

TRANSITION IN TONI MORRISON'S "CONSOLATA" FROM *PARADISE* (1997)

Rosalía Villa Jiménez

Universidad de Córdoba

Abstract

In her novel *Paradise* (1997), Toni Morrison portrays one of her main characters, Consolata or "disconsolate", through a constant journey in search for her African American identity as a complete woman. This journey engulfs Consolata in an eternal fluctuation between hope and hopelessness, which results from being caught up in the so-called liminal/diaspora space in hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996).

The present paper deals with location of culture and gender identity in the marginal, unhomely spaces between dominant social formations by analysing chapter 7 "Consolata". Consolata may be seen as an illustrative example of the black female community struggling to overcome the hurdles of being victimised as hybrid diasporic women in a patriarchal archaic western [black] culture.

Keywords: hybridity, diaspora, liminal space, cultural identity.

Resumen

En la novela *Paraíso* (1997), la autora Toni Morrison nos presenta a Consolata o «desconsolada», uno de los personajes principales, en un viaje en busca de su propia identidad como mujer afroamericana a la que han privado del poder de la palabra. Este periplo simboliza el estado fluctuante entre la esperanza y la desilusión que se sucede del denominado «espacio liminal» (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996). En este trabajo abordamos las cuestiones de identidad y de género para lo que estudiaremos el capítulo séptimo «Consolata». El personaje objeto de análisis es manifiesto particular de la lucha por superar los obstáculos que conlleva ser una mujer de la diáspora en una cultura [negra] occidental arcaica y gobernada por el dogma del patriarcado.

Palabras clave: hibridación, diáspora, espacio liminal, identidad cultural.

1. Hybridity, diaspora and cultural identity

Hybridity is defined as the process by which colonial authority becomes decentred from its position of power, so that authority may also become hybridised when placed in a colonial context in which it finds itself dealing with, and often inflected by, other cultures (Ashcroft 14).

Similarly, Homi Bhabha thereto states that “the colonial authoritative and representative power is seen as the ‘*production* of hybridization’ rather than a form of authority or repression itself” (12). Hence, hybridity may be explained as the process resulting from the clash between two or more representative cultural authorities, by which the colonising power is decentred or subverted when this clash enables resistance on the part of the colonised in the form of a performative mimicry.

Systems co-exist in an ambivalence space or space in-betweenness in which cultural differences articulate, giving rise to imagined constructions of national and cultural identities however. As a direct consequence, this third space of enunciation allows the dismantling of dual representation and power discourse, “The cultural hybrid breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside ... colonial discourse is *compelled* to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers” (Bhabha 112-13).

In a like manner, Hall, as cited in Williams, Patrick, and Chrisman, lays emphasis on the intentionality underlying the urge for an ambivalent discourse in as much as the colonising power and the colonised other express their volition for self-articulation, dissociating themselves from any form of cultural and national replica. In the same line, Young, following Derrida, points out that, “Hybridity is the process that makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way, that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different ... difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity” (26).

In regard to diaspora, Ashcroft briefly defines this process as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions which extends to colonialism” (68-70), which consequently ends up in hybridity and the enunciation of clashing powers in a space of liminality. Quite in a similar vein, Hall describes the concept of diaspora in the following way:

Diaspora is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*, Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and

reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.
(qtd. in Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman 402).

In addition to this, Avtar Brah understands the concept of diaspora as "an interpretive frame for analysing the economic, political, and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy" (16). In other words, these forms of migrancy constitute diasporic groups in a host community that set up a critique of the discourse of fixed origins, i.e., commonly the western[ised] discourse, either black or white. Amid the dispersal of exile and immigration, analogous to Bhabha's space in-betweenness, Brah proposes the concept of diaspora space as the site of immanent de/centring, "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (Brah 208).

Concerning the producing and reproducing of identities, Hall, on his part, provides a definition for the notion of cultural identity from two different angles. On the one hand, a cultural identity may be conceived of in terms of a unique shared cultural construct, which does not permit any possibility of disruption, hence advocating for an insurmountable power discourse. In this sense, hybrid diasporic identities would be cast adrift in a fruitless romantic quest for preserving cultural uniqueness:

Cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. ... our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall, qtd. in Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman 393).

But on the other hand, a cultural identity may present a turning point towards displacement within the mimicry process in the third space of enunciation. This second notion references hybridity (third space of enunciation) and diaspora (diaspora space) as a constant reconstruction of identity power discourses over the course of history, consonant with Hall and Brah's illustration of the rationale of diaspora. Brah elucidates that "tradition [hence cultural identity] is itself continually invented ... what is at stake is the ... myriad processes of fissure and fusion that underwrite forms of transcultural identities" (208).

In brief, hybridity and diaspora processes as elucidated above become key concepts in the continuous confluence and formation of cultural identities as well

as transgressing the borders of virtually insurmountable power discourses and fixed duality expressed by the self/other, centre/margin dichotomy. Accordingly, the ensuing section concentrates on the physical and transcendental liminal/diaspora spaces in Toni Morrison's chapter 7 "Consolata": the convent, the cellar and Consolata's journey in search for her own cultural identity as a female African American female (non)citizen.

2. The voyage to the centre, the convent and the cellar: culture as a site of travel

Consolata or 'disconsolate' begins her migratory voyage by a ship that evokes the memories of dreamers bygone. She departs from Africa and arrives to Brazil, where Mary Magna (Great Mother) kidnaps—and rescues—her along with two other children, later left in an orphanage on her return to the United States in 1925. Afterwards, Consolata becomes an inmate at Christ the King School for Indian Girls run by Mary Magna known as the Convent in a remote patriarchal black town in the desolate Ruby, Oklahoma—an old black frontier settlement—.¹

Her first great travel across the ocean—a paradox analogous to slavery trade and/or the Chosen people (chosen black community) of the Old Testament setting foot on the Promised Land—indicates an exile from her African homeland, which terminates in a constant struggle to dismantle duality in a liminal/diaspora space, to resist and counterattack.

Like many young girls' design, Consolata's was no exception. She was abandoned to live on her own on the streets, to poverty and rape, which precarious situation is a result of a patriarch-dominated sphere in which women's claims for her visibility are unheard. In light of this, being kidnapped/rescued at heritage's expense in order to reach the other side of the ocean will set her at battle to avoid the complete loss of her African identity and to re-define herself as a woman.

The convent school—temple/crypt—appears transformed into a threshold site of confinement and confluence, where upon many occasions, the female inmates cannot be heard being devoid of agency. Accordingly, this ambiguous

¹ According to Peniel, "Toni Morrison would situate [her] third novel, *Paradise*, within the frameworks of what has come to be understood as the black town movement of the American West" (83). The creation and rapid growth of all-black towns in the southern middle-west regions in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth-century was due to the fleeing of black communities from slavery, economic crisis and, most importantly the dissolution of the Freedman's Bureau Bill initiated by President Abraham Lincoln in 1865. This period is also referred to as the Reconstruction Era, which concerns the reconstruction of the states after the Civil War (1861-1865) and the need to upgrade the rights of former slaves.

remote secluded space is not always a place of identity loss but of liminal enunciation and performative acts and speech for our main character, Consolata—a green-eyed and light-skinned convent girl/woman embodying liminality.

Cycling from transition to self-realisation is as well echoed through ageing (growth) and travelling (movement). On the one hand, her second travel to the religious temple on the borders of Ruby—itself a space in-betweenness and an all-black town that enforces white values (civilised) and represses female sexuality (savage) as a corrective to black savagery—may be interpreted as a form of early displacement from the fixed western duality of self/other and centre/margin.

The threshold convent firstly gives shelter and comfort to a very young Consolata who, under the influence of innocence, sees cloistered life as the sole form of existence and identity expression. In essence, the innocent girl appears to enjoy a fixed canon of ideals far beyond her roots as an African woman-to-be.

At a very early stage or phase in the convent—underscored by Christian references—the young Consolata needs a protective mother to guide her through life and Mary Magna is appropriately allotted to play this role. The old nun, Sister later in adulthood, therefore, does not only embody a mother-daughter relationship—subverting thus the conventional mother-son bonding well established by a male-dominated Catholic sphere—but also calls to mind she symbolises the pure teachings of the Bible.

Put in other words, Mary Magna becomes ambiguously a conduit of female self-assurance through the monitoring of the young girl in the western religious tradition. To give an example:

For thirty years she offered her body and her soul to God's Son and His mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself. To her of the bleeding heart and bottomless love. To her quae sine tactu pudoris. To the beata viscera Mariae Virginis ... He who had become human so we could know Him touch Him see Him in the littlest ways ... And those thirty years of surrender to the living God cracked like a pullet's egg when she met the living man (Morrison 225).

Inversely, the second phase refers to maturity and implies an attempt at turning away from the past, from being an unwitting spectacle towards self-awareness—Consolata reminisces about Mary Magna, now her sister, from whom she becomes estranged and to whom she struggles to remain attached. In addition to being dis/placed in a space in-betweenness/diaspora space, Consolata finds a form of enunciation as a female self by means of transgressing the confining gardens of celibacy in the matriarch of the convent. The private sphere of the

convent, which first functioned as a haven to the orphan girls, now turns into an unsuitable place for a woman who is seeking fulfilment.

Having sexual intercourse, a sign of volition that counteracts rape in childhood, with a westernised black male counterpart serves to highlight Consolata's coming of age (she is 31)—reconciling with her heritage—i.e., as an articulation of her assertiveness, which may only be possible by being displaced in a liminal space and acquiring a diasporic hybrid identity that surpasses duality:

What did he say? Come with me? What they call you? How much for half a peck? Or did he just show up the next day for more of the hot black peppers? Did she walk toward him to get a better look? Or did he move toward her? In any case, with something like amazement, he'd said, "Your eyes are like mint leaves." Had she answered "*And yours are the beginning of the world*" (Morrison 228).²

Nevertheless, Deacon (Deke) at large withdraws from the clandestine, erotic affair knowing Consolata had made up her mind to refuse to live under the proscribed ideal of womanhood. Deke's narrative is blatantly marked by strict male standards to restrain women to the private sphere and sees Consolata as an unnatural savage African woman unable to control her femininity, which would, in turn, undermine the control and power of the patriarch of the Ruby community. Even if this travel for meeting a man from Ruby depicts a great leap for self-enunciation, Consolata still relies on Mary Magna to allow her to move towards spiritual freedom.

Overall, travelling into and out of the convent, itself a site for transition, either physically or transcendently, may be explained as a point of confluence between the past and the present, of tradition and novelty and cultural identity negotiation.

Relative to the cellar, it is important to point out this underground space shrouded in mystery and darkness—echoing the blackness of Consolata—may bespeak of light in the shadows of the daily work up in the matriarchal convent. Furthermore, the dark cellar reverberates the re-enacting of witchcraft and the supernatural, an illustration of returning to the ancestors. The references to reincarnation constitute a type of Africanism that reminds us of the importance of resistance and of heritage and self-realisation enabled in the liminal/diaspora space that shape the lives of African American women in a widest sense.

Following Vega, magic means a consecration to paganism, which allows spiritual freedom to Consolata, "el término mágico-religioso hace eco a la fusión

² Italics in the excerpt from Morrison's novel are mine to lay emphasis on the sense, if fleeting, of completion for Consolata.

entre la magia y religión característica de las culturas tradicionales africanas" (18). In addition, she goes on to explain "al reclamar y recurrir a lo sobrenatural estas autoras están abogando por el intermedio, lo posible, frente a lo monolítico y lo rígidamente definido. Lo que predomina en sus novelas es la perspectiva mestiza" (40).

Thus, this magical form of freedom appears interwoven with Mary Magna's teachings, which may be explained as a process of cultural identity negotiation by transgression.³ By way of illustration, "Yet however repugnant, the gift did not evaporate. Troubling it was, yoking the sin of pride to witchcraft, she came to terms with it in a way she persuaded herself would not offend Him or place her soul in peril" (Morrison 247).

The cellar—room of darkness opposite to the garden outside where light and fresh air heal Consolata at intervals—no sooner inflames the woman's desire to leave the convent than extinguishes the fire within her heart. By candlelight and in darkness, Consolata's identity is swallowed and vomited up from the black bottles of wine with handsome names.

Upon many occasions, she wakes to the disappointment of not having died, of having to cope with the waking day, "... and hoped that a great hovering foot would descend and crush her like a garden pest" (Morrison 221). The struggle in the liminal/diaspora space of the cellar may be excruciatingly destructive, on the other hand, being like a coffin to Consolata amid the clean depression of darkness in life. For instance, "Reaching for a bottle, Consolata found it empty. She sighed and sat back in the chair. Without wine her thoughts, she knew, would be unbearable: resignation, self-pity, muted rage, disgust and shame glowing like cinders in a dying fire" (Morrison 250).

On top of that, drinking and alcohol-impairment—a warm corrective—symbolise the mimicry of the cultural values imposed by the prevailing white middle-class patriarch. But being a complete replica of the western power discourse is solely a mirage on the borders of Ruby. African rituals, even if reconciled with the Christian dogma, rise from darkness and silence. The travel to the cellar, this said, embraces identity negotiation as a hybrid diasporic self, which may annihilate and revive Consolata at a time.

³ Vega underlines that the African American writer Toni Morrison in a series of interviews remarks «la importancia de la espiritualidad, lo sobrenatural y la magia—sin connotaciones peyorativas—como reflejo del entorno que la ha rodeado desde su infancia» (26).

3. The female diasporic hybrid: a minority discourse based on heterogeneity

By minority discourse we mean a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture (Janmohammed and Lloyd ix).

Janmohammed and Lloyd underline the binary relational opposition between minority (diaspora) and majority cultures when they collide, in which the latter exerts its representative discourse to re-define minority groups. Yet it is interesting to highlight, following Brah, that minority cultures should be considered individually as heterogeneous identities.

Accordingly, the extent of oppression by the dominant culture varies among oppressed groups. There is not a single homogeneous minority discourse that resists subjugation but myriad discourses that oppose relational positioning majority discourses differently.

As stated by Brah, diasporas should be re-codified as heterogeneous mappings of cultural identities fusing with the self-representative categories typically defining the melting dominant discourse:

Diasporas ought not to be theorised as transhistorical codifications of eternal migrations, or conceptualized as the embodiment of some transcendental diasporic consciousness ... the term should be seen as conceptual mapping which defies the search for originary absolutes, or genuine and authentic manifestations of a stable, pre-given, unchanging identity; for pristine, pure customs and traditions or unsullied glorious pasts. (196).

Briefly, any single diasporic minority identities struggle to maintain their own defining histories that codify unique class, gender and ethnicity categories in an oppositional and relational binary dichotomy when clashing with representative majority discourses.

In terms of gender and ethnicity, Sara Suleri points out minority feminist discourses pursue to undermine discriminatory and marginalising categories not only within a particular community but also when clashing with a majority authority takes place, “until the participants in marginal discourses learn how best to critique the intellectual errors that inevitably accompany the provisional discursivity of the margin, the monolithic and untheorized identity of the center will always be on them” (757-58).

She goes on to explain that in order to disempower monolithic authorities—western feminist, patriarchal ethnicity powers as marginalising discourses—it is essential that the female subaltern speaks for herself in a heterogeneous discourse

of/for the female other.⁴ In a similar vein, Keating (1998) states that these threshold identities should resist and articulate from within, deconstructing oppositional subjugating categories that define gender and ethnicity stereotyped models.⁵ Thus, the heterogeneous female other should:

Engage in what I call *tactical (re) naming*, or the construction of differentially situated subjectivities that deconstruct oppositional categories from within. ... By disrupting the restrictive networks of classification that inscribe us as racialized, engendered subjects, there is an emergence of nonbinary models of subject formation, thus opening up psychic spaces where alterations (...) can occur (...) in order to resist self-reification and closure, the challenge has to be taken up every time a positioning occurs. (25).

Furthermore, she underscores that "we redefine the other as a part of ourselves by acknowledging our own otherness" (31). Lorde, in a like manner, proposes to re-define personal identity in non-dual terms, destabilising the binary oppositional boundaries of gender and ethnicity by "recognizing the other(s) within ourselves and, simultaneously, to recognize ourselves within the so-called others" (107) in a liminal/diaspora space, blurring consequently the seemingly clear-cut self/other division, i.e., enabling *tactical (re) naming*.

Sandoval shares this approach towards (de)constructing engendered and ethnicity-related subjectivities by expounding her theory of differential consciousness, based chiefly on Brah's and Bhabha's premise on the strategy mechanisms allowed in the liminal/diaspora spaces. She remarks thus, "Differential consciousness represents a new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a tactical

⁴ "The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation ... Gramsci's perspective was to reach the state of freedom through a "permanent" victory which necessarily guarantees a dismantling of the master/slave pattern. This dismantling is to be realized within Gramsci's theoretical framework, by releasing the subordinated consciousness of non-elite group from the cultural hegemony exercised by the ruling class" (Louai 5).

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" reconsiders the concept of the subaltern proposed by Gramsci and applies it to the problems of gender, "and particularly Indian women during colonial times. She reflected on the status of Indian women relying on her analysis of a case of Sati women practices under the British colonial rule (Louai 7). Clearly the Sati woman loses her voice, as a subaltern, "The conflict between these two positions produced two different discourses with no possible solution; one postulates that, "white man [are] saving brown women from brown men," the other maintains that, "the woman actually wanted to die (Spivak 33).

subjectivity with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted” (Sandoval 14).⁶

On balance, hybrid diasporic female subjectivities that constitute minority marginalised groups may articulate and resist, according to Minh-ha, thanks to, “the ability to perceive difference within, between, and among speaking subject(s), which means that I am not I, am within and without i. I/i can be I or i, you and me both involved. We ... sometimes include(s), other times exclude(s) me. You and I are close, we intertwine” (90).

More specifically, concerning Morrison’s narrative, Consolata and the matriarchal convent school, to some degree, symbolise a minority discourse that enunciates and opposes complete displacement. At the death of Mary Magna by 1970s, Consolata takes up the responsibility of raising the few orphan girls in the convent, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas, becoming thus a more appropriate heterogeneous site for the reconciliation among subjectivities and a space for female realisation as little is made of racial/ethnicity purity and homogeneity, and gender distinctions.

The isolated threshold convent appears as a micro-cosmos that shelters a diversified female community transgressing exclusion and seclusion by the once all-empowered majority discourse. These new subjectivities are far more capable of acknowledging their otherness and recognising themselves in the self-representative authority.

In actual fact, they may conceive of the patriarch of the town and western gender and ethnicity canons as entities intertwining with their own in a liminal/diaspora space. Any form of separatism only reinforces differential oppositional cultures and the construction of universal fixed values estranging identities and discourses. In these terms, Widdoson points out that “separatism is not a solution—for blacks and whites [*men and women*]; ... But Ruby [*and the Convent*], immorally frozen in its own stasis (...) the town is ideal because it cannot change, and it cannot change because it is ideal” (329).

In addition to this, oppositional discourses are based on the sense of belonging to the community that displaces the diaspora women, i.e., of being identified as a natural hybrid female citizen in the target country. However,

⁶ Keating (2013) summarises Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness as “differential consciousness is not oppositional in any conventional sense of the term. Unlike oppositional forms of resistance, which rely on exclusionary mechanisms and dichotomous categories, differential consciousness represents a fluid, sometimes contradictory both/and approach. And yet, differential consciousness does not entirely always *reject* all conventional forms of opposition; rather, differential consciousness draws from binary oppositional modes selectively, in context-specific ways” (Keating, *Transformation* 109).

Consolata reveals that she still feels the burden of being an immigrant, abandoned, without legal rights to stay in the United States.

Morrison attempts at re-writing African American history from slavery abolition in the early second half of the nineteenth-century to the Declaration of Civil Rights in 1976—leading to the so-called Black Power and Black Feminist movements⁷—seen by the author as a second and third Reconstructions respectively, emulating in principle the Reconstruction Era of the United States in 1865.⁸

In theory, this third Reconstruction aims were to “do away with the invisibility black women experienced [by the white feminist and Black Power movements/discourses] and to meet the [real] needs of black women” (O’Brien 913). The writer attempts at speaking the unspoken and for the silenced, alluding to a reformed conception of female freedom by including primarily gender and ethnicity among the former categories of colour, creed and racism that took the form of exclusion and homogeneous misrepresentations of an underdeveloped woman.⁹ Notwithstanding, by calling into question the real influence of these movements over dominant discourses, Morrison places Consolata, a black woman of the diaspora, in a liminal space that more often than not becomes a site made up of strongly fixed boundaries, however, which construct Manichean discourses.¹⁰

⁷ Van Deburg shows an interesting survey study revealing that the term “Black Power”, in general, was interpreted negatively by white and black people, connoting violence and riot, but “it [actually] did not speak of a vindictive desire to get Whitey by seizing control of the country’s [United States] economic infrastructure. The ostensibly revolutionary rhetoric forwarded by Black Power advocates was designed to rouse the slumbering black masses, not to promote riots ... Black Power was seen as a force promoting, not disturbing, racial peace” (19). It was, in fact, a liberation movement to claim freedom and equal civil rights for the black communities during the 1960s-1970s. Unfortunately, in view that the Black Power rhetoric silenced black women, a wave of black feminism emerged to counteract this lack of perspective.

⁸ Peniel explains that “the African American who came [to towns such as Langston in Oklahoma Territory and Boley in Indian Territory] shared the general immigrationist view of the time: that to make a fresh start in owning land in the West was to lay claim to what seemed, after the Homestead Act of 1862, the American entitlement to liberty and prosperity” (83).

⁹ Morrison reasserts her role as female writer in a male public sphere and criticises the negative influence of gender relations as portrayed by African American male writers. Her literary and gender relations criticism is clearly seen through the collision course between the Convent and Ruby, the all-black town.

¹⁰ Janmohamed states that “Colonialist literature is an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of ‘civilization,’ a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology. That world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. Motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, language, social customs, cultural values, and modes of production” (59).

To crown it all, Morrison and Consolata encourage the reader to reflect on the possibility of articulation and self-representation—as hybrid female citizens—for immigrant or diaspora women facing the reality of imaginary threshold discourses that build apparently impassable physical and imaginary border walls.

4. Conclusions

Toni Morrison in chapter seven “Consolata” alludes to the importance of articulating and continuing African cultures/subjectivities by linking to any form of Africanism, especially outlining female identity, through re-shaping the life of Consolata, an African American diaspora woman. Morrison as well narrates the discourse dramas of liminality and diaspora referencing to citizenship, gender and ethnicity issues and presenting a heterogeneous female community and minority discourse, the convent, in a differential consciousness, thus distinguishing from larger and virtually insurmountable male-dominated towns or countries either black or white, mirroring majority Manichean discourses. The liminal/diaspora space, nevertheless, brings both light and darkness to Consolata or “disconsolate”. To quote Peniel’s words in reference to Morrison’s novel, from which “Consolata” is a wonderful example:

Paradise imagines how the Utopian efforts of African Americans to construct spaces free of white racialized violence and discrimination intersected with the desire to own land and establish full American citizenship in the all-black towns in the West. It also delineates the excesses of nostalgia for a place "out of time" in the face of the failure of the Utopian project (85).

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