
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Geographic Space and its Semantic Heterogeneity: An Ecocritical Reading of *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam* by Paule Marshall

Daniel Tia¹ ✉ and Melyou Marie Grace Andrea Akpa²

¹Assistant Professor, University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Department of English, American Literature., Cote d'Ivoire

²Master student, University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Department of English, American Literature, Cote d'Ivoire

Corresponding Author: Daniel Tia, **E-mail:** yawejanet@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Humans and nature remain bound to each other. Defined by the Holy Scriptures as divine creatures, both of those beings maintain certain equality anchored in spirituality, thus substantiating their relationship of consubstantiality and interdependence. Today where deviationist practices threaten nature and humans' lives, that spiritual bearing should be maintained. It is more relevant than ever to reinforce it and avoid perilous situations, which can destroy them all. Through a warning word, writers such as Paule Marshall have not only textualized their experience of childhood and that of adulthood, they have also fictionalized their cultural roots. One is rural, and the other is urban; the former provides peaceful life to its Barbadian population thanks to its virgin nature. As to the latter, it offers controversial living conditions to Americans. In truth, it pollutes and degrades the American environment, endangering the citizens' lives. Published in 1967, *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam*¹ is a consciousness-raiser whose aesthetic scope transcends its former context and crystalizes in the first half of the twenty-first century. On the one hand, it thematizes the splendor and vitality of Barbadian flora, its harmony with its population, and praises the wonders of nature. On the other hand, it depicts the greatness of American civilization through the realistic picture of the skyscrapers (architecture) and the impact of industrialization on nature. That double fictional representation is of paramount interest, for it raises issues about the responsibility of developing and developed countries in the management of their own environment. Through an ecocritical lens, the current study will bring out the semantic network, which emerges from the picture of space.

KEYWORDS

Industrialization, urbanization, technological progress, disruption of ecosystem, destruction of fauna, space

ARTICLE DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.3.20

1. Introduction

The analysis of themes, such as space, nature, and humans, is not recent. Geographers, ecologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and various other exegetes have been interrogating the above figures. In literature, for instance, writers aesthetically fictionalize those values. Thus, to comprehend them, literary critics use varied methodological approaches depending on their desired goal. In other words, the aim of our study is to scrutinize geographic space and its related influence on humans. With reference to the image of space and humans in literary texts, Paule Marshall's work entitled "*To Da-Duh, in Memoriam*" subtly appropriates the ecological debate; it decries humans' drift through a moralistic dynamism/perspective, which intends to sensitize and improve their behaviors or habits.

However, before diving into that fictional representation, let us address some of the critical works already carried out on Marshall's *To Da-Duh*. Through "*Ethnicity and Cultural Perspectives in Paule Marshall's Short Fiction*" (1986), Evelyn Hawthorne asserts, "Marshall's stories have been praised most conspicuously for their humanism and universality, they appear to have satisfied well

¹ For any other references to *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam*, we will use *To Da-Duh*.

the prevailing aesthetic requirements of 'organism unity' and the 'companionship of the whole' (Hawthorne, 1986). Furthermore, in *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (1995), Dorothy Hamer Denniston analyzes the impact of technology on humans (Caribbean people). To her, "Da-Duh is the increasing presence of Western technology, which will stifle and suffocate her peaceful world" (Denniston, 1995). Besides, in *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (1995), Joyce Owens Pettis examines Da-Duh's powers. To Pettis, "if Da-duh has the ability to know the future, as many of Marshall's elderly characters do, then she understands that the places foreshadow the encroachment of technological evolution in countries termed developing can see the various deaths, including that of the natural vegetation, that will follow progress" (Pettis, 1995). Further, analyzing the conflict of generation, in Marshall's work, Emmanuel Sampath Nelson's *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature* (2005) underlines the following, "*To Da-Duh in Memoriam*, originally published in 1967 and reprinted, introduces generational conflicts that emerge in Marshall's later marks and establishes Da-Duh, her grand-mother, as a guiding, ancestral force in her literary oeuvre" (Nelson, 2005).

Significantly, Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman's *Imagining our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame* (2007) points out the historical background of Caribbeans who settled in America. To both critics, "this much-anthologized story, first published in 1967, concerns a 1930's trip to Barbados taken by a second-generation immigrant from Brooklyn. The story obliquely offers an account of the ways in which 'Panama money' enabled an early-twentieth-century Barbadian Diaspora to move both horizontally (from Barbados to New York City) and vertically (into the middle class of the United States" (Shukla & Tinsman, 2007). More importantly, in *Paule Marshall's Critique of Contemporary Neo-Imperialisms through the Trope of Travel* (2011), Michelle Miesen Felix shows how "a young girl's travel to see her maternal grandmother in Barbados reveals the formidable presence of the United States as an emblem of modernity –and a potential antagonist to Barbadian sovereignty – on the eve of Barbados' independence. This [work] anticipates the United States to be the formidable antagonist to Barbados' sovereignty following colonialism" (Felix, 2011).

In addition to the above critical studies, Daniel Tia's "L'écriture de 'soi' dans *To Da-duh*, in *Memoriam* et *The Making of a Writer: from the Poets in the Kitchen* de Paule Marshall" (2019) questions the autobiographical features of Marshall's work. To Tia, *To Da-Duh* embodies a discourse in which the author's experience and that of her Barbadian relatives are interwoven. As shown above, we can infer that diverse critical studies provide an insight into Marshall's creative art. Those works show how positive Marshall's critical reception is. In terms of originality, they help to advance knowledge in the field of American literature. Together, they reveal how profound and dazzling Marshall's writing is. However, this review is not exhaustive; the ecological crisis or issue, which emerges throughout the author's text, is innovative and remains less explored; therefore, its study turns out to be advantageous for a better understanding of Marshall's literary project.

In other words, the current reflection propounds the issue of humans and space (environment). In the light of that problem, the current work aims to interrogate the significance emerging from the ambivalent picture of space in *To Da-Duh*. With reference to that objective, the use of an appropriate methodological tool, such as ecocriticism, will be helpful. To Andrea Campell, "through literature, ecocriticism can go beyond connecting readers with nature and analyze what constitutes those connections" (Campbell, 2010). Here, its role will consist in questioning the virginity of Barbadian nature: A symbol of an ecological plea, American industrialization, and urbanization: A controversial impact, and Barbados/New York: A double ecological vision.

2. The Virginity of Barbadian Nature: A Symbol of an Ecological Plea

This step scrutinizes Barbadian geographic space. It shows how that landscape is used as a praising symbol. It also indicates how the panegyric image of Barbados advocates the benefits of nature and requires its rational management.

To go ahead, it should be noted that Barbadian space is virgin; it does not suffer from any hazards of industrialization and other harmful human activities. What is relevant is that at the beginning of *To Da-Duh*, its autobiographical feature is underlined. To the narrator, "this is the most autobiographical of the stories, a reminiscence largely of a visit I paid to my grandmother" (Marshall, 1983). With reference to those autobiographical characteristics, the narrator equals the author. Here, the narrator reveals that she is a young black girl with Barbadian ancestral roots. Born in New York (America), she pays a visit to her grandmother (Da-duh), for the first time, with her sister and mother. Raised by her mother in Brooklyn, New York, the narrator is not used to seeing natural vegetation, sugar cane fields, and other fruit trees, such as mango and guava trees.

Plainly, that young girl (narrator) is from America, a society that has made remarkable progress in terms of urbanization and technology; however, its nature has profoundly undergone human influence. That is why Barbadian natural vegetation fascinates her and calls her attention to the tragedy experienced by Americans. Indeed, after a long journey, she disembarks in Barbados, where she is amazed by both the local population's hospitality and the wonders of nature. During that journey, she meets her grandmother (an old woman who makes possible her coming to life). To the narrator, Da-duh embodies various generations. She confesses it as follows, "[she] is an ancestor figure, symbolic for me of the long line of black woman and men –African and now world –who made my being possible, and whose spirit I believe continues to animate my life and work" (Marshall, 1983).

Importantly, Da-duh remains a reliable landmark in terms of genealogical background. In that regard, she should be celebrated and honored. To the narrator, without that woman, she would not have been born. That is why the narrator pays tribute to her.

Furthermore, the narrator's first impression after her disembarkation in Barbados is that she is happy to see her Barbadian relatives, who warmly and affectionately welcome her. She is also fascinated to be directly in connection with nature –she breathes the natural air of St. Bridgetown. The ensuing utterances describe her experience, "I was busy attending to alien sights sounds of Barbados, the unfamiliar smells" (Marshall, 1983). Through the preceding citation, an essential aspect of Barbadian space is emphasized. Indeed, despite her young age, the narrator keeps as a reminiscence the joyful mood she feels when she discovers her cultural roots. In the following utterances, her grandmother's physical picture provides details about her oldhood, "... her back which was beginning to bend ever so slightly under the weight of her eight-year-old years and the rest of her which sought to deny those years and hold that back straight, keep it in line" (Marshall, 1983).

Explicitly, one of the positive dimensions of Barbadian space is its rural and fertile feature. This helps Barbadian populations grow crops (foods). In addition to that, they breathe natural air (full of oxygen). This generates vital cells in their organisms. Better still, Da-duh's panegyric picture is illustrative of those privileges. To Martin Japtok, "the Caribbean ecology has been forever changed by the plants, animals, and agricultural methods imposed by Europe" (Japtok, 2000). Clearly, Barbados is a real symbol for the narrator and her American family, with whom she pays a visit to her grandmother. Once there, she realizes that the nuclear family in which she was born in Brooklyn (New York) has its extension in the Caribbean Island. She also discovers that she belongs to a large family. In St. Bridgetown, she finds herself with her relatives, with whom she learns to commune. Da-duh invites her as follows, "come, soul, Dad-duh said and took my hand. You must be one of those New York terrors you. Hear so much about. She led us, me at her side and my sister and mother behind, out of the shed into the sunlight that was like a bright driving summer rain and over to a group of people clustered beside a decrepit lorry. They were our relatives, most of them from St. Thomas, the women wearing bright print dresses, the colors vivid against their darkness, the men rusty black suits that encased them like straight-jackets. Da-duh, holding first my hand, became my anchor as they circled around us like a nervous sea, exclaiming touching us with their calloused hands, embracing us slyly" (Marshall, 1983).

As described in the above passage, the narrator experiences universal brotherhood and hospitality in Barbados. We learn from that experience that the narrator's Barbadian relatives are openhearted and proud to meet their Americanized sisters. In addition, they are ready to share with them what makes their dignity. Indeed, those Barbadian relatives are proud to belong to Barbados. Examining the connections between humans and nature, Gary Snyder asks the following questions, "another question is raised: is not the purpose of all this living and studying the achievement of self-realization? How does knowledge of place help us know the self? The answer, simply put, is that we are all composite beings, not only physically but intellectually, whose sole individual identifying feature is a particular form or structure constantly changing in time. [...] Thus, knowing who we are and knowing where we are, are intimately linked. There are no limits to the possibilities of the study of who and where" (Snyder, 1995). Plausibly, Snyder poses a precondition according to which identity and space are closely linked.

In other words, the narrator's contact with the Caribbean space is very advantageous for her. Thanks to her coming to Barbados, her cultural connections with her relatives are woven and expanded. For example, by walking beside her grandmother in a natural environment, she strengthens her relationships with both nature and her extended family. Further, she discovers that Barbadian space is full of potentialities, which already enable the local population to eat and make a fortune. As far as the narrator is concerned, she learns from her grandmother that the canes consumed in her birth society (America) are imported from Barbados. Da-duh confesses, "I din' think so; I bet you don't even know that these canes here and the sugar you eat is one and the same thin; That they do throw the canes into some damn machine at the factory and squeeze out all the little life in them to make sugar for you all so in New York to eat. I bet you don't know that" (Marshall, 1983). Through this citation, Marshall's text points out, on the one hand, the commercial relationship prevailing between Barbados and America, and on the other hand, it highlights the place of agriculture in the Barbadian economy.

Pointedly, thanks to nature, Barbadian populations cultivate diverse raw materials, which help them provide for their needs. In the ensuing utterances, Da-duh lists a few produce grown in Barbados, "this is here breadfruit, she said. That one yonder is a papaw. Here's a sugar apple. (The fruit looked more like artichokes than apples to one). This one be limes... She went on for some time, intoning the names of the trees as though they were those of her gods. Finally, turning to me, she said, I know you don't have anything this nice where you come from" (Marshall, 1983). More explicitly, sugar canes and various other fruit plants dominate Barbadian vegetation. Not only do they ensure a splendid beauty to the Barbadian landscape, but they also contribute to the development of that religion. For example, on their way to St. Thomas, the narrator and her Caribbean relatives contemplate the natural landscape; together, they appreciate the wonders of nature. The following textual clue exhibits their impressions, "as soon as we left Bridgetown behind though, she relaxed, and while the others around talked, she gazed at the canes standing tall either side of the winding marl road. C'dear, she softly to herself after the time. The canes this side are pretty enough" (Marshall, 1983).

In other expressions, the narrator is dazzled by the Barbadian landscape. She is not used to traveling in a country whose nature (environment) is in harmony with its population. In truth, she finds herself somewhat disoriented. She describes her state of mind as follows, "there were too much for me. I thought of them as giant weeds that had overrun the island, leaving scarcely any room for the small tottering houses of sun-bleached pine we passed or the people, dark streaks as our lorry hurtled by. I suddenly feared that we were journeying, unaware that we were, toward some dangerous place where the canes, grown as high and thick as a forest, would close in on us and run us through with their stiletto blades. I longed then for the familiar: for the street in Brooklyn where I lived" (Marshall, 1983).

Obviously, the narrator is nostalgic; she thinks about her American life, which differs from the one she experiences in Barbados. In fact, her joy of communing with her relatives and breathing natural air is punctuated by fear. Referring to the picture of Barbadian fauna and its fresh air, we can surmise that nature is a precious wealth for Barbadian populations. For example, the cane plantations of that region contribute to its economic development. That is why Barbadian populations have a profound respect for those plants. To Da-duh (the Old lady), the canes of St. Thomas are attractive; however, those of Bridgetown are more beautiful, "yes, but wait till you see St. Thomas Canes. [...] They're canes father, bo [...] Tomorrow God willing, I goin' take you out in the ground and show them to you" (Marshall, 1983).

As we can notice, the above passage praises the splendor and wonders of Barbadian nature. Once in Bridgetown, Da-duh fulfills her promise by accompanying her granddaughter to her cane plantation. During her conversation with the latter, she exposes the natural resources of Barbadian islands. Once again, the narrator finds herself overwhelmed with joy, "I found myself in the middle of a small tropical wood – a place, the tangled foliage fighting each other for a chance at the sunlight, the branches of the tree locked in what seemed an immemorial struggle, one both necessary and inevitable. But despite the violence, it was pleasant, almost peaceful in the gully, beneath the thick underground the earth smelled like spring" (Marshall, 1983). In accordance with that citation, it should be noted that Barbadian nature is virgin. Symbolically, that virginity epitomizes a real plea whose purpose is, on the one hand, to urge American decision-makers to control their policy of industrialization and, on the other hand, to preserve their environment.

As far as the following step is concerned, it deals with the impact of American Industrialization and Urbanization on nature.

3. American Industrialization and Urbanization. A Controversial Impact

This section scrutinizes American space and the literary implications of its industrial and urban projects.

To begin, let us underline that the technological progress to which Marshall's text alludes highlights the American engineers' ingenuity. In fact, their know-how provides American citizens with the necessary means to modernize their societies. Through that text, the author shows that the modernization of humans' lives takes into account the landscape design and construction of modern buildings. For example, the narrator discloses that New York (America) is full of skyscrapers. Apparently, those buildings attest that America is an urbanized area; they confirm the greatness of America over the other countries. Depicting American development, Marshall's narrator asserts, "we've got buildings hundreds of times this tall in New York. There's one called the Empire State buildings that's the tallest in the world. My class visited it last year, and I went all the way to the top. It's got over a hundred floors. I can't describe how tall it is" (Marshall, 1983).

By this realistic picture, the text under study praises America's architectural beauty and greatness. However, despite that comfort, and especially the modern life offered to American citizens, Marshall's text unveils another dimension, which calls into question that beautiful appearance discloses. Indeed, to construct some buildings, American authorities have undoubtedly initiated a town-planning project, which has only been possible thanks to the destruction of a portion of their land (vegetation). The intensification of those activities has negative impacts on the environment. Through a warning word, the narrator makes a relevant revelation to her grandmother, "we've got a chestnut tree in front of our house. I said. Does it bear? Not anymore. She gave the nod that was like a nervous twitch. You see, she said. Nothing can bear there" (Marshall, 1983).

A closer look at the preceding utterances attests that urbanization has destroyed much of America's wildlife. Some of the consequences are immediate. For example, the air breathed by people is polluted –it is not oxygenated enough; some of the agricultural activities are impractical; the disruption of the ecosystem process is another threat. As described in the above citation, American soils are poor. Indeed, the destruction of flora has been possible because of technological development; the construction of sophisticated machines facilitates the abusive exploitation of American nature. Through the image of the machine, Marshall's text shows how destructive American technological progress and policy of urbanization are. They profoundly influence nature and Americans' lives. Certainly, the advent of new technologies symbolizes American greatness, but in reality, American people suffer from climate change and global warming (technological change).

Therefore, the narrator's words can be considered as a cry of alarm, which blames American decision-makers for their incapacity to implement an efficient environmental policy. To Hubert Haddad, "[a] novel is not limited to the reader's quiet expectation. It takes in hand life in all its states. Violence is everywhere, gratuitous, absurd, or concerted, starting with humans' condition dedicated to the tearing away of nothingness and its painful return. The movement itself is violence, and its slightest transformation, violence multiplied tenfold. Now there is the reality that we live as creatures subject to History. A novel bears witness to that in a thousand ways. Talking about violence, but with opposite issues, sometimes saving. One of the major objectives of a novel is the questioning of all the violence that is done to men" (Translation mine) (in Pont-Humbert, 2013).

In the above utterances, Haddad exposes one of the essential functions of a novel. Here, violence acquires a varied meaning. It is not exclusively related to killing or injuring people. A novel can also represent another form of violence inflicted upon nature by humans, which ultimately causes damages to their physical integrity. Marshall's text subtly describes scientific progress as a necessary evil. In fact, the construction of machines and airplanes reduces humans' pain. With those means, they put forth little effort. However, they are also destructive agents for humans and nature. Both landscapes (America and Barbados) do not have the same advantages. One undergoes considerable losses, and the other is still intact (virgin). For example, Marshall's *To Da-duh* vehemently criticizes the Western world, whose intervention in Barbados illustrates violence towards nature and Barbadian populations. Marshall's creative decries that aggression as follows, "on the day of her death England sent planes flying low over the island in a show of force –so low, according to my aunt's letter, that the downdraft from them shook the ripened mangoes from the trees in Da-duh's orchard. Frightened, everyone in the village fled into the canes, except Da-duh. She remained in the house at the widow, so my aunt said, watching as the planes came swooping and screaming like monstrous birds down over the village, over her house, rattling her trees and flattening the young canes field. I must have seemed to her lying there that they did not intend pulling out their dive, but like the hard-back beetles which hurled themselves with suicidal force against the walls of the house at night, those menacing silver shapes would hurl themselves in an ecstasy of self-immolation onto the land, destroying it utterly" (Marshall, 1983).

Significantly, technological progress improves humans' lives –it helps them dominate the universe, but paradoxically, it jeopardizes the survival of nature, including that of human beings. The preceding passage shows how technological progress influences. It has destroyed the American environment. As a result, some of its fewest plant species are unable to bear fruit. Implicitly, Da-duh's words criticize American policy of industrialization and urbanization. No one can deny the subjugation of American nature has resulted in various ecological crises, which are disadvantageous for the healthy growth of the plants. Analyzing the impact of technology on American nature in one of Gerald Vizenor's works, Donelle N. Dreese affirms, "*Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* also addresses environmental themes by depicting an apocalyptic wasteland of near ecological destruction. Through his novel, the traveling pilgrims come across characters that are victims of the technological violence that has destroyed the Earth's balance. The evil gambler is the embodiment of the greed, selfishness, and environmental destruction that lie at the core of societal corruption" (Dreese, 2002).

Plausibly, in terms of technological progress, America is at a very advanced level. Through the picture of factories and that of skyscrapers, *To Da-Duh* illustrates American technical progress. Nevertheless, that development embodies negative implications on the American environment and inhabits. The above citation is corroborative evidence of that tragedy. Metaphorically, Marshall's text draws American authorities' attention to their responsibilities, inter alia the protection of nature and American citizens. Apparently, one of the aesthetic scopes of "To Dad-duh" is its involvement in urging American decision-makers to preserve nature for the benefit of the present and future generations. Da-duh's presence in work under consideration is symbolic –her respectful attitude towards nature and her granddaughters is a metaphor of exhortation (plea), whose purpose is to call for the redefinition of American environmental policy. Indeed, that metaphor invites Americans to recreate themselves by changing their visions and behaviors towards nature. Through Da-duh's commitment, Marshall's work shows up that Americans do not necessarily need the politicians' assistance to protect their environment. Each individual can reforest and play his or her part. To that end, Marshall's work sensitizes American citizens to contribute to the rejuvenation of their nature.

In addition to the above analysis, technological progress provides Americans with tourist activities. For instance, skyscrapers are works of architecture that attract foreign architects' curiosity. The latter visit the premises of buildings, such as "Empire State." This offers America a relevant place in the tourism sector. Let us also note that the construction of heavy factories helps America be one of the most industrialized countries in the world. That technological progress enables it to import raw materials and manufacture them into finished products. In turn, it exports them. Obviously, Marshall's *To Da-duh* describes the prevailing trade between America and Barbados, whose incomes contribute to the development of both countries. Nevertheless, American technical progress has a negative scope. For instance, industrial activities negatively influence both the American environment and its populations. To the author, those sways should not be overlooked. The following textual clue indicates how New York suffers from the hazards of industrial activities, "for a brief period after I was grown I went to live alone, like one doing penance, in a loft above a noisy factory in downtown New York and there painted seas of sugar-cane and huge swirling Gogh suns and palm trees

striding like brightly-plumed Tutsi warriors across a tropical landscape, while the thunderous trees of the machines down-stairs jarred the floor beneath my easel, mocking my efforts" (Marshall, 1983).

As depicted above, the industrialization of America transforms its environmental balance; its citizens suffer from that unbalance. Indeed, they evolve in a town that has lost its quietness because of the deafening noise. Worse still, they feel compelled to adapt to a problematic lifestyle model. Some appreciate that technological progress; however, Marshall's work points out its real feature by exposing Americans' sufferings. This unveiling has a major stake. Here, the author calls for a reduction in industrial activities to save and protect nature and humans. The text under study conveys what Edouard Glissant terms "Caribbean Discourse," which in reality, is not isolated from the rest of the world but poses itself as a line of thought aiming to sensitize deviant minds, especially those who destroy nature. Indeed, one of the characteristics of this discourse is that its proponents have Caribbean roots. Nevertheless, beyond the cultural and identity features, this discourse gives an interest to the relationship between humans and nature. Better still, *To Da-duh* indicates that America cannot be inscribed in humankind's history on the basis of its technological progress alone. On varying levels, the disconnection(s) between Americans and their nature is/are pointed out. To promote reconnection between both of the preceding entities, *To Da-Duh* extols the benefits of nature. Through imageries, the author urges reconciliation between humans and nature. She argues that by protecting nature, America will emerge as a model environmentalist.

A closer look at America's situation helps to discover that Americans are alienated by the sharp technological development envisioned by their political authorities. In an age of tough competition and accelerating technological change, priorities are given to the country's global positioning, not to its populations' sufferings. That pressure is experienced by various colonized countries where disconnections between humans and nature are recurrent. Examining the relevance of nature in humans' lives, J. Michael Dash asserts, "the relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from the land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. The landscape is a character in this process" (Dash, 1989). In accordance with Dash's viewpoint, Marshall's *To Da-Duh* calls for a patriotic reawakening whose purpose is to save both American landscapes and American citizens. As vividly shown in this quotation, American industrialization and urban project do not exclusively offer comfort and security to American society, for the populations suffer from the uninterrupted technological progress, making it controversial. Given those conditions, American decision-makers should revitalize their environmental policy for the benefit of their people.

As far as the following section is concerned, it deals with the author's double ecological vision.

4. Barbados/New York. A Double Ecological Vision

This step examines two toponyms, namely New York and Barbados; it aims to identify the implicit value constructed by *To Da-Duh* through that double toponymical vision.

At the beginning of the text under consideration, the narrator describes an excursion in which she and other members of her Americanized family (sister and mother) take part. Here, she presents New York as their point of departure and Barbados as their place of destination. Through this picture, the text does not make a mere mimetic representation of space; it focuses on a particular ecological vision whose torchbearers are both the narrator and Da-duh (ancestral figure). Indeed, the former has a double experience, one is acquired in America, and the other one is obtained in Barbados. The latter has never been to America; she only has Barbadian experience. Better still, the narrator experiences various cultural realities. On her way to St. Thomas, she feels lost in the face of the giant sugar canes, which form thick vegetation. Her words attest that she has never seen such a landscape before, "they were too much for me. I thought of them as giant weeds that overrun the island, leaving scarcely any room for the small tottering houses of sun-bleached pine we passed or the people, dark streaks as our lorry hurtled by" (Marshall, 1983).

As delineated in the preceding textual clue, Barbados is characterized by its beautiful landscape. Apart from that attractive aspect, Barbados is also a space of reunions and reconnection for the narrator's mother (Ady). Indeed, that woman spends fifteen years in America without seeing her Barbadian parents. During that period, she gives birth to two daughters (narrator and her older sister). In accordance with those details, one can infer that Ady's excursion to Barbados has a double scope. On the one hand, she pays a courtesy call to her parents and relatives; on the other hand, she undertakes that journey to introduce her children to her relatives. The following utterances underscore how relieved Da-duh and Ady are, "my Da-duh, my mother said formally and stepped forward. The name sounded like fading softly in the distance. Child, Da-duh said, and her tone, her quick scrutiny of my mother, had been away and restored the old relationship" (Marshall, 1983). As to the children (narrator and her sister), they take advantage of that opportunity to discover Barbadian society and meet the members of their extended family.

Symbolically, Barbados is a cultural space where Ady and her two daughters feel liberated from the noises of American factories and other machines. Here, Barbadian populations are generous towards nature. In that environment, the local populations consume natural resources, namely sugar cane and fruits (mangoes and guavas). Barbadian economy also depends on those agricultural produces. This substantiates Barbadians' shrewd attachment to nature. They are still anchored in a tradition inherited from their ancestors, which favors the perpetuation of human values. Unlike Barbados, America is depicted as an imperialist and capitalist country. As epitomized by the heavy industry, Americans are hypermodern; they consider the material as the immediate and efficient way out to solve their social difficulties.

In truth, Barbados is characterized by its humanist and naturalist visions. It advocates solidarity and togetherness among its people. As the story unfolds, the narrator discloses those values. By inviting her granddaughter to keep her company on her plantation in St. Thomas, Da-duh conveys her ecological vision. The Old woman tries to show her granddaughter that Barbadian people are connected with their lands. Her vision is present in Thomas King's *All My Relations* (1990). Examining Indians' cultural background, King maintains the following, "the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined" (in Simone Brigg Hartmann, 2006). She helps her granddaughter discover Barbadian vegetal resources, for she is convinced that her life expectancy is almost over. She, therefore, leads her granddaughter into a dense forest to teach her the benefits of nature. The young girl confesses, "Dad-duh led me into a part of the gully that we had never visited before, an area darker and more thickly overgrown than the rest, almost impenetrable. There, in a small clearing amid the dense bush, she stopped before an incredibly tall royal palm, which rose cleanly out of the ground, and, drawing the eye up with it, soared high above the tree around it into the sky. It appeared to be touching the blue dome of the sky, to be flaunting its dark crown of fronds right in the blinding white face of the late morning sun" (Marshall, 1983).

Implicitly, the Old woman and her granddaughter practice ecotourism. By spending a moment in the woods, both figures experience peasant life. In essence, the granddaughter is the future torchbearer of Da-duh's teachings beyond Barbadian borders. That is why after her death, the young girl avows, "she died, and I lived, but always, to this day even, within the shadow of her death. For a brief period, after I was grown, I went to live alone, like one doing penance, in a loft above a noisy factory in downtown New York and there painted seas of sugar-cane and huge swirling Van Goh suns and palm trees striding like brightly-plumed Tutsi warriors across a tropical landscape, while the thunderous tread of the machines down-stairs jarred the floor beneath my easel, mocking efforts" (Marshall, 1983). In other words, Da-duh has physically disappeared, but her vision remains kept in her granddaughter's memory –her duty is to make it known elsewhere.

Without a word, the young Americanized girl (Da-duh's granddaughter) adapts to her a-duh's new environment; she observes her surroundings, and this cheers her up. She expresses vitality and feels overwhelmed. In fact, Da-duh and her granddaughter's stay on her plantation embodies a double scope. On the one hand, the former teaches the latter to preserve nature, and on the other hand, the latter promises to advocate the former's teachings. Once back in New York, the young girl materializes her ancestors' teachings. For example, through her paintings, she represents Barbadian nature (environment). Through that picture, she decries the harmful effects of industrialization on other Americans, herself included. Undeniably, the narrator is taught that Barbados is a tourist area and that she should protect nature. "To Da-duh" discloses that she is 9 years old. In the framework of the ecological debate, she symbolizes one of the future defenders of the environment. By presenting the wonders of nature to her, the Old lady prepares her mind, for she will teach other Barbadians and Americans what she receives from her.

Contrary to Barbados, New York (America) is disparaged in *To Da-Duh*. The narrator presents it as a space where it is nearly impossible to grow food, "and you see all these trees you got here, I said. Well, they'd be bare. No leaves, no fruit, nothing. They'd be covered in snow. You see your canes. They'd be buried under tons of snow. The snow would be higher than your head, higher than your head, higher than your house, and you wouldn't be able to come down into this here gully because it would be snowed under" (Marshall, 1983). It should be noted that American soils are arid; it does not favor the practice of agriculture. As a result, America imports a number of raw materials to feed its populations and supply its industries.

Apart from the sway of climate, America suffers from its self-destructive industrial policy. This puts its citizens under tough pressure, giving the impression that material is the way out to all problems. Americans' concern is not to personify nature and allow it to benefit from a protective measure. On the contrary, they always undertake actions that provide them with the material. In the following utterances, the hidden features of America are displayed, "I heard those foolish people in New York does such and such" (Marshall, 1983). Clearly, Da-duh is aware that material has made African-Americans so addicted that they are now disconnected from their ancestral heritage (roots). She also knows that American technological progress destroys its environment. For example, Ady's husband castigates their excursion to Barbados. To him, that journey is a waste of material; the narrator confesses, "I longed then for the familiar: for the street in Brooklyn where I lived, for my father who had refused to accompany us ('Blowing out good

money on foolishness,' he had said of the trip), for a game of tag with my friends under the chestnut tree outside our aging brownstone house" (Marshall, 1983).

Obviously, the standpoint of the narrator's father is diametrically opposed to that of his wife (Ady). The latter embraces American materialistic ideology –he ignores what Barbados represents and what it can provide to his family members. In a contradictory word, the narrator creates her own American paradise in which the inhabitants are fulfilled. *A priori*, her desire is to convince her grandmother (Da-duh), "but as I answered, recreating my towering world of steel and concrete and machines for her, building the city out of words, I would feel her give way. I came to know the signs of her surrender: the total stillness that would come over her little hard dry form, the probing gaze that like a surgeon's knife sought to cut through my skull to get at the images there, to see if I were lying; above all, her fear, a fear nameless and profound, the same one I had felt beating in the palm of her hand that in the lorry" (Marshall, 1983).

More explicitly, through her description, the narrator deliberately displays a positive image of the American environment. However, she is aware that American society is polluted, and its soils are impoverished. No one can deny the importance of technological progress –it contributes to American economic prosperity. In *To Da-Duh*, Marshall decries American imperial policy towards its environment. Indeed, in the preceding work, strong pressure is inflicted upon nature. This worsens the practice of a number of agricultural crops. Through a coded discourse rooted in postcolonial ecocriticism, Marshall calls for a revision of that destroying attitude. Explaining Americans' hostile behavior, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin analyze avow, "the genuinely natural ways of indigenous ecosystems were irretrievably undone as 'wild' lands were cleared for farming or opened up to pastoralism (Graham and Tiffin, 2010)

Paradoxically, in Marshall's creative art, it acquires another semantic dimension, which is depreciative, for the environment is under profound pressure. Worse still, because of technological progress, Americans have become more materialistic than ecological. Analyzing humans' influence, David Harvey avows, "the geographic landscape of capital is perpetually evolving, largely under the impulsion of the speculative needs of further accumulation and only secondarily in relation to the needs of people" (Harvey, 2010).

The words of the narrator's father are illustrative of that materialistic view. Through the narrator's words, the characteristics of America appear. Indeed, the narrator only talks about what is missing in Barbados, "over the weeks, I told her about refrigerators, washing machines, movies, airplanes, the cyclone at Coney Island, subways, toasters, electric lights: At night, see, all you have to do is flip this little switch on the wall and all the lights in the house go on. Just like that. Like magic. It's like turning on the sun at night" (Marshall, 1983).

In this analogical depiction, Marshall's narrator praises America by revealing its technological potential. Through her physical description, she shows that living in New York is more interesting than evolving in St. Thomas (Barbados). Without being in New York, Da-duh has a virtual idea from the representation made by her granddaughter. Each of those interlocutors seeks to convey a positive image of their living environment. Da-duh's granddaughter is convinced that she cannot definitely settle in St. Thomas (Barbados). So, the privilege she gets from her journey to Barbados is that she meets her ancestors' land and her relatives. Her journey back home is also advantageous, for she receives teachings from Da-duh (her grandmother).

In turn, she is expected to perpetuate those teachings in Barbados and New York. What we learn from the narrator's presentation is that the American environmental policy overlooks nature. It is more interested in technological progress than in the protection of nature. To Bertrand Westphal, "the discourse on space implies a truth of space, which cannot come from a place situated in space but from an imaginary and real place, therefore 'surreal' and everywhere concrete. And yet conceptual" (Translation mine) (Westphal, 2007). With reference to Westphal's opinion, we can assert that Marshall's discourse praises America's economic assets. However, beyond that realistic picture, American technological progress embodies some drawbacks. For instance, New York is a noisy place. In that town, human activities have a strong influence on both nature and humans. Besides, America is far from being an Eldorado; that is why Marshall's discourse invites American decision-makers to take care of their environment for a thorough comprehension of Marshall's vision(s).

5. Conclusion

To sum up, let us recall that the purpose of the current study was to examine the semantic network associated with geographic space(s) in Marshall's fiction. For that purpose, three major points were considered through the lens of ecocriticism, inter alia the virginity of Barbadian nature: A symbol of an ecological plea, American industrialization, and urbanization: A controversial impact, and Barbados/New York: A double ecological vision.

The first point has addressed the picture of Barbados. Some of the discursive techniques involved in praising Barbadian space were regarded as a symbol aiming to exhort American decision-makers to promote a rational environmental policy, which can preserve both American space and its population. The second point has questioned the ambivalent dimension of American technological

progress. On the one hand, we have indicated that progress has significantly improved American populations' living conditions; it has considerably ensured American economic development. Here, the incorporation of skyscrapers in Marshall's text was characterized as a metaphor for the greatness of American civilization. In stark contrast to that position, we have indicated that American technological progress has not definitely shielded Americans from environmental problems, namely the depletion of cultivable soil, the shortage and reduction of vegetation space, and the pollution of ambient air. The third point has scrutinized two opposed visions. Barbadian vision has been considered as a promotor of an effective environmental policy, which helps the population of Barbados take advantage of the wonders of nature. As to the vision of New York, it advocates technological progress, thus minimizing its subsequent adverse consequences on American populations and their immediate and distant environment.

With reference to those details, it should be noted that the interest of this critical reflection lies in its ability to decipher the encoding process related to Barbadian and American spaces. In terms of advancement, our work has thoroughly explained both Barbadian ecological and American technological visions. Obviously, substantial answers have been provided to the questions raised by our study; however, given its limited volume, other significant aspects, such as identity construction women's leadership in the safeguard of nature, have been deciphered superficially. From that point of view, the study of themes, such as the metaphor of self-discovery and figurative alterity, will help to provide further insight into Marshall's fictional universe.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID ID: Daniel Tia <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2928-3257>

References

- [1] Campbell, A. (2010). Reading Beyond a Universal Nature: Hopes for the Future of Ecocriticism. *Ecocriticism Issue*. 8(1), 1-21.
- [2] Denniston, D. H. (1995). *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender*. Tennessee, University of Tennessee Press.
- [3] Dreese, D. N. (2002). *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literature (American Indian Studies)*. Bruxelles, Peter Lang Inc., International Publishers; New Edition (November 6).
- [4] Felix, M. M. (2011). *Paule Marshall's Critique of Contemporary Neo-Imperialisms through the Trope of Travel*. Dissertations (2009-). Retrieved January 25, 2021, from http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/121
- [5] Glissant, E. (1989). *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Virginia, The University Press of Virginia, (Translated and with an Introduction by J. Michael Dash).
- [6] Hartmann, S. B. (2006). Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives on Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context: Toward a 'Situated' Literary Theory and Practice of Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice. *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam - New York, Editions Rodopi, B. V., 87-110.
- [7] Harvey, D. (2000). *Responsibilities towards Nature and Human Nature in Spaces of Hope*. Edinburg, UP, 213-233.
- [8] Hawthorne, E. (1986). Ethnicity and Cultural Perspectives in Paule Marshall's Short Fiction. *Melus*. 13 (3/4), 37-48.
- [9] Huggan, G. and Tiffin, H. (2010). *Postcolonial Ecocriticism Literature, Animals, Environment*. New York, NY, Taylor & Francis Group.
- [10] Japtok, M. (2000). Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam*. *African American Review*. 34(3), 475-482.
- [11] Marshall, P. (1983). *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam. Reena and Other Stories*. New York, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York.
- [12] Nelson, E. S. (2005). *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature*. Westport, Greenwood Publishing Group.
- [13] Pettis, J. O. (1995). *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* University of Virginia Press. Charlottesville, Virginia, University of Virginia Press.
- [14] Pont-Humbert, C. (2013). Rencontre avec Hubert Haddad, Daniel Maximin et Nourredine Saadi. *Violence et vérité dans les littératures francophones*. Bruxelles, Peter Lang B., 55-71.
- [15] Shukla, S. & Tinsman, H. (2007). *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame*. Durham, Duke University Press, 20 July.
- [16] Tia, D. (2019). L'Écriture de « soi » dans *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* et *The Making of a Writer: from the Poets in the Kitchen* de Paule Marshall/Self-writing in *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* and *The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen* by Paule Marshall. *Journal de la Recherche Scientifique de l'Université de Lomé*. 21(4/1), 190-202.
- [17] Westphal, B. (2007). *La Géocritique réel, fiction, espace*. Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit.