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**RECLAIMING FEMALE SELF AUTONOMY IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S**  
**NOVEL *THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE***

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## **Dedication**

We would like to dedicate this work firstly to God, to our families and special dedication to our supervisor Mrs. BRAHMIA Lilia for her incredible effort in guiding us. Also, we would like to dedicate it to all those who backed us up with support and encouragement especially friends and colleagues.

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## Abstract

This study is an attempt to explore the journey of the black females in asserting themselves in Gloria Naylor's novel *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). Gloria Naylor, as an African American writer, explores how the black female is oppressed and segregated racially and sexually in the American society. She depicts how her female characters survive and reclaim their own identities. As many other African American female writers, Naylor portrays truthful scenes about how the black female lives. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze how Naylor's characters survive in a patriarchal and racist society and assert their identities.

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## Introduction

African American Literature includes a variety of literary works that discuss the issues of black people in America. More focus is dedicated to black females who suffer from triple jeopardy of class, race and gender. Different writers tend to defend and highlight the daily exploitation of women especially African American ones. Accordingly, the issue of identity and reclaiming the self becomes a crucial and common theme among all female literary works such as: *The Bluest Eye* (1987) and *Sula* (1973) by Toni Morrison, *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), and Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) to mention only a few.

This work sheds light on the dilemma surrounding the constant plight of African American females as they suffer from both sexism and racism. The exploitation of black women in patriarchal and racist society makes them weak and unable to express themselves. Indeed, female silence is well treated by African American writers who resort to writing as an option to end this silence and impotence. The study examines *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), a famous work by the African American writer Gloria Naylor. A typical feminist work dedicated to female issues and identity.

The choice of dealing with this topic is based on the belief that Gloria Naylor excels in fighting the female stereotype and giving voice to those who are rejected and marginalized. The main aim of this study is to examine the female identities that are concealed by the male dominated society, and how they struggle and resist proving themselves in a society which is both racial and patriarchal. Contrary to African American male writers which portray black women as helpless, victimized and segregated Negroes, the thesis conceives that female autonomy can be maintained by strong will, indomitable spirit, consistency and solidarity.

The current study responds to contemporary theoretical approaches like feminism and psychoanalysis. It is based on the writings of Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva, Patricia Hill Collins and Barbara Christian as major theorists of feminist inclinations. It also links the novel to psychological assumptions of Sigmund Freud. The selection of these two interrelated theories is motivated by the fact that they are both central to the female context; feminism studies female issues and the suffering they entail. In a similar vein, psychoanalytic literary criticism examines the female psyche as it is affected by racial and sexual discriminations.

The work is divided into three chapters; the first chapter is theoretical and aims at providing the theoretical background necessary for understanding the subject matter. Thus, it offers an overview of minor literature with an emphasis on African American female literature in general and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, in particular. The two last chapters are practical; that analyze Naylor's novel as a case study. The second chapter reveals the impact of displacement on her female characters. It also discusses the themes tackled in the novel like patriarchy and all kinds of violence and oppression against women. The third chapter deals with the survival tactics against sexism and racism that the black females adopt to survive in Brewster Place street. This chapter tackles how black females succeed in asserting themselves and rebelling against the segregating and racial barriers.

The thesis, therefore, draws attention to all female characters and their situations. On the one hand, it shows how they suffer from male aggression and how they become victims of the unjust status quo. On the other hand, it sheds light on some female characters that resist patriarchy and succeed in asserting their female superiority.

## Chapter I: An Introduction to African American Literature

Women, throughout history, struggled a lot because they had always been considered inferior to men, mindless and voiceless human beings. Wives, mothers and daughters had witnessed segregation and marginalization; they were considered the weakest vessels in any society and being a female is the worst thing that can happen to anyone. This issue is central to the twentieth century and its literature.

All black women in the American society suffered from dual oppression because they are African American females; they occupy the last position in the social hierarchy pyramid. African American females were merely viewed as means to satisfy the sexual desires of males and as a machine to produce children. They are victims of absolute exploitation and discrimination by whites and even by males of their own race (Moi 92). African American women were cruelly treated both at psychological and physical levels. They were brought to America during the establishment of the free states of the American Union to serve whites and, since then, their enslavement began. The black woman in America, at that time, was sold and bought as an object similar to any furniture. She worked in plantations, factories and as a housekeeper. She was a victim of merciless exploitation and oppression and suffered from the brutality of her owners; she was raped and beaten daily. In short, black women suffered mentally, physically and sexually (Hernton 123). It is important to note, however, that violence is witnessed by all American women and is not only linked to black ones. As Johnnetta B. Cole states in her book *All American Women: Lines that Divide Ties that Bind* (1986): “Women in the United States live with the possibility that they will be sexually abused, harassed, raped, or battered” (27).

In order to make their voices heard and to talk about their major concerns, African Americans resort to writing. This led to the emergence of the African American literary tradition that is classified under the name “Minor Literature”. The main aim of African



American literature is to reveal the cruel living conditions which all Negroes experienced in “democratic” America. One important theme that characterizes all African American literary achievements is “double consciousness” felt by all minority groups. A feeling left them with uncertainty and confusion about who they are and put them in a constant search for their identities (Du Bois 182). The journey of self definition is well explored in novels such as Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937), and Toni Morrison’s *Sula* (1973).

### **I.1. An Overview of Minor Literature**

The notion of “minor” in association to contemporary art was discussed, for the first time, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1975). According to Deleuze and Guattari, being a minor does not necessarily mean belonging to a specific ethnic group, rather it is being a stranger in one’s own tongue in dominant culture (16). Therefore, Minor Literature is not the product of minor language but it is what minor or ethnic people innovate and recount using a major language (17).

Those oppressed, marginalized people use a strange major language for reclaiming their rights and expressing their unique identities, for resolving the dilemma and confusion surrounding who they are. Deleuze and Guattari provide the example of Kafka who felt alienated and confused because he neither belongs to Prague Jews nor to Germans, his literary production is a way to reconcile the two contradicted cultures. Minor Literature enables Kafka to overcome his alienation, to express his rational thoughts and feelings, and to become visible to the crowd (16).

Deleuze and Guattari highlight three main characteristics of minor literature which they see as crucial conditions: “Deterritorialization” of a major language, the political nature of Minor Literature, and the collective value this literature stresses (16-7). So, Minor

Literature can play its significant role in challenging social, political and cultural boundaries if only these three major characteristics are taken into consideration.

The first characteristic of Minor Literature is “Deterritorialization” of a certain major language. The first characteristic of minor literature in any case, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, “is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”(16). From this scope, Minor Literature is the adoption of a dominant language by ethnic groups for discussing serious issues as reclaiming equal rights and opposing segregation. Those minority groups stress the “impossibility of not writing” (17); they felt an urging desire to write and to express the painful issues they experience. In so doing, writers of Minor Literature excel in using English as a major language because they have no other choice for promoting their lives except “Deterritorializing” the English language. For instance, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) deterritorializes the English language to describe the life of African American women and their constant struggle as a minority amidst two cultures. The English language becomes suitable and appropriate to carry not only the American experience but even all other minority issues. As Deleuze explains: “The impossibility of not writing because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature...an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a paper language or an artificial language”(16).

The second characteristic is “The political concern”; Minor Literature has a political consciousness. Since minorities form an integral part of the dominant society, they are part of its political system. Therefore, they must participate and comprehend the politics of the United States for reclaiming their rights. Deleuze and Guattari state: “Minor literature is completely different; it’s cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics”(17). So, minor writers, in their literary productions, must manifest their political status and ask for equality same as the native crowd. Such works as Richard

Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Frances E.W.Harper's *Eliza Harris* (1852) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) manifest a great interest in politics.

The last characteristic of Minor Literature is “The collective value”; it does not emphasize individuality. Instead, it stresses common and shared experiences among all minor people. It is a truthful and credible representation of the difficult living conditions that all minor people suffer from with no exceptions. Even if a minor author merely recounts his own individual experience, this depiction will represent the whole minority group; a kind of common consciousness that all minorities pass through. They all experience discrimination, racism, uncertainty of identity and alienation (Royster 81-104).

Minor literature operates as an instrument for mediation between two different worlds. Also, it is a way of opposing the oppressing boundaries of their new society through the weapon of language. There are no greater examples about minor literature as African American literature. It is not only the black minority in America that adopts the English language, but many other minorities that live there. They use that strange familiar language to voice their cruel lives and to assert the dilemma which surrounds their identities. This is certainly the case of many Asian and Latin ethnic minorities which come from different Latin American and Asian countries as Cuba, Mexico, Dominic, China, and Japan (Grice et.al 149-89). They all seek one common goal, which is the American dream. However, once they reach their desired destination, they face many obstacles in settling and starting a new life.

Coming from totally different backgrounds to white, capitalist and English speaking country causes them to suffer from the experience of racism, segregation and suppression of their unique cultural values and identities (Grice et.al 25). That urges the Asian and Latino American writers and intellectuals to produce literary works, in which they depict the struggle of their races in the United States of America. Among The most famous Asian literary works are; Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Amy Tan's *The Joy*

*Luck club* (1989) and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990). While the most well known Latin American literary productions are: Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Oscar Hijuelos's *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989) and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girl Lost Their Accents* (1991). Those writers, and many others, discuss the constant challenges which the minority immigrants face in the United States.

All the American literary works, tackle a major and common issue that all non Native American settlers suffer from, which is identity suppression. So, all ethnic minorities experience a constant search for their selves and who they are. They suffer, on the one hand, from their inability to adopt a new life and to fully integrate in the American society and, on the other hand, to preserve their own traditions and heritage. They are stuck in- between two contradictory worlds which create a dilemma about their identities.

### **I.1.1. African American Female Literature**

African American literature is considered one of the most significant aspects of American history. It is the body of literary production constructed by black minority to reclaim its rights and to resist slavery and oppression. This literature is a way to celebrate their roots and precious culture. It comes as a reaction against difficult existing circumstances. Their tendency to write was to argue their intellectual innovation and to prove that they are equal to whites.

The first African American recognized literary production is "slave narratives". It was on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1746 that Lucy Terry, a former slave woman wrote a poem in which she depicts the suffering of non Native Americans (Booker 8). Many slave narratives followed as the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl* (1861) and many other works which all describe the constant physical, mental and sexual abuse that blacks suffer from (Booker 8-9). All initial African American literary productions pave the way and encourage many other novelists to shed light on their miserable

lives. The most influential work at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the work of W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) which is recognized as a work of sociology. In it, Du Bois reveals the negative and massive impact of the white discrimination and segregation on black's psychology.

The Positive shift and transition in the development of African American literature is the Harlem Renaissance 1920s\_1930s, which is characterized by the revival of art, literature and all cultural traditions. All black authors and artists celebrate their unique roots through creating significant pieces which prove their unbelievable innovation (Jones 227). Among The famous works of Harlem Renaissance are Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Langston Hughes's *Dream Variations* (1922), James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of Negro American Poetry* (1922), Arna Bontemp's historical novel *Black Thunder* (1936) and many other works (High 211-21). The African American literature is not exclusively a black male production because black females also contribute in creating and shaping it.

Although black male writers do their best to give voice to their race, in their turn they segregate black females and depict them as passive objects. Black females, consequently, develop a sense of consciousness and awareness, and construct a literature of their own. "It is axiomatic that", Audre Lorde explains "if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment" (qtd. in Kumar 2). All the surrounding circumstances urged the black female to create a literature related to her own vision and beliefs, tackling different aspects about being a black woman in a white society.

African American female literature is an important part of American literature and culture. It examines different problems of racial and gender discrimination; slavery, double segregation, and displacement. The contribution of African American female writers can

never be denied as a crucial part of African American Literature from different angles (political, historical, social and cultural). According to Margaret Walker:

It is necessary as always when approaching Afro-American literature in any form--poetry, prose, fiction, or drama--to give a background of the socioeconomics and political forces and the historical context before proceeding to a literary analysis or synthesis. Then we will have the necessary tools with which to examine the strange phenomena found in American and Afro-American literature. (qtd. in Tate 202)

Black female literature is developed as a reaction to both white and black segregating society. It raises two major points about who is the African American female and how she expresses herself (Collins 9). Their literature argues the catastrophic situation of black women in a double segregating (patriarchal and racial) society. To quote Maya Angelou, “caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power” (65). Their main intention is to oppose the negative image of women found in male writings, because black male writers present women in stereotypical ways; they are always passive characters and victims who have no choice; they are merely depicted as objects (Kulkarni 59).

The growth of the Black woman’s movement, and its impact on the consciousness of African-American women, in particular, led to literary renaissance of the 1970s began with *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison (Gates 2). The success of works like Morrison’s novels, Maya Angelou’s poem *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) inspires a generation of younger black female novelists, including Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall, Octavia E. Butler, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat; the poets Audre Lord and Rita Dove and the playwrights Ntozake Shange and Suzan-Lori Parks among others (Gates 3). Most of the

African American female novelists depict how the black woman's life is influenced by sexism and racism since both are interconnected. They are questioning to which community a black woman must belong in order to understand herself and to promote her life most effectively.

The contemporary African American female literary production creates truthful scenes about the daily exploitation and constant racism imposed on the black female all her life. Their innovation is merely a reflection of socio-cultural and political forces which negatively affect the black woman. All Black female held the burden of confronting the life of blacks especially women; they describe real and truthful scenes of murder, rape and violence that black women suffer from. Furthermore, they mark a positive change through rising social and political awareness, because their productions are not only dedicated to their race but also to the oppressive white audience (Christian 178-9). Their works are a call for all black women to take a step forward against all boundaries imposed on them. An appeal for making a positive change in their lives if not for themselves, for their daughters and the coming generations (Collins 21-8).

African American female literature stresses an important feature of the psychological nature of black women which is the double sense of belonging or what is termed as “double consciousnesses”. This notion is first introduced by W.E.B Du Bois in his collection of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); it is a literary work that is considered a work of sociology, rather than fiction. In that outstanding work, Du Bois explores the massive effects of the white oppression and discrimination on the psyche of blacks. He declares that every black person in the American society experiences the feeling of “two-ness” in oneself. As he states: “One ever feels his two-ness; an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body” (3).

The above quotation clearly explains that blacks are torn between two opposing cultures; they are part of both African and American societies but full members of neither.

So, every black person who lives in the American society is inhabited by two distinct identities. As a result, black women also possess two contradictory identities, because they are both African females and American citizens. They are familiar with both cultures and languages and they are in constant search for themselves in the eyes of others in the outside world. They are totally aware that maintaining equilibrium between these two ambivalent identities is a defiantly cruel and hard process. However, the feelings of doubleness lead to internal strife and a struggle to emerge and to overcome the dilemma of identity.

African American women writers address and examine the negative effects of the double sense of belonging on the personal and social lives of black females, since it is difficult to reconcile those two identities. Nevertheless, they use their works as a subway to confront that serious problem. Through depicting various stories, either real or fictional, they urge those desperate black females to attain their desired dreams. They also suggest different survival strategies which black females can adopt to succeed in reconciling the two ambivalent identities within them. They energize their whole race to take a step toward having positive transformation in their identities and their whole lives.

Double segregation is an important feature of the African American female novels; they explore how the black female is doubly exploited and segregated because she is both black and female. She is a target of racial and gender discrimination and she rests at the bottom of the hierarchy pyramid, in which she is badly exploited. Whether their stories recount their own personal experience or not, black women writers create a new space isolated from patriarchal dominance, where the poor black female can ease her pain, discover and express herself through connecting with other women in the same submissive society (Christian 159-16).

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, presents how life is tiring in a double segregating community through her protagonist Celie. She is sexually and psychologically exploited by



males of her own society. However, throughout the novel and her meeting with the character of Shug Avery, Celie becomes conscious of her exploitation. She is psychologically dominated by the belief that the God to whom she is writing is a white male. Further, she is physically abused by males in her family as her stepfather Alphonso and her husband Mr\_\_ (Walker 155). “I say’ Celie explains “the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens [sic] I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown” (175). The story of Celie is just a sample among many other depictions of the double segregation that black females experienced.

The black female’s art is a place of truth where she emphasizes the importance of connectedness between black females, how solidarity can ease their constant pain and offer some hope. Further, they offer some revolutionary possibilities that can make change (Williams 80). The interrelation of sexism and racism is thus, among the main focus of the contemporary Black women writers since both of them are sources of oppression for women especially black ones. Most novels describe black women’s attempt to survive and struggle against the hostile system of a white racist society.

Another theme that is highly tackled in the works of African American female literature is displacement (Davies 84). They portray the plight of their characters’ journey from their homeland to another world; the main reason behind their migration is the bad experiences and troubled past. Additionally, Displacement complicates the identity quest. Most women writers take the challenge to write about the difficult and unfair living conditions (*Collins* 9-17). Hence, the path towards self-assertion must be continued and must emerge from one’s sense of belonging. Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Alice walker, Zora Neale Hurston among others portray how their black female characters struggle and rebel to reclaim their self autonomy. Also, they highlight how community and resistance

enhance the power of self assertion, to understand their humanity and their status as black women.

One can never talk about African American female literature without discussing two major concepts: “feminism” and “womanism” (Wilcox 70-1). Black feminist consciousness is the awareness of one’s own identity and destiny in American white dominated society. As Katie Cannon in her article “The Emergence of a Black Feminist Consciousness” declares, “ Throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman’s reality as a situation of struggle—a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed” (30).

Black Feminist Consciousness results from racism and the experience of black women in social and political movements during 1960s and 1970s (organized by Black leaders as Dr. Martin Luther King and others in order to increase black community’s pride and confidence). Patricia Hill Collins, in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), claims that “Black feminist works portray African-American women as individuals and as a group struggling toward empowerment within an overarching matrix of domination” (203). Furthermore, the Black Arts Movement which emerged during the 1970s highly affected the black female creativity “this turning had already initiated the discourse that would soon emerge as visible black feminist/woman centered reclamation” (Traylor 46).

So, revealing the black woman plight, segregation and constant struggle is the duty of the black female herself. She develops a unique feminism exclusively associated with her living situations. However, black and white feminism are similar, since both require education, call for collective actions and solidarity and both struggle to make change for their gender (Beasley 18). One of the crucial benefits of Black feminist consciousness is to get

over racial, social and political boundaries and revolt against all kinds of discrimination that are imposed on them in order to make positive reconfiguration in their lives.

The notion of “womanism” is totally distinct from “feminism”. The term is coined, for the first time, by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), in which she declares that the black female writer is likely to be womanist because she depicts racial and sexual issues and also she incorporates historical, social and political discourses in her writing. African American novelists are totally distinct from white feminists, because they are black; they experience the horrors of subjugation and exploitation by the American white society. The White female writes from a position of power, she focuses only on discussing patriarchal dominance, unlike the black female who faces a lot of obstacles and addresses complicated issues in her own society as poverty and racism (Nain5). Precisely, Black “womanism” is a philosophy that celebrates black origins and heritage. It explores past and present connections and concerns itself with unifying the black race (Ogunyemi 72).

After all, black female writers emerge as a voice for all black women and the whole black race. Through their writings, they help in promoting and liberating the African American woman. Toni Morrison, in this regard, states: “There is something inside us that makes us different from other people. It is not like men and it is not like a white woman” (qtd. in Bettye 255). One of the most outstanding black female writers is Gloria Naylor who dedicates all her works to defining the identity of black women and exploring their stereotypical discrimination. There is no greater example about her life commitment as her first Published work *The Women of Brewster Place* .

## I.2. Gloria Naylor's Biography

Gloria Naylor was born on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 in New York City. She was the eldest daughter of three girls to a telephone operator. During her childhood, her family moved several times, but her roots were in Mississippi. In 1968, she graduated from high school, and she became a minister of the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, in 1976 Naylor attended Medgar Evers College to study nursing. Then, she transferred to Brooklyn College of CUNY to study English and she received a bachelor's degree in literature.

Two years later, for the first time, she had read a novel written by the black female Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1965). Her experience of reading this novel motivated her to read and to learn more about her heritage and tradition as a black woman, since her education in the northern schools deprived her from learning about the long past and culture of blacks. Toni Morrison's *the Bluest Eye* (1965), highly influenced Naylor and encouraged her to start her own fiction; she gained self confidence and engaged herself in writing about her race.

Naylor's first significant novel which received wide success was *The Women of Brewster Place* published in 1982 after receiving a Master degree of Arts in African American Studies from Yale University. In 1983, she received the American Book Award for Best First Novel. In her novel, she reveals her own critical perspectives toward the crucial issues which her race suffered from as sexuality, class, and racial discrimination. Further, she investigates the effect of displacement and the corruption of the dominating white society.

She integrates the stories of own grandmother, great aunt, and mother through her fictional characters so to immortalize them. She also emphasizes the importance of reviving and preserving the tradition of their ancestors as a part of their unique identity (Carabi 36). Following the success of the first novel, Naylor continues writing and publishes other works as *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1993), *Bailey's Café* (1993) and *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998). All these works characterize Naylor's ability to carry her audience into

bittersweet situations that signify African American lives. The main concern of Gloria Naylor is precisely to present the experience of black women.

Naylor is a novelist, essayist, columnist, and educator; she is considered an important female figure of the African American contemporary literature. As a feminist writer, she commits the burden of reclaiming the rights of the black females like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker as many other black female writers. So, Naylor explores and highlights the endless struggle of black females, the double discrimination which they are subjected to, she gives them voice through her writings. Naylor, through her fictional scenes, identifies possible strategies for survival in which her female character undergoes positive transformation and overcomes all discriminating boundaries.

Also, she increases self consciousness among her black female audience; she makes them aware about their serious situation of being trapped between two dominating sides; the white American society and males of their own race. She urges them to take an action and to question their social and political status so that they can enjoy happy lives. In Naylor's words, in an article entitled "A Conversation", she states: "My emotional energy was spent in creating a woman's world, telling her side of it" (579). Naylor wants the black female to refuse oppression, to express herself and to oppose any patriarchal tyranny through educating, socializing and estimating herself. Through her different characters and different plots, Naylor confirms that black females and males are alike; the black female can assert herself and obtain a comfortable life by challenging the surrounding circumstances.

### **I.3. Summary of *The Women of Brewster Place***

*The Women of Brewster Place* is written by the African American novelist Gloria Naylor, published in 1982 and awarded as her first best novel. It is composed of seven stories of seven women with different backgrounds who struggle to survive and to reclaim their identities. The novel opens with a prologue entitled Dawn introducing the birth of Brewster Place. According to Naylor, it is “the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company” (Naylor 1). Hence, Brewster Place is personified as a character. It is also the setting where the story takes place. Though it is cut from the main street, it develops exclusive characteristics associated with its inhabitants. People there have their own music, language and codes (Naylor 2).

Brewster Place portrays the sad life of the city neighborhood seen through the lives of black women “They were hard-edged, soft-centered, brutally demanding, and easily pleased, these women of Brewster Place. They came, they went, grew up, and grew old beyond their years. Like an ebony phoenix, each in her own time and with her own season had a story” (Naylor 5). Naylor uses the image of phoenix to describe women who have different stories and who strive to build their new lives (Matus 138).

The novel starts with the story of Mattie Michael who leaves her hometown moving to the north because she finds herself pregnant by Butch Fuller and is afraid of her parents’ reaction towards her. Once she comes there, she attempts to find a place to live in and to work hard to take care of her son Basil, but different circumstances made her look for another place that suits her. Finally, she meets Eva Turner, an old woman who allowed Mattie to live with her but after Mrs. Eva’s death, Mattie buys the house. Years later, Basil is jailed because of infringement; therefore Mattie loses everything ending up in Brewster Place.

The second story is about Etta Mae Johnson, Mattie's childhood friend and closest one. Etta is attracted by wealth, luxury and rich people especially rich men so that she spends her life moving from one place to another and having relations with different men. Finally, she decides to join Mattie on Brewster Place aiming to find stability. When both of them attend the church, Etta is attracted by the preacher Reverend Wood and she thinks that she can have another chance in her life, but, unfortunately, her plans do not work. Therefore, she realizes that she must build her strong personality. When she returns back home, with a sad feeling and a broken heart, she finds her best friend Mattie waiting for her (Naylor 74).

Kiswana Browne is also among the women of Brewster Place; her story differs from the others since she is idealistic and wants to help others. She is a young woman, dropped out of college and moves to live in Brewster Place with African American people. She believes she can make a social change in the black community, because she feels that her family has rejected their black heritage. When her mother comes to visit her, they discuss Kiswana's choice of neighbourhood and her decision to leave school; she gives her money as well as advice for being a strong person.

The next story is about Lucielia Louise Turner, nicknamed as Ciel, and also ends up on Brewster Place. She is the granddaughter of Eva Turner, has a child named Serena with Eugene who treats both of them harshly. Eugene's irresponsible attitudes get Lucielia to abort the second baby. While both of them are fighting, they heard a scream from Serena, who receives an electric shock. After her daughter's death and leaving of her husband, Ciel feels lonely and unhappy but Mattie is the only person who takes care of her.

Another resident of Brewster Place is Cora Lee who has many children from different men. She lives with her children in an apartment, she loves them but it is difficult for her to look after them. When Kiswana finds one of her children eating from garbage, she provides her with help. Besides, Cora Lee accepts her invitation to take her children to

Shakespeare play in the local park, but Cora Lee realizes that she is the only one who is responsible for her children without need for man; she encourages them to be talented people like the actors on the stage.

The following section entitled *The Two* tells the story of the lesbian girls Lorraine and Theresa. They are badly stereotyped by the other women who reject Lorraine's behaviour but Theresa does not care about them. Lorraine finds comfort in talking to Ben, the oldest resident and the janitor of Brewster Place. One day, in her way to Ben's house, Lorraine passes through the alley near the wall, she was attacked by C.C. Baker and his friends who raped her, and to protect herself she takes a brick but instead she hits Ben and he died.

The last part of the novel is *The Block Party* that represents Mattie's dream in which it was a rainy day, the party is organized by Kiswana where the women enjoy it, but suddenly the women notice that the wall where both Lorraine and Ben die still with blood, they collaborate together and start to remove the brick of the wall. Finally, Mattie wakes and it's the morning with a sunny day. In short, the dream unites them and highlights the importance of community and womanhood (Sickels 116).

The novel ends with an epilogue *Dusk* which deals with the sense of an ending about the death of Brewster Place. Naylor tends to show that though Brewster Place is "still waiting to die" (192), its daughters keep dreaming though their dreams are broken again and again.



The history of African American Literature as broad field seems to be hold from different dimensions. This type of literature witnessed huge development that paves the way for the emergence of the African American female literature that highlights their different works and the era in which they lived. Taking into account that most of the notable writers in post slavery era were men, several reasons pushed the African American women to work hard to build their status as women, as black and as writers. Therefore, a number of African American women writers appeared on the literary scene raising their pens to depict the issues and suppression that controlled the women's lives especially Black ones.

Gloria Naylor, among other black women writers, is inspired by different works of other novelists especially Toni Morrison. In a conversation between them, Naylor admits:

I wrote because I had no choice, but that was a long road from gathering the authority within myself to believe that I could actually be a writer. The writers I had been taught to love were either male or white . . . Until I enrolled in a creative writing seminar at Brooklyn College . . . we read the *Bluest Eye*... *The Bluest Eye* is the beginning . . . And it said to a young black woman, struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painstakingly eloquent that it becomes a song . ("A Conversation" 568)

Naylor achieves fame through her significant works, particularly *The Women of Brewster Place* that reveals the condition and depression black women face in a white dominating society. Nevertheless, with their strong will and challenges they assert themselves in front of both white and black male's supremacy.

## **Chapter II: Oppression of Black Female in *The Women of Brewster Place***

Gloria Naylor is one of the most remarkable African American novelists. She dedicates her writings to discuss serious issues that her race and sex suffer from. Among her significant works is *The Women of Brewster Place*, which is considered a masterpiece. Naylor, in this novel, explores central aspects of the African American life in a white dominated society. *The Women of Brewster Place* examines crucial issues inseparable from the history of African Americans as class, gender and race. She sheds light on how the duality of identity haunts the African American soul and how displacement negatively affects the lives of this minority.

Furthermore, through various female characters and various stories, Naylor presents factual living conditions which all African American women experience. She also clarifies the devastating consequences of displacement on their self perception and esteem. Mainly, she introduces how African females are subjugated by males and how they respond and react towards their suffering.

### **II.1. Double Consciousness: African Women Displacement**

Since their history is suppressed by white Americans, Africans suffer from bad living conditions and the racial prejudice which negatively affect their psychologies and their daily lives. They suffer from a huge difficulty in reconciling and bringing together their precious African heritage and tradition along with the American culture. Unfortunately, this led to the feeling of “two-ness” and “double consciousness”

The African American lives are characterised by a sense of dislocation and mistreatment which highly affect who they are and their perspective towards who they will be, since everything concerning their past and history is suppressed. So, “Double consciousness” is resulted from displacement, and the loss of sense of home.

Displacement is believed to be the accurate solution to find one's soul and self, since the whole African American race suffers from ambiguity concerning its identity. By finding a new place to live in, African Americans hope to define who they are and to construct their own identities. As Barbara Christian states: "Because of the consistency of forced displacement in our collective experience, we know how critical where we are is to the character of our social creations, of how place helps to tell us a great deal about who we are and who we can become" ("Gloria Naylor's Geography" 106).

For Gloria Naylor, place has a significant impact on shaping one's identity and life whether negatively or positively. For her, place is not merely a geographical dimension but, rather, a spiritual one. In all of her novels, she attempts to create places, in which African Americans interact and call it home after long journeys of migration and displacement (Dixon 2-3). African American women are victimized more than men; they are enslaved and brought to America and due to the brutal segregation in the south, they migrated to the north in search for stabilization. Their sole dream is to cross over all racial barriers; they only want to find a place where they can feel safe and secure (Frías 49-50). In her novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor examines the impact of displacement on the lives of the desperate African American females and on their identities. Brewster Place is an imaginary street which represents a marginal space created for the immigrants, non-white people (Frías 49). It is the last shelter for those coloured people who do not find any place to go to.

Naylor creates this fictional place to depict the real harsh life out there in the American white society. Brewster Place is created on the basis of the capitalist economic greed and racial discrimination "[a]s an after thought ... agreed to erect four double-housing units on some worthless land in the badly crowded district" (Naylor 1). So, the white capitalists manipulate and subject everything and, as Susan Willis states: "Those who own property and control the means of production control time and place as well" (*Specifying*

*Place: Black* 36-7). Accordingly, Brewster Place is assigned to coloured people, who lack both economic and social status. The wall which cuts off Brewster Place from the main street is clear evidence about the racial discrimination and marginalization these women experience. James Baldwin claims that “the motion of the white people in the USA has been . . . a furious attempt to get away from the niggers” (“The Language of the Streets” 135). So, the wall that separates Brewster Place from the whites’ region can be used metaphorically to represent the racial prejudice of blacks. It stands as a barrier which prevents colored people from getting in touch with whites; a discrimination which is exclusively done on the basis of the skin color. The character Mattie, for example, is rejected because she is a black single mother; she finds nowhere to live except the area designed for colored people known as Brewster Place (Naylor 29-30).

Brewster sums up the whole African American history in the United States, from the early days of slavery till the present moment. As Alisdair Rogers declares: “How space is produced depends upon the historical and material circumstances operating” (239). That’s the case of Brewster Place; it is created upon racial, segregating circumstances. Since it is cut off from the city, which is blocked by a wall, it depicts the bad living conditions which all African Americans suffer from with no exception, and how the whites discriminate and exploit them. The inhabitants of Brewster Place suffer from poverty, joblessness and the absence of social services in addition to the carelessness of the land owners to the needs of those powerless colored people.

Naylor, in her novel, through her African American female characters and different series of incidents, highlights the effect of displacement on African American women during their whole lives. Barbara Christian claims that those black females have no place to live in and they must live in streets like Brewster Place because they are displaced, homeless and poor (“Gloria Naylor’s Geography” 119). Also, that marginalized street is considered an

indirect way of controlling the black minority, since the Brewster Place is created only for economic needs.

Though Brewster Place inhabitants are dominated by the presence of the wall which prevents them from getting attached with the whites, they accept everything since they have nowhere else to live in. It is crucial to highlight the distinction between the terms 'place' and 'space'.

In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), Yi-Fu Tuan explains:

'Space' is more abstract than 'place.' What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value . . . The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.(6)

Place, therefore, has undeniable effect on the black American people; they can claim certain home to be their home only when they do not feel threatened or segregated and only when they reach the feeling of security and love. Whenever these characteristics are absent in a certain place, displacing becomes an obligation.

At the very beginning of the novel, Naylor depicts a story of a young girl named Mattie Michael from her teenage till womanhood ending up in that "dead end street" (2). She used to live with her family in Rock Vale Tennessee, where she used to enjoy the smell of sugar cane field, she was denied to hang out with boys except Fred's Watson (21). However, Mattie does not obey her father's rule and become pregnant after a trip with Butch Fuller to the sugar cane field. Mattie's pregnancy is a turning point in her whole life; she is obliged to leave her home and to start a new life. As a teenager, pregnant and a single mother, Mattie's whole life turned upside down.

The above mentioned incident leads Mattie to leave her town, and to find a new place where she can settle in peace and build a sense of belonging. Mattie searches for a new place, where she can start over again with her upcoming baby, and forget her unhappy past. She is in a state of complete despair and can no longer think of anything. To borrow a passage from the novel: “She [Mattie] didn’t want to think about the strange city that lay ahead or even of her friend Etta who would be at the depot to meet her. She didn’t want to think about the home that had been lost to her” ( Naylor 24-5). Mattie’s next station after leaving her home is Ashe Ville, North Carolina, where she gives birth to her baby boy Basil and starts working, but she suffers from very bad living conditions; everything is expensive and she barely provides food to eat. Naylor explains: “Mattie couldn’t seem to save enough money to move. The babysitter cost her almost half of her weekly salary, and after she paid a week’s rent and bought some food, there was just enough left over for carfare” (28).

Mattie is just an example about how the black man is irresponsible towards his woman, how his selfishness and carelessness shutter down the life of the black female. Once he satisfies his sexual desire, he runs away; his absence causes the black female to face financial, social and emotional hardships as adolescent woman. She holds the burden and blame of the outcome of their relation; she is always left alone without any support of her man (Matus 137). All of that causes the black female to feel alienated in her own home and the sense of misrecognition. The search for place where one can live without any pressure and frustration, as the case of the segregated black females, is very important since those blacks hold certain sentiments to specific places (Rose 41). For instance, the south can be associated with feelings of pain and hatred because all the African Americans experienced the horrors of slavery there. As Gerda Lerner clarifies:

We poor colored women wage-earners in the South are fighting a terrible battle. . . . On the one hand, we are assailed by white men, and

on the other hand, we are assailed by black men, who should be our natural protectors; and, whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, we are little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves!.

*(Black Women in White 157)*

As the story progresses, a terrible incident happens to Mattie, a rat bit her son, and this urges her to leave her house once again and to start looking for a new secure place where she can raise her beloved son. While she is searching for a new place, she meets an old woman called Eva Turner, who hosts them in her house. After years, Mattie ends up in Brewster Place, she becomes a lonely old woman because her son left her. Brewster place is the last shelter for homeless black Americans, where they create new social relations and try to bond with each other.

Naylor, through creating metaphorical places, tends to show how place can psychologically affect African American females. The oppressed black female lives along with constant sated boundaries either by her family or by the whites, and this enables her to assert herself as Florence Stratton declares, “African women were subject to interlocking forms of oppressions to the racism of colonialism and to indigenous and foreign structures of male domination” (*Contemporary African Literature* 7).

For instance, in the case of the character Mattie who lives according to her father’s rules and obligations, that become clear when he forbids her from meeting Butch Fuller (Naylor 10). The absence of care, love and security, after her father’s abuse, leads her to feel alienated and to be occupied by the idea of homelessness. As a result, she undertakes the choice of displacement. In that scope, Johannes A Smit in his review of *Black Women, Writing and Identity* claims, “As each [Black woman] is displaced or migrates through choice, she leaves situations and moves to new circumstances for particular reasons—for liberatory

reasons or in search of opportunities” (199). So, displacing is a method which black women adopt, to suppress their own unsuccessful previous experiences or sad memories. Leaving behind home town, they hope to find a better place they can call home, where they can have a sense of belongingness and acceptance and where they can identify themselves without being repressed (Winsbro 6).

Mattie is not the only character who undergoes the journey of displacement and moving from one place to another, and ending up in that falling apart street; “to the street with a desperate acceptance that whatever was here was better than the starving southern climates they had fled from”(Naylor 4). Naylor’s other character, Etta Mae Johnson, also experiences displacement .Etta’s dreams of having a rich man who can satisfy her needs and to live in peace away from any restriction or rules, drives her to move from one place to another, as if she is running without a clear goal to maintain in her life. Naylor explains: “Etta spent her teenage years in constant trouble. Rock Vale had no place for a woman who was not only unwilling to play by the rules” (59). Etta has a rebellious soul, she refuses to be manipulated by males and she wants to live according to her own rules, somehow she is distinct from the other female characters in the novel. In her case, she is a fearless woman, who manipulates males instead of being a victim and manipulated by them, she has the desire to live a fancy life and finding a wealthy man (Naylor 59-60).

After leaving her home town, she resides with her friend Mattie in Ashe Ville, North Carolina and, then, she moves to Harlem in New York City. The journey of displacing which Etta undergoes because of her inability to find a place in where she can live . She is running from racial segregation and male exploitation and she wants to find who she is. As Naylor declares in an interview;

Concept of self is closely related to women's perception of space . . . Naylor said that closed spaces emanate from ‘a whole web of circumstances.’ A



woman's sense of space grows out of' the society in which you are born, and the way in which you are socialized to move through that society, 'and that movement, or the lack of it 'determines who you are, how you see the big you when you look into a mirror'. ( qtd. in Pearlman and Katherine 24-5)

After a long desperate travelling, she ends up in the same place with her friend Mattie. The sense of homelessness and unbelongingness are the main motives behind Etta's displacement, she does not accept male dominance but, instead, attempts to live according to her instincts and desires, she wants to be responsible for her own destiny. Naylor uses the character of Etta to present, how many of the oppressed African American females try to live in the white dominating society and find out place where they can express themselves freely, without any patriarchal offered or imposed definition (Montgomery 10-1).

Kiswana Browne is another character who moves from her home town and ends up in Brewster Place; she used to live in Linden Hills. Kiswana left her parents' home because she refuses to be assimilated to the whites and to deny her African roots, rather she is proud of being African American and celebrates her unique identity even in order to be more 'Africanized' she changes her name from Melanie to Kiswana (Naylor 86). She is different from the other African females of the novel; she is an educated woman and from the middle class, she chooses to live in that poor street. Unlike the other previous female characters, Kiswana is not forced to live in Brewster Place rather, she is dreaming to improve the social living condition of her race in that street; she wants to provide help and assistance for the African American community. Kiswana's dream of having communal relations with her race urges her to move to that poor street. She believes that by living in Brewster Place, she is in the right place that gives her a sense of belonging to other people of her own race.

Kiswana disproves her mother's opinion about living with those people when she states: "What do you mean these people. They're my people and yours, too, Mama-we're all

black. But maybe you've forgotten that over in Linden Hills" (Naylor 83). Kiswana's revolutionary soul drives her to leave everything behind even her family, tries to urge her people to fight for their rights and equality in the white dominated society. For Kiswana, being a part of her own race would enable her to provide a kind of help and assistance to those forgotten and marginalized colored people. Also, she would create new social ties and bonds as Doreen Massey states, "The geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness, and underscores the fact that both personal identity and the identity of those develops of space-time in which and between which we live and move (and have our Being') are constructed precisely through that interconnectedness" (*Space, Place and Gender* 122).

In the last story *The Two*, Naylor presents two other characters Theresa and Lorraine who are forced to leave their lives behind in Linden Hills, and to settle in Brewster Place. They are obliged to flee their apartment because they are lesbian girls and they are rejected and humiliated in their neighbourhood. Also, they are jobless, so the only available place to settle in and to start a new life is that "dead end street" in which "they now claimed Brewster as home" (Naylor 129). The behaviour of these two girls is considered inappropriate in their African American society. This is why they move to a new place where no one knows about their relation and they can live without being discriminated or rejected from their own race for being different. They only look for acceptance by their community.

Through her different African female characters and different plots in this novel, Naylor explores displacement and the constant search for place of African American women. She reveals that the African American female is victimized, by social norms, patriarchy and white segregation which cause her to struggle and challenge all boundaries in order to survive since "The sexual atrocities that the Negro woman has suffered in the United States, South and North and what these atrocities have done to her personality as a female creature, is a tale

more bloody and brutal than most of us can imagine” (Hernton 123). Consequently the Black female ought to find a place, where she settle down and realise her dreames.

Naylor reveals that the African Americans have separate places to live in, restricted according to the whites’ boundaries and racial segregation and Brewster Place is just an example about those racial, racist and marginal places that created for the African American community (Page161). Brewster Place is used metaphorically to represent racism which the African Americans face in a white dominating society; “the street and the African Americans who inhabit it are representative of African American historic position in the United States” (Page 161-2). This street summarises the whole miserable life which the Africans witness in a white society; they suffer from poverty, segregation and exploitation. In other words, just as the street which is blocked by a wall, their hopes of better living conditions, promising future and equality are vague and they will face only dead ends (Naylor 192).

Naylor uses the Brewster Place wall as a symbol of isolation and constant racism which all African Americans suffer from in reality (2). Also, through her female characters, she explores the impact of unfixed and unstable living place on the internal life and on the perception of identity, and that is what Du Bois calls “double consciousness”. So, all Naylor’s characters suffer from difficulties in their lives because they are Africans and American citizens, the whites forbid them from enjoying their rights as Americans simply because they are colored. The following passage explains the situation of blacks in America:

Blacks in a slave society were powerless and marginal yet the whites who owned them built their culture around not being black. The stories they subscribed to about them built their culture around not being black. The stories they subscribed to about the meaning of black skin (or ‘black blood’ since he was not always a reliable indicator of racial definition) shaped their construction of what whiteness want. (Roberts 5-6)

The above quote stresses the idea of duality which Du Bois calls “double consciousness”. So, whatever rights blacks are granted, they remain unable to pursue their dream of being full American citizens without being discriminated because of their skin color. Furthermore, African Americans suffer from the curse of the suppressed identity and their inability to emerge due to the harsh and tough boundaries that are set upon them.

Gloria Naylor, through depicting several models of African American women displacement journeys, wants to confirm that unsettlement, instability and the constant search for home, is a result of the racism and segregation practised on their race by whites. Also, she reveals that there is no place that is out or beyond racism and, though all her characters suffer in their daily lives, they have found a kind of hope and relief in Brewster Place. So, it is clear, that Brewster place has more than one function in the novel; it can be designated as an example of the usual manipulation of the racist whites. Also, it can be viewed as source of hope and relief for different female characters as Mattie, Etta, Lorraine and Theresa as they “cling to the street with a desperate acceptance that whatever was here was better than the starving southern climates they had fled from” (Naylor 4). For Hook, the black female is the one who must look for a specific place which she can call home and have strong supportive social bonding, as she states: “It has been primarily the responsibility of black women to construct domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination” (*Yearning: race, gender* 42).

## II.2. Themes of *The Women of Brewster Place* as a Feminist Novel

### II.2.1. Patriarchy, Violence and Oppression

*The Women of Brewster place* highlights different experiences of female characters under male dominance. They are portrayed as victims of oppression, violence, and patriarchy. Their stories reflect the constant pain and struggle of many African American women who resist the discrimination of both sexism and racism. Their dream is to find a place of their own, where they can live peacefully far from male aggression. Asserting their identities and reviving their status as women and as blacks is their sole aim. Throughout the novel, the female characters share common things in terms of exploitation and male abuse and how they are badly treated even from paternal side and their patriarchal authority. The relation between men and women in a patriarchal society is considered as a relation of domination and submission where women are controlled by men. She is never able or, at least, free to express her desire or find her identity since it is still considered as something taboo in a male dominated society.

In her book *Theorizing and Patriarchy*, Walby defines patriarchy as a “system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women ...the use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion of that every individual man is in dominant position and every woman is in a subordinate one” (20). So, as it represents a form of rules by force against women, it shows male’s behaviours that affect women and marginalize them (Walby 21).

Naylor’s novel is remarkable in presenting patriarchy that oppresses its victims, and it is made sufficiently clear through the portrayal of fathers and husbands whose aggressive behaviours are visible. They impose obedience on their daughters and wives. Violence is a broad term that covers destructive acts of abusive behaviours that “threaten” humiliate, degrade the well being dignity and the values of other (*World Report on Violence* 4).

Whatever the form of violence is, women are always victims of abuses that suppress and put them under male control. Male supremacy pushes him to use cruel force, by which his oppressive power and self esteem can keep his “domination” over women (Sherman19).

Gloria Naylor, in her novel, depicts some women’s situations like; Mattie Michel, Etta Johnson, Luciella Turner, Cora Lee and Lorraine who are subjected to all kinds of oppression and violence whether physically, sexually, verbally or psychologically.

Among these women is Mattie who suffers from her father’s physical abuse because he always warns her against Butch Fuller who seduces women. Her father cannot believe that his daughter is pregnant, and she refuses to give him the name of her child’s father. Despite all the respect and love that her father gave her and, with an effort to know the name, he beats her brutally. To use Naylor’s words: “He still held her by the hair so she took the force of the two blows with her neck muscles, and her eyes went dim as the blood dripped down her chin from her split lip” (22). Mattie remains silent and what hurts the father is her disobedience and again “Mattie’s body contracted in a painful spasm each time the stick smashed down on her legs and back, and she curled into a tight knot, trying to protect her stomach ” ( Naylor 23). Mattie is unable to accept her father’s reaction and to avoid more violence, she leaves home.

Another woman who experiences violence is Etta. Etta does not adjust to her surroundings sufficiently because she suffers in a white racist society which distorts her image. She is psychologically abused by those men who disappoint her each time; Etta’s strong desire is to find a dignified and honest life partner. When she met preacher Woods with whom she expects to build a new life, he uses her only for his self interest and he sexually exploited her. And even she wishes to marry a well to do man, but finally she realizes that she is trapped. She claims that: “If I walk into this street...I’ll never come back. I’ll never get out. Oh, dear God, I am so tired-so very tired” (Naylor 73).

Ciel is also a victim of her husband's oppression; their relation fails due to some obstacles like racism and unemployment that ruin their marriage. Eugene is that kind of man who is irresponsible and shows no interest to his family and sees women as a burden and an instrument for his desire. The black woman is always seen as burden in her community, throughout the course of the novel, readers feel sympathy toward her and because "the facts of today allow us to identify completely with a lonely, isolated, alienated young woman, a woman left without a family because of the meanness of the significant men in her life – stepfather, father, husband" (Hamilton 381).

Males in this novel have negative impact on women's lives. They have no actual presence, since they are presented as dead or irresponsible and passive. Like the case of Mattie takes the responsibility of her son Basil, who grows up without his father Butch Fuller. Another case of suffering is that of Cora Lee, in which all the men whom Cora knew are represented as "shadows" since they leave her alone holding the burden of raising their children. For them Cora Lee is just a sexual pleasure in which they burden her with children with no interest. The fathers of her children never stay for long and she is mistreated by them all, one of them was violent with her to the point that he fractured her jaw. To illustrate from the novel: "His gold-capped teeth and glass eye had fascinated her, and she had almost learned to cope with his peculiar ways. A pot of burnt rice would mean a fractured jaw, or a wet bathroom floor a loose tooth, but that had been their fault for keeping her so tied up she couldn't keep the house straight" (Naylor 114). Added to that Ciel's case with her selfish husband Eugene, is another clear example about the constant marginalization and humiliation which the black female suffers from.

African American literature depicts the constant absence of the father and the negative physical and psychological impact of their disappearance on their children especially girls during their childhood and adolescence. As the following passage explains;

“girls with absent fathers grow up without the day-by-day experience of attentive, caring and loving interaction with a man. Without this continuous sense of being valued and loved, a young girl does not thrive, but rather is stunted in her emotional development” (Krohn & Bogan 602). The mother plays the greatest role in her children’s life but the father too can provide them with his interest not only with security but even emotionally. Ciel’s daughter Serena witnessed a neglect and carelessness from her father, also she misses any kind of tenderness from him and this is clear when “Serena struggled out of Mattie’s lap and went toward her father and tugged on his leg to be picked up. Ignoring the child and cutting short the greeting of the two women, he said coldly, Ciel I wanna to talk to you” (Naylor 97).

The African American family is fragmented, that is not something bizarre, because the assisting father figure in the life of the black female is always absent and that is considered a normal feature of Black life, for no doubt that has profound negative effect on the future life of young girls especially on their sexual lives (Hunt & L.L Hunt 100). Though the presence of a responsible father is very important in the family , he is a source of security and love, sometimes he causes his children pain and destruct their whole infancy and adulthood.

Eugene always makes problems and excuses to get out of his relation with Ciel and his abusive attitude forces her to abort the second child, Eugene’s refusal of having a second baby pushes her to abort it, so that she will not lose her husband. “I lost my job today,” he shot at her, as if she had been the cause . . . ‘So now, how in the hell I'm gonna make it with no money, huh? And another brat comin' here, huh?’ . . . ‘I'm fuckin' sick of never getting ahead. Babies and bills, that's all you good for’ ” (Naylor 94). Here,Naylor depicts the verbal violence when Eugene attacks Ciel and humiliates her

Though Ciel is in need of his care after her abortion, “He came and grabbed her by the shoulders and was shouting into her face; ‘Look, Ciel, believe whatever the fuck you



want. I gotta go” (Naylor 95-9). As the quotation suggests, Eugene is such an irresponsible man who never cares about his wife even during serious moments. Indeed, he leaves home without attending his daughter’s funeral, leaving Ciel in a big sorrow, disappointed and she longs for death; “...She was simply tired of hurting. And she was forced to slowly give up the life that God had refused to take from her” (Naylor 101). The loss of the two children damages Ciel’s health, since Eugene lacks both financial and emotional stability. In addition, his abuse towards Ciel is not only a physical one but she is also emotionally oppressed.

The theme of violence and oppression is again presented in the story of the two lesbian girls, both Lorraine and Theresa who get away from patriarchal abuses. Naylor shows that because the two girls are lesbian, the neighbors in Brewster place neglect them. Theresa does not care about them while Lorraine is verbally oppressed and hurt by their insults and prejudices. She feels lonely and none can be her friend except Ben whom she considers like her father. As Deborah Holmes explains, Lorraine’s “search for acceptance among her community is no different from what the other women in Brewster Place are searching . . . for: love, peace, community, and a sense of belonging” (“Lessons in Storytelling” 14).

Rape is another form of violence against women which impacts them both physically and emotionally. In fact, Lorraine is the one who experiences a terrible raping accident that destroys her both physically and psychologically. It causes her self destruction and she becomes powerless. Naylor states emphatically: “The thing is, Lorraine wasn’t raped because she is lesbian, they raped her because she was a woman” (“A Talk with Gloria Naylor” 5). Lorraine was raped by C.C. Baker and his gang and she aggressively faces sexual abuse. The physical violence this character experiences is described at several intervals of the story. And, as Naylor emphasizes: “When they had finished and stopped holding her up, her body fell over like an unstrung puppet. She didn’t feel her split rectum or the patches in her skull where her hair had been torn off by grating against the bricks. Lorraine lay in that alley only

screaming at the moving pain inside her that refused to come to rest” (Naylor 171).

According to Naylor, Lorraine’s rape results from her lack of communal support. In an interview with William Goldstein, she maintains: “In the case of Lorraine there was no woman on that block willing to help her and she was in trouble. . . . And she had no one to go to. . . . It was her alienation from the other women that put her in that alley” (“A Talk with Gloria Naylor” 5).

The conditions of women of Brewster Place portray the bad image of men, be it a father or husband or others, and how they treat women as property or instruments for pleasure to assert their status as men. Naylor negatively represents men as “Negro beasts”, The insecure Butch, the father who brutally beats his daughter Mattie, and the other one who rejects his lesbian daughter Lorraine, added to that Cora Lee’s men who betrayed her, the hypocritical preacher Woods, the irresponsible Eugene who abandons Ciel and above all C.C. Baker and his gang (Fraser 98). However, the men of Brewster place tend to show that through abuse, they can keep women under their control. And, here, it becomes clear that the relation between men and women in Brewster Place is a negative one and also “destructive”; men depend on their patriarchal forces that disempowered women and put them in a state of frustration and despair. Men, in the novel, are always represented in a bad image since they ignore the value and role of women in their lives (Wahlstrom 64).

Those women are harassed and suffer from different kinds of oppression but most of them are more psychologically abused because hurting someone’s feelings is more painful and devastating. In addition, they are trapped by their inability to change their situation. Gloria Naylor shows, through her female characters, the complexity of life under male domination. The various situations women encounter within or outside their community show how patriarchy prevails and becomes a major reason behind all women’s oppression. Women

and exactly black ones are exposed to violence which is a sign of masculinity; their relations with men make them frequently victims and create barriers against their voice.

### **II.2.2. Female Silence and Impotence**

Throughout *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor explores a significant and a central theme which is the silence and powerlessness of African American females. The African American woman, during all her life, has been oppressed and persecuted, considered as a mute object, denied the right to express her own opinion and thoughts, and to take her own decision. She is forbidden even to argue and to prove herself; she is allowed only to accept what happens to her quietly.

The African American woman learns to swallow her pain and to bury her desire; she does not even dare to negotiate man's decision. She is the victim of both the white dominant society and her own race. Naylor examines, through her characters, how silence is associated with the African female's weakness and powerlessness. Eagleton suggests that "when women speak of being silenced, they don't mean that they are incapable of adequately speaking a language; rather they are referring to social and cultural pressures which undermine their confidence and make them hesitant about speaking" (*Working with Feminist Criticism* 16). The African American female is powerless and hopeless because she is classified at the last rank of the social order; she is a woman and she is black. That causes her to undergo oppression and exploitation by males of both races.

The concept of "The Angel in the House" is highly present in *The Women of Brewster Place*. This concept is well explained by Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women". Woolf explains that whenever she starts writing, an angel stops her. This Angel tends to be a woman and she names her depending on the famous poem "The Angel in the House" by Coventry Patmore. And though it is not easy to get rid of this angel, she manages to kill her. In her description of "The Angel in the House", Virginia Woolf states:

She The Angel in the House was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . In short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it---she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty . . . --her blushes, her great grace. (2)

From the above passage, a woman seems to be the ideal person and the pure wife of the house, added to that she is kind and charming. She is powerless and devotes all her time to her husband and children. In other words, she sacrifices her own ambitions so that others will attain whatever they want. Applying this vision on Naylor's characters, one can clearly distinguish many angels who "sacrifice themselves daily". Females in Brewster Place are exploited by all males in their lives; they are powerless and unable to challenge them. They have no voice to free themselves, so they are silenced. For Instance, Mattie chooses silence when her father asked her to reveal who is the father of her baby and dares not to utter any word. As it is illustrated in the following passage:

I say, whose is it?" And he came toward her, grabbed her by the back of her hair, and yanked her face upward to the confront blanket of rage in his eyes. Instinctively her body cried out to obey—to tell him that it was Butch's so he would release her and grab his shotgun and go out and blow Butch into as many piece as her world... 'I ain't saying, Papa' (Naylor 22).

Mattie's inability to stop her father's aggression and beating pushes her to keep silent, to protect her father from committing a crime so that her world will not get uglier than it is (Naylor 22). Beyond her silence, she attempts to protect her baby nothing more and to stay alive. Naylor depicts her character Mattie as a weak pregnant young African female unable to

protect herself from the violence of tyrant and misunderstanding father. Instead of receiving care and love, she is tortured by beating. Mattie embodies all the characteristics that make her an “Angel in the House”.

The character of Lucielia Turner, who is called Ciel, is another example of the oppressed African American house wife. Naylor portrays Ciel as a very weak and fragile woman, struggling to keep her careless husband Eugene. He pushes her to abort her second baby, and that causes her to be passive and very possessive of her first daughter Serena; she has only one dream that Eugene will change someday and take care of their little family and their apartment where they can have another baby. Ciel keeps silent whenever Eugene speaks to her, she could not express herself or have a real conversation with him, he is a tyrant male; she lacks the voice and the will to argue and defend herself. For example, there is a scene in the kitchen where he got angry and started to insult her and she shows obedience by remaining quite (Naylor 91-4).

According to Simone De Beauvoir’ *Second Sex* (1988), “it is often the seducer himself who convinces the woman that she should rid herself of the child. Either he has already abandoned her when he learns she is pregnant, or she altruistically wants to hide her disgrace from him, or else she finds no support from him” (603). Eugene does not care about his wife’s feelings; he does not even offer her support when she becomes emotionally devastated after aborting her baby.

Ciel always thinks about how to satisfy him in order to keep him by her side. For instance, she wants to work but she does not find who can take care of Serena because Eugene hates Mattie. Ciel’s life crumbles more when she loses her beloved girl, who represents the whole world for her after her abortion. Ciel loses hope after the death of her daughter, she is unable to move forward, all her world collapses in front of her eyes.

Also, the character of Cora Lee who is a single mother adopts the traditional role of the African American woman; she is helpless to stop having children from different men. Naylor depicts her as a victim of disordered sexual life starting from her childhood when she experiences that for the first time. In the novel, Naylor maintains: “It would return to her after her youngest daughter would approach her with news one afternoon that Cora Lee had been doing nasty with the Murphy boy behind the basement steps” (109). Cora Lee is left alone by all men she knows and they never get back again. Furthermore, she is severely beaten by them; she is abused both sexually and physically. Once they fulfil their desire, they leave her. The domestic role that is associated with the black female is that she is only an object of desire. Gloria Wade Gayles describes the position of African American women in the American society:

There are three major circles of reality in American society, which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it, there is a smaller circle, a narrow space in which black people regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small, dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation and vulnerability. (*No Crystal Stair* 3-4)

Occupying the last position in society makes women impotent and weak, unable even to protect themselves from male abuse. In return, they have no other choice except being silent.

Though Naylor’s female protagonists have different experiences, they are all silenced and they live under male oppression that forces them to turn into deep silence. This silence which is an inner phantom or, as Woolf calls it, “Angel” stands as a barrier against those women who become unable to assert their status as women and as blacks. The more

they are suppressed, the more they become weak and unable to assert their identities. The concept of “Angel” provides an image of the repression of women, as well as restricts their freedom and will. It obliges women to keep submitted to males’ control.

Obviously, each woman in Brewster Place confronts this angel within herself. They care about their families, husbands and even they try to protect their relation with their husbands. These women realize that violence and love are interconnected and, then, it is considered as part of their relationship, in which they accept any form of oppression. Ciel and Cora Lee are examples of those women who are unable to reject the physical violence as that would lead to the loss of love. Besides, if they tend to desire something, the patriarchal authority denies that.

Women, therefore, become worthless beings and their acceptance of violence and male oppression lead to their silence; this silence prevents women of the Brewster place to voice their opinions, and simply without anger, they have no identities. What women recognize is that their wishes to have a happier family life, to be treated as equal as their husbands, will not last for a long time. But what they want is to gain and find something of their own in order to express themselves.

Women in general and black ones in particular, realize that they are always exposed to the sense of powerlessness due to their experience with racial and gender discrimination. Moreover, the relation between men and women of Brewster place is a relation of oppressed and oppressors, in which women as oppressed believe that they are inferior, weak and they cannot voice their suffering and defend themselves. These women must struggle to break this silence or, in other words, to kill the Angels in the house that force them to remain impotent. In the words of Virginia Woolf: “Had I not killed her, she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing” (2). To fight powerlessness, they have to get

greater consciousness, claim their autonomy and freedom from male oppression that left them unprotected from all forms of violence.

Among the themes that are highly tackled in African American literature are those which are of great interest. The works of Gloria Naylor, as a famous figure, cover huge concepts and themes that reflect the real world of many African Americans especially black females. Their case in *The Women of Brewster Place* is well represented through their displacement from south to the north as a result to many troubles. Besides, it becomes difficult for these women to find a place to live in. The impact of displacement on the lives of women of Brewster place paves the way for male violence and oppression that women are exposed to.

In fact, the patriarchal system is behind all kinds of violence and oppressive acts that reveal men's domination over women. Naylor, in her novel, depicts how men badly treat women and use their abusive forces toward them to assert their supremacy and to keep them under their control. Since Women of Brewster place are victims of male oppression, this leads to their silence and impotence that stand as barriers against their freedom and self assertion.



### **Chapter III: Redefining Womanhood in *The Women of Brewster Place***

In most African American novels, writers put emphasis on characters who struggle to preserve their identities in a world dominated by whites. Throughout her novel, Gloria Naylor shows that her female characters become aware of themselves and redefine their womanhood. In fact, the novel portrays the survival tactics that empower these women and allow them to get over patriarchy and to succeed in promoting their lives.

As these females suffer from difficult situations, they escape their realities and live in a world of imagination; they always dream to have better lives. The women of Brewster place unite together because they have a common fate. These women tend to build a world of their own which is good and idealistic. Because, deep down, they are aware of their submission, they try to rebel to break down the burden of silence and to make their voices heard. In short, female autonomy is a common goal these women strive to achieve.

#### **III.1. Survival Tactics Against Sexism and Racism**

The African American woman, throughout her whole life, is considered inferior to all human beings; she is triply segregated and marginalized by race, gender and class (Jones 24). She is badly stereotyped in a white dominated society. Both sexism and racism are systems of oppression, which control the African American society and conspire against black women. Besides to the racial discrimination, the black female is subjected sexually by males of both races. Bell Hooks in her work *Wounds of Passion: A writing Life* (1999) asserts: “What the male does with his penis becomes a greater and certainly a more accessible way to assert masculine status” (94). So, they use the black female to prove their masculinity and exploit her sexually.

All Black Feminist scholars see that the black female must revolt and fight in order to promote her living conditions so that she can emerge as an independent entity, free herself from the exploitation of males and cross over the racial boundaries. The main goal of black

feminism is to urge and to encourage the powerless black female to step forward and to get rid of masculine prejudice and racism. For instance, Mari W. Stewart, in her public lecture, encourages the black females to revolt against whites when she states: “We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labour, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them” (qtd.in Richardson 59). She reveals that they have been exploited enough and it’s high time to express themselves to gain back their honour and dignity. Also, she stresses the importance of self assertion which the black female needs in order to reclaim her rights and to survive in that patriarchal and racist society (qtd. in Collins 2-3).

African American novelists like Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and many other feminist writers, provide the black marginalized female with various tactics, so that she can empower herself and survive. Walker, in her novel *The Colour Purple*, depicts how womanhood, sisterhood and voicing ones’ ideas through writing, encourage and empower the protagonist Celie to resist and break out all boundaries and emerge. Gloria Naylor, in *The Women of Brewster Place*, depicts some survival strategies through which black females can challenge the social racist boundaries. Because they are victims, they have either to bond and support each other or isolate themselves in order to effectively overcome their oppressions and problems (Stoll 918).

Black females, in the novel, combine their efforts to defend themselves not only against their men’s abuse, but also to avoid their isolation and silence. They share common interests though their situations are different and they simply “stood together hands on hips” (Naylor 4). In his book *,The Natural Superiority of Women*, Montague states that “because women are unselfish, forbearing, self-sacrificing, and maternal, they possess a deeper understanding than men of what it means to be human and women can realize their power for good in the world and make their greatest gains” (36).

The female community of Brewster Place tends to fight against racism and sexism; together they hold their oppressions, pains and frustrations only to protect their families and children and to revive their status as black women. Added to that, their survival relies on their personal strength and collective struggle. Nnaemeka states that “Women appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves” (*The Politics of (M) othering* 19). So, female solidarity is among the major survival strategies adopted by women to overcome violence, sexism, and impotence.

### **III.1.1. Female Solidarity**

Brewster Place combines women together since it becomes their own home; each woman in Brewster Place has a story that differs from the other ones. Their experiences of oppression, racial discrimination, patriarchal abuse and others urge them towards their solidarity which gives them a sense of belonging. As Naylor points out: “They stood together -hands on hips, straight-backed, round bellied, high-behinded women who threw their heads back when they laughed and exposed strong teeth and dark gums. They cursed badgered, worshiped and shared their men...these women of Brewster Place” (4-5). United together, they can overcome their pain and suffering.

Female friendship has a significant value; women’s solidarity strengthens their personality and resistance to struggle against suppression and male domination (Hook 43-6). Solidarity between Naylor’s characters takes different forms like mother daughter relation between Kiswana and her mother Mrs. Browne, or sisterhood as Mattie and Etta relation and also Kiswana with Cora Lee. Motherhood appears in Eva’s care of Mattie and in Mattie’s attitude toward Ciel; they both possess maternal love and attitude. And both Lorraine and Theresa represent women to women relations. Though they share common friendship, each woman has a specific relation with the other one. In Abel’s words: “Through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying

identity through relation to another who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self” (416). And this is what *The Women of Brewster Place* reveals in which Naylor attempts to create a female community where each one of the inhabitants wants not only to assert her own identity but with the relation that connect them, they help each other to do so.

Generally speaking, motherhood is a vital concept in many literary productions and particularly a core theme in African American ones. It provides a base for self actualization, resorts self confidence and serves as a guide to have power, and to encourage the black community to believe in woman and her roles (Akujobi 7). In her review of *The Women of Brewster Place*, Dorothy Wickenden states that “*The Women of Brewster Place* is a novel about motherhood, a concept embraced by Naylor’s women, each of whom is a surrogate child or mother to the next” (38). Indeed, the novel depicts many mother figures like Eva’s relation with Mattie when she gets in trouble after leaving her parent home, and devotes all her time to her son Basil. She becomes homeless until she finds Eva, Ciel’s grandmother who hosts and refuses to charge rent from her, she accepts her as one of the family members. Eva becomes Mattie’s surrogate mother and she “sets ... a repeated pattern of concern, generosity, and love between and among women” (Branzburg 118). Therefore, with the character of Miss Eva, Naylor focuses on the role of motherhood and exactly the mother daughter relation that creates a strong bond between women.

Miss Eva tries to advise and support Mattie when she learns about her problem; Eva shows maternal love and care for Mattie. As quoted in the novel: “The woman looked at the way she held the child and understood. Ya know, you can’t keep him runnin’ away from things that hurt him. Sometimes, you just gotta stay there and teach him how to go through the bad and good of whatever comes” (31). Eva’s help makes Mattie a wise woman who can overcome her pains and raise her kid effectively.

The mother daughter relationship between Mattie and Ciel is remarkable. Mattie helps Ciel after her daughter's death and even with her bad relation with Eugene. Mattie and Ciel are equal because they share same suffering; both hold the burden of male domination and loss of their children (Khaleghi 132-3). But, Mattie has a strong personality as Naylor claims in an Interview with Angela Carabi "what is extraordinary about Mattie is that, in spite of having all problems, she's generous and calm-almost magic yet very human. She allows people to feel free in her presence. Like an earth mother, I guess" (39). Mattie tries to protect Ciel "like a black Brahman cow, desperate to protect her young, she surged into the room, pushing the neighbor women and the others out of her way" (Naylor 103). After giving Ciel a bath, Mattie takes her in her arms and rocks her. Naylor in the novel states:

Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time. She rocked her Aegean seas so clean they shone like crystal, so clear the fresh blood of sacrificed babies torn from their mother's arms and given to Neptune could be seen like pink froth on the water. She rocked her on and on, past Dachau, where soul-gutted Jewish mothers swept their children's entrails off laboratory floors. They flew past the spilled brains of Senegalese infants whose mothers had dashed them on the wooden sides of slave ships. And she rocked on (103).

For Luciella, Mattie is her surrogate mother, in other words, Mattie is Luciella's "Mother line". In her book *Specifying*, Susan Willis defines this term as "a woman who passes on survival knowledge to another generation" (3). Indeed, Mattie plays different roles that determine her female solidarity with the other women; Mattie's past experiences, and with the support she gets from Miss Eva, make other women learn from her. Ciel's life, for example, is almost destroyed but her strong relation with Mattie makes her able to fight the burden of her past and rises to live in a new world (Worley 1-4). In short, Ciel takes the

power from Mattie to back to life. In her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich claims: “The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities” (250). From this point, it will be obvious that Women’s understanding of each other makes them have a mutual feeling about their suffering, and the help that each woman gives to another makes them able to change their lives.

The novel represents another relation between Kiswana and her mother, Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown seeks the better life for her daughter, but Kiswana rejects her mother’s opinions about their origins as blacks and to be closer to whites. She tells her mother “I’d rather be dead than be like you—a white man’s nigger who ashamed of being black!” (Naylor 85). This led Kiswana to go to Brewster Place and even to change her name to African origins. For Kiswana, to be with and among her people, allows her to be proud of her heritage and origins as a black woman (Kumar 5). Her mother rejects calling her with such a new name when she says: “It broke my heart when you changed your name. I gave you my grandmother’s name, a woman who bore nine children and educated them all ... Yet you needed to reach into an African dictionary to find a name to make you proud” (Naylor 87). Despite the disagreement between the two, Mrs. Brown provides her daughter with the mother’s love and help.

Another form of female solidarity is sisterhood which is represented effectively in the novel through different characters. Once Kiswana comes to Brewster Place, giving help to others is among her principles and desire since she wants to be among her black people. She builds a sisterhood with Cora Lee who fails in her role as a mother. As a good neighbor, Kiswana tries to be closer to both Cora and her children, who need care and protection and even entertainment. Kiswana’s help enables Cora to raise her confidence about being a good mother that can educate her children (Wilson 43-4). In her book *Communion*, Hooks explains: “Sisterhood wasn’t just about what we shared in Common—things like periods,

obsessive concern with our looks, or bitching about men—it was about women learning how to care for one another and be in solidarity, not just when we have complaints or when we feel victimized”(130). So that, the strong emotions and support between the women paved the way for sisterhood that encourages females’ solidarity and how they can benefit when they care about each other.

Sisterhood is also presented in the novel between Mattie and Etta, who are closely related since childhood; they share a lot of memories. “Sometimes being a friend”, Naylor points out, “means mastering the art of timing. There is a time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to prepare to pick up the pieces when it’s all over” (70). Though they have different relationships, Mattie can better understand Etta’s needs and feeling and she helps her to restore her self esteem and the same thing with Mattie when she finds support from Etta after her problems (Mukherjee 2678).

Both Etta and Mattie represent a good model of friendship and how they struggle, support and guide each other. They are both frustrated by male abuse and both try to hold a positive belief that guides them to their survival. Naylor asserts that Etta always tends to show her concerns to Mattie, she tells her: “Let’s face it, Mattie. All the good men are either dead or waiting to be born” (61). Mattie, as a generous person, makes Etta feel free. As stated in the novel: “She breathed deeply of freedom she found in Mattie’s presence. Here, she had no choice but to be herself. The carefully erected decoys she was constantly shuffling and changing to fit the situation were of no use here. Etta and Mattie went back, a singular term that claimed co-knowledge of all the important events in their lives and almost all the unimportant ones” (Naylor 58).

Lorraine and Theresa have no place among female bonding since they were lesbian and also neglected. The relation between the two is less successful and, as Andrews asserts, “Lorraine and Theresa's relationship, because of its unresolved tensions and concern over

power,... despite its seeming intimacy, remains less successful than that between Mattie and Etta, who generously accept and nurture each other” (8). The relationship between these two female characters lacks strength because they do not really help one another. Besides, they have no relation with the other women especially for Lorraine who is totally alienated and terribly affected by the rape accident she experiences. Here, Naylor clarifies Lorraine’s case in an interview with William Goldstein: “There was no woman on that block willing to help her and she was in trouble---there were tension in her own home...just living with another individual. And she has no one to go” (36). And it is clear to know the importance of community in the life of these women, Lorraine’s case can happen to any woman and rape is not due to the lack of community but in fact Lorraine is rejected since she is lesbian and has no place in that female community.

Though the women of Brewster Place suffer under difficult situations, Naylor shows the power of true relationships to solve their problems. Indeed, in her interview with Angela Carabi, Naylor claims that “women only had each other in our history...they would go to other women with their problems about children, about the men in their lives...gaining strength from each other in quiet ways. Yes, I was celebrating this in my novel” (41). With the sharing of personal memories, Naylor shows how her female characters gain power from each other; also they become closely related and find hope for better future. Nnaemeka in his book *Politics of (M) othering* argues that “the texts discuss women’s solidarity as an issue of survival; solidarity among women offers a safety net and a breath of fresh air in a suffocating, constraining environment” (19). Naylor is among many African American novelists who use their literary works to depict the different circumstances that black women in the community encounter. Their bonding helps them to challenge the difficulties and to survive.

The relation that bonds the women of Brewster place creates a form of empowerment, in which they benefit from support, care and nurturing each other. This paves



the way for their solidarity to survive their lives' conditions and plights to assert their identity (Sy 1-2). Each woman's pain and ability to rebel can be passed to another one like Mattie's understanding and strength that saves Ciel. How her presence makes Etta feel free, added to that Cora Lee who gains the knowledge of better life from Kiswana in which she manages to redefine herself and her responsibilities as a mother. Fowler, in her book *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary* notes: "The women, despite having reached what seems to be the dead ends of their lives, continue to dream and to nurture each other" (25). Indeed, the women of Brewster place share the same goal and despite their frustration, they are united and their strong connection gives them hope to dream about a better future.

### **III.1.2. The Significance of Dreams**

Gloria Naylor starts her novel *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) with an epigraph from Langston Hughes' poem "A Dream Deferred" (1951):

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over

Like a syrupy sweet?

May be it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Hughes' poem reveals the danger of the unfulfilled and suppressed dreams of the African Americans; it can be seen as a warning to the white American society. All African

Americans, with no exception, have only one dream, which is enjoying equal social rights with whites. But that dream is suppressed again and again by different racial boundaries. Consequently, this will fill the African Americans with anger and rage that, undoubtedly, would lead to massive results (*Gloria Naylor's colours* 23). Furthermore Jill L. Matus believes that Hughes' poem "suggests that to defer one's dreams, desires, hopes is life-denying" (50). As a result, dreams for the African Americans are considered the only tool for bringing hopes to their miserable lives, and the deferral of these dreams would make their lives more desperate and hopeless.

Naylor adopts the poet's verses to represent how female characters in the novel bring hope to their lives through dreaming of better future, but, unfortunately, all their dreams fall apart. Naylor's characters' future tends to be gloomy, since all of their dreams are deferred and unsatisfied. Though their dreams are unreachable, they are believed to be a tool for survival because those marginalized black females are helpless and unable to bring significant change into their present. So, they keep dreaming that tomorrow will bring change with it; they keep questioning how they can make positive shift in their lives. Though the seven female characters in *The Women of Brewster Place* are poor, segregated and marginalized, they keep dreaming. They are able to assert their wishes and to break out the silence in their dreams. Those black females fulfil their desires which are repressed by racial and patriarchal society through dreaming and wishing that one day their wishes would come true. Dreams and wishes can be viewed as an active resistance towards their unpleasant present and unclear future.

Also, by using the idea of dreaming, she evokes and refers to Martin Luther King's famous speech "I have a dream", at Lincoln Memorial, August 1963, in which he encourages the African Americans to keep dreaming no matter how much their desires seem unreachable. In that speech, also, King declares how he himself experiences the

disappointment and deferral of his dream to quote: “I watched that dream turn to a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast ocean of prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negroes problem of poverty” (King 75-6). Though King’s dreams are frustrated and broken, he does not lose hope as he declares in his speech “Yes ,I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hope but...I still have a dream, because you know, you can’t give up in life” (King76).

Starting with Mattie Michael, a single lonely mother who loses everything and ends up in that poor street; she is a victim of males whom she knows in her life (her father, lover and beloved son). Since the birth of her child Basil, she has one dream which is to keep him by her side, she sacrifices everything for him. Mattie spends her whole life looking after her son; he was her whole world and she does not have time for any other male except her son (Naylor 38-9). Basil is a spoiled, selfish and irresponsible and he lets his mother down after she sells the house in order to get him out of jail because he is suspected of killing a white man (Naylor 50). Unfortunately, Mattie’s dream is deferred and unrealized; she moves to Brewster Place where she starts to dream again about the neighbourhood. As if Naylor wants to assert that dreams are a way of resistance which empowers the black female to be more optimistic, even if the whole surrounding circumstances are against her. Though Mattie’s dream is broken, she does not lose hope, and she takes care of her friends in that poor street.

The following dream is Etta Mea Johnson’s. During her whole life, she is in constant search for a man who can fulfil her desires and appreciate her. Yet, she does not succeed in achieving that and ends up in Brewster Place with Mattie. Her dream is to find “settle-minded man” (Naylor 61). Etta does not belong to a certain place and does not experience settlement, because she is in continuous displacing. Since she is getting older, she believes that she must

find a man whom she can spend the rest of her life with. Her dream seems to come true when she meets Reverend Woods, a famous preacher in Brewster Church, she is attracted to him, she finds something in him she does not find in any man before (Naylor 66). Etta believes that Woods is unlike the other men whom she knows and she starts to dream that they will get married and finally she will settle down. But her dream is shattered when she realizes that Woods only uses her to fulfil his sexual desire nothing more (Naylor 72). The desire to enjoy a normal secure life motivates her to dream that she may be lucky enough to have it. As Laura Nicosia claims, “the dream is one of Naylor’s most successful strategies in the novel, allowing her to provide a vision of what needs to happen while at the same time with holding it” (57). All what Etta wants is to have a sense of acceptance and care, though her wish breaks down, she feels happy when she finds Mattie waiting for her, and she is not alone as she thinks (Naylor 74).

The character Kiswana Browne also has a dream which is to improve the living conditions in Brewster Place. She is unlike the other characters; she is an educated black female from the middle class, she moves to Brewster Place voluntarily to be a part of her unique community. Kiswana’s main dream is to make change in that worthless marginalized street, through urging its inhabitants to collaborate to make positive change in their lives and to fight for their rights. She creates “The Brewster Place Block Association”, so that they can gain their rights, improve their living and housing conditions. By doing so, Kiswana brings hope and roots faith in those desperate tenants.

Luciela also experiences the deferral of her dream and she almost loses her life. Ciel’s dream is to have a happy family and to keep her selfish, ungrateful husband Eugene besides her. As Naylor explains in the following passage:

It was all there: the frustration of being left alone, sick, with a month-old

baby; her humiliation reflected in the caseworker's blue eyes for the unanswerable 'you can find him to have it, but can't find him to take care of it'smile; the raw urges that crept, uninvited, between her thighs on countless nights; the eternal whys all meshed with the explainable hate and unexplainable love. (91)

After she aborts her second baby, she thought that everything will be fine and Eugene will not leave her and his daughter Serena. Eugene's irresponsibility and carelessness break Ciel's dream, because when they were arguing about his leaving, their daughter Serena dies (Naylor 97-101). Ciel's whole world crumbles and she loses hope in life. The grief colours her days and nights, she does not find a reason to live because her daughter "is the only thing [she] has ever loved without pain" (Naylor 93). Ciel could not deal with that killing pain of losing her beloved daughter. But Mattie took care of her and brought her hope again. Mattie, by taking care of Ciel, fulfils her own broken dream, which is to keep her son besides her because Basil and Ciel are raised in the same home as if Ciel is her second child. Mattie comforts Ciel that everything will be better and she will have hope to live again "morning would come" (Naylor 105). Their strong love and friendship allow them to get over their hardships and prevent Ciel from losing her life.

On the other hand, the two lesbian girls Lorraine and Theresa have a dream, which is to be accepted by their own black community. When they move to Brewster Place, their only wish is that to claim Brewster Place as their new peaceful home. They do not want to be rejected or excluded from their community only because they are different. The same as all the other women in that falling apart street, Lorraine also looks for normal, happy and peaceful life and to have sense of home (Holmes 14). When they arrive to Brewster Place, everything seems all right and the neighbours welcome them "at first they seemed like such nice girls" (Naylor 129), but they reject them as soon as they know that they are lesbians.

The presence of the two lesbians in that street is considered a threat to the lives of the other black women; since their behaviour is abnormal and is inappropriate. “Naylor’s presentation of the tensions in their relationship hinges on the community’s rejection of The Two. And she emphasizes the fact that their isolation is initiated by women in the community” (Christian 196). The two lesbians are neglected and rejected by the other females only because they do not play the domestic, regular role associated with woman (Naylor 131). They are insulted and disrespected by the others and that becomes clear when C.C Baker and his gang name them “dyke” and, also, when Sophie reveals their misbehaviour to the other women in the meeting of “The Brewster Place Block Association”.

As a result of the community’s rejection to them and lack of support, Lorraine is raped by C.C Baker and his gang because she is considered a threat to their manhood and her dream of acceptance and belongingness is frustrated and unrealized. “So, Lorraine found herself, on her knees, surrounded by the most dangerous species in existence-human males with an erection to validate in a world that was only six feet wide” (Naylor 169-70). Lorraine is alone and powerless, she is victim of her own gender and race. Due to that merciless rape, she dies, and that leads the other black females to feel sympathy towards her bad experience and to start dreaming being in her place (Naylor 175). As Maxine Sample asserts “Lorraine’s death brings reminders of collective victimization to the women” (9).

After all the characters dreams are deferred and unrealized, Naylor depicts one last dream which is Mattie’s dream, in which she blends all the previous characters and stories. Mattie can be considered as the only protagonist of the whole novel because she is central to all the stories; she provides all the other females with unconditioned love and supports them because she experiences the bitterness of loss, failure and loneliness. She can also be seen as a surrogate mother, she cares about everyone. Concerning that point, Linda Wells claims: “The mature Mattie becomes the sage, the mentor, who is no longer passionately troubled or

troublesome. She is the calm, unifying force, who suggests proper values through actions, rather than preaching or cajoling” (45).

Naylor, at the beginning of her novel, reveals how the black women in Brewster Place are similar to each other and that defiantly creates social bonds between them. They also share the same painful memories about oppression, pain and sense of inferiority (Naylor 4-5). Also, all the women’s dreams are related to that wall which blocks off the street, the fulfilment of their hopes and wishes are condemned by the wall and any attempt to ameliorate their lives is meant to fail. The same shared memories and experiences is what enables Mattie to be a refuge for the other women and to have that dream at the end of the novel which brings hope again to that desperate street. As Laura Nicosia clearly states:

Frankly, Mattie’s dream may seem even more vital to the readers who, after 176 Pages of witnessing events that lead only to suffering and suppressed or transferred anger, finally witness the women in a victorious act. Whether these emotions are, or only seem to be purged for the women is moot; the narrative act and its reception are vehicles for community building. (qtd.in Vinson 13)

Mattie’s night dream which is meant to be the last dream after the death of Lorraine and Ben is about a party which never actually takes place, in which all the residents of the street gather to enjoy their time after a long week of grief and sadness. Here it is worthy to refer to the father of Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, who divided the human mind into three parts which are: Conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious mind. The conscious mind is that the person is aware about his current situation, activities and actions. That is to say, he is able to recognize what happens around him. The pre-conscious mind is the one which contains past experiences which can be easily recalled, while the unconscious mind consists of

forgotten memories, thoughts and feelings which are impossible to have access to ( Freud 106) . So, the unconscious “is timeless, chaotic, infantile and primitive” (Page 184).

According to him the unconscious is responsible for all mental processes and behaviours and the acts which are produced consciously are considered only a part of whole human psychology (Strachey16). He also distinguishes three various systems working in the human mind which are the “Id”, “Ego” and “Super Ego”. The “Id” is mainly linked to the person’s instincts and desires, it belongs to the unconscious mind and it is governed by “pleasure principles” (*New Introductory Lectures* 106). For Freud, this “Id” is very dangerous if it is not controlled since it owes selfish and aggressive power, and this is why it is controlled by the “Ego”. The latter is governed by reason, and it rejects any unreasonable behaviour on the part of the “Id”. The “Super Ego” responds to the ethical principles and the perfect social standards. So, the “Ego” functions as a mediator between the “Id” and the “Super Ego”; it restricts the desires of the ‘Id’ by the ideal rules of the outside world (*New Introductory Lectures* 107-10). Concerning the desires of the “Id” which are suppressed and unfulfilled, they are buried in the unconscious by the “Ego”.

All the suppressed wishes which someone did not have the chance to fulfil manifest unconsciously in his/her dreams. So, dreams are a mental process in which the “Ego” fulfils the “Id” needs and desires successfully without being repressed by the external world (Lear 88). From what is stated above, dreams are believed to be very important for humans, because they allow them to fulfil their wishes and that creates a kind of relief in their lives and brings them hope. Concerning Mattie last sleeping dream is about her repressed wish about breaking all racial boundaries and the start will be by breaking the wall.

In her dream, the sun finally rises in the same day in which the party will take place after a raining week. Brewster Place was in a great need for any kind of joy and happiness to get over its losses and nightmares. Mattie’s dream about The Block Party brings and binds all



the women together, and also links all the incidents. That dream is a clear sign for the strong spirit and will of all black women in that street, who keep challenging all kinds of oppression and exploitation. During that party, when Cora Lee is looking for her daughter Sonya she sees some blood on the wall, she tells Mattie about it and they start to move the bricks of the wall, as soon as the other women joined them (Naylor 185-6). All the women there collaborate and unify their forces to break down the wall. That collaboration in tearing down the wall, stresses the importance of black womanhood and bonding between oppressed marginalized females in order to make significant change in their lives (Pearl 57). Though Mattie's dream does not take place in the real life, it illustrates the importance of fighting for ones wishes and desires, and also the necessity of collective efforts in order to maintain beneficial communal goals. Mattie's dream "unite them and provide a context of sharing and connection" (Matus129).

Naylor, through depicting different dreams of various black females, wants to reveal that ameliorating one's life and finding an endless happiness can be achieved only by cooperating and comforting with each other, the only thing that they must try harder. The dreaming of better life encourages the black suppressed female to struggle as much as possible if it is not for her, it may be for her children or simply for the sake of womanhood. Though Brewster Place is waiting to die since no positive transformation is achieved or made, its helpless females keep dreaming and their dreams are deferred again and again simply because they do not make enough effort to realize them. As Naylor argues that the idea of using dreams "I guess they all have dream they never quiet realize. The idea was just to see them trying" (Carabi 39).

### III.2. From Silence to Voice: Rebellious Characters and Female Autonomy

Nearly all the African American female literary productions concentrate on a recurring fundamental issue which is breaking the silence and asserting one's identity. The black female must emerge and prove herself in that patriarchal and racist society. She must reject all kinds of oppression and exploitation and define herself instead of any imposed definitions by others. According to Feminist criticism, the black female must construct her own identity and break the domestic perception that is associated with her. Always the black female is depicted as passive, powerless and inferior to man. In order to survive, she must rebel against the usual discriminating and controlling images of the American community towards her. For instance, ugliness is always associated with the black female as Toni Morrison illustrates in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), since the black female does not have blue eyes, she is defiantly ugly and inferior.

Many black female writers depict how their characters undertake a revolutionary process for liberating themselves from social and sexual segregation. Also, they tend to reveal how those silenced characters rebel against the stereotypical images imposed on them. Despite the fact that the black females are badly oppressed, they possess a strong power and will, because their silence can also be considered as a way of resisting all the discriminating circumstances. As Ella Surrey declares: "We have always been the best actors in the world. . . . I think that we are much more clever than they are because we know that we have to play the game. We've always had to live two lives—one for them and one for ourselves" (qtd. in Collins 114). The Black feminist consciousness encourages the black female to take the lead of her life and to construct her own identity.

Gloria Naylor, in *The Women of Brewster Place*, also depicts how the black female asserts herself and crosses over all the segregating boundaries through two main characters who are Mattie Michael and Kiswana Browne. Both females rebel against the domestic

racial and gender roles imposed on them and also they try to offer help to the other submissive females. The character Mattie is considered an inspiring persona to the black females in the white American dominating society; she encourages them to adopt the journey of transformation from passive to active females and also to emerge.

Mattie, as a single mother, witnesses oppression by her father; she suffers from rejection and marginalization, but she does not surrender to all that hardships and social barriers which she faces. Mattie struggles and succeeds in her life without the help of any male. She is the model of the independent black female who survives without the need or the support of males. She devotes her whole life to taking care of her son Basil; she offers him all her love, tenderness and time. She does not break down when she moves to Brewster Place she offers the other females care, love and support as she does with Ciel, Etta and Lorraine. Mattie substitutes the role of males in the life of those females. To be convinced that you are a worthy person and to gain self confidence is very difficult and a hard process but it is very crucial in order to break the racial boundaries as Pauli Murray states: “My own self-esteem was elusive and difficult to sustain. I was not entirely free from the prevalent idea that I must prove myself worthy of the rights that white individuals took for granted. This psychological conditioning along with fear had reduced my capacity for resistance to racial injustice” (*Song in a Weary* 106).

Mattie breaks the curse of male dominance, she frees herself from any segregation and victimization; she is a symbol of power, the rebellious black female whom every other black female must adhere to imitate and to maintain the same will and self confidence as her (Kaul 84). Unlike the other female characters in the novel, Mattie does not look for any male; rather she spends her time curing those broken lonely black females, who are left alone by their men. Her strong power brings hope to Ciel again and comforts her childhood friend Etta and she always is at her back. Mattie’s transformation can be taken as a response to Maria

Stewart's speech in 1831 when she called and urged the African American females to bring change to their lives and to wake up, also she encouraged them to prove themselves to the whole world that are strong and able to assert who they really are ( Richardson 30).

The character Kiswana Browne, an African American woman who has a rebellious and strong spirit attempts to challenge all the racial barriers in order to enhance the living condition of her race especially the weak powerless women. As an intellectual and independent woman, she has great plans for bringing radical transformation to that poor street, which has no one to fight for. Kiswana also asserts her self determination when she changes her name from Melanie to Kiswana, in order to celebrate her African heritage. The second step that Kiswana undertakes in her rebellion against the segregating social, racist boundaries is leaving her middle class home in Linden Hills and settling in Brewster Place to be a part of her people. She felt that she is responsible for her African American society and she must urge those speechless marginalized inhabitants to consolidate with each other in order to bring a positive change. As she states: "My place was in the streets with my people, fighting for equality and a better community" (Naylor 83). She becomes a social activist and creates an organization that calls for the rights of the tenants and promoting the living conditions in Brewster Place.

In contrast to the other female characters, Kiswana identifies her own identity as an African American woman, who is proud of being African. So, the ability to define who the black female is merely related to one's own self, may be black women tend to help and encourage each other to assert themselves but the real determination for self empowerment is the duty and responsibility of the black female only (Collins119).

The quest for identity as an individual process cannot be done only by the black female herself, as Kiswana who is able to define her own self and to take the lead in encouraging the others in that falling apart street . Naylor portrays the importance of self

autonomy and constructing one's own identity as a way to break all sexual, racial and patriarchal limitations and boundaries. So, the self esteem and self confidence are the weapons which every black female must obtain in order to emerge and to guarantee her survival. Mattie and Kiswana both create their own life styles and both are able to challenge the domestic roles that are associated with the black female. Though resisting all the racial and social hardships is an exhausting a painful journey, the black female must undertake it.

The novel represents women as weak and inferior, it depicts their miserable lives conditions and horrible plights in which most of them are hopeless. But through the relationships that Naylor creates in her novel, the women of Brewster Place as marginalized characters come together, bond with each other where their situation urges them to cooperate in order to survive. Naylor's portrayal of her characters working together to protect themselves is a positive image that brings change in their lives. These women wish to have a better life, they live in their imagination and though their dreams are deferred, they are significant in keeping them alive as well as uniting them and providing them with hope.

Naylor says: "They ebb and flow, ebb and flow, but never disappear" (192). She attempts to highlight the experience of black females who are burdened by their silence and their inability to choose the life that suits them but they build a community of their own, they become friends, sisters in which they help, guide and support each other. With their strong will, pure spirit and their solidarity that takes different dimensions, these women keep moving, resist and survive their problems. The strong connection between the women of Brewster Place shows how these oppressed black females overcome all the miserable circumstances through friendship, tolerance, understanding and cooperative living. Naylor's females as rebellious characters who fight back, overcome their silence and assert their individuality, and also they define their autonomy.

## Conclusion

Black women's status is the main focus of many literary works of African American female writers who highlight the racial and patriarchal segregation black women face. In her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor depicts women's miserable living situations because of race, class and gender. Through different female characters and imaginary settings, Naylor presents truthful scenes about how the African American female lives in a white dominating society.

She also shows that the constant search for place and integration is a major premise for African American women. Naylor's female characters displace in an attempt to find a suitable place with perfect conditions, but, unfortunately, things go the opposite and get worse. In this novel, displacement is believed to be a need which the black female adopts for promoting her life as in the case of the characters Mattie, Etta and Lorraine who end up in Brewster Place. All the women there share the experiences of being victims of the patriarchal system. They experience all forms of violence at the hands of men who tend to abuse and control helpless women. Naylor stresses the importance for those marginalized black females, to assert their female superiority. They ought to make total reconfiguration in their lives and to rebel against the domestic image of black women, which the racist society draws.

The novel reveals how women attempt to redefine their womanhood and to find solution to fight male domination. Though they suffer, they endure their pain together and consolidate with each other. In short, Naylor creates a female community where all women overcome their problems through friendship and solidarity which provide them with power and courage to resist. The Block Association, referred to in the novel, is a clear illustration about the black female solidarity and determination for promoting their lives together. The different relations that tie these women (sisterhood, motherhood or mother daughter relation) show how much it is helpful to gain support and care from each other.

Naylor uses dreams as a device for resisting the cruel living conditions and keeping her characters alive. In fact, the characters unite together, resist and rebel against the racial oppressions via dreams. In Mattie's last dream, for example, all women collaborate in breaking down the wall that blocks the street. Mattie's dream can be interpreted in the sense that womanhood is effective in helping the black female to survive.

The novel emphasizes the need of emerging and breaking all the segregating racial and sexual boundaries. That is to say, the black female must stick to her own desires and wishes till she fulfills them; she must convince herself that she is equal to male. Thus, identifying one's autonomy is the accurate defiant way for resisting all kinds of domination and exploitation.

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## ملخص

تهدف هذه الأطروحة التي بين ايدينا لدراسة رحلة البحث المستمرة عن الهوية الشخصية و تحقيق الذات التي تقوم بها المرأة السوداء في المجتمع الأمريكي العنصري في رواية الكاتبة الافرو أمريكية Gloria Naylor و التي تحمل عنوان نساء بريوستر بلايس (1982). Gloria Naylor في هذه الرواية تصف حياة المرأة السوداء المضطهدة من طرف المجتمع الأمريكي كما تكشف كذلك عن مختلف العراقل التعسفية التي تتعرض لها هذه المرأة الضعيفة سواء كانت عراقل عرقية ,اجتماعية أو جنسية. كما تقوم أيضا هذه الكاتبة بوصف كيف بإمكان الشخصيات النسائية الموجودة براويتها النجاة و التخلص من جميع القيود العنصرية و إثبات وجودها عن طريق بناء شخصية حرة مستقلة. هدفنا خلف هذه الدراسة هو تحليل كيف تمكنت شخصيات Naylor من النجاة في مثل ذلك المجتمع الرجولي العنصري و كذلك كيف استطعن إثبات شخصيتهن المستقلة.

## Résumé

Le présent travail vise à analyser le processus d'émancipation entrepris par les héroïnes dans Gloria Naylor roman *Les Femmes de Brewster Place* (1982). Gloria Naylor révèle les souffrances de la femme afro-américaine dans une raciste société, aussi elle suggère également des voies à suivre afin de se libérer du patriarcat et du sexisme, pour change leurs statuts des femmes esclaves victimes d'abus sexuels en des femmes émancipent et totalement libérée. Notre objectif de cette étude, c'est découvrir comment les personnages de L'écriture réclament leurs droits et assuré leurs indépendance et unique personnalités aussi dirigent une vie par elles-mêmes.