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~~/~~BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE~~/~~ RECLAIMING HOMEPLACE IN

GLORIA NAYLOR'S *LINDEN HILLS* AND *MAMA DAY*

by

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A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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ABSTRACT

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE: RECLAIMING HOMEPLACE IN

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The last eighty years have been marked by a large body of work by black American women authors who contemplate the effects of place on character. These authors both use and transform the notion of space itself as a way to bring to light traditionally marginalized voices that have been denied a place amongst the annals of history and in literature. Gloria Naylor, whose body of work spans the 1980's through the present day, is one such contemporary revisionist. My analysis of Naylor's novels, *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, considers how Naylor employs geographic structure and landscape to expose and explore extant power structures, as well as the effects of these power relations on the development of individuals and communities. In the end, I argue, Naylor illustrates the possibility of resistance to the deleterious effects of dominating power relations through the reclamation of homeplace, or (conventionally female) domestic space, by strong female protagonists. I underpin my argument by bringing into conversation with Naylor's texts, the works of bell hooks and Michel Foucault.

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A THESIS

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2011

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“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

- Audre Lorde

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“Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories.

Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and

literary practice.”

- bell hooks

-

In “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” bell hooks intervenes in contemporary discourses that usurp and misname experiences of “the other.” hooks argues that to position persons in the margins not represented by dominant norms and to name them as “other,” allows dominant discourse to define them, locates their identities as always already on the outside, privileges the voices of the center, and silences marginalized voices before they can begin to speak. hooks, in response, reinvents the margin as “a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category of colonized/colonizer” (hooks “Choosing” 152). Her call to action is a call to reinvent the space itself as a site of liberation, not domination.

Such revisions of spaces are critical to the project of black women theorists committed to bringing to light legacies of African American women that have been denied a place amongst the annals of history and in literature. As Mae Gwendolyn Henderson argues, “Self-inscription of black women requires disruption, rereading, and

rewriting the conventional and canonical stories, as well as revising the conventional genre forms that convey these stories” (Henderson 358).

In literature by black American women, one way in which concern over such revisions is illustrated is through the concentration on location as a driving force in their stories. Barbara Christian comments on this trend, stating:

Perhaps Afro-American writers have been particularly interested in setting, because displacement, first from Africa and then through migrations from South to North, has been so much a part of our history. Because of the consistency of forced displacement in our collective experience, we know how critical where we are is to the character of our social creations, of how place helps to tell us a great deal about who we are and who we can become. (Christian 106)

To be sure, the last eighty years have been marked by a large body of work by black American women authors who contemplate the effects of place on character, from Zora Neale Hurston’s *Color Struck* to Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* to Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and *Paradise* to Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, to name only a few.

In the fictional works of one such revisionist, Gloria Naylor, geographic structure and landscape play key roles in the development of her stories. In *The Women of Brewster Place* and *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor explores the lives of inhabitants of a walled-in housing project, where residents are confined not only by economic circumstances, but by physical ramparts as well. *Bailey’s Café*, the restaurant from which characters tell their stories is situated “between the edge of the world and infinite possibility” (Naylor BC 76), signifying a space that resists boundaries, order and closure. For the purposes of this thesis, I will consider the second and third novels in Naylor’s

oeuvre, *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, because they provide a connection between the other works noted above. Described as “sympiotically related” (Montgomery 31) for their interconnecting stories (characters in each of Naylor’s novels are often related intertextually by familial ties), the stories of *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day* provide a bridge between the “finality suggested by her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*” (Montgomery 31) and the possibility of a new world order as described in *Bailey’s Café*.

In *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, the importance of space is foregrounded in both texts. As with her other works, Naylor creates fictional landscapes along which extant power structures can be exposed and explored. In the following thesis, I describe the ways in which the geographical city spaces of both novels are geared toward the control of each area’s inhabitants. In the first section, I explore the geographical cityscape of the town of Linden Hills with particular attention to how this structure represents a Foucaultian panopticon designed to reinforce white, patriarchal, capitalistic order. I then demonstrate how such organization leads to alienation and lack of a positive community.

In the second section, I explore the cityscape of New York City in *Mama Day*. Though less obvious than the panoptic structure of Linden Hills, the space of New York City still consolidates power to the city center, which stands in for white, patriarchal, capitalistic order. The configuration of the city and the way in which power is distributed also lead to alienation and a lack of positive communities.

In the final section, I explore spaces of liberation in both texts and how central problems with power, control, and community are alleviated in these spaces. In particular, I look at the way powerful female characters reclaim what hooks calls “homeplaces,” or sites of healing that are free from the hegemonic pressure of dominant

power relations. Such spaces are rooted in a tradition of black women's struggle to provide a site for "renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole" (hooks "Homeplace" 49). These homeplaces provide means of liberation otherwise unavailable to the marginalized inhabitants of Linden Hills and New York City. Ultimately, it seems as if Naylor answers hooks' and Henderson's clarion calls to meet them in the margins by revising and reclaiming dominant ideas of space, the results of which provide means of liberation that affirm and sustain the self and community rather than limit and destroy.

Chapter 1: Geographical Panopticon: *Linden Hills*

In the following section, I begin by providing a brief synopsis of *Linden Hills*' plot, followed by a description of the way the town of Linden Hills was formed and distributed geographically, as well as in terms of its population. Through this description, I begin to discuss the ways in which the space of Linden Hills became imbued with value. I then describe how this spatial distribution becomes a means of control and finally how the geography of this space serves to prevent the formation of a community.

A Brief Synopsis: *Linden Hills*

Linden Hills, at least on the surface, is the story of two young African American men, Lester and Willie (also known as Shit and White, respectively), circling their way through the streets of the town of Linden Hills, picking up odd jobs from the town's inhabitants as a means to pocket funds to spend during the upcoming Christmas holiday. Along the way, they encounter the residents of the town and offer reflective insights into those residents' lives, particularly in terms of how those residents have given up various

aspects of their identities and effectively sold their souls to the town's patriarchal family, the Nedeeds, in order to "make it" in Linden Hills (Naylor *LH* 15).

Tracing Lester and Willie's travels chronologically, beginning five days before Christmas Day, the story culminates on Christmas Eve at Luther Nedeed's house (located at the bottom of the V-shaped town), where Lester and Willie bear witness to the resurrection of Luther's wife, Willa Prescott Nedeed, who Luther has previously trapped in his basement along with their son (who has since died), and whose story, written in an alternate typeface, has also been developing from the novel's beginning, interwoven throughout the text¹. As Willa reenters the main narrative, she lunges at her husband, sandwiching their dead son between them, and careens into the fireplace. In doing so, Willa sets herself, her son, her husband, and the entire Nedeed house ablaze as Lester and Willie narrowly escape in time to watch the house (and House) of Nedeed burn, and as the entire town of Linden Hills turns away from its demise. As I will explain, the burning down of Nedeed's house may be viewed as an inevitable outcome in the fight to create a space of liberation within the walls of an oppressive landscape. But first, the creation of such a landscape must be reviewed.

The written history of Linden Hills² began in 1820 with its purchase by the first Luther Nedeed, a black man who was rumored to have sold his wife and children to finance the acquisition. Then viewed by the white inhabitants of the surrounding areas as "hard sod only good enough to support linden trees that barely got you ten cents on the dollar for a cord of oak or birch" (Naylor *LH* 2), Linden Hills is divided from the neighboring Putney Wayne (originally a set of fields owned by a white sheep farmer of the same name) by Wayne Avenue, and slopes down a rocky face, curving through the

town's cemetery, coming to a sharp point bordering an apple orchard originally owned by another white farmer by the name of Patterson³.

Over time, Luther Nedeed and the successors of his land, legacy, and name developed the area to finally include a series of eight curved roads circling the hill, the names of each being, in sequence, First Crescent Drive through Fifth Crescent Drive and the last three composing Tupelo Drive. Building his own home at the bottom-most point of the "V," the first Nedeed also established an undertaking business and built a set of shacks along First Crescent Drive. His son, also Luther, finally succeeded in renting these shacks to a number of black families alleged to have been "murderers, root doctors, carpetbaggers, and bootleg preachers who were thrown out of the South and needed the short memory of the dead and the long shadows of the lindens for their left-of-center carryings-on" (Naylor *LH* 5-6). By lining the boundaries of Linden Hills with families deemed by society as undesirable, Nedeed took one of his first steps in controlling the space of Linden Hills. Here he ensures (at least in the town's inchoate stages), through a process that may be seen as a type of reverse gentrification, that the successful development within the town's boundaries was kept hidden by an unfavorable face. Eventually, the space in between became populated by wealthier black families.

Still, as "the last farmlands gave way to housing developments" (Naylor *LH* 6), the young Luther Nedeed's Linden Hills became increasingly desirable to outsiders. Seeing how intensely the government and real estate developers now wanted the land, the second Luther took measures to ensure they would never obtain it, going "through the hill with his son [Luther] beside him and, starting with First Crescent Drive all the way through Fifth Crescent Drive, sold the land practically for air to the blacks who were

shacking there. He gave them a thousand-year-and-a-day lease – provided only that they passed their property on to their children. And if they wanted to sell it, they had to sell it to another black family or the rights would revert back to the Nedeeds” (7). Here again, we see an attempt to fix the boundaries of Linden Hills, by specifying laws of inheritance. In one sense, this act may be viewed as liberating from an oppressive white culture, as the notion of inherited property has long served as a powerful means of ensuring white male hegemony. But, as we will later discover, tying Linden Hills to those very same capitalistic practices that have benefited white males will come at a cost, and the illusion of liberation by these means will come to the surface. As we will see, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 112).

The designation of “Linden Hills” thusly became a prized appellation, with more or less everyone in Wayne County at one point or another claiming to live within its boundaries. As Naylor notes, “There were other black communities with showcase homes, but somehow making it into Linden Hills meant ‘making it’ (Naylor *LH* 15). Further, “making it” in Linden Hills necessarily means moving down geographically to move up metaphorically; the closer one gets to Luther Nedeed’s home (i.e., the coveted Tupelo Drive section of town), the more *successful* (in a capitalistic sense, at least) one has or will become. As such, space here becomes imbued with value.

For the first through the contemporary Luther Nedeed, the alleged intent of Linden Hills was to overcome racial inequality by ensuring economic equality. To do this, Nedeed, *et. al.* created a “showcase” (9) neighborhood, “an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County but reflected it black” (9). Whether the true intention was to better the economic circumstances of its black inhabitants, increase the size of

Nedeed's bank account, "spit right in the white eye of America," (9), or (more likely) a combination of the above, Linden Hills eventually became a symbol of black financial success in a white-owned world. And yet, as we shall explore, such success does not guarantee positive community formation and, in the end, proves to be a false god.

Space and Geography

That space is a central issue in *Linden Hills* is apparent from the very beginning of the text, as is evident in the first paragraph of the novel: "There had been a dispute for years over the exact location of Linden Hills. Everyone associated with Wayne County had taken part in it: the U. S. Post Office, census takers, city surveyors, real estate brokers, and the menagerie of blacks and whites who had lived on its fringes for a hundred and sixty years.... [Its] boundaries contracted and expanded over the years to include no one, and then practically everyone in Wayne County" (Naylor *LH* 1). Indeed, the "exact location" of Linden Hills is the subject of much debate, particularly by agencies that legitimize value (realtors, surveyors, census takers, etc.). The inability to fix Linden Hills' location is of importance, illustrating how value is measured in a capitalist society, if we understand that, in terms of capitalism, goods (including houses and land) only exist when they become measurable commodities. (Indeed, one of the perceivably great powers of capitalistic systems is that monetary exchange can readily capture the value of all sorts of previously incommensurable goods.) At the same time, the inability to fasten the boundaries of Linden Hills also speaks to the ways in which boundaries are constructed and yet remain transitory, allowing for the possibility of movement when deemed desirable or appropriate, most often by those in politically

powerful positions. That “no one, then practically everyone” (1) wanted to live there reflects how the value of land is tied to such power in a capitalist society.

In Naylor’s fictional worlds, the landscape is never accidental, but most often functions to reveal the true nature of the systems it retains. In Linden Hills, the shape of the land and the positions of the homes that reside upon it are already a testimony to the logic of the system they inhabit. To “move up” metaphorically, one must “move down” geographically, and the V-shape nature of the space already guarantees that those at the bottom of the “V” (which is necessarily a smaller space than at the top) remain few, thus assuring the desire of the many at the top of the hill for that which is owned by the few at the bottom remains great (see the laws of supply and demand). All of the houses in Linden Hills face the point of the “V” (with the exception of Nedeed’s home, which faces up and affords him the view of the world he and his predecessors created), thus they are encouraged to look toward their goal, which, we have already established, is to move down to the bigger and more exclusive houses closest to Nedeed’s house. Nedeed, the founder or patriarch of Linden Hills, lords over his domain from the bottom of the “V.” All roads in Linden Hills eventually lead to Nedeed, as does the wealth generated from the leases on the homes of Linden Hills eventually fills his coffers by way of Nedeed’s Tupelo Realty Company and as do the bodies of Linden Hills’ inhabitants, upon meeting their demises, find their way into Nedeed’s embalming room, the last stop before they are interred in the cemetery. Either way, Luther Nedeed (any of the Luther Nedeeds) reaps the financial benefit of the machine he created as he watches it run from his veranda. As Nedeed states, “Just sit right here and they’ll make you a rich man through the two things they’ll *have* to do: live and die” (Naylor *LH* 6).

And so it would seem that Nedeed's dream of turning Linden Hills into "an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County, but reflected it black" (Naylor *LH* 9) had come to pass. And the geography of the town itself was in more than a small way responsible. Barbara Christian comments:

Naylor... stresses that [Linden Hills was] started by men for the purpose of consolidating power. The intentions of these men are evident in the geographical choices they make. Nedeed's choice of a 'V-shaped section of land,' 'the northern face of a worthless plateau,' indicates his direction. Not only is its site so clearly visible; even more important, its V-shape allows his land to be both self-enclosed yet situated in the world. And since Nedeed lives on the lowest level of 'the hills,' he stands as a sentry to his private development. (Christian 109)

Indeed, Nedeed's location allows him to be in control of Linden Hills, determining who he allows in Linden Hills and how the area develops.

Panoptism and Control

The geography of Linden Hills, for Nedeed, is hence revealed as an important means of control. Nedeed knows that to maintain his "ebony jewel" he must control the space, and he exerts control over the area and its residents through maps, boundaries, walls, laws of inheritance, etc. But to assume that the residents of Linden Hills follow an order that can be illustrated as a direct line from Nedeed to each of them would be an oversimplification of Nedeed's creation. Perhaps this is why Linden Hills is not simply a line of houses leading to Nedeed's house, but a series of houses along circular drives

that come to a point with Nedeed's house. In other words, the way Linden Hills is organized reflects the ways in which power works on and in that space.

Implicit in the study of the effect of place on characters is the idea that our concept of the geographic, or literally that which describes the world, is a political one. The acts of identifying and describing (and thus naming) place are already intimately bound up in social discourses that are inescapably influenced by extant power structures. To organize the world geographically is to order, hierarchically, the world in terms of its value. To understand the underpinnings of such order relates directly to Naylor's project, which is in part, in my opinion, to expose the ways power functions through social practices such as naming and mapping. Naylor also points out the particular problem of engaging in practices that once served as a means of repression. While one cannot deny the importance of some degree of wealth, one also cannot deny the problems when methods of monetary exchange define and dominate what we value. Such practices require establishment, hierarchy, and control. Once exposed, we can begin to explore how these practices have shaped our understanding of the value of the world, thereby opening the possibility of reform to these beliefs as a means to balance power relations.

Michel Foucault, whose work centers around the concept of such liberation, argues that everything is influenced by power relations⁴. The endeavor for analysts, he suggests, is not to simply identify or destroy power, for, as he explains, power is always present, but instead to explore the ways in which such power relations act on social technologies in such a way that informs ideologies and provides us with room for creative forms of liberation. Foucault argues that we can begin the process of liberation by analyzing asymmetrical power structures and understanding the forces at work that serve

to keep these structures in place (Bernauer and Rasmussen 11-13). Maintaining asymmetrical power structures, as both Naylor and Foucault realize, requires some form of control. At times, this control can be obvious. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault describes the power of a king as being violently imposed on the very bodies of those who defy his authority. Maintaining power, however, often relies on less obvious means of control.

The formation of Linden Hills brings to mind Bentham's more subtle and yet very effective means of control identified as the panopticon, and as further elaborated on by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. The panopticon is an architectural structure that has on its periphery a ring-like building with partitions that separate each room from the next and each room has one window facing outward and one toward its center. At this center, stands a tower, lined with windows that face the inside of this ring. Inside this tower, one sentinel is stationed. The location of the tower and the positioning of the guardian ensure that anyone in the rooms the guardian faces is the subject of constant visibility from the guardian, but is unable to be seen by anyone in the other rooms of the ring. Foucault explains the outcome:

The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility, and this invisibility is a guarantee of order.... The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.

(Foucault *DP* 554)

In effect, the panoptic formation ensures unverifiable visibility. In other words, the panoptic structure leads residents to believe that they are under surveillance at all times, even when they cannot see their surveyor. Eventually, inhabitants internalize the idea of being constantly watched and begin to police themselves. As noted by Foucault, the desired end of this process is to optimally increase individual utility and to a large extent, individual productivity and value (Foucault *DP* 562, 564). In this sense, Linden Hills is no exception. In essence, Linden Hills is geographically designed in such a way that it begins to police itself, gleaning its order from the tower that is Luther Nedeed, but perpetuating this power structure through its own residents. Survival for residents is thus predicated on those same residents maintaining the system that has afforded them their positions. Furthermore, Nedeed's drive to extract maximum value from the life and death of Linden Hill's residents is ensured by their adherence to this order.

Not unrelated, another characteristic Foucault describes of the panopticon is that, through its structure, it reduces the crowd to separate individualities, thus ensuring that crowd never collaborates to become a community. In fact, the fundamental goal is not to benefit public or communal life. The panopticon has no need for the "inconveniences of over-large assemblies" and thrives instead on the discipline and regulatory power of the "workshop" (Foucault *DP* 557-8). Foucault explains that "The discipline of the workshop, while remaining a way of enforcing respect for the regulations and authorities, of preventing thefts or losses, tends to increase aptitudes, speeds, output, and therefore profits; it still exerts a moral influence over behavior, but more and more it treats actions in terms of their results, introduces bodies into a machinery, forces into an economy"

(558). As such, individuals and their individual, economic outputs are what is desired, controlled, disciplined, punished, or rewarded.

Lack of community is also what seems to be a consequential problem in Linden Hills. As Christian argues, “Linden Hills is characterized as a group of houses that never becomes a community, a showplace precariously kept in place by the machinations of one wealthy black patriarchal family” (Christian 106). Further, she argues, that the residents have no interest in community formation. The traits that make makes survival in Linden Hills possible, “competitiveness, extreme individualism, the desire to conquer” run counter to the values of “nurturing and communality [that] are central to a just society” (120).

Indeed, the geographical structure of Linden Hills was organized in such a way to prevent the formation of community as a means to preserve and promote capitalist values. One means to ensure adherence to these values was to hand-select tenants for the thousand years and a day lease who had no interest in connecting over a history of racial oppression that bound them together, the most eager being the descendents of the aforementioned carpetbaggers and thieves who “had no use for the clouded inheritance of incense, blood, and distilled alcohol that had built the walls which they were constantly painting and whitewashing as if to remove a stench” (Naylor *LH* 11). These tenants “would gladly match dollar for dollar the investment from the Tupelo Realty Corporation to build up a community for their children to be proud of. So when their grandchildren thought back, it would be to Linden Hills. When they needed to journey back, it would be to the brick and marble” (11).

By locating their pasts in “brick and marble” (Naylor *LH* 11), the residents of Linden Hills are afforded the ability to deny a history troubled by slavery, displacement, and racial and class oppression. In fact, by denying such a history, residents of Linden Hills are allowed social mobility; they are transformed from the low class thieves and carpetbaggers to upper crust landowners of the posh Linden Hills. However, they still must answer to Luther Nedeed, who maintains an order in Linden Hills designed not to advance its residents, but to advance Linden Hills and the symbol of capitalist success it has become, often at the expense of its residents. As Cheryl Wall argues, “Ironically, those who desire to ‘free’ themselves of the bonds of history are least able to understand the forces that keep them in bondage. Upward social mobility weakens the will to know the past and consequently inhibits the formation of cultural identity; it leaves individuals vulnerable to psychic dislocation and despair” (Wall 6). The inhabitants of Linden Hills may find upward social mobility, along with a contrived history of bricks and marble (material goods with material value), but disconnecting with their true pasts has the effect of disconnecting residents from each other. By rooting their lives in material goods, the residents of Linden Hills must now compete with one another to obtain more of the same in order to perpetuate such a lifestyle. This competitiveness breeds aggressiveness and individualism rather than promoting communality. Like the criminals in Bentham and Foucault’s panopticon, these tenants make the perfect subjects for the discipline of the workshop.

Furthermore, by “whitewashing” the “stench” (Naylor *LH* 11) of their histories, these residents conveniently forget that the capitalist system in which they now engage to their benefit still perpetuates a class hierarchy that at one time wounded them and

continues to be destructive to others. One might even go so far as to argue that the residents themselves have been whitewashed, as they engage in the same behavior as the white landowners who benefitted financially from their higher class positions in society over black workers. The notion that the residents are themselves whitewashed brings new meaning to the idea of Linden Hills as “an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County, but reflected it black” (Naylor *LH* 9). If we take the “soul of Wayne County” to be white, then here, “white” stands in for erasure and at the same time, imbues the term, commonly associated with concepts such as purity and goodness, with a negative connotation. In Linden Hills, the flip-flopping of such terminology seems to be a common element. Black is white, up is down, and a group of houses clustered together is not a community⁵.

Given the social practices on which Linden Hills was established (capitalistic exchange, inheritance, control, panopticon, individualization), it is not surprising that the results of such practices prevent the formation of community. In the end, the only means of liberation from such a society is a violent burning down of its foundation. This is the tragic response and is most notable in the novel’s conclusion. As Lester and Willie note, after narrowly escaping Nedeed’s blazing house, the residents off Linden Hills, “let it burn” (Naylor *LH* 304). Ultimately, then, what is revealed about Linden Hills is the lack of community formation within a society that only rewards the capitalist values that Christian notes above. The residents are cast as individual production machines and prisoners of their own success, alienated from their past and histories and without the resources of a communal society to liberate themselves.

By no accident are these qualities also closely tied to the order imposed by a panoptic geography. Within such a structure, geography, and that which it contains, are not value neutral. The landscape of Linden Hills enables a successful capitalist machine while at the same it reveals the ways in which the power structures created by such societies also produce and require the perpetuation of values that do not give rise to community development.

Chapter 2: Power and Failed Community: *Mama Day*

Failed communities are also at stake in *Mama Day*. In the following section, I begin by providing a brief synopsis of the story. I then describe how the geography of New York City is, like Linden Hills, imbued with value determined by a capitalistic order. I then show how such order works on individual bodies within that space and how this also prevents community formation.

A Brief Synopsis: *Mama Day*

Mama Day follows the story of the relationship between George Andrews and Ophelia “Cocoa/Baby Girl” Day, beginning with the two meeting in New York City, falling in love, marrying, and traveling to the island of Willow Springs, where Cocoa was born and where George ends up meeting his demise. Narrated by George, Cocoa, and an omniscient, nameless, third person, the story is largely about the healing of a great rupture, prefigured in the novel as a rupture between men and women⁶ in both New York City and Willow Springs. This rupture is epitomized in the relationship between George and Cocoa and is exemplified in the couple’s inability to conceive a child. It is also apparent in the story of Cocoa’s triple-great grandparents, Sapphira and Bascombe Wade, dating back to 1823, the apocryphal year of the rupture’s origin, when, according to

island lore, enslaved Sapphira Wade bore her white “Norway-born” master (Naylor *MD* 5), Bascombe, seven sons, convinced him to set them free, and possibly murdered him before disappearing. The healing of this rupture becomes contingent upon the birth of a child to George and Cocoa, who must learn to live on equal terms before conception is possible, thus representing a new world order in which community survival is enabled through shared power relations as opposed to hierarchy and domination. George and Cocoa, who met, married and live in New York City, must first leave the metropolis, the land of domineering ideologies, and travel to Willow Springs to learn this lesson. As in *Linden Hills*, the spaces of *Mama Day*’s world beg for exploration as a means to expose extant power structures.

Geography, Power, and the Effect on Individuals

In *Mama Day*, the geography of New York City, like that of Linden Hills, is revealed to have an effect on its inhabitants. As in Linden Hills, the landscape of New York City promotes economic productivity. New York City, however, represents power that has become diffused, the result of a panoptic structure no longer requiring the gaze of the surveyor to maintain order. In both cases, residents take on the values of the system which they inhabit. True to this rule, in New York City, where economic productivity is paramount, the population comprises a mass of individuals who never form a community.

Similar to Linden Hills, New York City centers the gaze of its inhabitants. While in Linden Hills, residents concentrate their eyes on the bottom-most point of the “V,” in New York City, residents look toward midtown Manhattan. Facing inward, with their backs to the outer boroughs, residents are guided to see only the shiny center of the city, as if the only value in the city is found in midtown, where, by no accident, the financial

and business epicenter is located, as opposed to the outskirts of the city where one finds the “ghettos” (Naylor *MD* 65). Geography here manipulates the residents of New York City into internalizing the center as the prize and to ignore the disadvantaged who are “confined in ghettos by economic circumstances” (65), similar to the way residents of Linden Hills do not look back upon the neighboring lower class neighborhoods of Putney Wayne or Brewster Place, but are steered toward the big houses on Tupelo Drive. The structure of New York City thereby establishes a class hierarchy based on location and at the same time, imbues the spaces of New York City with value. Residents with the means to do so literally *buy* into “the illusion that [midtown] is where you have to live” and those “confined by economic circumstances” must live in the “ghettos” (65).

Further, New York City appears, like Linden Hills, to be a collection of people who never form a community. It seems to represent a space in which no one ever takes root. Cocoa points to this idea in her description of her first experience with the metropolis, stating:

There were more people living on my one block than on the whole island where I grew up. Because just when you think you’ve gotten a handle on it, there’s a new next-door neighbor or the Laundromat at the corner becomes a hole in the ground and the next year it’s a high rise with even more people for you not to know. A whole kaleidoscope of people – nothing’s just black and white here like in Willow Springs. Nothing stays put. (Naylor *MD* 63)

Cocoa’s inability to “know” her neighbors in New York City speaks to the lack of community there. The city is designed to create confusion; a fast-paced ever-changing beehive of activity that never allows for its inhabitants to settle and make connections

with one another. As Cocoa describes it, “No one ever seemed to be in [the buildings] for very long; everyone was out on the sidewalks, moving moving, moving – and to where?” (17).

Cocoa’s observation about the pace of the city illustrates how time manifests in this text and reveals that time, too, is influenced by extant power structures. George is also concerned with time. He describes it in the following manner:

The clocks and calendars we had designed were incredibly crude attempts to order our reality – nearing the close of the twentieth century, and we were still slavishly tied to the cycles of the sun and the moon.... We’d invented nothing, had yet to conceive of anything, that could chart the mental passage of time. (Naylor *MD* 158)

George’s description reveals that time, like maps, is simply another means to order the world. In New York City, this order is gleaned from “cycles of the sun and the moon,” which George writes off as “crude.” What George glosses over here is that the work day in New York City is also tied to cycles of the sun and moon (George and everyone else in New York sleep and work based on this cycle). The order of time is thus informed by economic power structures vis-à-vis the workshop, in a similar way to how these power structures function geographically.

In the end, time, like space, becomes another way in which the workshop’s productivity is ensured. Foucault argues that the discipline of the panopticon is geared toward creating “a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective” (Foucault *DP* 557). In New York City we see the functional mechanism manifesting in a world moving rapidly. On Willow

Springs, in direct contrast to that of New York City, time has been “redefined” (218) and is even described as “easy to forget about” (160).

Cocoa’s insights into the fast-paced life of residents of New York City reflect how such order also creates a culture of competitiveness and aggressiveness:

I didn’t have a job and I wanted one – badly. When your unemployment checks have a remaining life span that’s shorter than a tsetse fly’s, and you know that temp agencies are barely going to pay your rent, and all the doorways around Times Square are already taken by very determined-looking ladies, masquerades go right out the window. (Naylor *MD* 15)

As in Linden Hills, survival in New York City requires one to be aggressive. One must otherize the competition to succeed. This is why Cocoa insists on identifying her competition on the job market (as well as on the dating scene) as types of food, such as “the cherry vanilla who buzzed me in,” “fudge cream” and “milkshakes” (Naylor *MD* 20). Such labeling suggests Cocoa’s desire to devour her competition and in essence, puts Cocoa in a position of power over them.

Cocoa’s concern that “nothing is just black and white here” (Naylor *MD* 63) also speaks to the order imposed by the city by suggesting that the terms “black” and “white” take on different meaning in that space. In New York City, “black” and “white” are not just colors, but are politically charged as well, the meaning of both refusing to “stay put” (63) or changing depending on the economic climate or even the neighborhood. Cocoa learns to move within the city based on the connotations of these terms, noting such definitions even within her job search. For example, she decodes the presence of a black woman receptionist in the following way: “When small, liberal establishments put a

fudge cream behind their glass reception cases, there were rarely any more in back offices. Sticking you out front let them sleep pretty good at night, thinking they'd put the ghost of Martin Luther King to rest" (20).

George, too, has learned to get by in the space of New York City by internalizing its discipline. An orphan who was raised in the Wallace P. Andrews Shelter for Boys, George's upbringing was designed to teach him how to survive in the space of the city. These valuable lessons were conveyed by the imposing figure of Mrs. Jackson, the orphanage's Headmistress. Indeed, the stern wisdom imparted by Mrs. Jackson is characterized by George as "rules and facts" (Naylor *MD* 24) and the main lesson the boys were taught can be summed up in George's statement, "the discipline she tailor-made for all of us said, like it or not, the present is *you*. And what else did we have but ourselves? We had a more than forgettable past and no future that was guaranteed" (26). The forgettable past of which George speaks includes his own mother who was a teenaged prostitute whose john had no use for her or her child. This lesson taught George to keep his eyes ahead and not behind, much like the way New York City encourages its residents to keep their eyes on the center. In this way, George embodies the values imposed by the cityscape and further, has been rewarded as a result. As George states, "My engineering degree, the accelerating success of Andrews & Stein, proved beyond one shadow of a doubt that you got nothing from believing in crossed fingers, broken mirrors, spilled salt – a twist in your gut in the middle of a Third Avenue coffee shop" (33).

Here, George resembles Luther Nedeed. Free from the chains of his perceived sordid history, George buys into a white myth of success. Forgetting the past allows

George a certain level of financial success within a capitalist system, but in doing so he whitewashes the stories of those upon whose backs that success was accomplished, much like the descendants of the carpetbaggers and thieves in Linden Hills. In denying this history, George colludes with the oppressors who did not recognize nor allow a place for his mother, his birthright, nor his cultural history. In effect, George silences all of them.

But George's denial of his history also makes him, like the carpetbaggers of Linden Hills and the criminals of Bentham and Foucault's panopticon, a prime subject for the perpetuation of the capitalist machine. Without the distractions of a past to weigh him down with connections to others, George is focused only on what he has been taught equates with success: economic gain. Thus, his utility is maximized. Economic gain becomes a powerful and positive reward while the threat of being discarded becomes a means of punishment. In this way, the "tailor-made" discipline of Mrs. Jackson (26) becomes George's discipline and as long as he abides by the order of this discipline, George reaps great economic benefit.

George and Cocoa, like other residents of New York City, have become successful in that space by internalizing the values of its ideology. Still, despite their financial success, George and Cocoa are unable to conceive a child. Their inability to procreate in the space of New York City becomes a powerful metaphor for the effect of such a space on the creation of community. In short, those same values that ensure success in such spaces that are informed by capitalist systems (competitiveness, individualism, etc.) are the values that prevent George and Cocoa from creating the bonds with each other that would enable the birth of child (i.e. come together as a family that would represent a community).

Like the residents of Linden Hills, George and Cocoa are prisoners of their own success in New York City. Driven to see economic gain as the ultimate symbol of achievement, the discipline that coincides with such accomplishment is steeped in practices that restrict communal growth and focus instead on individual maximization.

Chapter 3: Reclaiming Homeplace

At the end of Christian's article on geography in Linden Hills, Christian asks, "How does one fight power without taking on the values of those who have power?" (Christian 120). This question is closely tied to questions that arise from Foucault's discussion of power in society, namely, how does one seek to balance power without simply recreating hegemonic power struggles in another direction? In both *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, we find attempts to balance power through economic mobility, but what is revealed is that such attempts only rename such power struggles (e.g., struggles that manifest as black versus white and men versus women are simply renamed in terms of class warfare) and reify a power structure that privileges one group over another.

In the following sections, I explore the ways in which hooks offers a response to this quandary through the creation of homeplace and how this plays out in *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*. Specifically, I explain the concept of homeplace as a site of resistance. My concern is how homeplace is represented in both texts and how figures in both novels create and protect homeplace as a means toward liberation and healing.

Patriarchy, Domestic Spaces and Homeplace

hooks suggests that through the reclamation of spaces that are informed by ever-present power relations, liberation from oppression is possible. On this point, hooks and Foucault agree. hooks notes that Foucault's description of power and liberation invites

the “critical thinker to search those margins, gaps, and locations on and through the body where (free) agency can be found” (hooks *RTR* 198). Accepting Foucault’s invitation, hooks provides a specific path to liberation through what she deems the reclamation of homeplace. This reclamation of home space enables the critical thinker to embrace and value her existence and resist the hegemonic influence of historically repressive social practices.

hooks argues:

Historically, black women have resisted white supremacist domination by working to establish homeplace. It does not matter that sexism assigned them this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom. (hooks “Homeplace” 45)

What hooks calls “homeplace” refers to those spaces in which black women have created protective areas, free from the pressures of dominating power. In essence, what hooks points to is an example of how black women have reclaimed and recontextualized spaces into which they have been thrust by the rules and order of an oppressive society. African American women have, in response, stabilized the balance of power by reordering homeplaces to be central to existence.

The relegation of all women to domestic spaces (e.g. the home) has been explained as inextricably linked to socioeconomic structures. In a capitalist society, dominant power is legitimized by wealth and is supported by a patriarchal order through the transfer of inheritance to male heirs (legitimized in the perpetuation of the name of

the father⁷). Women, in such a society, are thusly defined by their roles in the process of perpetuating the system vis-à-vis serving as childbearers. The female subject is hence cast as “complemented and completed by her relation to a male partner” (Ebert 19).

Patriarchy, in this sense, can be defined as “an autonomous system of social relations between men and women in which men are dominant” (Gamarnikow 99). In essence, patriarchy establishes male-female relations as discursive relations, which among other things, define biological reproduction, rather than being themselves determined by biology. Patriarchy as an “analytical category” thus positions the division of labor as social and not natural (99).

The structure of the family reifies patriarchal order. In marriage, women exchange their power of labor (i.e. ability to bear children) for their upkeep. The marriage contract:

gives the man-husband control over the woman-wife’s labor power, the goods and services she produces are use values rather than exchange values – they cannot be sold on the market, but belong to the man-husband. Thus, it is argued that the marriage contract is a labor contract by which men appropriate women’s labor power, and marital male-female relations, characterized by the husband’s ownership and control of his wife’s labor power, constitute the relations of domestic production and hence structure the domestic mode of production.

(Gamarnikow 100)

The division of power between men and women in patriarchal, capitalist society relegates women’s work to domestic spaces and subordinates the work of the female to that of the male, by virtue of its lack of capital value. This is not to say that all work that women do

is necessarily domestic nor that women can only do domestic work, but that ideologically, the distribution of work within such systems becomes a signifier of maleness/femaleness⁸.

Homeplace in *Linden Hills*

In Linden Hills and New York City, women who wish to be productive members of capitalist society are relegated to the domestic sphere, specifically because they are required to fulfill the roles of wife and mother. Indeed, these roles glean their order from a world determined by a male center. Women are, therefore, defined by their positions in relation to men.

In Linden Hills, these roles are almost painstakingly obvious. Luther demands that Willa provide him with an heir, a means to perpetuate the family fortune. Because land in Linden Hills is transferred through the male line, Willa's labor-power becomes something for Luther to exchange on the market and, consequently, becomes something of prime interest for Luther. Luther carefully controls the process of conception by hand-selecting his wife, like his father before him, and planning to the minute, through a series of astrological charts, anatomical drawings of the female reproductive system, and calendars of Willa's menstrual cycle, the precise moment of intended procreation. Through these methods, Luther believes he can control Willa's reproductive ability and ensure the birth of a son.

Maps and charts have long served as a means of control over spaces. Joan van der Woude argues that:

[Maps] have always represented unwieldy territories as tidy, governable units and, in so doing, functioned as primary political and ideological tools of empire. The

story of the mapping of America plots, unsurprisingly, the history of colonization, westward expansion, and hemispheric hegemony. It also charts other issues of interest, such as early representations of national identity, the problems of property rights and race, and how soil supposedly creates character. (van der Woude 1074)

Maps, like any technology, are also revealed to be influenced by extant power structures. Maps and charts both reflect power and assist in exercising power. Power is legitimized in maps, through print and institutions, much like Braithwaite's history books. Power is reflected through the labeling of boundaries denoting ownership as well as the process of naming place (and often *renaming* place). It is no accident that those vying for control of Linden Hills turned to the U. S. Post Office and city surveyors to sanction their claims.

That Luther utilizes map technologies for control over Willa's reproductive ability speaks volumes⁹. Not only does Luther's use of maps and charts to manipulate conception tie neatly into the theme of space which runs throughout the novel, it provides a shining example of yet another way in which male power is imposed over such spaces, this time, the space of the female body. Women's bodies become spaces to be conquered and are also manipulated in support of a male center. In the end, the woman is silenced in this process, her story and her body only spoken for in terms of its utility for reproduction. One reason for the use of alternate typeface to tell Willa's story comes into play here; her voice is subtext by virtue of its being unchartable in terms of a male ordered world, just as on maps, names and boundaries appointed by indigenous populations often become subtext.

But to read *Linden Hills* as simply depicting the plight of (particularly female) bodies within a patriarchal order would be to underestimate Naylor's underlying project, which is, I believe, at once to expose the effects of the power relations that make up such societies and offer a means of resistance that goes toward healing the wounds suffered as a result of these relations.

Willa's story is most exemplary of this struggle, but her story is preempted by two other women in *Linden Hills*. The stories of Laurel and Ruth support and illuminate, in different ways, Willa's ultimate sacrifice toward reclaiming space as a means of resistance and healing.

Ruth's story appears near the beginning of the novel, for it is Ruth who makes the suggestion to Lester and Willie about how they might work odd jobs in Linden Hills to make some extra money. Sitting in Ruth and her husband Norman's apartment on Wayne Avenue (located outside the space of Linden Hills), Willie reflects on the comfort of the space:

It was difficult to notice what wasn't in the Anderson's apartment because so much care seemed to have gone into what was there. Visitors found themselves thinking, What a nice feeling to be allowed into a home. And it *was* a home with its bare wood floors, dusted and polished, and with the three pieces of furniture that sat in three large rooms: one sofa in the living room, one kitchenette set with plastic-bottomed chairs on uncertain chrome legs, one bed. (Naylor *LH* 33)

Ruth and Norman's apartment appears in stark contrast to the lavish edifices within the borders of Linden Hills. With its three pieces of furniture and Styrofoam cups, differences in class between the residents of the two spaces are certainly evident. At the

same time, Willie is struck by the almost ethereal feeling of warmth and safety in the small abode. (Later, in Linden Hills, Willie experiences almost exactly the opposite feeling – one of nearly unbearable absence – when, at a funeral repast, he is served a “perfect” store-bought cake that Luther tries to pass off as made by Willa [Naylor *LH* 147] but that Willie notes is too perfect to have been made by an actual person). Indeed, what sets Ruth’s home apart from the houses in Linden Hills is that it is, in fact, a home, and not simply a building full of expensive artifacts and objects.

As Ruth’s story continues, we learn that Ruth and Norman’s sparse furnishings are a result of an affliction from which Norman suffers every other spring that cause him to “run up and down Wayne Avenue, screaming and tearing at his face and hair with his fingernails, trying to scrape off the pinks” (Naylor *LH* 34), eventually destroying or trying to harm himself with just about everything in his wake. A few years after “the pinks” began, Ruth had decided to leave Norman, for, originally from inside Linden Hills, she was “a woman who wanted children and the anchor of security which comes from the weight of accumulated things.... And she came to the realization that she could have none of that with Norman” (35). But that spring, Ruth chose to stay with Norman after a moment when he fought through “the pinks” to give his ailing wife “aspirin and a glass of water” (37). Ruth and Norman’s apartment became a house ruled by “love” (38) in which Ruth devotedly provides Norman with a homespace where “the pinks,” which may be seen as the wounds inflicted by a harsh outside world full of “racist domination and oppression” (hooks “Homeplace” 47), can be healed – not because Ruth is relegated to the role of resident healer/homemaker – but because she chooses it. This balance of power is reflected even in their everyday motions, as Willie observes:

Willie had a hard time figuring out how Ruth and Norman were both drinking from the same cup. Norman would take a sip and talk, and then she'd take a sip. It soon appeared unthinkable that there should be more than one cup between them since they never reached for it at the same time. (Naylor *LH* 34)

As with Norman's gesture with the aspirin during a fit of the "pinks," the indistinguishable cup becomes another example of Norman and Ruth meeting each other halfway, sharing responsibility for the other while never privileging oneself over the other.

Ruth's story serves, in a way, as a complement to Willa's story and helps elucidate why, before climbing the stairs to her death, Willa cleans and makes orderly the basement in which she is locked (thus taking ownership of it). At the same time, Ruth lives outside the borders of Linden Hills and further, never reenters that space. In fact, Ruth falls ill and is unable to travel there to visit Laurel and Willa and sends Norman within its walls instead. That Ruth is not able to enter back into Linden Hills also serves as an example of how the space of Linden Hills does not welcome powerful women nor does it support healthy relationships between women within its boundaries and further exemplifies how Linden Hills prevents community formation by discouraging such alliances. Indeed, in a land in which a woman's value is tied to her relationships with a man, it only makes sense for women to compete for male attention. At the same, Norman's jaunt inside Linden Hills on Ruth's behalf suggests the importance of alliances between black men and women in the fight for a balance of power, for Norman becomes a proxy for Ruth. As hooks argues, such alliances (as well as alliances between men and women of all races) are necessary to the struggle to reject the forces of domination

(hooks “Loving” 12-13). By using the privilege of mobility within Linden Hills that Norman enjoys as a man as a means to fight the very system that gives him such a privilege and yet denies it to others, Norman recognizes his own subject position. This recognition constitutes a type of “critical consciousness that can enable those with power and privilege rooted in structures of domination to divest” (hooks “Loving” 14). Such critical consciousness, or awareness and critique of one’s own position and privilege, are necessary to making alliances successful. This may be another reason why Ruth and Norman’s homeplace remains intact, despite the pinks.

Laurel, on the other hand, lives smack in the thick of Linden Hills, the second to last house on Tupelo Drive before Luther’s. Her story appears near the end of the novel and her fate preempts Willa’s death. Laurel, recently divorced, has sunk into a deep depression and finds her life and home in Linden Hills to be empty without a husband¹⁰. On the edge of despair, Laurel’s grandmother, Roberta, travels to Linden Hills and tries, by trying to guide Laurel through the traditional means of creating homeplace (keeping house, cooking, etc.) to save her granddaughter. But for Laurel, these actions have no meaning:

She was taking in the sight of an old woman, the sound of old stories, and the smells of an old tradition with nothing inside her to connect them. The woman-child just wasn’t in there and neither was the woman. (Naylor *LH* 239)

Laurel, as her grandmother suspected, had lost what she had learned from her grandmother about being “at home with [herself]” (236). Unable to create a homeplace from within (which is where such spaces must always begin), Laurel commits suicide, jumping off her diving board into a frozen pool.

Laurel's story is a stark contrast to that of Ruth and, furthermore and perhaps most importantly, serves as a foil to Willa's story. Highlighting the importance of homeplace, Laurel's story shows the significance of connecting with the knowledge of female relatives of older generations, whose work has been traditionally ignored and/or dismissed as unimportant. Laurel pokes fun at her grandmother's traditions, chiding her for bringing sweet potatoes from her own garden (Naylor *LH* 237) and for the way her grandmother keeps her house (321), but in the end it is Laurel's failure to embrace this type of knowledge that prevents her from being saved. Unable and perhaps unwilling to learn from her mother's mother, Laurel is unable to connect with the "old tradition" that Naylor and hooks see as integral to healing.

Thus we return to the story of Willa. Locked in the basement of her house by her domineering husband, Willa's story begins after the death of her young son, who lies covered on a cot in the corner as Willa slowly gives in to despair. To keep herself busy, Willa begins exploring old boxes and comes upon a trunk of the belongings of the previous Mrs. Nedeeds, dating back to the first. Through her exploration, Willa traces how these women, like her, faded into the background, behind their husbands and sons, beginning as strong, well-educated women and ending up devoured by their positions in within the House of Nedeed (Evelyn Creton Nedeed slowly poisoned herself with her cooking; Luwana Packard Nedeed is replaced by a housekeeper all the while she literally inscribes, by tattooing her own body, the number of times she engages with her house, which finally dwindle to none. Willa even finds an old photograph of Priscilla, the first Mrs. Nedeed, in which Priscilla's face is obscured beyond recognition, exemplifying the final realization of Priscilla's absence in the world). Sensing her predecessors'

similarities to herself, Willa, too, feels herself fading into the background, buried and silenced like the others, even to the extent that she begins to believe her own face has disappeared¹¹.

But unlike Laurel, Willa begins to reconnect with traditional knowledge of homeplace, uncovering the silenced stories of her predecessors by excavating their voices from hidden buried places, such as Evelyn's cookbooks and Luwana's bible. Though both written in what may be described as book-form, the voices of these women are inscribed within the books in a non-traditional manner and Willa must read between the lines, so to speak, to uncover their meanings. Luwana's voice is scribbled in the margins of her Bible, while Evelyn's words must be decoded from a type of recipe language. Such writing appears in contrast to Braithwaite's volumes of legitimized written history and thus constitutes a different type of conveying knowledge and recording history.

Fueled by the stories of her predecessors, Willa descends into her own history to uncover just what it was that brought her to the basement. What she finds is that it was her choice all along to be there. She muses:

It happened because, taking one step at a time, she descended down those basement steps. And since the Prescotts conceived a baby girl with healthy leg muscles and tendons, she had started walking down them from the second she was born. (Naylor *LH* 280)

Willa's startling revelation that finally allows her to reclaim power and rise up from the basement begins here with the space of her own body.

No longer subject to the confines of Luther's maps and charts, Willa transcends the chains imposed on her by Luther's world and retreats to the ill-defined free space of her being, preverbal and thus without order:

In, past the brain cells, where memory mingles with desire and night images are formed. In, past the heart tissues that beat out the rhythms of human limitation. Well past the bottom of the lungs that are only involuntary slaves for continuing existence. She breathed in to touch the very elements that at the beginning of time sparked to produce the miracle some call divine creation and others the force of life. An unconscious journey in toward the power of will that had crept alone in primordial muck eons before being clothed with fins, scales, wings, or flesh.
(Naylor *LH* 289)

The space to which Willa retreats is nebulous, unnamed and undefined. It is, by nature, something unchartable; it defies order and thus may be considered the first space. Like homeplace, this womb-like return to Willa's inner self provides a space free from imposed order and thus resists domination. This womb-space is thusly freed from a domineering order that reinforces male over female.

In unfettering her womb-space, Willa also reclaims it, thusly turning on its head the patriarchal notion that a woman's natural role is to mother. This point is crucial to Willa's resurrection and at the same time responds to hooks' criticism of mother-worship in African American culture as detrimental to the notion of homeplace as valid. As hooks has argued, "[B]lack mother worship extols the virtues of self-sacrifice while simultaneously implying that such a gesture is not reflective of choice and will, rather the perfect embodiment of a woman's "natural" role" (hooks "homeplace" 45). Indeed, for

Willa, the gesture of bearing a child had, prior to this rebirth, become an internalized duty to Luther. But by reclaiming this first space, the space of her body, Willa consciously employs her own will, which is exemplified when Willa reveals that she has named her son, not the name he had been denied by his father, but a name of her own choosing, Sinclair. By asserting her role in naming her son, and furthermore, engaging in the act of teaching him to write this name (thus putting it in print), Willa strips the patriarchal right to name and claim of its power. She reasserts the female role in creation and liberates the act of mothering from the fetters of its duty within a patriarchal society. In effect, Willa begins to chart her own territory, to bring the subtext of the female to the forefront of the map.

Willa returns to the world through what is described as a “birth” (Naylor *LH* 289), with plans to clean her house (literally and figuratively), beginning with the basement, and with the “rooms upstairs” to follow (289). It is through this reclamation of homeplace, beginning with her own body, evident, as noted earlier, when Willa begins to clean her home, that gives her the power to climb the stairs, face her warden, and fight against the system that has oppressed her from within. When Willa rises up, the House of Nedeed and all it stands for, begins to burn.

Flanked by the stories of Ruth and Laurel, Willa’s death is not tragic and, instead, takes on meaning glossed over by other literary critics of *Linden Hills*¹². As Michael Okonkwo also argues, Willa’s death constitutes a move of “messianic self-sacrifice,” which follows a tradition of black women’s literature that presents “the idea of women rallying and intervening as radical ‘messiahs’ to save other women, and men as well”

(Okonkwo 117)¹³. In the end, Willa's act is one of heroic martyrdom, setting the stage for homeplace in *Mama Day*.

Homeplace in *Mama Day*

In *Linden Hills*, the figure of Willa reclaims her position within homeplace as position of power and not subjugation, becoming a tragic heroine, resisting the tools of oppression and making her story and those stories otherwise silenced by dominating power structures central. But prior to her death, Willa also acknowledges her aunt, Miranda (Mama Day), whose reliance on traditional homeplace wisdom is reminiscent of Evelyn Creton Nedeed. Willa, in fact, makes a direct comparison between the two when she explores sources to consult about her marriage, stating, "She wasn't going out into the woods like Evelyn Creton or Mama Day to dig up shame-weed" (Naylor *LH* 148). Ironically, it is when she reconnects with this type of wisdom that she resolves her struggle. Through this reference, Naylor links the spaces of *Linden Hills* with those of *Mama Day*¹⁴. Willow Springs, the name of which is undoubtedly a play on the names of Willa and Willie of the preceding text (both of whom best represent figures of liberation; Willa as described above and Willie as an ally in the struggle), is the island on which Mama Day, who serves as the island's matriarch, along with her sister Abigail (Willa and Cocoa's grandmother) reside. As such, Willow Springs embodies and epitomizes homeplace.

Willow Springs is a space that resists the tools of domination that are found in the worlds of New York City and Linden Hills. Indeed it not only cannot be located on a map, it "ain't in no state" (Naylor *MD* 4), as it sits on the border of Georgia and South Carolina¹⁵. Even its history resists privileging one type of knowledge over another, as its

records are kept through rituals like Candlewalk, a night each year during which the island's residents "lead on with light" (110) through the streets of Willow Springs along the path taken by Bascombe Wade while searching for Sapphira after her mysterious disappearance. Although the residents do not know the origin of this ritual, they perform the ritual annually to keep the history of the island alive.

Furthermore, the residents do not rely on a written record (such as is the case in Linden Hills) but rely on traditional modes of oral storytelling and quiltmaking to preserve their histories¹⁶. Indeed, when island son (referred to as "Reema's boy" in the novel) attempts to explain the island's history and culture for publication as an academic text, he is all but laughed off the island. History, on Willow Springs, cannot be contained by such a text because it would necessarily have to be mediated by its author and the book form itself, privileging the author's understanding of history and limiting history to the space of the book. On Willow Springs, history is multivocal and is better represented by a quilt, with its fragments of cloth, each with their own story, sewn together to make a whole. In this way, no voice is privileged over another; all voices lend to the creation of a whole.

Finally, Willow Springs resists the detrimental effects of a capitalist system. One major way in which this occurs is by ensuring that the land of Willow Springs cannot be sold but instead is always owned by the "next" generation. In other words, unlike in Linden Hills, where land (and thus wealth) is passed from father to son and may be sold for a profit, ownership of land in Willow Springs is always deferred to the next generation beyond the existing generation. Because the existing generation does not actually own the land, they have no right to sell it, thus the land is never viewed as a

mark of wealth and all citizens of Willow Springs remain of equal class, judged on their actions, not by the size of their coffers.

But Willow Springs is not without threat of destruction by dominating forces. Indeed, the rupture that dates back to Sapphira and Bascombe Wade in 1823 continues to send ripples through the island, manifesting in the separation of wives from their husbands and mothers from their children, particularly in the Day family through Cocoa's generation. When George and Cocoa finally arrive on the island, bringing with them the effects of trying to survive in a hegemonic and destructive world, this rupture comes to a head.

hooks reminds us that "historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous... was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (hooks "Homeplace" 42). Such places are necessary for black people in a society where "we could not learn to love and respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside" (42)¹⁷. Therefore, homeplace must be free of those negative power relations that inform such perceptions of the self as is common in spaces like New York City.

And yet while creating a space free of hegemonic power relations is an important part of homeplace, we must also recognize the necessity for such a space to be free of a sexist mentality that further threatens the advancement of black culture. hooks warns that "We can no longer act as though sexism in black communities does not threaten our solidarity; any force which estranges and alienates us from one another serves the interests of racist domination" (hooks, "Homeplace" 48). This sexism manifests in a failure to appreciate the importance of black women's work in the struggle against black

oppression. Echoing the sentiments of many of her contemporary feminists¹⁸, hooks reminds us that anti-racist movements are necessarily incomplete if they do not also attend to issues of power surrounding gender (and vice-versa), for to do so reproduces the hegemonic structure both feminist and anti-racist movements seek to deconstruct. Therefore, homeplace must be void of all such subjugations.

It is no accident that in *Mama Day*, the rupture requiring healing on Willow Springs is characterized by a crisis between men and women and is exemplified through George and Cocoa's inability to conceive a child. To survive in the space of New York City, George and Cocoa have appropriated white, middle-class and sexist norms, thusly denying their own identities, which can become destructive. As Stuart Hall argues:

It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge,' not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm.... This inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. (Hall 225-6)

In other words, Cocoa and George's appropriation of white, middle-class, sexist norms actually reflects that the two have appropriated a mainstream devaluation of the legitimacy of black Americans.

For George, this self-hatred can be traced back to the story of his birth. The bastard child of a black prostitute, George has learned that this past is undesirable and insists on living in the present. In doing so, however, he not only denies his own identity, but glosses over the identity of his mother. While George sees the dream of filling the mold of a white, middle-class household (i.e. owning a home and providing financial

sustenance to maintaining this home, a wife, and a family) as tantamount to overcoming a sordid past, what he does, in effect, is silence that past by rendering other family structures and ways of providing for family as illegitimate. His mother, for example, may, in fact, have engaged in an act of selfless heroism, as she gave up her son to a world that could provide for him when she could not. George, however, sees this act as one of irresponsibility.

George's devaluation of his mother's sacrifice and the hatred of his own past as a result, manifests in other sexist behavior. One major example of this is through George's denial of the importance of women's work (i.e. labor), expressing discomfort with Cocoa's use of traditional herbal recipes passed down to Cocoa from her grandmother and great-aunt. He states, "I hated chives – why did you insist on putting chives in that mixture? Since you had started growing fresh herbs on the windowsill and in the back yard. Since your letters from Willow Springs, filled with advice about 'keeping that boy's heart ticking'" (Naylor 158). This moment reflects George's self-hatred but also devalues Cocoa's role as a black woman (much like he does with his mother) and, furthermore, establishes that while George may be marginalized as a black person, he still maintains a position of power in New York City's society as a man over women and so he, too, engages in the practice of domination. As hooks argues, the devaluation of black women's roles as one of the main problems facing African Americans in the struggle for liberation. She writes:

Overall devaluation of the role black women have played in constructing for us homeplaces that are the site for resistance undermines our efforts to resist racism

and the colonizing mentality which promotes internalized self-hatred. (hooks "Homeplace" 45)

George's position as a man exercising power over Cocoa's role as a black woman sets the stage for George's final conflict with Miranda (Mama Day), Willow Springs' resident healer¹⁹ and exemplar of the traditional black woman in homeplace.

Miranda, who was raised on the island of Willow Springs, not formally educated, but through oral tradition and reenacting ancestral practices, is representative of the type of woman hooks sees as key to black liberation. Such women are integral in creating the safe space of homeplace. In returning to their legacies²⁰, "contemporary black women can begin to reconceptualize ideas of homeplace, once again considering the primacy of domesticity as a site for subversion and resistance" (hooks "Homeplace" 48).

For George, however, there is no room for Miranda's work. Nevertheless, it is Miranda's work that makes Willow Springs a viable homeplace. There is no room for white, sexist hegemony in homeplace, nor on the island and thus there is no room for George, whose insistence in the end on privileging his way over Mama Day's way to help Cocoa is what will finally and literally break his heart.

The problematic effects of a domineering ideology are not limited, however, to relationships between men and women, but also manifest in other types of relationships. As I noted earlier in this thesis, the landscape of New York City does not promote the type of values necessary to enable community formation and instead requires residents of such areas to be aggressive and competitive to survive. When Cocoa arrives on Willow Springs, she also brings with her these values. As in Linden Hills, where alliances between women are thwarted by the perceived need to compete for male attention in

order to align oneself with male power, such behavior also manifests in the spaces of *Mama Day*. In New York City, this behavior is illustrated through Cocoa's competitive musings on both the job and dating scenes, as noted earlier. In Willow Springs, the competition is no less fierce, bringing about the conflict with Ruby, who feels Cocoa's presence is a threat to her own relationship with her husband, and which leads Ruby to trick Cocoa into allowing Ruby to braid her hair, during which Ruby rubs poison into Cocoa's scalp. Ruby's action here becomes a serious transgression against homeplace as she misuses the traditional African American female ritual of hairbraiding to enact her revenge. It is fitting that Ruby is later killed when her trailer (her own home) collapses on her.

The fight to save Cocoa's life quickly becomes the fight to restore a balanced order on the island and is prefigured as a battle between the two worlds of the mainland and that of Willow Springs, with George and Mama Day representing the spaces, respectively.

George insists that the only way to save Cocoa is to return to the mainland, but the only bridge back has been destroyed by a terrible storm. Frustrated by the slow process of rebuilding the bridge by the island's residents, George attempts to impose his knowledge (learned in New York City) on the residents but to no avail:

I had volunteered, hoping to use what little knowledge I had to help them speed it up. But no matter how I reasoned, they would not melt more than a gallon of tar at a time. They were working between cloud bursts, they told me. Why tar more wood than would dry properly in a short period?.... They could have two crews – one on each end – laying down boards toward each other. And I could calculate it

of them, making a diagram, to ensure them that the boards wouldn't gap. But no, that wasn't the way things were done here. (Naylor *MD* 263).

Here, George insists on relying on his engineering education (an education he received in New York City) to create a plan to rebuild the bridge. But what George fails to realize is that what is important is that the residents rebuild the bridge together, using knowledge tried and tested by the residents' own hands. George devalues the community of Willow Springs here, denying the traditional knowledge of the island's residents as well as the metaphorical bridge that is built between them as they construct a physical bridge. With each plank placed, the community is affirmed. Frustrated, George goes to Mama Day for advice.

Mama Day, however, has already embarked on her own journey to save Cocoa. Returning to her own homeplace, known as the "other place," the house of her childhood filled with memories of heartbreak, loss and death, to uncover the knowledge that will help heal her granddaughter. Just as Willa must reconnect with her past to become liberated from the chains of her ordered existence, Mama Day must also explore the painful past of the Day family. Returning to the other place, the house built by Bascombe's own hands for Sapphira, provides the catalyst that enables Miranda to see beyond the pain to her ancestral memory.

Elizabeth Hayes explains that the house and others like it (such as 124 in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), "embody the otherworldly women who inhabit them" (Hayes 671). The other place, in *Mama Day*, stands in for the knowledge of Sapphira Wade, the island's original matriarch, whose story and name have also been silenced and buried over time. Hayes continues to argue that such spaces "function as what Julie Kristeva calls in

Revolution in Poetic Language the ‘semiotic chora,’ a pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal space of the mother” (671). Like Willa’s nebulous dreamspace, the other place reconnects Miranda with the silenced voices of the past and the root cause of the rupture in 1823.

What Miranda learns is that the house was not a prison for Sapphira, as Miranda had suspected, but that Sapphira, like Willa, liberated herself from the chains of existence imposed on her by her position as a slave. In the end, heartbreak and rupture on the island turn out to be rooted not in the supposedly tragic story of Sapphira, but in Bascombe’s heartbreak at Sapphira freeing herself from and subsequently leaving him, shaking the foundations of his learned existence, which was predicated on a system of dominating power that privileged his worldview as a white man over hers a black woman.

Resolve for this rupture (and healing for Cocoa’s illness) must come from a willingness between George and Mama Day to meet each other halfway, with Miranda letting George into homeplace and George accepting the primacy of Mama Day’s alternative means to heal, thus expressing a willingness to give up his own position of power. Miranda notes:

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

The motif of hands and bridges serves here again as a metaphor for community building. As the island's inhabitants work to heal the bridge between the island and the mainland using their own hands, Mama Day and George must use their hands to bridge the divide between male and female on the island.

Knowing that this union must come willingly from both parties, Miranda sends George to the chicken coop, telling him to reach into the nest of the largest chicken and to bring back "whatever" he finds (300). When George finds nothing there, he muses:

Nothing. There was nothing there – except for my gouged and bleeding hands.

Bring me straight back whatever you find. But there was nothing to bring her.

Bring me straight back whatever you find. Could it be that she wanted nothing but my hands? (300-1)

Indeed, Miranda's intention is for George to return to her willingly with his hands, but George passes the lesson off as "mumbo-jumbo" (295), kills the chicken, and insists on returning to build the bridge (his way) instead of to Miranda. The final act of killing the chicken may be seen as George's final transgression against the possibility of feminine power and legitimacy. Instead of returning to Mama Day, George finds a boat and frantically tries to row to the mainland. Returning to *his way*, of course, leads to his demise as George's heart gives out.

Prior to George's death, Mama Day recognizes the problem of George's existence in Willow Springs as long as he refuses to accept other possible ways of being and living as legitimate. Reflecting on how she plans to save Cocoa from Ruby's poison (i.e., how she will enable healing), she states that "George did not need her. The Days were all rooted in the other place, but that boy had his own place within him" (Naylor *MD* 285).

George's "own place within him" may be read as his internalization of New York City's society, the center, which leads George to despise himself and at the same time encourages him to believe so staunchly in a system that relies on individuality and competitiveness, both of which run counter to the building blocks of community building. Miranda acknowledges the incompatibility of these forces in homeplace, as Naylor writes, "[S]he sees there's a way he could do it alone, he has the will deep inside to bring Baby Girl peace all by himself – but no Her head was already filled with too much sorrow, too much loss" (285). Miranda knows that the only way George can heal Cocoa on his own, is to give up his own life. His death, as the death of a hegemonic presence in the homeplace of Willow Springs, would enable Cocoa to live – and would ultimately promote a safe site of healing that facilitates the eventual birth of Cocoa's son, the birth of a new world order. Thus, George, who in refusing to give up his central position by dismissing Miranda's way, must die.

Conclusion: Toward a New World Order

In *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, Naylor shows how power's tendency to corrupt can lead to societies focused on greed and individualism that resist the formation of communities. Yet in both stories, Naylor creates portraits of home that are protected from the oppressive effects of these domineering ideologies by strong female characters. These spaces mirror bell hooks' vision of a homeplace, rooted in the legacies of mothers and grandmothers, as safe sites of healing for African Americans. Both Naylor and hooks see the space of home as a space in which the wounds inflicted by subjugation within unbalanced systems of power that perpetuate this lack of community formation can be interrogated and healed. Because notions of identity are informed by and

reproduced in extant power structures that seek to uphold a particular order, maintaining the security of the places in which those notions can be interrogated becomes a prime concern. Accordingly, those who are unable to conceive of a world that does not answer to the order inherent in the hegemonic makeup of patriarchal, capitalist society, are not welcome in such spaces and thus must be destroyed.

While Naylor is certainly critical of patriarchal, capitalist societies, her contribution to the contemporary discourse suggests that resistance to the negative effects of such societies is possible. Ultimately, Naylor points to the possibility of a new world order that both encourages and nourishes a positive, renewed, legitimate and fully achieved sense of self for all participants by encouraging practices that sustain a balance of power rather than promote unequal and unfair relationships. In this way, Naylor truly meets hooks and Henderson in the margin.

¹ Both *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day* complicate the idea of linear, authoritative (read: patriarchal) storytelling. While *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day* are bookended by the voice of omniscient, third-person narrators, both novels comprise multiple narrative voices that speak to a decentralization of authority in the novel. In *Linden Hills*, the narrative may appear to be a sort of bildungsroman following the development of Lester and Willie's descent into the reality of manhood as prescribed by a capitalist society represented in the town of Linden Hills, but Willa's voice certainly troubles such a reading. In fact, throughout the text, Lester and Willie serve almost as a traditional chorus, reminding the reader of the important aspects of each section she has just ingested (further, they tell us *how* we should interpret the same), which reflect the privilege of the author. In the end, Lester and Willie may only be guides (they have been compared to Virgil and Dante,

though I am not entirely sure of such readings). Willa, on the other hand, does go through transformation, becoming, through rereading the stories of her ancestors, her own person. As Willa's voice becomes part of the master narrative, it becomes evident that the story was also Willa's all along. In this way, Naylor complicates the traditional mode of storytelling, which may be viewed as a type of literary mapping.

² I speak here of a "written history" of Linden Hills because the history presented at the beginning of the novel only comprises a recognized history. Naylor reminds us that this type of historiography necessarily engages in the practice of erasure of all non-Luther Nedeed (non-patriarchal) histories through the character of Dr. Daniel Braithwaite, Linden Hills' resident historian. With an education financed by the Nedeed family, Braithwaite has been granted full access by Nedeed to the family's records (surveys, Tupelo Realty Corporation's documents, the original deed from 1820, etc.) and encouraged to write the history of Linden Hills. Well into his twelfth volume of work on the subject, Braithwaite claims to have amassed a nonbiased recording of Linden Hills, gathering his knowledge not only from the Nedeeds' records, but from his own observations gained through the privilege of having the only house, with the exception of the Nedeed house, with windows that face "up" instead of "down". But Braithwaite's knowledge is still mediated through a Nedeed lens, as it was the Nedeed family that gave him access to his view (another example of how Nedeed manipulates space as a means of control) as well as their records. History, that is, history that is legitimized in Linden Hills, is thusly also exposed as influenced by extant power structures.

³ The main location of Naylor's first and fifth novels, Brewster Place, described as a "slum" by Lester's mother (Naylor, *LH* 28), is also in the same geographical area as Linden Hills and Putney Wayne.

⁴ In an interview with the editors of the journal, *Herodote*, Foucault states, "Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transportation, one is able to capture by the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge, and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region, and territory" (Foucault *P/K* 69).

⁵ Naylor is not the only black woman author to play with words in this manner. In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, the primary action of the novel takes place on a hill known as "The Bottom." By flip-flopping these terms, these authors begin to disrupt imposed binary relationships between words like "black" and "white" and open discursive space to further challenge imposed meanings of and associations with the same.

⁶ Related to this struggle, rupture is also figured in the novel as a break between mothers and children. This particular rupture is also reflective of the practice of removing slave children from their mothers.

⁷ Naming plays an important role in Naylor's work, as well as in numerous other works by African American authors. In Naylor's texts, characters often appear with more than one name. In *Linden Hills*, Willa and the preceding wives in the Nedeed family are all known only as "Mrs. Nedeed." Luther is the namesake of his father as those before him are the namesakes of their fathers. Naming is even important in Luther's refusal to name

the boy he rejects as his son. These are all examples of how naming functions in society. Christian argues, "One means by which the powerless are kept powerless is through the distortion of words, of naming, that is imposed on them" (Christian 122). Names reflect power in Linden Hills; they establish order in society by insisting identities are drawn from the father (Luther).

⁸ Critics of arguments such as the one above have noted that such descriptions, rooted in the socioeconomic theories of Marx and Engels, rely on the assumption that property is the only indicator of wealth in a capitalist society and thus are only applicable to propertied classes. I do not necessarily disagree with such assessments, but for the purposes of this paper, taking into consideration the worlds presented in *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*, the theory does apply. This is also not to say that the work of black women is necessarily always tied to the domestic. Many theorists have studied the ways that black women in America have played multiple roles in providing for their families, including taking on the role of sole breadwinners. Yet what has also come to light in these studies is that black women continue to support their families in homeplaces above and beyond the work they are called upon to perform in order to provide for their families out of necessity to play by the rules of a consumer-driven marketplace that insists on the exchange of money for goods and services.

⁹ Though less obviously insidious, in *Mama Day*, George is also obsessed with maps and charts. Raised in an orphanage, George's understanding of women is informed by his education at the Wallace P. Andrews Shelter for Boys, in which sex education was taught to him with the help of "the skinned down poster on Mrs. Jackson's blackboard" (105).

Further, George expresses discomfort at the thought of visiting Willow Springs, which he cannot locate on a map.

¹⁰ This is not to say that a woman necessarily requires a husband to have a fulfilling life, only that in Linden Hills, a husbandless woman is, by definition, undefined, thus Laurel feels unbearably empty.

¹¹ After her death, Laurel is also described as “faceless” (Naylor *LH* 260).

¹² For a more in depth criticism of such claims, see Michael Okonkwo’s “Suicide or Messianic Self-Sacrifice?: Exhuming Willa’s Body in Gloria Naylor’s *Linden Hills*.” Okonkwo is particularly critical of Margaret Hormans’ “The Woman in the Cave: Recent Feminist Fiction and the classical Underworld” (1988), Maxine L. Montgomery’s *The Apocalypse in African American Fiction* (1996) and Teresa Goddu’s “Restructuring History in *Linden Hills*” (1993).

¹³ Such a tradition as described by Okonkwo suggests, too, that these authors are perhaps creating a literary homeplace as well as homeplaces for their characters, where black women authors can also rally to save themselves and men.

¹⁴ Naylor’s first five novels, are all connected, if not geographically, then by characters who are related. Willa and Miranda connect the spaces in *Linden Hills* to those of *Mama Day*, Kiswana Browne of Brewster Place is originally from Linden Hills, and George was conceived in Bailey’s Café. Christian argues that Naylor’s use of connected spaces throughout her novels serves a similar function to Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha county in that it allows her to explore, in different ways depending on which spaces she juxtaposes, issues of class, race and gender (Christian 106).

¹⁵ Because no state can claim Willow Springs, it is not necessarily considered part of the North or South. In this way, Naylor avoids any common assumptions made about race in connection to these geographic regions.

¹⁶ Even though as readers, we are privileged to have access to the written story presented in the novel, Naylor is careful to remind us to acknowledge such privilege as a means to resist it. As the island's narrator comments:

Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where you are. Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes here name. You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car – you done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word. (10)

¹⁷ Here hooks defies conventional academic rhetoric and cleverly uses the term “outside” to represent white society. This is particularly interesting in light of her essay, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” in which she locates her position as in the margins of society. This flip-flopping of terminology reopens discursive space in a way that does not privilege the representation of “white” over “black” (or vice-versa).

¹⁸ c.f. Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Maxine Baca Zinn, Bonnie Thornton Dill

¹⁹ I want to make a distinction here between why I use the term “healer” as opposed to “conjure woman.” In another paper I might conjecture that Naylor intentionally gives Miranda a somewhat mythical aura as a way to problematize the “conjure woman” stereotype. Naylor never, in fact, allows Mama Day to derive her power from unnatural

forces. Mama Day's "magic" is steeped in intuition as evidenced in the way she is attentive to her animals and the sounds of the woods for clues to the pending storm (both real and metaphorical). Indeed, even when Mama Day herself fears that she has crossed the line and brought about the death of Little Caesar, a child whose conception, through herbal remedies and knowledge of the female body she helped enable, Mama Day reminds herself, "Can't nothing be wrong in bringing on life, knowing how to get under, around, and beside nature to give it a slight push ... but she ain't never, Lord, she ain't never tried to get *over* nature" (Naylor *MD* 262).

²⁰ hooks pays homage to the legacy of her own mother and grandmother, from whom she learned that "houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of bodies, the nurturing of our souls" (hooks, *Homeplace* 41). She suggests that the experience of the tension between the forces outside and inside a black woman's home (the necessity to work outside in white culture in order to provide for her family versus the struggle to maintain these safe houses) is what ultimately distinguishes the lot of black women from black men in white patriarchal society.

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