back to work" (27-8). In Mattie's search for a new place after Basil is bitten by a rat, Naylor reflects on the socioeconomic basis of discrimination based on race, class and gender:

After countless attempts, she learned that there was no need in wasting her energy to climb to steps in the white neighborhoods that displayed vacancy signs, and she even learned to shun certain neatly manicured black neighborhoods.

"Where's your husband?"

"I ain't got one."

"This is a respectable place!" (29-30)

Mattie is turned away from shelter by whites because of her skin colour and rejected by blacks because of her class and her position as a single mother. When Mattie meets Eva, however, she actually finds more than just a place to stay.

In Eva Turner's house, Mattie finds sanctuary from the hostile world. This idea begins Naylor's long concern with the types of places that allow people a temporary refuge from modern realities. Eva's house becomes what bell hooks describes as a "homeplace". In her idea of the

homeplace, hooks recognizes the importance of the physical structure of a house that provides shelter. However, she also uses the term “space” to reflect on the greater psychological and communal significance. hooks argues that “it has been primarily the responsibility of black women to construct domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination” (42). A homeplace is a private space, outside of the historio-material realities of racism, sexism and poverty, where resistance to the dominant order can be achieved as communal bonds are created. *Matty?* Eva’s house provides a psychological, personal and communal space of freedom for the inhabitants. Through the community established between Mattie, Eva, Basil, and Ciel, the members of the household achieve a partial escape from the temporal march of history as the demands of linear time/history break down: “And she lay down with her son and sank into a timeless sleep. Time’s passage through the memory is like molten glass that can be opaque or crystallize at any given moment at will: a thousand days are melted into one conversation, one glance, one hurt, and one hurt can be shattered and sprinkled over a thousand days” (35). The idea of this place also transcends the physical need for shelter and becomes endowed with spiritual qualities. Mattie feels peace in the sun porch where the presence of Miss Eva and God is felt (43). She also knows she needs to own the house since “[h]er own spirit must one day have a place to rest because the body could not, as it pushed and struggled to make all around them safe and comfortable” (40).

Although Mattie is able to buy the house and live in it for thirty years, the realities of the material nature of place begin to slowly creep back in after Eva dies, Ciel goes away and Basil grows older. Basil’s selfishness and fear of the enclosed physical and psychological space of jail force Mattie to give up her house to secure his bail. Once again, the economic realities of owning place emerge. We see “a lifetime of work lying in the bricks of her home” (53) instantly taken away.

When Mattie arrives at Brewster Place she understands the limitations of this place: “Her eyes trailed slowly along the cracked stoops and snow-filled gutters until they came to her building. She glanced at the wall and, with an inner sigh, remembered her plants [in the sun porch] again” (54). This ghetto place, as represented by the wall, is the final possibility for Mattie as well as all of the other women of Brewster Place whose lives are shaped by their economic position.³

The confinement of Brewster Place is symbolized by the images of boundaries that pervade the novel. The wall is the obvious image of confinement in the lives of these women who have been displaced because of their race, class and gender. For Etta Mae Johnson, in contrast to the road imagery and images of mobility in her story, “the wall that closed off Brewster . . . crouched there in the thin predawn light, like a pulsating mouth awaiting her arrival” (73). Cora Lee’s small apartment seems suffocating with the anarchy of her children’s activity while she passively watches soap operas. This confinement of the place also extends to the psychology of the people of this neighbourhood. Naylor reflects on the limited psychic spaces of the people in this world of boundaries. When Ciel is instructed on the process of getting an abortion we begin to see her psychic isolation: “Ciel was not listening. It was important that she keep herself completely isolated from these surroundings. All the activities of the past week of her life were balled up and jammed on the right side of her brain, as if belonging to some other woman” (95). At Serena’s funeral “Ciel’s whole universe existed in the seven feet of space between herself and her child’s narrow coffin” (101). Although this literal and psychic confinement exists, Naylor reflects on possibilities for transcending the enclosed places and spaces.

Naylor presents various possibilities for overcoming the confines of place and creating more liberating spaces. Ultimately, however, these possibilities break down in the novel. Cora Lee can transcend her limiting apartment by watching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the realities of

time and place are suspended for a magical evening, but ultimately, she returns to her children, her shadow lover, and another pregnancy. Naylor offers the community between women as the greatest opportunity to transcend the confines of place. After Etta Mae's night with Reverend Woods, she is comforted by the fact that Mattie has waited up for her as she "climbed the steps toward the light and love and the comfort that awaited her" (74). This sisterhood between Mattie and Etta creates a communal space of intimacy that can overcome the debilitating effects of place. Mattie is also able to bring Ciel out of her confined psychological place through the mothering act of rocking: "Ciel moaned. Mattie rocked. Propelled by the sound, Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time" (103). Through their interaction, Ciel is able to transcend linear history to confront some of the confining places black women have experienced, like the slave ship (103). She, therefore, moves beyond the temporal reality of place and time into a space where healing can begin. Although this community between the women is very important, there are two shortcomings. The first problem is that the community does not enact change. Barbara Christian argues that the relationships are important but do not "substantively change their lives" as the novel closes with the women moving to another street to relive the same patterns ("Geography" 120). The second is that the community can be exclusive.

The women's community has its own boundaries that exclude certain people. Lorraine and Theresa are excluded from the community when the women of Brewster Place are "[c]onfronted with the difference that had been thrust into their predictable world" (132). The women cannot accept a lesbian relationship because of the psychic boundaries that separate acceptable from unacceptable sexuality. The discursive production of the social spaces of sexuality does not allow a language to describe a lesbian couple. Even Mattie, who is generally accepting of people, says, "I can't help feelin' that what they're doing ain't quite right. How do you get that way? Is it from birth?" (141).

Sophie's words to Lorraine demonstrate how social spaces are created to keep the "other" locationally separated: "'Movin' into our block causin' a disturbance with your nasty ways. You ain't wanted here!'" (145). In not recognizing Lorraine as a person, the community constructs a placeless existence for her as she is "'livin' in a world with no address'" (149). Nor are Lorraine and Theresa accepted by the men of this neighbourhood. C.C. Baker and his gang members have small boundaries to their world as well. Gillian Rose argues that "[s]exual attacks warn women every day that their bodies are not meant to be in certain spaces, and . . . homophobic violence delimits the spaces of . . . lesbian and gay communities" (34). Lorraine is raped because she has transgressed the men's borders: "She had stepped into the thin strip of earth that they claimed as their own. Bound by the last building on Brewster and a brick wall, they reigned in that unlit alley like dwarfed warrior-kings" (169). In Mattie's dream, the women of the novel are also implicated as perpetrators in the rape of Lorraine as their own blood symbolically spreads on the wall (187). The tearing down of the wall represents the women's attempt to escape their enclosed place and confining psychological space. However, we are soon reminded that this is taking place in a dream. There is no utopian ending to the novel. With the "death" of Brewster Place, these same scenarios will be enacted in similar places.

In *Linden Hills*, Naylor continues to describe the historio-material realities of Northern urban place in a very different context. Although the wealthy Linden Hills suburb is very different from Brewster Place, similar things occur. Naylor continues her preoccupation with borders and boundaries from the first lines of the novel:

There had been a dispute for years over the exact location of Linden Hills . . . The original 1820 surveys that Luther Nedced kept locked in his safe-deposit box stated that it was a V-shaped section of land with the boundaries running south for one and a half miles from the stream that bordered Putney Wayne's high grazing fields down a steep, rocky incline of brier bush and linden trees before curving through the town's burial ground and ending in a sharp

point at the road in front of Patterson's apple orchard (1).

The place of Linden Hills is a refiguration of the Bottom in Toni Morrison's *Sula*. In contrast to the "nigger joke" that establishes the Bottom when the white farmer tricks his slave into accepting land in the hills of Medallion, the position and development of Linden Hills is always controlled by generations of African Americans, the Luther Nedeeds. The dream of the second generation Luther Nedeed is to make Linden Hills into a separate black place in the midst of white America, a "wad of spit - a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America" or "an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County but reflected it black" (9). Luke Bouvier argues, however, that "[i]n attempting simply to reverse the poles of the black/white binary opposition by valorizing 'black' instead of 'white,' the Nedeeds remain within the same problematic as the white racists they are supposedly defying, for they both continue to naturalize and essentialize the rhetorical figure of race" (142). Even more significantly, the generations of Luther Nedeeds mirror white capitalist interests since they believe that "you spelled real progress in white capital letters" (11). Gradually, this separate place becomes the sign of black success in America and the geography of the hills becomes stratified to mark the degrees of socioeconomic achievement. Nedeed establishes his house at the bottom of the hill and the ultimate sign of success is to move down as close as possible to Tupelo Drive and Luther Nedeed.⁴

The boundaries that constitute Linden Hills are both literal and metaphorical. Linden Hills is separated from neighbouring places by physical boundaries so that residents from the poor neighbourhood of Putney Wayne are not allowed to cross over into this separate place. Linden Hills, however, has a more significant seclusion in its isolation from others: "They wanted what Luther Nedeed had, and he had shown them how to get it: Just stay right here; you step outside Linden Hills and you've stepped into history - someone else's history about what you couldn't ever do" (16). The

novel seems to be situated in the 1970s, which saw the rise of a black middle class in the North. Although there was still extreme poverty among blacks (Franklin 530), the “occupational differentiation that followed in the wake of industrialization and urbanization drew class lines more distinctly among African Americans” as “a substantial middle class emerged composed of people in the professions and business” (Franklin 424). Linden Hills has separated itself from lower class people. Its isolation, however, has created a sterile environment. As Doreen Massey states, “All attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places, can . . . be seen to be *attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time*” (5). In its seclusion and desire to be anti-history, Linden Hills emerges as a static landscape where people are recycled through a system of self-negation as they move closer to Luther: “whenever anyone reached the Tupelo area, they eventually disappeared. Finally, devoured by their own drives, there just wasn’t enough humanity left to fill the rooms of a real home, and the property went up for sale” (17-18).

Luther’s strict control over boundaries and who can enter Linden Hills leads to a sacrifice of identity as a consequence of moving “up” - which is ironically “down” - in this place. In his discussion on the poetics of African-American place, Houston Baker argues, “For place to be recognized by one as actually PLACE, as a personally valued locale, one must set and maintain the boundaries. If one, however, is constituted and maintained by and within boundaries set by a dominating authority, then one is not a setter of place but a prisoner of another’s desire” (104). In Linden Hills, the Tupelo Realty Corporation, of which Luther is the president, “was terribly selective about the types of families who received mortgages . . . only ‘certain’ people got to live in Linden Hills” (15). These certain people must annul their own identities and desires to follow a pattern established by Luther Nedeed. The negation of self in Linden Hills is most prominent in the story of Winston and David. Haunted by his father’s words, “Remember who you are and where you are,”

(77) Winston is forced to deny his relationship with David to marry Rosalyn Tyler. His reward, given by Luther, is a mortgage on Tupelo Drive. It is clear, therefore, how place is used to control individual identity.

The boundaries of Linden Hills are also established in relation to patriarchal power. Luther, from his place at the bottom of the hill, is the watcher and moulder of all that happens above him. Luther's "V-shaped section of land" (1), Barbara Christian argues, not only allows him "to select those who will be allowed to live near him," ("Geography" 109) it also "suggests the female body even as Nedeed's house situated at the entry suggests the male who wishes to take possession" ("Geography" 114). As Doreen Massey points out, "the need for the security of boundaries, the requirement for such a defensive and counterpositional definition of identity, is culturally masculine" (7). Furthermore, "spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. The limitation of women's mobility, in terms of both identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination" (179). Patriarchal authority, therefore, creates the social spaces women are to inhabit. This, in turn, results in the control of physical place. When Nedeed discovers that Laurel Dumont and her husband are to divorce and have left no children to inherit the house, he comes to tell her to vacate the property. When Laurel argues, "We're in the twentieth century up here at Seven Twenty-Two Tupelo Drive. And I have as much to say about the future of this property as he does," Luther responds, "You're in Linden Hills Mrs. Dumont. Read your lease . . . Howard Dumont has decided that there are to be no more Dumonts at Seven Twenty-Two Tupelo Drive, and . . . that's how things must stand" (244-5). Nedeed's control over boundaries also affects his own household. When he suspects that his light-skinned son is a result of Willa's infidelity, he confines her to the basement: "she had to learn why she was brought to Tupelo Drive. Obviously, he had allowed a

whore into his home but he would turn her into a wife" (19). The spatial construction of "woman" confines Willa to a physical location. In the socioeconomic stratification of the hill where the lowest is the highest, the basement should, technically, be the most prominent place. However, since Willa is forced into place by patriarchy, it becomes the least prominent, although, ironically, a place for self-recreation as Willa is eventually able to create an alternative psychic space.

In Willa's narrative, Naylor begins to manipulate traditional notions of place. Willa is able to use the reality of the place she is in to move beyond the boundaries that entrap her: "being deprived of the infinite expanse of the stars or the sound of waves from a bottomless ocean, she had to anchor the questions and answers for her limited existence to the material enclosed within those four walls" (266-7). Like Ciel's experience during Mattie's rocking in *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor locates Willa's situation in a tradition of the confinement of women when she says that Willa is able to "uncover our history . . . in the way that women have made history, and that is in a confined place" (Pearlman 25). Through the recuperation of the history of the previous women of the house, Willa is able to move outside the historical forces that have confined her to the basement. She discovers a different way of telling history through the documents. Luwana Packerville's writings between books of the Bible are a disruptive force to traditional masculine historiography. Teresa Goddu notes that "Luwana acts like a trickster, working to dismantle the patriarchal word . . . By personalizing biblical stories, she makes history autobiographical" (223). In Luwana's writings, "there were no dates heading the various entries and no apparent order to the aging fragments of the woman's mind" (117). While learning to move beyond masculine constructions, Willa slowly begins to understand the importance of reaching outside linear time and place to move into a space where she can begin to recreate herself.

Willa has to move beyond the restrictions of a temporal reality to create this psychic space

outside of the symbolic spatial order. Time as an image is very important in this novel. Willie is haunted by images of clocks in his dreams and the structure of the novel is marked by the march of the six days before Christmas. At first, Willa is only able to crack the face of the clock that haunts her basement confines (204). However, as she begins to understand herself by participating in the recreation of the history of her “foremothers,” she is finally able to transcend the limits of place and time:

She breathed in to touch the very elements that at the beginning of time sparked to produce the miracle some called divine creation and others the force of life. An unconscious journey in toward the power of will that had crept alone in primordial muck eons before being clothed with fins, scales, wings, or flesh. Then she breathed out. Out, past cells that divided to form ovaries, wombs, and glands. Out, past the crumbling planetary matter that formed the concrete for that room. Out, toward the edge of the universe with its infinite possibility to make space for the volume of her breath (288).

In this primordial psychic space, Willa discovers the “Will” that has shaped woman. After she is metaphorically recreated and undergoes a new birth (289), Luther brings her back to temporal reality with his voice telling her that it is Christmas Eve. Willa has claimed her own identity and is ready to reclaim her place in the house: “She awoke Willa Prescott Nedeed on Christmas Eve. And after she straightened the basement, she was going to start on the rooms upstairs” (289).⁵ Although Naylor is experimenting with these possibilities of transcending place and the creation of space, the novel does not have a utopian ending. People are still trapped within Linden Hills. Willa, literally, cannot leave as she is burned in the fire. It seems that the boundaries in Linden Hills are too strong to be transgressed.

In *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, Naylor has established her concern with place and space. Historio-material realities shape the search for place as the spatial constrictions of race and gender have influenced geographical migrations to the North where African Americans must attempt to establish new places. As she reflects on the importance of displaced people finding

places, Naylor also reveals the socioeconomic barriers to establishing physical places and metaphysical spaces. Although communities can develop in places, the literal and psychological boundaries can exclude people. Naylor is very suspicious of boundaries that attempt to essentialize identities in a specific place. In these restricting places, however, people can develop their own psychological, personal and communal spaces that can help alleviate the effects of poverty, racism and sexism. In the movement beyond temporal and material realities of place, positive spaces can be created. In these two novels, however, the spaces are only temporary as the characters remain in their confining places. The literal and psychological boundaries combine with the material realities of place to overcome this attempt to create liberating spaces. Not until her next novel, as her geography expands, will we begin to see new possibilities for characters as Naylor begins to explore more complex issues of place and space. *Mama Day* will offer new ideas on the relation of place and space to history, identity and community as she begins to experiment with traditional notions of place.

Notes

1. Geographers Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose have proven particularly useful for an understanding of the relationship between place and space. I draw on a wide variety of feminist critics including Susan Willis, Barbara Christian and bell hooks. Karla F. C. Holloway provides a feminist link to poststructuralist thinking from which I also draw on African-American male theorists like Michael Awkward, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Houston A. Baker, Jr..

2. Franklin and Moss, Jr. discuss the situation during World War I: "Injustice in the Southern courts, the lack of privileges, disfranchisement, segregation, and lynching served as important stimuli for blacks to move out of the South. The North was regarded as the "land of promise," and the African-American press did much to persuade Southern blacks to abandon the existence that held nothing better for them than second-class citizenship" (340). Mattie Michael, although her situation is somewhat different, is involved in the exodus during World War I. When she leaves the South, the Greyhound she rides in "was one of a legion of buses, trains, and rusting automobiles that carried the dark children of the South toward the seductive call of wartime jobs and freedom in urban areas above the Mason-Dixon" (24).

3. Ciel's story as well, stresses the economic barriers to establishing place. Because of their poverty, Eugene takes out his frustrations on her: "I'm fuckin' sick of never getting ahead. Babies and bills, that's all you good for" (94). Their economic position helps to reinforce their disfunctional relationship and as they fight over Eugene leaving for a while, Serena is left alone and sticks the fork into the electric socket in an attempt to reach a cockroach.

4. This downward movement parallels Dante's *Inferno* around which Naylor has structured her novel. As Dante's downward spiral leads into the depths of hell, so too does movement down the hill metaphorically represent a giving away of one's soul. As Grandma Tilson in the epigraph to the novel reasons, "You ain't gotta die to go to the real hell . . . Uh uh, you just gotta sell that mirror God propped up in your soul . . . to the highest bidder". For an analysis of the parallels between Naylor and Dante, see Catherine C. Ward, "*Linden Hills: A Modern Inferno*".

5. Naylor's thoughts on this are very interesting. In her discussion with Toni Morrison, she says that she thought that the point of Willa discovering her identity "was what was going to happen step by step once she discovered herself - she was going to barge up out of that basement" and "tear that whole house down to the ground" (587). However, she discovered Willa "liked being a wife and a mother and she was going upstairs and claim that identity" (587).

Chapter 1 : *Mama Day*: Experimenting With Geography

Gloria Naylor's third novel, *Mama Day*, is a departure from her first two as she begins to do some very different things with place and space. In contrast to Linden Hills, a "black wad of spit right in the white eye of America," Naylor takes us outside of America to Willow Springs, an island off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. The location of Willow Springs is very important as it is not limited by traditional constructions of place and space. Since Willow Springs has not developed within the same historio-material dynamic that Brewster Place and Linden Hills have, it is beyond the system of social spatialization that places people within restricting boundaries. As a result of its peripheral and intermediate position beyond the boundaries of individual states, Willow Springs is a transitional place where a distinct African-American culture is negotiated and where a living and dynamic history is created. Willow Springs is, however, only one of the settings in *Mama Day*. There is a constant dialogue between this Southern locale and the Northern city of New York. In the Introduction, I briefly outlined how Naylor is presenting the North/South contrast in the light of African Americans' attempts to establish places and spaces of freedom in a racist and patriarchal society. In this historio-material dynamic, however, the boundaries of literal place often limit psychological growth, define identity and prevent community. *Mama Day*, therefore, attempts a textual resolution of the material nature of the North/South dialogue as Naylor creates a metaphysical and metaphorical setting within which there can be a reconciliation of identity and community. With this move beyond the boundaries of literal place, Naylor returns to her emphasis on psychological, personal and communal spaces. As material geographies break down, these spaces bring a sense of

community that provides a solution to the barriers to community in the first two novels. This is actually enacted in the novel itself as it becomes a psychological, personal and communal space through the participation of the reader.

I. Willow Springs: A Disruption to Geography

It's hard to know what to expect from a place when you can't find it on any map.
-George Andrews, *Mama Day*

The geography of Willow Springs is very different from that of Brewster Place and Linden Hills. Unlike the other locales, the island is situated in a position outside the defining power of social spatialization. Its uniqueness is stressed by its geographical location, its relation to mapping and its association with traditional understandings of African-American history. Although Willow Springs is an intermediate place both inside and outside of America's specific history, its location moves it beyond the controlling influence of America. American historical events *have* taken place there: "Union soldiers . . . Two big depressions" (4). Parris fought in France during World War II, Winky Brown played baseball against Satchel Paige, and Dr. Buzzard was once on the vaudeville circuit (190). Dr. Buzzard's truck horn plays "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (46) and the residents pay their taxes "to the U.S. of A." (5). Some residents work on the mainland while others leave the island to live on the continent. Although it is clear that Willow Springs has links to American history and culture, its geographical location reflects a literal separation from America. At the beginning of the novel, a narrator, who appears to be the collective voice of Willow Springs, describes the location: "Willow Springs ain't in no state. Georgia and South Carolina done tried [to amalgamate it], though -- been trying since right after the Civil War to prove that Willow Springs belong to one or the other of them" (4-5). The problem for the states, however, is that "all forty-nine square miles

curves like a bow, stretching toward Georgia on the south end and South Carolina on the north, and right smack in the middle where each foot of our bridge sits is the dividing line between them two states” (5). In its position, perfectly in-between the two states, Willow Springs cannot be claimed by either for the purpose of income tax payments: “Georgia and South Carolina ain’t seeing the shine off a penny for our land, our homes, our roads, or our bridge” (6). This positionality keeps Willow Springs literally separated from the political influence of any individual state.

Metaphorically, however, the position of Willow Springs is even more significant. The island is a disruption to the places in Naylor’s previous novels that are constituted by boundaries. The boundaries that create place, whether a ghetto neighbourhood or a basement, constitute the identity of the place, or the people in that place, as “minor” in relation to the “major” or dominant authority. Willow Springs’ peripheral location, however, literally removes the island from being constituted within these boundaries. Although the marginal position of Willow Springs could possibly relegate it to “minor” status in relation to the *mainland*, in fact, it becomes a positive force since it allows the island to shape its own identity. Also, the intermediate position of Willow Springs is a metaphorical break from Naylor’s other places. In contrast to places that are constituted by boundaries established by a dominant authority, the “in-betweenness” of Willow Springs represents an energizing fluidity. This fluidity moves it beyond the transparency of social spaces that attempt to define identities in place. Symbolically located in the interstices of the spatial order, this place resists becoming the mirror image of a discursive construction. Therefore, in its peripheral and intermediate position, Willow Springs breaks down the notions of “major” and “minor” and becomes a self-defined place.

In its resistance to a dominant discursive construction, the position of Willow Springs outside mapping practices is also part of the positive marginal location. The island cannot be found

on modern maps. However, when Reema's boy, an anthropologist "from one of those fancy colleges main side," comes to do some research, he is "all excited and determined to put Willow Springs on the map" in both a literal and symbolic sense (7). The narrator states, "Reema always was a little addle-brained - so you couldn't blame the boy for not remembering that part of Willow Springs's problems was that it got put on some maps right after the War Between the States" (7). Willow Springs resists a mapping that is an attempt to impose a geographical stasis. A map would define them in terms of their relationship to the *mainland*, taking away the self-defining quality of their own place. As Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose concur, "Mapping operates in hegemonic discourses as a form of mimetic representation - it textually represents the gaze through transparent space" (8). In other words, a map would attempt to inscribe on paper the identity of a place while ignoring the people's own definitions. Reema's boy does this when, assuming that the people themselves do not know, he attempts to find out the significance of 18 & 23, and finally concludes "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" (7-8). In true colonial fashion, the type of "scholarly" thinking that Reema's boy has developed on the mainland has been constructed into the measure by which everything is weighed. Ignoring the island's rich culture and history, this thinking does not allow for a conceptualization of place beyond the material level. He cannot understand that 18 & 23 *is* the whole of Willow Springs as myth: the people and their daily livelihood, as well as their history that stretches back through the Day family.

Ironically, Naylor presents us with a map of Willow Springs before the narrative begins. The map, however, takes on an important significance and becomes part of Naylor's strategic irony. Willow Springs is central in the map while the *mainland* appears only enough to demonstrate the

island's in-between position. Also, the map itself is not traditional. In its more caricature form, it is, in some ways, a parody of traditional mapping. Unlike William Faulkner's map of his fictional Yoknapatawpha County,¹ Naylor's map has a much more mythic quality to it. It is not drawn to scale, nor does it demonstrate typical map features like elevation. The surrounding vegetation helps to reinforce the mythic quality of Willow Springs; from the start, the island has the potential to be a very different place. In contrast to the inscribing power of hegemonic mapping, it is an artistic rendition and, therefore, resists geographical stasis as the imagination is activated, causing the reader to be open to the energizing possibilities of this place. On the map, Willow Springs is also shaped like a womb, with the umbilical cord attached to the mainland. Naylor, therefore, instills in Willow Springs a metaphorical identity from the beginning. It has the potential to be a womb-like space where there can be rebirth. When the bridge/cord is severed, as is expected, personal transformation is possible. The map also has an ironic intent. We are given the map before the narrative itself condemns the mapping of Willow Springs. As the reader participates in the telling of the story, her/his assumptions are constantly disrupted. Do we accept the documents that attempt to inscribe identity or do we go along with the narrative that questions this practice? As disruption of traditional notions of meaning and belief is a common theme of the novel, so too is the novel itself a disruptive force to our thinking.

Willow Springs is also a disruption to traditional understandings of history. As we have seen already, Naylor is greatly concerned with the historio-material forces that have shaped specific African-American places. Place and history are inextricably linked. In *Workings of the Spirit*, Houston Baker makes this connection as he examines Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*. Baker interprets Wright's description of the transportation of Africans to the new world amidst the terrible conditions in the hold of the slave ships: "The boundaries set for Africans left them . . . in the

hole” (107). Baker continues, “PLACE as an Afro-American portion of the world begins in a European DISPLACEMENT of bodies for commercial purposes. Commodification of human beings meant that relationships of property, and not free, human, personal relations, marked the spaces between Europeans and Africans. *Ownership* was the watchword over the hole” (108). Therefore, “Afro-America was a PLACE *assigned* rather than discovered” (109). With the fictional history and geography created for it by Naylor, Willow Springs moves outside of traditional notions of history and place in its relation to slavery.

The concept of land ownership upsets notions of the history of slavery. Land ownership is a key issue for Gloria Naylor that runs through all her novels. Although *Mama Day* is situated in an historical context of slavery, the people of Willow Springs own their own land. Originally owned by the Norwegian, Bascombe Wade, the residents have no doubt about its ownership now: “So who it belong to? It belongs to us - clean and simple. And it belonged to our daddies, and our daddies before them, and them too - who at one time all belonged to Bascombe Wade” (5).² In the context of slavery where black people could not own anything and were, in fact, owned themselves, the ownership of Willow Springs becomes a means by which the people can shape their own culture and history. The present inhabitants realize the danger of allowing white interests to own land. Developers would love to purchase land to build resorts on, but Mama Day, acting on behalf of Willow Springs, asks for one million dollars per acre, knowing it is an impossible demand. Although the developers leave mumbling things about “‘community uplift’ and ‘better jobs,’” the people of Willow Springs understand

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. John'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 (6).

The residents of Willow Springs perceive the colonizing power of capitalism. Once ownership of land is secured, the dominant party automatically constructs the people there into the “minority” or “other”. This is then reinforced by physical boundaries, like fences,³ raised to constitute an inside and an outside or a major and a minor. Also, since the dominant authority assumes the institutional control, they can push the “minority” into demeaning jobs, controlling its position in the system of power relations. Although slavery has ended, a new form of slavery is still possible once white, capitalist interests enter a place. Through land ownership, however, Willow Springs resists this colonial process.

The ownership of the land works together with the island’s location to produce a separate place away from the dominant society. The fragile bridge that connects Willow Springs to the mainland is a symbolic marker of the positive otherness of this place. The narrator asks, “Look on any of them old maps they hurried and drew up soon as the Union soldiers pulled out and you can see that the only thing connects us to the mainland is a bridge - and even that gotta be rebuilt after every big storm . . . we rebuild it ourselves when need be, and build it how we need it - strong enough to last till the next big wind” (5). In contrast to the way that African-American places have been assigned and controlled for so long by racist forces, the ability to regulate the building of their own bridge symbolizes the control the people of Willow Springs have in creating their own place and history. The destruction of the bridge and consequent separation from the mainland is anticipated and expected. It is a reminder of their transitional position outside of America. In the way, therefore, that Willow Springs resists the historio-material nature of place, it becomes a separate African-American space.

In contrast to how the identity of place is usually inscribed through a dominant gaze, this island is a large “other space” where African-American culture forms itself. Travelling over The Sound is an ironic reversal of the Middle Passage of slavery. One does not go back to Africa, but the removal from the mainland allows the people to create their own culture and history while still on the edge of America. In “Recovering the Conjure Woman: Texts and Contexts in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*,” Lindsey Tucker discusses the location of Willow Springs in its relation to the Sea Islands “that stretch from Pawleys Island off the South Carolina city of Georgetown, south beyond Savannah to Amelia Island on the border of Florida” (179-80). She argues that Naylor has chosen this location because the “Sea Islands are, with the exception of New Orleans, the most African of places in America” (180). During the slave trade, “the least acculturated Africans remained,” giving rise to the “distinctive Gullah heritage” that makes “the Sea Islands an actual and symbolic African presence, one rich with magico-religious beliefs” (180). Willow Springs’ location allows the people to negotiate aspects of their African culture with the Euro-American culture that exists on the mainland. Since the marginal and intermediate position takes the island outside the control of the dominant discourse used to define identity, mediation and re-vision become key as the people of Willow Springs are in a position to negotiate their own culture, especially in terms of ritual and religion. Therefore, although Abigail and Mama Day read from the Bible and attend the Christian church, the culture of Willow Springs extends beyond traditional American religious practices. They do not celebrate Christmas, but rather on December 23 they observe Candle Walk, a communal remembrance of the history of their place and their original ancestor Sapphira. In place of the traditional Christian funeral “that should have called for a sermon, music, tears - the belief in an earthly finality for the child’s life,” (269) the people of Willow Springs have the “standing forth” where they deny the departed’s presence has left the island. The island is also a place of conjurers,

some positive and some negative. All of these ideas are aspects of an Afro-centric world view.⁴ The people of Willow Springs have negotiated an African-American identity for themselves.

An important aspect of African-American culture is the existence of conjure, which forms a disruption to the history of slavery. Conjure, as a non-material expressive entity, is an example of an empowering personal space. In Sapphira's power as a conjure woman, she is able to avoid the social spaces that would place her identity. The story of Sapphira Wade and Willow Springs goes beyond a history of control over African Americans. We realize that in Willow Springs there is "something deeper than the old historical line about slave women and their white masters" (225). Reflecting on the other place, George realizes, "A slave hadn't lived in this house. And without a slave, there could be no master. What had Miss Miranda said - he had claim to her body, but not her mind?" (225). Sapphira's will is strong enough that she consciously avoids the process of social spatialization that would inscribe her as a slave. Also, it is clear that Sapphira's power over Bascombe Wade is responsible for the land being deeded to her sons and the future generations: "Thanks to the conjuring of Sapphira Wade we got [the land] . . . it was the 18 & 23'ing that went down between them two put deeds in our hands" (5). Naylor is offering a whole new dynamic to the master/slave paradigm as she questions traditional historical realities. In "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson discusses the importance of disruption and revision in black women's writing:

The self-inscription of black women requires disruption, rereading and rewriting the conventional and canonical stories, as well as revising the conventional generic forms that convey these stories . . . Disruption - the initial response to hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse - and revision (rewriting or rereading) together suggest a model for reading black and female literary expression (30).

Willow Springs is a space where such disruption and revision occur. It forms a contrast to the places in Naylor's first two novels where African-American history is often written or dictated by

racist and patriarchal forces. Willow Springs has created its own history.

In her disruptive and elusive role in history, Sapphira Wade is also a trickster figure. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. examines the African roots of the trickster figure in America. Esu-Elegbara, “the divine trickster figure of Yoruba mythology,” (5) is used as the basis for Gates’ discussion. Esu’s qualities include “individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture” (6). Gates stresses that “Esu as the figure of indeterminacy extends directly from his lordship over the concept of plurality” (37). Sapphira Wade embodies the characteristics of Esu. Neither her character, nor her story, can be pinned down by a colonizing discourse. Naylor provides the Bill of Sale at the beginning of the novel as a written inscription of her character. The novel, however, deconstructs these notions since Sapphira is a signifying force on racist and patriarchal inscriptions of identity. In her trickster role, she disrupts the history of racism and slavery. In the ability to will herself free, she embodies the qualities of Esu who “represents power in terms of the agency of the will” (37). The ultimate disruption is in her ability to leave Willow Springs “in a ball of fire to journey back home east over the ocean” (*Mama* 111). In contrast to Naylor’s other characters who are often defined and controlled within the boundaries of place, Sapphira defies racist, patriarchal and geographical boundaries as she is able to transgress the limits of physical place and return to her original home.⁵ Sapphira forms a disruptive and revisionary force in the face of the traditional geography of slavery and the subsequent places assigned to African Americans.

Naylor even goes so far as to question the ability to recover an accurate history at all. The constantly changing and ambiguous history makes Willow Springs a space characterized by movement, in contrast to static places like Linden Hills where the meaning of history is dictated by a

dominant discourse. One can never totally piece together what happened between Sapphira and Bascombe. From the beginning, we are given different versions of the story:

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 (3).

As the story "shift[s] down through the holes of time," (3) it changes form. Later in the novel, we begin to encounter different versions of the story. It seems probable that Sapphira did not kill Bascombe after all. Although *Candle Walk*, to some generations, is symbolic of Sapphira's lighted walk to the east bluff where she left for Africa, (111) Mama Day envisions a different version: "She tries to listen under the wind. The sound of a long wool skirt passing. Then the tread of heavy leather boots . . . Oh, precious Jesus, the light wasn't for her - it was for him . . . How long did he search for her? Up and down this path" (118). This possibility, which becomes the most likely in the novel, has Sapphira leaving and Bascombe consequently dying of a broken heart. Later, Mama Day wonders, "What really happened between her great-grandmother and Bascombe Wade? How many - if any - of them seven sons were his?" (138). This history forms the basis for Willow Springs and yet, as Cocoa says at the end of the novel, "[T]here are just too many sides to the whole story" (311). The novel itself is an enactment of this indeterminacy. The diamond shaped symbols that separate Cocoa and George's conversation from the collective voice of Willow Springs, are representative of the many-sided history of the novel. As one pauses on these multi-sided symbols, one literally experiences this uncertainty.⁶ This indeterminacy is a positive force because it does not allow for a static history and culture.

The ambiguity of events in Willow Springs creates an active history beyond the stasis of

documented history. In contrast to Dr. Braithwaite's recording of the history of Linden Hills in twelve volumes that sit on his bookshelf,⁷ the history of Willow Springs cannot be contained within any boundaries. Neither Mama Day nor anyone in Willow Springs knows the name of Sapphira (206). It is her memory and her spirit that is important, not certain facts like a name. Although the Bill of Sale for Sapphira is a written inscription of her identity, Mama Day finds it faded and incomplete, a disruption to what was inscribed on it before. She is left with an incomplete date and name and a few remaining words: "Law. Knowledge. Witness. Inflicted. Nurse. Conditions. Tender. Kind" (280). In contrast to the finality of the Bill of Sale - "Conditions of Sale . . . Final" (1) - these remaining words have the openness to be interpreted in multiple ways and seem to emphasize a "new code (law reinforced by knowledge) whose key words are 'tender' and 'kind'" (Christol 355). Since Sapphira's character and history will not be contained in written documents, there is no historical essence to be uncovered. As the narrator questions how Sapphira could have had seven children in a thousand days, s/he suggests, "[A]nd we guess if we put our heads together we'd come up with something - which ain't possible since Sapphira Wade don't live in the part of our memory we can use to form words" (3-4). Therefore, as the history is beyond linguistic inscriptions, and yet, is within the minds of the people, it inhabits the realm of myth.

Karla F. C. Holloway offers that myth "is a dynamic entity that (re)members community, connects it to the voices from which it has been severed, and forces it out of the silence prescribed by a scriptocentric historicism" (25). The spirit of 18 & 23 is a part of the everyday lives of the people. Although "the *name* Sapphira Wade is never breathed out of a single mouth in Willow Springs," the collective narrator says that there "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” (4). The collective narrator says of Reema’s boy: “If the boy wanted to know what 18 & 23 meant, why didn’t he just ask? . . . He coulda asked Cloris about the curve in her spine that came from the planting season when their mule broke its leg, and she took up the reins and kept pulling the plow with her own back” (8); or, he could have listened to the story of this novel as Cocoa and George converse in the west woods near The Sound and “have heard from them everything there was to tell about 18 & 23” (10). In contrast to traditional historiography that attempts to uncover the facts of a documented past, the history of Willow Springs as myth is the basis of their history that is being created even as Cocoa and George tell their story. This dynamic history is beyond the defining boundaries that often constitute the relationship between place and history.

Like the history, there is a vibrant culture that is elusive and ever-changing. This forms a contrast to how culture becomes fossilized within the boundaries of literal place in a novel like *Linden Hills*. Candle Walk commemorates the freedom Sapphira achieved when she left Wade. It is also a reminder of the hard labour and communal nature that has shaped Willow Springs as the gifts they exchange “only had to be any bit of something, as long as it came from the earth and the work of your own hands” (110). Candle Walk changes with time, however. Although the contemporary generation has changed the giving - “They started buying each other fancy gadgets from the catalogues . . . Or . . . they got a bowl of them hard gingersnaps come straight from a cookie box . . . A few . . . will even drive their cars instead of walking, flashing the headlights at folks” (111) - Mama Day realizes that Candle Walk is always changing. She recalls her youth when the people carried candles to the bluff, looked toward Africa and said, “Lead on with light, Great Mother” (111). Mama Day’s father “said in his time Candle Walk was different still” and “her daddy said *his* daddy said Candle Walk was different still” (111). The end of the novel has Mama Day actually

giving away souvenirs she purchased in New York along with her ginger cookies (306). Candle Walk is not a static event. It binds traditions of the past with new understandings of the present.

In the southern locale of Willow Springs, Naylor offers us a new perspective on place. Unlike the static anti-history that characterizes Linden Hills, Willow Springs has a living and changing culture and history. In transcending the literal and metaphorical boundaries that normally constitute place, Willow Springs becomes a vibrant African-American space. Since Willow Springs is not constituted by its relationship to the *mainland*, it avoids being inscribed by boundaries established by a dominant discourse. This brings one to a potential problem, however. Why does Naylor seemingly reject the possibility of positive communities in the urban North? *Mama Day* continues Naylor's preoccupation with contrasting Northern and Southern locales. However, this novel introduces new ideas into this comparison. She envisions a different way of dealing with place and ultimately moves beyond the material nature of the North/South dialectic.

II. Naylor's Expanding Geography of North and South

Black women writers portray the difference between South and North as a difference in economics.

-Susan Willis, *Specifying* (8)

New York is where I was born, so writing about New York is writing about what I know. All of the other locales in my work have been metaphysical, so they exist nowhere. They are presented as emotional situations.

-Gloria Naylor interview with Rebecca Carroll (161)

In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, Hazel V. Carby focuses on the literature of the Northern city written by black women. She criticizes other literary historians for their singular focus on the pattern that "has been established from Alice Walker back through Zora Neale Hurston which represents the rural folk as bearers of Afro-

American history and preservers of Afro-American culture,” a literary tradition that “has effectively marginalized the fictional urban confrontation of race, class, and sexuality” (175). Carby continues: “Afro-American cultural and literary history should not create and glorify a limited vision, a vision which in its romantic evocation of the rural and the folk avoids some of the most crucial and urgent issues of cultural struggle - a struggle that Larsen, Petry, West, Brooks, and Morrison recognized would have to be faced in the cities, the home of the black working class” (175). In the realistic style of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, Naylor centred her work around these issues in the urban North while, at the same time, using the South for comparison. This comparison was based on the historio-material ramifications of migrations from the South to North and the hindrances to the establishment of place and space. She also considered how the literal boundaries of place work to produce psychic boundaries, inhibiting the creation of personal identity and communal relationships. In *Mama Day*, Naylor takes the North/South comparison out of the realm of socioeconomic significance. The Southern locale of Willow Springs becomes a metaphysical and metaphorical setting in which she envisions a reconciliation of the psychic boundaries of literal place that shape identity. Ultimately, Naylor begins to break down traditional notions of North and South as she moves away from the essentialism of this dialectic to reflect on the greater importance of a metaphorical reconciliation between East and West.

The Northern city in *Mama Day* is quite different from its characterization in Naylor’s previous novels. She sets it in a known locale - New York City in the late 1970s and into the 1980s - and deals with middle-class characters. There are few apparent literal boundaries that mark off the territory of communities like the wall of Brewster Place. This is perhaps due to the economic advantages that Cocoa and George enjoy. George has worked his way from an orphanage, through college, to a partnership in the engineering firm of Andrews & Stein. His relative wealth affords him

the luxury of having a house in the suburbs and being able to travel as he constantly follows the NFL playoffs. Cocoa, although struggling to find work at the beginning of the novel, also has the capital necessary to travel, as she goes home to Willow Springs every year.⁸ She has the leisure time to socialize at night: “One of Selma’s parties or the usual round of dinner dates singing the life’s-tough-on-fifty-grand-a-year-and-you-can’t-find-a-decent-black-woman-anyway blues” (99). In her ironic middle-class-blues statement, Naylor shows herself to be conscious of the economic advantages of Cocoa and George, especially in comparison to people like the women of Brewster Place.

In this novel, however, Naylor continues to focus on the limiting psychological boundaries of literal place through Cocoa’s reaction to New York. Cocoa perceives an unnaturalness to city life where cafes are “designed for assembly line nutrition,” (13) job interviews require one to become part of “the herd” waiting to be seen (15), and people are always moving, seemingly to nowhere (17). Cocoa criticizes New York because “nothing’s just black and white here like in Willow Springs” (63) and she longs for the simplicity of her childhood home where “you knew when you saw a catfish, you called it a catfish” (22). Cocoa longs for a type of linguistic certainty in place: a fit between sign and referent. We have already seen how this is impossible in Willow Springs. Part of Cocoa’s growth in the novel, therefore, is to overcome these superficial confinements of place. Like the psychological boundaries that are a result of the literal boundaries of Brewster Place and Linden Hills, Cocoa has established her own psychological and physical boundaries in reaction to the impersonal city. George offers, “I’ll lay even odds that if I took my compass and drew lines that radiated from your home and made a circle, you haven’t moved beyond an area much larger than Willow Springs for your shopping, entertainment, or friends,” (65) and proposes that Cocoa needs to *see* New York. George loves and understands New York, his home, and provides the opportunity for Cocoa to experience what he sees. In this, Naylor suggests that beyond the boundaries of place is the

possibility of psychological space, a freeing of the mind from its confinements. As Cocoa stands in the middle of the George Washington Bridge she realizes, “Standing there under and over all that incredible space, I saw how small and cramped my life had been. I actually lived on this island - somewhere down there on Ninety-sixth Street” (98). She remembers “the sound of hummingbirds in the gardens at the Cloisters,” an apt metaphor for her cloistered life in New York (99), and from this point, Cocoa becomes more open to George (99). In overcoming the psychological boundaries of place, community becomes possible as Cocoa’s growing acceptance of New York is linked to her relationship with George.

Although George loves New York and considers it to be his home, the limits of his place have greatly shaped his identity as well. Growing up an orphan, George has had no retrievable history to ground his every-day life in. He believes that his mother was a prostitute who killed herself after his birth. He is jealous of what Cocoa has: “To be born in a grandmother’s house, to be able to walk and see where a great-grandfather and even great-great-grandfather was born. You had more than a family, you had a history. And I didn’t even have a real last name” (129).⁹ Growing up in a city orphanage has shaped George’s value system. Although at times he longs for a history like Cocoa has, Mrs. Jackson’s philosophy has been engrained into George’s psychology: “Only the present has potential, *sir*” (23). This type of psychology has allowed George to be able to work his way through college and finally establish his engineering firm. In the Northern city, therefore, George has developed an ideology of empiricism in order to be able to succeed financially; the material nature of place has shaped his identity.

George has also adopted a certain ideology to fit into his place in white America. At the start of the novel, George is a typically Westernized American. He loves Shakespeare and has a passion for football (his favourite team is, significantly, the New England *Patriots* of the American

Football Conference (125)). He is a Republican (56) and values privacy (31). George also relies on certain patriarchal scripts to read the world. He reads books written by men to explain women: “Women stayed on an emotional roller coaster: between being premenstrual, postmenstrual, and menstrual, they were normal only about seventy-two hours out of each month” (141). He also has internalized Hollywood versions of the South in his *Gone With the Wind*-like picture of “images of jasmine-scented nights, warm biscuits and honey being brought to me on flowered china plates as you sat at my feet and rubbed your cheek against my knee” (33). Crossing over into Willow Springs, therefore, is a psychological process as well as a physical one. In Willow Springs, one needs to put aside individualistic and patriarchal scripts. George, however, cannot cross over completely. He struggles with believing in the legend of Sapphira. His Western, linear mode of thinking will not permit him to believe in an oral legend, but requires traditional proof. He thinks, “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” (218). George looks to racist and patriarchal written inscriptions for justification of the mythical. Valerie Traub states that George’s “reading strategy doesn’t provide him with the materials which would enable him to read *differently* - that is, to read . . . *inside* the world of Willow Springs where individual agency . . . can give birth to *new* narratives” (160). If George could cross over into the womb-like other place/space of Willow Springs, a new birth could occur.

Since the psychological boundaries of literal place are so limiting, Naylor moves beyond realistic settings. The Other Place is established as a psychological space where the boundaries of place break down. The people of Willow Springs fear the Other Place, and yet, as Mama Day wonders, “Where do folks get things in their head? It’s an old house with a big garden, that’s all” (117). However, she does concede that “there *was* the other place, where she was gonna bring

Bernice in the spring” (118). When Bernice, who has begged Mama Day to help her get pregnant, does come in the spring, Mama Day hears “[f]eet passing into the other place where flowers can be made to sing and trees to fly” (139). As Bernice moves into this psychological space where the boundaries between the literal and the symbolic are broken down, she is able to believe in her power to conceive a child. As Mama Day moves the egg into her womb (140), new life is conceived. The Other Place, therefore, represents the womb of Willow Springs itself, where new birth is possible for those who can transcend psychological confines. As Naylor states in the epigraph to this section, this location is a metaphysical setting.¹⁰ As this setting takes the novel out of the realm of the material nature of place, the psychological boundaries of place can break down. Willow Springs is a place where the literal and the metaphorical are blurred, where a reconciliation between different ways of thinking is possible.

The storm scene in *Mama Day* illustrates both sides of this paradigm. Although a literal storm, it is also a symbolic enactment of the historical Middle Passage of slavery:

It starts on the shores of Africa, a simple breeze among the palms and cassavas, before it's carried off, tied up with thousands like it, on a strong wave heading due west. A world of water, heaving and rolling, weeks of water, and all of them breezes die but one . . . it lives on to meet the curve of the equator . . . it rips through the sugar canes in Jamaica . . . groaning as it bounces off the curve of the earth to head due north . . . A buried calm with the awesome power of its face turned to Willow Springs (249-50).

The storm of slavery is the original history of Willow Springs and yet, it also takes on a greater significance. The interspersal of Psalm 77 throughout the scene brings the African history together with the Western. However, we see that during the storm “Miranda goes over to her sister, and gently she closes Abigail’s Bible” (250). From the people of Willow Springs, “prayers go up . . . to be spared from what could only be the workings of a woman. And She has no name” (251). The storm is their heritage through Sapphira. It is the power and disruption of 18 & 23 that has created

this place. The people believe in, and fear, this power. In contrast, is George's reaction as he tries to compare the experience to the power of a nuclear steam turbine generator and concludes, "That was power. But the winds coming around the corners of that house was God" (251). Although George is an agnostic (251), he still looks to Euro-American scripts from which to read the world. George's thinking will not open him up to the possibility of Sapphira and the unique African heritage of Willow Springs.

The most striking divergence between George and the people of Willow Springs is their contrasting belief systems. As already discussed, George's upbringing in the Northern city has formed his empirical and individualistic ideology: "When I left Wallace P. Andrews I had what I could see: my head and my two hands, and I had each day to do something with them" (27). His words are in direct contrast to the beliefs of Mama Day who knows "*there is more to be known behind what the eyes can see*" (36). Because of his place in white, capitalist society, George has established psychological boundaries to his belief system. In *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women*, Bonnie Winsbro discusses the importance of "different responses by ethnic individuals to the crossing, violation, or destruction of geographical or sociocultural boundaries," (6) adding that "to define oneself, one must define one's beliefs and one's relation to surrounding groups, thus choosing or creating one's own centre and one's own boundaries" (16). George has created his own boundaries to belief and will not cross over these established lines. Cocoa knows that George's psychological mapping will not work in Willow Springs: "Your maps were no good here" (177). He cannot accept or understand the Afro-centric elements of the culture that go beyond empirical reasoning. Ruby's conjure that threatens Cocoa's life does not fit into the boundaries of his beliefs. Abigail knows, "That boy is from beyond the bridge . . . We ain't even got his kind of words to tell him what's going on" (267). George is

constantly searching for rational answers for things he sees in Willow Springs.¹¹ If he could only transcend these psychological barriers and cross over into the space of Willow Springs, he could undergo a new birth and find a spiritual home on the island.

Mama Day is the potential mediating figure who can help George transcend his psychological confines. She is the link, the bridge, to help him totally move into the realm of Willow Springs and to help Cocoa. George's dream is a symbolic foreshadowing of Cocoa's illness and his response. As George struggles in *The Sound*, trying to reach Cocoa as she cries out from the other side, he sees Mama Day on the bridge telling him to "Get Up And Walk" (184). Although he himself tries to swim harder, his salvation is only through Mama Day: "With my last bit of strength I pushed my shoulders out of the water to scream in her face, You're a crazy old woman! And I found myself standing in the middle of *The Sound*" (184). George resists Mama Day, however, when Cocoa is ill. The quest she gives him is to leave John-Paul's cane and Wade's ledger, symbols of the history of Willow Springs and masculine values, in the chicken coop. He is supposed to just bring back his hands and give them over to Mama Day, to the community of Willow Springs and its history. However, his individualism is too engrained. George has created his own options in his life: "There were times when I tried too hard, pushing myself with the knowledge that I was all I had. And now you were all I had, and with you needing me, I had to hold on to what was real" (291). Therefore, George concludes "these were *my* hands, and there was no way I was going to let you go" (301). Although he is able to save Cocoa through the power of his own will, George dies of a heart attack because he cannot give himself over to the community of Willow Springs.

As Naylor begins to move away from the material nature of the North/South and urban/rural dialectic that pervades so much of African-American literature, Willow Springs becomes a metaphorical space. I have already touched on the womb-like significance of the space of Willow

Springs where literal and psychological new birth is possible. Furthermore, established within the literal geography of Willow Springs is the possibility for the island to be a psychological space that negotiates an African-American identity. It is striking how much use is made of the directional indicators North, South, East, and West in the novel.¹² The map that precedes the narrative begins this trend by providing a compass, clearly establishing the importance of geographical sections on the island. The north part of the island is where Ruby lives, and is, therefore, considered to be somewhat dangerous. The south woods are characterized as an easy place to walk in (208). The east woods, in contrast, are wild and hard to manoeuvre through, but, as Mama Day says “there were more lessons to be learned in these” (205) because they are the woods from which Sapphira took flight and in which Bascombe Wade’s grave is located. The west woods, where the Other Place is located, are “a real pleasure to walk through” and “more like a wild garden - and a garden with a water view” (217). I am proposing that Willow Springs, although far from being symbolic of America, enacts a parody of the geography of North and South in America. In the parody, the stereotypical danger of the American North and innocence and simplicity of the South¹³ is rejected as the focus revolves around East and West. I believe that the East and West sides of the island are representative of African and Euro-American cultures. In its location closest to America and its characterization as a garden, the west woods could be seen as a representation of America. It is also the location where Bascombe Wade, a European, built a house for Sapphira. At the same time, the house is the Other Place, where Mama Day’s conjuring is based. The east woods, closest to Africa, are where Sapphira took flight to go back to Africa and where Bascombe Wade’s grave is located. East and west on the island, therefore, represent both African and Euro-American cultures.

This mediation between cultures is what George resists. When he finally entertains the possibility that he cannot help Cocoa by himself, he momentarily overcomes his individualism to ask

Abigail what he can do: "And surely, she must have realized that when she answered, 'Please, George, go to the other place,' that the road I took south to work on the night shift at the bridge was a much longer walk" (289). Although, as a last resort, he finally "stumble[s] through the west woods" (293) to meet Mama Day at the Other Place, he rejects her way to heel Cocoa as "munbo-jumbo" (295). George will not give himself to the communal nature of Willow Springs, nor open his mind to its empowering psychological possibilities. Only in death does he escape his psychological confines and achieve peace (302). At the end of the novel, Mama Day watches Cocoa overlooking The Sound, communicating with George and "both can hear clearly that on the east side of the island and on the west side, the waters were still" (312). There is perfect peace and symmetry here between East and West. Africa and Euro-America have the potential to be a self-contained, whole cultural identity. In using this metaphorical geography as a method for reflection on these issues, Naylor has moved beyond the material limitations of place as Willow Springs has the potential to be a psychological space/matrix where transformation is possible. In the next section we see how she goes even farther beyond literal geographies.

III. Meta(physical) Places and Eruptions of Space

As in her first two novels, Gloria Naylor grounds *Mama Day* and its characters in geographical locations. However, we have also seen how Naylor is suspicious of the psychological boundaries of place that define identity and prevent community and how she, therefore, moves beyond material geographies to focus more on metaphysical places and spaces. In *Mama Day*, psychological meta(physical) places become important. Many characters in Naylor's works experience painful day-to-day realities and, therefore, look to places beyond physical and temporal boundaries for momentary stability and psychic shelter. However, unlike psychological space, these

meta(physical) places are static entities. Therefore, the disruption of static psychic places and the ability to move on in life become important issues for Naylor. Once again, space is offered as a more positive alternative. Throughout *Mama Day* are instances of what I will call eruptions of space.¹⁴ These moments of space that individuals experience are characterized by psychological movement and reflect on the necessity of community. In these eruptions, memory also becomes very important as it is a communal space of psychic disruption and a mediating force that changes the present.

Naylor presents certain human relationships as comfortable meta(physical) places. George's life has always been one of control. Although he had no hand in the circumstances of his birth, he has shaped his own destiny by always being in control of situations. This is reflected in his personal relationships. With Shawn, George has established a comfortable psychic and physical place. Although their five year relationship has grown sterile, when George and Shawn discuss "making a go of it, once again," George thinks, "And it was comfortable being around her again, thinking of holding a body that you didn't have to prove anything to. No old ground to go over about who and what you were, no new moods or ties to learn, none to explain. Shawn was a safe haven" (101). By comparing their relationship to literal place, Naylor alerts us to its psychologically limiting effects.

Naylor demonstrates the importance of disruption to these comfortable places. Cocoa is a disruption to George's "safe haven" with Shawn. As George tries to convince himself of his comfort with Shawn, he thinks of Cocoa: "And coming around that corner was trouble. Beautiful trouble" (101). Cocoa's ability to break down the self-control George has always prided himself on is apparent from their first meeting. He thinks, "And where could I possibly place you? My life was already made at thirty-one. My engineering degree, the accelerating success of Andrews & Stein" (33). He tries to convince himself, "Don't get near a woman who has the power to turn your existence upside-down by simply running a hand up the back of her neck" (33). Cocoa also

experiences this kind of disruption with George. Mama Day can sense this in the letters Cocoa sends home. When she writes that it is over with George, Mama Day offers, ““That don’t sound like nothing but a temper tantrum . . . She’s hard-headed and she’s spoiled, and this is one who won’t let her have her way” (109). Cocoa herself realizes, “Your touch was slowly making new and alive openings within me and I would lie there warm and weak, listening to you sleep, thinking, What will I do when he’s not here? How will I handle all this space he’s creating without him to fill it?” (119). In the relationship between Cocoa and George, Naylor demonstrates how important disruption is to static meta(physical) places. With this disruption comes psychological movement and growth as communal space is created in the relationship.

Naylor proposes that Mother is another meta(physical) place.¹⁵ George is greatly affected by the lack of a mother. He constantly tries to picture her, an impossible task since in his dreams he can only see his “mother’s constantly changing face” (183). In contrast to his self-imposed individualism in order to accomplish his goals, George longs for a unity with a stable mother image where he can feel a nurturing presence that he has never had. When he comes to Willow Springs, George is greatly affected by Abigail’s reaction to the complement that the sisters do not look old: “Miss Abigail put her hands up on each side of my face - Well, bless our heart, child - and a lump formed in my throat at their gentle pressure. Up until that moment, no woman had ever called me her child. Did they see it in my eyes? The intense envy for all that you had and the gratitude for their being willing to let me belong?” (176). Also, when Bernice has flippantly asked George about his mother, Cocoa fears she will be verbally attacked by him. Instead, he transfers his longing for his own mother to Cocoa who narrates, “Your face stayed turned and it was barely a whisper: I’d like you to nurse our children. I said nothing as I waited. The silence grew longer and longer. The silence stayed. You slipped under the covers, cradled your head between my breasts, and we never spoke about the tears” (202). In this

safe place at her breast, George attempts to find the security of Mother as he experiences momentary unity with a nurturing presence. Although this is understandable for George who has never felt the love of a mother, Naylor offers that people must be able to accept their situations and “*Just live on*” (88).

George can experience a different kind of (comm)unity if he opens himself to it. I use Michael Awkward’s term (comm)unity¹⁶ to reflect on this crucial issue in *Mama Day*. Awkward quotes W. E. B. Du Bois’ famous reflections on African-American double consciousness: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of [whites] One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (12). Therefore, (comm)unity for Awkward arises from a call and response pattern that becomes a way to transcend the “deliberating psychological disjunction (or double consciousness) and isolation from the larger black community” (14). (Comm)unity, in its properties beyond material realities, becomes an empowering communal space. This is what George longs for, but ultimately rejects.

George experiences an eruption of space in consequence to his deeply ingrained individualism after he rejects (comm)unity with the men of Willow Springs. The poker game is a challenge to George’s character. He cannot believe that the game could be enjoyable if Dr. Buzzard cheats. Ambush replies, “Sure, it is. It ain’t like he does it now and then, he does it every hand. So the challenge is how much you can get away with not losing. It about amounts to the same thing” (200). George will not accept this, however, and reduces the game to one of facts and odds. When he loses a hand he knows he should have won, he thinks that “it was pretty hard to believe that an entire game could render one player three of a kind or better through the last twelve hands. But no one else was having problems believing it; they had gotten to his campsite talking that way” (208). George,

therefore, uses his knowledge from a game theory course that taught about “analyzing problems of conflict by abstracting common strategic features from an infinite number of conflict situations” (210) to figure out how to overturn Dr. Buzzard’s cheating. Once George begins to win, the players become suspicious and afraid as the joy is taken away from the game (212). When George wins, he is actually disappointed (213) and a moment of space occurs. The rhythmic clapping begins as Parris sings the spiritual:

Take my hand, Precious Lord . . .
 Lead me on. Let me stand.
 I am tired. I am weak. I am worn . . .
 Through the dark. Through the night.
 Lead me on to the light . . .
 Take my hand, Precious Lord
 And lead me home (213-14).

In this song is the possibility for George to become a part of the (comm)unity of Willow Springs. If he could learn to take the hand of Mama Day, and believe in the light of Candle Walk, he could find a spiritual home there. However, George cannot respond to the call of the spiritual: “I didn’t understand the rhythm and I refused to spoil it by attempting to join in. Perhaps if I had known that I only had to listen to the pulse of my blood - ” (214). There is the possibility for George to experience a space of (comm)unity in a metaphysical bond with the men there. With the help of the moonshine, he imagines a unified cosmos as Dr. Buzzard stands on his hands: “And through my watery eyes his body *was* stretching up into the stars - they outlined and illuminated the soles of his feet” (214). This space of coalescence is only a fleeting moment for George, however, as he passes out from the alcohol. Throughout the remainder of the narrative, he will struggle against giving himself over to this space of (comm)unity.

Mama Day experiences eruptions of space as a very positive and dynamic force. For Mama Day, sisterhood is a space of positive (comm)unity. When she calls Abigail to tell her that Cocoa is

coming in, their traditional greeting of “You there, Sister?” (35) produces a childhood memory of a time after Peace had drowned in the well. She remembers the pain in the house and “*climbing up on the bed, she shakes the younger child awake. ‘You there, Sister?’ The answer is coated with phlegm, on the edge of tears. ‘Uh, huh.’ Miranda’s small fingers place themselves around the rhythm of Abigail’s breathing. Nested under the quilt, they are four arms and legs, two heads, one heartbeat*” (36). This space of (comm)unity through sisterhood is a progressive force. It is not a meta(physical) place because it is characterized by psychological movement and subsequent activity. The communal space is a bonding that allows the sisters to deal with the pain of losing their sister and their mother. Remembering these events is also necessary to be able to look past the pain.

In *Mama Day*, memory is also a vital communal space. For Mama Day, remembrance of the ancestor comes in an eruption of space.¹⁷ Like George, Mama Day remembers the mother figure; however, this remembrance is not a static and stable place. After Mama Day finds the faded Bill of Sale for Sapphira at the Other Place, she tries to discover her name as she cleans: “She closes her eyes and runs her fingers over the crumbling paper, and all she sees is a vast gray wall. She tries again and fails. She scolds herself for not knowing better: a gift is something that’s given, not demanded . . . Samarinda . . . Savannah . . . Sage Marie . . . Samora” (280). Mama Day then “falls asleep, murmuring the names of women. And in her dreams she finally meets Sapphira” (280). However, this does not happen unconsciously. Mama Day must actively search for the ancestor: “Door upon door upon door. She asks each door the same thing: Tell me your name. And her answer is to have it swing open so she’s facing another” (283). When it seems she is too tired to open another, “she finds herself in a vast space of glowing light” and discovers the mother/ancestor: Daughter. The word comes to cradle what has gone past weariness. She can’t really hear

it 'cause she's got no ears, or call out 'cause she's got no mouth. There's only the sense of being. Daughter. Flooding through like fine streams of hot, liquid sugar to fill the spaces where there was never no arms to hold her up, no shoulders for her to lay her head down and cry on, no body to ever turn to for answers (283).

In this space, Mama Day meets Sapphira, the “great, great, grand, mother” (218), and her own mother as she experiences a nurturing she never received as a child: “she opens the mouth that ain't there to suckle at the full breasts, deep greedy swallows of a thickness like cream, seeping from the corners of her lips, spilling onto her chin. Full. Full and warm to rest between the mounds of softness, to feel the beating of a calm and steady heart” (283). Unlike George's Mother place, however, experiencing this eruption of space produces action.

The space of remembrance of the mother/ancestor becomes the catalyst to help Mama Day deal with the pain of her childhood. Holloway claims that “(re)membrance is activation in the face of stasis, a restoration of fluidity, translucence, and movement” (68). We see this as Mama Day “sleeps within her sleep. To wake from one is to be given back ears as the steady heart tells her - look past the pain; to wake from the other is to stare up at the ceiling from the mahogany bed and to know that she must go out and uncover the well where Peace died” (283). bell hooks argues that memory for African Americans “is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory . . . are constructed to give a ‘new take’ on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation” (147). She calls for “a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (147). This occurs when Mama Day goes to the well. She sees Sapphira, Peace, and her mother in it and wonders, “How was she ever gonna look past this kind of pain?” (284). Mama Day, therefore, goes to the memory of the

strong-willed men of the family and finds the courage to look past the pain when she sees her father's hands in her own: "And then she opens her eyes on her own hands. Hands that look like John-Paul's. Hands that would not let the woman in gingham go with Peace" (285). She even sees Wade's hands in her own: "other hands that would not let the woman in apricot homespun go with peace. No, *could* not let her go. In all this time, she ain't never really thought about what is musta done to him" (285). In this communal space of memory there is a reconciliation of the separation between the men and women that has pervaded the Day family.¹⁸ Mama Day knows that "looking past the losing was to feel for the man who built this house and the one who nailed this well shut. It was to feel the hope in them that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had gone before. Those men *believed* - in the power of themselves, in what they were feeling" (285). Through the memory of her family's history, first through the women, and then through the men, Mama Day comes to terms with the pain of the memory. The merging of the once separate histories provides the collective backing necessary to affect the present.

Mama Day realizes that the memory is also the means to find "a missing key to an unknown door . . . The door to help Baby Girl" (280). In remembering the stories of the men, she learns that George is needed to help Cocoa overcome the hateful conjure power of Ruby. George and Cocoa have created a communal space through their relationship where their union is beyond the physical. Mama Day thinks, "Baby Girl done tied up her mind and her flesh with George, and above all, Ruby knew it" (265); she tells Abigail, "He`s a part of *her* . . . And that`s the part that Ruby done fixed to take it out of our hands" (267). Mama Day thinks of George's immense will, buried deep inside and knows, "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" (285). This joining of hands would produce an eruption of space that would link George to the history of the Days. In Naylor's

own words, it “would have been a physical holding as well as a metaphysical holding of hands with him and with all the other parts of Cocoa’s history, the other men whose hands had worked and who had broken hearts” (Perry 233). As already noted, George refuses this joining and dies of a broken heart like Bascombe and John-Paul. The novel begins/ends, however, with George finally joining the (comm)unity. The story is told in 1999 when Cocoa overlooks The Sound where George’s ashes were scattered. There, she experiences a silent communication with him. George’s spirit remains in Willow Springs and literally becomes part of the culture and myth there, part of 18 & 23. In this, George has found a metaphysical home in Willow Springs, a space of (comm)unity.

As the narrative of *Mama Day* breaks down the material nature of literal place, the novel itself becomes a communal participatory space. *Mama Day* follows in the tradition of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has labelled the “speakerly text” which “is exemplified in the peculiar play of ‘voices’ at work in the use of ‘free indirect discourse’” (*Signifying Monkey* xxv). We have already seen that a variety of voices speak in *Mama Day*.¹⁹ Most significant, however, is the reader participation in the novel. The collective narrator tells us that, unlike Reema’s boy, we can listen in on Cocoa’s and George’s conversation that creates this novel (10). The novel itself takes on the call and response pattern that creates (comm)unity. Unlike George, we can respond to the communal call of the book if we put aside our own reading strategies constructed from the white, patriarchal world. We can actually cross over into the “other space,” the womb of Willow Springs. In this communal and creative space, personal transformation and new birth is possible as we participate in the creation of the novel and actually become Cocoa and George. The collective narrator says, “Think about it: ain’t nobody really talking to you . . . 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” (10). Like the memory of Sapphira that inhabits the realm of myth in Willow Springs, the

reader too can experience the psychological movement and development that comes as a result of communal (re)membrance. The novel as communal space has a transforming power as the boundaries between text and reader are broken down. As Naylor moves away in her novels from the confining nature of literal places, so too does this novel reflect an opening of textual geographies. This performative nature will continue in *Bailey's Cafe* as Naylor makes an even more radical move away from material place and realistic novel.

In *Mama Day*, Naylor begins her experimentation with place and space. In contrast to places that are constituted by the symbolic spatial order, the "fluidity" of Willow Springs resists colonizing discourses. In moving beyond the material nature of place in her first novels, Naylor's Willow Springs, as metaphysical and metaphorical place, breaks down the boundaries of place that hinder psychological movement and development. Established within the geography of Willow Springs itself is the possibility for the island to be a psychological and communal space where African-American identity is negotiated. Willow Springs and the novel itself become a womb-like space where identities can be reformed and the call and response of (comm)unity can empower the present.

Notes

1. See the Vintage International edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* or Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner*.

2. The circumstances surrounding the deeding of the land are important for an understanding of the unique past in Willow Springs. I will deal with this below.

3. Naylor's critique of the power of a capitalist economy recalls ideas in *Linden Hills* where images of fences and boundaries abound. The people in Linden Hills put up fences, Luther Nedeed builds a moat around his house, and Willie and Lester talk about what modern education teaches: "They get thinking fences, man, don't you see it?" (45).

4. For an analysis of African tradition of "remembering" the female ancestor, see Karla F. C. Holloway, *Moorings & Metaphors*. I will come back to this below. For some thoughts on the standing forth, see essay by Ralph Reckly Sr.. Lindsey Tucker, already cited, provides an excellent overview of conjure in relation to *Mama Day*.

5. Compare this to the idea of the flying Africans in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Naylor consciously, it seems, inverts the gender of the flier since Morrison's flier is a man, Solomon. Naylor also possibly echoes Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* where the Ibos escape from Tatem Island, running, even while chained, past the slave ship on the water. For other parallels between Marshall and Naylor see Peter Erickson (134-8).

6. Compare the circle symbols of Toni Morrison's *Sula* that Naylor probably is signifying upon.

7. Dr. Braithwaite outlines his view of historiography in *Linden Hills*: "You strive to capture a moment of time, and if your work is done properly, history becomes a written photography" (261). These fixed, static images, evoked through the image of photography, pervade *Linden Hills*. This is also carried on in *Mama Day* where movie and photography images abound. Part of the growth of the characters is to realize that the essence of places and people cannot be captured in closed documents. Near the end, the collective narrator states, "Still, it ain't about chalking up 1985, just jotting it down in a ledger to be tallied with the times before and the times after" (305). That Cocoa eventually learns this is demonstrated when, speaking in 1999, she tells George, "[Y]ou change as I change. And each time I go back over what happened, there's some new development, some forgotten corner that puts you in a slightly different light" (310).

8. Barbara Christian writes, "Mobility of black women is a new quality in . . . books of the early eighties, for black women, in much of the previous literature, were restricted in space by their condition" ("Trajectories" 244). Although published in 1988, the time *Mama Day* is set in reflects this trend. Cocoa's movement allows her to see different ways of living and although she insists that Willow Springs is a much simpler life, she continues to live in New York City. Working-class characters like the women of Brewster Place probably could not travel to a place like Willow

Springs. However, as Naylor begins to transform literal places into psychological spaces, *Bailey's Cafe* will finally offer liberating place/space to working-class characters.

9. Toni Morrison deals with a somewhat similar issue in "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction," when she argues, "What is missing in city fiction and present in village fiction is the ancestor . . . Writer after writer after writer concedes explicitly or implicitly that the ancestor is the matrix of his yearning" (39). Also, the importance of the link between place and one's personal name is an important issue in African-American literature. Kimberly W. Benston offers a theoretical perspective in "I yam what I am". Important novels for this issue are Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

10. Missy Dehn Kubitschek offers that "*Mama Day* belongs not to the tradition of the realistic novel but to the tradition of the romance" ("Toward a New Order" 77). In this way, Willow Springs could possibly echo Shakespeare's magical island in *The Tempest* where the boundaries between illusion and reality break down. Although Naylor denies she consciously used *The Tempest*, she admits it could unconsciously be there (Perry 234). See Valerie Traub and Peter Erickson for extensive analysis on how they see Naylor revising *The Tempest*.

11. It becomes humorous when George attempts to explain how lightening could have struck twice at Ruby's house. Instead of entertaining the possibility that this might be beyond rationality, he goes through a scientific reasoning of all the possibilities (274).

12. There are more examples in addition to what I cite below. Ruby poisons Cocoa as she braids her hair: "North to south, east to west, round to square" (246). Before Ruby's house is struck by lightening, Mama Day walks north to Ruby's place, then south to the bridge, east toward Chevy's Pass and then west to the other place (269-72).

13. As we have seen, both Cocoa and George have thought this way. Naylor's first two novels, at times, also seem to make these generalizations. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Mattie Michael's South is associated with youth and innocence. She has to leave the South to flee from her father's anger at her pregnancy. In *Linden Hills*, Laurel Dumont's experiences in the South with her grandmother are also associated with a time when things were simple in comparison to her wealthy middle-aged lifestyle. However, Ben's story in the first novel, does deal with the damaging material reality of sharecropping in the South.

14. In this terminology, I am playing on an expression of Susan Willis. She has offered that Toni Morrison's novels exhibit moments of African-American history and culture she terms "eruptions of funk" (*Specifying* ch. 4). Often, Gloria Naylor's eruptions of space are based on historical remembering, but go beyond temporal geographies hence offering new possibilities for the psychology of her characters.

15. In *Workings of the Spirit*, Houston Baker briefly mentions this idea. In examining the folk mother of Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, Baker suggests, "MOTHER does seem a black-determined PLACE" (118).

16. Although in *Inspiriting Influences* Awkward argues that Naylor's relationship to other African-American writers is characterized by a positive (dis)unity, I believe that the possibility for relationships in *Mama Day* is about (comm)unity.

17. In *Moorings and Metaphors*, Karla F. C. Holloway offers that the ancestor as metaphor illustrates "the importance of cultural, spiritual, and metaphysical places in both African and African-American women's writing" (2). In the framework of my essay, however, remembering the ancestor fits into my delineation of space rather than place.

18. Missy Dehn Kubitschek writes, "The emotional alienation between Bascombe and Sapphira reverberates through the generations in a perpetual separation of men and women of the same generation, and of women and their children. In the family tree, this dichotomy is expressed through all-male and all-female generations" ("Toward a New Order," 87).

19. We even hear the voices of John-Paul, Jonah Day, and Grace from the Other Place (151).

Chapter 2: *Bailey's Cafe*: A New Kind of Geography

"*Bailey's Cafe* is another ball game"

-Gloria Naylor - Interview with Virginia Fowler (146).

Gloria Naylor's fourth novel, *Bailey's Cafe*, takes us back to New York for its primary setting. We know from *Mama Day* that the cafe is located near Riverside Drive and 125th Street in New York City (130). In moving back to the northern city, perhaps one might expect Naylor to return to a similar concept of place as seen in her first two novels. Although corresponding themes abound, Naylor's treatment of place in *Bailey's Cafe* is the most radical of all her novels. From the description of the cafe, it appears that the concept of literal place is being disregarded: "There is nothing in the back of this cafe. Since the place sits right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility, the back door opens out to a void" (76). In this way, *Bailey's Cafe* continues Naylor's use of place as an expression of metaphysical situations that began in *Mama Day*. In its disruption of traditional meanings of place, the novel continues her move away from the literal places that define and trap people to a more non-material idea of place and space. Continuing her preoccupation with the geographical relationship between place and space, Naylor offers new possibilities for individual identity and community.

Before I examine what Naylor does with place and space, however, a crucial theme of the novel must be examined. Naylor develops the issues she introduced in her first two novels of how spatial relationships based on race, class and gender attempt to define individual identity. This process of social spatialization also leads to a codification of social space into locational separations and literal places. Therefore, Naylor's deconstruction of traditional notions of place becomes a means to transgress a hegemonic spatial order. In a non-place, or space, characters overcome the

boundaries used to define them and can reshape their own identity. Naylor also continues her preoccupation with other geographical issues as she breaks down traditional notions of geographical separations in this novel. In its global perspective, *Bailey's Cafe* reflects on world-wide issues and moves toward an attempt at reconciliation through a global sense of community. Ultimately, as Naylor rejects traditional notions of place, the novel itself becomes central. She continues the trend begun in *Mama Day* where the boundaries between text and reader are broken down. As Naylor moves beyond material geographies, her novel also becomes a non-material space. Through its performative nature as jazz and blues, it becomes a space of reader participation where there is a communal reconciliation outside of the spatial order.

In *Bailey's Cafe*, Naylor brings us back to the issues of place and space that pervade her first two novels. This novel is largely about the production of social space and its relationship to place. The people who come to Bailey's Cafe have all been, in some way, victims of social spaces that attempt to define them. I believe that it is necessary, therefore, to examine this issue in depth. In his own words, Bailey's story is given to "set the tempo" of the novel (4)¹ and his section introduces this theme that continues throughout. He links race and class as important factors in the establishment of spatial boundaries with the portrayal of the Van Morrisons, the black couple for whom his parents worked as butler and cook. In their wealthy position, the Van Morrisons adopt the spatial strategies of the rich white people. Blackness, in this community, is a negative sign. Bailey tells how "there were no other colored servants in our household or in the neighborhood" because all the white neighbors only hired white European servants (5) and explains that "[w]ealthy Negroes held the same kind of attitudes as wealthy white people but even more so, feeling that they had more to prove. According to my mother Mrs. Van Morrison didn't want them as servants because it cheapened their appearance to the neighbors" (7). In perceiving blackness as a negative sign, the

Van Morrisons mimic white racist hegemony, and, consequently, deny their own selfhood.

The portrayal of the Van Morrisons seems to parody characters in the African-American literary tradition. Mr. Van Morrison has made part of his fortune through real-estate and Bailey's father thinks of him as "a real race man" (6). With this ironic characterization, plus the fact that Bailey's father has to stoke the furnace (4), Naylor links the Van Morrisons to the depiction of the Daltons in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Mr. Van Morrison's position as a trustee of the Tuskegee Institute also recalls Mr. Norton, the northern businessman in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Both Wright's and Ellison's rich, white characters are blind to the real effects of racism and capitalism on African Americans.² In this parody, Naylor suggests that the Van Morrisons have mirrored white, capitalist interests. Ironically, the spatial stratifications based on race and class that they imitate ultimately define them. Although they have monetary wealth, the Van Morrisons are still demarcated by a system of power relations: "Mrs. Van Morrison's neighbors wouldn't dream of eating with her, while Mr. Van Morrison wasn't about to sit in anybody's boardroom. And until that happens, real power getting shared at the top, nothing but a game of smoke and mirrors is going on at the bottom" (12). In this portrayal, Naylor begins her concern in the novel with how people in place are defined by spatial relationships determined by the dominant society.

Bailey's thoughts on baseball provide an interesting metaphor for the social construction of race and the power relations that create the rhetorical figure of race. Peter Jackson argues that "'race' is fundamentally a social construction rather than a natural division of human kind" (6). The dominant white discourse constructs a view of blackness that establishes a social space that black people must inhabit. This social space then becomes the impetus to enact locational separation, as Jackson offers: "spatial structures are implicated in the production and reproduction of social relations in the sense that particular territorial forms both produce and reflect particular social

processes” (4). Naylor uses the idea of the Negro Leagues as a metaphor for the social construction of race. Since blackness is constructed by the dominant society as a negative sign, or even an absence, it must be spatially separated from whiteness. Therefore, black baseball players must establish their own league that runs parallel to, but is separate from, the white league. The white league is the *major league* and, therefore, being defined in relation to the dominant, the Negro League becomes the minor, or, the other. Their league is, as Bailey says, “Organized baseball, just not recognized baseball” (11). Bailey’s ironic take on this situation rhetorically signifies³ on its reality: “I didn’t question why Negroes had separate teams; watching their games and then the white games, it was pretty clear to me. The Negroes were better players. And just like us at school, who wanted to team up with the pee-pants who had snot running out their noses?” (9). This signification provides a disruptive verbal revisioning of the segregation. However, Bailey does recognize the limitations of his rhetoric and the seriousness of the situation.

Despite the irony, there are significant implications in the discursive construction of race and the resulting locational separation. The concept of race is from its inception involved in power relations. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that race is a rhetorical trope that “signifies the difference between cultures and their possession of power, spelling out the distance between subordinate and superordinate, between bondsman and lord in terms of their ‘race’” (“Writing ‘Race’” 6). Forms of racism then become “*structured* (in the sense that they occur in the context of deeply entrenched, asymmetrical power relations) and *institutionalized* (in the sense that they are perpetuated, often unintentionally, through the policies and practices of public and private bodies)” such as in “housing, education and employment” (Jackson 10), and in this case, baseball. Although Bailey discusses the opening of the *major leagues* to black players, he recognizes the limitations of this process. When Branch Rickey, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, signs Jackie Robinson to their farm team, Bailey

envisions a new model for baseball where “there would have been some colored people owning teams and colored people managing teams and colored people coaching teams” (12). However, he realizes, “It’s not gonna happen now. The best I can see for baseball is the same old way. The Rickey’s of the world calling the shots because a hundred Jackie Robinsons isn’t gonna really integrate baseball and baseball is *not* going to help integrate America” (12). Like the Van Morrisons, the black baseball players’ locational separation is enforced and reinforced by structural white authority. Bailey’s story provides an interesting introduction to the novel. In the social geography of America, the construction of blackness places African Americans in certain social spaces. This space then places the “minority” in relation to the “majority” in literal separations reinforced through power relations.

In setting “Mood: Indigo,”⁴ the first story in “The Jam,” in the South Side of Chicago, Naylor implicates the racism that has caused urban locational segregation of African Americans;⁵ however, she goes beyond these implications as she reflects on how African Americans have responded to their circumstances. Bailey, who narrates the story, states that “[u]nlike other cities, the South Side of Chicago has always been the South Side of Chicago. Colored settled there, stayed there, and made it their own. It was old and run-down when they found it, and it grew older while they were there. But they gave it whatever they had” (40). In this section, therefore, Naylor reflects once again on the historio-material significance of place and it becomes a powerful critique of capitalism and city experience. In *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, David Harvey discusses how capitalism affects urbanization. He argues that “the very existence of money as a mediator of commodity exchange radically transforms and fixes the meanings of space and time in social life and defines limits and imposes necessities upon the shape and form of urbanization” (1). Therefore, in “the urban process confusion, conflict, and struggle are a normal condition” (1). In “Mood: Indigo,” the black people of Chicago do the best they can, some saving for the future of at

least one child since “colored folks lived that way: hanging on during the times with no chance for the times when there’d be a chance” (40-1). This constant waiting for an opportunity, however, can cause people to give up: “like in any city, there are those who fall through the cracks of the upswings and downswings. The ones who kind of give up trying for themselves and their children. Sadie’s daddy was like that, before he became Sadie’s daddy” (41). Because of the pressures of the urban capitalist system, Sadie’s parents find it simpler to become “easy-living folks,” moving from place to place, earning money through various occupations (41). The sterility of this lifestyle is emphasized, however, through the constant abortions Sadie’s mother must undergo. New life cannot emerge in this system. Because of the heavy monetary responsibility, Sadie’s birth causes her father to leave and her mother to need to sell herself to earn money for daily living. The subsequent hatred the mother feels for her daughter is demonstrated in her constant reminder that Sadie is “The One The Coat Hanger Missed” (41). In fact, Sadie does not even learn her name until she is four years old when “she learned it was Sadie, because that’s what the woman kept screaming each time she brought the leather strap down on her back, shoulders, head” (42). In this scene, Naylor begins to demonstrate the psychological damage that can occur with the lack of a healthy homeplace.

Sadie’s story demonstrates the psychological need for physical place and the damaging effect of placelessness. Yi-Fu Tuan states that “[h]ome is an intimate place” where physical objects take on great sentimental significance (144). In reflecting on the importance of place in her novels, Toni Morrison offers: “I think some of it is just a woman’s strong sense of being in a room, a place, or in a house . . . I do very intimate things ‘in place’: I am sort of rooted in it” (“Intimate” 213). In contrast to this intimacy and rootedness, place for Sadie is damaging and transitory. As Sadie and her mother move “from boardinghouse to boardinghouse,” (42) Sadie learns to be very good in order to avoid physical and psychological abuse from her mother: “And when very good didn’t work, she

tried very very. There wasn't a speck of dirt in any of the rooms they boarded in, and they moved often. Sadie scraped the soles of her boots with sandpaper before she'd let herself into their room. The floor she kept bleached would have left telltale prints if she didn't" (43). The super cleanliness of the house is symbolic of the sterile environment Sadie must dwell in. Because there is little positive psychological development, Sadie is forced to dream of possibilities for place: "There was to be a trim white bungalow with a green picket fence, and she would keep the front yard swept clean of leaves and pick all the withered blooms from their fence full of roses" (44). Sadie creates this meta(physical) place/home as a stable reference point in her psyche. She dreams of a home that she is able to establish herself, expressing creativity and artistic vision, to counteract the damaging effects of placelessness with her mother.

Eventually, Sadie does establish her own physical place in the face of poverty. However, in Daniel's house, every day is a race against the soot of the passing trains to keep everything clean. Despite the constant work, Sadie is able, to some extent, to create a personal space through her garden. Her geraniums "were the reddest flowers she could find, hardy enough to thrive through the soot and vibrations . . . Each spring, when they came to full color, Sadie had the garden she needed to round out her dream" (55). The flowers provide a natural disruption to her desperate material circumstances and thus are a sign of her endurance and creativity despite the overwhelming poverty of her situation.⁶ Her personal space, however, is still ultimately controlled by others. When Daniel dies, the material reality of her situation becomes the dominant factor as his two daughters show up with the deed to the shack saying, "Buy or get out" (56). For Sadie, it "took her ten days to get rid of what had been accumulated in twenty-five years, and it brought the sum total of \$97.50. But they were asking \$200.00" (57). Sadie is trapped in this system where place and property are contingent upon the accumulation of capital.

As Sadie goes out to try to earn the money necessary to purchase the house, we see how place is stratified through spatial relationships based on wealth. The house that Sadie lives in is different than what she had dreamed: "Not a trim little bungalow with a green picket fence, a three-room shanty hemmed in by other three-room shanties near the railroad tracks" (51). Sadie literally lives on "the other side of the tracks" in South Chicago. This is a spatial designation of place that segregates the poor through literal boundaries. When Sadie tries to find work with the people on her side of the tracks, she is given "the directions to houses that they cleaned in themselves, houses on the other side of town" (58). The other side of town is characterized by physical manifestations of spatial boundaries. Sadie walks the "streets where fences of all types hemmed in the green lawns and flower borders" (58). David Harvey discusses how "money is . . . often used to secure particular spaces against intrusion. The purchase of private property rights secures exclusive rights to dominate a parcel of space" (*Consciousness* 33). Since African-American place is often assigned by the dominant white discourse, the ability to create private spaces becomes very important. As we have seen in *Linden Hills*, however, class differences, another discursive construct, separate people as exclusive spaces emerge. In Sadie's case, "it only took one to call the police, and she was warned to get off those streets and go back to where she belonged" (58). Inscribing place with connotations of "belonging" reinforces a spatial construction of identity. Sadie's identity is produced for her because she is poor. Realizing the rigidity of these spatial designations, when Sadie mistakenly "ended up on streets where the lawns were even greener and larger, the fences all wrought iron and looming high over her head," she "knew not to even bother knocking on these front doors" (58). It is clear that this city has developed a spatial system based on economic accumulation. The wealthy live in their own part of town and seclude themselves even further by erecting fences. This system defines who you are by where you live.

The material realities of place eventually become too much for Sadie. Although she is able to find some work, she ultimately sells her own body to try to make the money necessary to buy the house. Sadie, therefore, places her own body within the capitalist system that threatens to destroy her. Even this is punished when she is arrested and jailed for two weeks. Ultimately, since Sadie does not have the material means necessary to keep her place, she is forced to look to a non-material method. The bag that is placed beside her as she spends the night on her knees in her yard contains a way to transcend the confines of place: “she reached back into the crumpled bag to pull out the stars. Five of them were emblazoned on a label redder than her geraniums. And the five stars became the only ones she needed as she unscrewed the top of the flat pint bottle to drink the sweet wine” (65). Through the alcohol, Sadie escapes the material realities of place as she constructs a house in her mind. Of course, this is only an illusory escape. As she continues to live among extremely poor conditions, she is only able to achieve moments of “freedom” when “at night the stars came out and she made a few improvements to her home” (66).

The story of Iceman Jones is given as a counterpoint to Sadie’s story. His history is also one of the physical and psychological strain of the material realities of place. Although his work as an ice deliverer is physically demanding, Iceman Jones uses rhetorical strategies to transcend place. He tells Sadie and the others in the cafe about the day there was a fire on his route: “It really was a story, moving close to shades of a lie” (72). Since the hydrants were not working, he and the fire chief unhitch his wagon and pull it to the fire with a car. When Bailey offers that Iceman Jones is embellishing the story, he responds, “Bailey, if I’m lying, I’m flying, he said. Then he looked at Sadie and winked. Well, all right, I didn’t have quite enough ice in my wagon to put out all the flames. So me and the firemen stood around that building and spit out the rest” (73). Jones’ lie constitutes an important strategy in African-American expressive culture. Houston Baker calls this

mode of discourse or performance “mythomania,” a “compulsion to embroider the truth, to exaggerate, or to tell lies” (*Workings* 74). This performance is in the tradition of the trickster rabbit or funky blues singer and is “designed to forward the cultural anima’s always already impulse toward freedom or liberation” (76). Baker offers that the “flexibleness and permeability” of mythomania “are functions of the nonmateriality of classical space, which is a *medium* rather than a signally distinctive substance” (77). In this nonmaterial performative space, Jones can negotiate his position in the material reality of urban life. It is a way to deal with the harsh realities of place.

Sadie, on the other hand, continues to rely on her wine to escape material place as she establishes her psychological home. Sadie slowly develops her relationship with Jones in her mind. In this meta(physical) place, she has control over the boundaries of her reality - the only time in her life when she has total control over place. Therefore, Sadie cannot accept the marriage proposal from Iceman Jones. As they dance in the back of the cafe, we read: “It was a deal she just couldn’t live with . . . she looked up at Jones’s sky. She knew this dear sweet man was offering her the moon, but she could give him the stars” (78). For Sadie, it is better to keep her psychic home with him rather than attempting to create a physical one. It is a safe place, away from the pain of the material realities of the world. Her belief in the possibility of community with another person has been destroyed because of her experiences. Sadie’s life will continue in a similar way with her star place as her own personal reality. “Mood: Indigo” provides an excellent analysis of the historio-material forces that help to shape urban place. It is largely a reflection on the relationship between class and place and the construction of social space that places people, inscribes identity and prevents positive communal relationships. In the next stories, Naylor begins to reflect on the relationship between place and the social construction of gendered spaces.

In “Sweet Esther,” Naylor returns to the issue she explored in *Linden Hills* of how the

construction of women's social spaces through patriarchal discourse confines women to physical places. Esther's brother is a share-cropper, working for a wealthy farmer. Since he "has the fat wife and eight children to feed," (95) he has handed twelve-year-old Esther over to his employer, in a business-like transaction to obtain higher wages, saying, "This is your husband . . . Do whatever he tells you, and you won't be sent away like the others" (95). Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose argue, "The social construction of gender difference establishes some spaces as women's and other's as men's; those meanings then serve to reconstitute the power relations of gendered identity" (3).

Esther is involved in these power relations in her two roles in the house. First, she is constructed as an aesthetic object. She is placed in a beautiful room with a fancy bed - "I can pretend I am a princess. Only princesses would have a bed like this. Deep pink and trimmed with lace" (96) - and is literally prepared for her "husband" as she is washed with scented soap and rubbed with lotion.⁷ Esther is also, however, a sexual object. Since she has been delineated as property, she must obey the commands of her "husband" to go down to the cellar where he uses her for his sexual pleasure: "I do not want to be sent away. So I come down when he calls. And rejoice that it is dark" (96). We see how patriarchal discourse, in defining gendered social spaces, is literally enacted to place women in physical locales of subordination. In her sexual role, Esther is more than "Other" to her "husband": she is not seen at all. In contrast to Ralph Ellison's invisible man who creates his own underground retreat, Esther, who is forced into the underground, is literally the invisible woman. Since she has internalized a conception of herself from the fat wife - "The black gals. The monkey faces" (96) - she fears that her "husband" will actually look at her: "I lie there the first night and pray to God very hard that he will never look at me . . . God answers my prayers" (96).

In the space that Esther must inhabit, physically located in the dark basement, she is shaped by what her "husband" wants her to be. His command over her identity is apparent: "Play with your

toys, he whispers as the spiders scratch and spin, scratch and spin their webs in the dark” (97). The toys, however, are “leather-and-metal things” that “are greasy and smell funny” (97). Esther thinks, “No, they are not toys. I do not know what they are, but I will soon learn what they are for. And I will learn that in the dark, words have a different meaning. Having fun. Playing games. Being a good girl” (97). As he controls her identity formation, fragmentation results. Esther’s fragmented identity as a result of the defining discourse is symbolized by the image of the shadow. In trying to grasp what is happening to her, she is affected by listening to The Shadow on the radio: “It becomes my friend because it finally gives me the words I have been seeking. What we do in the cellar is to make evil” (98).⁸ But this shadow, she soon realizes, is an “other” self that has been constructed by her position within the discourse of patriarchy: “And then I grow up. I still believe there is a Shadow. But I also come to believe that he enjoys to stand there and watch” (98). This discourse is so powerful that it has literally created this “other” self, a masculine reflection within Esther’s own identity. “Sweet Esther,” therefore, demonstrates the power of patriarchy to create a social space for women that results in confinement in physical and psychological places. In the dynamic of these power relations, women’s identities can be controlled by masculine hegemonic discourse. We will eventually see, however, that Esther does have the ability to recreate herself when she shows up at Eve’s place.

In “Mary (Take One),” Naylor continues to reflect on gender issues and the relationship between space, place and identity. Mary is shaped by the social spaces that surrounding people create for her. From her birth, Mary’s father constructs an aesthetic social space for his daughter: “It was Daddy Jim who started calling me Peaches. Plump and sweet. Yellow and sweet. Daddy’s baby. Daddy’s beautiful baby” (102). As in Esther’s story, this gendered space becomes located in a physical place. Daddy Jim is, significantly, a bricklayer, and Mary “remember[s] the wall he started

building around the house when I was nine years old” (103). This literal and metaphorical wall is created to control Mary’s future sexuality because she is perceived as beautiful by the outside world. She is a commodity to be controlled by the patriarch/father. Daddy Jim perpetuates this aesthetic space that has been constructed by filling her room with mirrors. In an interview, Naylor links the ideas of space and identity. Since the

concept of self is closely related to women’s perception of space . . . Naylor said that closed spaces emanate from ‘a whole web of circumstances.’ A woman’s sense of space grows out of ‘the society in which you are born, and the way in which you are socialized to move through that society,’ and that movement, or the lack of it ‘determines who you are, how you see the big *you* when you look into a mirror’ (Pearlman 24-5).

The imagery used above is, of course, a perfect reflection of what happens in this story. In the mirrors in her room, Mary begins to see herself through the gaze of the men, and even the women, around her. As an object of a dominant gaze, therefore, she becomes what others desire:

“Everywhere I turned, I could see her. But what was she doing in my room? She was a whore and I was Daddy’s baby” (104).⁹ Mary perceives an “other” self in the way the people around her do:

“Yes, they all looked at me and knew, just knew, what she was. You have to believe what you see in the mirror, don’t you? Isn’t that what mirrors are for?” (104). As she grows older, Mary has to give into the self that has been created for her: “she was always there, reflected in the wetness of men’s eyes. Tormenting me . . . I could feel their eyes stripping my clothes away: they knew her promise was there. You. You. No, not me - I wasn’t like that. No, never me. So I gave them *her*. Sweet, sweet relief” (105). As she surrenders her constructed self, sexual intercourse, what the men desire, becomes an illusory means of “salvation” for her.

The emotional strain of placelessness becomes key in the new life Mary leads. In her affairs with the plethora of men, she begins to hate herself - “Before, I had only hated her. Now I wanted to hate myself. And I started thinking that I should always have hated myself, I was probably always

enjoying those back rooms and back stairs” (107) - and wonders “if, indeed, I had been born into a world without mirrors, there might have been a chance for a real home” (108). Because of the social space created through the dominant masculine gaze, there is no possibility for a physical home or a healthy personal space. Her relationship with the club-footed lover reinforces this physical and spiritual placelessness as he takes her all over the country to keep her away from other men (109). However, his possessiveness finally confines her to the physical location of an apartment when he attempts to have her only for himself. Mary’s mutilation of her own face is the only way to escape the inscribing dominant gaze. She overturns the metaphorical mapping of her body with a literal marking of her face. This physical reality of scarring breaks the aesthetic illusion that has defined her within a system that commodifies the female body. When her lover discovers her, he can only speak her name. The essence of “Mary” for him has been destroyed because her outward appearance has been marred. Subsequently, her wandering across the country continues: “When those railroad tracks ran out of land going east, I changed trains and went south, changed again and went west, then north. I was circling back toward the east again and realized I’d come to the end of the line” (112). At the end of the line, the only place left to go is to Bailey’s Cafe.

I have discussed, in length, how race, class, gender and sexuality relate to the historio-material significance of place and the construction of gendered spaces. This is central to understanding the novel because all the people who end up at Bailey’s Cafe have been victims of hegemonic social spatialization and the resulting limitations and boundaries of literal place. The reality of the African-American historio-material dynamic, therefore, has made the establishment of places/spaces of liberation nearly impossible. The people who come to the cafe have been battered by these forces and, consequently, are at the point of deciding whether to live or die. Bailey’s Cafe, however, is actually the second stop of the “relay for broken dreams” (144) that is the street the

novel is located around. It is flanked on either side by Gabe's pawnshop and Eve's "boardinghouse". Gabe's pawnshop is the first place people arrive at when there is an initial decision to live or die. The most striking characteristic of the shop is that it is never open. When people arrive they see a sign that reads, "Back at ---, and each hour [Gabe] keeps moving the hands one hour forward" (144). When Miss Maple arrives at Gabe's, he sees that the "plate-glass window was overflowing with the broken relics of uncountable dreams" (212). He also sees at "the far end of the counter . . . the locked gun case. The revolvers were laid in neat rows on the glass shelves; above the case were shoe boxes filled with assorted shells" (212). Gabe's shop is the stage where one realizes that her/his dreams have died and there is the initial possibility for suicide. As a pawnshop, Gabe's place is filled with relics from the past. If one can move beyond what has happened in their past and realize that the shop is closed, one can move down the line to the cafe.

X
Bailey's Cafe represents that transitional state where one's will must decide between life and suicide. Bailey, whose experiences in the Pacific during World War II have demonstrated the horrifying side of humanity to him, returns to stand on a dock in San Francisco, staring at the water. He thinks that "at the very moment of Hiroshima happening, it all stopped being worth it. You get a man like that, with thoughts like that, staring out over the edge . . . The only world worth existing for me in that white shroud was the sound of the surf, and I already knew what the surf was bringing . . . susshing . . . susshing . . ." (27). As he is thinking of ending his life by plunging into the water, he feels Nadine's touch: "Startled, I turned around and she was standing in back of me. And in back of her was this cafe . . . We were in business" (27). The cafe, therefore, is presented as an emotional solution to those considering giving up. Virginia Fowler records Naylor's directions to the stage production of *Bailey's Cafe*. The cafe, Naylor says, is "more of an experience than a place. It exists in the space where the human heart makes the ultimate decision to either die - or dream" (Fowler

168). Since Bailey's Cafe "sits right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility, the back door opens out to a void" (76).¹⁰ The edge of the world exits at the back door where the void, or the "endless plunge," (76) of the back room represents the emotional struggle between living and dying. The back room becomes largely the projection of the memories of the people who go into it. Bailey describes how the Christmas season especially brings in many "who come in through the front door and head straight on to the rear of the cafe - and don't come back" (162). These people will "stay out back until a certain memory becomes just too much to bear" (163). Infinite possibility, however, is the space of the cafe where a person dreams, where, as in *Mama Day*, the power of the will takes hold and allows the person to "Just live on".

In its more literal characteristics, Bailey's Cafe has great significance because it is outside of the historio-material constructions of literal place. It is far from a traditional cafe. Bailey and Nadine have only one item on the menu every week night and Nadine is not concerned about the service: "If we start serving 'em too readily, they'll begin thinking we're actually in the business of running a cafe. Forgetting how it happened they stumbled in here, they'll start looking for us when they're hungry" (28). The cafe, therefore, literally exists for a purpose outside of economics and consumption. As Bailey says, "Even though this planet is round, there are just too many spots where you can find yourself hanging on to the edge just like I was; and unless there's some space, some place, to take a breather for a while, the edge of the world - frightening as it is - could be the end of the world" (28). Outside the normal functions of the relationship between place and capitalism and place and the construction of social space, the cafe can be a resting place, as well as a psychological space, away from the historio-material spatial order. Like the blues, which are referred to so often in the novel, the cafe is a non-material space within which one can negotiate the harsh reality of daily life.

Blues

Bailey's Cafe is a psychological manifestation of the blues. In the history of African-American expressive culture, the blues "developed out of the statement (or call) and response patterns of collective work groups" (Williams 124) during slavery. The blues emerged, therefore, as a creative and communal exercise in dealing with the reality of slavery. In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Houston Baker observes that the "material conditions of slavery in the United States and the rhythms of Afro-American blues combined and emerged . . . as an ancestral matrix that has produced a forceful and indigenous American creativity" (2). The blues at work "successfully negotiate an obdurate 'economics of slavery' and achieve a resonant, improvisational, expressive dignity" (13). Baker describes the blues as a matrix, "a womb, a network . . . a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (3).¹¹ Bailey's Cafe is this matrix, a psychological space outside of the historio-material spatial order where the characters' situations can be dealt with, and eventually transcended, through the power of the will to survive.

As already discussed, the people who come to the cafe have arrived at a crossroads¹² in their lives where they must decide to live or die. Bailey says that the street is "nothing but a way station . . . you eventually go back out and resume your life - hopefully better off than when you found us - or you head to the back of the cafe and end it" (221). Those who come to the cafe are at this juncture, or crossroads, in their lives. Baker locates the blues singer "at the railway junction lustily transforming experiences of a durative (unceasingly oppressive) landscape into the energies of rhythmic song" (*Blues* 7). He continues: "Polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between . . . the juncture is the way-station of the blues" (7). As the material boundaries of physical place break down, the crossroads, a placeless place, or space, becomes an energizing possibility. The cafe is this space of transition and possibility since the

the relationship between the old man and the young girl, Godfather stops bathing her and makes her wear loose homespun to hide her changing body. Since he will not allow boys to see her (83) and he will not touch her, Eve is totally isolated in a sterile environment: "I was now forced to go through months and months with no one and nothing to touch me" (83). Therefore, Eve looks to other means for physical and emotional stimulation. During puberty, Eve discovers that Billy Boy's stomping as she presses herself into the ground provides sexual stimulation: "I part my thighs ever so slightly and arch my pelvis hard into the soil - there, yes, now I can feel it even down there. So close to the earth - the tremors. *Stomp, Billy*" (87). She reasons, "I sought him [Billy Boy] out and sought out the earth whenever I needed release from the tight silence in my home, tightening to the point of danger the closer I grew toward womanhood" (87). Eve's escape to the ground represents her desire to transcend the constructed space and place she must live in. It is an attempted return to a natural order, away from the symbolic order of the masculine space of Godfather's house where she must conform to Godfather's notion of femininity. No deviance from the roles he has specified will be accepted. When he catches Eve asserting her individuality and sexuality, his anger produces immediate action. Eve is expelled from Godfather's place, the masculine garden. She relates, "I wouldn't have needed to leave east of the delta if Godfather hadn't thrown me out of the church. To be thrown out of his church was to be thrown out of the world" (85). Because of her disobedience, he will not allow any part of himself to be associated with her: "He said I was going to leave him the same way he's found me, naked and hungry" (88). Therefore, he purges all the food from her - "every ounce of food his hard work had put into [her] stomach" (88). Although this is a demonstration of patriarchal dominance, the symbolic purging of his influence from her life will allow Eve to recreate herself, in her own image.

Eve's journey represents an escape from the symbolic spatial order as she transcends gender

constructions. Her journey up the Mississippi Delta from Pilottown to Arabi is a test of her will to live. She proves that she has the endurance and will to survive even as the delta dust slowly creeps into the moist openings of her pours, mouth, nose, eyes and ears. It also moves under her finger nails and between her toes. Finally, as Eve relates, "The moist space between my hips was easyUp my thighs and deep into my vagina, so much mud that it finally stilled my menstrual blood" (90). In becoming part of her, the dust creates a new essence: "Layers and layers of it were forming, forming, doing what it existed to do, growing the only thing it could find in one of the driest winters in living memory. Godfather always said that he made me, but I was born of the delta" (90). The delta, a decidedly feminine/vaginal symbol, becomes a transformative space that challenges Godfather's patriarchal control. In this new birth, she becomes genderless, breaking free from the scripts that have defined her: "I had no choice but to walk into New Orleans neither male nor female - mud. But I could right then and there choose what I was going to be when I walked back out" (91).¹³ Because she has challenged the spaces constructed for women, when she leaves New Orleans, there "seemed there was nowhere on earth for a woman like [her]" (91). She ends up, therefore, at Bailey's Cafe, ready to establish her own place and space.

Eve's journey is also a disruption to traditional linear history. Her walk from Pilottown to Arabi is the "walk that took a thousand years. When people ask me how old I am and I say, About a thousand years, they think I'm being coy. But it's the gospel truth" (82). Elaine Showalter says that finding and restoring women's past "demands that we challenge the temporal categories that have been adopted by traditional - that is, men's - history. Events and periods . . . and the temporal grid of men's history may filter out women's experience, values, and achievements" (30). In taking Eve's story out of the realm of temporal history, which is a masculine construction, Naylor allows her to escape the cause-and-effect, linear march of history that has ignored women's stories for so long.

She also escapes the construction of women's spaces throughout history. As Gillian Rose states, "historically . . . landscapes are often seen in terms of the female body and the beauty of Nature" (87) and "the visual representation of women and landscape has concentrated on the complex construction of images of 'natural' Woman as the objects of male desire" (99). In contrast to representation as sexual object, Eve herself creates a new relationship to the land through her stomping with Billy Boy and her journey. And, although she has been expelled from the masculine garden, at the end of her journey she creates her own garden. Eve's garden is a disruption of Western patriarchal notions that have linked the Garden of Eden and Eve of Genesis with the deceit and sexuality of women. In controlling her own garden, this Eve takes command over her own identity and sexuality: "As you move in toward the center of the yard, where that large tree stump sits, spring, summer, or fall you're gonna find circles and circles of lilies . . . Canna lilies . . . Peruvians. Casa Blancas . . . Lilies-of-the-Nile. Stars of Bethlehem" (92). In this garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is only a stump, surrounded by lilies whose names create world-wide connotations. In Naylor's view, the phallic tree that represents God(father)'s control has been cut down. The lilies connote the new life that is possible for women on a global scale if they can, as Eve has, escape the spaces granted to women and recreate themselves. This is what the women who come to Eve's are looking for.

Like Bailey's Cafe, Eve's "boardinghouse" negotiates a position between literal place and psychological space. Even in its physical properties, it is a space for the reconstitution of identity. Since Eve has established her place to be a womanist space away from the symbolic spatial order, only certain women can find it. When women come to the cafe looking for a place to stay, Bailey is limited in what he can say: "I tell them the only thing I can: Go out the door, make a right, and when you see the garden - if you see the garden - you're there" (81). Jesse Bell¹⁴ comes to the cafe with Eve's card saying, "There's no fucking address like this on the block" (132). Two times, Bailey tries

to convince her that she cannot look for a physical place:

- What are you looking for? I asked.
- The address on this card, goddammit (132).

Jesse must realize what she personally needs at Eve's. She must be willing to step outside of the symbolic spatial order to be able to recreate herself. As Bailey says, a "woman is either ready for Eve's or she's not. And if she's ready, she'll ask where to find it on her own. Not that finding her place is any guarantee of getting a room. Eve is particular" (80). Eve has put restrictions on who can stay at her "boardinghouse": "But does she know about delta dust? That's what I ask any time I'm tempted to let a woman stay here because of the pain in her story" (81). She tells of a woman who came to her with "Lucky Strike spelled out on the inside of her thigh with a lit cigarette butt. A reminder to get the right brand the next time she was sent to the store" (81). Although her story is the worst Eve has ever heard, next to Esther's, Eve will not take her in since "with all that this woman had been through and would still keep going through - they always manage to keep going through it - she didn't know, just didn't know, about delta dust" (82). As already seen, the delta dust in Eve's story symbolizes her escape, through the power of the will, from Godfather's spatial order and her recreation of her identity. Eve will only extend her space to those who have the will to transform themselves. Thus, when she finds Jesse in the lower depths of the prison, Eve "wasn't moved by her story. But when she was tired of wallowing in her own shit, come and find her" (133). Eve offers the space necessary for a recreation of self: "*And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live*" (136). Eve is able to help Jesse break her drug dependency by making her gaze straight into her own history and realize her own worth, which in turn, gives her the will to survive the crash of the withdrawal.

The others that come to Eve's are also able to recreate themselves. The rooms that the

women stay in become their personal spaces in which they can negotiate their fractured identities suffered because of the spatial order. When Daddy Jim tries to take his daughter home, Eve says, "Leave your daughter here . . . and I'll return her to you whole" (113). Mary (Peaches) controls the environment around her as she begins to recreate an identity. The men who come up to visit her must bring daffodils, flowers personally chosen by Mary: "And if they go upstairs with a bouquet that's less than perfect, Eve's taught her to send them back down again. Look in that mirror good, and accept no less than what you deserve" (113). In contrast to the masculine reflection Mary had been conditioned to see, in this personal space she is able to decide her own worth and what she shall be.

Esther's situation is somewhat more complicated. She says, "The first thing [Eve] offered me was this basement room. And she removed the light bulbs herself. What they'll need from you, they'll need in the dark if they know it or not, she said" (99). Although Esther remains in the basement entertaining the dark fantasies of men, there is still the possibility of recreation. She makes the basement her own space, where men must come to her. The removal of the light bulbs signifies on Ellison's *Invisible Man* where the protagonist speaks from his subterranean retreat that is full of the light of 1, 369 light bulbs (7). This parallel leads us to analyse the similarities that have placed each character in her/his basement. Both Esther and invisible man have gone underground because they are invisible to others around them. Esther's situation, however, is a result of a masculine spatial order. Like the invisible man who promises one day to emerge from his hole, there is the hope that Esther can eventually come back up from the basement after she has recreated herself.

Eve's place is also extended to a male character - Miss Maple. In "Miss Maple's Blues," Naylor deals with many of the same gender and race issues, this time from a masculine perspective.¹⁵ The spatial constructions of gender have affected the identity of Miss Maple (Stanley). While growing up in California, the sign of "manliness" was constructed around the machoism of his uncles

in contrast to his father's gentle manner. When the racist Gatlin brothers confront Stanley and his father, Stanley hates his father's peaceful reaction and recalls that his "uncle Leon once beat a man to a pulp just for calling him black" (179). When he is much older, Stanley begins to understand how gender and race are constructed by dominant discourses. His unsuccessful journey across America in search of employment reveals that white America does not have the language to reconcile an African American with a Ph. D.. Stanley's story merges the construction of race and gender as he starts to wear dresses to interviews, knowing that the "dresses weren't making a *bit* of difference to anyone" (204). Although Stanley "never felt more like a man" (204) as he disrupts gender constructions that dictate what the different sexes can wear, the spatial order of race and gender prove to be too powerful. He ends up at Gabe's, "set on using the last money he had in his pocket to buy a pawnshop revolver" (165) but is able to make it to Bailey's Cafe where Eve invites him to work for her. In Eve's space away from the symbolic spatial order, he is able to create his own identity. He "can wear any piece of cloth on his own terms" (213) since "Eve has allowed Miss Maple to be one of the freest men" (216). Eve gave him the idea for his name because it is a way for him to appear to be a housewife as he sends entries into jingle contests. In his disruption of gender constructions, therefore, Miss Maple becomes a signifying force on the dominant society from an other space, making "to the tune of close to fifty thousand dollars and counting" (215).

I am arguing, therefore, that Eve's place is a significant personal space away from the hegemonic discourses that create gendered spaces. I believe it works on the same principles as what Teresa de Lauretis calls the "space-off". In *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, de Lauretis discusses how gender is a discursive construction, "a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies" (5). Therefore, the "sex-gender system . . . is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a

Who
what?

What's
No!

system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society" (5). We have seen already how this system operates to define the women (and men) in this novel. de Lauretis claims, though, that "the critique of all discourses concerning gender" involves "the ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective - a view from 'elsewhere'" (25). This space is "the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations" (25). The "space-off" consists of "spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus" (25). I propose that Eve's place works like this "space-off". It, too, is located in the margins of the discourses that have inscribed the gender roles of characters like Mary, Esther and Miss Maple. As de Lauretis' "space-off" exists simultaneously with hegemonic (transparent) space, so too do Eve's space and the dominant spatial order "coexist concurrently and in contradiction" (de Lauretis 26). In its metaphysical manifestation, Eve's place is a psychological space that always exists for people to enter into for self-recreation. In its literal properties, it is a disruption to traditional places that are constituted by a discursive spatial order. It moves beyond the characteristics of a normal place as it becomes a space where inscribed identity can be challenged and reshaped. Since, like the cafe, Eve's place is a way station (159), the women will leave again and return to the other world. However, the newly formed identity will allow them to move in that world free from the spatial order. Although the power relations of the spatial order will still operate, psychological liberation is now possible on the personal level.

The idea that the street is a psychological manifestation is strengthened by the fact that it is located everywhere. Bailey acknowledges that people "step in here from all over the United States and some parts of the world." (3) and Mary, during her wanderings across the country is told, "Just

get off at that next stop . . . you can find Bailey's Cafe in any town" (112). Bailey has stepped into the cafe from the wharf in San Francisco, Sadie from the streets of Chicago and Miss Maple from Pittsburgh. But, it is Mariam's appearance straight from a back street in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (153) that moves the novel into a global perspective. "Mary (Take Two)" reflects on the relationship between space and place on a global scale. Mariam's people, Ethiopian Jews, are greatly affected by their constructed position as "minority". Parallel to African-Americans, they are "outcasts in their own nation and only allowed to be tenants on the land" (146). Their place in Ethiopia is constituted by boundaries: "In a nation that time forgot, a nation ringed by mountains, they are hemmed in by huge stone churches but have clung to the God of Abraham and the Law of Moses" (146). Their social space, therefore, that is constructed by the dominant (Muslim) society is reinforced by their geographical position as outcasts in the mountains.

In this hostile world, however, their own society has become stratified by patriarchal spatial relationships. During childbirth, the women must go to the hut of blood, and later to the hut of woman-in-childbed, until they become "clean" again after sixty-six days (147). This locational separation based on the women's "uncleanliness" reinforces the superiority of the men. As in America, the nature of gender and sexuality is constructed into the everyday fabric of power relations. Male circumcision is a normal practice, but, as Eve realizes, female circumcision is not part of the Law of Moses: "It's the law of the Blue Nile. And along those shores there is no woman in her right mind - Jew or Muslim - who will want her daughter to grow up a whore" (150). The definition of "whore" is a part of the everyday apparatus of life. If a woman is not circumcised, she is considered a "whore" that no man will want to marry. The ceremony, therefore, is a means of control over women's identity and sexuality. As in the stories set in America, Naylor recognizes that women themselves help to perpetuate this construction of their identities and oppression of their

bodies. Women perform the ceremony and mothers long for their children to have it done.¹⁶ These practices reinforce institutional control over women's bodies.

Mariam's pregnancy, therefore, causes a threat to the power structures of the spatial order. This immaculate conception threatens the men's control over women's bodies and reproduction. No one in the village believes that no man has ever touched her. Since she cannot name the one who impregnated her, she must be cast out of the village. Because of their remote location, her mother knows that "[t]o such a girl expulsion from her home village amounts to a death sentence" (154). In her mother's response to the situation, the literal boundaries of place once again become apparent. She begins to understand the spatial designations that constitute her positionality on the night she plans to transgress the masculine space of the temple to approach God, the ultimate authority, and ask forgiveness for her daughter. The women have to sit outside the temple and "maneuver for a space among the other married women to sit as close to the threshold as possible" (155). On this night, for Mariam's mother, there is not "the familiar stir of pride in watching her husband and sons step into the lighted courtyard. In knowing that they will be praying so near the Holy of Holies" (155). She transgresses the threshold, a sin because she is not a virgin, on her way to demand from God "pure and simple justice" (156). Although she knows that she should be allowed in here - "I am also His servant and He is my God too" (156) - a young girl screams when she discovers "that it is Mariam's mother violating the sanctuary" (157). She is put to death by the high priest because she has crossed over the borders that define who she is as a woman. As Mariam is expelled into placelessness because her situation does not fit into the spatial order, she finds Gabe's pawn shop on a back street of Addis Ababa. Gabe "extends his wrinkled hands and turns them for her to see. I am in exile like you, he says; I am a white Falasha. And I will lead you to a place where you can rest" (159). This place is Eve's.

This breakdown in place and time is significant for more than just demonstrating global similarities in women's stories. Most important is what Naylor is continuing to do with place. In her fictional world, Naylor has constantly envisioned literal place as a damaging entity. The symbolic spatial order "places" certain people because of race, class, gender and sexuality. These places are often isolated pauses constructed by boundaries that limit physical, psychological and spiritual movement. The boundaries of place also control identity and prohibit potentially liberating communal bonds. Boundaries lead to inside/outside, major/minor dualities that are used to define and control people. The deconstruction of literal place in this novel, therefore, is representative of Naylor's desire to transcend the boundaries of place for the more liberating possibilities of space. In breaking down the boundaries of the space-time continuum, Naylor proposes a global fluidity that defies the boundaries of place. Just as her global vision connotes fluidity, so too must personal identities be fluid. Fluid identities defy the transparency of the spatial order and allow people to experience psychological liberation. Finally, the breakdown of place and time is significant for its communal implications. In the fluid, as opposed to stratified, sense of place, the correlations between people are highlighted. As Doreen Massey states, "The geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness, and underscores the fact that both personal identity and the identity of those envelopes of space-time in which and between which we live and move (and have our 'Being') are constructed precisely through that interconnectedness" (122). As many different people end up at Bailey's Cafe, a global communal space is created.

The interaction between Bailey and Gabe links the reality of oppression on a world-wide scale. Gabe is a Russian-Jew, originally from the Caucasus Mountains, whose "spine is bent from straddling so much of the world for so long" and whose "eyes water constantly from the strain of all he's seen" (145). Gabe understands the timeless oppression Jewish people have faced: "For him

Hitler was only the latest punk on the scene” (219). His thoughts reflect on the global historical reality of the construction of race and its devastating effects with the machinery of power relations. In his culturally specific way, however, Gabe can enter the blues space of Bailey’s Cafe. Gabe’s blues - “he started sputtering about chickens pecking on their heads, which I guess was some Russian way of saying they were pretty low-down” (222) - are in response to the spatial order of the newly forming Israel that will not allow someone like Mariam in. Bailey reflects on how “inside those borders it’s the same old story: You got your haves and your have-nots. You got those who are gonna be considered inferior to others because of the type of Jew they are, the color of Jew they are, or whatever. But above all, the groups who are in power are going to do whatever they can to stay in power” (222). Once again, the limiting boundaries of literal place that separate people are reflected upon. In the space of Bailey’s Cafe, however, where the boundaries of place are broken down, community is once again possible.

Bailey’s Cafe becomes a communal space that transcends the global boundaries of place. The people gather together at the cafe to eagerly await the birth of Mariam’s child. Mariam, whose situation obviously echoes the immaculate conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, becomes the focal point of great expectations. She brings the possibility of a saviour figure, and, therefore, heralds, as Maxine Montgomery writes, an “utopian postwar new world order” (31). This miracle birth from an outcast woman can overturn the inscribing power of the social spaces that have so fragmented identity and possibilities for community.¹⁷ After the baby is born in cascades of light in the back room, there is a rejoicing in the cafe as Mary (Peaches) sings:

Anybody ask you who you are?
 Who you are?
 Who you are?
 Anybody ask you who you are?
 Tell him - you’re the child of God.

One voice joined in. Another voice joined. And another (225).
 This then, switches to the personal: “Anybody ask you who I am? / Tell him - I’m a child of God” (226). In contrast to the situations that have brought each of the them to this cafe, the call and response pattern of the spiritual allows all the people to join in a communal affirmation of their own personal worth. As James Cone states, the spiritual is “the people facing trouble and affirming, ‘I ain’t tired yet’ . . . But the spiritual is more than dealing with trouble. It is a joyful experience, a vibrant affirmation of life and its possibilities in an appropriate esthetic form. The spiritual is the community in rhythm, swinging to the movement of life” (33) . It is within this eruption of space that this type of community is possible through the collective voice.

This collective speaking of voices is not limited to the text. The communal voice actually extends outside the text to include the reader’s participation. Just as Bailey’s Cafe is a blues space for the characters of the novel, so too is it for the readers. The epigraph to the novel is an entrance into the space of the blues:

hush now can you hear it can’t be far away
 needing the blues to get there
 look and you can hear it
 look and you can hear
 the blues open
 a place never
 closing:
 Bailey’s
 Cafe

These words signify the process of entering the blues for the characters in the novel who need them to survive. The downward spiral of the epigraph, however, also takes the reader into the matrix, the womb, of the blues. The novel itself is this matrix and a space of participation between reader and text. Barbara E. Bowen reminds us that “[f]or the blues singer, the importance of the call-and-response pattern is its continual affirmation of collective voice. As antiphonal phrases repeat and

respond to each other, the singers are assenting to membership in a group and affirming that their experience is shared" (189). The blues space of the novel becomes a way for the reader, like the characters, to recreate themselves in the matrix as the communal nature of the blues provides the collective backing for this self-recreation.

Another non-material, musical significance of the text is its structure around a jazz set. Bailey is the "maestro" who presides over the music of the book. He provides an introduction to the set. The other sections, all musical terms, are entitled "The Vamp," "The Jam" and "The Wrap". The whole novel, therefore, is one musical performance. Like the spirituals and the blues, jazz is also a participatory activity. Before Bailey even speaks, we hear, "Maestro, If You Please . . ." (1). This is the communal voice of the text, which includes the characters and the readers, that begins the music of the book. In this jazz set, most of the characters sing and play their own songs: they tell their own stories. Their stories, therefore, take on the fluid and signifying characteristics of jazz. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. states, signifying is "repetition and difference, or repetition and reversal" (63). The improvisational quality of jazz incorporates this signifying process: "Improvisation, of course, so fundamental to the very idea of jazz, is 'nothing more' than repetition and revision" (63-4). As the characters tell their stories, they become the signifier, improvising their own stories within the signification of the spatial order. In this disruptive act, they can recreate themselves through controlling their own performance of the story. With its blues and jazz structure, *Bailey's Cafe* as a novel becomes, like music, a non-material entity, a communal space of participation between the characters and the readers. Through the collective power of the blues and jazz, there can be a recreation of personal and communal identity. The book itself, therefore, although named after a place, transcends the boundaries of literal place (and literal novel) to become itself a psychological, personal and communal space outside the symbolic spatial order. Within this textual matrix,

transformation is possible.

Notes

1. *Bailey's Cafe* is actually structured as a jazz performance. Bailey's story is an introduction to set the stage for "The Jam" where all the various stories will be performed. I believe this structure is very significant and will be discussed below. Consequently, there are no quotation marks used in the text, even in dialogue. My quotations will reflect this. I also will use Bailey as the name of the cafe owner. Although he says this is not his real name, he doesn't care if people call him that (28).

2. In *Native Son*, the Daltons are considered to be very generous in their giving to African Americans, and yet, Mr. Dalton's real estate company keeps blacks segregated in run-down apartments with high rent. In *Invisible Man*, Mr. Norton thinks his involvement with the college (that recalls Tuskegee), makes him a real "race man". However, on his journey with invisible man, he discovers the reality of poverty among people he would never have associated with.

3. Geneva Smitherman defines signifying (signifyin) as the "verbal art of ritualized insult, in which the speaker puts down, needles, talks about (*signifies on*) someone, to make a point or sometimes just for fun" (206).

4. The title for this story is taken from Duke Ellington's famous song "Mood Indigo".

5. Historio-material forces have shaped the nature of the black urban ghetto. As African Americans migrated to the Northern cities in search of better economic opportunities, they faced structural and institutional discrimination in their attempts to establish place: "Discrimination in housing was not only private practice but public policy . . . racial policy was laid down in the manual of the Federal Housing Administration that declared, 'If a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall be continued to be occupied by the same social and racial classes'" (Franklin 512). Furthermore, African Americans faced exploitation by "landlords and real estate brokers who took their rents but refused to comply with the minimum housing and health standards established by the city and state. As they paid high rents for rat-infested slums, they discovered that in such neighborhoods their children received inferior education, found few job opportunities, and had few, if any, public facilities" (Franklin 512).

6. Alice Walker, in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" describes how her mother used her garden to contradict the pressure of their poverty and hard labour. Through the many-coloured flowers, her mother became an artist, expressing herself through her personal garden (241).

7. Esther is central in Naylor's revision of Biblical women throughout *Bailey's Cafe*. Naylor uses the Bible to offer a critique of gender construction over time. In the Old Testament book of Esther, the title character becomes part of the harem of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus). Before she can come to the king's chambers, however, she must undergo purification of "six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with *other* things for the purifying of women" (Esther 2:12). Both Esthers, therefore, are commodities prepared for the patriarch.

8. This also echoes the opening lines of "The Shadow" radio program: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men. The Shadow knows" (Neuman, Sound Byte: Radio Serials).

9. This Mary seems to echo Mary Magdalene in the New Testament. Virginia Fowler states that although there is no evidence of Mary's occupation, "Christian tradition has shaped Mary Magdalene into the prototypical reformed prostitute" (130). (I would suggest that this may be a result of associating the sinful woman of Luke 7 with Mary Magdalene. Although *she* does appear to be a prostitute, the Pharisee is the one who constructs her as a sinful woman that should not even be touched.) Naylor, therefore, uses Mary to reflect on an important issue in the novel: how "whore" is constructed. Turning Mary Magdalene into "whore," reflects a process of spatialization where an "other" is created to help define what the dominant is not. The dominant has an "internal need for something outside itself against which it can define itself" (Blunt and Rose 16). So, in *Bailey's Cafe*, Sugar Man constructs the image of "whore" to help define his own masculinity. When Mary comes to the cafe, "Sugar Man shook his head and had the courage to whisper what every man in here was thinking: born to be fucked" (102). Although Sister Carrie quotes "the whore Scriptures" (134) to attack the women who stay at Eve's, she has constructed a space for "whore" because she is a "woman afraid of her own appetites" (33). In a lower key beneath the surface of Sister Carrie's facade, her repressed sexuality is apparent: "*You gotta help me, Lord Jesus. Remove this burning from me. Remove these evil thoughts. Wipe out Satan*" (34). In *Bailey's Cafe*, therefore, Naylor is questioning the process that constructs "whore". This is why one is never too sure what Eve's place is. Although Carrie and Sugar Man are sure it is a "whorehouse," (81) Bailey "can't find a thing wrong with what goes on at Eve's" (80). As readers, we must resist instinctively constructing Eve's place into "whorehouse".

10. This recalls the imagery used in *Linden Hills* when Willa moves into the psychic space.

11. This definition of a matrix is also an excellent way to conceptualize the womb-like space of Willow Springs.

12. Bailey actually uses the term "crossroads". When he reflects on the possibility of George's birth causing the street to fade away he says that "we'd have been thrown back to those same hopeless crossroads in our lives" (224).

13. Eve also takes on the characteristics of an Earth Mother/Goddess figure, another disruption to the patriarchal dominance of Godfather. This is an obvious revision of Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls*, where Sechita, "egyptian / goddess of creativity" (24) is a performer in a carnival in Natchez, Mississippi. In Shange's work, the "heavy dust of the delta" reflects the despair of Sechita's situation as "god seemed to be wipin his feet in her face" (25). For Naylor, in contrast, the delta dust has a transforming power.

14. Jesse Bell is a revision of Jezebel in first and second Kings of the Old Testament. Like Jezebel who leads King Ahab and the people of Israel away from God to follow Baal, Jesse is seen as a wicked woman by Uncle Eli (Elijah) because she has corrupted the wealthy King family by introducing African-American food and music to them. Like the Nedeeds and the Van Morrisons, the King family has adopted white spatial strategies of classifying people based on class status (135).

As the family slowly rejects her, Jesse turns to heroin to “escape” this material reality of place.

15. A lack of space prohibits me from dealing with Miss Maple’s story. His section is immense and would take many pages to deal with adequately. Therefore, I will briefly touch only on the race and gender issues in the story.

16. These themes are dealt with in a precursor to *Bailey’s Cafe*. Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) focuses on the emotional and psychological damage inflicted through female circumcision and genital mutilation. Naylor is as critical of the practices as Walker is. Naylor does, however, try to understand the mental processes of those who perpetuate the ceremony. For Mariam’s mother, the ceremony means everything to her. When it is delayed because Mariam is found to be mentally handicapped, her mother “begged the midwives for Mariam’s ceremony” (149).

17. The child is, of course, George from *Mama Day*.

✓
describe

Conclusion: Naylor's Geographical World

The purpose of this thesis has been to study Gloria Naylor's geography: how place and space operate in her novels. In the Introduction, I offered a theoretical direction based on geographical discourse. Although place has been such an important reality for African Americans, it has often been greatly complicated by the process of social spatialization that has shaped African-American place through an enactment of the power structures of dominant authorities. Within the symbolic spatial order, the construction of race, class and gender works to physically place African-American women and men. Naylor is greatly concerned with how the historio-material relationship between social space and physical place works to shape individual identity and hinder positive communal relationships. Naylor's novels, therefore, reflect how African Americans have looked to non-material methods to escape the spatial order and the material nature of place. Through the creation of psychological, personal and communal spaces, Naylor's characters form strategic disruptions and escapes from imposed space and place.

In the overall schematic of this thesis, I have intended to demonstrate that there is a progression throughout Naylor's novels. In the Introduction, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* were used to introduce Naylor's concepts of place and space. I pointed out the historio-material forces at work to shape African-American attempts to establish place and space in a racist and patriarchal society. Although at times the characters create alternative spaces, they ultimately remain trapped within the psychological and physical boundaries of place.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how Naylor's geography begins to expand in *Mama Day*. Willow

Springs is presented as an “other space” that is outside the hegemonic production of social space and the resulting limitations of physical place. In developing a metaphysical and metaphorical setting in Willow Springs, the novel moves beyond the material nature of place as the island becomes a womb-like space where there is a reconciliation of the psychological forces that control identity. As the novel moves in this metaphysical direction, (comm)unity becomes possible through eruptions of psychological, personal and communal space.

In Chapter 2, I argued that *Bailey's Cafe* takes Naylor's ideas on place and space to the greatest extreme as literal place is almost totally disregarded. Places are presented as metaphysical spaces within which characters who have been crushed by the symbolic spatial order can reconstitute their own identities. As the constraints of space-time break down, an empowering space of community provides the collective backing needed to transcend the confinements of place and social space. I have also argued that in an increasing fashion throughout her novels, Naylor has broken down the concept of place as a specific geographical and material entity and, consequently, the novels themselves become psychological, personal and communal spaces. Since the focus on this novelistic progression is so important, I want to briefly return to an issue that I alluded to in the opening sentence of this thesis with the intention of moving toward a conclusion.

Through her interconnected novels,¹ Naylor has created a fictional and geographical world. Naylor admits that “with *Brewster Place* I had dreamed . . . of having a quartet of interconnected novels that would serve as the foundation for a career I wanted to build in writing” (Epel 170). Although her comments reflect her concern with establishing a space for herself as a novelist, there must also be a greater significance. Numerous critics have mentioned that Naylor appears to be creating a fictional world similar to that of William Faulkner.² Since she is very aware of Faulkner's work,³ I am proposing that Naylor is consciously signifying on him as she attempts to revise his

writing of place. By focusing his fictional world so centrally around a specific geographical place, it seems that Faulkner attempts to map out a history of the South. Malcolm Cowley concurs when he argues that Faulkner's goal was to "invent a Mississippi county that was like a mythical kingdom" in which Yoknapatawpha would "stand as a parable or legend of all the Deep South" (2). As noted throughout this thesis, Naylor is very concerned with how place and history are related; however, if, like Faulkner's attempt to map out a Southern history, the connections between her novels represent an attempt to map out an African-American history, there must be different implications since Naylor's places span the American landscape. From Louisiana to New York, from California to Willow Springs, Naylor locates her characters in a multitude of places. Therefore, in what could very well be an intentional revision of Faulkner, Naylor's historiography spans the American landscape.

The plurality of places and characters in Naylor's novels represents an improvisational performance of fluid African-American histories. As the process of mapping involves a hegemonic essentialization of experiences and identities, Naylor's fictional world cannot be seen in terms of a mapping out of African-American history. Therefore, I am linking Naylor's move toward the speakerly and performative novel with her type of historiography and calling this "improvisational performance". Like her move away from the symbolic spatial order that essentializes experience, Naylor's fictional world resists an essentialization of the African-American experience. Furthermore, in breaking down conventional notions of space-time, Naylor's historical fluidity is key. As Naylor's places are multiple and fluid, so too are histories and identities. This fluidity disrupts the transparency of the symbolic spatial order that attempts to essentialize experience and identity within the boundaries of place.

In this improvisational performance of African-American her/histories, Naylor goes beyond novelistic realism and traditional historical recuperation. The performative nature of *Mama Day* and

Bailey's Cafe reflects a modern African-American women's tendency that, as Karla Holloway says, "replace[s] traditional historiography with a spiritual historicism" (134). In the existence of (comm)unity and myth within the text of *Mama Day* and the communal performance of *Bailey's Cafe*, Naylor's novels become spiritual geography and history as the text itself opens up a communal space for the recreation of identity. Naylor's later novels, through the call and response pattern, have the power to transform the reader. As readers/hearers/creators of the text, we move into the communal matrix/womb of the novels where social space and material place can be transcended and identity reformed. Gloria Naylor, therefore, has created new geographies, both literal and textual, that propel her characters and her readers into a new consciousness.

Notes

1. There are many connections between the novels. Although an examination of all their significance is not possible within the scope of this thesis, I will give a brief overview. Brewster Place and Linden Hills are located near each other. Characters in each neighbourhood talk about the other and Kiswana Browne forms a connecting link between places. Barbara Christian's essay, "Naylor's Geography," is an excellent interpretation of the similarities and differences of these two places. Willa Prescott Nedeed, who appears first in *Linden Hills*, is the link to *Mama Day* since she is Cocoa's cousin. How people in different places have contrasting perceptions is emphasized as Mama Day, who makes an appearance, is seen by Willa as a sort of hoodoo "hick" (*Linden* 147-8). In *Mama Day*, George and Cocoa discuss the fire in Linden Hills (31). I believe that we are meant to compare Willa and Cocoa as inheritors of the line of Sapphira. Cocoa's strong spirit, even when she is a baby, is emphasized (39). *Bailey's Cafe* has the most radical connection. Mariam gives birth to George who, at the end of the novel, is on his way to Wallace P. Andrews and Irene Jackson. It is hard to reconcile, therefore, the literal arrival of Mariam in New York City. I believe this is simply part of Naylor's attempt to break down space-time. The issue of George as a saviour-type figure could be examined in great detail if space permitted.

2. Barbara Christian ("Geography" 106) offers that the connections between the novels reflect a Faulknerian geographical fictional world, while Lindsey Tucker mentions that Willow Springs, like the fictional Yoknapatawpha county, is not charted on American maps (179).

3. In an interview with William Goldstein, Naylor reveals, "I am still an admirer of the style of Faulkner though we can talk about his ideology *another time*" (35). For instance, Naylor admits that the narrative structure of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* greatly influenced the style of *Mama Day* (Fowler 152), while she also states that in *Brewster Place* she developed Mattie in reaction to Faulkner's creation of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* (Fowler 148).

Works Cited or Consulted

- Awkward, Michael. *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Baker, Houston A. Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. 1984. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- . *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. Phototext by Elizabeth Alexander and Patricia Redmond. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Bell, Bernard W. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*. 1987. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.
- Benston, Kimberly W. "I yam what I am: the topos of un(naming) in Afro-American literature." *Black Literature and Literary Theory*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Routledge, 1990. 151-72.
- Blunt, Alison and Gillian Rose. "Introduction: Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies." *Writing Woman and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. Eds. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose. New York: The Guilford Press, 1994. 1-25.
- Bondi, Liz. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Geography: Space for Women?" *Antipode*. 22.2 (1990), 156-67.
- Bouvier, Luke. "Reading Black and White: Space and Race in *Linden Hills*." *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. Amistad Press, Inc., 1993. 140-151.
- Bowen, Barbara E. "Untroubled voice: call and response in *Cane*." *Black Literature and Literary Theory*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Routledge, 1990. 187-203.
- Brown, Calvin S. "Appendix: Faulkner's Geography and Topography." *A Glossary of Faulkner's South*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. 223-41.
- Carby, Hazel V. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Carroll, Rebecca. {Untitled Interview}. *I Know What the Red Clay Looks Like: The Voice and Vision of Black Women Writers*. New York: Carol Southern Books, 1994. 159-65.

- Christian, Barbara. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- . "Gloria Naylor's Geography: Community, Class, and Patriarchy in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*." *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. Amistad Press, Inc., 1993. 106-125.
- . "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction." *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. Eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. 233-48.
- Christol, Helene. "Reconstructing American History: Land and Genealogy in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*. Eds. Werner Sollors and Maria Diedrich. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994. 347-56.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1972.
- Cowly, Malcolm. "Introduction." *The Portable Faulkner*. New York, The Viking Press, 1951.
- de Lauretis. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Dixon, Melvin. *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Eckard, Paula Gallant. "The Prismatic Past in *Oral History* and *Mama Day*." *MELUS*. 20.3 (1995): 125-35.
- Ellington, Duke. I. Mills, and A. Bigard. "Mood Indigo." Rec. 9 September 1957. *This is Jazz* 7. Sony Music Entertainment Inc., CK 44444, 1996.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Epel, Naomi. {Untitled Interview}. *Writers Dreaming*. New York: Carol Southern Books, 1993. 167-77.
- Erickson, Peter. *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1991.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage International, 1990.
- Fowler, Virginia C. *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes." *Critical Inquiry*. 12.1 (1985): 1-20.
- . *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Goddu, Teresa. "Reconstructing History in Linden Hills." *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad Press Inc., 1993. 215-30.
- Goldstein, William. "A Talk With Gloria Naylor." *Publishers Weekly*. September 9, 1983: 35-6.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford or Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- . *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn. "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition." *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991. 16-37.
- Holloway, Karla F.C. *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- hooks, bell. *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Jackson, Peter. "Introduction: The idea of 'race' and the geography of racism." *Race and Racism: Essays in social geography*. Ed. Peter Jackson. London: Allen & Unwin, 1987. 3-21.
- Kelly, Margot Anne. "Sisters' Choices: Quilting Aesthetics in Contemporary African American Women's Fiction." *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*. Ed. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. 49-67.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." Trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 7.1 (1981): 13-35.
- Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. *Claiming the Heritage: African-American Women Novelists and History*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

- . "Toward a New Order: Shakespeare, Morrison, and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *MELUS*. 19.3 (1994): 75-90.
- Lynch, Michael F. "The Wall and the Mirror in the Promised Land: The City in the Novels of Gloria Naylor." *The City in African-American Literature*. Eds. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert Butler. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995. 181-95.
- Marshal, Paule. *Praisesong for the Widow*. New York: Plume, 1983.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- Meisenhelder, Susan. "'The Whole Picture' in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *African American Review*. 27.3 (1993): 405-19.
- Montgomery, Maxine Lavon. "Authority, Multivocality, and the New World Order in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe*." *African American Review*. 29.1 (1995): 27-33.
- Morrison, Toni. "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction." *Literature & the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*. Eds. Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1981. 35-43.
- . "'Intimate Things in Place' A Conversation With Toni Morrison." *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*. Eds. Michael S. Harper and Robert Stepto. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. 213-29.
- . *Song of Solomon*. New York: Signet, 1978.
- . *Sula*. New York: Plume, 1982.
- Naylor, Gloria and Toni Morrison. "A Conversation." *The Southern Review*. 21.3 (1985) 567-93.
- Naylor, Gloria. *Bailey's Cafe*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- . *Linden Hills*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- . *Mama Day*. 1988. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- . *The Women of Brewster Place*. New York: Penguin Books, 1983.
- Neuman, W. Russell. "Broadcasting, Radio and Television." *Microsoft Encarta Multimedia Encyclopedia*. CD Rom. Microsoft Corporation, 1993.
- Pearlman, Mickey, and Katherine Usher Henderson. "Gloria Naylor." *Inter/View: Talk With*

- America's Writing Women*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990. 23-9.
- Perry, Donna. "Gloria Naylor." *Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out. Interviews by Donna Perry*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 217-44.
- Reckley, Ralph, Sr. "Science, Faith and Religion in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *20th Century Black American Women in Print: Essays by Ralph Reckley, Sr.* Ed. Lola E. Jones. 1991. Acton, Massachusetts: Copley Publishing Group, 1992.
- Rogers, Alisdair. "Key Themes and Debates." *The Students Companion to Geography*. Eds. Alisdair Rogers, Heather Viles and Andrew Goudie. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992. 233-52.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Salvaggio, Ruth. "Theory and Space, Space and Woman." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 7.2 (1988): 261-82.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Ed. Northrop Frye. New York: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Shange, Ntozake. *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*. 1977. Toronto and New York: Bantam Books. 1986.
- Shields, Rob. *Places on the Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Smitherman, Geneva. *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994.
- Spain, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Spillers, Hortense J. "Cross-Currents, Discontinuities: Black Women's Fiction." *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. Ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985. 249-61.
- Storhoff, Gary. "'The Only Voice is Your Own': Gloria Naylor's Revision of *The Tempest*." *African American Review*. 29.1 (1995): 35-45.
- Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969.
- Traub, Valerie. "Rainbows of Darkness: Deconstructing Shakespeare in the Work of Gloria Naylor and Zora Neale Hurston." *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*. Ed. Marianne Novy. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 150-64.

- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Tucker, Lindsey. "Recovering the Conjure Woman: Texts and Contexts in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*." *African American Review*. 28.2 (1994): 173-88.
- Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1983. 321-43.
- . *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Pocket Star Books, 1992.
- Ward, Catherine C. "Linden Hills: A Modern Inferno." *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad Press, Inc., 1993. 182-94.
- Williams, Sherley A. "The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry." *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*. Eds. Michael S. Harper and Robert Stepto. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. 123-35.
- Willis, Susan. *Specifying: Black Women Writing The American Experience*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Winsbro, Bonnie. *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. 1966. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.