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Spatializing Race, Gender and Identity in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

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Spatializing Race, Gender and Identity in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

By

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> Surrounded by their comings and goings, listening to their talk, their songs, following their instructions, Cee had nothing to do but pay them the attention she had never given them before . . . They took responsibility for their lives and for whatever, whoever else needed them. The absence of common sense irritated but did not surprise them. Laziness was more than intolerable to them; it was inhuman. Whether you were in the field, the house, your own backyard, you had to be busy. Sleep was not for dreaming; it was for gathering strength for the coming day. . . You couldn't learn age, but adulthood was there for all.
>
> *Home*, Toni Morrison

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to present a study of the novels *The Women of Brewster Place*, by Gloria Naylor, and *Paradise*, by Toni Morrison, with a focus on the literary spaces displayed in these works and their influence in the identity formation of their main characters. The spaces of Brewster Place community and its wall, as well as the town Ruby and its mansion entitled the Convent, evidence disparities in relation to notions of race and gender, being regarded as racialized and gendered spaces. These spaces, in turn, influence the identity formation of the female characters of the novels. In order to carry out the study of gendered and racialized spaces, it was necessary to examine the theoretical background behind the formation of spaces and the power relations imbued in them, with theoreticians such as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey contributing extensively to the research. Prominent authors in the field or race studies and gender studies, such as Caroline Knowles, Carole Boyce Davies and Margaret Higonnet contributed in creating an overview of the experience of black women in the United States. Finally, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Linda Martín Alcoff are studied in this dissertation in light of processes of identity formation. Moreover, in the literary analysis of the present work, a comparative study of the novels is provided in order to trace parallels between the influence of the spaces displayed in the novels and the identities of their characters.

RESUMO

O objetivo do presente trabalho é estudar os romances *As Mulheres de Brewster Place*, de Gloria Naylor, e *Paraíso*, de Toni Morrison, tendo-se como foco os espaços literários apresentados nas obras e sua influência na criação de identidades de suas personagens. Os espaços da comunidade de Brewster Place e de seu muro, assim como da cidade de Ruby e de seu casarão intitulado Convento, evidenciam disparidades relacionadas a conceitos de raça e gênero, tornando-se espaços racializados e gendrados. Estes espaços, por sua vez, tem função importante na construção de conceitos de identidades de suas personagens femininas.

De forma a investigar os espaços racializados e gendrados em *As Mulheres de Brewster Place* e *Paraíso*, foi necessário examinar o aporte teórico por trás da formação de espaços e as relações de poder imbuídas nos mesmos, com teóricos como Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre e Doreen Massey sendo foco do capítulo de discussão teórica. Autores proeminentes nos campos de estudo raciais e de gênero, tais como Caroline Knowles, Carole Boyce Davies, Gaston Bachelard e Margaret Higonnet contribuíram amplamente na criação de um panorama da experiência da mulher negra nos Estados Unidos. Por fim, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks e Linda Martín Alcoff servem de embasamento teórico no estudo de formação de identidades negras. Na análise literária da presente dissertação, um estudo comparativo das obras foi feito de forma a traçar paralelos entre a influência dos espaços literários apresentados nos romances e as identidades de suas personagens.

1. INTRODUCTION

> *Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.*
>
> *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

The trauma that has marked African-American experience in the United States and, consequently, has influenced African-American literary production, dates back not only to episodes in history such as the Middle Passage and the Plantation Culture; it also comes from experiences of communal history and memory. In the documentary *Toni Morrison Remembers*, produced by BBC, the senior curator of The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Carl B. Westmoreland, claims that "[i]n America, one of the most painful parts of being despised is being told you are nobody, and that you have no history, no value, and that you are just a burden, a waste". In his speech, Westmoreland shows one of the most painful aspects of African-American experience in the United States: the lack of acknowledgement of the black community as one of the pillars that helped to build the nation that the U. S. has become.

The African-American community, with the end of slavery and the implementation of the Jim Crow Laws separating blacks from whites, began to battle for a place in American society. Movements such as the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920's and the Black Arts and Civil Rights movements of the 1960's stood out for exposing the complex facets of the black community, such as the wealth of their musical styles and

their accomplishments in different artistic areas. The “black is beautiful” motto gave the black community the strength to fight against oppression, culminating with the end of institutionalized segregation in the 60’s and, finally, with the hope for African-Americans to build a home on American soil.

Following the Civil Rights Movement, the 1980’s witnessed the emergence of Race Studies and later Critical Race Theory. Critics evaluated not only how racism was widespread in mainstream American society, but also how the concept of race should be seen as socially constructed (Tyson 372). Scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. have contributed extensively in the effort to create an African-American literary tradition by bringing into attention black authors and identifying in their works elements that characterize African-American literature, such as the use of black vernacular English and the exploration of traditional figures in black culture, as for instance the trickster (*The Signifying Monkey* 172). As Race Theory developed and received contributions from many prominent scholars, another important aspect was emphasized regarding relations of race: oppression does not work as a single force; on the contrary, it is made of many different axes that converge and interfere with one another, such as class, gender, and religion. As a consequence, new areas of study and lines of criticism have been incorporated into Race Theory, such as Marxist Theory and Postcolonial Theory.

With the emergence of Critical Race Theory, the lack of a real representation of black literature in the American literary canon became evident. Constituted mostly by white male writers and strongly influenced by European literary styles, it was not until recently that the American literary canon began to include prominent black writers, such as Phillis Weatley, Ishmael Reed, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, among others. African-American literature has shown its importance for representing a diverse and rich culture that mingles elements of the African and American culture.

Also, the themes portrayed in African-American literature are many: for example, Langston Hughes explores the suffering of his community and the influence of jazz as a cultural production; August Wilson's plays constitute together an anthology of black history in America; Richard Wright presents in *Native Son* the experience of a young black man who tries to fit into the white mainstream community of Chicago; and Amiri Baraka depicts in *Dutchman* issues of assimilation of white culture by a black man and the veiled segregation that continued after the Civil Rights movement.

With the emergence of black women writers, issues of gender and social oppression came to the foreground. Prominent novelists such as Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker expose the stories of Celie and Janie and their abusive husbands, women slaves who are raped by their masters, as well as the power of feminist bonds in *The Color Purple* and T*heir Eyes Were Watching God*; Maya Angelou displays in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* her personal account of identity formation, the effects of being raped by her stepfather when very young, and in her later books the experience of maternity.

Another issue widely explored in African-American literature is the controlling images concerning black men and women created during slavery that remained and became widely spread in American society. In the book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, bell hooks describes the processes underlying the association of black men and women with controlling images related to emasculinization, violence and oversexualization that still permeate the black community:

> White people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men, who are ranked third, and black women last . . . Most Americans, and that includes black people, acknowledge and accept this

> hierarchy; they have internalized it either consciously or unconsciously. (52-53)

Patriarchal plantation culture considered the rape of a white woman by a black man much more seriously than the rape of black women by their white owners. After all, black men, contrary to their white counterparts, were seen as naturally violent and potential rapists. In fact, white culture even stimulated young white men to seek black women in a sort of rite of sexual initiation, a phenomenon which certainly helped to create and perpetuate the stereotype of black women as oversexualized individuals.

hooks complements this contextualization of gender differences in the black community by providing a picture of the United States after slavery. In post-slavery American society, job opportunities for black people were few and limited to menial jobs, taken mostly by black women. This scenario gave rise to the stereotype of the black woman as the sole provider of the family, that is, the matriarch. The author maintains that black men, who were mostly unemployed and dependent on the women to keep the family structure, saw this as a threat: "Just as white men perceived the entry of white women into the labor force as a threat to male positions and masculinity, black men were socialized to regard the presence of black women in the labor force with similar suspiciousness" (79). Black men, who bought into the American patriarchal and capitalistic mentality of men as the center of society, saw women as providers as a threat to their masculinity, which resulted in many families being abandoned by their fathers and many women being abused by their husbands.

As a result, black women saw themselves on a crossroad concerning their identities: on the one hand, they could not identify themselves with white women, as their historical differences in relation to race discrimination cannot be underestimated. Black women could not relate completely to white feminist claims, since race was an

important issue behind differences in gender stereotypes concerning black and whites. On the other hand, black women did not see themselves in the same struggles as black men, for their hierarchical position was different. For instance, during the Civil Rights Movement, in the 1960s, black men and women gathered in order to fight for better conditions for the black community and the end of segregation. However, despite the social progresses the movement achieved, women were still expected to assume the same subservient positions they did before. The image of the woman occupying the lowest position in the social hierarchy had been internalized by black men. Thus, black women became twice marginalized, that is, not only concerning gender and race in society at large, but also regarding their gender roles inside their own community (hooks 2).

To better understand this double marginalization of black women portrayed in literary works as well as the geopolitics of gender and race in post-Civil Rights United States, an examination of how spaces are constructed and the role they play in gender and racial configurations is a must. Spaces are not neutral geographical categories; rather, they function as a means of enforcing or refuting notions of what it means to be black and, more importantly for my purposes in this study, what it means to be a black woman. Daphne Spain defends the importance of space in gender relations when she claims that, "[i]n essence, spatial segregation does more than create a physical distance; it also affects the distribution of knowledge women could use to change their position in society" (*Gendered Spaces* 14). She claims that spaces are the venue through which stereotypes of gender can be strengthened, as they limit the access to knowledge and, consequently, the resources available for marginalized groups to reach social equality.

The study of how spaces are racialized and gendered is also important because of the role they play in identification and subjectivities of the main characters of the two

novels. In *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America*, the importance of space in conceptualizing race is highlighted, the argument being that identities and spaces are socially constructed:

> . . . [G]eography, the spaces and places that we exist in and create, simultaneously shapes and records the way life unfolds, including the lived experience of ethnicity and race. Experiences and identities, in turn, influence our interpretations and definitions of space and place, just as the etched glass vase creates a diffuse image that influences the viewer and reveals the artist. (Berry and Henderson 6)

The passage above draws a connection between space and identities as, on the one hand, space is like a picture frame where experiences are inscribed and influences conceptualizations of identities, and, on the other hand, it is categorized and defined by the individuals that are part of it. Space, in other words, shapes identities and is in turn shaped by them.

Finally, Susan Friedman proposes, in *Mappings,* a new geography of identity (18), which, rather than moving from the approaches of gynocriticism and gynesis[1], complements them by considering that identities are constructed not solely on the premises of gender, but in a confluence of difference axes, such as race, class, space and so on. The three angles (space, race and gender) concerning identities provided above complement one another and prove to be pertinent in the sense that identity is constructed based on the interrelations of gender, racial and spatial relations.

In the context of African-American literature written by women, the novelists Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison present the experiences of the black community through their powerful fiction. In their works, different aspects of African-American life, such as

[1] Friedman (1998) defines *gynocriticism* as the study of women as part of the literary tradition and *gynesis* as the study of how the idea of the feminine is displayed in literary texts.

religion and mysticism in *Mamma Day* and *Song of Solomon*, and identities, as for instance in *Bailey's Cafe* and *Sula*, are explored mainly through the characters of black women. More specifically, the books *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* provide a rich source for the study of gender and race issues and their inter-relations with spaces. These two novels bring into light, through communities of black women situated in the walled Brewster Place and in the isolated Convent, the various facets and struggles of black women, thereby exploring the spatial configurations traditionally assigned to women and how they cope within these spaces in order to be able to conceive individual and collective identities.

In *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Gloria Naylor presents the story of seven women: Mattie, Etta, Kiswana, Luciela, Cora, Thereza, and Lorraine. They move to Brewster Place, an African-American community surrounded by walls, escaping from disillusions elsewhere or with the hope of becoming independent. The focus of the narrative changes in every chapter, describing the characters' personal experiences and relating all of them by the end of the plot with the brutal rape of one of the Brewster Place's women. The novel deals not only with racial issues, the community's marginalization from the white world and the poverty these women face, but also with gender relations, since these women go to Brewster Place basically to nurture each other, something very much connected to the idea of building a home. It is important to understand how Brewster Place became what it did and what issues related to race and gender made these women bond. This way, one can analyze why the rape happened, and also why, at the end of the novel, all women gather together to clean the wall against which Lorraine was raped, a scene that strongly depicts the notion that women create a sense of identity based on the community they are part of.

In the interview given to Angela Carabí, Naylor justifies her choice of space in *The Women of Brewster Place* and emphasizes its importance with regards to the major themes of the novel:

> By exploring the lives of different women in Brewster Place, I'm attempting to create a little microcosm of a certain experience, the black female experience in America. This is why the book is structured the way it is, with the women on different levels in those apartment buildings which are intentional. Where I placed them and how they lived meant something in relationship to the wall in Brewster Place. (27)

The wall, which separates and at the same time gathers women, strengthens the view that space plays an important role in the novel: the context creates the atmosphere in which these women are able to recollect, share and overcome memories of a traumatic past. Also, the figure of the house is significant when analyzing the story from a gender perspective: the domestic and private sphere of the house, associated with women, is explored as these women are only able to bond in these particular spaces. Therefore, the imagery of the house and the community of Brewster Place, surrounded by walls, are important constituents of *The Women of Brewster Place* when taking into consideration racialized and gendered spaces.

In "Female Leadership in Gloria Naylor's Novels: Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Community Othermothers" Mahboobeh Khaleghi underscores the pertinence of space in fostering relationships among the female characters of *The Women of Brewster* Place:

> In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor indicates the women's sense of isolation, their mistreatment by men and their search for identity through shared experiences . . . Women appropriate and refashion oppressive

> spaces through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves. (131)

The community of Brewster Place as a whole and, mainly, the dead end street with a wall and the apartments that the women inhabit are the space in which they can talk to each other and not only present their stories, but also construct their subjectivities. The space of the rundown Brewster apartments create a comfortable atmosphere where they can share their experiences and together find ways of overcoming their difficulties, reevaluating their identities and going about the process of creating new identities.

In *Paradise* (1997), Toni Morrison depicts the stories of five women: Consolata (also known as Connie), Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas. These African-American women abandon their houses and former lives and occupy the Convent, an old and empty Christian school, being despised by most of the male inhabitants of the nearest town, Ruby. However, women from the town, such as Billie Delia, Arnette and Soane sympathize with them, seeking the help from the Convent from time to time. In *Paradise*, not only is the Convent marginalized, but also the town of Ruby itself: the town grew out of a settlement of a group of African-Americans who used to inhabit the nearby white town of Haven. Thus, the novel deals with the racialization of both Ruby and the Convent, together with the gendered tensions between the two sites.

In *Paradise*, the house is a space that segregates the women from the towns of Ruby and Haven, but that also serves as a mechanism to unite them around the project of creating their own identities:

> Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost . . . out there where the wind handled you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians . . . the

> men never walked the road; they drove it, although sometimes the destination was the same as women's. (*Paradise* 270)

The house is portrayed as a space in which women from in and out of Ruby go in times of need. In "Geographies of *Paradise*," Patricia McKee demonstrates the novel's sense of isolation concerning race and gender by providing a parallel with American history. In this sense, Ruby is a representation of towns created in the aftermath of the Civil War and the ensuing violence, which forced African-Americans to leave their homes; in the same way, the Convent as inhabited by Connie, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas, is the result of a process of exclusion from the communities previously inhabited (McKee 200). In sum, the town of Ruby is both the result of and the generator of exclusion, since the male inhabitants of the city condemn the women who live in the Convent and project feelings of anger and violence towards them.

Morrison's ability to connect spaces, gender and race is examined further in "Diasporic Designs of House, Home and Haven in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*". Here, the author argues that,

> The light she throws on interior spaces illuminates the social and cultural designs operating in the novel's world. The house's architecture makes manifest its original owner's deepest fears and desires. The fear of power and female sexuality remains common throughout many cultures and societies. (Dobbs 113)

The space of the house in *Paradise* helps the women to expose their anxieties and dreams and bond with each other, while provoking at the same time feelings of anger and violence in the male community. Peter R. Kearly develops Cynthia Dobbs' claim by explaining that "[t]he women of the Convent do not need men to heal themselves, and in fact in their distance from men create a maternal space of community that poses a

stark contrast to the patriarchal lineage and architecture of Ruby" ("Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and the Politics of Community" 12). The Convent becomes a nurturing space that strengthens emotional bonds and promotes identity formation. Hence, both in *The Women of Brewster Place* and in *Paradise,* the isolation and the space of the house allow women to feel safe, be themselves and share their inner feelings, past experiences, and traumas.

Although much has been discussed concerning the notion of community in these two novels, the role of the space as their main constituent tends to be overlooked. The formation of both communities is analyzed from the point of view of religion, gender issues and psychological space, but not the space of the house as an influential aspect in new conceptualizations of identities. The necessity of studies concerning spaces and identities is emphasized in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject,*

> The question of movement and migratory subjectiveness and captivities are all interlinked in any consideration of African-American women's writing in the U.S. For example, novels of "passing" can be read within the context of migratory positionalities that have to do with identity and race and personal politics in conjunction with racially oppressive hegemonies. . . For it is not just the physical movement, but the ways through which various subject positions are negotiated. (Davies 110)

In this passage, Carole Boyce Davies points to the importance not only of spaces, but of the transition between them, as an important element in identity formation. In *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, the space of the house, different from spaces

inhabited previously, is the one that allows women to shift the identities they were assigned, as they bond with each other.

In conclusion, the study on how spaces are racialized and gendered in both *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* is relevant due to their influence on the identity formation of their main characters and also on how they cope with the controlling images created by society, which highlights the separation between blacks and whites and give African-Americans "houses, but not homes" (Schur 277). The space of the house in the two novels is one of segregation and isolation, which emphasizes gender and racial stereotypes, but also a site of empowerment that enables them to subvert the spaces that they occupy. The two novels deal with the concept of bonding as well: these women, by being women and African-American, are twice marginalized in American mainstream society. They face violence, see their dreams shattered, but they remain strong. Identities for African-American women are, in both novels, based on the sense of community and on the space they inhabit. In this dissertation, thus, I intend to contribute to studies on African-American women and their representation in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, claiming that the racialized and gendered spaces of Brewster Place and the Convent are influential in the process of identity formation of the main characters of the two novels, as they display or challenge typical stereotypes regarding African-American women.

Having said that, it is important to stress that, though the present dissertation focuses mainly on how black women construct their subjectivities based on spatial configurations, the study of gender relations requires not only feminist approaches, but also a study on how masculinities are conceived and influence gender relations. With this in mind, male characters in *The Women of Brewster Place*, such as C.C. Baker and

Eugene, as well as the characters Steward and Deacon Morgan in *Paradise*, will be studied as relevant contributions to the study of these novels.

The general objective of this dissertation is, then, to analyze the socio-cultural mechanisms behind the formation of spaces in the novels *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* — such as gender and race — as well as the way they influence the sense of identity of their main characters, by emphasizing or rebutting stereotypes concerning African-American women. Theoretical framework regarding gendered spaces, specifically the concept of the home, is presented, as well as theoretical perspectives on the concept of racialized spaces, followed by an analysis on how gendered and racialized spaces are portrayed in the novels. I will discuss their influence on identities and conclude with a comparative analysis of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* in light of the role of space concerning controlling images and the ways the characters of the novels cope with them.

The present dissertation is organized into three chapters, followed by a conclusion. Chapter 1 focuses on the contextualization of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* in the African-American literary tradition and the context of American history; Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework concerning space, race, gender and identity; Chapter 3 will examine Naylor's and Morrison's novel in light of the concepts previously developed, focusing especially on a comparative analysis of processes of identity formation and whether they support or refute traditional stereotypes related to African-American culture; finally, in the Conclusion, suggestions of possible approaches concerning the study of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* will be provided.

2. THINKING ABOUT SPACE: THEORIES ON RACIALIZED AND GENDERED SPACES AND IDENTITIES

> *All of us are multi-local, multi-layered. To begin our conversation with an acknowledgement of this complexity brings us closer together. Not further apart.*
>
> *Taiye Selasi*

2.1. Overview of Spatial Theory

According to Michel Foucault, it was in the Eighteenth century that architecture became political (*Power* 349). It was at this time that architecture started to move from the focus on territory to the ideas transmitted to the population. In other words, architects began taking social organization into consideration; buildings incorporated notions of what a city and a society should be, thereby reflecting the 18th century trend among the French that cities should symbolize the nation as a whole. By conceptualizing the nation within a city, buildings and structures gained marks of power, thereby exposing and enforcing the moral and societal elements of their time.

Echoing Foucault, Henri Lefebvre argues that the meaning of geographical spaces, landscapes and properties are fundamentally social and, therefore, the product of various cultural and ideological forces. Applying Marxist theory to spatial analysis, Lefebvre is concerned with what he calls the *production of space*, namely, the different axes of power involved in the configurations of public and private spaces. Drawing from Marxist theories, Lefebvre highlights the power of *superstructures* in projecting *ideologies* into spaces, that is, the way ideals and social values are infused in a

determined space by a group that holds a dominant hierarchical position in society. He defends that,

> It would be more accurate to say that [space] is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures . . . Is space a social relationship? Certainly – but one which is inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of the earth, of land) and also closely bound up with the forces of production (which impose a form on that earth or land); here we see the polyvalence of social space, it's 'reality' at once formal and material. Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of production.* (*The Production of Space* 85)

Lefebvre conceptualizes the term *production* as a set of recurrent operations performed by people, carrying the ideologies of a particular group or person. When applied to space, these ideologies can be problematical in a number of ways, since they can reinforce disparities in relation to class, race and gender, for instance. As Foucault has mentioned, relations of power lead to the marginalization of communities that do not fit into what is considered the mainstream values of a particular society. Thus, dominant groups help shape and create spaces that propagate their ideologies and social standards, and theses spaces in turn assume an active role in counter producing ideas: in sum, spaces function in a cyclical way, being the products of and the producers of the ideas and societal values of a particular community.

Grounded on a Humanistic perspective focused on the notion of structures as producers of spaces, Yi-Fu Tuan conceptualizes the terms *space* and *place* using the metaphors of *spirit* and *personality*:

> We can take 'spirit' in the literal sense: space is formless and profane except for the sites that 'stand out' because spirits are believed to dwell

> in them. These are sacred places. They command awe. 'Personality' suggests the unique: places, like human beings, acquire unique signatures in the course of time . . . the personality of a place is composite of natural endowment (the physique of the land) and the modifications wrought by successive generations of human beings. ("Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective" 445)

Tuan emphasizes in the passage above, through the concepts of spirit and personality, the importance of people and agency when conceptualizing a space and a place; the meaning and uniqueness of a place is conceived when an individual identifies himself/herself with it and applies his/her experience onto that world. He complements his argument by examining types of place he calls *public symbols*[2] and *fields of care* [3] (Tuan 447), thereby placing the creation of meaning of each place not in the buildings and structures embedded therein, but rather on how each person or community understands them.

Should space then be studied through an approach centered on how people experience these spaces? Anthony Giddens's Structuralist Theory proposes a halfway path between Marxist and Humanistic views of space. Giddens criticizes the Marxist argument that structures should be regarded as the sole constituent of space, in the same way that he considers Humanistic views on space incomplete in the sense that they disregard the structures in which people are inserted (Clark et al. 1991). What Structuralist Theory suggests is,

> . . . a reconstruction of the importance of both structure and agency . . . [Giddens] wanted to treat people as knowledgeable and capable subjects,

[2] *Public symbols* refer to places that are extremely visual and easy to be identified, evoking a sense of admiration to the ones that inhabit it. (Tuan 448)

[3] *Fields of care* make reference to places that are not very easy to be identified once they are not visual, with its importance lying in the way it evokes people's affections (Tuan 451)

> not as the cultural dupes of structural determinism, and he wanted to construe the changing circumstances of social life as 'skilled accomplishments' by these subjects. (*Approaching Human Geography*, 97)

Gidden claims thus that both structure and agency are relevant in the process of the creation of spaces and the relations they evoke; in this sense, spaces *produce* and *are produced* by social relations, with individuals and communities having the agency to accept or refute the structures in which they are inserted.

Gidden's Structuralist theory becomes the target of criticism, however, when it comes to his arguments concerning space and temporality. Doreen Massey provides a wide range of criticism on traditional theories regarding space and place, by inviting scholars to consider them as dynamic and as the result of the intersection of multiple axes. Her criticism on Giddens and other theoreticians is grounded on the argument that space tends to be seen only as a distance that, due to improvements in technology and communication, has been condensed and obliterated as the time one takes to go from one location to another gets shorter. Massey claims that time does not eliminate space; rather, it is responsible for reconfiguring spaces and changing its dynamics (*For Space* 92). Another important point she makes is that much has been said regarding the relation between space and time and the idea that time would eventually annihilate space, whereas the focus of discussion should be directed towards space and the relations of power embedded in it.

Massey's critique is also directed towards the categorization of the terms space and place; she points out that the definitions assigned to each of them are superficial and based on opposing binaries, which disregards the complexities and subjectivities involved in the creation of each space and place. The author argues that,

> . . . an understanding of the world in terms of relationality, a world in which the local and the global really are 'mutually constituted', renders untenable these kinds of separation . . . One cannot seriously posit space as the outside of place as lived, or simply equate 'the everyday' with the local. If we really think space relationally, then it is the sum of all our connections, and in that sense utterly grounded, and those connections may go round the world . . . My argument is not that place is not concrete, grounded, real, lived, etc. It is that space is too. (184-185)

The passage above shows well Massey's point of view that, by categorizing space and place through the binaries of abstract/concrete, global/local, emotion/reason, many subjective aspects are ignored and not considered relevant to the understanding of spaces and places. Spaces can be local and global at the same time, in the same way that places can be territorial and abstract too. By characterizing these terms into units of meaning, many of the contradictions and conflicts that happen in spaces and places tend not to be understood properly.

Finally, Massey's rich arguments regarding the conceptualizations of space and its relation to time led her to attempt a more inclusive definition of the term space and place in *For Space*. She characterizes space and place through the concept of *throwtogetherness*[4], that is, the juxtaposition of multiple trajectories and stories. She claims, then, that what defines spaces and places are the negotiations of social relations that happen within them, therefore being in constant redefinition and having no particular rules. Each space is a different space, since it is made of different people. What must be taken into consideration are the conflicts and contradictions that are

[4] Massey defines the word *throwtogetherness* as ". . . the juxtaposition [and] the negotiation of those, equally varied, wider relations within which they are constituted" (*For Space*, 187).

exposed in each space, which characterize its political aspects and sets the ground for possible problematizations.

2.2. Gendered Spaces

One of the conflicts and contradictions that have been widely studied in literary and spatial analysis since the 1980's is the tendency spaces have of enforcing gender disparities. Massey and Linda McDowell in the essay entitled "A Woman's Place?" (*Space, Place and Gender* 462) explore the way spaces can be gendered in a study of the spatial conditions in four areas of the United Kingdom, displaying how they have changed with the developments of the labor system. The areas analyzed are the following: coal cities such as Durham, where the patriarchal belief that because mining is too dangerous, women should be confined in their houses and perform domestic work, consequently being excluded from the public sphere of the towns; the traditional cotton towns of Hackney and Lancashire, in which, though women work outside their houses, their money is considered 'pin money' whereas men's wages are considered essential for providing for the family; and rural areas, such as East Anglia, where women work in the agricultural system and are given more freedom to go through farms, though their jobs are only seasonal.

Massey's and McDowell's research has shown that, with new configurations of labor in the UK, other gender problems have been brought to attention. Female factories have enjoyed the decline in mining activity and have been installing branches in coal cities, paying lower wages to women with the argument of their lack of experience; men, though at home, have not assumed domestic work, which has resulted in double labor for women who work outside the home. In Hackney, exploitation has increased, since the high rates of women workers has made competition worse and given way for

wages to be even lower than they used to be; in Lancashire, women have gathered themselves in unions in order to fight for their rights, resulting in a limited number of factories interested in opening their branches in the area. Finally, in rural areas, due to harsher conditions and the lack of time for women to perform both agricultural and domestic work, women have become more isolated than they used to; also, societal values in rural England have remained traditional and patriarchal. Moreover, Massey's and McDowell's claim is based on the premise that spatial configurations influence the way gender is experienced, and that the expansion of capitalism and new demands for labor have changed old patriarchal values in some aspects and made them even stronger in others (Massey and McDowell 467).

Daphne Spain complements the studies on how spaces and gender are connected by establishing a parallel between the space of the city and its influence on gender relations. In *Gendered Spaces,* she explores the notion of gender issues in relation to space by analyzing, similarly to Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell, the processes through which spaces are created according to notions of workforce, thus enforcing the argument that the position of women in society changes as spaces change and that status and action are deeply related to aspects of gender and space. In the article "Gender and Urban Space", Spain draws on Henri Lefebvre's theory of production of space to claim that the gender codes that characterize the patriarchal system we live in can be found within cities, and are understood and reproduced by the members of a particular community (Spain 584). For example, public spheres, such as streets and financial areas located in the center of a city, are designed for men, who are assumed to perform roles such as the provider of the family and the patriarch; domestic spheres, such as the house, hairdressers and residential areas located in the suburbs, are designed for women, assumed to perform domestic roles. These examples show how gender issues and power

relations, in the Foucauldian sense, are embedded in the structure of cities. In this sense, men belong to labor and to public relations, having more freedom of choice and control of their lives, whereas women hold a peripheral position in communities, being neglected in domestic spheres and living under the influence of male providers of the family structure.

When thinking about gendered spaces and the spheres designed to women such as the ones previously mentioned by Spain, one cannot but wonder about why specifically the space of the house has become associated with women. Gaston Bacherlard's *The Poetics of Space* provides a phenomenological perspective on what feelings and symbols are evoked by the space of the house, with a parallel with the values and gender roles traditionally assigned to women. In the first chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard draws a parallel between memories and dreams and the house people inhabit. He claims that the first house people remember becomes inscribed in them as a fundamental reference (Bachelard 15). He moves on in the next chapters to an analysis in depth of what kind of emotions are evoked by the space of the house, claiming that houses are characterized by the binaries of inside and outside, of what is known and what is unknown, and also by the binaries of retreat and exposure.

To strengthen his argument, Bachelard uses the house *La Redousse* in Henri Bosco's *Malicroix* as an example. He explores the following passage of the literary work as an example of his claim:

> Though the shutters and doors were insulted, though huge threats were proferred, and there was loud bugling in the chimney, it was of no avail. The already human being in whom I had sought shelter for my body yielded nothing to the storm. The house clung close to me, like a she-

> wolf, and at times, I could smell her odor penetrating maternally to my very heart. That night she was already my mother. (45)

The passage above proves itself important to literary and spatial analysis because it illustrates Bachelard's claim that houses are related to the dialectics of inside and outside, of danger (the storm) and protection (the house). The house, then, becomes the space of nurturing, where one can find a sense of protection, hence being associated with motherly characteristics. This point of view is also evident in the association of the house and a nest: "For instance, in the house itself, in the family sitting room, a dreamer of refuges dreams of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole" (Bachelard 30). The house is equivalent to a hut, to the memory of the first house inhabited mentioned in the first chapter of *The Poetics of Space* and also to the memory of a womb, which is associated once more to the sense of care and motherhood. Therefore, the house, referred by the pronouns *she* and *her* in *Malicroix* and associated to a nest in *The Poetics of Space*, is given the image of a motherly woman and her gender role.

The association between the house and motherly characteristics referred above is explained and complemented by Margareth R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton in her introduction to *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space.* For her, gender divisions tend to be determined by opposing binaries, which, in turn, are extended to spaces. She presents a timeline on gender and space by claiming that, "Primitive thought attributes a sex to all things in the universe and even to inanimate objects; all of them are divided into two immense classes according to whether they are considered male or female" (*Reconfigured Spheres* 2); she moves on to the Enlightenment period to complement the gender division of spaces by analyzing the justifications of segregating women from the public spheres of society,

> . . . all insisted on women's 'natural' weakness and maternal destiny and their concomitant maladaptation to serious study of public activity. A circumscribed woman's sphere was theorized in order to distinguish the roles of women and men and to explain their different statuses. Even women's bodies were reanatomized (using skeletons deformed by corsets and drawing on artistic models such as the Venus of Medici) in order to justify by small skulls, narrow ribs and wide hips, as well as by menstruation and childbirth, women's consignment to a sphere separate from that of men. (Higonnet 4)

The argument that women are naturally fragile and therefore fit to stay confined in the domestic sphere became prevalent in the Eighteenth century and helped regulate social relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries (Higonnet 4). Higonnet develops her analysis and evokes other feminine spaces that tend to be controlled, such as their bodies, clothes as a means of declaring social status and the idea that the nation is related to a woman, symbolizing fertility and in need to be conquered.

2.3. When Gender Intersects with Race

Though Gender Studies have contributed extensively to the understanding of how spaces reproduce gender disparities and help to create gender roles, they are insufficient when the target of analysis is black women. In this sense, it is important to take into consideration issues regarding race and how it intersects with gender in order to have a broader view of the experience and lives of African-American women. Bonnie Thornton Till and Ruth Enid Zambara defend the need of a complementary approach when it comes to gender, claiming that intersectional studies emerged from the necessity of understanding the complexities of gender relations when it comes to African-Americans

(*Emerging Intersections* 4*)*. For Thornton and Zambara, intersectional studies are important because they consider the ways power works to shape identities at the individual and societal levels.

In "Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space", the authors examine spaces through four categories: contested, fluid and historical, relational and interactional, and concerning difference and inequality (Neely and Samura 1938). Spaces are contested in the sense that they are organized around the interests of a particular dominant group; they are fluid and historical as they change over time and are influenced by historical events; they are relational and interactional in the sense that they expose and are influenced by socially constructed notions of race and gender, for instance, and they are related to difference and inequality since they are important elements in the construction of relations of power and, therefore, inequality.

Space as a socio-cultural category, can also affect and at the same time be affected by the social of race and gender. In "The Space that Race Makes", Delaney argues that space is connected to race in the sense that geographies of race are present in many aspects of our lives, especially in the concept of the home. For him, "elements of the social (race, gender and so on) are not simply *reflected* in spatial arrangements; rather, spatialities are regarded as *constituting* and/or *reinforcing* aspects of the social" (7). In this comment, the author claims that spaces help to shape and produce relations of racial disparities, and, therefore, the way individuals within communities react to it, thereby enforcing the notion of spaces as a relational and interactional category.

The intersection between gender and race is explored further by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. For her, gendered spaces function in different ways when it comes to white and black women, which can be explained through the analysis of the labor

system in the United States and how it has changed over time, consequently interfering with family dynamics and gender relations within African-American communities. For Collins, the gender divisions between private and public spheres presented earlier by Daphne Spain does not apply properly to African-American experience, considering the fact that black women transit between the domestic sphere of the house and the public sphere of society. This transit and lack of a private sphere of relations occur due to the fact that there has never been a sense of privacy and intimacy in African American communities. Since the time they were brought to American soil as slaves, every aspect of their lives became controlled by their masters with the objective of increasing profit. Men and women performed the same jobs, though neither of them could keep what they produced. In addition to that, being a stay-home mother was not even an option for black women (64).

With the end of slavery, black women were presented with two options: to work in the fields in the same conditions of slavery times or to work in households, with the constant risk of being victims of sexual harassment by their bosses. Because there were more jobs available to women than to men, the option of staying at home taking care of children was still not a viable option for black women; also, having equal salaries to men was not an issue; what mattered was the ability to provide for their families. The migration period in the United States, in turn, presented job opportunities for black men, though more uncertain than for black women, which changed again family dynamics and gendered spaces. Men attended pool houses, barbers shops and streets, and women occupied spaces such as households and churches (Collins 55). Finally, the Post World War II period, marked by the decrease of segregation in America, changed the African-American community once more, showing that the spatial problem was not related solely to race and gender, but also to class. Jobs became part time and low paid, lacking

stability and benefits; black men started to turn to drug dealing, sports and music for personal accomplishments and financial support.

In conclusion, Collins analysis shows how the spatial changes that occurred over time interfered with gender relations within the African-American community, showing that problems that once were understood only in terms of gender and race had now to be seen also in relation with class. In other words, spaces and their reconfigurations constantly influence how gender and race are experienced, and, in turn, result in the theme explored in the next section of this chapter – subjectivities – and the ways they are formed and controlled.

2.4. Black Subjectivities and Controlling Images

Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr. describe the studies of race, class and gender as the "holy trinity" of the 1980's ("Multiplying Identities", 625), though they have been considered too essentialist and sometimes taken as a cliché later in the 1990's. In fact, the notion of identity as a single, inherent, stable essence is challenged by the complexities involved when it comes to different spatial configurations, different cultural backgrounds, gender and race. A black woman can be identified as a mother/daughter, as a girlfriend, as a student, as a worker. In each different situation, there is one determined identity that is constructed and enacted in order to fulfill the social norms of each place. Also, the intersections mentioned earlier in this chapter defy a static sense of identity when a black woman identifies herself with feminist struggles, and yet, sees herself unable to relate with white women and their feminist claims. Intersections create subjectifications, which in turn make identities fluid and in constant construction.

The process of identity formation is explored in depth in the article "Self, Identity and Identity Formation: From the Perspectives of Three Major Theories" from a sociological perspective, taking into consideration that identities are produced and reproduce social relations in the same way as spaces, gender and race. Hüseyin Cingoğlu and Yusuf Arikan divide identities into two major categories, *self* and *identity*, the former one defined as "a dynamic entity with the ability to interpret and reinterpret their environments and eventually transform themselves into something that we could identify as the next step: identity" (Cingoğlu and Arikan 1115), while the latter is conceptualized as the outcome of the self, thus not being a ". . . set, concrete entity[;] on the contrary, it is very flexible and it can change according to its environment, context and expectations from the counterpart, whether it may be society, a group or other identities just like itself" (Cingoğlu and Arikan 1116). The terms self and identity, in turn, are characterized by two major elements: *structure* and *agency*. By structure, they mean the cultural frameworks in which an individual is inserted and the set of social rules one has to follow in order to be part of a particular society; if one is in an academic setting, there is a set of behaviors to be adopted that as a result create a different identity from the one adopted at home, for instance. By agency, the freedom of choice an individual has within a determined structure to create his/her own sense of self and, in consequence, identity; within the academic setting, despite the social rules that demand a certain kind of behavior, there are options available for a person to decide what sort of individual he/she wants to be (Cingoğlu and Arikan 1116).

Linda Martín Alcoff agrees with Hüseyin Cingoğlu and Yusuf Arikan and claims that, despite the fact that identities are infused with hegemonies, there are aspects of agency within it (*Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* 84). For her, personal experience is not sufficient to define identity, thus demanding a contextualization of

spatial and historical configurations to frame it. Alcoff draws on the notion of *Haecceity*[5] from Philosophy to discuss how identity was seen in the past as an essence and, how today scholars have come to the realization that identity is actually made of both fundamental and relational characteristics. Fundamental characteristics are the ones that shape the way a person sees the world: as an example, gender changes the way an individual relates to the world and to others, thus becoming a fundamental characteristic of a person's identity; one does not stop being a woman. Relational characteristics are the ones that, though equally important, are subjective and can vary within different structures. However, some concepts, such as race, despite being subjective in different contexts, can become fundamental in the sense that they may bring into play pre-conceptualized notions of what a person should or should not be.

So, how do relational characteristics, such as race, become fundamental? This answer is well addressed by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* through the concepts of controlling images. For her, controlling images are stereotypes imbued with dominant ideologies that are used to regulate and justify racism and oppression; because they are considered natural, they tend to be reproduced as something fundamental that cannot be changed. Collins uses Higonnet's argument of binary thinking mentioned earlier in this work when addressing gender categorization, though now applied to race: for her, "[o]bjectification is central to this process of oppositional difference. In binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (70). Thus, it is through the categorization of the Other as less human,

[5] *Haecceity* is defined by Linda Martín Alcoff as "that which makes a thing the thing that it is and distinguishable from other things. *Haecceity* is that without which a thing is no longer identical to itself, and thus said to consist of only intrinsic, nonrelational properties" (*Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*, 89).

dumb and even animalistic that mainstream values of society are delineated and that hegemonies are created and maintained.

Collins focuses her research on African-American women, examining the most common controlling images designed to expose and portray them as inferior or less deserving. She discusses four controlling images common in mainstream U.S. society: the mommy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the jezebel. The first one, the mommy, is the motherly figure, the subordinate one that gives away the chance to be with her own family in order to take care of white people's children. She is the "ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power" (72); she is nurturing and asexualized and usually portrayed as overweight and with well-defined African American traits. The matriarch, in turn, is the image of the bad mother which is the opposite of the mommy figure. This is the woman who has to work outside to provide for her family, and, for doing so, becomes "overly aggressive, unfeminine . . . [and] allegedly emasculate[s] their lovers and husbands" (75). This image is significant because of the suggestion of what white women should not become. Finally, the next controlling image, the one of the welfare mother, is directed to poor black women who do not have access to work. According to Collins,

> Like the matriarch, the welfare mother is labeled as a bad mother. But unlike the matriarch, she is not too aggressive – on the contrary, she is not aggressive enough. While the matriarch unavailability contributed to her children' poor socialization, the welfare mother's accessibility is deemed the problem. She is portrayed as being content to sit around and collect welfare, shunning work and passing on her bad values to her offspring. (79)

The image of the welfare mother originated so as to justify the need to control black women's fertility; the manipulation of their bodies and offspring represents profit and workforce for their owners in slavery, though is regarded at present times as population growth to be controlled. Thus, the welfare mother controlling image represents the attempt to perpetrate this domination over black family structures. Finally, the fourth controlling image, the one of the jezebel, presents black women as oversexualized so as to justify, among other things, white men's sexual assault. This image is significant not only because it justifies rape, but also because it portrays black women as having deviant sexual desire, the opposite of how white women should behave.

Moreover, the image of sexualized black women is complemented with the image of black men as sexually insatiable and thus potentially rapists, aspect that is addressed by bell hooks in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. The author discusses these images disseminated among black boys since infancy and how they create confused and angry black men: they are taught to be responsible and provide for their families, though there are not enough opportunities available. Also, black boys are encouraged to adopt a tough behavior so as not to be viewed as castrated and unmanly,

> Young black males, like all boys in patriarchal culture, learn early that manhood is synonymous with the domination and control over others, that simply by being male they are in a position of authority that gives them the right to assert their will over others, to use coercion and/or violence to gain and maintain power. (83)

However, despite the fact that all boys are taught to be tough, this violence tends to be seen differently in relation to white and black boys. Whereas in the first scenario violence is seen as a characteristic related to immaturity, in the second violence is seen as something inherent, as if black boys were fundamentally evil and capable of

increasingly violent actions. This creates a sense of failure and self-worthiness in black boys that permeates their entire life, since they can never fulfill the model of manhood designed by patriarchal society (hooks 89).

Therefore, the consequences of the ambiguous messages given to black boys in adult life can be various. Black boys who live with the pain of being a constant failure turn out to be angry black men who can direct themselves to sports and music careers in order to gain a positive visibility and self-fulfillment, maintaining a pattern of sabotaging themselves because they do not consider themselves worthy; these can also direct themselves to rentable though illegal markets such as drug dealing or can become violent men, reinforcing then the controlling image of black men as dangerous.

In conclusion, spaces are important features to be taken into consideration as they intervene directly in the processes of individuals' subjectivities. Spaces are racialized in the sense that they are produced by disparities of races and in consequence reproduce stereotypes and racism through its structures and mechanisms of power. For black women, marginalization comes not only from race, since gendered spaces, mostly the house, are depicted in society as a means of strengthening gender roles of submissiveness and patriarchal relations, and consequently triggering oppression and abuse of black men towards black women.

3. GENDERING AND RACIALIZING SPACES IN *THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE* AND *PARADISE*

> *Home is a good place to begin . . . Home is an idea: an inner geography where the ache to belong finally quits, where there is no sense of 'otherness', where there is, at last, a community.*
>
> *Janet Zandy*

3.1. Spatializing Race and Gender in *The Women of Brewster Place*

Earlier in this dissertation, spaces are examined based on their multiplicity; Foucault's argument that spaces are infused with power and hierarchies is developed further by Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura as they claim that within spaces one can easily identify structures of difference and inequality. Also, spaces are contested by individuals; there is always an oppressive group of individuals and oppressed one, though oppression does not work as a single force and is defined by different aspects, such as race, gender, class, and so forth. These inequalities are reflected in different spaces, as claimed by Lefebvre; and these spaces tend to, in turn, reproduce the structures of power and inequality that constitute them, thereby creating a cycle of oppression. Marginalization, therefore, produces different spaces and is strengthened by them, thus being strongly characterized by the social relations of its inhabitants. Moreover, Neely and Samura present more elements regarding spaces and agree with Doreen Massey concerning the fluidity of space: according to the scholars, temporality cannot be disregarded in the spatial analysis, considering that spaces are not static and tend to change as societal relations that take place within them also change. Finally,

Massey's concept of *throwtogetherness* displays the intersectionality present in the study of space; one cannot understand spaces only through the notion of class, for instance, since other axis of study, such as gender and race, also intervene in the production of different spaces. Gendered spaces, then, are spaces that reflect disparities between women and men, such as domestic spheres that confine women in houses and apartments and reinforce the neglecting of their participation in public activities of society. Racialized spaces, in sum, display the disparities among different races and are evidenced by structures of power and institutions that segregate black from white communities.

Gloria Naylor represents the intersections of race, space and power in the first chapter of *The Women of Brewster Place*, "Dawn", by displaying a community created with the purpose of fulfilling the political interests of a dominant group of society. Since the beginning of the novel, Brewster Place, set on the badly crowded part of the city, presents itself as "the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company" (1). It addresses the interests of the aldermen and managing director of the Unico Realty Company, failing to acknowledge the needs of the Irishmen to whom the place is designed for and being a strategy for calming down the nerves of the population. The wall, erected by the town population to avoid the smell of the exotic food from the immigrants who live there, already exposes the racialized characteristic and segregation of Brewster Place from the rest of the city. Differently from when the double-housing units are erected, there is no ceremony to celebrate the wall; rather, it is baptized with the vomit of one of its women's son, which increases the idea of decay and disregards the promise sensed in the street and in the times. The wall, then, is a key element that

transforms Brewster Place into a dead end street, which divides people who belong to the city and who do not.

It is then that the African-American community starts to replace the Mediterranean people who inhabit Brewster Place. Differently from the latter who see its second and third generation move away from the housing unit in order to achieve better life conditions, African-Americans see Brewster Place with "a sense of promise in the street and in the times" (2), creating an idea of a new place that can become a home, and that is very different from the difficult life of the South of the United States. This argument is well described by the following passage:

> Brewster Place rejoiced in these multi-colored "Afric" children of its old age. They worked as hard as the children of its youth, and were as passionate and different in their smells, foods and codes from the rest of the town as the children of its middle years. They clung to the street with a desperate acceptance that whatever was here was better than the starving southern climates they had fled from. Brewster Place knew that unlike its other children, the few who would leave forever were to be the exception rather than the rule, since they came because they had no choice and would remain for the same reason. (4)

Brewster Place becomes again the hope of a new beginning, even though its bedrock and history have shown that no good can come from this dead end street. Therefore, Foucault's claim that power is imbued in space is richly explored in the first representation of Brewster Place, since the space is created to segregate rather to integrate communities that are different from the mainstream American society.

Naylor explores again notions of space and power in the chapter "Kiswana Browne", together with the aspect of temporality as she discusses the results of the Civil

Rights Movement in African-American society and in the character's life. In this section, the author presents the story of Melanie, the daughter of a white father and black mother who, as a political statement, decides to change her name to Kiswana and abandons her life in the rich neighborhood of Linden Hills to live in Brewster Place. Being used to a comfortable upper class life, Kiswana has difficulties understanding the gender roles a poor black woman has to fulfill, "[h]ow was she expected to be out, job hunting every day and still have time to keep a kitchen that look like her mother's, who didn't even work and still had someone come in twice a month for general cleaning." (78). Her mother's visit brings into attention matters not only related to the notion of race and power, but also in relation to Kiswana's own identification. The woman is troubled by the contrast between Kiswana and her brother, who, though dark-skinned and with afro hair, refuses to adopt a political stand regarding his race, whereas she, who inherited white traces from her father, is politically engaged. Also, her mother is unable to understand why she had changed her name from Melanie to Kiswana, since it was given to her in order to honor her grandmother, a strong black woman who fought for her and her nine children's rights in a racist society.

Kiswana's attempts to "be what [she is] not" (85) are made clear throughout the chapter, showing the clear contrast between the racialized space of Brewster Place and the rich setting of Linden Hills:

> "At least you have a halfway decent view from here. I was wondering what lay beyond that dreadful wall – it's the boulevard. Honey, did you know that you can see the trees in Linden Hills from here?"
>
> Kiswana knew that very well, because there were many lonely days that she would sit in her gray apartment and stare at those trees and think of

> home, but she would rather have choked than admit that to her mother. (79)

The trees of Linden Hills, which symbolize life and health, are opposed to the grey colors of Brewster Place, where it is harder for life to grow and develop. Also, the image of the wall brings to light once again the racialized and segregated characteristics of the community, isolated from the rest of the city.

Moreover, in "Kiswana Browne", issues from the Civil Rights Movement and its repercussions in the black community are explored when the character argues with her mother about the reasons she decides to change her name from Melanie to Kiswana and refuses her former life in Linden Hills, a luxurious neighborhood, in order to live in Brewster Place. Kiswana's mother defends the argument that, though the Civil Rights Movement reconfigured some aspects of American society, it has not changed much in others:

> Melanie, I'm not saying it wasn't important. It was damned important to stand up and say that you were proud of what you were and to get the vote and other social opportunities for every person in this country who had it due. But you kids thought you were going to turn the world upside down, and it just wasn't so. When all the some had cleared, you found yourself with a fistful of new federal laws and a country still full of obstacles for black people to fight for their way over – just because they're black. There was no revolution, Melanie, and there will be no revolution. (84)

The claim highlighted by the passage above is that, despite the contributions of the Civil Rights movement to promote the black community and its cultural production, it did not achieve its main goal of unification. American regulations and practices were set in

order to divide blacks and whites, the decayed apartments in Brewster Place and the wall that divides them from the rest of the city being a strong evidence of the lack of integration.

Though these chapters present strong elements that reinforce disparities of race regarding Brewster Place and the city and the social hierarchies embedded in these spaces, the chapter "The Block Party", presents through Mattie's dream the women's last attempt to break free from the structures of power that oppress them and make Brewster Place a better space. Kiswana, trying to improve the life conditions of the African-American community, incites Brewster Place inhabitants to throw a party in order to raise funds for improving the buildings. However, the community is still shocked by Lorraine's rape and Ben's assassination that happened the week before; rain falls intermittently for one week and all women share the same nightmare of being in Lorraine's place when the rape happened. The party is interrupted by the rain, and that is when Cora Lee, taking her children inside one of the buildings, sees that the wall is still stained with Ben's blood. This is the scene that triggers Brewster Place women's rebellion toward the figure of the repressive wall and incites them to gather together in order to tear it apart:

> Women flung themselves against the wall, chipping away at it with knives, plastic forks, spiked shoe heels, and even bare hands; the water pouring under their chins, plastering their blouses and dresses against their breasts and into the cracks of their hips. The bricks piled up behind them were snatched and relayed out of Brewster Place past over-tuned tables, scattered coins, and crushed wads of dollar bills. They came back with chairs and barbecue grills and smashed them into the wall. The "Today Brewster – Tomorrow America" banner had been beaten into

> long strands of red and gold that clung to the wet arms and faces of the women. (185)

The rebellious act of tearing the wall apart symbolizes not only their questioning the repression and violence they suffer because they are women and black, but also their giving up the vision of an integrated community. Without the wall, the women are able to see more clearly and in a more realistic way the challenges they have to face together in order to overcome racial and gender differences in a society that disregards and segregates them.

Finally, the last section of the novel, "Dusk", displays the death of Brewster Place and the failure of the women's attempt to strive in the community. Brewster Place has "given what it could – all it could – to its "Afric" children, and there [is] just no more" (189); The remains of the prominent wall permeate in the scars African-Americans have to bear, and the rundown apartments are still alive in the memory of the women who once called it a home and projected their dreams and hopes for the future in the dead end street.

Therefore, Naylor is able to explore issues of race through the rundown buildings of Brewster Place and mostly through the image of the wall, which segregates Brewster Place inhabitants from the rest of the city and provides only the view of Linden Hills, of what life could be for them. The wall also strengthens the metaphor of the dead end street, which symbolizes the lack of hope and opportunities for this community even after its women's rebellious act of tearing the wall apart, strengthening the claim that racism is still present in mainstream American society in implicit ways.

Gloria Naylor also explores the intersections of racialized spaces and gender oppression by presenting the domestic sphere of the house as a site of disillusions, but mostly as a healing space for women. Gaston Bachelard's and Margareth R. Higonnet's

claim seen in Chapter 2 that there is an association between motherly characteristics and the space of the house, as well as the feelings evoked by the dialectic of inside and outside, of protection and the unknown, strengthen the link between women and domestic spaces in the novel. In fact, the domestic space appears several times in the plot as a space for bonding, for sharing experiences, concerns and dreams, and also a space of healing: it is in Brewster Place apartments, and mainly in the kitchen, that women gather together in order to share the loneliness and dreams that black women experience in their lives.

Naylor provides the first representation of the house as a healing space in "Mattie Michael", with the story of one of the first African-American women to arrive in Brewster Place. The chapter begins with her arrival in Brewster Place, already symbolized by the lack of hope:

> All the beautiful plants that once had an entire sun porch for themselves in the home she had exchanged thirty years of her life to pay for would now have to fight for life on a crowded windowsill. The sight turned into a knot of pity for the ones that she knew would die. She pitied them because she refused to pity herself and to think that she, too, would have to die here on this crowded street because there just wasn't enough life left for her to do it all again. (7)

The metaphor of the plant, which symbolizes not only life but Mattie herself and her own dreams, highlights the sense of decay evidenced in the buildings and also the idea that there is no hope coming from the dead end street building; she is entrapped in a situation that she cannot change. The plot is focused on Mattie's trajectory towards Brewster Place, with the character feeling the aroma of sugar cane and remembering her younger years in Tennessee. Here, the memories of a first home, discussed in Gaston

Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, are evidenced as the sugar cane brings the character back to her younger years living in her father's farm, where her story towards Brewster Place begins to unfold. It is back then that she meets Butch Fuller and, after having a romantic relationship with him, finds herself pregnant and abandoned by the man, who is known for his gallantry.

Mattie suffers not only with the abandonment by Butch, but also with the disappointment from her father and his refusal to accept her pregnancy, spanking her as he realizes that she refuses to reveal the father of her baby. She decides to leave home and live with her friend Etta in order to avoid family conflicts, but as Etta decides to go to New York to experience the place where everything happens, Mattie sees herself alone in a strange city and with a baby. Her difficult work routine, together with the poverty of the boarding house where she lives, makes her think that "[s]he could go home. Home. Home." (30), but there is no home anymore where she can go to with Basil, her baby. It is then that she meets Eva Turner, a black woman who lives in a townhouse with her granddaughter, Lucielia, and starts living with them. Eva's house is presented as a nurturing space since Mattie arrives there,

> In the unabashed fashion of the old, Miss Eva unfolded her own life and secret exploits to Mattie, and without realizing she was being questioned, Mattie found herself talking about things that she had buried within her. The young black woman and the old yellow woman sat in the kitchen for hours, blending their lives so that what lay behind one and ahead of the other became indistinguishable. (32)

The first image of the space of the house presented in the novel already evokes the gendered notion that the house, and mainly the kitchen, is the space where women share their experiences and bond with each other. It is in this moment, while Eva serves

Mattie and Basil some of her dinner, that Mattie feels in a safe environment where she can expose her experiences and plan what to do with her life.

As Basil grows older and Eva passes away, leaving the house to Mattie's care, the issue of abandonment and deceiving by men returns to her life. Basil, being spoiled throughout his entire childhood and teenage years by his mother, becomes a selfish man who cannot find his way in life. He constantly gets into trouble, and, being imprisoned due to a bar fight, convinces his mother to bail him out with the house as a guarantee that he would go to the court meeting scheduled. He does not attend to the meeting, leaving Mattie with nothing but disappointment and despair for losing her house, her home. The house is presented then as the metaphor for Mattie's dreams; it is in this space that, having bonded with Miss Eva, she is able to recreate a sense of home and of family, as well as putting her life back together and being able to provide for her son's needs. Basil's irresponsible behavior serves as a reminder of what role men have played in Mattie's life; she is now confined into the poor and walled space of Brewster Place and its colored daughters.

Similarly to Mattie, Etta Mae acknowledges the house as a place for bonding, but also for healing from love disillusions. Her story, similarly to Mattie's, begins with her arrival at Brewster Place, where she goes to visit Mattie. Since the beginning of the chapter, the passages from well-known jazz songs, together with her walk and strong personality, expose that Etta is not the average woman who is traditionally associated with subservient characteristics; rather, she is ". . . a black woman who [is] not only unwilling to play by the rules, but whose spirit [challenge] the very right of the game to exist" (59). She goes through the country moving from town to town and from love affairs to love affairs, never being able to find a good man with whom she can settle down.

Her arrival at Brewster Place is depicted with the curious eyes of the children who are enchanted by her Cadillac and with the judgmental eyes of the adults who wonder whether she had finally made it this time. Mattie is the only character presented as a comforting presence to her,

> She dumped her load on the sofa and swept off her sunglasses. She breathed deeply of the freedom she found in Mattie's presence. Here she had no choice but to be herself. The carefully erected decoys she was constantly shuffling and changing to fit the situation were of no use here. Etta and Mattie went way back, a singular term that claimed co-knowledge of all the important events in their lives and almost all the unimportant ones. And by rights of this possession, it tolerated no secrets. (58)

Therefore, it is in Mattie's presence that Etta can truly talk about her life and hopes for the future. She arrives at Mattie's apartment with the hope of finding a new love, one that would give her the security and comfort so that she does not have to worry about providing for herself. Mattie gives her the option of going to church, a place where there are widowers and men of good will. It is there that Etta meets Reverend Woods, a preacher who sometimes gives sermons at their local church, but who not only knows the "game" she plays, but also masters it very well.

The story develops with the two women at the church listening to Reverend Woods' preaching, and Etta wondering about whether life could have been different to her. As the service ends, she is hopeful that Reverend Woods is the perfect choice of a good man to whom she can start a life with. However, his intentions are to "Let her win a few, and then he would win just a few more and she would be bankrupt long before

the sun was up" (71). As Mattie predicts, Etta falls into Reverend Woods' charm, but does not say anything to her friend, claiming that,

> Sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing. There is a time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to prepare to pick up the pieces when it's all over. Mattie realized that this moment called for all three. (70)

The story ends with Etta going back to Mattie's apartment, with the broken spirit of one more love story that did not happen the way she expected. Once again, the dead end street of Brewster Place presents itself as a place for disillusion for black women. It does not matter whether these women "played by the rules" or defied them, their destiny is the same: living poorly in Brewster Place apartments.

In "Lucielia Louise Turner", Naylor explores the house as a space for bonding and healing through the character's dysfunctional family relation that reflects the inability for black men to live up to African-American gender roles. Also living in Brewster Place, Lucielia is married to Eugene, a black man who does not know how to be part of a family and struggles with an idea of masculinity that he is unable to fulfill. The story begins with Eugene arriving at the apartment after being away for a long time and with Lucielia trying to find reasons to justify her feelings towards him,

> The vibrations from those words rode like parasites on the air waves and came rushing into her kitchen, smashing the compression into indistinguishable days and hours that swirled before her. It was all there: the frustration of being left alone, sick, with a month-old baby; her humiliation reflected in the caseworker's blue eyes for the unanswerable "you can find him to have it, but can't find him to take care of it" smile;

> the raw urges that crept, uninvited, between her tights on countless nights; the eternal whys all meshed with the explainable hate and unexplainable love. (91)

Since the beginning of the chapter the narrator exposes the tension between the gender roles each character assumes; on the one hand, Lucielia has to work in order to complement Eugene's low wages and feed her daughter; on the other hand, Eugene tries to live up to the image of the man who provides for the family, but is unable to do so, feeling less masculine and blaming his wife for all the problems they experience.

For Lucielia, consolation comes in the space of the kitchen in the same way that it does for Mattie; it symbolizes her loneliness and the hours she spends waiting for Eugene, but it also represents a space of communication and a safe environment where she can reveal her wishes and problems to Mattie. Eugene's return and attempt to make things better is problematized with the loss of his job and with the unexpected news of Lucielia's pregnancy. The sense of emasculinization is developed even further in Eugene's mind, now a father of two children who does not have a job and depends on his pregnant wife to work and take care of the family. He blames her for getting pregnant, claiming that "I'm fucking sick of never getting ahead. Babies and bills, that's all you good for" (94).

Eugene's frustration, together with Lucielia's fear that he might decide to leave her alone with another baby, results in her decision to abort the child. The aborted child and Lucielia's suffering serve as a foreshadowing of what is to come, since their problem is not the unexpected child, but the family dynamics and the gender roles assigned to black men and women that are either unachievable or work as a way of reducing men's masculinities. Her hopes of maintaining the family together are strengthened by the possessive behavior she adopts in relation to her eldest daughter,

"the only thing [she has] ever loved without pain" (93). However, Eugene's decision to go away to work in the docks render a fight between the couple, and the baby, who is left alone in the living room, decides to play with an electric socket, consequently dying in an accident. The death of the child is the ultimate disillusion for Lucielia, who now has nothing to hold onto.

Here, once more, her apartment is presented as a consoling space. Mattie, a strong maternal figure in Lucielia's life, takes the woman to her house and rocks her like a baby,

> She rocked her into her childhood and let her see murdered dreams. And she rocked her back, back into the womb, to the nadir of her hurt, and they found it – a slight silver splinter, embedded just below the surface of the skin. And Mattie rocked and pulled – and the splinter gave way, but its roots were deep, gigantic, ragged, and they tore up flesh with bits of fat and muscle tissue clinging to them. They left a huge hole, which was already starting to pus over, but Mattie was satisfied. It would heal. (103-104)

Mattie, here again presented as a nurturing figure, is the one who incites Lucielia to go on with her life in the same way she has done with Etta and the same way that she learned by herself after being deceived by her own son. The scene in which Mattie rocks Lucielia and bathes her represents not only her pain of losing her child finally bursting out, but also a ritual of rebirth, of "exorcizing the evilness of pain" (104) in order to be reborn. The bath Mattie gives Lucielia is described as a baptism and strengthens the argument that Lucielia will be able to heal from her pain and will start her life all over again.

Though the space of the house is traditionally related to women and healing, the wall, presented as an oppressive space, serves as a key element in the spatialization of gender and reinforcement of gender disparities. In "The Two", gender issues result in violence with the story of the homosexual couple Thereza and Lorraine. The women are first regarded as nice girls, but after Sophie, one of Brewster Place women, sees them looking at each other in the same way that she looks at her husband and spreads the rumor of their relationship, Lorraine and Theresa start being victims of retaliation from the general community, referred to as *the two*. Lorraine, who has always been worried about other people's opinions, is extremely affected by the reaction of their neighbors, and finds in Ben, Brewster Place drunken janitor, a friend to whom she can talk to. In this section of the novel, the reader becomes familiarized not only with Lorraine's story, marked by the repressive figure of her father who refuses to acknowledge his daughter's sexuality and sends her out of his house and also the trajectory of prejudice who renders her the loss of her job as director of the Board of Education, but also with Ben's story; Ben, who worked in a farm, was obliged to see his employer, a white man, sexually abuse his daughter to protect his family. His inability and the consequent decision of his daughter to leave the house mark the image of this man as one emasculated by society and who only finds comfort in drinking.

In the last story of *The Women of Brewster Place*, spaces are first presented in contradictory ways, as they can serve both as repressive and as nurturing environments. For example, on the one hand, Theresa's and Lorraine's trajectory towards Brewster Place is marked by the transition between different places in order to avoid prejudice, as highlighted in the passage,

> "They, they, they!" Theresa exploded. "You know, I'm not starting up with this again, Lorraine. Who in the hell are they? And where in the hell

> are we? Living in some dump of a building in this God-forsaken part of town around bunch of ignorant niggers with the cotton still under their fingernails because of you and theirs. They knew something in Linden Hills, so I gave up an apartment for you that I'd been in for the last four years. And then they knew in Park Heights, and you made me so miserable there we had to leave. Now these mysterious theys are on Brewster Place. Well, look out that window, kid. There's a big wall down that block, and this is the end of the line for me. I'm not moving anymore, so if that's what you're working yourself up to – save it!" (134-135)

Brewster Place, considered the last option for Theresa of a place they can live without worrying about people's opinions, is the last hope of finding a nurturing space where they can be a couple and overcome the difficulties concerning their sexuality and acceptance from society. The kitchen is once more the space where Lorraine and Theresa are able to discuss their relationship and issues of identity, thereby becoming a space for bonding in the same way that it is for Mattie and Lucielia, for example; Ben's apartment, where both Lorraine's and Ben's stories are exposed to the reader, can also be seen as a space for bonding.

On the other hand, the wall, located in the end of the street, becomes a symbol not only of repression, but of violence as well. As the story progresses and Lorraine starts developing her friendship with Ben, whom she considers a fatherly figure, she suffers prejudice from C.C. Baker and his gang, who refuses to accept her sexuality and want to show her what it means to be with a man. Kiswana, who sees Lorraine being harassed, mocks Baker's attempt to assert his masculinity, and Lorraine's smile at Kiswana serves as an act of defiance for the young boy. The act results later in the story

in sexual violence when Lorraine goes back home alone one night and is surrounded by Baker and his gang, being violently raped several times against the wall. Ben, the first person to find the woman after the rape, tries to help her, but she kills him with a brick from the wall.

Lorraine's rape and the assassination of Ben mark the role the wall plays in the community; first presented as a distinct limitation between the city and the community, it also serves as a reminder of gender differences and women's abuse. The fact that she is raped against the wall evokes the feeling of helplessness in relation to black women, who have to face rape, the ultimate form of violence to a woman, in silence, as they have literally nowhere to run to; it is the end of the line, a dead end. Ben's murder, in this sense, represents the inability of Lorraine to connect to any male figure, since it invokes suffering and disillusions, as well as loss of hope and the failure of dreams of fitting into the community.

At last, in the conclusion of the novel, "The Block Party", gendered spaces work as to incite the creation of a communal identification regarding Brewster Place's women, who are able to identify themselves with Lorraine's pain and her experience of abuse. The following days after the event are marked by a strong and intermittent rain, reinforcing the sense of mourning and reclusion:

> They were confined to their homes and their own thoughts as it became increasingly difficult to tell a night sky from a day sky behind the smoky black clouds . . . Greasy cooking odors seeped into the damp apartment walls; cakes wouldn't rise, and bed sheet remained clammy and cold. Children became listless, and men stayed away longer at night or came in and picked arguments to give themselves a reason they could understand for needing to go out again . . . electric bills rose sharply as portable

> heaters, televisions and lamps stayed on night and day as Brewster Place tried desperately to bring any kind of warmth and light into their world. (174)

The rain comes in order not only to wash away all the shock and trauma coming from the rape, but also to promote self-reflection by the women of the community. These women, even though could not relate and identify themselves with Theresa and Lorraine before, now understand and share their pain as rape is considered by any woman the ultimate type of violence and the abuse to be feared the most.

The sense of unification coming from Brewster Place's women is emphasized even more in their first attempt to have the block party after the rain gives way for a few hours. It is in this celebration that the women who inhabit the community find out that all of them have had the same dream: they have all seen Lorraine's figure, "the tall yellow woman in the bloody green and black dress" (174), a haunting presence that reminds them of what can happen to all of them one day, despite of age and class. Lucielia, who now lives in California and starts her life all over again, goes back to the community by impulse after having a strange dream: "Something about that wall and Ben. And there was a woman who was supposed to be me, I guess. She didn't look exactly like me, but inside I felt it was me" (178). Therefore, the dream comes to show that the rape happened not only to Lorraine, but to all of these women; they feel it as if they are the victims of the violence she suffered, and share her pain. The rape connects all women and incites them to create a collective identification, one of women who have suffered many times and in many different ways and have to hold on to each other in order to overcome their traumas.

In sum, Naylor presents in *The Women of Brewster Place* racialized and gendered spaces mainly through the oppressive wall and the domestic sphere of Brewster Place

apartments. The community, offspring of racial segregation, is a product of exclusion and in turn reproduces this exclusion to its African-American inhabitants, challenging black women to fight for a place in American society but failing to do so as racism is implicitly present in social relations. Also, the house, mainly the kitchen, and the wall, rather than portrayed as spaces that confine and oppress women, are represented as spaces for self-reflection, bonding, and, most of all, confronting traumatic experiences, making Brewster Place's women emotionally able to overcome these traumas and find an idea of home and community in each other.

3.2. Spatializing Race and Gender in *Paradise*

In Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, the intersections of space, race and power are presented in Ruby, Oklahoma, town created by a group of families and product of exclusion from Haven. The history of Ruby is the history of descendants of outcasts who, after being freed from slavery and getting back from the war, try to start their lives again in the town of Haven. The Great Depression, together with the arrival of whites in Haven and the inability of integration between the two communities, incites the Morgan family, and mostly the twin brothers Deacon and Steward, to follow their father's and grandfather's steps and migrate to a new place:

> The twins stared at their dwindling postwar future and it was not hard to persuade other home boys to repeat what the Old Fathers had done in 1890. Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose . . . Out There where every cluster of whitemen looked like a posse, being alone as being dead. But lessons had been learned and relearned in the

> last three generations about how to protect a town. So, like the ex-slaves who knew what came first, the ex-soldiers broke up the Oven and loaded it into two trucks even before they took apart their own beds. Before first light in the middle of August, fifteen families moved out of Haven – headed . . . deeper into Oklahoma, as far as they could climb from the grovel contaminating the town their grandfathers had made. (16)

The post-war American society, marked by societal and racial issues, struggles with its economy and presents its inhabitants with few job opportunities, being black men even less privileged. In this sense, the arrival of whites into Haven reconfigures the town and reinforces social hierarchies that benefit the white and oppress the black, inciting black men to build a home of their own, where they can find prosperity and live without the fear of discrimination.

However, similarly to Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, oppression is reproduced in this space concerning women who live in the Convent, a house situated in the outskirts of the town. The location of the house already signals its marginalization, and the first scene of the novel, in which Ruby men invade the Convent in order to evade its women and "shoot the white girl first" (3), supports that this community is marked by traumas and does not accept anything different from its standards. As the group of men goes through the abandoned premises inside the Convent to find its other inhabitants, the narrator provides reasons to justify the invasion of the house:

> Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons . . . So when nine men decided to meet there, they had to run everybody off the place with

> shotguns before they could sit in the beams of their flashlights to take matters into their own hands. The proof they had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Covent were those women. (11)

The binary way of categorizing people and the objectification of the Other as inferior and something to be controlled presented earlier in the theoretical background by Patricia Hill Collins is well illustrated in the excerpt above; men blame the Convent women for all the bad things that happen in Ruby as a means of justifying their abuse and control without noticing that they are indeed reproducing what they have experienced years before in Haven. Therefore, Ruby is the offspring of hegemonic relations between blacks and whites and, in turn, recreates these power relations by not accepting strangers and violently banishing them.

As a result of the exclusion experienced and perpetrated in Ruby, the town produces a society that, besides not accepting any newcomers, refuses to reconfigure itself with ideas from younger generations. This is seen in "Seneca", where the tensions between the old and young generations of the town are brought into attention. The chapter begins with Dovey, Steward Morgan's wife, wondering about her relationship with her husband and the constant pressure that Steward and his twin brother, Deacon, feel in order to keep Ruby prosperous. Acknowledged by most as the "owners" of the town, Deacon and Steward refuse to accept the fact that Ruby's younger generations are not interested in tradition anymore and want to adapt it to present times. Their traditionalism is challenged by the younger generation's wish to change the motto of the Oven, a sacred place for Ruby's inhabitants where they gather the community and perform rituals since their times in Haven, from "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" to

"Be the Furrow of His Brow". The discussion between the twins and the community is marked mostly by the religious aspect of the new motto, considered outrageous by the twins taking into regard that people should not consider themselves as God; but is also characterized by the refusal for the Morgans to accept anything different from what was established by their predecessors. Deacon's dialogue with Reverend Misner and one of Ruby's younger men strengthens the Morgans' control of the town and community:

> "Seems to me, Deek, they are respecting it. It's because they do know the Oven's value that they want to give it new life." . . .
>
> "They don't want to give it nothing. They want to kill it, change it into something they made up."
>
> "It's our history too, sir. Not just yours," said Roy.
>
> "Then act like it. I just told you. That Oven already has a history. It doesn't need you to fix it;" (86)

The passage illustrates not only the inability from the Morgans to accept that a space, and particularly the space of Ruby, is bound to change with time, but also the sense of domination and control that reigns over the community and the struggle to keep the town stuck in time, refusing to give to the younger generations voice and control over their own history.

In addition to that, the new generation is presented, similarly to the chapter "Kiswana" in *The Women of Brewster Place*, as the hope of change and the failed belief in the Civil Rights Movement. The attempt to make Ruby a better place is highlighted by the expectation shared by the young people from Ruby that,

> Since the murder of Martin Luther King, new commitments had been sworn, laws introduced but most of it was decorative: statues, street names, speeches. It was as though something valuable had been pawned

> and the claim ticket lost. That was what Destry, Roy, Little Mirth and the rest were looking for. (117)

Here, Morrison emphasizes through the younger generation's point of view the same argument presented in Kiswana's character by Naylor: the attempt to build a real racial integration in the United States and the consequences it had. Kiswana is not able to change the conditions of Brewster Place, marked by oppression from the real estate company that created it and from the society that segregates it with a wall, in the same way that the young generations of Ruby are not able to claim their Civil Rights Movement lost ticket in a town that oppresses and is based on the conservative values of older men who refuse to accept any new ideas that changes their traditional standards.

The traditionalism and isolation of Ruby is problematized further and made clear with the 8-rock rule presented in the chapter "Patricia", when race purity is exposed as a criteria for Ruby's inhabitants. The chapter displays the story of Patricia, one of Ruby's women, who tries to trace a historical lineage of Ruby in order to build a sense of identity for herself and understand her place in Ruby society. Her job is made harder as the community's women refuse to contribute to her research, changing the conversation and presenting oral evidence that does not help in creating a timeline for the foundation of the town. However, Patricia is able to categorize nine families that were important in the process of migration and construction of Ruby, called the 8-rock families. The concept of the 8-rock families is explained in the excerpt,

> All of them, however, each and every one of the intact nine families, had the little mark she had chosen to put after their names: 8-R. An abbreviation, for eight-rock, a deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them. (193)

These nine families share not only the dark black skin, but also a past of violence and exclusion. First inhabiting the town called Fairly, the nine families face the Disallowing, violent banishment in which "the [white] men . . . insulted them in ways too confounding for language: first by excluding them, then by offering the staples to exist in that very exclusion" (189). The promise of a new home is restored in Haven, a community they can call their own and integrate different peoples; however, once more the arrival of white people creates racial tensions, encouraging the Morgans and the other 8-rock families to migrate deeper into Oklahoma and build their homes in another space.

Patricia, by tracing the footsteps to the beginning of Ruby and studying the 8-rock families, starts understanding the discrimination behind the relations between her family and the rest of Ruby citizens. Her father, member of one of the traditional families that suffered from the Disallowing, marries Delia, a lighter-skinned outsider who passes the light-skin feature to her daughter and granddaughter. The prejudice the family faces is proven by the refusal from the community to accept a white doctor into town to save Delia from death, as well as by Patricia's talk to Reverend Misner, when she pleads to him ""Well, help me figure this place out. I know I'm an outsider, but I'm not an enemy."/ "No, you're not. But in this town those two words mean the same thing"" (212). The parallel Reverend Misner traces between outsiders and enemies strengthens the argument that Ruby's population, traumatized by violence experienced both in Fairly and in Haven, opt for reproducing discrimination by isolating itself from the rest of the world and keeping their lineage within the boundaries of the 8-rock families. Patricia, talking to her father in order to gather more information about her past, is shocked to discover that the criteria used to decide whose family belongs and does not belong to the 8-rock group was based on race purity,

> It was clear as water. The generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too. "God bless the pure and holy" indeed. That was their purity. That was their holiness. . . It wasn't God's brow to be feared. It was his own, their own. . . By whom? The Morgans, probably. They ran everything, controlled everything. What new bargain had the twins struck? . . . Suddenly Pat thought she knew all of it. Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For Immortality. (217)

In other words, the community uses race purity, defined by ranking people into levels of blackness, as a standard for accepting or not accepting who should belong in the families to migrate to a new town. And, in this sense, Ruby citizens, by keeping tradition and avoiding creating an environment that accepts newcomers, perpetrate the trauma and segregation in American society.

To sum up, Ruby, similarly to Brewster Place, is the outcome of processes of segregation and marginalization and, in turn, reproduces them to its citizens and inhabitants. In this sense, the hierarchies and social relations that take place within these spaces contribute extensively to perpetrating marginalization, since the community internalizes them and considers them somehow normal. As mentioned in the introduction of the dissertation, in an American social hierarchy, the individuals who occupy the lower hierarchical layer of power are black women, and, thus, become the target for the reproduction of marginalization and violence.

When it comes to gender, in *Paradise*, the house, similarly to Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, is an important aspect in the analysis of the novel concerning its gender relations, being presented as nurturing and a space for healing. In "House of

Fear: Domesticity and Community in Toni Morrison", David Yagüe González defends the claim that for women and mostly black women,

> "'The woman's place is in the home' – even if that home abuses, confines, perverts. The home as a shelter is an enduring myth that both men and women found reasons to support." (Prince, 2005:66) Many of the inherited traumas the African American community – and specially women within this community – has to endure have taken place within the four walls of their houses. (120)

The idea of houses as places of illusory safety has been inherited since slavery times, as the house was seen not as a shelter, but as the symbolic notion of work and where black women were victims of sexual harassment and oppression by their white owners. González claims that these women, who saw the house not as a place for healing, but one of trauma, perpetrated this idea to other generations, enforcing the need for black women to recreate a safe environment outside their homes (121).

The house is presented as both a site of pain and a haven in "Mavis", the second chapter of the novel that recreates the trajectory of the character Mavis to the Convent. The woman, mother of four children, leaves her youngest twins in the back seat of her husband's Cadillac to go grocery shopping and accidentally suffocates them. Since the beginning of the chapter, the reader is presented with a 27-year-old woman who does not fit into the life she has; her older children do not like her and she believes that her husband gives hints for the children to kill her. The death of the twins, the only family members Mavis has any emotional attachment to, symbolizes her detachment from her family nucleus and the inability to conform and perform the roles of a good mother and wife perpetrated in society. Here, the house is presented as a space for trauma and for painful experiences. Mavis decides then to steal the Cadillac and run away, finding out

that she cannot relate even to her mother, who, despite showing solidarity to her daughter at first, calls Frank, her son-in-law, and tells him to get his wife back.

In her journey through the country, Mavis becomes more emotionally available to people and able to connect with the few women she gives rides to on her way to Los Angeles. It is only when she runs out of gas near the isolated house of the Convent that she is able to find a comforting presence. The Convent is described in this section of the book as wide and unknown, as seen in the excerpt:

> Mavis looked around the kitchen that seemed to her as large as her junior high school cafeteria and that also had swinging wooden doors. She imagined the rooms full of rooms beyond those doors.
>
> "You all ain't scared out here by yourselves? Don't seem like there's nothing for miles outside."
>
> Connie laughed. "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside." (39)

Despite the description of the house as imposing and somehow mysterious, Connie's behavior, together with elements such as the peaches she picks up to make a pie, the homemade coffee and the sweet potatoes on the stove give the house a comforting and nurturing characteristic. The narrative changes to the contrast between the house, mainly its kitchen where "she felt safe" (41), and her impression of Ruby,

> Mavis immediate impression of the little town was how still it was, as though no one lived there. Except for a feed store and a savings and loan bank, it had no recognizable business district. They drove down a wide street, past enormous lawns cut to dazzle in front of churches and pastel-colored houses (45).

Differently from the description of the Convent, Ruby is characterized by Mavis as a place that, though full of people and with more inhabitants than the ones in the Convent, a place with no life and that seems to be stuck in time; the houses, all painted in the same color, also point to the homogeneity of the community and its rigidness, as well as the lack of tolerance for everything that is out of its mainstream patterns. Thus, the Convent is a safe environment not only concerning Mavis' past, but also in relation to Ruby and its mainstream American values.

Morrison presents once again the importance of the house as a welcoming space in "Grace", in which the narrator introduces the story of Grace, also known as Gigi, and how she gets to the Convent. The chapter begins with her arrival in Ruby, which draws the attention of men and mostly K.D. Morgan, Deacon and Steward Morgan's nephew. Grace's first description of Ruby is somehow similar to Mavis', of a place without a sense of a life. Her arrival, similar to Etta Mae's in *The Women of Brewster Place*, is seen with judgmental eyes for most inhabitants and with intense curiosity by men:

> She had stopped five minutes ago in a so-called drugstore, bought cigarettes and learned that the boys at the barbecue grill were telling the truth: there was no motel. And if there was any pie it wasn't served at a restaurant because there wasn't one of those either. Other than the picnic benches at the barbecue thing, there was no public place to sit down. All around her were closed doors and shut windows where parted curtains were swiftly replaced. (68)

The passage above highlights once again the traditionalist nature of Ruby; there is no public life in the town because it does not accept anything different from the social standards of family life, in which women stay in performing domestic roles and men work hard, leaving home only to go to the church or to attend an event in other people's

houses or in the Oven. Also, the notion of intolerance is clearly emphasized in the passage, since there are no open doors available for this outsider who does not fit into the gender role assigned to women.

Grace, in an attempt to take a ride to the nearest bus or train station, takes a lift in a hearse that goes to the Convent in order to pick the body of one of its oldest inhabitants who passed away. It is then that the woman sees Connie for the first time, drunk and sleep deprived. The description of the house, differently from the ones of Ruby, is presented as something mysterious, but also as sexualized:

> Fright, not triumph, spoke in every foot of the embezzler's mansion. Shaped like a live cartridge, it curved to a deadly point at the north end where, originally, the living and dining rooms lay. . . The southern and contained signs of his desire in two rooms: an outsize kitchen and a room where he could play rich men's games. Neither room had a view, but the kitchen had one of the mansion's two entrances . . . Except for the bedrooms no one in the house could see the sun rise, and there was no vantage point to see it set. The light, therefore, was always misleading. (71)

Grace keeps watching the house while Connie sleeps in the kitchen floor, even though the house is full of rooms. The woman goes through the house and depicts it as unconventional and even a bit frightening, and is amused by the many elements that were left from its first owner, an embezzler, such as sexual statues and toys, which somehow relate to the sexualized stereotype first attributed to her. Thus, the character is able to identify with the house and consider it a safe environment for her to live, serving again as a contrast to the judgmental eyes of Ruby's people.

In “Seneca” and “Divine”, the Convent is seen through the stories of Seneca and Pallas, who find in the house and their inhabitants comfort and a place to overcome painful experiences. In the first chapter, the narrator explores the story of Seneca, who is abandoned by her older sister Jean in an orphanage. Since her first rape when she was still a child, Seneca learns that “there was something inside her that made boys snatch her and men flash her” (261). As an adult, Seneca lives an abusive relationship with Eddie, and when he is imprisoned, Seneca finds herself alone and decides to go to his family’s house in order to seek help. Eddie’s mother refuses to provide any help for his son, claiming that Seneca does not really know him and implying that she is just one more of his problematic relationships. The girl decides to leave again, and as she intends to get a bus, is approached by a woman in a limousine that offers her 500 dollars to work for 3 weeks. Though the characteristics of the job are not exposed, the discretion the woman asks Seneca to have, together with the luxurious way of life she lives for a short period of time, implies that the job performed had some sort of abusive and sexual connotation. Seneca goes deep into Oklahoma once more and, lost in a blizzard with nowhere to go, finds in the Convent a shelter.

Similarly to Seneca, Pallas exposes in the chapter entitled “Divine” her trajectory towards the Convent, marked by disillusion. The girl, daughter of a rich entrepreneur and an artist, falls in love with Carlos, the school janitor, and decides to run away with him; but, as she does so, is shocked to learn that Carlos is actually infatuated with his mother and refuses to have a romantic relationship with her. Pallas runs away again and finds comfort to her depression in the Convent. Here, the character describes the house as nurturing,

> Pallas, bred in the overlight of Los Angeles, in houses without basements, associated them with movie evil or trash or crawling things.

> She gripped Seneca's hand and breathed trough her mouth. But the gestures were expressions of anticipated, not genuine, alarm. In fact, as they climbed the stairs, images of a grandmother rocking peacefully, of arms, a lap, a singing voice soothed her. The whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too. As though she might meet herself here – an unbridled, authentic self, but which she thought of as "cool" self – in one of this house's many rooms. (177)

For Pallas, the Convent and its women create an atmosphere where she can feel safe to show her traumas. Though leaving the Convent to live with her father once, the character decides to go back to the house as she discovers that she is pregnant. The character's return to the Convent then emphasizes her decision to take control over her own life and run away from the prejudice and social retaliation from her schoolmates. The Covent presents itself, once more, as a space where she can heal her wounds.

Finally, in "Consolata", the narrator presents the trajectory of the most important figures of the Convent, Connie, and how the conflicts between the isolated house and Ruby begin. One of the Convent's teachers called Mary Magna, in a trip to Brazil, rescues the young Consolata, who had been raped several times and is found in a street garbage, and takes her to the house in order for her to be taught together with the Native Americans who attend the school. With time, the Native American girls go away from the school and the eight-rock families found Ruby; that is when Connie sees Deacon Morgan for the first time. Infatuated with each other since they first meet, Deacon and Connie start meeting each other near the Convent, even though he is already married to Soane. The relationship lasts for some time, but Deacon ends up feeling intimidated by Connie's behavior towards sexuality as she bites his lip with desire. The event triggers,

on the one hand, the rupture of the bond between the male figures of Ruby and the women of the Convent; on the other hand, the bond between Ruby's women and the house becomes stronger. Soane goes to the Convent in order to meet his husband's mistress and finds in Connie a friend; Loane goes to the house in order to buy peppers and other herbs; and Arnette goes to the Convent to abort her unwanted child. In sum, at the same time that the women from the Convent become a threat to men as they do not fit into the submissive and chaste role assigned to women, they become a reference to the town's women since they provide a consoling space for anyone who needs it.

Despite the fact that the Convent is portrayed as a healing space, the dysfunctional relationship between the house and the male inhabitants of Ruby, first evidenced with the relationship between Deacon and Connie, is reinforced as the Oven is appropriated by men. The argument is well described in the book *Burnin' Down the House: Home in African American Literature,*

> The oven is taken apart brick by brick and moved to the center of the new town [Ruby], where it is reassembled. The hearth is home for the residents of Haven and later, the new established Ruby. And, significantly, it is not located in a kitchen place. Instead it is outside, in the center of the town. Once the oven is removed from the kitchen, just as in *Native Son*, the illusion of (black) female authority is shattered. Morrison literally removes the kitchen walls that might otherwise reinforce the pretense of (black) female power, concealing the true male authority that maintains identity, passes along traditions, conduct business, and polices the community. (Price 68)

The scholar defends in this claim that the oven, a traditional symbol strongly associated with the image of the black woman, is dispossessed through the symbol of the Oven,

important place in Ruby where meetings are held and celebrations take place. By taking the oven from the kitchen, Morrison is enforcing the power men have in this society and the inability for women to speak for themselves and take an active role in the development of the town. Therefore, in the same way that the wall segregates and confines women in *The Women of Brewster Place*, the Oven in *Paradise*, placed in the center of Ruby, reiterates the idea that women are powerless and that men hold control over the space.

In spite of Ruby's men appropriating themselves of the black female space of the Oven, the violence directed to black women, especially to the black women of the Convent, serves as a tool for encouraging the creation of bonds amongst them. The women's reaction towards the cycle of abuse they live in is shown in the chapter "Consolata", with Connie taking action to incite the women to bond with each other,

> That is how the loud dreaming began. How the stories rose in that place. Half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles. And it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning. In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer's tale. They enter that heat in the Cadillac . . . inhale the perfume of sleeping infants and feel parent-cozy although they notice one's head is turned awkwardly. They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive away home . . . The male voices saying saying forever saying push their own down their throats. Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict . . . Runs up and down the halls by day, sleeps in a ball with the lights on at night. Folds the five hundred dollars in the foot of her sock. Yelps with pain

> from a stranger's penis and a mother's rivalry – alluring and corrosive as cocaine. (264)

The passage shows the importance of the loud dreaming sessions Connie creates to help Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas know more about each other and connect with each other's stories. The ache in their bodies evidence that the common characteristic in all of these women's lives is pain, and it is by accessing this pain that they are able to bond to each other and heal from their traumas. The loud dreaming session, then, has the same function of the common dream of being raped in Lorraine's place in *The Women of Brewster Place*, connecting them through a shared painful experience.

Therefore, the space of the house is presented in contradictory ways in *Paradise* in the same way that it is depicted in *The Women of Brewster Place*, having in mind that on the one hand the house is a space for confinement and abuse in these women's pasts and that the oven, important symbol of African-American women, is taken away from them. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the Convent becomes a place of cure, where Connie, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas relate to each other and become empowered in order to overcome their abusive life stories.

3.3 Black Subjectivities and Controlling Images in *The Women Of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*

In Chapter 2, the notion of identity was exposed as a concept that, similarly to racialized and gendered spaces, is socially constructed. Huseyin Cingoglu and Yusuf Arikan divided the aspects of identity formation into two major categories: structure and agency. The former refers to structures of power in which an individual is inserted, which influences the options regarding types of identity one can assume; the latter refers to the choices one has concerning the subjectivities to be assumed. In this sense, the

racialized spaces of Brewster Place, its wall, the Convent and Ruby function as structures in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, as they model the identities that its inhabitants can assume. Also, Linda Martín Alcoff provides an important aspect concerning the agency one has when inserted in a range of social relations: when it comes to identity formation, there are aspects that are relational, that is, conceived through interaction amongst individuals, but others that are fundamental and cannot be changed. Brewster Place and the Convent women are women and black, and these characteristics cannot be changed and influence directly their processes of identification.

Also, Patricia Hill Collins exemplifies the fundamental characteristics mentioned by Alcoff through the concepts of black women's controlling images. The term *controlling images* refers to a process in which a dominant group of society, putting itself in a higher hierarchical position, categorizes the marginalized groups of society as the Other, inferior and object of manipulation. This manipulation happens through the creation of stereotypical images related to black women, such as asexualized mammies, matriarchs that are bad mothers, welfare mothers that neglect their children and jezebels that are oversexualized. These images denigrate the black community and especially its women, creating an image of black women as individuals with no responsibilities and self-worthiness, bound to be dominated and oppressed.

On the other hand, the experience of black men tends to be problematized as they have to deal with what bell hooks calls ambiguous messages given to them by society. At the same time that black men learn early in their childhood the patriarchal ideal that men are made to dominate things, they are not able to achieve that standard of behavior since race intervenes and stereotypes of black men as violent, oversexualized and potential rapists are widespread and get in their way. Therefore black men, failing in the

attempt to achieve a notion of masculinity that sees white men as its beneficiary, become angry black men, and take their frustration and anger out on black women, the last group in a hierarchy of race and gender.

In the novels *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, Patricia Hill Collins' notion of controlling images is presented by the authors as a means of plastering the identities of its women and their role in society. Both novels present characters who try to enact gender roles in American society, but are oppressed through the controlling images associated with black women. Mattie is first depicted in *The Women of Brewster Place* through the mammy image, being described by Eugene as "that fat, black bitch" (90). She is the one who "represent[s] the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behavior. By loving, nurturing and caring for her white children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant's group perceptions of the ideal Black female" (Collins 72). In that sense, she is presented as sort of asexualized individuals who are responsible for providing comfort to whoever needs it.

Etta Mae Johnson and Grace (Gigi), in turn, are fist associated with the controlling image of the jezebel, which "represent[s] a deviant Black female sexuality" (Collins 82). In fact, both Etta Mae's and Grace's descriptions in the beginning of the novels reinforce the idea that, because they are more liberal when it comes to their sexuality and represent the counterpart of the traditional image of the subservient woman, they are seen with judgmental eyes and not taken seriously by the community members. This is shown in Morrison's *Paradise* in the scene when the Convent women attend K.D's and Arnette's wedding, for example:

> "Have you ever in your life seen such carrying on? Bet you can't locate one brassiere in the whole bunch." . . .
>
> "This is a wedding, remember?"

"You're right, aunt Alice. I said you right."

"How would you like to have somebody dancing nasty at your wedding?" (158)

The behavior of the Convent women, and mostly of Gigi, is seen as sexually deviant, which is understood at the same time as a threat to subservient women and also as appealing to men, as for example to K.D. in *Paradise* and to Reverend Woods in *The Women of Brewster Place.*

In addition to that, the controlling image of the welfare mother is also exposed in *The Women of Brewster Place* in the character of Cora Lee. Defined by Collins as "the image of the welfare mother [that] constitutes a class-specific, controlling image developed for poor, working-class Black women who make use of social welfare benefits to which they are entitled by law" (78). Cora Lee is described in the beginning of her chapter as a girl who has always liked dolls and who grows up to become a woman obsessed with babies, though not liking them anymore when they become infants and demand responsibilities,

> Oh, for them to stay like this, when they could be fed from her body so there were no welfare offices to sit in all day or food stamp lines to stand on, when she alone could be their substance and their world, when there were no neighbors or teachers or social workers to answer to about their actions. They stayed where you put them and were so easy to keep clean. (112)

The passage above represents Cora Lee's inability to relate to her older children as well as her dissatisfaction in being an example of the welfare mother; even though she dislikes being dependent on the state to live, she does not know how to get out of this situation because of her many domestic chores as a mother.

Though not defined as a specific controlling image, other characters from *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, such as Lucielia and Mavis, struggle with the gender role of being a mother and a wife. Both characters try to cope in a family structure that is dysfunctional since both gender roles of black women and men clash with each other. Also, characters such as Kiswana, Lorraine, Seneca and Pallas try to find a sense of identity in the novels, problematized by the intersections of race, gender, class and sexual orientation.

Furthermore, the controlling images of black women are highlighted in the novels by black men, whom, frustrated with their failure in performing their masculinities, project their rage onto their mothers, wives, daughters and female neighbors. The argument is developed in the article "Black Female and Male Images in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and *The Men of Brewster Place*",

> While the Afro-American females have had to "bear a heavy burden of male frustration and rage through physical abuse, desertions, rejections of their femininity and general appearance". . . Afro-American males have had to live with the image of "shiftless, irresponsible, do-nothing; a manchild on whom no one can depend." (Jardim 86)

Similarly to the controlling images of women, the stereotypes associated to men have been originated in slavery times; being forced to watch women of their communities being abused by their white owners has created a sense of castration that becomes stronger with the end of slavery and the lack of jobs directed to black men. Black men, who bought into the American image of the successful man and provider of his family, found that the only way they could assert their masculinity was either through their sexuality and violent behavior, which created another stereotype of black men as violent and rapists, and, the most common option, through "reversing the situation by

dominating the group the patriarchy has damned as even more inferior, black women" (Jardim 86).

In *The Women of Brewster Place,* the image of the black man as oppressor and castrated is seen in many instances: in Basil and his irresponsible behavior towards Mattie, which renders her to lose her beloved house; in Reverend Woods and his seductiveness with the purpose of using women like Etta Mae; in Ben and his traumatic past, when he sees his daughter being sexually harassed by his white landlord but does not do anything to prevent it; but mostly in the characters of Eugene and C.C. Baker, who internalize a notion of masculinity that results in painful and even criminal experiences directed towards Brewster Place women. In the case of Eugene, Naylor presents a man who is unable to perform the social role of the man as the provider of the house, thus being the head of the family. His refusal to let Lucielia work and his inability to have a steady job puts him is a crossroads with few choices, and he opts for transferring all the family responsibilities to his wife,

> His manhood and pride are what matter the most to him, and the only way he has of diminishing his failure in being unable to financially support his family is by passing on the responsibility of parenting to Ciel. The moment he disassociates himself from the family unit and the responsibilities which come with it, his manhood is "saved" and he can go on with his life. (Jardim 88-89)

Eugene is able to perform his manhood through sexual intercourses with his wife; however, he is challenged once more with Lucielia's unexpected pregnancy and the consequent lack of future prospects of achieving better life conditions. His oppression is then evidenced as he incites Ciel to abort the child, and, as she does so, in his decision to work elsewhere, denying completely any family responsibilities and emotional

attachments. The fight, which results in Serena's death, shows the ultimate rupture of this family and in a situation where "black men and women plac[e] [the] ultimate blame for their subjugation on each other" (Jardim 86). Hence, Naylor presents in Eugene the black man as frustrated and as an absent husband and father.

Differently from Eugene, C.C. Baker evokes the image of the young black man trying to assert his masculinity outside family unit. He is the man who, besides buying the same idea of masculinity that Eugene performs, tries to achieve it by means of assuming a behavior of constantly proving it. When confronted by Kiswana, an educated woman, and laughed at by Lorraine, a homosexual, C.C. Baker, who has not even finished elementary school, feels emasculated and diminished, thus having to prove that he is able to dominate them and prove himself better. Miriam Jardim strengthens this claim by arguing that "[c]learly their wish of possessing her sexually is not so much for the sexual pleasure it can grant them, but with the intent of cruelly hurting her not only physically but, in the process, silencing her and also destroying her integrity and self-esteem" (93). Therefore, raping Lorraine is the way Baker finds to put her in a lower hierarchical place in comparison to him, and, through his character, Naylor evidences the violent behavior directed towards black women.

Likewise, in *Paradise* Morrison presents male characters that, though able to perform the idea of masculinity by creating a prosperous community, have to assert their power through violence and abuse. This idea is presented in Frank, Mavis' husband, who rapes her and "tr[ies] to bother" (*Paradise*, 314) their daughter; in K.D. Morgan and his irresponsible behavior, slapping his girlfriend Arnette when he finds out that she's pregnant and claiming that she "cornered [him] at more socials than [he] can remember and when [he] finally agreed [he] didn't have to take [her] drawers down [she] beat [him] to it so this ain't [his] problem" (*Paradise*, 54); in Carlos, who

maintains a romantic relationship with Pallas and her mother; in the boys who rape Pallas when she runs away from home and Seneca when she is a child, but mostly in the twins Deacon and Steward Morgan.

In Steward Morgan's character, described as the twin who is "a leader in everything" (17), his frustration in achieving the ideal of manhood, though not evidenced by standards of wealth, is problematized regarding lineage. This is made clear with Dovey's description of him:

> Almost always, these nights, when Dovey Morgan thought about her husband it was in terms of what he had lost. His sense of taste one example of the many she counted. Contrary to his (and all of Ruby's) assessment, the more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses. The sale of his heard at 1958's top dollar accompanied his defeat in the statewide election for church Secretary because of his outspoken contempt for the schoolchildren sitting in that drugstore in Oklahoma City . . . Small losses that culminated with the big one: in 1964, when he was forty, Fairy's curse came true: they learned neither of them could ever have children. (82)

Therefore, though considered a successful man and provider for his family, Steward is unable to achieve the complete sense of manhood as he cannot provide an heir to continue the eight rock legacy. Considering himself one of the owners of Ruby, Steward then projects his feelings of defeat by not being content with what he already has and always defining himself more by what he loses than by what he actually achieves. And, in this sense, a strategy to assert himself to the community is to dominate both the town community by neglecting the ideas of Ruby's younger generations and specially by proving his power over the Convent women.

Morrison displays Deacon Morgan, in turn, as a sort of a shadow of his brother Steward. The argument can be evidenced by his behavior after the Convent retaliation, when he is the one who "ha[s] changed the most. It was as though he had looked in his brother's face and did not like himself anymore" (300). The failure in Deacon's attempt to achieve an image of masculine man can be seen in two instances: first with his failure to avoid the death of both of his sons, who go to war and believe that Vietnam is safer than Mississippi and Louisiana; secondly, with his infidelity towards Soane and his romantic relationship with Connie, who ends because he feels intimidated by Connie's sexual freedom and her act of biting his lip until it hurts, as if she actually wants to eat him. Here, the repulsion he feels towards Connie reveals that he relates her to the jezebel image, oversexualized and someone not to be taken seriously. His act of proving himself is shown as he too walks within the Convent with the purpose of banishing the women who live there; however, differently from his brother, he is unable to do so, refusing to shoot Connie and later confessing to Reverend Misner,

> Deacon began to speak of a woman he had used; how he had turned up his nose at her because her loose and easy ways gave him the license to drop and despise her. That while the adultery preyed on him for a short while (very short), his long remorse was at having become what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different. (302)

Thus, Morrison presents in Deacon's character a man who, despite oppressing the women from his community and the Convent, achieves a sense of self-realization and attempts to redeem himself. His oppression is displayed as the shadow of his brother's actions, together with the threat felt for having a relationship with an independent woman who sees herself as an equal to him.

In spite of black men reinforcing the controlling images associated to black women through a patriarchal system that oppresses both black women and men, the space of the house proves itself as a haven where women can gather together, share their stories and give strength to each other. In fact, Naylor and Morrison present both in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* apartments and the house of the Convent as spaces where women tell each other their stories; in *The Women of Brewster Place*, it is where Mattie tells Miss Eva how she had had her son Basil, where Etta Mae finds hope after being deceived by Reverend Woods, where Kiswana can talk with her mother about who she wants to be, where Lucielia can be reborn after the death of her child, where Cora Lee finds out that she can be a better mother to their children, and where Thereza and Lorraine find a safe place to discuss their sexuality and be themselves without fear of prejudice. In *Paradise*, the Convent is presented as the space where Connie is first welcomed, where Mavis finds herself released of the pressure of being a good mother and wife, where Gigi can be herself without being judged, where Seneca can overcome the trauma of being raped when very young and being abandoned by her sister and where Pallas can overcome the pain of losing her lover to her mother and being pregnant. Besides, the Convent is presented also as a safe haven to women from Ruby, welcoming them every time they have to abort a child, want to escape from a subjugating life, or just want to find some comfort to be themselves without being misjudged by people in general. Therefore, the spaces of the apartments and the Convent, by providing a safe environment for these women to share their stories, help them become more independent and self-aware. By discussing their painful experiences together, these women feel empowered to continue their lives, knowing that they are not alone and can help each other whenever in need.

The new subjectivities assumed both in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, hence, are key elements when it comes to facing their pasts and traumas. In Naylor's novel, this is seen in Mattie's dream of the block party and in the women's act of tearing the wall apart, "almost in perfect unison with the beating of their hearts" (187). Mattie's awakening to a sunny day signals the idea that, though these women have gone through rough patches in life, there is still hope of making through the day if they stick with one another – together they can break the wall and finally have themselves heard by society. In Morrison's novel, the women are empowered and reinvent themselves as, after the violence in the Convent and Connie's death, they are able to confront their pasts: Gigi encounters her father, who is in jail, Mavis sees her daughter Sally, now a woman, and finds out that she really loves her mother; Seneca meets her sister who has abandoned her, though she does not recognize her, and Pallas, now with a baby, goes back to her mother's house in order to pick up her shoes. By collectively achieving closure of their pasts the group of women is able to keep going with their lives.

In conclusion, the space of the house, presented as the apartments in Brewster Place and as the Convent, is explored both by Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison as spaces that evidence oppressions of race and gender, but, as they do so, incite the women who inhabit them to share their stories and bond with each other. This act of bonding, in turn, empowers these groups of women and triggers a process in which they reinvent themselves and deviate from the controlling images first assigned to them.

CONCLUSION

> *Each one of us has lived through some devastation, some loneliness . . . when we look at each other we must say, I understand. I understand how you feel because I have been there myself.*
>
> *Maya Angelou*

The emergence of spatial studies, considered relatively new in literary analysis, is an important aspect to understand how different forms of marginalization work within a societal organization. They are created out of social negotiations and reflect relations of power that are embedded in their geographical structure. Thus, by understanding how the mechanisms of power work inside spaces, it is possible to infer how disparities of race, gender, class and ethnicity, for instance, are conceived and propagated in different societies.

Within spatial analysis, the image of the house has a strong influence in African-American culture; it recalls slavery times and exploitation, but it also has a strong symbolism for black women. It is in the house that women meet each other to tell their struggles and share their dreams, and, in doing so, bond with each other. Black women can face abuse and abandonment within their family structures, but together they are able to overcome these experiences and in the process of reinventing themselves, create a true sense of home.

Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison show in their novels *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, then, the idea of spaces marked by struggles that are transformed into homes by groups of women. They present in their works spaces that are extremely racialized, as they divide black from white communities either through a wall or miles

deep into the country and evidence division even within the black community. The domestic space of the house, depicted as gendered spaces that confirm the differences and hierarchies related to gender roles in society, confines women and oppresses them in some ways, but by doing so, arouse a process of self-reflection which makes women find ways to, as David González claims, create homes outside their family units.

Through the racialized and gendered spaces of their novels, Naylor and Morrison are able to break apart with the image of the black woman as naturally strong and matriarchs, image perpetrated by a white patriarchal society with the purpose of manipulating the way society sees black people and devalue black women and also emasculate black men. This way, neither black women nor black men are able to create a strong community that can in fact ascend socially. In *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*, the authors show characters, especially women, with their flaws and life challenges, not with the purpose of victimizing them, but with the intent to create a more realistic and diverse picture of the African-American society and expose a racism that, though not as institutionalized as in the period of the Jim Crow Laws, is still part of American society even after the Civil Rights Movement.

In sum, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise* show, through the lives and struggles of black women, the need for women to bond in order to heal. Despite having been written a decade and a half apart from each other, the two novels address issues that are current in our present society, seeing that patriarchal values are still internalized by men and women, and controlling images both regarding black women and men are passed on through generations. The productions of female authorship, which gain more ground within diverse areas of society, gradually foster the need to deconstruct these values that oppress so many lives.

The present dissertation had the purpose of claiming that racialized and gendered spaces intervene in the subjectivities of the main characters of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Paradise*. They do so by presenting the apartments of Brewster Place and the Convent as spaces for connection and cure of these women and showing how they reinvent themselves at the end of the plot. Furthermore, other issues can be explored in future works and will contribute extensively to portray a picture of the current exploitation of black communities in the United States and other countries, such as the relation between spaces with the idea of a nation that is perpetrated, the hierarchies between genders evidenced in the black female body, the issue of mysticism and religion blended in the two novels as well as the duality between literary and geographic spaces.

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