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**Male Domination and Domestic Abuse in Gloria Naylor's**  
*The Women of Brewster Place*

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**Abstract**

This article aims at an analysis of male domination and domestic abuse in Naylor novel. The women of Brewster place. It deals with the subordination of women is restricted not only by Whites, Black men, they dominate the women inspite of color, creed, generation, men of various ages condemned women. The travail encountered by the black women grapple with a continuum of sexual exploitation and violence. The black woman is often seen heavily investing in the mother – child relationship with an absent or estranged father. The socio- economic conditions of African American society are also responsible for the Black man's absence from the family and community. Consequently, motherhood is all that black woman cares for the child is all she has. This paper begins with a brief outline of the novelist and continues with the justification of the title which eventually throws lights on the exploration of female sexuality, subjugation, Alienation.

**Key Words:** Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Repression, Male Subjugation.

Gloria Naylor is distinguished black women writer who emerged on literary scene with her award winning novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* in 1982. The male domination and domestic abuse seems to be the evaluation of as the social components along with its roles played and concerns impelled in Naylor's the social order as defined in her creations. The online Wikipedia defines "patriarchy," i.e.. 'male domination' Patriarchy is a social system in which adult males hold primary power and predominance in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. In the domain of the family, fathers (or father figures) hold authority over the women and children. Accordingly Wikipedia defines the term 'domestic abuse' Domestic violence (also named domestic abuse, battering, or family violence) is a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation ... Domestic violence can take a number of forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse such as female genital mutilation (n.pag).

In novel *The Women of Brewster place* Gloria Naylor admits her stance was about feminine particularly poor Black Women she gave voices to her victims and how they struggled in male domination and trapped in domestic abuse. The seven female characters specifically Mattie Michael, Etta Mae Johnson, Ciel, the lesbian couple Lorraine and Theresa, despite the various stages of commitment, eventually whether they achieved social progress or not they definitely encountered by male supremacy.

Although Mattie Michael protagonist of the novel seduced by Butch Fuller, in spite of her father's Sam Michael warns Mattie "Sam Michael was brutally beats Mattie her refuse to reveal

who is reason for her pregnancy. He feels that he has not protected her daughter from sexuality and distorted the faith and trust , he had in his child. But Sam Michael beats her almost to death.

Mattie's contracted in painful spasm each time the stick smashed down on her legs and back, and she curled into a tight knot, trying to protect her stomach. He would repeat his question with each blow from the stick, and her silence caused the blows to come faster and harder. He was sweating and breathing so hard he couldn't talk anymore, so he just pounded the whimpering girl on the floor.  
(WBC23)

It is Mattie's mother raised her voice to protect her daughter. "So although Mattie's mother is ineffectual in her dealings with her father, it is she who, through threatened violence, prevents him from beating the pregnant girl into pulp" (Barbara Christian 357). Barbara Christian in her quote substantiates that, even though Sam Michael is not a physically abusive man, women in Michael's household are regarded inferior forgetting their age or relation. Sam's failure in protecting his daughter from the threats of the world who also realizes his incompetence in protecting his own daughter. When Sam reach the momentum of absolute hopelessness that they cannot improve the lives of their daughter, they transmit all the stress from oppression onto them. Mattie Michael was banished from her family because of her out of pregnancy. Mattie Michael was deceived by Butch Fuller, by her father and by her son.

Patriarchy and domestic abuse appear in many novels by African American fiction writers, this issue is also discussed by bell hooks states in her essays that fuse feminist theory with her personal experiences of male persecution. In her essay "*feminism a transformational politics*", bell hooks anticipates to show how white supremacy and domination might have

intensified gendered relationships in African American society. hooks also denotes that to end the global persecution one has to start from within one's core family unit or oneself; "It is necessary to remember that it is first potential oppressor within that we must resist the potential victim within that we must rescue- otherwise we cannot hope for an end domination, for liberation"(21). hooks also presents the primary fear of African American women. Claiming that domestic violence is the most destructive in these communities:

Growing up in a black working class father dominated house hold, I experienced coercive male authority as more immediately threatening as more likely to cause the exploitation and oppression in the home made one feel all the powerless encountering dominant forces outside the world .(21)

Another blue soul in the community is Etta Mae Johnson an aging femme fatal who has excisted by her ability to attach herself to successful "Etta suppresses all that her knowledge and experience have taught her and convinces herself that the visiting minister, Reverend Mooreland T Hoods might actually want to marry her rather than simply enjoy a brief, sexual interlude with her." (Fowler 33). But Reverend Hood's two-facedness is revealed, Etta spins a fantasy around Reverend Mooreland T Hoods, come to an end. Once she recognizes preacher Reverend Hoods is not different from the countless other men who have deceived her. "She didn't try to visualize what name would be. It matter. They were all the same, all meshed together into one lump that rested like a iron ball on her chest". (72) Etta Mae is a fallen Eve forever banished from the Eden of marriage and social status that would be her as the pastor's wife, was shattered. Like Mattie's encounter with Butch Fuller Etta's mating with Reverend Hoods. Both the women are harassed by men for their sexual pleasure. Being born as Black woman they encountered with these sexual

abuses. Etta and Mattie together representation a number of black women migrants who have been ignored by history their dreams are deferred. “ pin those dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry , they’re mixed with a pinch of salt and thrown into pots of soup, and they’re diapered around babies. They ebb and flow, and flow, but never disappear. So Brewster place still waits to die” (192) each character in *Women of Brewster Place* resulting in the loss something of value identity or social status. Susan Meisenhelder states that “Butch’s ‘seize the day’ philosophy expressed through his description of the right way to eat cane, is ‘gender specific’ in suggesting that women, like sugarcane, are to be disposed of once their sweetness has been enjoyed.”(6)

What Mattie ultimately loses as a result of her afternoon of freedom and pleasure in the woods is not Butch Fuller at all, but her home and her parents. The price of claiming her right to her own body is the severance of all the ties that have created and sustained her, the very ground of her being (Fowler 29)

Yet another character owing to male persecution is Lucielia Louise Turner as Ciel also lives at Brewster place. The social condition make these woman to the burden of guilt when their relationship with men are unstable. Rather than affirm themselves in perplexing the men in their lives, the women sometimes insist on enduring in a submissive posture. This is Ciel’s dilemma. Ciel is involved with a man, Eugene, who is constantly deserting her and then returning. It is Eugene’s unemployment directs his anger towards Ciel forced her her to do abortion this makes Ciel is in exasperated situation. “He becomes irritated and says to Ciel “what the hell we gonna feed it when it gets here, huh- air? With two kids and you on my back, I aint’t never gonna

nothin notin!”(95) Ciel realizes that she should tell him of the emotional pain in her abortion. This proclamation of Eugene clearly displays the hindrance of his economic predicament. He screams at Ciel and again decides to move away.

Eugene’s infirmity to face the social and economic realities are responsible for his problem and unable to provide the for Ciel and his daughter Serena he embraces Ciel is responsible for his plight and overreacts that “ I’m fucking sick of never getting ahead. Babies and bills that’s all you are good for... (94). She is unable to suppress the truth concerning her marriage to Eugene but a while Ciel rinses rice in preparation for dinner, her thought reveal her silent frustration:

The second change of the water was slightly clearer, but the starched-  
Bubbles were still there, and this time there was no way to pretend  
deafness to their message. She had stood at that sink countless times  
before , washing rice and she knew the matter was never going to be  
totally clear.... Serena would be waking up soon and wanting attention  
Feverishly she poured water off and tried again” (94)

With housekeeping and mothering Ciel’s silent frustration reveal in daily routine associated with chores. “Ciel’s insistence placate and keep Eugene removes her attention from her child, as a result of which the child dies. “Mattie snatches Ciel from despair into which she sinks after Serena’s death” (qtd in Andrew Larry -6)

Another resident of Brewster place is lesbian couple Lorraine and Theresa are looked down upon by the community of women. The lesbian couple have faced stiff resentment and they are socially despised. Though they are not economically deprived they had to left Theresa's apartment in Linden Hills. Lorraine has faced stacks of ill treatment and she was criticized by CC.Baker. "why don't come over here and I'll show ya what a real man can do"(162) .Their argument results in humiliating of Lorraine by CC. Baker gang. It depicts male chauvinism, male degradation and most probably male fury. The hooligans exhibit their supremacy, strength, and rejection through the form of gang rape. Megha Bharati

Lorraine wasn't raped because she is a lesbian; they  
raped her because she was a woman. And, regardless  
of race, regardless of social status, regardless of sexual  
preference, the commonality is the female experience.  
When u reduce that down in this society even to  
Something as abysmal as rape, there is no *difference*  
between women. ( qtd in Megha Bharati91)

The black community repeats the codes violence upon not only by Whites, here it is done more specifically on Black women by Black men. Naylor customs terms that express the community's ineffectiveness as well as male values.

In novels of Naylor the Black women, is an individual- a human being who is in search of her identity. They raise their voice to break the chains of societal bigotry. They have the capacity

to resist and struggle, to make them noticeable and perceptible and thus define their autonomy. The character of Naylor perfectly fits in the image of struggler and survivor in *Women of Brewster place*.

Naylor in her novel *The women of Brewster place* deals with the varied ways in which women have been silenced and kept ignorant by the dominant culture. Her contention is that it is the human need to create and maintain a true self in a social context. The male dominated society destroys the victim both physically and psychologically and leaves her into a pathetic state of powerlessness and psychic impotency.

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