

Disempowerment to Emancipation: The 'Black Feminist Standpoint' Antidote of Female Bonding in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*

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ABSTRACT

The paper endeavors to contextualize Black Feminist Standpoint in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and efficaciously attempts to raise social consciousness, through its exemplary narrative milieu, regarding the everyday struggles of Black womanhood, and humanize them at the intersections of multitudinous nomenclatures of oppression. The chapter ponders over the predicaments of African American women and their capacity to stand firm against the fake definitions of man and woman prevailing in the racist, classist, and sexist ideology which leads to their invisibilization, thus, ultimately associating their personal lives and experiences to their cultural undertakings, thereby employing subjective autoethnographic convictions as a pedagogical tool. The study also provides a detailed scrutiny of the exploitive and brutal experiences of seven women protagonists, not only as a means of resistance but also as instrumental to building community and Black-sisterhood. The enduring descriptions of black-sisterhood, as an alternative matrix of kinship to revolt and fight back, engender a network fostering care, nurture, healing and combined survival.

KEYWORDS: Black Feminist Standpoint, Female Bonding, Black Sisterhood, Autoethnography

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

INTRODUCTION:

Since historical times, African American women have been exploited on the basis of race, class and gender, and thrown towards the periphery, to the margins of the margin, by the satanic patriarchal-cum-stereotypical forces of the mainstream America. These unaided women have been stripped off their identities and have been treated even worse than animals. However, it has been found that by forming experiential bonds amongst themselves, African American women gather enough strength to negotiate and re-negotiate with the mainstream patriarchy and form their distinct standpoints. In this vein, Montgomery adumbrates, "only by forming bonds among themselves do the women overcome life's difficulties and find the necessary strength to survive in a challenging world" (Montgomery, 1996). Patricia Hill Collins(2012) upholds that the symbolic

interpersonal liaison that these women interlace among themselves, as an imperative facet of Black Feminist Standpoint as well as a chief organizing characteristic of Women's Liberation Movement, directs our consideration to numerous uncharted quarters of Black female experiences which help foster the edification of a standpoint. Collins further reiterates that these collective experiences emanate from their present-day apartheid as well as their shared records of coercion. Deborah Gray White (1985), for example, "documents the ways Black slave women assisted each other in childbirth, cared for each other's children, worked together in sex-segregated work units when pregnant or nursing children, and depended on one another when married to males living on distant farms"(White, 1985). Mary Ann, Weathers articulates that what relates these African American women is not the acuteness of poverty along with economic uncertainty, but a

consciousness, via Black feminist autoethnographic conviction, of "the scourge of the male superiority-oriented society" (Weathers, 1995, p. 158-62). So, it can be asserted, in Alice Walker's tone, that a standpoint is forged through this womanist-bonding which is "supportive, affirming, and that fosters Black women's autonomy" (Walker, 1983) in a white-supremacist-cum-hegemonistic society. This exploration of female-bonding using Black feminist autoethnographic narration can be successfully traced out in the works of Pauli Murray (1989), Patricia Bell Scott (2016), Mary Ann Weathers (1995), Michele Wallace (1995), Toni Morrison (1987), and Gloria Naylor (1983), to name a few.

Ever since the receiving of the American Book Award (1983) for the novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor has been reckoned to be one of the fanatical and insightful African American writers. Naylor, like her female contemporaries, yearns to carve out the happenings of African American women with impatience as well as with edginess. While conversing with Tony Morrison, her godmother, Naylor "speaks of her struggle to realize the dream of writing the lives of black women without falsification and sentimentality, making visible those whom society keeps invisible" (Matus, 1990, p. 49-64). Gloria displays her concern towards the predicaments of representing not only herself but allowing the rhetorical space in her writing to narrate the lives of these marginalized and subjugated women. Her attempts of achieving this intricate objective can be noticeably seen from her very first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), itself.

To put in a few words, the paper aims to analyze, through Black feminist autoethnography (Black Feminist Standpoint + autoethnography), how the subjugated women's individual narrations and experiences trapped inside the larger spheres of gender biases, racial prejudices, and class differentiation, eventually helps in creating a sense of individual solidarity, Black-sisterhood, as well as communal strength in order to combat against the discriminations faced by them. In the novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, it is evidently seen how Naylor propounds a narrative individualism to the seven Black women of heterogeneous characteristics, namely Mattie Michael, Miss Eva, Etta Mae Jonson, Kiswana Browne, Luciella Turner, Cora Lee, and the lesbian couple Lorraine and Theresa, who come to reside at the Brewster place, a "worthless land in the badly crowded district" (Naylor, 1982, p. 01), alienated from the other parts of the city by a brick wall, representing the outrageous face of racism and undetectable violence of the capitalist configuration

of society. These women of heterogeneous characteristics narrate their tales of sufferings, hopes, losses, and experiences autoethnographically. Despite of multifariousness in their stories, astounding semblances are found in their insolent expressions, their self averments, and their unswerving as well as audacious antagonism to the domineering status quo. This resistance that radiates from their tripartite-oppression is the consequence of the relationship and affinity that these women weave among them out of their collective frequent occurrences of despotism and marooning in the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The specimen of such relationships can be seen throughout the novel- the deep, rich, and much durable kinship between Mattie and Etta; Mattie Michael's "passing down of the folk wisdom of Miss Eva through the black oral tradition of testifying" (Wattley and Lewis, 2017, p. 28); Kiswana's constant parental supervision to Cora Lee; Ciel's eventual surrendering to her other-mother, Mattie, who very well knows as a result of her testimonial experience- that Luciella's "tears would end" (Naylor, 1982, p. 105); and Mattie's much needed support to socially debarred lesbian Lorraine.

The first account is of Mattie Michael's, "...the willing surrogate mother of each of Brewster Place's woman in need" (Whitt, 1999), whose narrative spans from 1940s to 1970s and accounts her peregrination from Rock Vale to Brewster Place. She is epitomized as an African American woman who has been mistreated, elapsed and demoralized. Her narrative is riddled with emotional traumas punctuated by screams, the screams of her father and her son. Mattie's life, before her encounter with Butch, has been subsisted within stringent and conventional guidelines, whose future and sexuality are in the hands of her patriarchal father, "an old man with set and exacting ways; she is the only child of his autumn years" (Naylor, 1982, p. 19). Unfortunately, getting swayed by her temptations and, hence, defying her protective father for a "crazy nigger, Butch Fuller" (Whitt, 1999, p. 18), she gets impregnated. As her narrative proceeds, we realize, in Virginia C. Fowler's explication, "Samuel Michael is the only member of the household for whom Mattie's pregnancy represents dishonor and shame" (Fowler, 1996, p. 28), thus, is symbolized as a dictatorial father figure in her life. Feeling consternated about a potentially ferocious feedback, she dismisses the idea of letting her father, "stagnating in an Old Testament view of life" (Whitt, 1999, p. 20), and know about her baby's father's identity. Here, Naylor mirrors how in the canonical matrix of dictatorial fathers, Samuel Michael is majorly blameworthy of thrusting upon the puritanical norms leading to Mattie's

imprisonment within a gender-specific role. Moreover, by defying her domineering father's will, Mattie crafts her own distinct standpoint, and ultimately challenges the workings of patriarchal "insiderism" (Collins, 1986). Naylor also, appealingly, displays a mother-daughter relationship when Fannie Michael forefronts herself as a redemptive force in Mattie's life, confronting her in her remorseful state of pregnancy:

Ain't nothing to be ashamed of. Havin' a baby is the most natural thing there is. The Good Book call children a gift from the Lord. And there ain't no place in that Bible of His that say babies are sinful. The sin is the fornicatin', and that's over and done with. God done forgave you for that long time ago, and what's going on in your belly now ain't nothing to hang your head about- you remember that. (Naylor, 1982)

Protecting Mattie from her apoplectic father, Fannie even forewarns Samuel to slaughter him if he belabours their daughter again, saying, "Hit my child again, and I'll meet your soul in hell" (Naylor, 1982, p. 24). This flawless description of mother-daughter bonding can only be ventilated via Black feminist autoethnographic conviction, where Patricia Hill Collins fittingly remarks that motherhood is strikingly copious than just a relationship between a mother and her child, it's the kinship among mothers. This kinship facilitates Black women to hold up to one another by lending support and guidance on parenting, sustenance, nutrition, and constructing a firm and secured home for children. In his work "African American Mother-Daughter Relationships Mediating Daughter's Self-Esteem" (Turnage, 2004, p. 155-73), Turnage speaks about the significance of mother-daughter relationship as, according to him, self-evaluated self-admiration and esteem of a daughter is optimistically correlated with her mother's trust upon her. In addition, as Turner points out, "exploration of African American mother-daughter relationships may give society a deeper understanding of the unique relationships that women of African descent hold" (Hall, 2015, p. 137-46).

As a "Black feminist spectator" (hooks, 1992), bell hooks comprehends the entrapment of Black women's body in the hegemonic imagery of the crazy Black bitch, money-hungry whore, freak, superwoman, or a public charge. Blending the highlights of standpoint with autoethnography, Gloria Naylor very critically narrates the afflictions of Etta Mae Johnson, Mattie's childhood friend from Tennessee, in the hegemonic discourses of racism and

sexism. The opening line of Etta's narrative is embellished with a chorus, highlighting the painful realities and struggles of Black women on an everyday basis:

I love my man
I'm a lie if I say I don't
I love my man
I'm a lie if I say I don't
But I'll quit my man
I'm a lie if I say I won't

My man wouldn't give me no breakfast
Wouldn't give me no dinner
Squawked about my supper
Then he put me out of doors
Had the nerve to lay
A matchbox to my clothes
I didn't have so many
But I had a long, long, way to go. ((Naylor, 1982, p. 55-56)

This chorus proficiently appositely illustrates the ensnarement of a Black woman within the white hegemonic power structure, which can only be scrutinized via autoethnographic sincerity. Hudak, a feminist autoethnographer, believes that this methodology allows us "to address the power imbalance inherent" (Hudak, 2007, p. 746) within the hierarchical categorization. Despite such impenetrabilities, these African American females experience subjugation and belittlement in a holistic manner, which is exemplified by the narrative of Etta Mae Johnson, who, absolutely unperturbed by her activities, is always dogging for upcoming opportunities, leading her life in the fast-pace, unlike Mattie. An omniscient narrator in the novel describes Etta's journey as,

Etta spent her teenage years in constant trouble. Rock Vale had no place for a black woman who was not only unwilling to play by the rules, but whose spirit challenged the very right of the game to exist. The whites in Rock Vale were painfully reminded of this rebellion when she looked them straight in the face while putting in her father's order at the dry goods store, when she reserved her

sirs and mams for those she thought deserving, and when she smiled only if pleased, regardless of whose presence she was in. That Johnson girl wasn't being an uppity nigger, as talk had it; she was just being herself. (Naylor, 1982, p. 59-60)

Here Etta's narrative substantiates what the feminist autoethnographers Allen and Piercy (2005) assert that African American females need not to "insist on being dispassionate or positioned outside the hermeneutic circle to make valid contributions to knowledge" (Allen and Piercy, 2005, p. 156), rather by assiduously using their experiences of individual as well as shared efforts, they can deracinate the features of white-hegemonistic supremacy. Hence, by breaking the shackles of hegemonic impositions, Etta abides by her own set of rules and searches for long-sought-after stability, leading her to minister Reverend Moreland T. Woods.

Even after Mattie Michael's constant disapproval of their germinating bond, Eva gets majorly absorbed by the conjecture of having a respectable life being a preacher's wife, and ultimately consummates with him, but unfortunately, he turns out to be "... a charlatan who is concerned only about his material gain and carnal lust" (Montgomery, 1996, p. 95). Understandably devastated and shamefaced, Etta returns home, and with Mattie's unheeded guidance, eventually extricates herself from the constraints of submissivity and victimization, thereby, creating new definitions of self-hood. Here, feminist autoethnographic convictions allow us to understand how the staircase heading to Mattie's apartment indicates a maternal setup resulting out of the women's emotional rejoinder to life's inescapable challenges. Both Mattie and Etta accomplish an overwhelming sense of autonomy in the protected shelter of each other. In ways that signal the formation of a specifically feminine space existing outside the boundaries of white patriarchy, the omniscient narrator describes the women's compendious sojourn to Brewster Place as a female rite of passage:

Etta and Mae had taken totally different roads that with all of their deceptive winding had both ended up on Brewster Place. Their laughter now drew them into a conspiratorial circle against all the Simeons outside of that dead-end street, and it didn't stop until they were both weak from the tears that flowed down their faces. (Naylor, 1982, p. 60-61)

Self-demolition of African American women and their incapacity to stand firm against the fake definitions of man and woman prevailing in the sexist

ideology leads to their invisibilization, as portrayed by the characters like Pauline and Pecola in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1990), Margaret and Mem Copeland in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1988), and Lucielia Turner and Eugene in *The Women of Brewster Place*. Ciel desired for a contented married life, but gets multiple brutal blows after losing a child in abortion and another in a domestic accident only because of Eugene's carelessness and lack of bonding between the two, thus, eventually forcing her to "give up the life that God had refused to take from her" (Naylor, 1982, p. 101). Her domestic life gets fraught with turmoil after her abortion, and also after Eugene's simultaneous announcement of leaving her. Only after this, does Ciel ultimately recognize her projections of such values and connotations onto him: "She looked at Eugene, and the poison of reality began to spread through her body like gangrene. It drew his scent out of her nostrils and scraped the veil from her eyes, and stood before her just as he really was- a tall, skinny black man with arrogance and selfishness twisting his mouth into a strange shape" (Naylor, 1982, p. 100). This consciousness, according to feminist autoethnographer Simien, sprouts "from an understanding of intersecting patterns of discrimination" (Naylor, 1982, p. 100) in Ciel's life. Such recognitions, as Hannah Arendt (1998) puts in, are apprehended via Black feminist autoethnographic narration, where these narratives are "living realities" (Arendt, 1998), allowing us to "transform our personal stories into political realities by revealing power inequalities inherent in human relationships as well as the complex cultures of emotions embedded in these unequal relationships" (Arendt, 1998).

Ostensibly, Lucielia's devastation comes with her daughter, Serene's death due to electrocution, whose last scream becomes a synecdoche of death for Ciel, snapping all her yearnings to live. In this critical condition, Mattie acts as a stalwart redemptive figure who ushers Ciel back from the depths of despair. Here Mattie's voice "smashe[s] against the gates of heaven, raging and kicking, demanding to be heard" (Naylor, 1982, p. 102). She proceeds with a strapping impulse to shield Ciel, "like a Black Brahman cow desperate to protect her young" (Naylor, 1982, p. 103). This mournful mother is baptized by Mattie in a heartrending scene that serves as the novel's poignant genesis. Her redeeming presence transforms Ciel's bathroom into a site of rejuvenation residing outside the precincts of male, white gawk. In this vein, it becomes paramount to understand Black feminist autoethnography not only as a means of resistance but also as instrumental

to understanding black female-bonding, the enchantment of which is well apprehended in the utterances of the feminist autoethnographer, Weathers, who articulates that in an hour of need, African American women turn to themselves and to "one another for strength and solace" (Alcalde, Bordo and Rosenman, 2015, p. 272) and, hence, collectively toil to "save" themselves (Alcalde, Bordo and Rosenman, 2015, p. 272) from the shackles of domineering supremacy. These African American women, in Wallace's statement, "serve as comrades who provide one another a way out of isolation, and a way to diffuse anger and distrust between Black women" (Alcalde, Bordo and Rosenman, 2015, p. 266). In the end, Ciel reappears in the Block party, no longer hurdled by pseudo-hierarchical patriarchy. Her narrative concludes on an optimistic note, for Ciel's tears, which were so long in coming, "would end. And she would sleep. And the morning would come" (Naylor, 1982, p. 105).

The novel's subsequently narrative is of Kiswana Browne, who willingly abandons her opulence in Linden Hills to dwell with her 'own people' in the Brewster Place in order to be in "day-to-day contact with" (Naylor, 1982, p. 84) their problems, makes efficacious attempts to raise social consciousness regarding the everyday struggles of Black womanhood, and humanize them at the intersections of multitudinous nomenclatures of oppression. Moreover, her maneuvering act of changing her name from Melanie to Kiswana accentuates the fact that she was "proud of [her] heritage and the fact that [she] was of African descent" (Naylor, 1982, p. 85), thus, reminding us of Collins's portrayal of mutinous youth: "[r]ebellious youth, who are armed with a vision and the knowledge and skills needed to build a movement, can do wonders" (Collins, 2005, p. 307).

The divergence between Kiswana and her mother is an emblematic generational conflict, where on one hand, Kiswana endeavors to unite the women of Brewster Place by forming 'Tenants' Association', where they could collectively fight for their cause, and on the other hand, her mother disapproves of her daughter's intent, and claims, "There was no revolution, Melanie, and there will be no revolution" (Naylor, 1982, p. 84). Mrs. Browne recommends Kiswana to take privileges of her class, acquire adequate edification, and then toil from within the establishment to bring about a change. Kiswana's conviction that her parents suffer from "a terminal case of middle-class amnesia" (Naylor, 1982, p. 85), gets shattered when her mother clutches her by the shoulders and gyrates her. Mrs. Browne shields herself by articulating,

I am alive because of the blood of proud people who never scraped or begged or apologized for what they were. They lived asking for only one thing of this world: to be allowed to be. And I learned through the blood of these people that black isn't beautiful and it isn't ugly; black is! It's not kinky hair and it's not straight hair; it just is. It broke my heart when you changed your name. I gave you my grandmother name, a woman who bore nine children and educated them all, who held off six white men with a shotgun when they tried to drag one of her sons to jail for 'not knowing his place.' Yet you needed to reach into an African dictionary to make you proud. When I brought my babies home from the hospital, my ebony son and my golden daughter, I swore before whatever gods would listen, those of my mother's people or those of my father's people, that I would use everything I had and could ever get to see that my children were prepared to meet this world on its own terms, so that no one could sell them short and make them ashamed of what they were or how they looked, whatever they were or however they looked. And Melanie, that's not being white or red or black. That's being a mother. (Naylor, 1982, p. 86)

This disagreement between Kiswana and her mother eventually mends their bond, as Kiswana contemplates her own reflection mirrored in her mother's tear-filled eyes. Kiswana's discovery of this trivial commonality prompts her serious realization that "her mother had trod through the same universe that she herself was now travelling. Kiswana was breaking no new trails and would eventually end up just two feet away on the couch. She stared at the woman she has been and was to become" (Naylor, 1982, p. 87). Ebele Eko accurately examines that Kiswana "comes to understand and appreciate the source of her own dynamism, idealism, and dedication: her mother" (Eko, 1986, p. 139-52).

Black Feminist Standpoint vis-a-vis autoethnography, as Collins (2000) puts forth, is "characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to different challenges" (Collins, 2000, p. 28), thus, funding the next striking character of Brewster Place with sufficient justification. Instead of contemplating about having a conventional life, Cora

Lee displays her utter obsession with babies since her childhood, and transforms herself into a baby-making machine. Naylor uses Cora's narrative as a reverie on the carnal facets of the mothering newborns, indulging sexually with miscellaneous men, who are symbolized as "the shadows- who came in the night and showed her the thing that felt good in the dark, and often left before the children awakened, which was so much better"(Naylor, 1982, p. 113). Cora Lee, an "easy child to please"(Naylor, 1982, p. 107), commences methodically to exercise her lately discovered gratification to refurbish her pleasure for dolls after her father's repudiation to gift any more dolls to her on Christmas- only now they were real babies instead of dolls. However, her tutelage and affection remains strapped only with their infancy; their blossoming childhood simply becomes indecipherably annoying for her, as once her infants sprout "beyond the world of her lap"(Naylor, 1982, p. 112), "she just didn't understand them" (Naylor, 1982, p. 112), thus resulting in their undernourishment and paucity of discipline and hygiene in them. Jill Matus aptly examines,

As a caretaker of a small baby, she regresses into a world that reflects a comforted, comforting sense of self. The image of herself as mother - the power, the sensuous pleasure, and the closely circumscribed world of a mother-child dyad - marks the end of her desire. Cora's dream projects a static world in which the mother-infant relationship must never be ruptured- hence the necessity for infinite replacement of the newborn baby. (Jill, 1990, p. 56)

Regardless of such a disconcerting narration of Lee's condition, Naylor discovers a sanguine metamorphosis in her, invigorated by Kiswana Browne, who prompts her to realize her motherly responsibilities, and alters her outlook regarding her children from just an ostensible to a genuinely pragmatic one. It is only after Kiswana's departure from her residence that Cora Lee appears to glimpse over the pandemonium and disrepair caused due to her "inability to mature" (Awkward, 1989, p. 97-134). So she indefatigably and enthusiastically cleans the chaos, and produces her kids scrubbed and tidily clothed to accompany Kiswana for the performance in the park of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*(Shakespeare, 1998). Her acquaintance and kinship with Kiswana ultimately twirls her own fantasies, thus permitting her to energetically and optimistically engross with her broods, who would eventually acquire "good jobs in insurance companies and the post office, even doctors or lawyers"(Naylor,

1982, p. 126). In this context, it becomes tremendously imperative to comprehend the valorizations of the self-affirming prototypes of Black feminist autoethnographic conviction, which permits us to appreciate, in Lorde's assertion, how African-American women "give lip service to the idea of mutual support and connection between black [African American] women"(Lorde, 1984, p. 153) in order to realize the potentialities of Black female bonding.

The penultimate of the novel deals with two lesbian lovers, Lorraine and Theresa, "who have come to Brewster Place not because they are economically deprived, but because they are socially scorned for controlling their sexuality"(Naylor, 1982, p. 47). As Davis (1999) articulates that Black lesbian women "have been invisible to the dominant culture; their unique ways of knowing and understanding the world have not been known" (Davis, 1999, p. 364-81). In the realm of autoethnography, an exegesis of their exploitive and brutal experiences "propose the fact that both of them have been pushed into the marginal space of Brewster Place by the patriarchs" (Kumar, 2016, p. 49-59). In this context, feminist autoethnographer, Bridgens (2007), articulates that it's only through autoethnographic conviction and narration "that some experiences, which are ignored, distorted or silenced because of the discomfort they cause, can become known or understood" (Bridgens, 2007, p. 5). These lesser known facts or experiences of Black African American women prompted some other critics like St. Pierre (1997) who believes that "for the ancient Greeks, the focus of morality was on aesthetics of existence, and free men (heterosexual) developed practices of the self that would allow them to become the ethical subjects of their actions" (Pierre, 1997, p. 410). Hence, contained by this grapple for acknowledgment, the redolence of the autoethnographic struggle is contrasted with the predicaments of lesbian women for equality and emancipation. The narrative of "the two" establishes that both Lorraine and Theresa function as scapegoats for the community,

Confronted by the difference that had been thrust into their predictable world, they reached into their imaginations and, using an ancient pattern, weaved themselves a reason for its existence. Out of necessity, they stitched all of their secret fears and lingering childhood nightmares into their existence, because even though it was deceptive enough to try and look as they looked, as they talked, and do as they did, it had to have some hidden strain to invalidate it- it

was impossible for them both to be right(Naylor, 1982, p. 132).

Similar abjections are received by the couple in the Brewster Place when Sophie, the watchdog and the gossipmonger, spreads rumors about their sexual orientation, thus turning the neighborhood against them.

So it got around that the two in 312 were that way. And they had seemed liked such nice girls. Their regular exits and entrances to the block were viewed with a jaundiced eye. The quiet that rested around their door on the weekends hinted of all sorts of secret rituals, and their friendly indifference to the men on the street was an insult to the women as a brazen flaunting of unnatural ways. (Naylor, 1982, p. 131)

The Black community of Brewster Place, shows an intolerant attitude towards the lesbian lifestyle, of Lorraine and Theresa. The momentous air of female-kinship in their narrative is established via Mattie and Etta, who recognize in the lesbian couple a mirror of their own relationship. This becomes palpable when Mattie articulates, "Well, I've loved women, too. There was Miss Eva and Ciel, and even as ornery as you can get, I've loved you practically all my life"(Naylor, 1982, p. 141), and further defends them by arguing against Sophie, "those two girls who mind their own business and never have a harsh word to say 'bout anybody - them the two you mean, right, Sophie?"(Naylor, 1982, p. 140). Commenting upon this collective fortification received vis-a-vis the marginalization of the lesbian couple, the addressing of which is best done via autoethnographic sincerity as it bears "an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfair or injustices within a particular lived domain"(Madison, 2005, p. 5), the politics of location as applying to the community of Brewster Place fashions itself out, as a dead-end street-closed and cut-off, from outside influences, which allow it (the community) to establish its own rules for social conduct. Cheryl R. Hopson, a feminist autoethnographers adumbrates that "to achieve true Black feminist sisterhood, we must get to know, question, and challenge the roots of our distrust of one another; we must also recognize, respect, and affirm our individual ideas and experiences" (Bordo, Alcalde and Rosenman, 2015, p. 268-69). This debate over the inclusion or exclusion of the lesbian couple into the association ultimately escorts to Lorraine's atrocious rape. Lorraine, in turn, attempts to cease this brutal act by C.C Baker in the only way she knows: "the only word she was fated to utter again and again for the rest of her life. Please"(Naylor,

1982, p. 171). Helen Fiddymment Levy pertinently remarks upon Lorraine's rape, "Through the brutal gang rape of Lorraine, Naylor connects violence against women directly to the cultural ideal that privileges make aggression, acquisitiveness, and dominance" (Levy, 1992). Naylor's innovative and thought-provoking description, of Black woman's rape, by the rapist from her own community, becomes so geographic that the body, of Lorraine as the victim is made to tell the rapists story. Employing Black Feminist Standpoint vis-a-vis autoethnography as an instructive contrivance, the rage of Black lesbian women, whose bodies are maimed and brutalized by Black men, who, then, use racism as a justification for their violent choices, is clearly reflected, which is very skillfully and artistically portrayed in Lorraine's dishonor, and in that utter devastation, she kills Ben, the janitor of Brewster Place, who is also a father-like figure to her.

This episode eventually unites all the women: "there is a vital oneness created among all the women of Brewster Place as a result of the vulnerability of Black womanhood" (Smith and Chin, 2015). Ciel even goes further to identify herself with Lorraine. She utters, "There was a woman who was supposed to be me, I guess. She didn't look exactly like me, but inside I felt it was me... and something bad had happened to me by the wall- I mean to her-something bad had happened to her"(Naylor, 1982, p. 179). In this context, Adele Clarke (2005) examines that analogous to Marxist version of standpoint theory, Black feminist autoethnography, that "offers a diverse qualitative approach focusing on individuals or collectivities"(Clarke, 2005, p. 8-9), contemplates about Black females in particular situations deliberated to foster a shared awareness as well as a standpoint. Patricia Hill Collins also mirrors the face that this collaboration among African American women bears a "degree of permanence over realities transcend individual experiences" (Collins, 1990, p. 375).

All this becomes quite evident when Naylor ends the novel with a dream sequence titled "The Block Party", what exactly happens is that Mattie has a dream and her dream becomes, an expression of communal guilt, complexity and anger that the women of Brewster Place about the Lorraine's rape. This final chapter acts as an epilogue which mediates between the violent disruption and chronic yearning by presenting at first a kind of a cathartic impulse of resistance followed by an affirmation of quite sustaining, personal dreams. Two stories specially titled in the novel as, "The Two" and "Cora Lee" become virtual preparations to make the final chapter a mediation. Every individual women and small girl

residing, at Brewster Place has had disturbing dreams about Lorraine. What the woman know cognitively, is that these dreams unite them and provide, a context of sharing and connecting. Everyone in the community of Brewster Place knows well that this, "Block Party" is significant as well as important because it provides a platform for moving forward, after the terrible tragedy of Lorraine and Ben. Rain becomes the cheap symbol in this final sequence and as it begins to pour down, the women desperately try to solicit community involvement. All this becomes quite evident when Naylor ends the novel with a dream sequence titled "The Block Party". Here the story tells of Mattie's ambiguous, surreal, cataclysmic dream of Lorraine's rape and Ben's assassination underneath the silhouette of the brick-wall, which is symbolized as a racial-cum-patriarchal relic, and the women of Brewster Place settle on deracinating it from there. Readers witness their yearning determination and fortitude, where "women flung themselves against the wall, chipping away at it with knives, plastic fork, spiked shoe heels, and even bare hands"(Naylor, 1982, p.186). Even after the ensuing rainstorm, the women remain unfaltering and resolute in their exertion to abolish not only the bloody bricks, but also the chastising and imprisoning wall that has kept them trapped and marginalized in myriad ways. This utopian portrayal of a collective exertion to obliterate the brick-wall foregrounds a revolutionary accent uprooted in the twentieth century Afro-American struggle for self-determination. In this regard, the novel undeviatingly attends to not only the role of everyday individuals in the expedition for liberation but also the place of female-bonding and Black-sisterhood as instruments of empowerment and community edification.

Black feminist autoethnographer, Rachel Alicia Griffin(2012), focuses upon the twin aspects of Black Feminist Standpoint vis-a-vis autoethnography: one, the fashioning of a solo "voice"(Griffin, 2012, p. 138-57) concerned with Black woman's positionality in the mainstream patriarchal community, and second, how the solidarity of their collective voices establish, assert, and uphold a vibrant Black Feminist Standpoint in a progressively bothersome political milieu distressing African-American females as a collective assemblage. This indestructible standpoint along with the currency of female-bonding and shared struggle "serve to temper the potential schismatic effects of class" (McDonald, 2006, p. 178), gender and race.

The sunshine of the subsequent morning is buoyantly construed by Mattie as "a miracle", yet the sun is shining "on the stormy clouds that had formed on the horizon and were silently moving towards

Brewster Place"(Naylor, 1982, p. 188). The final dream-sequence chapter ends with these words of the textual narrative:

Etta came out on the stoop and looked up at Mattie in the window.

Woman, you still in bed?

Don't you know what day it is?

We're gonna have a party.(Naylor, 1982)

From the feminine point of view, Mattie and Etta provide an ideal scenario of existential bonding, as an anecdote to a male-induced fracture, of women's lives specially at the level of Black men against Black women. The concluding fabrication of the novel recapitulates and accentuates the open-endedness of "The Block Party". Albeit we assimilate that the street has been censured and its dwellers evicted, Brewster Place is "dying but not dead"(Naylor, 1982, p. 191), and shall not perish until "the expiration of its spirit in the minds of its children"(Naylor, 1982, p. 191), where the spirit unabatingly continues to reside in its " 'Afric' children"(Naylor, 1982, p. 192).

bell hooks put it rightly when she says that, "sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim... women's liberationists embraced it, making shared victimization the basis of woman bonding" (hooks, 2000, p. 45). Naylor further emboldens these women to have faith in their culture, rituals and traditions, "...so great is the wealth of our experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression" (hooks, 2000, 65). In, *The Women of Brewster Place*, it is the brutal rape of Lorraine which creates a shared abhorrence and a sense of community cohesion among women who had largely remained isolated and individualistic. However, this achieved feminine communal bonding and sharing, is not shown as an actual narrative event, but as the dream of the novel's most prominent and central character, Mattie Michael. Mattie within her character and personality personifies an existential quietude and maturity in which the African-American women's existential tribulations get finally negotiated both on the, *alazonic* as well as the *ironic* levels, autoethnographically.

CONCLUSION:

Interrogating the fabricating extent of female-bonding among African American women, Black feminist autoethnographer, Arlie Loughnan

(2002) posits an assortment of questions, like "Is sisterhood possible? Can our feminist agenda transcend the discomfort, resentment and silence that surround issues regarding power relations among feminists from different racial and social class contexts? Is the unity we need and seek to fight against unequal gender relations, our common enemy, possible, or even desirable, when racial inequality remains unchallenged and is allowed to fester?" (Moletsane, 2002, p. 01) Her questions seem to have been answered through an exegesis of Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, is an acknowledgement of the pliability with malleability, potency with resistance, anticipation with trepidation of African-American women in the socio-hegemonic, patriarchal, racial as well as gendered mainstream society, where the endurance of these women is upheld by their enthusiasm, dedication as well as resilience. This endurance permits them to confront and dismantle the pseudo-established socioethnic-cum-gendered-cum-racial power structure. Naylor, through her novel, which is epitomized as a microcosm of African American female experience, further accentuates the essentiality of a bundling determination facilitated by the entrenchment in their ethnicity, and the fabrication of new definitions of self-worth with the help of female-bonding and black-sisterhood to subsist in the domineering stipulations of the mainstream patriarchal world. bell hooks, in this context, bolsters these African American women to have conviction in their traditions, customs and beliefs, "...so great is the wealth of our experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression" (hooks, 2000, p. 65). Henceforth, by "making shared victimization the basis of woman bonding" (hooks, 2000, 45), Gloria Naylor, through her quintessential narrative matrix, and, in the remarks of Black autoethnographer, Bochner, exhibits a plausible expedition of changeover as of "who I was to who I am" (Bochner, 2000, p.270), and further to who we are as a group, and encourages these African American women towards a psychosomatic expedition from marginalization to emancipation, from repression to self-declaration.

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