

Feministic Representations Of Double Consciousness in Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Café

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the representations of double consciousness in Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Cafe. It also examines the American consciousness with the double consciousness of being a female and an African-American. It highlights the experiences of the black women. Female is subjected to male desire. They view that black and white are essentially different and the loss of this difference equals the loss of cultural and spiritual identity. Bailey's Cafe is set up in a road side cafe managed by Bailey and his wife. At one level the book is concerned with the often strange stories told by the couple's patrons. The principal theme of the novel according to Naylor is female sexuality. This is relevant when the author examines the lives. This novel has not provoked the heated controversy or accusations of male-bashing that have been generated by her. Though she gives the picturesque of the male domination, physical and mental torture on the women not only of the white but also of the black, the double consciousness persists in all her novels still her men are not objects of radical or instruments of torture. She gives us characters who are at times fools-vain, egocentric, who always make a wrong choice. But such characters are always human, and their numbers can equally be divided between male and female.

Keywords: Consciousness, Feminine, Sexuality, Chauvinism

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Gloria Naylor secures a coveted position of being one of the very few present-day American authors who have explored manifold aspects of being a black man and a black woman in white-dominated America. In the fictionalization of the lives of women, Naylor pays close attention to the impact of African-American women on matters of race and sex in the latter half of the twentieth century. Her novels are far more tentative about celebrating the efficacy of female friendship, lesbian relationships and self-affirmation through sisterhood. There are important moments of friendship and supportive connections but there are no radical transformation. She does not draw on feminist ideology as an agent of transcendence. She calls attention to the particular problems of black woman without suggesting that such problems are gender issues alone. She hopes that the novels do not make a bitter statement about the men. She wants to clarify that the problem she addresses will be over simplified if they are seen only in terms of male-female relationship.

To the black and female it is to fall victim to the deprivations of racial injustice and sheer gender bias. Possibly, no other social-group is subjugated to such as distasteful exhibition of human depravity and debasement. In the chronicles of human history no other sect of humanity has ever suffered from such a physical, socio-economic, cultural, and sexual harassment and sufferings like the African-American woman with the exemption of the agonies of untouchables of India. Being women they are the victims of sexual brutalities at the hands of the whites and the blacks too; being black women, they fall ill with racism; and being former slaves, the white authority forces them to survive in miserably minimum resources and were compelled to remain poor. The black women in Africa were made victims of triple jeopardy: sexism, classicism, and racism.

The black women were subject to the worst kinds of exploitations and oppression. They were labelled as wild and savage created without souls. They were forced to give up their bodies like animals to white men at random. They were converted into "promise and loose" character a mere toy or a plaything. They were used as sex pot not only the whites but were also treated as breeding animals.

They were discarded by both the white and blackmen. After the abolition of slavery, the blacks were able to form their identity of African-Americans. The African-American women become the victims of racial and sexual exploitation. Her life was as black and as a second class citizen of America. She was like a curse in the society. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir has beautifully said:

Humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being... He is the subject, he is the absolute - she is the other. (46)

Women in general are the “others,” the object to the males. The condition of the African-American is equally pathetic. They are vanquished and defeated people. They feel they have become other of the other. Blacks develop their own consciousness: the awareness about what it is to be as a black and female in the racist white America. As a result they developed their own black feminist consciousness.

The word black is used for those Americans who are of African origin. It defines the ethnic traits to the erstwhile slaves. They were earlier called ‘Niggers.’ The word ‘Nigger’ or ‘Negro,’ is a pure product of America. Black has replaced Negro just as the word Negro had replaced Nigger. It is also used in the context of American civilization to describe a free man of colour. In *Waiting for the End*, Leslie Fiedler says: “To reject the image created by the white society they want to redefine their identity in the context of their experience in the American society. They use black” (125).

The term “feminism” is used to show, women struggle for social equality. It means the female struggle to liberate herself from the injustice they suffer in the society from male domination and in the field of sex. Consciousness as a terminology of feminist notion, according to Teresa Delouretis, is,

The awareness of a woman having poised on the divide that joins and distinguishes the opposing term in a sense of conceptual sets central to contemporary theories of culture, subject and object, self and other, private and public oppression and resistance, domination and agency, hegemony and marginality sameness and difference and so on. (“Eccentric Subjects: Theory and Historical Consciousness” 115)

Thus, feminist consciousness refers to reality, regarding women socio-sexual existence. It is the experience of certain specific contradiction in the social order. So in the term black feminist consciousness, ‘black’ denotes the race, and ‘feminist’ means a person who knows the exploitation of woman is precipitated by patriarchal power and that one is keen to end that power to recreate the lives of women and to construct a society founded on no discrimination. To bring racial, social, sexual, and economic equality for black women, it means a kind of awareness of one’s own destiny as a black female and poor in America.

W.E.B. Du Bois articulates the doubleness that pervades African-American literature, where characters and texts content with dual African American and western traditions. In the fourth novel, *Bailey’s Cafe*, Naylor employs this double perspective offered by women’s insider/outsider status. Similarly, the ambiguous status of African-American inside but outside mainstream American culture has made it necessary to use a “double consciousness” the famous term of Du Bois the Black feminist theorist has emphasized the black women as the other” in American culture, a perspective that especially enables them to see all other perspectives. Naylor’s novels are empowered by her ability to present the better conditions of present-day life. By depicting the complex and sarcastic fusion of joy and sorrow in the lives of African-American characters. Naylor drives her characters into the cryptic but unusually contending sphere of the “difference,” into life not in avoidance of the chasm but at its edge.

Naylor uses this theory of double-consciousness in her novel that breaks perceived reality and it also attempts to heal those breaks. There are many characters such as a religious zealot, a penny whore, a self-mutilating nymphomaniac, and a black Ethiopian Jew who is “a little off in the head.” *Bailey’s Cafe* extends a haven for social mutations whose agony has driven them to the cafe. Naylor’s characters exemplify black women’s pain that even Stanley, a black-man, suffers as a woman when he wears ladies’ attire to make off the heat of the summer. Besides this portrayal of female suffering, the characters of Naylor epitomise Du Bois’ doubleness in their position. Naylor plants her exemplary characters in a narrative that connects the perceived gap between the African-American and European literary tradition by undermining the ethnocentric nationalist and Eurocentric Universalist structures of reference.

In *Bailey's Cafe*, Naylor sets up a complex dynamic between the crushing stories of the character who have drifted into the mystical neighbourhood itself, presided over by “Bailey” and his wife Nadine who run the cafe: Eve, who manages the boarding house/bordell, and Gabriel, who owns the pawn shop. The lives of these visitors to the neighbourhood of Bailey s Cafe have been marred by their terrible counters with racial and gender discrimination. That mono logic power has been inflicted implacably, brutally, without question or hesitation.

Naylor prefers to find her fourth novel, *Bailey's Cafe*, within a pointedly gendered and cultured framework where voice and all of its correlations are driven towards vitiating the infinite forms of authority, patriarchy, legal and creating a new world order among partlydeprived women globally. The novel consists of a series of roughlyinterconnected stories- each one from a specific woman's point of view - and it crowns with a marvellously real, communal jubilation of the birth of George, Mariam's son, during the Christmas time.

It is throughEve, Naylor presents the double personality of woman in order to survive in the male dominating society. Eve had to struggle for her life hence opens a guest house which is termed as a whorehouse. People feel that she runs a whorehouse. “She'd sell her own mama for a dine” but she doesn't care like Sadie she too has had a pathetic childhood similar pain and torture. Instead of love and kisses she has received thrashing from her parents. This has made her emotionless, carefree and the blows of poverty urged the thirst to earn money by hook or by crook. She knows that to be in this world and to survive it is essential for her to hide the dirt of her life under artificial make-up. She has to have a double consciousness, one what she is and the other what she has become due to circumstances.

Lucy Strike is another visitor of Bailey's Cafe who has been the victim of male torture The name of the brand of cigarettes he took was spelled out on the inside of her thigh with a lit cigarette butt. A reminder to get the right-brand,when she went to the shop next time, she was used for sexual satisfaction and was made pregnant,but was later left as he had his first wife who was white and beautiful. He gave her the lesson that nobody loves you when you're down and out (82). She felt her black colour was like dirt on her fingerprints which could not be washed as,“it was not a part of me - it was me” (97).

Naylor novelised Eve with her ecclesiastical precursors, who capitalises her feminine appeal to cajole a naive Adam to bite the forbidden fruit and violate the divine law. Similarly Naylor's Eve encourages a creature re-visioning of the space that generally have detailed women's lives. That Eve walks, she says, a millennium before reaching Bailey's, is a crucial allusion interlinking her role amongst a community of women to the millennial regime of Christ. On one level she redeeming figure for women such as the spirited Jesse Bell, who turns to heroin and female lovers when her wedding to the moneyed Sugar Hill king family wraps up in a resentful breakup. The newspaper distorts Jesse in its sensationalized detail of her divorce. Her lament that she,“didn't have no friends putting out the *Herald Tribune* suggests the exclusion of the experience of women of colour from the written word and the printed text” (118).Eve's role in Jesse's recovery is unquestionable at best. Eve relies on the magic or the power of conjure in healing Jesse's addiction to heroin by engineering a set of ample illusions which admit Jesse to have unrestricted access to the enslaving drug. During Eve's unique treatment of Jesse, in a bit of provocation, Jesse curses Eve to go to hell. Eve's rather pointed response directs attention to the equivocal fictional world that's informs the novel “I think you've forgotten that where we are” (141).

Thus, Naylor's character Eve can be situated within the antithetic poles. Neither she is in the ecclesiasticaltouch nor rigidly a Madonna, she inhabits somewhere between the two extremes. Her capability to manoeuvre reality and her devoted affinity with the supernatural are traits that invite a comparison with folk figures such as the shape-shifting trickster or the revered conjure woman. Despite the ambiguities surrounding Eve's character, her role has a double consciousness struggle to make her existence.

Naylor presents in *Bailey's Cafe* that women and those with black pigmentation have to suffer from poverty, mental and physical torture. Society does not permit them to earn a respectful living so for their survival they have to fight and keep dual consciousness. The black cultural nationalism emboldens the perspective that whites and blacks are essentially different and the loss of this elemental difference equates a loss of spiritualand cultural identity.Naylor is a Universalist, and argues that the cultural assimilation and integration entailed byuniversalism claim a hegemonic cast of

approval upon that which is different denying both cultural difference and identity.

Critics feel that she perpetuates not obliterates racial oppression. In *Bailey's Cafe*, Naylor presents a literary version of Du Bois's synthesis and includes the nationalist and universalist perspectives. Her representative characters and canonical conversations fuse the nationalist and universalist positions to make a liberating literary alternative. *Bailey's Cafe* speaks to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's plays and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to set up a national and universal backdrop, ultimately aspiring to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which merges the universal and national. Naylor affirms the canonical nature of these author's works by representing their motifs, structures, and characters. Naylor builds a universal national fusion in which African-American cultural divergence has a place. Naylor redefines black beauty so that they attain confidence and move forward for their survival.

The final section of the novel that follows Miss Maple's story continues the focus on male identity and the relationship between blacks and Jews. Naylor brings the problems of black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism. The black male proprietor of *Bailey's Cafe*, the Jewish owner of the pawnshop are brought together to bless the baby boy Mirim, an Ethiopian Jew. Though this cross-cultural nurturant concern, the novel provides a final suggestion of a new male identity. Political and ceremonial discourse is made to seem a largely male affair and it is Miriam's mother who protests against this state. The finale of all the stories is not madness or darkness but light and birth. Naylor sees the future of America and hopes a day will come when the women will be given due respect, she will not require to struggle to make her identity. There will be no sexual and racial discrimination. There will be equality between male and female/black and white they will be free from racial and sexual atrocities which will be helpful to uplift their socio-economic status.

In *Bailey's Cafe*, one can find theory of double-consciousness demonstrating the complexities of life and the universality of all people and situations. We are all searing for our identities, all of us making wrong turns and starting afresh. She presents us with new role models. For black women these role models demonstrate how to live a life outside the stereotype found in literature created by white men, women and black men. A man is born to a woman whose vagina has been ritually sewn shut. This marks the literary independence of Naylor and also her literary rebirth. Her hope that black men and women will not suffer the male torture and the oppression, but will face them boldly till it will die and a new society will come into existence and the women will be free, independent and with a single consciousness.

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