

THE EFFECTS OF GENDER RELATIONS, AND RACIST IDEOLOGY ON FEMALE BLACK IDENTITY

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Abstract:

*In the Afro-American community, gender relations and racism are made up of numerous interconnected segments that are difficult to comprehend. In this study, the impacts of gender relations and racism on female Black identity are investigated in two novels by Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills* and *Bailey's Cafe*, and one novel by Marshall, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*. Marshall's concentration on racial issues is evident in the majority of her works, which depict cultural disparities between Americans and Africans. The novel's protagonist is also a woman who is subjected to racial discrimination in every way. Merle, the protagonist of the novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, shows the effects of racist persecution on Afro-American women. Merle's character is shaped by factors such as race, class, and gender. Although it is obvious that no Black woman writer can create a piece of art without taking race and gender into account, Marshall's works score higher in this regard due to the level of resilience shown by female characters when confronted with injustice.*

Keywords: Gender, relation, racist, female, black, identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Gender Relations' is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of social processes. Gender is a relational analytic category as well as a social process. Gender relations, in other words, are a complicated and insecure process made up of and mediated by interconnected pieces" (Flax 44). Despite the fact that racism's detrimental impact on Black women has historically outweighed all other forms of oppression, gender inequality has been one of the most pervasive forms of oppression in the Black community since 1970. Black women have learned to talk in both African American and female voices. They are African-American women when they come up against racism, but addressing masculine bias puts them in the role of an ordinary woman. In the Afro-American community, gender relations and racism are made up of numerous interconnected segments that are difficult to comprehend. Despite the fact that they are two separate topics, disregarding their reciprocal interplay would be a huge miscalculation in our conversation.

Masculinity prejudice and racism are two key foundations of Black women's oppression, according to Black feminism. These two major sources of oppression are classified as follows by Patricia Hill Collins:

The visibility of Black feminism can be summarised in two distinct moments. The first happened around the turn of the century, when the Black women's club

movement provided many of today's guiding concepts. The antiracist and women's social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s sparked the second or modern Black feminist movement, which continues to this day (30)

Collins categorises the two fundamental sources of oppression in the Afro-American community, but he also shows how the Black feminist movement manifests itself. "Through the 1970s, black feminists remained deeply split over whether their oppression was founded on race or sex." As a result, certain groups, such as the black feminist Combahee River Collective, struggle to identify a single oppressor" (Solomon p. 130). In American society, Afro-Americans have long been segregated. The racial segregation of Blacks in American society prompted the Black community to take action. The persecution of black women in the Afro-American community, who had already been subjected to masculine preferences, was compounded. "US Black feminist practise has frequently occurred within the context of Black community development efforts and other Black nationalist-inspired endeavours" as a result of this double oppression. (Collins number 30).

2. THE HILLS OF LINDEN

Willie Mason and Willa Prescon Nedeed, the novel's two characters, embark on a four-day excursion in Linden Hills. Willie makes a physical trek down the hill, communicating with various people, a journey that begins with him looking for work and finishes with his maturity and a fully developed perspective on Blacks, particularly Black women. Willa's journey, on the other hand, is an emotional and mental excursion into the past. This journey also leads to self-actualization and resistance to the Black patriarchy's power and oppression. Gloria Naylor's film *Linden Hills* explores African-American identity by examining gender connections as well as racial issues. In *Linden Hills*, Naylor uses an inverted style of sequences and spaces to attain this goal and overcome the problem of contradictions in the Afro-American community. "Ascent in material terms is linked with fall in moral ones in the inverted space of Linden Hills, a neighbourhood of middle-class "black" citizens eager to rise financially by moving down the hill toward progressively more sumptuous homes" (Engles 91). Naylor deconstructs all conceptions of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in this inverted environment. "Those who are 'black' are 'white' in some ways,' women can be stronger than males, and 'wealthy' individuals can be 'poor' in some ways" (Engles 91). *Linden Hills'* materialism is responsible for these deconstructive notions. The actions of materialist Blacks are not dissimilar to the actions of racist Whites. *Linden Hills* has become a decadent society, especially in terms of morals, due to their desire to abuse the poor and women. Such racist behaviour in *Linden Hills* runs counter to one of the town's defining characteristics: its emergence. Charles E. Wilson discusses the motivations of the founders of *Linden Hills*: "The establishment of *Linden Hills* defines the founding residents' response to southern memories of segregation and subjugation: the posh Black neighbourhood was founded in complete defiance of racism and White authority" (11). *Linden Hills* loses its purpose as a refuge for Blacks fleeing racism's oppression and becomes a cause of Black oppression. Naylor appears to be attempting to convey the *Linden Hills* contradiction. This paradox is the progressive vanishing of Whites, with white Blacks taking their place. Virginia Fowler

explains why Naylor wrote the effect and how consumerism affects the lives of Black people: "Naylor's storey has a variety of metaphorical implications, but the fundamental notion is the death of the human soul caused by the pursuit of the American dream of financial wealth" (69). Gloria Naylor can communicate a positive and undamaged personal understanding with her audiences thanks to a ready-made approach in establishing Linden Hills. The roots of Naylor's work are the traditional ready-made styles, which flood it with their rich symbolism and allegories. Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are two of the best examples of classical writings that impacted Linden Hills. The existence of Satan as the king of Hell, whose spirit emerges in the character of all five Nedeeds, is one of the similar elements of the two great works. Another common thread running across the works is the patriarchal forces that culminate in the exploitation of female sex.

3. DANTE'S INFERNO AND LINDEN HILLS

Linden Hills is the best example of racism's collateral damage. "The location of Naylor's second novel, *Linden Hills*, makes it plain that she is building a geographical fictitious realm, similar to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county" (Christian 106). This fake geographical location is near to Brewster Place, a real-life fictional location founded by seven Black women. Linden Hills, unlike Brewster Place, is home to middle-class Blacks and is regarded as a symbol of black achievement. Naylor creates two distinct villages next to each other in order to gain a better knowledge of the entire Black community. The novel's geographical contexts, as well as the shape of the location on the map, make the hidden truths of the Black community visible to the naked eye. The "V-shape" permits his land to be both self-contained and connected to the rest of the globe. And, because Nedeed resides at the bottom of 'the hills,' he acts as a sentry for his own development" (Christian 109). Barbara Christian examines the effect of setting and geography on female Black characters in her essay "Naylor's Geography: Community, Class, and Patriarchy in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*."

Gloria Naylor is fascinated by the effect of setting on a character's personality. Because displacement, first from Africa and subsequently through migrations from the South to the North, has been so much a part of our history, Afro-American writers may have been particularly concerned in setting. Because forced displacement has been a part of our collective experience, we understand how important where we are is to the character of our social constructions, and how place can tell us a lot about who we are and who we can become. Perhaps for Afro-American women writers, location is even more important. (106)

The validity of critics' observations of the influence of Dante's *Inferno* on *Linden Hills* on the one hand, and the double oppression of Black women by patriarchal and racial influences on the other hand, is confirmed by these geographical signs of the setting with their specific meanings and the symbolic phrasing of meanings in the storey, used deftly by Naylor. *Linden Hills*, by Gloria Naylor, tells the storey of two young Black poets on their journey from Putney Wayne to Linden Hills' middle class portion. Willie K. Mason and Lester Tilson, two

contemporary young Black poets, decide to look for work in the upscale Linden Hills neighbourhood a few days before Christmas to buy gifts for their families. Naylor's current version of Dante's *Inferno* is based on his search for extra work:

Dante's use of a mirror image of Florentine society, fifteenth-century Florentine society, captivated me. As a result, you would be punished in proportion to your offence. And, given his entire world perspective, as you travelled along his microcosm of Florence, ancient Florence, you saw people who had sinned to varying degrees. 'My God, you know, I see how it could work with upward mobility,' I added. because as you 'rise up,' you have to abandon links or perform crimes against these ties, which for me move from the lesser to the greater, in my scenario (Berg 2).

As in Dante's *Inferno*, the resemblance of the styles aids Naylor in displaying the reasons and consequences of man's free will to choose. Hell is described and depicted by Dante as a funnel-shaped receptacle under Jerusalem. The entry to Hell is the Dark Wood of befuddlement and ignorance. The nine circles of Hell are residences for different types of sinners. From top to bottom, the first five circles represent sinners who have sinned because of their unrestrained strong impulses. The unbaptized pagans are housed in the first circle; the desirers of sexual relations and lust are housed in the second circle; voracity is housed in the third circle; greed for wealth and prodigality is housed in the fourth circle; and the pensive sadness or gloomy character is housed in the fifth circle. Those who have committed their misdeeds out of irrationality and unreason are the four remaining circles at the bottom of the funnel. Lower Hell is divided into four circles by a wall known as the City of Dis, which separates it from upper Hell. The City of Dis is directly ruled by Satan, who is located in the heart of the city. Satan has been consumed by the frozen lake, which has encircled him from the waist down. The circle nine settlers, who are locked in the frozen lake like Satan himself, are betrayers; the eighth circle comprises the deceptive; the seventh circle brings inhuman behaviour into a community; and the circle six settlers are people who have uncommon religious ideas.

4. LINDEN HILLS AND MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

A Marxist-feminist analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* can show how similar the structure of Linden Hills is to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The patriarchal environment of *Paradise Lost* had an influence on Eve, the prototype of all modern women. We have two patriarchal forces against each other in the class fight between Satan and God. On the one hand, God fights to keep his position and strategic position as a bourgeoisie, while Satan, an ambitious member of the working class, works hard to overcome obstacles and battles to establish a new empire. Despite the fact that Satan portrays himself to his brethren as the saviour of the working class from God's oppressive monarchy, he does not challenge God directly in a face-to-face battle. He tries to subjugate another working class by using secret planning to achieve his goal. He intends to establish a permanent dominion in Hell that resembles God's empire in heaven, control a huge number of working-class people, and exercise dominance over others. As Quilligan points out, "Satan, the commander of Hell's 'captive multitude,' himself chained to

himself, is the one who comes to conquer the new world: his first thoughts are of dominion and, more importantly, population" (180). Linden Hills finds itself in a similar scenario. As the founder of Linden Hills, Luther Nedeed constructs a monarchy to combat White supremacy and tyranny and to provide a haven for homeless Blacks, but it turns out to be a hell. The protagonists and antagonists of *Paradise Lost* are God and Satan. God, as the supreme ruler of the universe, invites Satan to serve him as an obedient servant. However, Satan finds this reign burdensome and refuses to submit. Satan approves his command of the rebellious angels in Book II of *Paradise Lost*. Satan suggests a full-fledged war or a plot against God. Due to his lack of equal power to God, Satan comes to the conclusion that he must overcome God in an indirect challenge in order to reclaim the people's rights that have been infringed by the merciless tyrant, God. Here, Satan has Engels and Marx's doctrine: they "declare that the capitalists, or bourgeoisie, have successfully enslaved the working class, or proletariat, through economic policies and control of the production of goods," and that the proletariat "must revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of their economic and political power" (Bressler 115).

Nedeed, like Linden Hills, has a similar concept of Satan. He intends to deprive the White bourgeoisie of economic and political power, but his materialism and obsession with possessions drive him to collaborate with the oppressors. His rebellion against the Whites is about breaking free from the oppressor's slavery and establishing a new Black identity; yet, the establishment of Linden Hills ignites the urge to colonise his fellow Black people, just as Satan did on his journey to Earth. Lowenstein further on Satan's colonial desire: "The imperial Satan of Milton's epic also seeks glory, notoriety, and dominance, and Milton links him to commercial sea voyagers connected with European empires later in the poem" (qtd. in Quilligan 62). The effect of such a colonial empire on the inhabitants of Linden Hills is to exacerbate the oppression of the local Black community. The materialistic lifestyle of Linden Hills has a considerably greater impact on women than it does on males. The most important consequence of this materialism is the objectification and exploitation of women. Luther Nedeed expresses this objectification perfectly: "His father was right: breaking in a wife is like breaking in a good pair of slippers." You'd wear them until they fell apart rather than go to the trouble of getting a new pair once you'd become used to them" (67). Women's objectification in Linden Hills makes it easy for the patriarchal Black community to exploit them and rob them of their rights, whether monetary or spiritual. However, Black women will not easily yield to the patriarchal force. Even Nedeed, who is one of the main sources of oppression for Black women in Linden Hills, recognises that the women of Linden Hills have evolved and are now resistant to White and Black tyranny. Nedeed wants to treat ladies the same way his father did. "However, the world had changed dramatically since his father's day, particularly in terms of women" (67) the objectification of women is a natural entitlement for Nedeed and the other Men of Linden Hills, and they will not share this inborn inheritance with women. "Sure, they had desired a husband but not at the cost of their future - a sullen, discontented bunch - it was too much to expect them to share your future and legally own half of what they've never worked for," Nedeed says of his father's time when he wants to find a girl to marry (67). This resistance to archaic and patriarchal beliefs is not limited to the younger generation of African-Americans.

5. THE CHOSEN PLACE, THE TIMELESS PEOPLE

Merle Kimbona, the protagonist of Paule Marshall's second novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), describes the life of Merle Kimbona, who lives in the fictional Caribbean island of Bournehills. Merle is Paule Marshall's megaphone in this work, and Marshall is successful in making a careful review of the distinguishing traits of western power and control through a scrutinised portrayal of Merle's behaviour and thinking. Merle's look, as a hybrid with some evidence of a White father marrying a Black slave, is riddled with inconsistencies that make her suspicious while yet intrigued about her past. On Bourne Island, the same contradiction exists. There are two districts on the island. New Bristol is the area of the city that has managed to stay up with modernization thanks to unscrupulous politicians. The other section of the island, known as Bournehills, is impoverished. The Philadelphia Research Institute, based in the United States, has begun a specific initiative for the development of Bournehills in order to bring significant improvements to the island. The project is to be carried out by the Center for Applied Social Research, a subsidiary of Philadelphia Institute; however, carrying out such a fundamental effort to modify at least the appearance of Bournehills turns out to be nearly impossible. To some part, this is due to the people's opposition to Whites' hegemony. "The Timeless People, Bournehills, and the surrounding waters in *The Chosen Place* push both tourists and island residents to confront the past, their histories, or be destroyed in the process" (Olmsted 249).

Merle, who has reached his full potential, is a trailblazer in the fight against Western hegemony. "Merle Kimbona in *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* and Avey Johnson in *Praise song for the Widow* reveal subtle, if ultimately optimistic, models of resistance to the insidious, internalised effects of racism and Western acquisitiveness," writes Olmsted of Merle's subtle resistance to White hegemony (249). Selina Boyce in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* can be added to Olmsted's list to round up the list. Three different age groups are represented by these three women. Selina is a young girl who has not yet reached the age of consent, but she is on the lookout for a true identity in order to solve her most pressing problem. Avey is an elderly woman who struggles with assimilation and eventually resolves her issues and resolves her mental conflicts by returning to her Black community. Merle is in her forties and is going through a painful process that will make her case more challenging than the other two. "The similarities between Selina Boyce in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Merle Kimbona in this novel, and Avey Johnson in *Praisesong for the Widow*," says Joseph Skerrett in reality, these three protagonists make up a chronology of human psychosocial growth" (68).

On Bournehills, neocolonial exploitation of Black people is typified by the establishment of a sugar cane refinery owned by Kingsley and Sons. The objective of operating this industry on the island in conjunction with the launch of a new development programme by Americans raises suspicion the majority of individuals on Bournehills are extremely impoverished sugar cane farmers whose daily lives are reliant on Kingsley's family's actions. The primacy of Whites on the island is symbolised by the sugar cane factory. Marshall focuses on racial issues in most of her stories, emphasising the cultural distinctions between Americans and

Africans. The novel's protagonist is also a woman who is subjected to racial discrimination in every way. Merle, of the Timeless People, plays this role in *The Chosen Place*. Merle's character is shaped by racial, social class, and gender differences. Although it is obvious that no Black woman writer can create a piece of art without taking race and gender into account, Marshall's works score higher in this regard due to the level of resilience shown by female characters when confronted with injustice. Merle is a famous figure because of her aversion to racial and gender concerns. If Merle is analysed in a triangle connection with Saul and his racist wife Harriet, her resistance is readily apparent. The conflict between Harriet and Merle begins when they first meet. Harriet, on the other hand, is a cautious figure, and her white complexion has given her a false sense of self-assurance.

6. CONCLUSION

The similar structure of Naylor's characters to these Biblical characters creates an environment that heightens the fictitious characters' sufferings. Naylor appears to have succeeded in demonstrating that women have always been oppressed and exploited by patriarchal forces, whether they are divine figures or earthly beings. From the beginning of Eve to the current period, Naylor's narrative is the storey of all persecuted women. The oppressor's and oppressed's situations have never altered; the only thing that has changed is the manner of exploitation.

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