

**GYNOCENTRIC NARRATIVE, INTERSECTIONAL INFERENCES, AND FEMALE
AFFILIATION IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S *THE WOMEN
OF BREWSTER PLACE* (1982)**

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Abstract: Equipped with heart-wrenching stories, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* offers a powerful rendering of female quandaries in a society predominantly lined by Men. Subsequently, the present paper seeks to examine Gloria Naylor's novel in regard to gynocentric paradigms. As such, critical notions of patriarchy and phallogentrism are explored in the definition of female bonds in the midst of an estranged community. The objective of this study is then to probe the theories that guide black feminist thought in the light of the women of Brewster Place's experience. It also examines how black female trials and tribulations inspired foundational concepts of female bonding and identity construction as persistently expressed by African American female writers. As such, Naylor's novel shatters the stereotypes on black women and demonstrates that their experience is as varied as that of female Americans of European descent. Consequently, the present study explores the implications of race, gender, and intersectional corollaries in Gloria Naylor's discourse and the identity scheme it prompts.

Keywords: Gynocentrism, identity, intersectionality, phallogentrism, race.

**GYNOCENTRISME, INTERSECTIONNALITÉ ET AFFILIATION FÉMININE
DANS *THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE* (1982) PAR GLORIA NAYLOR**

Résumé : Construit sur fond d'expériences poignantes, *The Women of Brewster Place* par Gloria Naylor offre une représentation sociologique des dilemmes féminins dans une société majoritairement dirigée par des hommes. Par conséquent, le présent article ambitionne d'examiner le roman de Gloria Naylor sous l'angle des paradigmes gynocentriques. Ainsi, les notions critiques de patriarcat et de phallogentrisme sont à explorer dans la définition de la solidarité féminine au sein d'une communauté ostracisée. L'objectif de cette étude consiste ainsi à sonder les théories qui structurent la pensée féministe noire à la lumière de l'expérience des femmes de Brewster Place. Elle examine également comment l'expérience négative et hostile des femmes noires a profondément inspiré les concepts fondamentaux d'affiliation féminine et de construction identitaire constamment formulées par les écrivaines africains-américaines. À ce titre, le roman de Naylor brise les stéréotypes sur les femmes noires et démontre que leur expérience est aussi variée que celle des Américaines d'origine européenne. Par conséquent, la présente étude explore les implications sociologiques liées à la race, au genre et aux contingences de l'intersectionnalité dans le discours de Gloria Naylor et le schéma identitaire qu'il dessine.

Mots-clés : Gynocentrisme, Identité, intersectionnalité, phallogentrisme, race.

Introduction

In the 19th century, African-American writers' literary agenda resided in integrating linguistic sophistication and grace to the hostile and negative arena of the American experience. That specific sociological chart extolled those writers of African descent to claim racial and gender integrity. Under the banner of Harlem Renaissance, both fiction and Nonfiction became the adequate site to formulate African American experience in regard to racial and gender contingencies. The novel became then a platform for social enquiry and sociological confrontation against racial biases and preconceptions that endorsed Euro-Americans to disregard abating social environments for Blacks. For Kwame Anthony Appiah, philosopher, cultural theorist, in his book titled *Early African American Classics*, the African American writer just affirmed his humanity and citizenship. He contends that "the African American the writer only wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon in his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face." (Appiah 1990: 5) In the process of achieving both a racial agenda and a citizen project "to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American", the twentieth century also beheld an outpouring of literary productions elicited by the feminist movement. However, the social urgencies and feminine platforms intoned hardly concurred with those of the African American women writers who engraved one of the most intimate and incensed voice in African American literature. Precisely, African American women writers endlessly envisioned black women fiction as the locus for female experience. They expressed the necessity and the drive to reflect on female contingencies, which delineate both an intellectual commitment and a literary pledge. American white feminist Elaine Showalter, one of the first feminists to unswervingly develop a systematic program, coined the term gynocriticism, a feminist discourse that champions woman-centered ideologies, identities and social precincts. Gynocentrism also challenges the phallogocentric promotion of masculine standards as normative, and the presentation of those standards as neutral rather than gendered. Feminist writer Lynda Burns, University of Melbourne, in her outstanding book titled *Feminist Alliances*, underscores that gynocentrism calls for a celebration of women's positive differences, dealing with women's history, myths, arts and music, as opposed to an assimilationist model privileging similarity to men. (Burns 2006: 153). As literature has always been intertwined with social norms and values, African American women writers persistently discoursed on intersectional concepts. Helga Crane in *Quicksand* (Nella Larsen-1928), Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston-1937), Sula and Nel in *Sula* (Toni Morrison-1973), Roselily or Mirna in *In Love and Trouble* (Alice Walker 1973), as well as Celie in *The Color Purple* (Alice Walker-1982), are perfect illustrations of female characters who tussled to attain selfhood and feminine ethos. Subsequently, in women's writings, and particularly in Gloria Naylor's fiction, black women are glorified and celebrated through the lenses of communal values and cultural ethics. Gloria Naylor (1950-2016) was an American professor and novelist. Her novels include *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Café* (1992), *The Men of Brewster Place* (1999), *1996* (2005). In her novels, Naylor provided a powerful and vibrant portrayal of sociological contingencies.

Precisely, *The Women of Brewster Place* celebrates the life experience of seven black heroines whose differences stand for the miniature of the black female experience. The novel was widely acclaimed and won the 1983 National Book Award in the category First Novel. Referring to her novel, Vashti Crutcher Lewis, a contributor to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, commented on the "brilliance" of Naylor's first novel, derived from "her rich prose, her lyrical portrayals of African Americans, and her illumination of the meaning of being a black woman in America." (Vashti 1996:174)

The novel comprises a series of interconnected seven stories about seven women who struggle to come to terms with their past. It takes place in an unidentified conurbation located somewhere in the northern states during the 1980s. In minutiae, *The Women of Brewster Place* recounts the experience and bonds of a group of African American women in a housing project referred to as Brewster Place. According to Ed Decker and Jennifer York, in their article "Naylor, Gloria: 1950- ", Naylor observes the persistent messages that that true friendship and affection are not dependent on gender, and that women in the black ghettos of America bear their burdens with grace and courage. (Decker and York 2004: 49). In an interview with Virginia Fowler entitled *Conversation with Naylor*, Naylor labels her works "female centered" as her characters collectively share the existential inferences the black urban female experiences. Naylor's focus on characters that inhabit the margins of society demonstrates the exclusive nature of dominant culture. Thus, the present article questions Naylor's postulation of an African American female sociological code as the progeny of the African culture. Its intent is to illustrate how feminine filiation and intersectional paradigms mold black women's experience. Accordingly, our research procedure investigates Naylor's unique and intricate feminine and intersectional universe, its mechanisms and main characteristics. The architecture of our article is then incorporated within several dominant queries referring to the notion of identity politics: Is female literary discourse, through the prism of gynocentrism, a perfect reflection of black historiography? What is the crucial relation between literature and gender inferences? Is female bonding a suitable riposte to distorted identity? In order to gauge female contingencies in Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, the present paper is structured around three sections. The first section presents significant definitions and considers personal experience and historiographical contingencies within gynocentric paradigms. The second section examines the intersectional queries that mould Naylor's female characters at the epicentre of race, phallogentrism and social restrictions. The last section investigates the role and place of female bonding in a hostile and negative environment.

1. Écriture Feminine and Microhistory

Introduced by Helene Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa"(1976), "écriture féminine" refers to an exclusively feminine style of writing, which obliterates all forms of repressions and subverts all significances. Cixous's essay is an extremely influential contribution as an incitement to a "feminine mode" of writing; the phrases "white ink" and "écriture féminine" are often quoted, denoting this looked-for new feminine mode of writing. In the same vein, Luce Irigaray posits a "woman's writing" which evades male monopoly and the risk of being diluted into the existing system.

Along with these feminist critics, Gloria Naylor proposes a fictional world that moves beyond conventional precincts and embraces a diverse society and interconnects the trials of her female characters to the tribulations of the human condition. More specially, Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* outlines estranging and degraded worlds in which a community comprising seven women (Mattie Michael, Etta Mae Johnson, Kiswana Browne, Cora Lee, and Ciel, Lorraine and Theresa) are compelled to construct both physical and symbolic sanctuaries so as to be secure from racial and male control. Naylor conveys the estranging atmosphere of Brewster Place. For her, "Brewster Place became especially fond of its colored daughters as they milled like determined spirits among its decay, trying to make it home. ..." (Naylor 1982: 9). Naylor underscores the strength of African American women and depicts the diverse experiences they defied, underlining the riches and the diversities of the black female experience. Naylor provides a psychological profile of the women of Brewster Place as "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" (idem). In doing so, she turns the historiography of African American women into a micro-history of each of the seven women. Artfully, Naylor condenses history in a paragraph "a thousand days are melted into one conversation, one glance, one hurt, and one hurt can be shattered and sprinkled over a thousand days" (Naylor 1982: 18). Insulated and estranged from the influences of mainstream society, Brewster Place takes on its own exclusive ethnic persona, as the cradle of the mystique feminine and the formulation of the other side of the story.

1.1. The Heralds of the Mystique Feminine

Seven sections examine the lives of the women of Brewster Place which epitomizes an array in age and experience. As such, Brewster Place becomes a microcosm of black womanhood standing as the herald of female grieves across generations. According to Maxine Lavone Montgomery, professor of English at Florida State University, specialized in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction, Literature and Culture along with Gender and Critical Race Studies, in her book *The Fiction of Gloria Naylor: Houses and Spaces*, as neighbors, in Brewster Place, women's lives intersect and blend, nurturing friendship and motherly or sisterly love that becomes a source of strength, resilience, and healing (Montgomery 2010: 19). Referring to the notion of resilience, the reference to the phoenix is worth revealing. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the phoenix is, in classical mythology, a unique bird that lived for five or six centuries in the Arabian desert, after this time, burning itself on a funeral furnace and rising from the ashes with renewed youth to live through another cycle. Dying and regenerating from residues, "like an ebony phoenix," each voice rises reclaiming full recognition as a black woman. Thus, the culmination of a woman's story announces the opening of a new one. In a spherical narrative, Naylor's novel captures the soreness, misery and resilience of a group of colored women. In doing so, Naylor promotes the nationwide and perpetual dimension of the condition of the women of Brewster Place in the following words "today Brewster, tomorrow America" (Naylor 1982: 139). Referring to African American

female sociological corollaries, Kesho Yvonne Scott, an associate professor of American Studies and Sociology at Grinnell College, in *The Habit of Surviving: Black Women's Strategies for Life*, pinpoints that "black women both shape the world and are shaped by it" (Scott 1991:47). Along with the contingencies that shape women, gynocentrism holds an outstanding theoretical reputation.

1.2. Shaping Gynocentric Archetypes: Text and Theory

According to Elaine Showalter, American literary critic, feminist, and writer on cultural and social issues, gynocriticism holds a double import. It includes the investigation of female contingencies as a gender status but also the "internalized consciousness" of the female. In her most influential essay, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, Elaine Showalter calls for a separate and autonomous model of literary theory by rejecting male models and theories and recalling women's literary tradition to the present. In doing so Showalter focuses on "the new visible world of female culture" (Showalter 1979: 131). Showalter thus argued for the realignment of the conceptual standpoints of literary studies by considering women's writing as central rather than marginal. She definitely constructs a bridge between female psychodynamics and female creativity and response. For instance, through her immediate response to the pain inflicted on her, Lorraine endorses her determination to survive and resist the atrocities of the male controlled society she lives in. Very meaningfully, Naylor depicts the positive implications of women's support and solidarity. For instance, Lorraine's rape triggers the sympathy of the female community. It also prompts women's consciousness about the necessity to bond and resist gender and racial oppression. That very notion of oppression lies in the nexus of intersectionality which combines social restrictions tailored for women.

2. Demarcating Intersectionality: Female Trials and Tribulations

Intersectionality is a theoretical device contributing to the understanding of how the aggregation of a person's segments of identities conglomerate to generate a unique mode of discrimination. Instances of such identical facets include gender, class, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, and disability. Therefore, intersectionality ascertains manifold favorable or detrimental dynamics. The concept of gender is an entirely cultural construct deeply wedged by racial and phallogocentric biases. Most of the women of Brewster Place endure sociological burdens beyond their control. As such, gynocentrism contests androcentric production of masculine standards as normative and unbiased. Then, Naylor magnificently presents the experience of African American middle class women. She celebrates the exceptionality of African American women and inculcates them to mend their lives and soothe racial and sociological quandaries. In challenging those masculine standards, Naylor exposes the intersectional nature of her narrative by merging race, gender, and sexism.

2.1. On the Other Side of the Spectrum: Mapping Female Experience

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor's fictional characters engage in a fierce struggle to survive in an environment of poverty and prejudice, violence and devastating adversity. As such, the relations between men and women are portrayed

through the prism of female subservience and male control. For instance, at twenty, Mattie Michael is seduced and impregnated by a notorious womanizer Butch Fuller. Apprehensive to reveal the identity of the baby's father to her own father, "an old man with set and exacting ways" (Naylor 1982:19), Mattie leaves home and engages in a geographical journey (she travels east on a bus) before arriving at Brewster Place.

As for Etta Mae Johnson, she refuses to "act her age", and tries to court Reverend Moreland T. Woods. But he only values her body noting that she was "still dripping with the juices of a full-fleshed life" (Naylor 1982: 67). Just as Mattie predicted, Reverend Woods needs Etta only for sexual incentives. Eventually, Etta finds herself in a cheap motel with Woods. She is then forced to ruin the fantasy in which she envisions herself as a dignified Mrs. Woods. Ciel, one of the women of Brewster Place, faces the same sociological constraints. She struggles to keep her matrimonial bond unbroken and safeguard an illusion of a standard family life, with husband Eugene and baby daughter Serena. But upon Ciel's pregnancy, Eugene becomes morose, detached and callous. Notwithstanding Ciel's sacred commitment, Eugene cannot be an attentive husband and a thoughtful father, and, as such, he is the representative of deviant manhood. Consequently, Ciel succumbs into a serious depression, fully unconscious to her environment, trying to commit suicide because incapable of governing her rage and pain. Other woman, same trajectory, same subjugated neighborhood; Cora Lee is the lone mother of seven children, most of whom begot by different men. Living in a fantasy world, Cora Lee constantly welcomes nocturnal visit of men. Once again she discards her own promise and that of her children in trying to secure a better existence. As the women of Brewster Place are controlled and determined by external circumstances, they become incompetent in exercising autonomy over their lives and bodies. Naylor then endorses the idea of a universal womanhood eradicating the hurdles of intersectional dynamics such as age, income, class, and race. Sociological prejudices are one of the most detrimental paradigms in Black women's full self-expression. As such, Lorraine and Theresa "the two", prototypes of black lesbianism, provide another version of intersectionality.

2.2. Construing Queer Orientation: Reading "The Two "

One of the foundational texts of Lesbian literature is Ann Allen Shockley's novel, *Loving Her*. Published in 1974, the novel is widely considered the first novel to feature a black lesbian protagonist. The book follows the story of Renay, a black woman who leaves her obnoxious marriage to a black man to instigate a love entanglement with a white lesbian named Terry. The novel is a groundbreaking narrative, for it paved the way for black women writers to depict lesbian relationships in their writing. Other works published in the early 1980s featured black lesbian protagonists like Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and Audre Lorde's autobiography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). While both novels explored the development of their characters' sexuality, they also examined the characters' experiences as black women in a sexist and white supremacist society. Similarly, among the seven stories of the novel "The Two" centers on the lives of a couple named Lorraine and Theresa, the only lesbian residents of Brewster Place whose experience testifies a case of heterosexual prejudice. The couple moved to Brewster

Place to circumvent potential persecution from residents of a more affluent neighborhood where they can certainly afford to live. However, their neighbors in Brewster Place only feel distress and abhorrence notwithstanding the two living serenely. The women's distrust turns into incredulity and triggers antagonism once they determine that Lorraine's and Theresa's "friendly indifference is simply an insult to the women and a brazen flaunting of unnatural ways" (Naylor 1982:131). A next door neighbor, Sophie, embodies society's indiscretion and homophobia. She spreads rumors and gives significance to every trivial action of the couple. While Theresa is oblivious and unaffected by rumors, Lorraine, a timorous and unassertive elementary school teacher, is profoundly stunned by her uncommon sexual orientation. Excluded and estranged, she becomes a pariah in her own community. Very interestingly, lesbianism is interspersed with the notion of phallogentrism. The patriarchal and homophobic prejudice is most evident in Naylor's text. For instance, C.C. Baker, leader of a group of young drug addicts and robbers, persistently "verify their existence" (Naylor 1982:161) and would call themselves "man" to substantiate their masculinity. As such, C.C. Baker happenstance with Lorraine considerably invalidate his most prized "penis" so much that the mere thought of a woman "who lays beyond the end of its power" (Naylor 1982:162) is considered a somber peril. Becker's male conception is preposterous and only demonstrates how unconfident and insecure he is when dealing with a woman who undermines his manhood. Thus, upon returning to Brewster Place from a nightclub outing, Lorraine is grudgingly raped by C.C. Baker and his underlings, nearly lifeless. Eventually, notwithstanding her exertions to weave a knot with her community, Lorraine is banned and alienated from the human chain. She is then obliged to substitute a companionship with Ben **who** provides comfort and renewed hope. After losing Lorraine, Theresa desperately realizes that life without mutual support and commonality is excruciating. Here lies the import of the interactions between Brewster Place sociological framework and female bonding.

3. Pledging Female Knots and Intersectional Patterns

Gloria Naylor belongs to the female African-American Writing Movement which has also been called Black Feminist Movement. Along with this movement, Black women have been dynamically and passionately active in reclaiming and constructing black women's ethos. Subsequently, Naylor reinvents women power in distinction from an estranging past by promoting a redemptive identical journey. In order to survive an impecunious and hostile neighborhood, to subsist in isolation, riposte phallogentric decrees, procedures and racial shackles, the women of Brewster Place engaged in a process of self and communal reinvention. Through the prism of amity and cohesion, Naylor informed the mutual strength of seven colored women. As such, she celebrates women's communion and its impact on the fulfillment of their quest for selfhood. Enthused by common human and gender conditions, the women of Brewster Place weave valuable and powerful bonds that consent to survival.

3.1. *Modeling a Constricted Female Community*

Constrained by external circumstances, the women of Brewster Place have to come together and form a tightly-knit society that enables each and every woman to achieve selfhood. Thus, Naylor exhibits a womanist spirit throughout the novel. It explicitly articulates a feeling of anger and anguish; moreover, she expresses her stance regarding rape, homophobia and social prejudice. As a retort strategy, the women of Brewster Place collectively share their rich and bitter experiences on Brewster Place. That female congregation is reflected in the form and content of the novel, and in the use of language as well as through images, metaphors, mood and tone. Examining a group of women characters rather than only one protagonist, Naylor reveals the diversity of black women experience and resilience. Consequently, the novel highlights the strength generated by women's attachment. For instance, Mattie Michael is the merging element of the text; convened in Etta's story, in Ciel's story, in Cora Lee's story, in "The Two" chapter, and in "The Block Party" chapter, Mattie Michael functions as the surrogate mother and spiritual conductor of the community. She provides comfort to others, notwithstanding her suffering from sociological shackles and psychological soreness. Indulgent and open-minded in her approach, Mattie unreservedly endorses her role as a soul mate to the other women of Brewster Place. Although she apprehends that Etta Mae is once again tossing herself into an emotional cataclysm with a man once more, Mattie perfectly knows she cannot halt her. Ashamed of herself for thinking that she could outsmart a con artist like the Reverend, Etta returns to Mattie's apartment weary and defeated. Nevertheless, Mattie awaits the arrival of her friend without a word of condemnation; instead, she offers only love and consolation. She is present for her "to pick up the pieces when it's all over" (Naylor 1982: 70). Referring to lesbianism, Mattie clearly states that perhaps the emotional bond the lesbians feel for each other is not radically different from the emotional bond of two longtime friends like Etta Mae and Mattie Michael. Through the prism of such a statement, she reveals a notable level of intellectual and emotional maturity.

Besides, upon realizing that Ciel intends to commit suicide, Mattie rushes to save her. Cautiously, Mattie seats Ciel in the bathtub, and rubbing her hands on Ciel's body, proceeds to bathe Ciel in a figuratively emotional passage. The ritual of bathing recalls Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) in which she portrays the healing process performed by Baby Suggs to restore Sethe. The healing process requires the bonds of womanhood and the support of the community. Like for Sethe, the ritual bathing not only cleanses Ciel's body but, also redeems her spirit. By the very act of saving Ciel, Mattie also protects herself, and the ritual of bathing that she performs on Ciel becomes a testament to the healing powers of female bonding, particularly in the face of a chauvinistic, male-centered world. Mattie becomes then a catalyst for possible change and, while baptizing Ciel, Mattie is also cleansing her own spirit and forgiving herself for her past turpitudes. As Baby Suggs, Mattie is the symbol of the Mater Familias, the Alma Mater, the Earth Mother, that is, the spiritual nurturer of the community. Toni Morrison definitely asserts: "nobody could make it aloneYou could be lost forever, if there wasn't nobody to show you the way (Morrison 1987:159). As a rejoinder and adjustment to the recurrent interference between the outer world

and the female's psyche, Mattie Michael becomes the matriarch of the group, a source of comfort and strength for the other women.

3.2. *Rescinding the Bricks of Seclusion*

Mattie Michael is a central character; as such one must acknowledge her significance and her transformation from a victim to a vehicle for female change. Female bonding functions then as a therapeutic and restorative expedient that triggers communal consciousness and enables to defy pain, achieve communal alliance, and fulfill selfhood and emancipation. The women of Brewster Place eventually realize that the essence of their bond stems from mutual reminiscences and dreams. Only principles and ethos born within a communal spirit can persevere and contest the uninterrupted sequences of abuse. Naylor's conception of selfhood is distinctive in the sense that the women of Brewster Place celebrate deliverance and sociological release only when they form a close-fitting communion. For instance, the seven women's painful sociological trajectories and psychological salvage are only projected through the comfort of other women. As such, they are bound to rely on each other in an environment branded by gender shackles. The assertion is confirmed by the bonds between Cora Lee and Kiswana, between Mattie and Ciel. The brick wall that sealed their street several years earlier separates them from the rest of the city and symbolizes their psychological and spiritual isolation. Providentially, in the closing pages of the novel, Ciel removes a brick that she thinks is stained with the blood of Lorraine recently gang-raped and left to die. Spontaneously, the other women join her and collectively they tear down the wall, experiencing an inner renewal, a sense of community and unity, and a rebirth of hope. Brewster Place is an urban housing project built in 1918 "on some worthless land in the badly crowded district" (Naylor 1982: 180) of an unnamed city. The shady circumstances under which it is conceived foreshadow its ill-fated future, "it first becomes home to "patriotic boys [...] on the way home from the Great War" (Naylor 1982: 181). They are followed by a wave of "dark haired and mellow skinned Mediterranean immigrants"(Naylor 1982:182) relegated to the fringes of society. Then a wall goes up at the end of the block, cutting off the neighborhood from the rest of the city, strangling all expectation of its affluence. Eventually, the women collectively break the wall that stands for their metaphorical seclusion and misery. The ultimate section finds Cora Lee expecting again and still disregarding her older children. Nonetheless, Cora Lee prompts the women's final act which functions as the climax of the novel. Upon discerning a blood spot on the wall at the end of the street, Cora Lee appeals to the other women that "it ain't right, it just ain-t right. It shouldn't still be here" (Naylor 1982: 185). Eventually, the women of Brewster Place proceed to dismantle the wall brick by brick. Even though a thunderstorm proceeds, the women stay unwavering in their exertion to eradicate not only the bloody bricks, but also the incarcerating wall that has kept them entombed and confined in so many ways. Notwithstanding female tribulations, the novel is weighed with hope and yearning. In the final words of the text, Etta calls up to Mattie from the outside: "Woman, you still in bed? Don't you know what day it is? We're gonna have a party " (Naylor 1982: 189). Obviously, the women are taking matters into their own hands, determined to

remove, unhurriedly, meticulously, and unswervingly, the innumerable hindrances that obstructed their evolvment in life.

Conclusion

Gloria Naylor, a celebrated Afro-American novelist, established her own identity as a female as well as a black woman writer, with a state of prominence in African-American literature. Through her literary contribution, she faithfully depicted her vision of the world in which human beings confront evil and a life of illusion and despair. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor explores the female mystique through a series of sturdy female characters. They face profound and alienating trials from social marginalization, familial exclusion, and economic impoverishment to psychological deficiencies and maternal distress. Naylor's characters are wrinkled by the broad-spectrum dimension of pain as their lives systematically replicate the experience of contemporary African American women. The novel simply narrates women's passion, disenchantments, thwarting with their trials, tragedies and triumphs. Known for her lyrical prose and her skillful infusion of the mythical and magical in her novels, Naylor realistically portrays the varied lives of African American women in a Caucasian and male-oriented society. *The Women of Brewster Place* provides then a moving portrait of the strengths, struggles, and hopes of colored women. Nevertheless, Naylor, as well as her female counterparts, succeeded in challenging misogynist male attitudes. At the end of the novel, the women demolish the wall that separates them from the rest of the city. In doing so, Gloria Naylor weaves together the truths and myths of female experiences, creating characters who are free to determine the course of their lives, embodying the self-actualization Harlem Renaissance spirit. Naylor's novel highlights the beauty of human interdependence and of establishing bonds; it invites readers to transcend differences so as to form sustainable female alliances. Influenced by women writers as Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, it is no surprise that Naylor produces *The Women of Brewster Place* as a novel that responds to the wide-ranging concerns of black women writers and to patriarchal society's devaluation of women by revalorizing female values. Barbara Christian asserts that Naylor strongly retorts "the Western patriarchal emphasis on the individual" by focusing on the "necessity of honoring female values" (Christian 1993: 118). To some critics like John DiConsiglio, writer, journalist, and editor, Morrison and Walker's influence on Naylor is just a starting point in her literary career that permits Naylor's fiction to equal that of Morrison and Walker. Outstandingly, Naylor's fiction in general and *The Women of Brewster Place* in particular, is a remarkable one, for it focuses more on place, shared memories that revere the strength generated by empathy and union of women to face racial and androcentric oppression (DiConsiglio 1998: 4). As such, *The Women of Brewster Place* illustrates a feminist approach in writing. It is worth mentioning that the story has only two major male characters, Ben and C.C Baker both of which are portrayed as either weak or evil, respectively. Introduced by Helene Cixous, professor, French feminist writer, literary critic, philosopher and poet, in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", écriture féminine refers to a uniquely feminine style of writing which abolishes all repressions, undermines all significations, subverts the

logic and the closure of the phallogentric language, and opens in a joyous circle of meaning. As for Luce Irigaray, she postulates the existence of "woman's writing" which eludes male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into the existing system. The numerous references to the male's phallus heavily resonate in the notion of phallogentrism, a term defined as "ideas focused on or concerned with the phallus or the penis as a symbol of male dominance ". Thus, Naylor's novel is a clamorous assessment of patriarchy and phallogentrism; as such it calls for an acknowledgment of queer theory.

Subsequently, like most works written by an African American woman writer, *The Women of Brewster Place* received criticism, denigration, and even disparagement. According to Laura Nicosia, in "Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*: Evolution of a Genre " in *Narrative of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences*, the novel was described as "a short story sequence, a contingent novel, a composite novel, short story composite, anthology novel, integrated short-story collection, a hybrid novel" (Nicosia 2007: 193). For Linda Labin, associate professor in English Language and Literature, and writer, in "*The Women of Brewster Place*" in *Masterplots II: Women's Literary Series*, the novel was even accused of being unoriginal and presenting characters that are often described as "archetypal, stereotypical, or flat" (Labin 1995: 2). Moreover, in the delineation of the predicament of colored women, Naylor does not refer to the attitude of white men towards colored women. However, most definitely, *The Women of Brewster Place* is a passionate voice which echoes seven women who struggle to stay alive, physically and spiritually, in a world that has never been compassionate to African Americans.

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