
**NEGOTIATING RACISM AND SEXISM THROUGH SPACIOTEMPORAL LENS IN
TONI MORRISON'S *PARADISE***

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ABSTRACT: *Racism and sexism occupy a central space in the psyche of the African American in a nation where the culture of the dominant class determines the American way of life. In order to assess the place of African Americans in the larger nation space, their negotiating of racism and sexism must be placed in spacio-temporal matrix. For this purpose Lefebvre's notion of "double illusion", Homi K Bhabha's concept of "hybridity", and Edward Soja's idea of "Thirdspace" have been applied to analyze Toni Morrison's novel Paradise. The paper is an attempt to understand how Toni Morrison represents the community life of African Americans within the larger space of the American nation in the backdrop of their negotiation of racism and sexism in both national and community levels.*

KEYWORDS: racism, sexism, spacio-temporal, community, nation, negotiation

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Paradise* depicts the tension between the demands of the supremacist white culture and the African American's attempts to negotiate and/or resist them by occupying the margin of community life. The appropriation of the nation space by the larger culture as exclusively white space relegates African Americans to the periphery from which they reevaluate the impact of racism and sexism in their lives. The study is an attempt to better understand how Morrison's black characters counter such hegemonic exercises, and how, in the process, they replicate some of the white values and practices they are critiquing such as racism and sexism. In order to depict the nuances of these practices Morrison places them in spaciocultural matrix of the black community's contribution to the national life and their positioning in the edge of community life. The theoretical framework of the work is based on Lefebvre's notion of "double illusion", Homi K Bhabha's concept of "hybridity", and Edward Soja's idea of "Thirdspace"

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSIONS

What Toni Morrison's *Paradise* immediately brings to mind is W.E.B. Du Bois's observation that in the United States, African Americans were "a nation within a nation" (qtd. in Fredrickson 287). The activities and ideologies of the inhabitants of Ruby, their relationship with the Convent women, and their reactions to the attitude of the white to them, appear to support Du Bois's observation. If they are "a nation within a nation", they must have a different history of their own, which should also contribute to the making of the general history of America. But Morrison problematizes such simple solution to the biased historiography of

America by foregrounding “the contorted interrelationships among and between the [black] communities in the novel” (Widdowson 314). She rather offers the possibility of reconstructing a manifold history of African Americans and, hence, of the US in general.

If the normative (white) history of the US is ‘real’, then the marginal history of the African American is not less ‘real’. *Paradise* encapsulates such politico-historical events as Founding Fathers, Declaration of Independence, assassinations, Civil Rights, Reconstruction, black activism, Black Nationalist and Separatist movements, Vietnam War, and Watergate. They are observed both from the vantage point of official representation, and from the ignored perspectives of the African American. By re-examining American national history in the flashlight of black perspectives—both individual and community—Morrison offers multiple, alternative, and, sometimes, oppositional history of the nation. The Ruby community, a descendent of free blacks living in Louisiana since 1755, has the experience of “serving, picking, plowing, and trading” (*Paradise* 99). The community also helps to govern the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. It has been shown that this community bears a history of more than two hundred years till 1976 — the present of the novel.

But, in spite of their long history as free blacks to be in a position to have the status of Founding Fathers enjoyed by their white counterparts, they were “thrown out of office without ceremony or proof of wrongdoing”. Consequently, they are reduced to “field-labour”, “street sweeper”, and sharecroppers (*Paradise* 193). Morrison captures the biasness of American historiography through her re-angled fictional narrative that brings to the fore the tragedy of these African Americans. This community has the distinction of participating in the administrative works for five years. But the larger culture makes them beg for manual works in cotton and rice fields for fifteen years. Ironically, it is not only this neglect, but also another similar disregard shown to them by other well-to-do black communities that jeopardized their search for home within the wider space of the nation. This rich and lighter-skinned community refused to incorporate them into their fold. The more the richer and lighter-skinned members of the community get the upper hand over the poor and darker-skinned ones, the more irreparable the gap between the two becomes. The descendents of these fifteen families should have been allowed to enjoy the promises made in the Declaration of Independence, but, in 1976, they were still deprived of these proclaimed rights. Morrison seems to suggest that in postcolonial America, colonial values, exercised during slavery, are still replicated making African Americans desperate to assert their existence through act of violence.

Failure of Declaration, Reconstruction, and Civil Rights seem to contribute to the act of violence such as the shooting of the Convent women by Ruby men, a group of black people given to the ideology of maintaining “pure blood”, who have otherwise a reputable family history. Thrown out of office unceremoniously, reduced to penury, and rejected even by their wealthy brethren, the inhabitants of Ruby were forced to inculcate ghetto mentality such as maintaining “pure blood” at any cost. Such mentality has its origin, Morrison seems to imply, in their legacy of not allowing their women to work in white homes for fear of being raped by white men and got their blood contaminated. Because the nation failed to provide them a respectable home, they desperately tried to make it possible in the marginal space of their community life, initially in “Haven”, then in “New Heaven”, and ultimately in Ruby.

As the progeny of the unacknowledged (black) Founding Fathers of the nation, they should have been entitled to enjoy all the rights and privileges enumerated in the Declaration and the

subsequent amendments of the constitution. But a nation, based on temporality and sociality of (white) American experience, fails to encompass experiences of the black by placing them in spatial configuration. By spatialising black experiences, Morrison deconstructs official history of America to give an inclusive picture of the history of the nation. It is not simply a black version of American history, but a comprehensive, inclusive, and, as conceptualized by Lefebvre and Soja, a third spatial view of history (Soja 65). This history is fluid, multiple, and kaleidoscopic, not fixed or rigid. Such reconstruction of national history is a corrective endeavour to compensate for the erasures that the official version of American history is guilty of – a fictional reaction to the normative (neo)colonial manipulation of history that has made American history biased and lopsided.

The exodus of Morrison's blacks from one place to another, caused by political and social compulsion, makes them undergo variegated experiences. These experiences range from occupying administrative positions in the government offices to absorbing in lower class jobs, depending on the whims and fancies of the white. This uncertainty of socio-political existence in the national scale forces them to assume so called pure and uncontaminated community ethos, which, in the long run, turns out to be a mere myth. Morrison seems to suggest here that neither the white nor the black can live without being "contaminated" by each other's value systems, practices, and physical contacts. The presence of the light-skinned (black) community in the nation is a case in point representing the absurdity of the ghetto mentality entertained by both the white and the black. Morrison's ambivalent position in dealing with such issues becomes clear in the rejection of the ancestors of Haven community by other black communities, who denied the former access to their towns.

The Ruby community had to be in a constant move from the time of "Big Papa" and "Big Daddy", the old "Founding Fathers", till the settlement of the "New Fathers" in Ruby, in search of freedom and home. During this period, the community members tried their level best either to escape or resist white dominance in their own characteristic ways. However, their patriotism cannot be called into question because Steward, a member of the community, kept the American flag flying on holidays at home (*Paradise* 88). If they served in Louisiana since 1755, helped govern both Louisiana and Mississippi from 1868 to 1875, were reduced to field labour after that, they are justified claimant to equal rights and privileges enjoyed by white Americans. Denied those Declaration promises, they remained isolated and focused on their community life. At the same time they harboured the prejudices of maintaining pure racial identity unaffected by and detached from the onslaught of white American values they are fighting against. Ironically, the values and practices they harbor as specific and endemic to their community – pride in racial purity, interest in acquiring property, upholding of patriarchal values, belief in rule of the gun than rule of law, and practice of racism – are, in fact, a replication of white values and practices. This agglomeration of intra- and inter-racially infected shared values justifies Morrison's claim that "Africanism" cannot be separated from "Americanness" and, vice versa: "Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness – from its origins on through its integrated or disintegrating twentieth-century self" (*Playing* 65).

The black community's attempt to move to the centre is constantly thwarted by the racist attitude of the white, supported also by draconian laws, compelling them to relegate themselves to the margin. The Ruby community's confidence on "ancestral stock" strengthened when its members encountered racism in the form of refusal by white doctors to offer treatment to Ruby,

one of their female members, only for being black (*Paradise* 113). The subsequent death of Ruby for not getting adequate treatment in the ward made these people more committed to maintaining racial purity and converted them to, what Morrison calls, “isolasionist” (Denard 12).

In a situation like this, the most crucial question that Morrison seems to address is whether Ruby should fall back on its past history, or move ahead affecting necessary changes in the attitude of its inhabitants to make palpable a better future and home. Though Morrison seems to underscore the second alternative, the question still to be asked is: Who will break the ice? The possible alternatives are—men in Ruby, women in Convent, and women in both Ruby and Convent. Though she does not deny the possibility of Ruby men initiating such an attempt, her vote appears to have gone for the third alternative. The young women of Ruby in particular, in a sisterly alliance with the Convent women, will be able to break the shackles of racism (both white and black), and separatism (also white and black) to make a bridge between community life and mainstream national life. What Morrison seems to suggest is that if such a miracle is to happen, that will be initiated by the like of Misner, the liberal man in Ruby, or somewhat more convincingly by Billie Delia, who is critical about Ruby men’s vying for patriarchal dominance over the Convent women. Her critique of Ruby men turns out to be ominous and justified when they initiate a shootout at Convent.

Billie leaves Ruby to work in a clinic in Demby heralding the possibility of a better future and home. Given the fact that Ruby women are not allowed to work outside for fear of white oppression, Billie’s act of choosing a career outside Ruby is in itself a radical act – a departure from Ruby’s inverted racism and patriarchy. It should, however, be noted that unlike the white feminist’s focus on rape as exclusively the domain of black male, Morrison reversed this “racist stereotype” from black male to white male by making the Ruby men debar their women from working in white households for fear of being raped by white men (hooks 68).

If the problem with Ruby is inverted racism and patriarchy, the problem with Convent is reversed feminism, by which I mean the tendency on the part of Convent women to follow the white feminist’s view of binary opposition between men and women. This projected dichotomy between the two sexes is, in fact, detrimental to the greater interest of the black for whom solidarity between black women and men is as important as reducing sexism between them for the black’s success in the struggle against white racism and patriarchy. The Convent women seem to have overlooked the historical evidence of black men and women working together to initiate a “redemptive subversive challenge to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” in spite of the existence of sexism in black communities (hooks 77). Unless there is a bond between the people living in the margin (different black communities and black women and men in case of *Paradise*), marginality cannot be upheld as a space of resistance. Feud between marginalized groups would only lead to catastrophe, not freedom. Highlighting the need for addressing sexism in black life, bell hooks notes:

Unless black women and men begin to seriously confront sexism in black communities, as well as within black individuals who live in predominantly white settings, we will continue to witness mounting tensions and ongoing divisiveness between the two groups (77).

Just as racial and community differences and diversities are regarded as detrimental to national interest in the wider spectrum of the American nation, individual and generational differences

are also regarded as harmful to community interest in the African American community. This duplication of the ideologies of the dominant white culture by Ruby men is an attempt to homogenize differences in the name of community interest. They try to impose their ideologies on Ruby's young generation, which professes a different ideology, in the manner George Washington proposed long back. Washington suggested that "slight shades of difference" should be allowed to be consumed by homogeneity in the name of patriotism and/or nationalism (141). The central question confronting the old and new generations of Ruby is whether to accept the change made in the inscription on the community Oven from "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" to "Be the Furrow of His Brow". While the original inscription gives the impression of detachment, isolation, and inaction, and hence, of looking back to the past, the latter provides the progressive spirit of acting and looking ahead to the future through involvement in black activism. History can never be fixed like the one white Americans want to maintain by replicating the colonial practices at work at the height of slavery. By trying to keep intact the history of the Oven, the elders of Ruby are only imitating the same white values they are critiquing.

The shooting of Convent women is also another such replication of white ideologies already mentioned. Morrison, being a realist, does not discard the historical compulsion or necessity of Black activist and separatist movements microcosmically represented through Ruby and Convent, and ironically presented as paradise. But Morrison also foregrounds the weaknesses of such movements leading to maniacal suspiciousness not only between the white and the black, but also within the black community itself. What Morrison therefore hints at is perhaps the tendency on the part of Black activists to keep black women away from such movements. Though Morrison is against labeling her novel with any '-ist', and justifiably so because she writes about the general history of America, her women-centric Convent appears to be in the line of women activism. But, as *Paradise* so convincingly manifests, in order to fight white racism, there is no need to embrace inverted racism by the black, nor is it possible without coordination between black men and women.

It did not appear to Ruby men that fighting racism and classism does not mean getting obsessed with legacies of ancestral trauma, but deconstructing or redefining them according to the need of the hour. This "seemingly irreversible bonds of national unity", upheld by the powerful group, hamper the possibility of locating cultural difference in "Third Space" where alternative re-visioning can be made possible (Wilson 3). Segregation, inequality, and restriction (on movement) imposed on African Americans not only relegate them to the margin of national life, but also lure them to subscribe to the same colonial values and practices in the coterie of their own community. Such unhealthy practices impair any likelihood of envisioning alternative perspectives and pursuing unconventional practices. Ruby's young generation's desire for re-setting the words inscribed on the Oven, and its attempt to embrace Black Nationalism as an alternative to white nationalism are endeavours to protest against Ruby men's blind adherence to past traditions on the one hand, and so-called American nationalism, on the other. In both cases the weaknesses lie in the lack of dynamism and flexibility in embracing differences whether in the community level (as in Ruby) or in the national level (as in the American nation-state). This rigidity and exclusivity practiced by both the black community and the American nation-state induce the young people of Ruby to envision alternative discourses even though they may turn out to be damaging to themselves. As Morrison has demonstrated, Black Nationalism cannot be an adequate alternative to (white) American nationalism, nor can rejection of tradition be a substitute for surrendering to it. What

she perhaps professes is a negotiation between the two in the location of hybridity where multiple possibilities emerge – neither the first nor the second, but the third and beyond: “But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Bhabha 211).

What is most disheartening is the fact that elders of Ruby not only ingest “their parents’ own unresolved frightening experiences”, but also transmit this second-hand trauma of the “second-generation” to their progeny (Hesse & Main 485). This observation is substantiated by Pat Best’s comment that the trauma of “the Disallowing” experienced by Ruby community’s ancestors “was a burn whose scar tissue was [never] numb” (*Paradise* 194). There seems to be a conflict between one’s individual aspirations and loyalty to one’s community. The second-generation Ruby patriarchs have had no trouble in committing themselves to fulfilling the community needs (at least their version of community solidarity) apart from which they do not appear to have entertained any other personal needs. By doing so, they maintain the stability of home although at the cost of isolating themselves from the mainstream national politics on the one hand, and cutting themselves off their own young generation, the other black communities, and black national politics, on the other. This kind of obsession with their ancestors and community interests make them insensible to hopes and aspirations of the third and the fourth generations of the Ruby community. These new generations have started inculcating new ideologies under the influence of Black Nationalism and, thus, put up a challenge to the conventional ideals of the second-generation Ruby men.

Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an imagined community implies the possibility of imagining the nation from multiple perspectives. African Americans’ upholding of “Africanism” is an attempt to imagine Africa as a nation in trans-Atlantic scale. The inclination of the young generation of the Ruby community towards Black Nationalism is a case in point. Morrison, however, takes up an ambivalent position in addressing this issue. She rather seems to suggest that neither blind adherence to “Africanism”, nor obsessive cynicism about American Nation-state is going to solve the problems encountered by African Americans.

Living in an all black town, people of Ruby fail to realize the need for interacting with the larger white culture in order to evoke re-memory for revising their past trauma to live a meaningful life in the present. Like Son in *Tar Baby*, men of Ruby are obsessed with their past in the form of almost worshipping their ancestors, as a result of which they are unable to cope up with their present. The women in Convent, on the other hand, don’t have positive memories of their past that they can be obsessed with. They are in a better position than the black community in Ruby because unlike the latter, the Convent women have the blessings of living in a community based on mutual cooperation and sisterly alliance among its members. While the Ruby community sacrifices flexibility and multiplicity of community life in the name of honoring the ideologies of their ancestors and maintaining ‘pure-blood’, Convent women, because of their firsthand knowledge of the debilitating effects of patriarchy —whether black or white — are more knowledgeable and flexible to deal with their present. They are susceptible to change, while the Ruby men are not. The problem with the inhabitants of Ruby is that while dealing with generational trauma, they do not allow it to be qualified by any firsthand trauma on their part. This reduces the momentum of the healing process. The Convent women, on the other hand, initiate the healing process only after undergoing firsthand experience of trauma. The present of the Ruby community must be built on the edifice of collective memory as well

as new initiatives taken for reorientation of past trauma to meet the needs of the present. Unfortunately, they seem to forget that no community can live an isolated life.

The failure of Ruby community to create a viable home in the town far away from the centre (mainstream) of national life seems to lie in its inability to understand that “the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” (Tradition 44). By removing the sacred Oven from Haven and (re)installing it in Ruby, the community has brought with it “the pastness of the past” without taking into consideration the viability of the Oven (and the ideologies epitomized by it) in their present. In other words, men of Ruby have started worshipping their ancestors’ ideologies to the extent of not allowing any positive change as demanded by their present situation. Interestingly, such a change is welcomed by the young generation of Ruby. Ruby has certainly been able to provide a secure space for the community from which it can envision a new identity and home to counteract rejection by the outside world – rebuffed by both the white and the black on the basis of race and class respectively. But being too rigid to entertain changes, men of Ruby have started inculcating those white values of segregation and exclusivity they were fighting against. The imposition of these ideologies on the young generation leads to the formation of a hegemonic structure where difference is not entertained but overwhelmed by homogeneity. The aspirations of the young generation to move to the centre by subscribing to black (national) movement like Black Power problematizes this uncritical adherence to tradition and ancestral ideas.

The Ruby community’s delinking of itself from the mainstream national life is a counter-move to challenge its rejection by both the white society and other black communities. The Ruby men’s refusal of the outside world is occasioned by their sense of “shame” resulting from witnessing their women folk--“pregnant wife or sister or daughter”—being refused shelter unceremoniously (*Paradise* 95). It appears that as long as the ancestral trauma remains fresh in the memory, the Ruby community relies on the collective consciousness and communal well being by living in the margin detached from mainstream white culture. But when the impact of that trauma recedes with the passage of time, the young generation tries to move to the centre by breaking the shackles of self-exiled coterie and ghetto mentality upheld by the elders of Ruby. Reverend Misner has very succinctly captured the weakness of the elders of Ruby community when he observes:

But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates (*Paradise* 161).

The elders of Ruby, in order to become subjects, make their women and children objects in an ironic mimicry of the white’s projection of the black as “objects” and “Other”. By articulating their desire for a change in the language of inscription on the Oven, the young people of Ruby challenge the hegemonic structure the community is built upon. A home built upon such a shaky edifice may provide momentary respite from the hegemonic space of the nation, but with its inherent weakness assuming gigantic proportion in the era of the young generation, it can no longer sustain the unity and solidarity of the community as a whole.

Just as slaves have no identity apart from the identity of the slave holders, the women and children of Ruby have no identity apart from the identity of their husbands and fathers respectively. Such imperious and disdainful practices degenerate the community from one with potential for counteracting racialized, conservative and class-ridden hegemonic spaces of the

nation, to one with propensity for replicating coercive practices championed by the white culture. The Ruby community ultimately becomes the microcosm of the American nation in its replication of the practices entertained in the wider space of the nation and in its overlooking of the genealogy of the marginalized families. By reconstructing the history of the community on the basis of the genealogy of each and every family, Pat Best deconstructs the myth of sustainability of community ties on the basis of hierarchical family structure and uncritical subscription to ancestral ideologies. The nature of trauma changes with the passage of time and the healing process also requires a different approach in tune with the character of that trauma. The Ruby elders' attempt to pass on ancestral tradition in its pure and uncontaminated version ironically leads to the homogeneity of all traumas irrespective of their individual and situational significance.

In order to heal personal trauma African Americans will have to rely on community assistance because the American nation-state does not provide such a healing space for them. In *Paradise* both the Ruby community and the Convent women choose marginality as a space of resistance to race and class division in case of the former and patriarchy in respect of the latter. The Ruby community's act of situating itself in the margin, ignoring the white at the centre and other stratified black communities at the epicenter, is in itself an act of resistance. In this all black community there is no space for the white and other black communities because they believe in "purity of blood". The women in Convent, however, are more flexible in the sense that a white woman is allowed to stay in the place. This is perhaps because their struggle is not so much against racism and hierarchical class structure as against patriarchy. Ironically, the all black community of Ruby can only be preserved by inculcating and perpetuating the values epitomized by "the Oven"—hence the necessity of uninstalling it from Haven to be reinstalled in Ruby.

The hegemonic practice of the Ruby men against their own women and children extend to the women community in the Convent whose carefree and unconventional living put up a challenge to their conservative views of life. This is counteracted violently by these button-down men leading to the murder of these women irrespective of their racial difference—another example of patriarchal hegemony practiced to keep their frustration at abeyance. Though the all black town of Ruby can provide the black community a respite—a protective space against white hegemony and black classism—it ultimately fails to provide them a viable and sustainable home because of the orthodoxy and impractical ideologies of its men folk. They seem to forget that "Time Present and Time Past Are both perhaps present in time Future/And Time Future contained in time past." (Burnt Norton 13).

The Convent women, on the other hand, solely rely on their present status as Convent women bonded together in sisterly love having a link with the Ruby community but free from direct influence of its patriarchy. Just as Ruby becomes home for the "too dark and too poor" community, Convent becomes home for these women (Schreiber 52). In fact, both the communities, refused a home in the wider space of the nation, establish home for them in the marginal space of community life. But it seems that both of them are victims of what Lefebvre calls 'double illusion'—"the illusion of transparency" and "the realistic illusion"—or what Edward Soja refers to as "myopia" and "hypermetropia" (62). The Ruby men are victims of "hypermetropia", that is, "farsightedness, seeing so far into the distance that what is immediately before [them] disappears" and the Convent women are victims of "myopia", that is, "nearsightedness, seeing only what is only right before [their] eyes and no further" (62). It

is because of this “double illusion” that neither the Ruby community nor the women community of the Convent is in a position to make home viable and sustainable in their communal space from which they can put up a resistance to the wider hegemonic space of the nation.

The positive aspect of the Ruby men, however, is that they can derive mental strength to cope up with rejection and discrimination by both white and other upper class black communities by invoking their ancestors. But in doing so, they create a home which shuts its doors and windows to new ideas necessary for sustaining themselves in the present situation. Similarly, the Convent women are in a position to derive strength from their present status as free women seemingly unaffected by patriarchy. But this overwhelming reliance on the present makes them blind to the importance of history which repeats itself. Their rejection of and escape from the past disable them to establish a home that can sustain in the future. The Ruby men’s rejection of the present makes their eulogizing of the past self-defeating which, in turn, poses a serious threat to the sustainability of their home.

There is, of course, no denying the fact that however chauvinistic and sectarian it might appear to be, community solidarity, even if imaginary, is a must for making home possible for the African American in the American nation space governed by jingoistic racism. But for that to happen, African American communities must get rid of classism and sexism among themselves by focusing on their solidarity as a race to destabilize the hegemonic structure imposed on them by their common enemy, the larger white culture. Ironically, it is this culture which lures them to replicate the very structure and hierarchy they are fighting against. Unfortunately, the Ruby men, obsessed with rituals, traditions and past trauma of their ancestors, fail to consolidate racial solidarity by moving beyond restraining practices of sexism and classism. In the overpowering patriarchy of the town of Ruby, there is little space for freedom of speech and thought for women and children, whose needs and ideas are ignored, if not suppressed. It is because of their complete surrender to “the pastness of the past” that the Ruby men fail to convert Ruby into a viable and sustainable home. Consequently, they fail to anticipate a Ruby governed by practical customs and ideas sanctioned by every member of the community. Such obduracy on their part make them (the Ruby men) carry on a home which is not flexible enough to satisfy the needs of their young generation, on the one hand, and to welcome the sisterhood of the Convent women, on the other.

Instead of building on the cooperation and solidarity of black men and black women irrespective of class, the Ruby men thwart any such attempt on the part of their women who recognize sisterly affinities between them and the Convent women. Unlike the Ruby patriarchs, the Convent women, however, are flexible enough to mix up with the Ruby community by living in a way that poses a sharp contrast to the waywardness of the patriarchs of Ruby, who dictate their children and womenfolk to live in a particular manner in the town. Such a home can never be a befitting substitute for a home denied to them in the nation space.

Shaking themselves off the legacy of their forefathers’ insulated existence against white racism and black classism, which the Ruby men are also guilty of replicating, the young ones of the Ruby community aspire for consolidating black solidarity by joining black movements like Black Power. Though fraught with their own weakness these black movements are attempts on the part of the African American to move to the centre by counteracting jingoistic racism practiced by those occupying the centre. The Ruby men lack dynamism and flexibility

necessary for reaping the maximum benefit of living in the margin and have no intention of moving to the centre keeping intact their marginal identity. Ruby's young generation, on the other hand, wants to move to the centre by joining black movements thereby reclaiming home and identity denied to it and its forefathers by the white at the centre of American nation space. Occupying the margin itself is not enough to create a viable home, unless a movement to the centre is in the offing.

It is well understood by Ruby's young people but adamantly ignored by the elders of Ruby. Ruby men's vetoing of the young generation's attempt to change the words inscribed on the "Oven" is indicative of the former's blind adherence to smothering traditions. According to Reverend Misner, the problem with Ruby is that while its founders think they are protecting their women folk and children by living an isolated life, they are actually "maiming" them by imitating white values (*Paradise* 306). Schreiber is right in maintaining that the Ruby community can create an isolated but secure home away from white rejection by building new identity, but such a home cannot be sustainable because of its own ambivalences and self-contradiction (54).

CONCLUSION

Rejected by the nation, African Americans are inevitably drawn towards community life for healing and making home possible. Morrison, therefore, concentrates on their community life to foreground the unrepresented history of America, and then place it along with the normative official history of the nation. In doing so, she brings to the fore multiple ambivalences and self-contradictions of the stance taken by both the white and the black, rejecting thereby black/white binary. She demonstrates how both the centre and the margin are equally loaded with insurmountable obstacles inhibiting a march towards a meaningful and brighter future. If the American nation is hell for Morrison's blacks, community is also no paradise for them. The future, therefore, seems to lie in breaking the shackles of such conventions. Neither by rejecting "Americanness", nor by replacing it with "Africanism" Morrison's black characters can make home possible in this world.

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