Chapter Two

Individual and Group Identity among Afro-American Women

The word “identity” conjures up numerous meanings and images in the mind. Looking up the word identity in a dictionary brings about a variety of meanings for different contexts. However, the identity that is related to the current study emphasizes the features, characteristics, and attitudes that an individual or a community have, that make them poles apart from other people or communities.

According to this definition, Black identity finds a clear-cut meaning. The adjective Black casts a shadow over the word identity and restricts the unique characteristics constituting the individual personality to an especial group of people. This especial group of people, the African-American community, has always been struggling for an independent identity in the affluent society of the US. The search for identity among the Afro-American community has also been reflected in the writings of Black women writers.

The realistic style of writing among the early Black women writers was not sufficient for challenging the new oppression faced by the Afro-American community. The early Black women writers did not mention the challenges of racism, gender, and class. They just copied the White writers. The new generation of Afro-American writers including Paule Marshall and Gloria Naylor challenged whatever confined and restricted the life of Black women in the US. Mary Helen Washington believes that the new generation of Afro-American writers “worked to create a sense
of international solidarity among women of colour, and they placed Black working-
class women at the centre of their concerns” (194). One of the subjects that
preoccupied the thoughts of Black women writers completely and sometimes
extremely is the identity of the Black people in the US. Gloria Naylor and Paule
Marshall like most of the African-American writers present their readers an identity
that belongs just to the Black people of the US. Although African-American
community includes many ethnic groups from different origins, but to some extent,
Marshall and Naylor have been successful in illustrating such an identity for African-
American people. The concept of self and identity among Blacks cannot be
considered the same as among the individual Whites, especially in the segregated
society of the US. “Black feminist works portray African-American women as
individuals and as a group struggling toward empowerment within an overarching
matrix of domination” (Collins 203).

Carol E. Henderson explains the connection between individual identity and
group identity in the following lines: “The collective emphasis placed on constructing
‘weblike strands’ that connect individuals to their communities and help build
people's relationships amongst themselves forms the basis of the redemptive
possibilities of communal renewal and affirmation” (1001). Philip Page in Reclaiming
Community in Contemporary African American Fiction also explains the role of the
Afro-American women writers in connecting this individual identity to their Black
community:

Like Legba, the West African deity who links the human and the
divine, they are poised at the crossroads where postmodern ideas
intersect issues of race, the repressed American past, and
contemporary Americans' awakened consciousnesses about
themselves. Voicing such intersections, they are enacting
deconstruction as America. Their fiction gains its special power because it gives voice to these national concerns, because it risks opening the nation's identity and the Politics of Movement in African American Fiction (qtd. in Henderson 1001-1002).

The pronoun [they] at the beginning of the second line gives a description of Afro-American writers. The role of the Black writers in the US is to lead their people’s concern in the right direction towards their actual identity. Since Black Afro-American writers voice the opinion of the oppressed Black women, the deconstructive role of the Black women writers becomes more important than that of their male peers do. Paule Marshall and Gloria Naylor are classified as the pioneers of this deconstructive movement. In this chapter, four novels of the two writers will be examined to reveal the quest for Black identity among African-American women. *Brown Girl, Brownstones, Daughters, The Women of Brewster Place and Bailey’s Café,* are the novels that will be closely scrutinized to prove that: 1. The quest for the self and Black identity is inevitable for Black women and 2. This identity and the self, presented in these novels are not only in contrast with others, but are in connection with family and the Black community. DeVeaux explains this connection: "You have to understand what your place as an individual is and the place of the person who is close to you. You have to understand the space between you before you can understand more complex or larger groups" (qtd. in Collins 112).

Not only in these four novels, but also in the writings of most of the Black women writers, identity is considered as an organic unit that connects all individuals to each other through a collective web of unconsciousness. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, in *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* confirms identity as an organic whole:
Both language and culture are the blueprints of identity and value for a nation or a people, leading Ngugi to assert that: 'Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Although conceding that culture is like a constantly moving river, 'It is like studying a river in its very movement that is in its very being as a river. it is also an organic whole-a slowly mutating but particular identity in itself: 'In this sense society is like a human body which develops as a result of the internal working out of all its cells and other biological processes (qtd. in Kanneh 36).

This organic whole that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o defines as an identity and compares it to a human body that the development of it is due to the concordant function of its components, is clearly evident among the Black women of the African American community. The works of Marshall and Naylor, like those of the other Black women writers, reflect the Black community, especially the female Blacks. Although Marshall depicts her characters from among the well-to-do and successful Black women and Naylor’s are from the poor, the well-chosen characters are the best examples of the Black identity questers. In all the four above-mentioned novels, an upward moving trend, or an evolution takes the place of the character’s ignorance and dynamically changes her from an individual evading her Black community into a trailblazer resisting any kind of oppression. The finest example of such a dynamic character is Selina, the daughter of the Barbadian immigrant parents in “Brown Girl, Brownstones.”

**Brown Girl, Brownstones**

The relationship of a Black female individual and her community is portrayed in the behaviour and feelings of Selina, the protagonist of the novel, toward other individuals and her community. The first and the most important person that moulds
and influences Selina’s character and shapes her individuality is Silla, her robust and sturdy mother. Sila’s clear thought and common sense in facing Selina’s desire for growth makes Selina unable to reason or think with understanding and intelligence. Selina’s mother is unable to justify herself to her daughter and to express herself through love and tender feelings. “‘If I was to hear one word outta you ’bout what I said here today I gon kill you. You hear? I gon kill you even though you's my child and I suffered plenty pain to bring you …’”(64). This is the first time in the novel that she is threatening Selina to be obedient and follow the rules of the mother who is ruling the roost, but not the last time:

On the trolley the mother's rage joined the wheels' clatter and the trains' rumble overhead. ‘I din want to show my colors in front those White people in the office,’ she was saying, ‘that's why I din lick you down right there and then. But I got a mind to do it now. You's too own-way. You's too womanish!’ She almost screamed; her hand shot up and Selina shrank against the window. ‘Patrolling the streets this time of night. Taking trolley out to this hell-hole. Making my heart turn over thinking something happen. I tell yuh, I wun dare strike you now ’cause I'd forget my strength and kill you’ (86).

The discourse and type of language that Silla Boyce is accosting her daughter with, does not seem to be a dialogue between a mother and a daughter. Rather, it seems to be a conversation between two enemies. The woman dramatized here as Silla, is representative of all Black women before 1970’s and before the appearance of modern Black feminism. These mothers belonged to the older generation of Blacks and were not aware of the new generation’s desires for self-actualisation and individuality. Moynihan states that the “Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminising their daughters,
and of retarding their children's academic achievement” (qtd. in Collins 173). This calmly objective and dispassionate behaviour of Selina’s mother persuades her to keep her distance from her mother and even from her family and set up her individuality. Selina’s parents were native Barbadians, but Selina was brought up in the capitalist society of the US. She cannot accept, and adopt the principles of the Barbadian community as her mother gives her a tangible and visible form. These tough kinds of emotional and mental conflicts that Selina faces in her everyday life make a stout character out of her. The way she is judging the problems between her parents as a ten years old girl establishes the truth that she thinks older than her age, although her mother accuses her of partiality with her father: "Oh I know. I know I isn't to do a thing against your beautiful-ugly father. He's Christ to you. But wait. Wait till I finish with him. He gon be Christ crucified." (64).

Selina is torn between two extremes: a father that doesn’t care about money and spends extravagantly. This is to some extent due to his point of view about living in a country without any legal rights. He is living in a country where Black citizens are under a pervasive system of oppression, let alone a Black Barbadian staying illegally in that country: "As far as the record goes I aint even in this country since I did enter illegally. Y'know that's a funny thing when you think of it. I don even exist as far as these people here go” (54). On the other hand, the burden and worrying responsibility of tolerating a mother who is powerful, dominant, and materialistic is too heavy on Selina’s shoulder to be taken for granted, and as it happens at the end of the novel, she leaves her mother for her individuality in spite of keeping her loyalty to her ethnicity. Selina’s mother has all the characteristics of a Barbadian community member or as Mary Helen Washington's idea that Silla acts as "the avatar of the community's deepest values and needs" (MacLeod 169-170). The most distinguished feature of this community is to fulfil materialistically to be able to resist the dominant
Whites. Although her mother is persuading Selina to join the Barbadian Association and behave the norms of the community, Selina has her own ideals and does not surrender to this strong influence easily:

Selina's wish to develop her own goals and not follow a norm set by her ethnic group expresses itself in her observation that her best friend 'Beryl's face had somehow lost its individual mold, that soft pleasing form she used to gaze at'. As Heather Hathaway comments, 'for Selina, as a character who is both representative of and yet also markedly different from typical second-generation immigrants, the demand to conform to community mandate is asphyxiating'. Unlike her peers, she does not wish to fulfil her community's expectations. Though for much of the novel Selina remains unsure of the values she wants to replace materialism with, she is certain that she does not want to fit the mold that the community seems to have cast for her.

Ethnicity, for her, appears to be a kind of conformity to materialism, of which the Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen is the most visible expression, an expression which she scathingly denounces when first visiting the association. The Association, aptly called 'the biggest thing since Marcus Garvey', serves as the novel's most visible symbol of Selina's conflict with ethnic nationalism (Japtok 308).

This association as mentioned in the above-mentioned words becomes Selina’s obsession and an uncontrollable persistent vindictiveness with her mother and her ethnicity. Selina on the other hand, lacks the active sense of self, due to her lack of understanding of Black Caribbean culture. This hollowness in her life makes
her envy the luxurious and unattainable life of the dominant Whites and evades her Black ethnic affiliation. The limbo that Selina is caught up in, keeps her out of the luxurious heaven of the Whites and makes her Black ethnicity a persistent suffering hell:

At Fifth Avenue she walked almost cautiously past the luxurious displays in the tall windows and covertly watched those to whom the street belonged: the meticulously groomed, mink-draped women, who tapped out their right of possession with their high heels, who moved secure in an aura of wealth, with ennui like a subtle blue shading under their cold eyes and a faint famished touch to their pallid cheeks. They made her rage inside, for she knew, walking amid them in her worn coat and tarn, that she was nonexistent—a dark intruder in their glittering inaccessible world (182).

A look at the definition presented at the beginning of this chapter about identity makes one think that what are these characteristics belonging to an individual like Selina, or any other character that confronts and challenges the Black community. An individual in the White society of the US is free to have her individual personality without any commitment to the society or people around her to take up her time and energy. If Selina had been a White girl, she would have not encountered such conflicts and challenges from her mother and her people. The problem arises when Selina decides not to be controlled by her mother, to be independent, and self-supporting. “Though for much of the novel Selina remains unsure of the values she wants to replace materialism with, she is certain that she does not want to fit the mold that the community seems to have cast for her” (Japток 308). This typical ideology contrasts her with the Association and her mother’s principles for achieving greater
social conspicuous importance. This state of mistrust and anxious feeling is not limited to the Barbadian community. This may come true for any Black individual experiencing life in a White dominant society. Although Marshall’s characters challenge each other in imaginary surroundings, “the acknowledged tension between community and individual in the fiction of Paule Marshall exceeds beyond the perimeters of any imagined country” (Macpherson 75).

It is not merely Selina that finds conflicts with the forceful requirements of her mother and the Barbadian community. Any Barbadian who does not follow the standards of the community and does not think or conduct in a socially acceptable route is considered to be an outsider. This outsider can be “Suggie, one of the tenants in Silla's house, ... She, too, fully adheres to Barbadian culture and fondly remembers the island. Yet she, too, is regarded as an outsider by the community because of her promiscuity” (Japtok 309). Selina’s father, Deighton, has the same problem, though he belongs to the first generation of Barbadians and has lived the Barbadian culture in Barbados. However, the community and his wife, for shifting from materialism to spirituality, have rejected him. MacLeod writes: “I also want to suggest that the novel's primary male figure, Deighton Boyce, is attacked by his own community for failing to suppress the inferiority of his own intrinsic alterity, for failing to be a ‘real-real Bajan man’”( 171). Silla behaves Deighton as her child and deprives him from all his responsibilities and his role as a father. She has sold his piece of land in their native place with a clandestine plan and is going to buy a new house in the US without considering him as the owner of that property. However, he is not going to hold a grudge against her. "I did tell you that I was one man never hold a grudge against a soul. And I did tell you something else. ‘He pointed at her back, his eyes narrowed.’ I said what's done is done” (102). Although Deighton is trying to keep peace, Silla is irreconcilable and inflexible with Deighton and wants to
control him in any way that is possible. The climax of such a control is the time when Silla cannot trust her husband to give her the money of the sold land:

   Even if you come up to the bank window with me, the man still gon put the money in my hand 'cause I’s Deighton Boyce, best-proof. And I know you not gon show your colors in front those White people by trying to snatch it from me. Even if yuh did try and the police came, they would see that the money is rightfully mine. Think! Silla-gal, this is one time you got to trust me. I got the ace in the hole, mahn . . . But rest yuhself. ‘He slapped her shoulder jovially.’ I coming back with yuh money ... .”(102).

The above-mentioned examples from other characters in the book, foreground the attitude that individuality in a Black community is sacrificed by ethnicity and nationalism. This conflict between ethnicity and individualism becomes more severe when a character wants to be independent, or is in the search for identity. It is the quest for identity that “Silla and Selina, rather than Beryl and Ina-the exceptional questers, rather than the ordinary women-constitute the core of Brown Girl, Brownstones” (Kubitschek, “Paule Marshall's Women on Quest” 54). The two major characters, that Kubitschek enumerates as the core of Brown Girl, Brownstones, reveal the difficulties of re-establishing a close relationship between individual and ethnicity in the female Black community. Silla symbolizes a perfect member of the community who admits all the requirements of the Association and behaves all the principles and rules without any exception. She attends all the sessions of the Association and relishes materialistically. She is a “symbol of ethnic conformity” (Japtok 310). On the other hand, Selina is in the opposite side. She does not believe in the Association. She sympathizes with her father, shares his feelings, and shows compassion for him. Although these essential attributes show the juxtaposition of
different ideology between Selina and her mother, they will not prove that they are not the same. Selina discovers this truth late at the end of the novel: "Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want. I want it!" (265). Selina confesses that she has taken a leaf after her mother’s book. If she is like her mother in every respect, then why does she runaway from her Black identity? Moreover, what is the reason of misunderstanding between Selina and her mother?

As a young and immature individual girl, who is living with her mother and is supported financially by her, Selina does not have self-confidence and self-reliance to be an independent individual. She rejects her mother and her community’s materialistic views, but at the same time she is dependent on her materialist mother financially. The behavior of such a materialistic and self-centered mother prevents and hinders her movement out of an unfair dislike of her community and ethnicity. The clashes in her family between her parents and the restrictions her mother imposes on Selina make her different from her peers. She cannot mix with her friends and enjoy her youth. When Miss Thompson is pleading her to enjoy herself by joining the Association, “I'll tell you how and where. Right down there at this here Association your people have. That's where. Your momma was telling me all about the dances and nice social things they has for the young people. You might meet some nice boy down there and ..." (186), she accuses the whole Association as some corrupt people."‘Are you serious?' Selina drew back in aversion. ‘I wouldn't be caught dead there with those money-changers!’"(186). The allegation demonstrates the fundamental qualities and characteristics of Selina’s bias and ignorance about her community. Selina keeps
her biased thoughts in front of her eyes to prevent her from watching the lights of her flourishing community.

It seems that the lack of experience and fear of being restricted and limited by her community and being subject to control can be important factors in determining Selina’s point of view on Caribbean Black identity. This fear is completely observed and recognised by Miss Thompson when she asks Selina to join the Association, but Selina rejects, even the thought of being there:

‘They's your people,’ Miss Thompson said casually and resumed walking. ‘But you won't go. And I knows why.’ She gave Selina a piercing and disdainful glance. ‘You's afraid. Scairt. Frightened.’

‘It's not a matter of being afraid.’ ‘That's all it is a matter of,’ she said knowingly and hobbled on, her eyes fixed indifferently ahead. ‘Scairt that if you went you'd begin to understand your momma and them a little better. Scairt that then you wouldn't be so hard on them all the time . . . ’ She rapped the cane in emphasis. ‘Scairt that you'd have to change some of your ideas. Just plain disgraceful scairt’ (186).

The insistence and maintained assertion of Miss Thompson despite the disagreement of Selina for attending the Association makes her curios and a little contemplative or even a little inclined to be thoughtful about the Association. This inclination and tendency is clear in her question from Miss Thompson. "But why? Why would you want me to go there?" (187). Miss Thompson as a Black Caribbean, being born in the US can understand Selina better than her mother. She knows that if Selina goes to the Association even once, it will be a change for the better. Miss Thompson is convincing her to know more about her people and her ethnicity. She insists that Selina is not allowed to judge her people by her ignorance: “To understand, that's why. So when you start talking so big and smart against people,
you'll be talking from understanding. That's the only time you have the right to say whether you like them or not, or whether what they done was right or not’ (187).

Selina’s lack of unawareness and her lack of knowledge of the racist ideology and its effect on the oppressed Black community, makes her impervious to a positive response to the application of the Association. By going to college and confronting the White dominant society with complete awareness “she begins to understand the acquisitiveness of the Barbadian community as a defensive mechanism against racism, the wish to own things as an attempt to fight back against exclusion” (Japtok 311).

The first year of her college comes to be a shocking experience for her to lose her real self and at the same time it makes her closer to her community. College separates her from her Black community, and the extent of space between Selina and these people whom she is always talking against them becomes less day-by-day. “She sensed being surrounded by White faces, but few ever came into focus. She sat in class, mechanically taking notes, and all the voices, the professors, students, even her own when she recited seemed like distant echoes.” (182). This is for the first time that Selina feels of being torn into different parts and pieces. She is an American, but at the same time she feels herself a stranger among White people. Gilory considers the split between 'American' and 'Negro' in the US as a strength for the Black community: “One ever feels his two-ness-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (qtd. in Kanneh 65). This two-ness persuades Selina to reconsider her behavior toward her mother, her community, and her ethnicity. She knows the individuality which she is searching for, cannot be retained by ignoring her Black identity. She is an individual, but this individual can find meaning just in the context of the Black community. Although it is difficult for her to
sacrifice her individuality for ethnicity, she is determined to carry forward without giving up in spite of difficulties and inner objections.

The maturity that Selina finds about the Black identity makes her mother more understandable for her, and at last she consents to attend the Association. Her first presence at the Association is of shock and envy. The distressing feelings after shock is surprising and upsetting her. For the first time in her life, Selina perceives the group identity of her Black people that is in contrast with her individuality. Black identity is a puzzle that needs to be solved to her. Selina envies the power of the Black group identity, but she refrains from welcoming this power inside in spite of being tempted: “Slowly she gazed around at the faces that had moved in an endless parade through her childhood, at the blurred hands pouring that crescendo of sound into the air. They were no longer individuals suddenly, but a single puissant force, sure of its goal and driving hard toward it. Their surety of purpose frightened her. It was enviable” (190).

By watching the solidarity and union of interest among the members of the Association, Selina’s consciousness is awakened and she becomes aware of her surroundings. The shared feelings and beliefs of the Association are those she has always been looking for. The Association’s motto: "IT IS NOT THE DEPTHS FROM WHICH WE COME BUT THE HEIGHTS TO WHICH WE ASCEND" (188), the first thing attracting her notice at the time of her arrival to the place, craves her heart for joining the Association. The lecture of Cecil Osborne, the speaker of the meeting, stirs Selina to emotion. Osborne in his lecture provokes these Black people to bring about a new definition of the Black identity and become conscious of the existing circumstances. He reminds them of the abilities they have for acquiring their self-confidence and establishing a new relationship with the White community out of any contempt for the Blacks.
This then is the Barbadian Association. Still in its infancy. Still a little fish in a big White sea. But a sign. A sign that a people are banded together in a spirit of self-help. A sign that we are destroying that picture of the poor colored man with his hand always long out to the rich White one, begging: 'Please, mister, can you spare a dime?' It's a sign that we has a business mind! I thank you! (189-190).

These are the politics of empowerment for the Black community. They want to be powerful in all respects especially in economics. The Association is the complete change of Black activism in the White society of the US. Although this transformation of the activism is in its early stages, it has been successful in creating a new group identity for the Black people of the US. The politicians of the US, after the Slavery period and Middle Passages, publicly announced the need for a pluralist politics. This politics may have been efficient for the capitalist US and for the affluent people of the society, but it has never been dealing with the problem of the working-class successfully. The cause of all the failure of pluralist politics in the US is lack of deep and profound thinking on “racial segregation, social exclusion, and political fragmentation” as Joe Lieske and Jan W. Hillard point out:

These issues now appear to challenge a key objective of the pluralist dream: i.e., the development of an integrated society cemented by the bonds of economic self-interest and material progress. For instead of emphasizing the economic and social problems that residents share in common, much urban politics revolves around the racial, ethnic, and cultural divisions that separate them (qtd. in Jennings 26).

The Black community in the US cannot help the racial, ethnic, and cultural divisions due to the supremacy of the dominant Whites. These divisions are imposed
on them by the society and the active response of the Black community to this oppression along these years has been the confrontation of the institutional power. Along with challenging the institutional power, creating a group identity and resisting by means of this identity, grows among the female Black community. It can be claimed that it is group identity, which gives them self-confidence to cope with the problem of racial segregation. The Association of the Black Caribbean is the symbol of such a resistance in *Brown girl, Brownstones*. Many Black feminist scholars have defined the act of resistance among the female Black community, but a brief precise definition of the Black female resistance is presented by the historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. She defines resistance as "women's involvement in the organized struggle against slavery, peonage, and imperialism. Strategies included open and guerrilla warfare, maroonage, slave revolts, and peasant revolts" (qtd. in Collins 202).

The act of resistance is a great effort to prevail over a situation full of trouble, and to achieve success. Afro-American women mostly struggle for survival of customs, beliefs, and identity of the Black community in the US. The proof for such a claim can be seen in the Association of the Black Caribbean where the audiences are almost entirely Black Caribbean women followed by their younger daughters. The act of resistance also results in empowering Black women by creating the sense of self-reliance in confrontation of the institutional power and this makes them ready to be self-actualised. Reaching to the stage and position of self-actualisation brings into being a sensible and rational state of thinking capacity. The above-mentioned conclusive evidences meet the requirements to prove and confirm the ability, capacity, and strength of the Associations of resistance in facing the forces of oppression. “Yet popular perspectives on Black political activism often fail to see how struggles for group survival are just as important as confrontations with institutional power” (Collins, 202). Moreover, as Collins points out, “historically
African-Americans’ resistance to racial and class oppression could not have occurred without an accompanying struggle for group survival” (201).

In Brown Girl, Brownstones, two influences more than any other factor assist Selina in embracing Black group identity. The first one is the influence of her mother, and the second one is her love relationship. Although the behaviour of Selina’s mother seems to be lacking in reason and logic, she aims at giving Selina the ability to receive and appreciate her self-esteem and inspiring her with confidence and the belief in her abilities. Silla not only takes the responsibility of Selina as a mother, but she behaves like a powerful and self-reliant father. “As is the case for women in Black diaspora societies, African-American women have long integrated economic self-reliance and mothering” (Collins 184). Silla as any other Black mother takes great care of her daughter in the degenerated society of the US. For a young girl, as Selina, this protection may seem suffocating and makes her feel uncomfortable, as it means excessive restriction on her individuality. “US Black mothers are often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective; yet these same women manage to raise daughters who are self-reliant and assertive” (Collins, 185).

Selina is self-reliant, assertive, and forcefully strong. These qualifications and essential attributes in Selina’s character can establish the truth of her mother’s achievement in moulding Selina’s personality in spite of laying down lots of restrictions on her. In discussing the mother-daughter relationship in Paule Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brownstones, Rosalie Troester justifies the cause of a Black mother’s protection:

Black mothers, particularly those with strong ties to their community, sometimes build high banks around their young daughters, isolating them from the dangers of the larger world until they are old and strong enough to function as autonomous women. Often these dikes are
religious, but sometimes they are built with education, family, or the restrictions of a close-knit and homogeneous community. . . . This isolation causes the currents between Black mothers and daughters to run deep and the relationship to be fraught with an emotional intensity often missing from the lives of women with more freedom (qtd. in Collins 186).

The only personal shortcoming, or personal flaw, that can be traced in the character of Selina, is her weak ties with her community. This personal flaw does not end to a tragedy, because shortly after her presence at the Association she recognises that she is at fault. “And in that same moment Selina asked herself what was there for her to fear when she was all of one piece” (233). Selina opens her eyes to see her people and her mother whom she had once ignored and had spoken against sharply and unsympathetically. At the end of the novel she claims that she is exactly like her mother: “Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child” (265). She is exactly her mother however, their ways of showing resistance to racial segregations are different. Silla as a mature and experienced woman does not care too much for the surrounding White sea around her however, Selina who is in a direct touch with the White society at college cannot be ignorant to the suffocating situation that has confined and restricted their development. Selina’s mother has always been among the people of her community, among the Black sea with few white sharks however, Selina is in a direct touch with the two opposite worlds of Blacks and Whites. In one of the scenes at the end of the novel where Selina with her group has won a dance competition, and they are celebrating their success in Margaret’s house, one of the White girls of the group, the challenging conflicts between the Whites and Blacks are obviously dramatized. A
small conversation with Margaret’s mother proves her that White people will never understand Black people. The conflict begins when Margaret insists Selina on meeting her mother alone. “Margaret hurried over and, taking Selina's arm, tried to pull her away. ‘Hey, come with me for a minute,’ she said, ‘my mother wants to meet you . . .’ Selina shrugged her off, protesting, ‘But we're dancing’ ” (246). None of them as college friends can understand the other one’s behaviour. Margaret considers her mother’s willingness to meet Selina as an honour for Selina, however, Selina considers this behaviour as a contemptuous behaviour on the part of a White blonde girl. This is understandable in Selina’s manner when she protests: “but we’re dancing”. Margaret’s answer when Selina asks her why her mother wants to meet her alone, shows the negative atmosphere of the whole family on the issue of Black people generally. “‘Why does she want to meet only me?’ ‘Because I just told her how good you were and how I had a catharsis watching you’ ” (246). Margaret needs her mother’s confirmation of Selina to continue her friendship. The reality of such a fact will be visible if the contemptuous behaviour of Margaret’s mother toward Selina is observed. Selina describes her meeting with Margaret’s mother as a harsh investigation: “It was all like an inquisition somehow, where she was the accused, imprisoned in the wing chair under the glaring lamp, the woman the inquisitor and Margaret the heavy, dull-faced guard at the door” (248). It cannot be claimed that such a description by Selina is just a false sense of perception or maybe Selina is exaggerating on the subject, because Margaret’s mother is really insulting Selina and her people with her words. "We were heartbroken when she took ill. I even went to the hospital to see her. She was so honest too. I could leave my purse-anything-lying around and never worry. She was just that kind of person. You don't find help like that every day, you know. Some of them are . . . well. . .” (249). This is a description of their old Black maid. Apparently Margaret’s mother is telling good of a Black maid
and at the same time she is accusing the rest of the Black women maids of being thieves. Margaret’s mother seems to be one of those sharks of the White sea for Selina. She wants to break Selina’s self-made character so she raids on racial issues directly:

Oh, it's not their fault, of course, poor things! You can't help your color. It's just a lack of the proper training and education. I have to keep telling some of my friends that. Oh, I'm a real fighter when I get started! I wish they were here tonight to meet you. You . . . well, dear . . . you don't even act colored. I mean, you speak so well and have such poise. And it's just wonderful how you've taken your race's natural talent for dancing and music and developed it. Your race needs more smart young people like you. Ettie used to say the same thing. We used to have these long discussions on the race problem and she always agreed with me. It was so amusing to hear her say things in that delightful West Indian accent ... (249).

Such racist-based behaviour from the side of Western hegemony justifies the alliance of all various Black groups for creating a single collective Black identity. “It is this feeling of drowning that marks both Selina's rootlessness after the death of her father ‘the cold and powerful wave drowning out her mind’ and her loss of human identity when she is reduced to a "Negro" by the white racism of her friend Margaret's mother” (Jones 599). Although racial discriminations exert a lot of pressure on Black female community, they are not successful in disconnecting the Afro-American community members from their collective Black identity. Racial oppression has vaccinated the Black cultural identity against the gradual disappearance. Afro-American collective identity has always acted as a shield against the racial oppression
especially for Black women. The individual Black women from the age of slavery till
the present epoch of modern slavery have defined their individual identity in
connection with the collective Afro-American identity. DeVeaux says that "you have
to understand what your place as an individual is and the place of the person who is
close to you. You have to understand the space between you before you can
understand more complex or larger groups" (qtd. in Collins 112). Selina’s
development toward the collective Black identity undertook the same proceedings that
DeVeaux says. Selina relieves herself from the contradictions and misunderstandings
that exist between her individuality and her ethnicity. Selina’s partial judgments of
her community give their place to a complete understanding of her ethnicity and her
collective Black identity. “Selina may not agree with all of the actions of the
Barbadian community; but, she realizes that if she denies them, she will be (to echo
Marshall) ‘in conflict with herself” ’ (Thorington 59). Selina cannot deny herself, her
mother, and the black color of her skin. She belongs to the Afro-American community
as a whole with some differences that seems to be natural in every community. “I
contend, then, that as African Caribbeans and African Americans, if we allow our
differences to intrude and override the ties that bind, we, too, are denying a part of
ourselves, in terms of a diasporic community” (Thorington 59). Her reconciliation
with her ethnicity develops Selina toward wholeness and perfection. This wholeness
allows Selina to move easily from the Black small pond of her community to the big
White see. Gavin Jones writes of the White sea of capitalism:

This explicit resistance to resolution and wholeness, recalling the
contradictory house imagery discussed earlier, lies at the heart of
Marshall’s manipulation of the sea—a sea that has a constantly shifting
quality in her work. Alongside the dark sea of diasporic consciousness
is a white sea of capitalism, commercialism, and exploitation. It is this
sea into which Selina's father, Deighton Boyce, dives as a child, reaching for the coins thrown from cruise ships by rich, white American tourists (Jones 599).

Marshall, compares the new world of the US for Blacks to a big White sea in which life becomes nearly unbearable for Black small fishes that are brought here by force. The White sea is full of danger and exploitation for such defenseless people who are vulnerable to many kinds of oppression especially colonial oppression. The colonial oppression are so pervasive that it becomes nearly impossible to avoid the unpleasant impressions of them. “Marshall … coming-of-age novels prefer not to conclude, only to portray their protagonists with the final exhilaration of starting a new and independent life. Selina is on her way to confront the social history of her people and the legacy of slavery and exploitation under British colonialism” (Rose 90). Travelling back to the past is a major theme in Marshall’s works. She makes her characters powerful and resistant to colonial forces by connecting them to their Afro-American culture. Selina knows that relying on her collective Black identity is the only way to stop the racist cruel machinery from working destructively. She has witnessed her father’s destruction under the pressures of colonial and racist power structures. Gavin Jones explains the gradual progression of Selina from individuality to wholeness:

The most obvious progression in Brown Girl involves Selina Boyce's gradual realization of the doubly conscious nature of black experience in the US. Although Selina has the example of her father before her throughout much of the early part of the novel-Deighton Boyce has his "manhood" consistently crushed by white racism, becoming an Eliotic 'hollow man’ whose only consolation is a religious mania that places a shielding veil before his eyes (Jones 601).
Selina on her way toward wholeness has to avoid the mistakes that her parents have committed. Silla has engaged her attention with “buying a house,” unaware of the destructiveness of being ignorant to her African cultural heritage. Silla’s willingness for finding a financial identity marks her destruction. She loses her husband, her daughter and more significantly her hope to a prosperous future. Selina’s father, as Gavin Jones in the above-mentioned quotation explains, becomes a “hollow man.” This hollowness is due to his rootlessness. Living in the White sea without having a defensive mechanism has made him vulnerable to the racial oppression, and finally leads him to a religious mania. Selina is totally different from her parents. She finds her roots in Afro-American culture and begins her journey toward her origin. Selina’s nourishment on her Black culture in the White sea is making a whale out of a small fish. “It is in this ravaged world that Selina comes to her full growth. Her maturity, her triumph, is in her recognition of decay, a decay which is only on the simplest level architectural. She has come to see the bankruptcy of the values which her parents suffered because of their empty value structure” (Benston 70). Opposite to Selina is her sister Ina. She chooses her way of life on the facing side of Selina and takes a leaf after her mother in this respect. “Her ambition is to ‘buy a house later on.’ She hastens to add, ‘Oh, not a brownstone,... just a small place on Long Island’; but the quality of life will be the same, the vision of ‘buying house’ having lost its grandeur while retaining its underlying misdirection” (Benston 70). There can be seen no difference between Ina’s course of action in her life and Silla’s one-sided, and flat ambition to buy a house. The only remarkable difference between Silla and Ina is that Silla is at the end of the line and Ina at the beginning. This kind of life is killing for Selina who has a proud and ambitious spirit. This lifeless style of life will be the attrition of her soul.
It is complacency and lifelessness that Selina comes to fear most, and it is the expression of self that she, like Stephan Dedalus, prizes above all. Thus we last see her leaving the world of brownstones, walking down the city streets. On the streets are insecurity, danger, suffering, the grotesque. But the streets are also challenging, changing, throbbing with the fast pulse of life. Selina leaves the death-grip of ‘the mother’s’ acquisitive, house-oriented world, and is truly reborn. The signal to her new life is, like the new-born baby's cry, ‘a frail sound in utter silence’ (Benston 70).

Selina’s journey to Barbados marks a new life for her and all other young Black women who are in the quest for their Black identity. The end of the novel becomes the beginning of a journey toward the betterment of Back women. Selina is a representative for those who are in the quest for identity. Her journey is a symbolic journey that Black women have started from the early time of slavery to the present post-colonial epoch. All Afro-American women, like Selina, dream of a journey towards freedom and salvation.

_The Women of Brewster Place_

Gloria Naylor published her first novel _The Women of Brewster Place_, in 1981. She was awarded the American Book Award for this novel. Most of the critics praised Naylor lavishly for her first novel. Judith V. Branzburg explains that "the success of novel is in her rendering in rich, sensuous, rhythmic language, a sense of the reality of AfroAmerican women's lives while including serious examination of racial and sexual politics" (Branzburg 116).

_The Women of Brewster Place_, is a fictional account of a series of important
occurrences in the life of seven Black women taking place in the fictional place of Brewster Place in an unnamed northern city. Naylor in *The Women of Brewster Place* situates her female characters under uncontrollable circumstances that affect the life of these Black women. Unlike Marshall, that puts her characters in a direct contact with Whites, Naylor in *The Women of Brewster Place* cuts a place off her Black characters. This isolation does not mean that these Black women are not under the effect of racism or patriarchal forces, rather the converse is true.

The intent or essential significance conveyed by suffering and pains of these seven Black women, without adequate social contact with Whites and Black men, exhibits the oppression they are tolerating severely and naked of all pretentions. The interactions of the Brewster Place are the naked truth of the Black community. The Women of Brewster Place create a collective web for helping each other. Since, in their efforts, to overcome their problems, they come to this insight that they need each other to have success or achieve the dreams that have been deferred by the society oppression. Naylor in all her novels, especially in this one, follows the principles of Maria W. Stewart, her Black feminist predecessor, objecting the injustice of the situation:

Maria Stewart challenged African-American women to reject the negative images of Black womanhood so prominent in her times, pointing out that race, gender, and class oppression were the fundamental causes of Black women's poverty. In an 1833 speech she proclaimed, "Like King Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praise; so also have the White Americans gained themselves a name. . . while in reality we have been their principal foundation and support." Stewart objected to the injustice of this situation: ‘We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the
Therefore, the unfair and unjust treatment of Black women is a major theme in *The Women of Brewster Place*. The injustice of situation is fully dramatised in Brewster Place by a symbolic wall that prevents the normal functioning of the Black community. “The people of Brewster Place have a wall imposed on them by White city officials who want them separated from more "respectable" folk” (Christian 109). The dead end of the Brewster Place is a dead end for the Black women who free themselves and get away from the captivity and confinement of their families and the Black patriarchy. Marie-Josee Chapleau explains the dead end of Brewster Place and the effect of such oppression on the women on Brewster Place as the following: “In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Brewster Place has the same effect: it is an ominous dead end street, which serves to emphasize the poverty and violence that are an integral part of the ghetto. In addition, the wall serves to remind the residents that they have reached the end of the line, and that there is nowhere left for them to go” (Chapleau 10).

All the women who find protection on Brewster Place except Kiswana, the organizer of the Brewster Place community, are those who are seduced by a man, hurt by a lover or driven out by a father. The women on Brewster Place are desperate and they are overwhelmed with uneasiness and fretfulness, to the phase of losing prospects. However, reaching to the point of losing hope does not mean that they give themselves up to the patriarchal and racial dominance. The Women of Brewster Place are not only in search for their independent identity but through an unconscious collective web of knowledge, they share their experiences in creating a group identity.
“In their struggle to survive, the women come to understand that they need one another, and that by banding together to comfort and help each other, they will overcome the barriers which have prevented their dreams from becoming reality” (Chapleau 9). Since they have similar affective state of consciousness and similar experiences, the unconscious plan to achieve such an aim would work easier. To examine and scrutinize individual and group identity in *The Women of Brewster Place* closely and carefully, all the major characters of the novel are examined in detail separately. In order to perceive and comprehend the nature and importance of the Black identity more clearly, and to discover and find more about the individual and group identity among the Afro-American community, the mutual interaction of the characters also will be discussed. Although the female atmosphere of Brewster Place is socially inclusive, the common goal of all these Black women places them in the same direction. Consciously or unconsciously the women on Brewster Place are looking for a place that hides them from the unaccustomed world of Western hegemony and the old familiar world of Black patriarchy. Castellucci Cox gives a brief account of the diveres origins and a historical background of *The Women of Brewster Place*:

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor overtly engages historical issues when she ascribes specific phases of African American history to each of her seven stories, representing eras as disparate as the post-Reconstruction period and the 1960s Black Movement. Mattie is the daughter of the defeated plantation South, the child of slavery who joins the migration North to a more apparent freedom. Etta Mae, a consciousness born of the Harlem Renaissance, hears her own outcry in the blues of Billie Holiday. Kiswana, clearly a product of the Black Movement of the 1960s, claims her heritage through African names
and artifacts more "authentic" in her view than her family's history.

Luciela and Cora Lee inherit an inner-city world that is both physically and emotionally impoverished. Theresa and Lorraine, finally, are the victims of a contemporary world which triply oppresses them as women, lesbians, and Blacks (161).

As Castellucci explains here the women of Brewster Place have diverse origins however, the pressure of the Western hegemony has forced them to come together and be united against the pervasive oppression of racism and sexism. The Black women who have chosen Brewster Place for settlement are the representatives of all desperate women of Afro-American community. These Black women not only have diverse geographical origins, but they differ socially, economically, and culturally. Naylor has been successful in depicting different characters with diverse origins that share a common source of oppression. The diversities of the settled women of Brewster Place is so extreme that some critics consider *The Women of Brewster Place* as a collection of seven short stories exploring the lives and experiences of seven protagonists that each one creates a special single effect. In the following section, the seven women of Brewster Place are analyzed to examine the Black individual identity and its connection with the collective Afro-American identity.

Mattie is the first woman who enters on Brewster Place. Mattie’s hometown is Tennessee where she gets pregnant by Butch Fuller. Mattie’s pregnancy causes her rejection by her family. The act of being rejected by her family, especially her father, makes her so chaotic and agitated that she is determined to forget everything about her past and bring into existence a new identity for herself. The following description of Mattie’s conditions can show her hopelessness more clearly.
She didn't want to think about the home that had been lost to her, or her mother's parting tears, or the painful breach with her father that throbbed as much as the soreness that was still in her back and legs. She just wanted to lay her head on the cushioned seat and suspend time, pretend that she had been born that very moment on that very bus, and that this was all there was and ever would be (25).

The narrative of Mattie is the story of most of Black women who are going to lead a certain type of existence. Having lived the strict rules of the Black families, results in premarital sex, or running away from family and consequently rejecting their Black ethnicity and avoiding their Black identity. As in the case of Mattie, like all young women of the Afro-American community, she wants to forget everything, even the time she passed among her family and gives rise to a new identity however, this is her past identity that builds up her new identity. “But just then the baby moved, and she put her hands on her stomach and knew that she was nurturing within her what had gone before and would come after. This child would tie her to that past and future as inextricably as it was now tied to her every heartbeat” (25).

As an individual, Mattie feels a need and desire for freedom that has been lost to her all these years by her family. However, getting rid of home and its burdens, considering the worrying responsibilities of independency and the burdens of parenthood for a fatherless child comes to be full of problems and hard to manage. The situation can get her into difficulties and this is why going back home becomes a tempting desire for her. “She could go home. If she found nothing Sunday, she could try again Monday. She could go home. If nothing Monday, she must show at work for Tuesday. Who would keep the baby? She could go home. Home. Home” (30). She is ready to lose her individuality at the price of withstanding the unpleasant consequences of coming back home. However, coming across Miss Eva, the
experienced old woman who has reached to the particular state of self-actualization justifies her to resist the oppression as a solution to her problem. Miss Eva reminds her of her responsibility as a mother and not as a child to her parenthood family. "Ya know, you can't keep him runnin' away from things that hurt him. Sometimes, you just gotta stay there and teach him how to go through the bad and good of whatever comes" (31).

Mattie makes an unexpected movement out of her bewilderment, fear, and misery toward building a new individual identity in her new place. After Miss Eva’s death, Mattie gets the house and constructs her new life on her concern for the house and her love for her son however, all her full considerations for the two are overall off base. “She loses them together ... [and] she ends up on Brewster Place, for the first time in her life able to live for herself” (Kulp 9). Although Mattie’s life before ending up on Brwester Place has been a life full of oppression and suffering caused by racial discrimination and patriarchal influences, she does not stop fighting because she has not been able to win the battle against these oppression. In order to win the battle, she gives priority to group identity over individual identity. Mattie on Brewster Place, whom Gloria Naylor introduces to us is not a person who lives merely for her son Basil and her house. “Naylor creates a strong female character who overcomes the barriers set before her in order to become the matriarch who nurtures and cares for the other women on Brewster Place” (Chapleau 8).

Mattie is self-dependent, and self-reliant even at the time she is immature and not yet having reached the specified state of a self-actualised character. Early in the novel when Butch Fuller, the man who seduces her, clucks softly to Mattie and calls her “I say, hey, gal” (8), she responds emotionally with rejection and demands him to show respect. ” ‘I heard you the first time, Butch Fuller, but I got a name, you know,’ she said, without looking in his direction” (8). Mattie is the favourite character of
Maria Stewart. Stewart believes that "It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded, reproaching the Whites; for that will never elevate us," she exhorted. "Possess the spirit of independence. . . . Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted" (qtd. in Richardson 53). Mattie has this particular ability of independence, she is not also afraid of the probability of disapproval, loss or failure. She has experienced all of them but she is not going to give up and abandon her rights to oppression. “Moreover, once Mattie arrives on Brewster Place she finds a community of women who look to her for comfort and love” (Chapleau 10). As Stewart wants her, she does not keep her hands folded and tries to lead The Women of Brewster Place in the right direction. Although Mattie has lost her only son, she decides to be a mother to other women who are searching for freedom from the bondage of sexism. She creates, for the first time, a collective web of knowledge among the Black women of Brewster Place to share her experiences of resistance with them. Mattie is the appropriate mouthpiece of Gloria Naylor to show the essential attributes of a Black woman who feels fondness and concern for other Black women as a mother or sister. It appears to be true that Mattie has taken some lessons from Maria Stewart’s lecture on Black mothers. “It is you that must create in the minds of your little girls and boys a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue, . . . and the cultivation of a pure heart” (Richardson 35). In or with relation to Mattie’s behaviour with her son, she has been successful in constructing a reasonable an unbiased relation with the women on Brewster Place. This success is due to the feelings shared by the Black women of Brewster Place like all other Afro-American women.

The theme of The Women of Brewster Place, like most of other writings by Black Afro-American writers, is the oppressive situation of their community and a confident desire for a hopeful future. Gloria Naylor by getting inspiration from other
writers especially the Afro-American poet Langston Hughes whom Clayton Robinson describes as "the literary explicator and interpreter of the social, cultural, spiritual and emotional experiences of Black America" (qtd. in Chapleau 11), implicitly illustrates the necessity of a new identity that provides protection and safety for the Black women of the Afro-American community. Arnold Rampersad, Langston Hughes' biographer describes the connection:

Another author whose work Naylor clearly uses in her novel is the African-American poet Langston Hughes. In fact, in the epigraph to *The Women of Brewster Place* Naylor reprints an excerpt of his poem "Harlem," from *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. The fact that Naylor uses this poem is important because it encodes aspects of her novel's theme. Furthermore, her choice of poet is important since much of Langston Hughes' work centers on the dreams of Black America. (qtd. in Chapleau 11)

In fact, it seems that Gloria Naylor by writing this novel tries to answer Langston Hughes’ question: “What happens to a dream deferred?” which is the main question of the poem Harlem. Although there is no response to the questions in “Harlem”, the questions express the intentions and opinions of the poet without any ambiguity. Without explaining the poem in greater detail, the poem itself speaks louder than any words: “What happens to a dream deferred? /Does it dry up /like a raisin in the sun? /Or fester like a sore /And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? /Or crust and sugar over - like a syrupy sweet? /Maybe it just sags /like a heavy load. Or does it explode?” (Hughes). Marie-Josee Chapleau explains how *The Women of Brewster Place* is inspired by Hughes’ Poem:

"Harlem," like the novel, is about the possible consequences of dreams
deferred; it presents seven questions or situations which parallel the circumstances of the seven women of Brewster Place and their respective stories. The poem does not provide answers, but the way in which the poet asks the questions suggests that the answers are all in the affirmative: Dreams dry up like raisins in the sun, fester and run like sores, stink like rotten meat, crust and sugar over like syrupy sweets, sag like a heavy load and finally explode” (Chapleau 12).

Reading Harlem carefully gives a clue to the destination of the seven women of the Brewster Place. In Harlem, Hughes explains how the put back dreams will dry up and sometimes will explode. The problem of the women on Brewster Place is what Hughes makes it the theme of his poem. The women of Brewster Place have dreams that seems to be unachievable in the racist society of the US. They know that they have to face a lot of problems to attain their dreams however, they are not going to surrender to such problems. Having dreams is a common feature of the women of Brewster Place without any exception. It can be said that the differed dreams have been the cause of their settlement on Brewster Place. These Black women have left their homes in the hope of achieving the dreams that their parents have been ignorant about them. The women of Brewster Place differ in the kind of the dreams they have developed. Most of them have personal dreams except Mattie Michael who dreams of a female Black community that is free from the racist and sexist oppression. Although they have been successful in establishing a Black community with common and shared goals, they have not gained a significant achievement in fulfilling their deferred dreams:

*The Women of Brewster Place,* …, describes the myriad problems for Afro-Americans (particularly women) who refuse to abandon
unachievable dreams. ... These dreams are evident in textual information from Etta Mae Johnson's desperate need for social respectability that ‘stuffed up her senses’ to the point that she totally misreads the intentions of a visiting minister and Kiswana Browne's mother's characterization of her daughter as one who ‘constantly live[s] in a fantasy world—always going to extremes—turning butterflies into eagles,’ to Mattie Michael's dream of female community that concludes the novel. (Awkward 49-50)

As Awkward illustrate in the above mentioned words, the desire of the seven women of Brewster Place for achieving their dreams is completely evident in their character and personality. As it was mentioned before they may vary in the extent of their dreams however, all their dreams aim at achieving freedom from the bondage of racism and sexism and toward creating a self-actualised character.

The two other major characters who help the story come to its climax are Loraine and Theresa. Their struggle to be part of the Brewster Place community ends into a complete devastation when others know the sexual relation between them. Unlike Kiswana Browne, who came to Brewster Place by her own decision, other Black women settled on Brewster Place with discomfort, because they could not find any other place to begin a stable and conventional life.

‘They, they, they!’ Theresa exploded. ‘You know, I'm not starting up with this again, Lorraine. Who in the hell are they? And where in the hell are we? Living in some dump of a building in this God-forsaken part of town around a bunch of ignorant niggers with the cotton still under their fingernails because of you and your theys. They knew something in Linden Hills, so I gave up an apartment for you that I'd
been in for the last four years. And then they knew in Park Heights, and you made me so miserable there we had to leave. Now these mysterious theys are on Brewster Place. Well, look out that window, kid. There's a big wall down that block, and this is the end of the line for me. I'm not moving anymore, so if that's what you're working yourself up to - save it!’ (134-135).

The way Theresa is accosting Lorraine, to some extent reveals the personal behaviour and the point of view of the two, toward their Black community and their identity too. Theresa does not give a careful attention to the attitudes and the views of other people about them. She does not like to mix with people and keeps her distance from the community. On the other hand, Lorraine is very conservative and cares more than usual for the opinions and views of others. Except for their personal natures that affect their behaviours, there are some other factors that influence their views on their Black community and their ethnicity. In most of the societies, in which an ethnic community is considered as a minority, the wrong doings of any member of the community in minor, affects the whole community. The Afro-American community of the US, which is suffering from the multi-layers of oppression, does not allow any new threat to grow inside the community. “Women’s sexual agency or erotic autonomy has been threatening to a series of social institutions. In particular, the prostitute and the lesbian have historically functioned as the major symbols of threat” (Collins 168). By considering lesbianism as a major symbol of threat to the Afro-American community, the strange behaviour of neighbours, families, and even the Black men of the Afro-American community toward Lorraine and Theresa will be more understandable. “Ongoing discrimination because of color and sex aggravates the inhabitants’ anger and insecurity. They feel the need to lash out and seek revenge
for their suffering, to find scapegoats; the two are the designated targets” (Chapleau 37). Lorraine’s rape is also justifiable according to this principle of the Afro-American community. Lorraine’s reaction to her rape can clarify the problems of Black women in the US. Lorraine kills Ben the old janitor of Brewster Place in response to being raped by five young Black men. This retaliation shows that Lorraine and all other Black women consider the male-oriented society as the cause of their problems. Ben who has sold her daughter to prostitution, should pay for his irresponsibility toward her daughter and the whole female Black community in general.

Homophobia keeps Lorraine and Theresa within fixed limits more than racism does. The irrational dislike and hostility of homosexuality Patricia Collins notes that "for Black lesbians homophobia represents a form of oppression that affects their lives with the same intensity as does race, class and gender oppression” (qtd.in Chapleau, 34). Showing hatred for the lesbinanism, originates in a psychological fear that exists in the collective unconsciousness of Afro-American community. Lesbianism is a sickness that everybody, including their families, should avoid. “Theresa and Lorraine are confronted with rejection and oppression from their families, their work colleagues, and their community. They are challenged by such beliefs as homosexuality being a sickness, ‘just as is the rape of a baby’ (Chapleau 34). The oppression imposed on Lorraine and Theresa by Afro-American community homophobic behaviour is so great that it has stopped them from joining to the collective Black identity. They are not considered as members of Black community and it gives them a feeling of rootlessness and isolation. “During an argument with her lover Theresa, Lorraine, who believes that her homosexuality does not represent a sense of difference significant enough to permanently isolate her from the larger Afro-American community, speaks of herself as someone ‘who just wants to be a human
being’ (Awkward 58). Although both Lorraine and Theresa have voluntarily chosen Brewster Place to settle, and their lesbian relation is a mutual affair, the kind of resistance they show against the homophobic oppression explains their tendencies toward Afro-American identity and their ethnicity. Theresa has decided to put an end to her connection with her community for not being accepted as a lesbian by the community. In Christian's view, "Theresa insists that being a lesbian means that you are different by nature, and that you are outside society, since it punishes you so intensely, while Lorraine detests the word lesbian, insisting that she is not different from other people" (qtd. in Chapleau 37). On the other hand, Lorraine believes that their lesbianism, that was a reaction to the dominance of the patriarchy and a way to relive themselves from the sexual exploitation by men, has lost its function. Lorraine notices that the oppression layed down on them by homophobia is larger than the oppression exerted by the patriarchal forces and racial discriminations. The price that Lorraine pays for homophobic oppression is her rape by a gang of Black men. Before her rape, Lorraine decides to mix with the men of the community to create an environment for joining the Black community. “The character that comes closet geniality is Ben, the handy man of Brewster Place, who is consoling to Lorraine, one of the lesbian lovers, marginalized by the men and women of the area” (Lewis 49). Lorraine is not successful in approaching her Afro-American community. The collective Black identity does not have a definition for a lesbian. This exclusion finally results in the killing of Ben. Awkward believes that Naylor’s intention of Ben’s murder by Lorraine is to show the extent of patriarchal oppression in the Afro-America community and Naylor’s concern for Afro-American women:

Put simply, Naylor "kills" Ben because, despite his sensitivity to Lorraine's and his own daughter's circumstances, the urge for violence that is his response to his wife's castigations is of a kind with the
reaction of the gang members to their inadequacies. When the text says of Ben's drunken movements near the wall after Lorraine is raped, ‘Side to side. Side to side. Almost in perfect unison with the sawing pain that kept moving inside of her,’ it insists that the reader view Ben as part of a continuum of male violence against women of which the actions of the gang are the reprehensible extreme (Awkward 60).

Lorraine becomes a scapegoat on Brewster Place and her revenge on Ben makes a remarkably brave woman out of a conservative timid Black girl. Lorraine receives admiration for her daring, courageous behaviour and it paves the way for her connection to the Black collective community of Brewster Place. The Block party is the celebration of this unity."The Block Party suggests that a new order results from the utter chaos surrounding the brutal rape of Lorraine. It is an order based on the female protagonists' comprehension of their interconnectedness” (Awkward 61).

Although The Women of Brewster Place after the rape of Lorraine accept them in their community, the homophobia still remains as a barrier that obstructs the complete inclusion of the lesbian couple. Lavon Montgomery believes that the common point between the couple and the community is more than their disagreements:

“The Block Party,” the culminating narrative and most problematic of the seven stories that comprise Naylor’s debut work of fiction, is indeed what Jill Matus refers to as “everyone’s story.” each woman therefore dreams of Lorraine so as to convey the oneness between Brewster’s colored daughters that belies the notions of sexual difference. Even though residents attempt to exclude the lesbian couple from the nurturing bond of friendship uniting the women as one collective body, Theresa and Lorraine’s frustrating efforts at inclusion
suggest that the lesbian couple has more in common with Brewster’s colored daughters than the community realizes (13).

Gloria Naylor presentation of the two, without mentioning their family names shows the catastrophic situation of a lesbian couple in a Black community. It is a paradox that a community which is suffering from segregation, imposes some restrictions on its people that results in a more disastrous segregation. As Chapleau says this exclusion shows that “Theresa and Lorraine's struggle is not one of discovering who they are as Black women, but rather who they are as Black lesbians” (34). Lesbianism, as a new category with a new definition for the mutual relation of couples, has always been under attack both from the White hegemony, and the Afro-American community. One of the reasons behind such a negative outlook toward lesbianism is that lesbianism with its new definition for women’s mutual relationship, calls the dominance of the wide spread patriarchy into question. Another reason for showing a negative view toward lesbianism in the US, originates in the White imperialist philosophy to conserve its dominance. Vance explains how “Visible Black lesbians challenge the mythical norm that the best people are White, male, rich, and heterosexual. In doing so lesbians generate anxiety, discomfort, and a challenge to the dominant group's control of power and sexuality on the interpersonal level” (qtd. in Collins 168). The above-mentioned reasons, justify the hostility of the Western hegemony toward lesbianism however, the Black community does not have any reason to fear it. Afro-American community has more benefits in inclusion of lesbians than their exclusion. Even the neutral state of lesbianism cannot be a threat to the group Black identity. The best example of the harmless effect of lesbianism on Black identity can be seen in The Women of Brewster Place. Lorraine and Theresa do not interfere in the women of Brewster’s concerns, however, the women of Brewster have
involved themselves even in the most private aspects of the couple’s affairs. Marrie-
Josee Chapleau suggests women’s jealousy as a reason for the hatred of the couple:

It could also be suggested that the women are jealous of the relationship, because it is doubtful whether any of them is in any kind of similar relationship with a man. Cora Lee’s men come and go in the dark, Lucielia’s husband beats her for burning a pot of rice, and those are only the ones Naylor tells us about. It is also a sociological fact that Black men are more often absent from the Black woman's life (40).

The women’s jealousy may seem as a peripheral and not major cause of the rejection of the two. It seems Chapleau is a little exaggerating on the matter. There may be some other reasons for such repellent behaviours. One of the reasons that these conservative Black women cannot accept Lorraine and Theresa to be included into their community may be the fear of being accused of the same tendencies. In a community that homosexuals and prostitutes are considered as traitors of the Black race, the fear of being accused of as a lesbian seems to be natural. Another reason for rejecting the idea of lesbianism by Black women may be the fear of developing the same tendencies inside them and being rejected by the community as Lorraine and Theresa were rejected. There are some wise people like Mattie in the community that have advocated their life for the betterment of the women. Accusing such a wise woman as Mattie, who cares for any new comer to Brewster Place and accepts any Black desperate woman as a member of her family, seems to be illogical. Lack of knowledge about their own feelings and desires may seem truer. The following undisguised conversation between Mattie and Etta on the subject of lesbianism reveals the truth:
'They love each other like you'd love a man or a man would love you - I guess.' ‘But I’ve loved some women deeper than I ever loved any man,’ Mattie was pondering. ‘And there been some women who loved me more and did more for me than any man ever did.’ ‘Yeah.’ Etta thought for a moment. ‘I can second that, but it's still different, Mattie. I can't exactly put my finger on it, but ...’ ‘Maybe it’s not so different,’ Mattie said, almost to herself. ‘Maybe that's why some women get so riled up about it, 'cause they know deep down it's not so different after all.’ She looked at Etta. ‘It kinda gives you a funny feeling when you think about it that way, though.’ ‘Yeah, it does,’ Etta said, unable to meet Mattie's eyes (141).

Mattie is thinking aloud in front of Etta. She accepts that the love between lesbians may be the same as heterosexuals and more importantly, this kind of love may give a funny feeling. Etta’s reaction to Mattie’s idea on love between lesbians is an interesting one. Etta is “unable to meet Mattie’s eyes” when Mattie suggests the “funny feeling” of lesbian love. Etta may have considered Mattie’s comment as a kind of proposal for beginning a homosexual relationship. The setting of *The Women of Brewster Place* as Philip Page In *Reclaiming the Community in Contemporary African-American Fiction*, explains is well like. “The well-like imagery of Brewster Place is also extended to each character. For example, Theresa and Lorraine, the lesbian couple, are placed into a metaphorical well by the community because of their sexual orientation, and, they are unable to climb out of it” (qtd. in Chapleau 14). The women of Brewster Place are readier than the other members of their community in accepting the homosexuality in general and lesbianism in particular as a norm among the members of Afro-American community. This acceptance is due to their sympathy they feel toward the lesbian couples. The women on Brewster Place have experienced
two major types of oppression and they consider homophobia as a kind of oppression too. Mattie Michael as the leader of the group explains how lesbianism can be considered as an interesting feeling.

Etta Mae Johnson’s story is different from all other women’s who have given themselves up to Brewster Place. She has not devoted herself to Brewster Place, for she has always been looking for something better. Although her individual life turns around searching the right man to fulfil her dreams, she has never been able to succeed in achieving her goal. Etta was completely ruined in a sexual abuse by a reverend preacher when she had been searching for a perfect soul mate. Unlike Lorraine and Theresa, who have serious homosexual tendencies, Etta has heterosexual desires that result in her sexual abuse by men. Comparing Etta’s predicament with men and the two, justifies the homosexual tendencies of Lorraine and Theresa because as it was discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the reasons for the willingness of Black women to lesbianism was their desire for having an independent identity that protects them from the patriarchal physical and psychological cruel treatment.

Etta, as other female characters in Brewster Place, has made a strong connection with Mattie, the spiritual leader of Brewster Place. Although Mattie, as a collective link, controls the female atmosphere of Brewster Place however, her mutual relation with different individuals varies extensively. The mutual relationship of Etta and Mattie is a special one. They share some knowledge about Brewster Place that others lack it. Castellucci Cox gives an example of this mutual relationship: “Though Mattie and Etta welcome Ciel lovingly, they deliberately conceal Lorraine's story from her, despite Ciel's extrasensory connection to the community tragedy and her own share in the nightmarish dreaming” (164). Mattie in not only a close friend to Etta, but also a kind mother that is ready to welcome her at home any time. “There’s
Etta Mae Johnson, survivor and good-time woman, who comes home to Mattie when her dream of redemption by marrying a ‘respectable’ preacher is sordidly ended” (Gottlieb 4). The mutual relations in Brewster Place most of the times function as a healing processes. The trust which is created among the individuals especially between Mattie and other characters functions as a tranquilizer for the chaotic and restless mentality of the Black women who are suffering the double oppression of race and gender.

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor constructs a bridge of understanding and trust-even when conflicts arise between characters. One of the several effective scenes occurs when Etta Mae Johnson returns home after her date with the Reverend Moreland Woods; then, Mattie Michael stays awake that night while playing old records in order to console Etta after her evening of emptiness (Kendrick 390).

By any large, the tendency to remain connected to the larger community has always been a permanent desire among Afro-American women. This especial relationship helps them to become more powerful in confrontation with the diverse pervasive oppression of the racist society of the US. “Whether this relationship will persist depends, ironically, on Black women intellectuals' ability to analyze their own social locations” (Collins 33). Etta knows that her despair and loneliness can only be removed if she stays in connection with the community and especially Mattie as the griot of the group. “Unlike the earlier rebels who disappear from the community’s history, Etta Mae's life will be difficult, but it will not be solitary because she and Mattie will together keep Brewster Place alive” (Fiddyment Levy 269).

A very interesting but poignant fact about the oppressive situation of Black women in the US is perceived in Etta’s last interaction with a male figure. Etta
considers church as a safe and spiritual place where abuse and sexual exploitation of women will never happen. By having such a high opinion about church, she decides to choose her favourite man from among the preachers and begin a respectable life. However, “after Preacher Woods' one-night stand shatters her brief illusion that she might achieve her dream of quick respectability as a preacher's wife in the front pew, she returns again to Mattie as to a center” (Andrews 289). The only place that Etta and other Black women can trust is the collective community that they have established in Brewster Place. Brewster Place becomes the collective unconsciousness of these Black women to share their experiences for the betterment of their lives. Gerald D. Kendrick explains the supportive relationship among the female characters in Brewster Place: “The greatest achievement of the novel centers on Naylor's ability to emphasize the need for supportive relationships among her characters. Not one woman lives alone; no one loves too long in vain; no one mourns alone. These attributes are the most important creations of Gloria Naylor; they help to bring her characters alive” (Kendrick 390).

Kiswana Browne unlike the other settlers of Brewster Place does not reside there out of compelling circumstances. The ability to choose between her middle-class parents’ home and settling in her desired place ends her to Brewster Place. Kiswana is a political activist and aims at arranging a community in Brewster Place. Kiswana can be a foil to Mattie. Although both of them share one final goal and that is the progress and development of Black woman in the racist and patriarchal society, their manners and approaches are different from each other. Not only Mattie and Kiswana are different in their characteristics, but other characters also differ from each other in many ways. Some critics believe that Gloria Naylor “wanted to present multiple images of Black women. Moreover, she wanted her novel to depict the diversity of the culture of the race, since "one character couldn't be the Black woman in America. So
[she] had seven different women” (Chapleau 14). Of course Kiswana should be an exception because she is there in Brewster Place only to help these Black women from their unfortunate conditions. Kiswana’s emphasis is on healing them emotionally to make them believe, their power of will for creating changes in their lives. “They are able with Kiswana’s help, to bond together and to aid each other’s quest for individual power, power enough to leave both emotionally and physically the dead-end of Brewster Place” (Gillespie 172).

Kiswana is a self-made girl who knows what’s her aim in life opposite to moste of the Black women on Brewster Place. The self-actualized Kiswana, not only resists the oppression, but also persuades other women to develop a sense of resistance towards the imposed oppression. Kiswana and Lorraine are the two opposite characters who are on extremes. Kiswana has settled in Brewster Place to help her people however, Lorraine is there for not being accepted by other people. Lorraine’s weak character and Kiswana’s self-actualised character are revealed when a gang of young boys insult Lorraine. “‘Yeah, Butch, why don't ya join the WAGS and really have a field day.’ Lorraine's arms tightened around her packages, and she tried to push past Kiswana and go into the building (162). Lorraine is submissive in this scene, however, Kiswana’s reaction is a daring one. “‘No, wait.’ Kiswana blocked her path. ‘Don't let them talk to you like that, They're nothing but a bunch of punks.’ She called out to the leader, ‘C. C., why don't you just take your little dusty behind and get out of here. No one was talking to you’”(162). Although Kiswana is angry and also a little terrified of the situation, she is not going to give up. Kiswana has always followed two important principles in her life and provokes others to follow them too. The first principle she follows, is her respect for her ethnicity and hatred for racial discrimination. The second principle is her resistance to Black patriarchy. The
first principle became pragmatic by moving to Brewster Place. Her resistance to patriarchy is pictured in the way she forces Black men to respect her:

All he could see mirrored was respect for the girl who had beat him at the dozens. Lorraine smiled at the absolutely lost look on his face. He curled his lips back into a snarl and tried to regain lost ground by attacking what instinct told him was the weaker of the two. ‘Ya laughing at me, huh, freak? I oughta come over there and stick my fist in your cunt-eatin’ mouth!’ ‘You'll have to come through me first, so just try it.’ Kiswana put her books on the stoop. ‘Aw, Man, come on. Don't waste your time.’ His friends pulled at his arm. ‘She ain't nothing but a woman.’ (162).

Another woman on Brewster Place who takes advantage of Kiswana is the welfare mother, Cora Lee. Cora has followed a fix line from her childhood to her present situation. She has been fond of dolls in her childhood and at her present situation in Brewster Place she has raised seven children from seven different fathers. It seems that she wants men just for giving her a baby child to act her childhood dolls. “Naylor has Kiswana befriend Cora Lee to show her that she can discover another side of life if she would expose herself and her house full of illegitimate children to another view of life” (Holt 187).

Cora has been resistant to changes all these years. “She is almost lifted out of the inertia of her life by the power of art when Kiswana takes her to see a Black production of Shakespeare in the park” (Gottlieb 4). Kiswana’s outlook toward Cora is that of a doctor to a patient. She knows that Cora is sick mentally due to her childhood and familial background. Kiswana believes that Cora’s integration with the Black community and taking an active role for the development of both her family
and her community will be a supposed cure-all for her problems. “When Black middle-class activist Kiswana Browne invites Cora Lee to an all-Black production of *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, she proffers tradition in its literary essence as a panacea for Cora Lee's inadequate mothering” (Fraser 97).

The theme of mothering is present throughout the novel. In the absence of a strong and trustworthy connection with the male members of their community, the Black women of Brewster Place have substituted this shortage with sisterhood and motherhood connections. The domino of motherhood does not end in Black communities, due to the surrounding influences of understanding which is created by this kind of connection. Although the role of biological mothers is very significant in *The Women of Brewster Place*, the role of the adopted mother as a spiritual leader in their lives becomes more significant than expected. The best examples of such role mothers are Mattie and Kiswana, who have devoted their lives for the development of Black women, as their own children since they have settled in Brewster Place.

Barbara Christian explains the mother-daughter relationship on Brewster Place:

Kiswana's meeting with her mother is an amplification of a major chord sounded throughout this novel, for Brewster Place women mother one another. Perhaps these women are sometimes labeled "matriarchs" because together they are able to endure so much. There is no question that their stories in this novel are interconnected because of the caring bond they assume for one another, a bond that does not, however, preclude disagreements, falling-outs, even ineffectiveness (113).

Kiswana’s mother has come to Brewster Place to satisfy her to come back to Linden Hills. Kiswana’s mother is a materialist middle-class woman that cannot
accept her daughter has settled in a run-down area. When Kiswana explains that she wants to find her own identity by living among her people who are Brewster Place settlers and not well-to-do people on Linden Hills, her mother accuses her “of trying to escape from her real self. She tells Kiswana that her skin is too close to White and her hair is too fine for her to ever fit in on this street” (Holt 186). Kiswana does not agree with her mother in this respect. She believes that her mother has been brought up in a bourgeois system and this upbringing does not allow her to understand Kiswana. “She makes every attempt to establish herself as one of the members of the neighbourhood by establishing the Brewster Place Black Association to force the establishment to clean up the buildings and the street. Kiswana is determined to leave her mark by helping her people” (Holt 186). By including a character like Kiswana in the sequence of the events happening in the story, Naylor shows her skill in bringing diversities of Afro-American community together. Most of the characters in the novel are poor Black women that have left their homes to find a better life or at least something that lessens the sufferings of the racist and sexist oppression, except Kiswana who has settled on Brewster Place for improving the conditions of Afro-American women for attaining a better life free of such oppression.

Ciel, the granddaughter of Eva, lives on Brewster Place with Eugene and their daughter Serena. Ciel is suffering from the irresponsible and not caring husband like the other Black women of Brewster Place, however, her maintained assertion on making her husband better, makes her situation different from the other women of Brewster Place. Their mutual life is replete with quarrels over finding a job for Eugene to finance her family. During their last quarrel over the irresponsibility of Eugene, their daughter Serena ceases to live with an electric shock. Naylor describes her as follows:
People had mistaken it for shock when she refused to cry. They thought it some special sort of grief when she stopped eating and even drinking water unless forced to; her hair went uncombed and her body unbathed. But Ciel was not grieving for Serena. She was simply tired of hurting. And she was forced to slowly give up the life that God had refused to take from her” (101).

Of course, the role of Mattie should not be underestimated in provoking Ciel to resist and stand against the dominance of Eugene. Eugene also knows that Ciel is under the influence of Mattie who tries to empower Black women of Brewster Place. Eugene has to accept this reality that Ciel is not the same submissive woman who allowed Eugene to take advantage of her. “He coerces his lover's submission to his authority, a submission which results directly in her abortion of the fetus of a baby she desperately wants, and indirectly in the death of their two-year-old daughter” (Awkward 51). Mattie, who has lost her son earlier and has suffered patriarchy, will stand beside Ciel to sympathize with her loss and to save her from exploitation.

Mattie knows how cruel the Black patriarchy is. The patriarchal oppression may be exerted by a biased father, an opportunist lover or an irresponsible husband. “What Mattie and Ciel come to share in Mattie's act of primal mothering is their isolation, their burden of responsibility as mothers, and the loss of their children” (Andrews 288). These common losses which is the characteristics of most of women of Brewster Place function as fine twisted cords that link these Black women through a collective web. This magical web becomes a multi-functional system that enables Black women to share their experiences, feelings, affections and sympathies. The collective web of knowledge, by Mattie’s leadership, is at work to recover Ciel from her disastrous situation. “As a result of the mystic, magical powers of Mattie's love,
Ciel eventually recovers. The spirit with which these women cope appears to be more powerful than the circumstances they must confront” (Holt 180). Mattie does whatever a mother should do for her child. This affectionate behaviour which has been a deficiency in Ciel’s life brings her back to life. She is born again from a new mother. Her biological mother brought her to a world full of oppression and left her alone however, this new mother is bringing her back to the new world of self-definition:

Mattie cupped her hands under the faucet and motioned for Ciel to drink and clean her mouth. When the water left Ciel's mouth, it tasted as if she had been rinsing with a mild acid. Mattie drew a tub of hot water and undressed Ciel. She let the nightgown fall off the narrow shoulders, over the pitifully thin breasts and jutting hipbones. She slowly helped her into the water, and it was like a dried brown autumn leaf hitting the surface of a puddle. And slowly she bathed her. She took the soap, and, using only her hands, she washed Ciel's hair and the back of her neck. She raised her arms and cleaned the armpits, soaping well the downy brown hair there. She let the soap slip between the girl's breasts, and she washed each one separately, cupping it in her hands. She took each leg and even cleaned under the toenails. Making Ciel rise and kneel in the tub, she cleaned the crack in her behind, soaped her pubic hair, and gently washed the creases in her vagina slowly, reverently, as if handling a newborn (104).

The motherliness that Mattie expresses toward Ciel shows the importance of powerful bonds that Black women of Brewster Place have created among them. Although Mattie is not Ciel’s biological mother, she minds Ciel as her own child. This
kind of relationship does not exist merely between Mattie and Ciel. All Black women of Brewster Place have come to this understanding that helping other Black women out of misery means a new step toward freedom from the bondage of pervasive oppression. The Black women of Brewster Place have created an invisible strong linkage that makes them the members of one family. If it had not been for this big family, Ciel would have not been able to recover from the abundant sorrows surrounding her.

Cora Lee had a strong liking for dolls in her childhood however, she was not successful in convincing her parents into buying a doll for her, even as a Christmas gift. Having failed to fulfil this childhood wish for dolls, at the age of thirteen, she makes an attempt to achieve one for herself. She makes the doll by her own hands to have a real newborn baby to entertain her with. Cora Lee does not stop bearing new dolls as she does on Brewster Place in her adolescence. Her seven children are as her dolls in her childhood. She destroyed all her dolls in an outrage in her childhood however this does not happen on Brewster Place due to the maturity she gets in the Black community of Brewster Place.

She spent all of her time with her dolls—and they had to be baby dolls. She told this with a silent rebellion the year they had decided she was now old enough for a teenaged Barbie doll; they had even sacrificed for an expensive set of foreign figurines with porcelain faces and real silk and lace mantillas, saris, and kimonos. The following week they found the dolls under her bed with the heads smashed in and the arms twisted out of the sockets” (107-108).

There seems to be two reasons for destroying her dolls at that age as a teenager. The first reason can be her willingness as a mother who desires for maturity
in her baby children. Having been disappointed to see this development, she destroys her dolls. The second reason that Michael Awkward mentions is that: “Cora is interested in baby dolls as cuddly, helpless figures which she can think of as possessing an unvarying need for her attention and whose static natures are a perfect complement to her own inability to mature” (46). Both of the reasons can be relevant to the particular situation of Cora and they do not contradict each other. Cora, in the same way, reluctantly behaves her seven children as she behaved her dolls. She makes children as many in number as her dolls and she does not give careful attention or showing any concern to her children as she did to her dolls till she encounters Kiswana. She persuades Cora to attend her children more patiently and with more responsibility and become a member of the association of Black women in Brewster Place. Kiswana asks Cora to participate with her seven children in a Black production of “A Mid-summer Night’s Dream”. Cora’s attendance to the theatre brings significant development in her individual and social life. In her individual life she finds a confident desire for changed and new potentials. She feels more responsibility for her children and does not consider them as her own childhood dolls.

School would be over in a few weeks, but all this truant nonsense had to stop. She would get up and walk them there personally if she had to - and summer school. How long had the teachers been saying that they needed summer school? And she would check homework every night. And P.T.A. Sonya wouldn't be little forever - she'd have no more excuses for missing those meetings in the evening. Junior high; high school; college - none of them stayed little forever. And then on to good jobs in insurance companies and the post office, even doctors or lawyers. Yes, that's what would happen to her babies. (126)
These are the responsibilities she marks for herself to do for her children that had never occurred to her before. The changes that Cora undertakes connect her to her Black community too. She attends the tenants’ association regularly and understands that the sufferings and oppression of the whole community are interrelated. Cora learns that the powerless Black women can be strong if they establish a community. The strength of the Brewster Place community is transmitted to every individual including Cora and helps her to become matured. Cora leaves her childhood dreams of having dolls and develops some new dreams for freedom.

*Mama Day*

Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* creates an environment for Afro-American women to experience their Black culture ethnicity. Naylor illustrates the cultural differences of the Black community and the White dominant society by separating Willow Springs from the mainland White settlers. Although the separated island has been very close to the mainland, the modernization effect has been very little. The two major characters of the novel, George settling in New York, and Ophelia in Willow Spring, exhibit the cultural differences of the two parts of the wooden bridge which connects the island to the mainland. Larry Andrews explains the contrast: “In *Mama Day* the rural South, alternating with New York scenes between George and Ophelia, offers a setting for a healing community with roots in female folk tradition and nature” (287). Naylor’s aim in creating such a fictional island is to bridge Afro-American community to her past and her cultural heritage like most of her novels however, the feminine atmosphere that helps the achievement of this goal is more significant than the others. This feminine atmosphere which Larry Andrews calls it “female folk tradition” helps the Afro-American community to have a recovery under the pressures of Western modernization and hegemony. “Mama Day displays a
similar preoccupation, with the crucial difference lying in Naylor's conviction that traditional ways and the communities that maintain them have the resilience to survive and adapt to temporal and social changes” (Lamothe).

Gloria Naylor brings into existence the fictional island as a memory for the Afro-American community to rescue the African roots of female tradition in confronting the oppression. Although this dream island as most of Afro-American communities, suffers from the dominant patriarchy, the resistance that the female community of Willow Springs shows toward the authority and control of the Western imperialism compensates for the shortage and allows a space for the female Black consciousness to define itself.

The female Black community of Willow Springs shows its resistance to the powerful waves of Western culture whose aim is to efface the African traditions, by managing to understand their culture and practicing it. Kubitschek in an essay called, “Toward a New Order: Shakespeare, Morrison, and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day” explains the symbolic significance of African traditions in preserving their Black collective identity.

Mama Day testifies to two fundamental characteristics of African American culture: the past's persistence in the present, the present's participation in myth and archetype. For example, the devastating hurricane in Mama Day travels a naturalistically accurate route from Africa west to Willow Springs over the Sea Islands to the mainland US-that is, the route of the Middle Passage. The storms are the heritage of slavery, periodically ravishing the land; the novel's perspective recognizes no division between their literal physical being and their symbolic meaning (76).
The above-mentioned words show, how the cultural influences from the Western hegemony to Afro-American community can be reversed. This reverse backward movement has only been possible by Black women’s firm hold to the African traditions. The best example of such reverse backward movements that helped to the independence of the island and was an important new development in the life of the islanders is “when Bascomb Wade deeded all his property to his slaves, thanks to the persuasive efforts of the Sapphira Wade, the slave who captured his heart. In lieu of Christmas, the islanders hold an annual “candle walk” to honor the slave who secured her freedom and theirs” (Madison 73). Unlike the other islands connected to the mainland of the US, or around the mainland, there has been no slavery since 1823, and this is due to the efforts of an individual Black female slave who privileges the interests of her community over her own interests. “The island is mythic in that it is a place of almost complete political, cultural, and economic autonomy, erecting a successful resistance to Anglo-American cultural supremacy and economic imperialism” (Lamothe). The role of the Black women in bringing into existence such autonomy is very significant. The role of Mama Day, compared to others, is more important. She is pictured as a very powerful woman skilled in magic, herbal healing, and midwifing. This omnipotent old woman acts Mattie, in *The Women of Brewster Place*. She helps everybody and struggles to define a new collective Black identity for the Black female islanders. This sense of duty and obligation toward other Black women confirms her role as a griot among the Black women of the community. Some men even have accepted her as a spiritual leader and healer both for soul and for body. Kathleen Puhr has noted, “in *Mama Day* as well as her other novels, Naylor follows both Morrison and Maya Angelou in depicting women with the power to heal both body and soul” (qtd. in Madison 78). The role that Naylor gives to Mama Day to act as a bonding substance among the Black women is not in contrast with her
individuality. In fact, most of Black women writers emphasize clearly the different and separate functions of individual and group identity. “Morrison and Naylor both focus on the worth of communal relationship and cast a critical eye on the individual who serves his or her relationship to the community. But, neither of them abandons the significance of individual identity” (Madison 78). Individual and group identity is of great importance among Afro-Americans. Due to the geographical displacement, Black communities have always suffered the lack of a true, real identity. Individual identity, in the oppressed Afro-American community of the US, loses its significance, if it is not connected to the collective Black identity. Carol E. Henderson elaborates on the flickeringly unsettled Afro-American identity:

“The temporal devastation for African Americans was twofold,” writes Page. “First, slaves were denied their African past, and then ex-slaves had to repress their slave pasts to become psychically whole. Because of these unresolved issues of place and time, African-American identities have historically been unsettled, constantly placed, replaced, and displaced in figurative passages from one attempted identity to another” (1001).

It seems that the unsettled Afro-American identity is a little settled in Willow Springs. From the very beginning they have been independent from the mainland in spite of communicating and doing business with the mainland. They don’t practice Christianity as it is practiced on the mainland, and Blacks are the onlysettlers of the island. In willow Springs the individual identity of the islanders, in contrast to the mainland Black individuals, is not an alienated identity too. “In Willow Springs, women travel multiple routes in order to construct their roots, we find that they do more than merely embody or transmit static cultural norms” (Lamothe). In general,
Willow Springs seems to be a utopia among the other Black communities. Gloria Naylor has been successful in creating an ideal and perfect community for the Black community which is run according to African and not American cultural norms.

“hooks argues that it is possible to construct communities based on ‘relational’ love, that would enable Black people no longer … rooted in Black folk traditions to resist ‘the internalized racism or alienated individualism that would have us turn away from one another’” (qtd. in Lamothe).

Although Willow Springs is different from the ideal community that hooks defines for Blacks, and is founded on Black folk traditions, its resistance against the racist ideology and its integrated individualism especially among the women of Willow Springs is the desired outcome for bell hooks. *Mama Day* is the perfect example of such a utopian community. Mama Day like Sapphira Wade is a trickster. She is both resistant to the pervasive racism, which has been present in Black communities since the time of the slavery and devoted to the communal benefits too.

*Mama Day*’s communal sense makes her responsible for the problems of the women in Willow Springs and as a spiritual leader she has united them. Her Goddess-like behaviour, her magical power, and her bravery that allows her to go into the forest at night while most of men are afraid of doing it, has created a female atmosphere that protects the female islanders from the patriarchal oppressive forces.

The following example when Mama Day needs Brian Smithfield’s help to bring about recovery from illness for one of the women of community, illustrates this female atmosphere:

Sue Henry? Sue Henry, this is Miranda Day. I'm fine, thank you, and you? That's good, glad to hear it. Now, I got somebody here I'm nursing who ain't doing so good. And I want you to get on that little beeper you got, call Brian Smithfield, and tell him I need him out at the
Duvalls — he knows where it is, the south end of the island — and I need him tonight. Not tomorrow, tonight. You been knowing me a long time, ain't you, sugar? So if you don't do that, you know I ain't phoning back to find out why. You know I'm coming over the bridge tomorrow to stand in front of your face to ask you. Why, of course, there won't be no call for that. We'll see him here soon as he can make it. You take care now. And my best to your mama (77).

Gloria Naylor’s development of Mama Day’s character helps her to create such a female atmosphere. Mama Day is in her octogenarian however, she communicates with the younger women of the community easily. She has filled the generation gap with her mature characteristics and her sense of humour. “Mama Day (1988) - devotes considerable attention to the special bond that can exist between women characters, including women of different generations’” (Andrews 285).

**Daughters**

Paule Marshall’s fourth novel, *Daughters*, is very close in structure to *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Both of them illustrate the life of a young Black girl, who is in the search for her Black identity. Selina in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, and Ursa in *Daughters*, are the representatives of the new generation who are expressing their doubts about their parents’ conservative and materialistic life. Selina has to challenge her mother to find a way out of the difficult situation she is facing, and Ursa should challenge her father. “Like *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, this novel focuses on a young woman’s attempt to cope with the expectations and personal histories of her parents” (Taylor 220).

Ursa, the protagonist of the novel, lives both in New York and in Triunion. Ursa’s father is an immoral and dishonest politician in Triunion, who has won all the
elections on the island by making connections with the colonial powers in the US however, Ursa stops him to be re-elected by standing on his way. Ursa’s aim is to save his depraved father and bring their family life, back to those old days when his father had not entered politics. Triunion is a symbolic name for the three women who created an impressive female bond to resist the powerful corrupt patriarchy. These three women include Ursa, Primus Mackenzie’s daughter; Estelle, Mackenzie’s wife; and Astral, his mistress. Peter Erickson explains the alliance formed by the three women in Triunion:

The links among the three women have been implicit in the star imagery that joins their names - Astral, Estelle (stellar) and Ursa, after the constellation that contains the big dipper and permits one to find the polestar-and in the sequence that connects Ursa’s abortion, Estelle's miscarriage, and Astral's abortion. But the events at the end of the novel dramatize these links as the characters' conscious actions (Erickson 270).

Except the star imagery in their names that connect them to each other, their union in spite of different roles that they play in the life of PM Mackenzie becomes very significant. Astral has been Mackenzie’s mistress for thirty years and by the help of Mackenzie she works as a manager in a state company. Estelle has been a loyal wife to Mackenzie. She has not left him in spite of his mischievous plans and his secret love affair. Ursa, Mackenzie’s daughter, who lives in New York, has got revolutionary tendencies toward the corrupt colonial influences in Triunion. The subordinate Triunion under the rule of the corrupt PM Mackenzie is a burden for Ursa who has been interested in studying the colonial oppression in Afro-Ameican communities. Ursa chooses this subject for her thesis project however, her supervisor
rejects the idea. Ursa, “as the sole female, Congo Jane [who] represents a paradigmatic model of resistance” (Ferguson 179), wants to rebel against her father and bring autonomy to Triunion however, she does not know that “the desire to recover the subalter’s autonomy was repeatedly frustrated because subalternity, by definition, signified the impossibility of autonomy: subaltern rebellions only offered fleeting moments of defiance, ‘a night-time of love,’ not ‘a life-time of love’” (Prakash 1480).

The collective web of knowledge which is created among the three figures to resist the extremely depraved PM Mackenzie, helps them to ignore their contentions. The role of Ursa becomes very significant and helpful in shaping a collective consciousness among the women. It would have been impossible to make peace between PM Mackenzie’s wife and mistress, if it had not been because of Ursa’s active role. Erickson elaborates on Ursa’s reconciliation role:

The double female triumph in which the novel culminates. Estelle and Ursa secretly conspire to sabotage Primus' re-election and thus successfully undercut the male political corruption he has come to represent. Moreover, at Estelle's instruction, Ursa acts as an intermediary who in effect carries out reconciliation between her mother and her father's mistress, Astral Forde. Primus is thus undercut a second time because this female communication undoes the separation and rivalry between wife and mistress by which male control is normally assured (270).

Ursa, who had been in good terms with her father, is forced to take the side of her people. PM’s rivals in elections had revealed his corruptions. Having knowledge of his father’s wrong doings, persuades Ursa to play an active role in his father’s
defeat in elections. The patriarchal corruption and the colonial influences on the island result in women’s integration. Ursa’s role in enlightenment of her mother and her father’s mistress cannot be ignored. Before the elections, Estelle sends a telegram to Ursa to return to the island urgently to help her father for the coming elections. Ursa hesitates when she sees her mother’s ignorance on PM’s behaviour. Ursa does not “understand why Estelle has stayed on through all the shit the PM's laid on her. Why don't you leave him? Why didn't you years ago when you found out about Miss Forde?” (254). Estelle soon gets recovery from PM’s oppressive patriarchal dominance and joins Ursa for creating social changes on the island. “Soon after her arrival on the island, Estelle proficiently organizes the building of a roofed market shed that provides shelter for the hawker-women who walk miles every morning to sell produce at the market and sit all day in the sun” (Ferguson 182). The female-male relation in this novel is also a big problem like most of the novels written by Afro-American women writers. Black men, because of their roles in politics, have always been free to forget the unwritten consensus over the independency of their communities. The corrupt politicians, like PM Mackenzie, have always negotiated the freedom of their Black community with the colonial powers because of their personal benefits. On the other hand, Black women have always been a source of resistance to such alliances between the patriarchal and colonial forces. The best example of such a resistance is the statue of the female Congo Jane in Triunion who is a symbol of freedom for the people of the island. The outcome of this female-male breaking apart is the fall of men and the alliance of women. Peter Erickson gives details about the female-male split in *Daughters*:

> Although Primus and Estelle first enter politics in a partnership that appears to emulate the combined male-female leadership of Will
Cudjoe and Congo Jane, they gradually move in opposite political
directions. As Primus becomes more enmeshed, Estelle becomes more
disaffected, to the point that she ultimately engineers her husband's
electoral defeat. Second, their daughter Ursa duplicates this pattern in
her relationship with Lowell Carruthers. His painful status as a coopted
Black male, which is registered by his tedious, obsessive recounting of
office politics, contrasts sharply with Ursa's disengagement when she
quits her job as an advertising researcher. While her father is
displeased with Ursa's decision and cuts off communication, her
mother affirms it, thus establishing a female alignment (269).

The female alignment becomes stronger due to the patriarchal oppression.
Mackenzie’s mistress also joins this alliance against the corrupt patriarchy symbolized
by PM. The collective Black female consciousness is at work to defeat the corrupt
patriarchal power structure that has been engulfed by the colonial power in the US.
This female collective web is very dynamic in its progress toward creating a
collective Black identity, because of the pressures they receive both from the male-
dominant society and the racist colonial powers, in which their common financial
goals have united them. The next Black woman that joins the female Black collective
community is Mae Ryland, the wife of Sandy Lawson, the first Black mayor of
Midland City. She leaves her husband and joins the female alliance when she comes
to this understanding that her husband like other corrupt politicians has entered the
immoral and dishonest colonial power structure. Mae who had supported Sandy for
gaining such a high position in government, releases herself from the bondage that
patriarchy has provided her. Once again, Peter Erickson explains the process which
ended to Mae Ryland’s embracement of the female group identity:
With Mae's support, Sandy becomes the first Black mayor of Midland City. But like Primus Mackenzie and Lowell Carruthers, Sandy Lawson is caught up in a power structure that overwhelms him. In a move that echoes the separations enacted by Estelle and Ursa, Mae Ryland soon renounces the alliance and returns to the outsider role of community organizer. It is from this location that she encourages Ursa to undertake "some real work" (269).

Studying the name symbolisation in the novel also can be helpful in understanding the individual and collective Black identity among the women of Triunion. The name of the island itself is a foreshadowing for alliance that will appear among the three close women to Primus Mackenzie. The three women that based the cornerstone of the Black women’s alliance in Triunion were Ursa Mackenzie, Estelle, and Astral. The three of them share some common features that justify their alliance. First of all these three women are the nearest people to PM; Ursa as his daughter, Estelle as his wife, and Astral as his mistress. The second interesting thing that they share, is having abortion which can be a symbol of ineffectiveness in their lives. Their actual effectiveness begins when they are united and mark PM’s defeat in elections. The last but not the least significant symbolism is applied to the names of the three members of the alliance. All three names bear star imageries with them. “Two other notable facts surround Ursa's name. Polaris, pole-star, or stella polaris, phoenice, was erroneously thought for a long time to mark the pole-which would have rendered the ‘heavenly pole’ affixed entity…. . Ursa Minor's location asserts the relativity of things” (Ferguson 180). Ursa, as her name symbolizes the pole star, her behaviour is also identical to her symbolized name. “Ursa's name ... recalls her African roots. Arabs from North Africa knew Ursa Minor as Al Dubb al Asghar- the lesser Bear”
(Ferguson 179). She is really the lesser bear among the group of stars. Al Kazwini belief about the Pole Star can be a clue in understanding the symbols hidden in Ursa’s name:

More subtle is the historical link between Ursa B.’s name and institutionalized slavery. The 13th century Persian astronomical writer Al Kazwini narrates a community belief that staring at the north star would cure ophthalmia, the most common disease of the desert that made eyes itch. Ophthalmia was also a notorious affliction endured by slaves on the Middle Passage; its high incidence en route caused many slaves to be seriously devalued by plantocrats and pro-slavery entrepreneurs on arrival in the Caribbean. Perhaps the fact that Ursa is temporarily directionless—since the North star is in her own constellation—suggests that she might have been staring at the polestar without knowing it (qtd. in Ferguson 180).

It can be concluded that the Black women of Triunion, like all other women of Afro-American diaspora, have always been facing two major sources of oppression. Patriarchy and racial discrimination have exerted too much pressure on Black women to be tolerated individually. Consequently, the best way to resist oppression is by creating a collective identity that functions as a support to all individuals.
Works Cited


