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# The Politics of Lived Space: Black Feminist Subjectivity and Narrative Resistance in Alice Walker's *Meridian*

**Ms. Himanshi Chaturvedi, Dr. Rupali Mirza**
Research Scholar, Era University Lucknow,
HOD & Associate Professor, Era University Lucknow

**Abstract**
The paper explores how the spatial configurations in Alice Walker's *Meridian* are dynamic locations where Black female subjectivity is constructed, limited and negotiated. Drawing upon feminist spatial criticism, it argues that the various landscapes in the novel, such as communities, educational institutions, and politics, are unified spaces that entangle racial and gendered exclusions in an attempt to control the visibility, movement, and voice of Black women. The movement through and between liminal and marginalized spaces by the name that *Meridian* carries finds what the author calls a counterprecise spatial practice where she rebels against the fixed social labels and reclaims the authority over the prevailing discourses of activism, motherhood, and sacrilege. The transformation of lived spaces into spaces of discipline and ease of ethical contemplation is an excellent example of how unstable the hegemonic spatial orders exist, and how one can conceptualize a sense of identity through a spatial reorientation. Associating personal space with shared political scenes, Walker proves that space is both an arena where power is exercised on the Black female body and a place where moral questions and historical awareness are discussed. Finally, the novel prefigures gendered space as the key to interpreting Black female subjectivity, showing how the feeling of space mediates a tension between social obligation and individual autonomy, which existed in the mid to late twentieth century during the civil rights era.
**Keywords:** Alice Walker, *Meridian,* Black female subjectivity, Civil Rights Movement, embodied space, narrative resistance

## Introduction

In Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), protagonist enters the world of Saxon College, a Black historical women's college in Atlanta, through which her vision of herself, her community, and belongingness will change fundamentally. However, this is not an auspicious entrance into the promised land of educational prospects of an upwardly mobile protagonist. Instead, the fact that Meridian is admitted at Saxon is used to show how the university's spatial structure shapes its people as disciplined individuals: gates control entry; dormitories control time, rules and respectability; lawn clipping hides the life of poor Black families, who fight to survive, at their edges. Once in Saxon, the Wild Child, a young, pregnant girl escaping poverty and violence, arrives in the sanitized territory, and the institution reacts reflexively: Wild Child is kicked out to the literal and social boundaries, and Meridian faces criticism of breaking into the spatial logic that makes Saxon so conscious of being too dark, too impoverished, too rowdy to be under the type of protection the institution ensures. This initial image captures the primary preoccupation of the entire novel, namely how the subjectivity of Black women is constructed, confined, and negotiated by existing spatialities of the mid twentieth century America, wherein even the so-called free spaces, such as the college, the organization of activists, or even the Northern cities, act through exclusionary logics that render some of the Black female bodies constantly out of place.

The Wild Child episode unveils much that much of the Walker criticism has under-theorized, namely that space in *Meridian* is not an impartial backdrop but instead is an operating power that defines the formation of Black female identity by breaking movement, visibility, and the agency of the body. Through the patrolled campus boundaries of Saxon and the racially divided geographies of the rural South, through the domesticizing efforts of compulsory motherhood and the political ideology of the Civil Rights Movement, *Meridian* navigates the overlapping lines of spatial constraint that both run parallel and simultaneously through the concept of a race, gender, class, and political ideology axis. These spaces are plotted with accuracy in the novel, showing the interaction of institutional regimes (universities, hospitals, prisons), intimate formations (homes, apartments, romantic relationships), and collective destinations (demonstrations, churches, movement meetings) in defining where Black women can access, what they can do, and who they can be. But Meridian disavows spatial determinism; rather, Walker enacted the spatial navigation as a mode of resistance in itself, where Meridian evolves what the Walker describes to be a counter-spatial practice a conscious practice of occupying margin, transitional, and unexpected spaces that allows her to rebel against assigned social roles and form an ethical subjectivity that is not controlled by the dominant activist narratives of activism, childbirth and self-sacrifice. At the end of the novel, Meridian has changed spatial marginalization, meant as an imposed exclusion to a chosen autonomy, residing in a funeral home, sleeping in vacant rooms, and moving continuously across the rural South with nowhere to go permanently, a radical rejection of all efforts to locate, incarcerate, and domesticize her body and mind.

It posits in this paper that, as practices of discipline and the location of ethical self-fashioning, institutional, domestic, and political spaces actively shape the specificity of Black female subjectivity in a manner that creates spatial navigation as resistance by rearranging the relationship between location, mobility, and agency in the post-Civil Rights moment. Although the literature on the subject has fruitfully discussed the role of the novel in addressing civil-rights activism, womanist spirituality, maternal ambivalence, and revolutionary violence, critics have given very little thought to the spatial aspects of the issues: the manner, say, in which the politics of motherhood is structured announced in the spatial structures of the home that limit the movements of women, or the manner in which the activism of revolutionary movements necessitates the literal occupation of spaces in which the bodies of Black women had been previously excluded. This rhetorical under-examination indicates a larger trend in Civil-Rights literary criticism to attach greater value to the temporality of change, development, and historical discontinuity, and to overlook the spatial schemes of racial and gender power action on a daily and corporeal scale. Therefore, it still have not come to fully explain how space, as practiced, occupied and availed territory, turns into a key instrument by which Black women can negotiate the paradoxical exigencies of racial uplift ideology, patriarchal domesticity and political solidarity during a period of transition and upheaval.

The spatial turn as a feminist theory element provides invaluable analytical instruments to question the dynamics involved. Geographers and theorists like Doreen Massey, Gillian Rose and Linda McDowell have continuously shown that space is never inert; it is always built upon relationship of power and they therefore demonstrate the production of gender relations in space (numerous women are constrained to access public spaces, women are confined to the household, and space demarcations that construct masculine and feminine space are naturalized). However, the racialized aspect of spatial production has been frequently not adequately considered in feminist spatial theory, which tends to discuss women as an undifferentiated group and ignore the issue of how white domination alters the space of women of colour. Black feminist critics have started to fill this gap by imagining homeplace as a site of resistance and refuge against racial terror, which bell hooks, in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), conceives of as symbolic of the displaced and the marginalized Black subjects of geographic imaginaries, who are thus places of dispossession to Katherine McKittrick in *Demonic Grounds* (2006). McKittrick specifically demonstrates how Black geographies are formed by the clash of racial-capitalist spaces towards Backs, as well as practices of Blacks in place-making, existence and space resistance. It is based on this work that it is proposed that *Meridian* provides a history of Black female spatial navigation that prefigures embodiment, motion, and the growth of alternative spatial epistemologies, or methods of knowing the world through the body relationship between place, boundary, and territory.

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Walker's *Meridian* foreshadows other Black feminist geographic literature, in which space is viewed as a point of interlacing, intersectional sources of domination and accretion. The spatial limitation of *Meridian* is not just being the Black person in the white-supremacist society or the woman in the culture of patriarchy; it is simultaneously the experience of the Black woman who is disciplined in institutions and across geographies by intersecting and enhancing processes of racial and gendered control. Her Blackness is policed at Saxon College via middle-class respectability politics, which deem particular expressions of Black embodiment unacceptable, as well as her gender via dormitory curfews and sexual surveillance. Her racial suppression at home in a romantic relationship does not absolve her gendered spatial subordination; instead, Black men often support patriarchal spatial structures that reduce women to care giving roles and household work. Even in spaces of the civil-rights movement, where racial liberation is claimed as its aim, Black women are limited to the space of the behind-the-scenes organizing, making men take up the more visible, public roles. This intersectional spatial analysis shows how the relationship of Black women to space cannot be possibly described in single-axis terms, but instead, their spatial experiences are the result of conflict between race, gender, class, sexuality, and political identity, which produce forms of exclusion and constraint that are qualitatively different than those that involve Black men or white women.

To theorize how *Meridian* circumnavigates these confluent space constraints, It would term “Counter-Spatial-practice” as a form of spatial practice that not only passively submits to hegemonic practices of space, nor does it idealistically envision total escape. Counter-spatial practice is a demarcation of how Meridian negotiates space not through a confrontation, which would make her an easy target of violence, nor through irreversible withdrawal, which would be a sign of defeat, but as a strategic maneuvering across and between spaces that do not, and will never, add up into one place. There are three major dimensions of the practice. First is occupying the marginal and liminal places of the funeral home, cemeteries, abandoned buildings, and roadside churches that are without the normative category of space, which provides escape from institutional surveillance and social requirements. Second, it requires restless movement, a rejection of standing, where it allows Meridian to escape entrapment in fixed identity positions, mother, wife, activist, saint. Spatially, it creates space to change the stigmatization of space into a resource to revalue the spaces and positions of the so-called abject or disposable spaces in the mainstream space hierarchies. In counter-spatial practice, Meridian transforms into the terms of her exclusion the conditions of a new subjectivity, one that builds its authority precisely on the fact that she is outside of respectable institutions, domestic arrangements and traditional movements.

The present paper disrupts three strands of academic discourse, which are interconnected. In the context of Walker's criticism, the spatial analysis rereads the previous notion about the nature of Meridian, which is either saintly self-sacrifice, maniac, or a new paradigm of political investment. Through the preemptive spatiality, it can be seen that Meridian's spatial expression (alopecia, paresis, syncope) instantiates the corporeal effects of spatial discipline, with her professedly unusual actions (solitary residence, rejection of domesticity, constant traveling) forming a consistent spatial tactic of providing psychic freedom within the maze of constraints. Meridian, in the field of feminist spatial theory, serves as an example of the necessity of a racially sensitive spatial analysis that elicits the operations of such spatial violence and spatial innovation as a result of the experiences of Black women to racialised patriarchy. In the civil-rights literature, the spatial concern, that the novel reveals aspects of mobilization politics not usually found in heroic accounts: how gendered space is reproduced in activist organisations, how the hierarchy of classes is reproduced by spatial exclusion even by Black institutions and how it feels to be a body occupying a space of struggle in the segregated South. In the end, the spatial ontology of Walker opines that, to emancipate Black women, they do not merely need access to historically denied spaces but the meaningful renegotiation of the nexus between identity and space of location, a vision of selfhood that is not established by place.

The subsequent analysis charted across four principal domains—each delineating a distinct facet of Black women’s spatial restrictions and negotiations—represents a systematic effort to interrogate Meridian’s spatial trajectory. At the beginning of the analytical inquiry, institutional milieus, including the example of Saxon College and the infirmary, are thoroughly explored as the places where codified disciplinary architectures are enacted and where the politics of respectability, as well as the medical intervention in the Black female bodies, are actively produced. Then, this is narrowed down to the domestic setting, where gender work is challenged in the space of homesteads and intimate romantic encounters, reinforcing patriarchal power even in so-called Black societies. The third text speculates on the politics of civil-rights activism by the way in which spatial power and constraint, which are deployed around popular gatherings, voter-registration efforts, and organizational structures, can at the same time empower and limit Black women to locate in specific spatial regimes. Lastly, Meridian counter-spatial praxis is examined in which she occupies the margins of locations like the funeral parlor, cemetery, and roadside church, where she builds a new spatial ethic based on solitude, historiographic memory and an ethical relation to the dead. Space in those places is not a backdrop, but a capital on which Black female subjectivity is constituted, challenged, and put to work. The concrete visualization of lived experience and plight of the Black woman, reaching its ultimate in the demand of the civil-rights movement and beyond, requires as Walker shows in her novel, not just consideration of the political dimensions and personal relations but also the spatial space that determines their mobility, the scope that is travelled and the space that is eventually marked as their own place.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study pursues four interrelated objectives. First, it aims to theorize space as a constitutive force in the production of Black female subjectivity in Walker's *Meridian*, demonstrating that spatial configurations function not as narrative backdrop but as primary mechanisms through which racial and gendered power operates on bodies and consciousness. Second, the study seeks to develop the concept of counter-spatial practice as an analytical framework for understanding how Meridian navigates overlapping institutional, domestic, and political spatial regimes through strategic occupation of marginal and liminal zones. Third, it endeavors to apply an intersectional spatial methodology that reads race, gender, class, and political ideology as simultaneously operative forces within spatial organization, rather than as discrete variables producing separable forms of constraint. Fourth, the study aims to situate Walker's spatial poetics within and against existing traditions of feminist geography and Black feminist geographic theory, establishing *Meridian* as a literary text that anticipates and contributes to contemporary theoretical debates about Black women's spatial experience.

**Significance of the Study**

This study makes several contributions of scholarly significance that operate across intersecting disciplinary fields. Within Walker studies and African American literary criticism, it advances a spatial rereading of *Meridian* that reframes previously debated aspects of the novel—including Meridian's political withdrawal, her rejection of motherhood, and her apparent physical deterioration—as components of a coherent counter-spatial practice rather than symptoms of ideological ambivalence or psychological breakdown. This reframing enriches critical understanding of the novel's formal and thematic architecture and opens new interpretive possibilities for a text that remains central to African American women's literary tradition.Within feminist spatial theory, the study contributes an intersectional spatial methodology that foregrounds the racialized dimensions of spatial production, addressing a persistent gap in a field that has historically analyzed gender and space without adequate attention to how white supremacy and racial capitalism restructure spatial experience for women of color. The concept of counter-spatial practice proposed here offers a vocabulary for forms of spatial resistance that are particularly salient for subjects whose access to normative spatial resources is systematically denied—a contribution with implications beyond the specific literary text under analysis.

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Within Civil Rights literary and historical scholarship, the spatial analysis surfaces gendered dimensions of movement organizing that heroic civil rights narratives have frequently suppressed, documenting how the spatial arrangements of activist organizations reproduced patriarchal hierarchies even within ostensibly liberatory political cultures. Finally, the study's contemporary and global dimensions establish *Meridian* as a prescient text whose spatial theorizations illuminate ongoing struggles for racial and gender justice across varied national geographies, affirming the continued relevance of Black feminist literary analysis as a mode of geographic and political theorizing.

**Scope of the Study**

The study is delimited to a close spatial analysis of Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), with primary attention to four categories of space: institutional spaces (Saxon College and medical facilities), domestic spaces (the childhood home and heterosexual domestic arrangements), political spaces (civil rights demonstration sites and activist organizational structures), and counter-spaces (the funeral home, cemeteries, roadside churches, and abandoned buildings). While the analysis draws upon biographical context where relevant, it does not undertake a comprehensive biographical study of Walker, nor does it attempt a systematic comparison with her wider body of work. Theoretically, the study operates within the intersecting frameworks of Black feminist geography, feminist spatial theory, and intersectionality theory, with selective engagement with Foucauldian spatial analysis and de Certeau's theorization of everyday spatial tactics. The historical scope is anchored in the mid-to-late twentieth-century American South and the Civil Rights era, though the concluding section gestures toward contemporary and global resonances of the spatial dynamics the novel identifies. The study does not undertake quantitative or empirical geographic analysis, remaining throughout a work of literary and cultural criticism informed by spatial theory.

**Literature Review**

Critical scholarship on Alice Walker's Meridian has concentrated on three primary areas: the novel's representation of civil rights activism, its treatment of motherhood and gender roles, and its engagement with spirituality and womanist ethics. Christian's Black Women Novelists (1980) positioned the text within African American women's literary tradition, examining Walker's critique of revolutionary violence and her emphasis on spiritual transformation. McDowell's analysis in "The Changing Same" (1995) focused on maternal representation, documenting how the novel depicts Meridian's rejection of motherhood as both traumatic experience and potential site of liberation. Byerman's Fingering the Jagged Grain (1985) analyzed the text as Walker's response to Black Power ideology, while Hite's "Romance, Marginality, Matrilineage" (1989) examined the novel's reconstruction of political activism through feminist frameworks that center grassroots organizing over heroic individualism.

Scholarship has also addressed the novel's formal properties and narrative structure. Butler- Evans's Race, Gender, and Desire (1989) examined Walker's use of narrative fragmentation, nonlinear temporality, and multiple perspectives as techniques for representing consciousness and ideological critique. Nadel (1988) analyzed the text's circular structure and recursive narration as formal correlatives to Meridian's iterative ethical development. Holloway's Moorings and Metaphors (1992) and Harris's work on Walker explored the novel's engagement with African American sacred traditions and ritual practices. Walker's Down from the Mountaintop (1991) situated Meridian within broader patterns of Black women's fiction following the civil rights movement, documenting thematic and formal continuities across this body of literature.

Existing criticism has not systematically examined the spatial dimensions of the concerns it identifies. While scholars note that Meridian moves through various geographic and institutional locations, analysis has not treated space as a constitutive force in identity formation or as a primary mechanism through which power operates. The novel's engagement with motherhood, for example, has been analyzed through frameworks of ideology, psychology, and political economy, but not through attention to the spatial arrangements that structure reproductive labor and domestic life. Similarly, scholarship on civil rights activism in the text has focused on ideological debates and organizational politics without examining how spatial contestation itself functions as political praxis.

Feminist geography and spatial theory provide frameworks for analyzing gendered spatial relations. Massey's Space, Place, and Gender (1994) demonstrated that built environments and spatial organization reproduce gender hierarchies through restrictions on women's mobility, enforcement of domestic confinement, and naturalization of spatial divisions between public and private spheres. Her concept of "power-geometry" describes how different social groups experience differential access to spatial mobility based on their positioning within structures of domination. Rose's Feminism and Geography (1993) analyzed embodied dimensions of spatial experience, documenting how threat of violence shapes women's relationship to public space.

McDowell's Gender, Identity and Place (1999) examined spatial segregation in labor markets and its role in concentrating women in particular economic sectors. Spain's Gendered Spaces (1992) provided cross-cultural analysis of spatial segregation by gender, revealing variation across societies and historical periods.

Feminist spatial scholarship has been critiqued for insufficient attention to racial difference. Spain acknowledged that her analysis did not adequately address how racial capitalism reorganizes spatial relations for women of color. Feminist geography's focus on exclusion from public space as paradigmatic form of gendered oppression has been identified as reflecting primarily white, middle-class women's experiences while overlooking forms of spatial violence specific to colonialism, slavery, and racial terror—including forced displacement, territorial dispossession, and denial of protected domestic space through systematic sexual violation.

Scholarship in Black feminist geography has addressed these limitations. McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* (2006) argued that Black women have been rendered geographically illegible through processes of displacement, erasure, and confinement that deny claims to place and territory. McKittrick documented how dominant geographic imaginaries construct Blackness as unplaced—either absent from landscapes of power or present only as exploited labor—thereby naturalizing dispossession while obscuring Black place-making practices. Drawing on Wynter's philosophy, McKittrick analyzed how racial capitalism operates through spatial technologies that categorize, contain, and control Black bodies, producing what she termed "black geographies": alternative spatial epistemologies emerging from Black subjects' negotiations with disciplinary regimes.

hooks's *Yearning* (1990) theorized "homeplace" as a site where Black women created spaces of refuge, self-affirmation, and political possibility under conditions of racial terror and economic exploitation. hooks documented how homes functioned differently for African Americans than the accounts in white feminist theory suggested, serving as spaces wrested from white supremacist control through Black women's domestic labor and community-building. However, hooks also identified contradictions within homeplace, noting how these protective spaces could reproduce patriarchal gender relations and middle-class respectability politics that police Black women's sexuality and enforce gendered labor divisions.

McKittrick and Woods's Black Geographies and the Politics of Place (2007) assembled interdisciplinary scholarship mapping geographic dimensions of Black life and struggle. Contributors documented how racial segregation, urban renewal, environmental racism, and mass incarceration operate through spatial logics that concentrate Black populations in territories marked for extraction while denying access to spaces of opportunity. Woods's analysis of the Mississipp"Delta revealed persistence of plantation spatial organization in contemporary geographies of underdevelopment, which he characterized through the concept of "blues epistemology"—spatial knowledge forged through

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navigating landscapes designed to exploit Black labor while preventing mobility and self-determination. Shabazz's Spatializing Blackness (2015) and Gilmore's Golden Gulag (2007) examined carceral geographies, documenting how the prison-industrial complex operates through spatial technologies of confinement and surveillance extending beyond prison walls.

While McKittrick centered Black women's spatial practices, other work in Black geography has focused primarily on Black men's experiences of racial-spatial constraint without systematically theorizing gender's role in shaping these processes. Historical scholarship has begun addressing this gap: Hine's concept of "cultures of dissemblance" documented Black women's spatial strategies of concealment and misdirection for protection from sexual violence, while Carby's Reconstructing Womanhood (1987) analyzed nineteenth-century discourses mapping Black women's bodies as territorially available for white male occupation. Hartman's Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments (2019) examined spatial politics of early twentieth-century Black urban life, documenting how young Black women claimed city streets, dance halls, and tenement apartments as spaces of erotic freedom despite intensive policing. Hartman's attention to the "anarchy of colored girls" analyzed spatial transgression as practice of freedom.

Crenshaw's intersectionality framework (1991) has been applied to spatial analysis, though geographic scholarship has not fully developed spatial implications of her concept. Crenshaw's essay "Mapping the Margins" used spatial metaphors—margins, locations, intersections—to describe how different social positionalities occupy distinct locations within power matrices. Geographic work extending intersectionality theory has documented how subjects positioned at intersections of multiple systems of domination experience qualitatively distinct forms of spatial constraint that cannot be understood through additive models combining separate oppressions.

Additional theoretical frameworks inform spatial analysis. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) analyzed how institutions regulate subjects through spatial organization, including arrangement of bodies in space, creation of enclosed areas, and assignment of individuals to specific locations. de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) distinguished between "strategies" employed by institutions and "tactics" used by individuals to navigate institutional spaces, documenting how subjects create autonomy through improvisation and creative spatial use. Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology (2006) theorized spatial "orientation," analyzing how subjects become oriented toward particular objects and life paths through repeated spatial practices, and how heteronormativity operates spatially through domestic and urban arrangements directing subjects toward normative trajectories.

The Black radical tradition has theorized mobility and marronage as central to freedom struggles. From Douglass's escape from slavery to analyses of the Great Migration to contemporary social movements, Black political thought has examined spatial mobility as both necessity and strategy under racial domination. Roberts's *Freedom* as Marronage (2015) theorized fugitivity and flight as central to Black freedom throughout African diaspora history. Historical research on civil rights organizing has documented gendered dimensions of spatial politics: Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1995) showed that women constituted majority of grassroots organizers while men dominated public leadership, and Ransby's S*tudy of Ella Baker* (2003) examined tensions between women's behind-the-scenes organizing and men's visible authority within movement
spaces.

This paper establishes that space functions as mechanism through which power operates on bodies and consciousness, that Black women experience distinct forms of spatial constraint emerging from intersecting oppressions, and that spatial practices constitute modes of resistance and self-fashioning. However, literary criticism has not systematically applied these frameworks to African American fiction of the civil rights era. Analysis of how novels represent and theorize the spatial dimensions of Black women's experience during this period remains underdeveloped. This study addresses that gap through spatial analysis of Walker's Meridian, examining how the text represents institutional, domestic, and political spaces as sites where Black female subjectivity is produced and contested, and how the protagonist develops spatial practices that negotiate overlapping forms of constraint.

**Analysis**

**I. Institutional Spaces and Black Female Containment**

The spatialization of racial and gender hierarchies is organized by institutions in the way they are designed, regulated in their bureaucracies, and disciplined to organize everyday life. This is the situation in the case of Meridian, where a historically Black educational institutions and medical facilities, where Black communities are supposed to receive care and protection, becomes the key location in which Black women are exposed to multiple forms of spatial containment. The Saxon College, the female aristocratic college that draws Meridian in the pursuit of education and self-expression, also functions by the rules of space logic that police classifications, sexuality, and middle-class respectability imperatives with as much strictness as any white supremacist institution. Similarly, hospitals and clinics, which should remain a relatively neutral environment of healing and care, act as a theater of reproductive control where the autonomy of the Black woman's body is subjected to medical scrutiny and interventions. These institutional spaces indicate that spatial oppression is not comprehensible in terms of single-axis models of racial domination, but instead, institutions subordinate Black women in terms of gendered processes that make them susceptible to forms of control that are not accessible to Black men or white women. By interrogating material circumstances of a counter-spatial practice of development by Saxon College and medical institutions by questioning how they spatialize power as they respond to concurrent structures of institutional constraint.

**Saxon College as Segregated Space**

Meridian's arrival at Saxon College is a spatial threshold that guarantees change but brings up enhanced surveillance. The novel presents Saxon as a place of Black struggle, a place dug into white-supremacist geography where Black women can get an education without being directly controlled by white people. However, this liberatory promise is immediately undermined by Walker's narration, who turns to the college's space of architecture. The campus gates that mark entry into Saxon simultaneously delineate boundaries of exclusion, determining which Black bodies are deemed worthy of institutional protection and which remain exposed to violence and deprivation beyond the walls. The clipped lawns and dingy houses are a symbol of decency and success, yet even their tidiness relies on spatial isolation from the impoverished Black communities that surround the campus, whose plight the institution hides under its green lawns and physical location. Such spatial arrangement replicates what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has described as the "politics of respectability": a policy in which the middle-class black institutions attempted to redress the racist stereotypes by policing the behavior and appearance of the black bodies, which were considered to be insufficiently civilized (Higginbotham, 1993, p.185-220). The spatial organization by Saxon literalizes the politics of respectability, establishing a haven where individuals dominant in class and color hierarchies can exist and pushing out bodies that disrupt the image that the institution has worked hard to maintain.

The Wild Child episode encapsulates the exclusivity of space or spatial logic in Saxon with a graphical devastation. When Meridian meets the Wild Child—a thirteen-year-old girl pregnant, homeless, and trying to escape abuse—the protagonist is instinctively drawn to her condition, and thus, she decides to keep the child within the Saxons' boundaries. The Walker's description highlights the spatial illegibility of the Wild Child: she is not native to any place, she is not under the purview of any institution, but rather exists in the in-between zone between the secure space of Saxon and the violent street outside. This designation of the child as being wild is her label as not part of civilization; her

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body is not something that can be tamed or made part of civilized social space. The fact that Meridian decided to take her to campus is a daring spatial trespass, an offense against the informal codes of conduct that govern institutional space. The reaction of the college indicates the process by which spatial discipline works: the Wild Child is not only denied entry, but is literally pushed out, her death in the process making literal the violence of spatial exclusion. Walker tells the story: "The Wild Child was dead. She had been struck by a speeding car as she ran across the street in front of the campus, her arms laden with white dogwood blooms" (Walker, 1976, p. 26). The dogwood, a Southern image of purity and resurrection, turns in a bitter irony the effort the Wild Child makes to introduce beauty into the space of Saxon, which is aborted by the very spatial boundaries that the institution adheres to.

Saxon's administrative reaction to the Meridian's transgression is an expression of institutional space, which disciplines through stigma and isolation. Meridian faces no formal punishment, but the society ostracizes her and pressures her psychologically because other students and the administration label her as dangerously unmanageable, someone who fails to respect proper boundaries. The novel presents the use of Saxon's spatial surveillance through describing the rules of the dormitory, the curfews, and how the movements of students can be tracked on and off campus. These regulations, which are introduced as protectionist ones, actually restrict the mobility and independence of Black women, defining when and where they may go, whom they can associate with and what they can do. The dormitory itself becomes a feminized zone of imprisonment, with women being put to sleep under institutional supervision and their personal lives subject to scrutinized. Academic spaces—classrooms, libraries, and administrative offices—operate through more subtle but equally powerful spatial hierarchies, positioning students as recipients of knowledge dispensed from authorized positions while their own embodied experiences and community connections are dismissed as irrelevant to legitimate learning. For Meridian, Saxon's offered education feels like another form of captivity, a spatial prison that requires her to disconnect with those who are outside the institution in exchange for access to its resources.

**Hospitals and Medical Spaces: Reproductive Control and Bodily Discipline**

When the Saxon College represents the best example of institutional discipline by spatial surveillance and social control, medical spaces of Meridian literalise the most radical way of spatial-bodily control, the intrusion into the bodies of Black women through medical treatment and reproductive control. The abortion scenes symbolize crucial situations in which the body of Meridian is a disputed area, under the jurisdiction of the medical authority that acts without her full consent or even awareness. Walker's narration reinforces the coldness of the abortion clinic as an institution and the dehumanizing nature of the procedures of the latter that place Meridian in the role of object to be worked with instead of a woman exercising and having agency over her own reproduction. The physical layout of the clinic—the waiting room, where the women sit in silence, shame, the examination room, where the bodies are placed to provide maximum access to the medical practitioner and the least amount of dignity, the recovery room, where the women continue to be observed—choreographs a process to enforce submission without accepting responsibility to the violence it causes.

Racial medicine and gender policing intersect in the medical space with an annihilating effect. The historical context of medical experimentation on Black women—from J. Marion Sims's gynecological experiments on enslaved women to the Tuskegee Study to coerced sterilizations—has haunted such a medical institution depicted by Walker to indicate that modern health care ensures it repeats past practices of treating black bodies as medical objects, as opposed to individuals. The experience of abortion that Meridian goes through is not introduced as something that healthcare acknowledges her right to her own body, but rather as a punishment for sexual sin, where medical staff members seem to look at her with a thinly veiled disgust at her unmarried pregnancy. The novel suggests that to achieve reproductive healthcare, Black women have to expose their bodies and space to violation and attend institutions where they are supposed to be given authority to control the body, but little care or compassion. This contradiction, where freedom demands subordination to the institution, shows that real bodily sovereignty is impossible when there is a combination of racial and gender oppression.

Meridian's subsequent mental health crisis and implied institutionalization extend this analysis of medical space as site of discipline. However, though Walker tells this period elliptically, hints of hospitalisation or psychiatric care are replicated throughout the interrupted chronology of the novel. The mental institution represents the ultimate spatial prison: a space that is literally planned to house bodies that are considered a danger to themselves or others, where all facets of existence are monitored and controlled by medical professionals. Psychiatric institutionalization has traditionally served as the means of punishing the breaking of gender norms among Black women, where the diagnosis of hysteria, depression, and other mental illnesses is used to pathologize women who refuse to be confined as homemakers or those who defy male dominance. According to Dorothy Roberts documents how Black women have faced disproportionate rates of coerced psychiatric treatment, particularly when asserting reproductive autonomy or challenging state control over their children (Roberts, 1997, p. 156-189). Meridian's breakdown appears physically through hair loss, temporary paralysis, and fainting spells, which can be interpreted as a rebellion of her body against the weight of space and body constriction that acculturation creates. Her physical breakdown materializes the expenses of operating in institutions established to penalize and restrain the Black female subjectivity.

Medical institutions, therefore, symbolize the purple end of spatial-bodily control in Meridian: spaces in which the reproductive autonomy of Black women is made literal in terms of spatial restriction, in which the body itself is made topography to be occupied, dominated, and governed by institutional power. The interrelation between the spatial surveillance of Saxon, and the bodily intrusion of the abortion clinic illustrates a spectrum of control: the space of institutions of the institution of the body acts over the bodies of Black women on where they are allowed to go and what they are allowed to do, whether they are allowed to reproduce, in what conditions, and with what autonomy. These experiences establish the conditions under which Meridian will eventually develop her counter-spatial practice, seeking spaces beyond institutional control where different forms of embodied existence might become possible.

**II. Domestic Spaces and Maternal Constraint**

If contemporary institutions castigate Black women through institutionalized forms of surveillance and control, the domestic world functions through finer but equally effective forms of repression. The politics of the home in the lived experience of Black women cannot fit into the frameworks of white feminist praxis, which have tended to define domesticity as a site of patriarchal hegemony against which women are attempting to liberate themselves into the realm of the public. As bell hooks demonstrates, for African Americans, the home has historically functioned as a "homeplace"—a refuge and site of resistance wherein Black families cultivated dignity and self-determination amid racial terror (hooks, 1990, p. 41-49). However, hooks argues that the protective power of the homeplace also depends on the unpaid domestic work of Black women and often recreates gender relations between men and women inside Black communities. Meridian navigates this dialectic, elucidating how domestic space simultaneously offers sanctuary and imposes confinement; how familial obligation is mobilized to justify women's spatial and psychic restriction; and how the transmission of gendered spatial roles from mother to daughter perpetuates cyclical constraint. Through a detailed analysis of Meridian's childhood home, her relationship with her mother and her future domestic order with romantic partners will help us track down how the domestic world naturalizes the matter of confinement of women with ideologies of motherhood, romantic love, and racial community ideologies that mask coercion as nurturing.

**Meridian's Childhood Home: The Inheritance of Gendered Space**

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Meridian's relationship with her mother provides the background of the institutionalization of gendered expectations via domestic space. Mrs. Hill represents the contradictions of Black motherhood in the realities of racial and economic oppression: both fully committed to her children and at the same time enraged at the sacrifices the motherhood demands; both proud of the middle-class respectability she has gained and weary of the effort it takes to maintain. Walker describes the life of Mrs. Hill spatially, as she lives within the limits of households and social bonds that do not allow her space to experience desire or personal growth. The Hill homestead—modest yet respectable—represents what the family has had to attain through the hard work of the father, as a schoolteacher, who can provide financial security that puts the family above the poverty that surrounds the rest of the country. Yet this achievement is predicated upon Mrs. Hill's unpaid domestic work: cooking, cleaning, childcare, and the emotional work that would be needed to keep the family together and socially acceptable among the Black community.

Walker emphasis on the spatial dimension of this gender division of labor by describing how Mrs. Hill was restricted to the house. Whereas the father of Meridian dangled between house, school and community with the liberty granted to men of any color, Mrs. Hill is bound to the house with her world shrinking down to kitchen, bedroom and small garden. The novel depicts the psychic damage that is created by this spatial constraint, with Mrs. Hill not achieving her aspirations and repressed desires that lead to depression, resentment, and a lack of emotional expression towards her children. Her relationship with Meridian becomes fraught with ambivalence: she loves her daughter but cannot grant the unconditional acceptance Meridian craves, for such an act would validate choices that Mrs. Hill was never permitted to make. When Meridian ultimately rejects motherhood and leaves her own child, Mrs. Hill sees this as a form of betrayal—not because she values motherhood but because Meridian's refusal exposes the coercion implicit in Mrs. Hill's maternal performance. The spatial liberation of the daughter incriminates the spatial restraint of the mother, which demonstrates that what Mrs. Hill considers as natural feminine responsibility was actually a prison where the mother chose to stay since no other options appeared feasible.

The Sacred Serpent mound introduces a contrasting spatial imaginary that violates the domestic order. The Native American burial site, inherited by Meridian's family along with their land, represents a sacred space irreducible to the logics of private property, domesticity, or racial uplift. Walker portrays young Meridian's attachment to the mound and her visits to the mound as a space of spiritual and imaginative freedom that is unavailable in the house or in the broader Black community. The mound offers what Ton"Morrison terms "rememory"—a spatial practice through which historical consciousness operates beyond linear temporality, linking present to past through embodied engagement with place (Morrison, 1987, p. 43). For Meridian, the mound can be seen as a site where she can experience forms of being that are not necessarily gendered and racialized subject positions otherwise available to her: daughter, student, future mother, respectable Black woman. The mound's destruction—its violation to accommodate a golf course for white tourists—reflects the racism of the commodification of space, the Indigenous sacred space turned into a recreational amenity serving white pleasure and profit.

This violation of the mound functions as a spatial analogue to the bodily violations that Meridian will experience through unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and medical procedure. Both the sacred land and the female body are contested spaces, which are subject to control and used by outsiders, and their actions are justifiable by development, progress, and proper use discourses. Meridian indicates that the subsequent occupation of marginal and sacred spaces by protagonist Meridian in the form of the cemetery, churches, and the funeral home is her efforts to re-achieve the spiritual-spatial relationship established by the mound. Unable to prevent the destruction of Indigenous sacred space, Meridian learns to find other spaces that exist outside dominant spatial orders—spaces where other forms of consciousness and relationality can be developed.

**Heterosexual Domesticity and the Spatialization of Gender Inequality**

Meridian's domestic relationships with romantic partners—initially with Eddie, her teenage boyfriend and eventual husband, and then with Truman, the civil rights activist in love with Meridian—reproduce patriarchal spatial relations despite both men preaching rhetoric of Black liberation. Walker shows how marriage alters the spatial experience of Meridian: she leaves the home of her parents, where, at least, she had access to education and community and enters the cramped apartment of Eddie, whereby the world narrows towards childcare, housework, and the anticipation of Eddie's return from work or social engagements. *Meridian* represents Eddie's belief that marriage gives him power to determine the movement and activities of Meridian, and her understanding that she will stay at home and take care of their child, whilst he enjoys freedom to come and go as he pleases. This gendered spatial division—man as mobile, woman as stationary—repeats in Black domestic space the very patriarchal logic with which white, middle-class families are organized, and it reveals that racial oppression does not automatically engender gender equality within Black communities.

Pregnancy emerges to be the ultimate manifestation of the spatial constraint, a state in the woman's body itself becomes territory occupied from within. Walker's narration of Meridian's pregnancy highlights the fact that it comes with a loss of bodily and spatial control: her body becomes something she cannot control, her mobility is restricted, and her existence becomes subordinated to the fetus developing in her. The medical authorities claim to have authority over her pregnant body, so they determine when she may give birth, on what terms and what interventions they should allow. This coercion of femininity is hidden with the ideology of motherhood that surrounds pregnancy, and the potential of women to carry the pregnancy is framed as a realization of some vital feminine role, as opposed to placing female bodies for reproductive labor. Meridian experiences pregnancy as a violation, her body commandeered for purposes she never intended and cannot escape. *Meridian* suggested that the reproductive imperative has an additional burden on black women, that they will be perpetuated for bearing children to keep the race alive, and compensate for historical losses through genocide and violence, which shows their commitment to the Black community. Meridian's resistance to motherhood, therefore, amounts to rebellion not just against the patriarchal gender norms but also against racial nationalist discourses that position black women's bodies as a source of reproduction.

Her relationship with Truman, though more intellectually stimulating than her marriage to Eddie, ultimately reproduces similar spatial dynamics. Truman, despite his civil rights activism and artistic aspirations, expects Meridian to provide domestic and emotional labor while he engages in his political and creative endeavors. The room they share—the apartments in Atlanta and New York, the movement offices, and the demonstration sites—are structured by gender hierarchies that place women in supportive positions and men in positions of authority and visibility. Walker portrays that, despite being characterized by radical political commitments, movement culture tends to strengthen traditional gender relations through spatial arrangements that marginalize women to behind-the-scenes organizing.

**III. Political Spaces and Collective Action**

The Civil Rights activism necessitates the literal occupation of space that historically excludes Black bodies. Lunch counters, voting booths, neighborhood parks, buses, and schools—the mundane local spaces—are turned into a space of political struggle as the Black activists claim them in resistance to Jim Crow's spatial drift. The spatial aspects of civil rights activism are inseparable from its political content; the demand to integrate was one of the core demands of spatial justice, for the right to occupy, traverse and use space without racially-based restrictions. However, as the case of Meridian demonstrates, the spatial politics of activism do not necessarily take place in the same way that they do to men, and create a sort of exposure and vulnerability that remain frequently unacknowledged within movement narratives. Black women activists not only faced the racial violence directed at all civil rights workers but also gendered forms of sexual threat, harassment, and

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assault, which conditioned their spatial experience in distinctive ways. Moreover, even the locations of the political organization, the movement offices, strategy meetings, and demonstration locations, replicated gender hierarchies in their spatial arrangements that discriminated against women's labor and leadership while celebrating male authority and publicity.

**Demonstration Spaces and the Physical Struggle for Spatial Integration**

Walker depicts voter registration campaigns and protests as spatial practices that change the geography through Black bodies' physical segregation. When Meridian leads marches through small Southern towns or accompanies families to the voter registration office, she participates in collective action that makes visible the spatial architecture of white supremacy. The novel emphasizes the physicality of such spatial violations: white crowds of people who come together to harass Black demonstrators, police brutality toward protestors, the constant threat of arrest, beating, or murder that accompanies any attempt contested space. Walker observed the extent of cruelty on the body of Meridian...she knew if it took 150 years to crack them, then the whites had geared it to take 200 years to restore the Blacks intact once more. Meridian shows that spatial violence does not merely work towards keeping black bodies from particular locations but to damage and destroy those bodies, imposing the power of white supremacy right onto black flesh.

Meridian's body itself is a place of political struggle where she is subject to violence as she becomes involved in a spatial struggle. Her body changes as she progresses through the novel—the mysterious paralysis, loss of hair, weakness and fainting fits—can be interpreted as somatic impacts of occupying spaces that are designed to exclude and eliminate her. The novel suggests that spatial integration is costly on the body, especially to women who face both racial violence from white supremacists and gender-based vulnerability to sexual assault. Black women's participation in protests involved regularly negotiating physical and sexual security, their bodies being labeled as desirable targets of white male violence in ways that complicated the movement's focus on achieving access to segregated space. Walker's attention to Meridian's physical aspects of the political struggle is preempted as these dimensions of struggle are separated from questions of bodily vulnerability, care, and sustainability.

**Mapping Danger: Segregated Geography and Black Women's Spatial Knowledge**

The novel maps the topography of terror that designs small-town Southern space in the course and after the civil rights period. Chicokema, the rural Georgia town where Meridian eventually settles into her wandering existence, exemplifies these spatialized power relations. Walker accurately describes the racial geography of Chicokema, the white neighborhood with its comfortable homes and well-maintained lawns, the Black one with poverty and neglect, and the invisible boundary between these two areas that is recognized by everyone, but no one acknowledges. This spatial segregation works both formal mechanisms—zoning regulations, property limitations, and also in an informal manner—intimidation, lynching, and even economic retaliation against those who cross racial lines. *Meridian* reveals how such a geography creates specific modes of spatial knowledge among the black and white residents: the whites can move through space with relative freedom, their mobility unchallenged, and their presence naturalized; Black residents must develop sophisticated spatial awareness, constantly calculating risk, anticipating danger, and navigating routes that minimize exposure to white violence.

Meridian's activism in these small towns requires that she conflict with this embodied spatial knowledge while simultaneously challenging the racial geography that it assumes. She must know which streets are safe at which times, which white residents are the greatest threat, and which Black families can offer shelter if needed—the experience of her ancestors in their struggle against spatial apartheid. Yet her work also requires that she betray these survival strategies, and leading marches down the street where the Black presence is undesirable, registering voters at a courthouse designed to exclude them, occupying space in a way to be retaliation against. This paradox—that effective activism involves both close familiarity with dangerous geography and the willingness to violate the survival regulations that knowledge dictates—creates a certain burden on women, who face additional vulnerability through gendered sexual violence. *Meridian* argues that Black women invented unique spatial practices as a response to this double jeopardy, community care, collective protection and tactical withdrawal strategies of spatial struggle that helped them to engage in spatial struggle while acknowledging the specific dangers they faced.

The sacred tree that is used throughout the novel's landscape becomes a spatial monument of racial terror, locations where the white violence against Black bodies has been perpetrated with impunity. Katherine McKittrick suggests that these places are what she calls "Black geographies of violence"—the places covered by historical trauma that still infuse the modern spatial experience of collective memory and embodied practice (McKittrick, 2006, p. 38-72). For Meridian, these memorial sites are pilgrimage sites; she seeks to bear witness to violence and venerate the people who died in the struggle against oppression. Her cemetery visits represent a form of spatial practice of history reckoning in which she attempts to connect the current struggle to the past sacrifice. This practice reveals how space operates not only in the present tense but also as a carrier of historical memory; the contemporary geography traces the vestige of violence shaping continued possibilities of movement and belonging.

**Gender Hierarchies Within Movement Spaces**

Despite the civil rights movement claiming liberatory aims through its institutional structures and spatial configurations, it often recreated patriarchal gender relations, thereby marginalizing women's substantive contributions. Walker expresses this dynamic of Meridian's experiences in the movement's offices and strategy meetings, where Black women perform essential labor—clerical tasks, fundraising, community outreach, childcare—while men occupy the positions to hold leadership positions and get recognition in the mainstream. The hierarchical nature of these political spaces literalizes the spatial demarcation of women working in back rooms and subordinate positions and men on center stage, where their voices are loud, and their authority normalizes. This gendered space division indicates more widespread trends in Black radical movements, where women's labor remains indispensable yet remains invisible, and their leadership is restricted by masculinist norms of political dominance.Meridian's growing alienation from mainstream civil-rights organizations partially explained that the movement spaces, despite their revolutionary rhetoric, continue to spatialize Black women's subordination. Meridian describes her discomfort at meetings where her suggestions are ignored or subsumed by male leaders, her annoyance with organizational cultures that place women in the supporter role and her realization that the very spaces intended to advance Black liberation can operate on exclusionary principles that reproduce gender inequality. Charles Payne's historical research on civil rights organizing confirms Walker's fictional representation, documenting how women constituted majority of grassroots organizers while men dominated public leadership roles and received disproportionate credit for movement victories (Payne,1995, p. 265-283). This spatial and organizational marginalization of Black women's political work reflects what Patricia Hill Collins terms "controlling images" that render Black women's leadership invisible or illegitimate (Collins, 2000, p. 69-96).Meridian's eventual dissociation into non-conventional movement organizing does not signify a rejection of political commitment; on the contrary, it is an intentional rejection of spatial configurations that force her to take up only subservient roles. The narrative suggests that her choice operates alone—move through small towns without any formal membership—raises a clear understanding that political spaces of solidarity, even those which seem to be devoted to liberation, can reproduce the patterns of bondage and marginalization which render sustained participation unsustainable. Such a departure should then be viewed as an individualistic withdrawal, but rather as a strategy of seeking alternative forms of political practice that can empower Black women to take control over their own spatial location and political labour. Meridian's solitary activism—voter registration, local community organization, historic violence—is described as counter-spatial practice: a mode of political engagement that operates through marginal spaces and tactical mobility rather than through entrenched organizational structures and institutional location.

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**IV. Spaces of Solitude and Counter-Spatial Practice**

Having traced how Black women are disciplined by institutional, domestic and political space through intersecting disciplinary mechanisms of constraint and surveillance, Meridian creates counter-spatial practice as a reaction to these forms of accumulated oppression. Inhabitation of peripheral and liminal spaces—the funeral home, cemeteries, roadside churches, and abandoned buildings—does not provide escape from political struggle; rather, an alternative form of defining the spatial terms under which political commitment is enacted. These marginal spaces exist outside normative spatial categories that govern the respectable society: they are neither fully a public nor a private place, neither sacred nor a secular place, nor productive nor unproductive. Their marginality itself exempts them from the high regulatory attention paid to more centrally situated locations of social reproduction, thereby creating interstices in which other subjectivities may emerge. Through strategically inhabited of such spaces, combined with incessant mobility that refuses spatial fixity, *Meridian* develops a kind of ethical selfhood based on solitude, historical consciousness, and unwavering refusal of all efforts to locate or domesticate her consciousness.

**The Funeral Home: Inhabiting Liminal Space**

Meridian's decision to live in a funeral house is a classic paradigmatic instance of counter-spatial practice. The funeral home, by its very nature, exists in a privileged status in social geography: it functions simultaneously as a commercial business and a sacred space, as a site of community assembly and a vessel of death. It is a location familiar to all, yet one that remains essentially uninhabited. By choosing this liminal space as her home, Meridian situates herself intentionally outside of conventional categories of habitation and domesticity. She is neither homeless nor fully domesticated, neither a completely integrated part of the community nor absolutely isolated from social relations. Walker describes this choice without any sensationalism, representing it as a rational consequence of how Meridian rejects normative domestic life: "…Meridian since she was twelve year old. She would visit the funeral home on saturday afternoon…" (Meridian, 1944, p. 59). The matter-of-fact tone belies the radicalism of this spatial strategy, which converts social marginalization into chosen autonomy.

The funeral home's inherent association with death and mourning makes it particularly suitable as the place of ethical and political development of Meridian. Death is an ultimate constraint space, where the action and mobility of the body are irreversibly ended. Yet the funeral home is a place that has been established to pay those who have died, to preserve their memory, and to enable the community to grieve. By inhabiting this space between life and death, Meridian situates herself in a relational situation that prefigures mortality in a manner that enlightens her political commitments. Her activism, concerned with bearing witness to historical violence and celebrating those who have died in struggles for freedom, acquires an additional layer of meaning when considered through the lens of the daily occupation of a space saturated with the presence of death. The funeral home becomes site of what Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation"—imaginative practice through which contemporary subjects establish ethical relation to those who suffered and died under regimes of racial violence (Hartman, 2019, p. 11-14).

Moreover, the funeral home is not limited to traditional domestic expectations—no family demand, no children to raise, no partner to serve—provide Meridian the solitude that is necessary with regard to ethical reflection and political dedication. Meridian posits, solitude is a radical act by Black women, who are in a continual demand to perform childcare and emotional labor. Virginia Woolf's famous assertion that women need "a room of one's own" for creative and intellectual work takes on different meaning for Black women, whose access to protected private space has been historically denied through slavery, economic exploitation, and spatial dispossession. Meridian's funeral home provides such space, but its space is marginal and strange, which guarantees that this privacy come with social costs. She is marked as eccentric, possibly mad, certainly outside bounds of respectable femininity. Yet these expenses seem better than the psychological demise that traditional domesticity would involve.

**Black Sacred Space and Alternative Spatial Epistemology**

Along with living in the funeral home, Meridian also attends Black churches, especially modest, rural congregations located outside major streets, which is another aspect of the counter-spatial practice. The Black church has traditionally served as a counter-institutional site among African American communities: both within and outside the hegemonic social structure, both subject to the surveillance of whites but developing a self-reliant culture of Black spiritual and political life. Walker describes these sacred areas as places where alternative epistemologies and community practices flourish despite external oppression. In the church, Meridian also experiences forms of knowledge unavailable in the secular world of education: implicit spiritual activities, call-and-response communication, and testimonial evidence that authenticate experience in the lived world rather than abstract doctrine. Such practices challenge the mind-body dualism that defines the Western institutional knowledge, instead demanding the combination of intellectual, spiritual, and bodily aspects of human experience.*Meridian* highlights the functioning of Black sacred space on a logic rather than the secular institutions. Church architecture itself mirrors this divergence: rather than the hierarchical, surveillant lines of school buildings or the bureaucratic separation of offices, the Black churches construct the discursive space where group participation and individual recognition become possible. The congregation organizes in a circle of witness, members facing each other rather than a single authority. Music, movement and communal call function as spatial practices that create a provisional community and respect the individual experience. To Meridian, these holy spaces allow for to replacement of white-dominated institutions that exclude Black experience as well as Black secular organizations that reproduce gender hierarchies. Within the church, her leadership and spiritual authority can be recognized without forcing her to adopt masculine standards of political aggression.Walker does not idealize the sacred spaces of the Black community deliberately as an all-inclusive solution to political struggle; *Meridian* recognizes that churches simultaneously reinforce conservative gender norms, police sexuality, and institutionalize accommodationist politics that subvert a meaningful challenge to white supremacy. Meridian's involvement with these spaces is nuanced: she gets spiritual nourishment while maintaining a critical view of them; she participates in communal worship, yet challenges the orthodox doctrine. This selective participation exemplifies counter-spatial practice, which—a strategic ability to occupy spaces temporarily, extract empowering elements, reject limiting ones, and evacuate before the institutional compulsion force.

**Cemeteries: Spatial Practice of Historical Consciousness**

Meridian's frequent visits to burial grounds throughout the narrative play the role of a spatial praxis that allows her to cultivate a historical consciousness and ethical interaction with the deceased. These cemetery pilgrimages, first intuitively viewed as morbid or escapist, Walker described as a politically imperative form of labor: commemorating violence, honoring sacrifice, and maintaining connections who fought for liberation. The pattern of visits to the cemetery is systematic; Meridian is attracted to the graves of martyrs of civil rights, lynching victims, and ordinary Black individuals whose lives and deaths have remained absent in official historiography. She spends time on these sites, sometimes speaking to the dead, sometimes sitting in silence, and what appears to be deeply personal but still serves as a collective practice of memory. These cemetery visits represent what Katherine McKittrick terms "geographic storytelling"—spatial practice that connects embodied present experience to historical geographies of violence and resistance (McKittrick, 2006, p. 113-147). *Meridian* challenges the historical erasure that comes with the spatial transformation under racial capitalism through conscious physical itineraries to historical trauma. Where the cemeteries might be paved over and consigned into extinction, she maintains her insistence on their continued significance. Where dominant narratives glorify progress, that not address the expenses of attendant costs, she maintains a focus on those who died in pursuit of change. This spatial practice of historical consciousness functions at both ethical and political levels: it prevents the instrumentalization of the dead for contemporary ends and simultaneously derives inspiration and guidance from their exemplary behavior.The novel argues that cemeteries serve as counter-spaces in several respects. First, they exist beyond the sight of the productive economy, refusing to give one a traceable utility within

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logical capitalism. Secondly, they offer conditions that encourage reflection and isolation, and that are absent in environments governed by social interaction and surveillance. Third, they render visible the historical consciousness that the dominant society is trying to suppress and attempts to repress, marking graves with the deaths that are obscured by official histories. For Meridian, visiting such sacred grounds constitutes a form of spiritual practice, which is similar, yet distinct from, church attendance: whereas the latter brings her into the living community and collective traditions, the former links her to the dead and the weight of the historical memory they carry.

**Conclusion**

The novel's conclusion does not follow the traditional closure rather presents the Meridian's persistent movement through rural Southern space without a fixed destination or end. Truman, who comes to find reconciliation, discovers Meridian preparing to leave and entrusts him with the responsibility for local organizing while she continues to unknown locations. Those critics who have interpreted this ending as a failure to achieve a resolution or stability have, this is misunderstood the spatial logic Walker develops throughout the text.

Walker's depiction of Meridian's physical transformation is described at the novel's end in explicitly spatial terms: the protagonist's physique is transformed, her hair has fallen out and regrown as cap-like, and her sudden paralysis suggests radical testimony to bodily experience that surpasses beyond normal bounds of health and illness. Such physiological modifications force her into the category that defies reversal; she adopts an identity that can no longer be fully recognized in the conventional taxonomies of selfhood and embodiment. By electing to persist as an itinerant wanderer—shifting from one township to another without anchoring itself in permanence—she literalises this transformation in her spatial practice. She renounces the stasis conferred by property ownership, marital relations, family duties or institutional loyalties, in favor of precarity and locomotion as essential preconditions to the preservation of the ethical and political agency she has produced.

The nomadic subjectivity builds on the long tradition of practices in the African American and African diaspora experience. From marronage to the Great Migration to modern forms of displacement through gentrification and mass incarceration, Black spatial experience has been defined by both forced mobility and strategic fight. Meridian's choice to accept the continuous movement, converting necessity into strategy, transforming the spatial precarity of racial capitalism into the chosen practice of freedom. Yet, Walker does not romanticize this decision: the novel acknowledges the costs of homelessness, the susceptibility of life without sheltered domestic space, and the exhaustion of constant movement. Meridian's counter-spatial practice offers no answer to structural oppression, no blueprint for collective liberation. It rather represents a personal ethical reaction to the impossible conditions—a way of preserving selfhood and political commitment when all conventional forms of belonging become unsustainable.The torch-passing to Truman suggests that Meridian's counter-spatial practice, while necessary for her own survival and ethical development, cannot be generalized as a universal model. Different subjects will form different spatial strategies depending on their particular positioning within intersecting structures of oppression. For Truman, whose race and gender afford him certain privileges that Meridian does not have, a political commitment requires settling in one place, creating institutional structures, and maintaining visible leadership. For Meridian, the same commitment requires an opposite approach: refusing fixity, inhabiting margins, moving constantly to avoid the spatial limitations that would domesticate or contain her consciousness.

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