

## In Search of their Own Identity in Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Cafe

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### Abstract

Afro-American started to write the novels, drama, poem only by their poor education. They were worked as slaves especially in United States. Women were suppressed and repressed and oppressed by the white dominated people. They were forced for prostitution. Black writers retraced their roots by writing novels, drama, poem etc. Writers like Gloria Naylor brought their original origin in their writing. So the researcher takes one author as an example and discussed the novel written by Gloria Naylor.

**KEYWORDS:** Gloria Naylor, Black people, Prostitution, Orphan, Community, Racism.

### A note on author:

Born January 25, 1950, in New York City. Her mother wouldn't like her daughter to raise in Southern Side. So she decides to move to the northern side to make Naylor, a versatile figure, in the world. She insists Naylor to read all kinds of classic novels at seven. In the age of Twelve, Naylor tries to write a novel, she does not need teaching. As for Naylor's taste in reading, she enjoys mostly women writers. Her favorites includes Louise Erdrich, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Edwidge Danticat, Margret Atwood. Naylor admits that her reading is sporadic. She was born and raised in the North, she and her family took annual car trips to the South in the summers to visit her relatives. It helps her to write the novels. Naylor found these journeys enjoyable and informative. This elements from her life that has been most influential on her novels. Understanding that Southern life in many ways defines the African American experience, Naylor feels obligated to capture this essence in all her works. The works are *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Café* (1992), *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998), 1996(2005). In her fourth novel, *Bailey's Café* is the most unique of Naylor's novels, because it depends most heavily on the reader's imaginative powers. Naylor feels that we have more in common than we have differences in terms of gender lines, racial lines, and National lines. We have, of course, attempted to exterminate ourselves over those tiny differences, but they are in fact minor. As a means of mitigating these differences that various groups have intensified over time. Naylor writes in order to "articulate experiences that want articulating for those readers who reflect the subject matter, black readers, and for those who don't—basically white middle class readers in the hope that these will be some glimpse of understanding" (Goldstein 36). If any writer can bridge the human divide, there is no doubt that Gloria Naylor can.

### Review:

In *Bailey's Café*, each chapter explains the life struggle of a different character. This novel has several mini plots like other novels. The reader realizes the depths of

human struggle and survival despite the odds. This Café serves as a sanctuary for those who have been denied the solace of human compassion. It is also called a way station. They can do whatever they wish or they can sit quietly. Because the customers have been exploited emotionally and physically. In Bailey's Café, the characters are travelled from other place to this. For Bailey himself it is San Francisco. For Eve, it is New Orleans. For Sadie, it is Chicago. For Peaches (Mary), it is Cincinnati. For Mariam, it is Addis Ababa. And for Miss Maple (Stanley who disguises), it is Pitts Burgh. Since the Café itself is rooted on no particular place, it is the perfect haven for its transient Patrons.

In this regard, Bailey's Café, way station for a multinational group of citizens in transit, and Eve's place, domicile for a largely female assembly, serve as institutional sites positioned along a path leading to freedom from imposed limits. Naylor points out in Bailey's Café as "...the place sits right in the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility..."(76). Later, the omniscient narrator reveals that "one can find Bailey's Café in any town" (112)

First to be introduced is Sadie. Sadie has entered the Café from the Southside of Chicago. When she is ten, she has become house cook, maid, laundress and general care teller for an alcoholic mother. When she is thirteen, her mother forces her into prostitution. After a few months later, the mother subjects the young girl to painful abortion, not only physically but also mentally. Sadie's life becomes more miserable than a common child's life. Sadie fights forecome a respectful lady, even though she is still a Prostitute.

When Sadie is fourteen, her mother dies and with no visible means of support beyond prostitution. Daniel, thirty years her senior extends a marriage proposal to her. After marriage, Sadie functions as a wife and house keeper for twenty five years. When Daniel dies, Sadie tries to raise money in order to purchase the property from Daniel's daughter (from previous marriage). Sadie is reduced once again to prostitution to yield enough income to complete the purchase. Naylor makes the reader to rethink constructions of female sexuality present in the larger society. In Prostitution, she sells her body and she is careful to change only what she needs in order to pay her bills. When she tells her client that she requires only \$ 2.04 in order to meet her daily \$ 5.79 goal. She has already earned \$ 3.75. And by the time, she was arrested and sent to jail for two weeks. She has no time to earn full money for the house.

Sadie becomes homeless, selling her body only when she needs food or liquor so that she can temporarily forget her troubles. Sadie's story in the café ends when she rejects the marriage proposal of the local ice delivery man. Iceman's mistake is in offering a life lived on his terms, not hers. "She knew this dear man was offering her the moon, but she could give him the stars" (78). Narrative emphasis on "moon" and "stars" refers ambiguously to both the tension between masculine and feminine.

The next chapter belongs to Eve, who owns a boarding house (brothel) next doors to the café. Eve is a peculiar woman, who does not allow just any downtrodden woman to reside in her establishment. She provides room only to those women who truly need help. Eve has arrived at Bailey from New Orleans. An orphan, Eve is raised by a stern Minister, a God Father. Even after she undergoes the early stage of puberty, Godfather is laundering her personal items and giving her a nightly bath. Then he stops the baths, but he still prevents her from other-children (boys). Eve understands

that God father needed to distributive the baths. She misses being touched by mother human being. She longs for any kind of touch. Soon she discovers a way to be satisfied, ultimately wreak havoc on her home life with God father. She allows the mentally challenged boy, Billy to play Hide and Seek and she invents another game that provides her with physical pleasure. Lying in a Prone position, pressing her body into the ground, Eve instructs Billy to march back and forth around her body while stomping as vigorously as he can.

Eve's sexual pleasure, given fullest expression during earth stomping with Billy suggests the oneness that the novel's central mother figure shares with the earth. Naylor re-figures the patriarchal story of Adam and Eve in Genesis through the presentation of a self-determining female character whose very existence calls into question masculine privilege and rule. So Eve defines herself in opposition to God father who rears her. Eve's birth suggests that she owes no allegiance to any masculine entity, human or divine. "God father always said that he made me, she relates, "but I was born of the delta" (90).

When God father finds the "game" (which is played with Billy), he forces Eve to leave home. Godfather's banishment of Eve sets the stage for the autonomous, self determining life that she leads. She develops a talent for making money and a love for well-kept gardens. Never subjecting her own body to prostitution, she sees herself as providing a social service for a basic human need. Eve establishes a boarding house (brothel) outside of which she has created the love-liest of gardens. And from these gardens, she insists her tenants (gentleman callers) purchase flowers to bestow upon their chosen (lady). Her home is a feminine place of healing, renewal and rebirth. Eve's actions might seem bizarre, even malevolent at times, in ways that place her at odds with the idealized maternal figure hook recalls. Eve allows the young woman to regain the dignity she forfeits as a consequence of the commodity states ascribed to the black female within a capitalist system.

Next is Esther, Forced into prostitution at age twelve, Esther remains in this condition for 12 more years. Then who provides her with a comfortable house and plenty of food. Because to feed her brother's wife and his eight children. So Esther agrees to what she thinks is marriage to the farmer. Esther is forced to do unspeakable sexual acts that he farmer insists her to perform in the house. Esther does not understand at the age of twelve that when he encourages her to play with the toys he has purchased for her, he introduces her to sexual toys and sexual genes. Being with the farmer for twelve years in order to pay her brother for each year that he cased for her "against the shrill protests of [his] fat wife" (98). It signals the ways in which women often act as agents of female oppression, the farmer's wife bathes Esther in preparation for the sexual abuse that the young woman endures. Esther's story reveal the extent to which the young woman has internalized the negative self image that the larger society assigns. Esther lacks a positive existence, "I like the white roses because they show up in the dark. I don't. The black gal, monkey face, Tar coal soot unspeakable pitch coal ugly soot unspeakable" (95). Esther realizes that she is not legally married to the farmer. When she arrives to Eve's house, she understands her past, provides her with a dark room in the basement. All of her clients never see her in the light. She can function only in darkness. She insists that her callers bring white roses, which she can faintly discern in the dark.

The next chapter forces on Mary (peaches) described as the most beautiful woman any one has ever seen. The Kansas-born peaches is a light-skinned beauty who is “Cocoa-butter dream” (101). When peaches living in her parent’s home, the boys often pursued her, but her father was so protective. She was not allowed to date anyone. Peaches ironically becomes controlled by an ever-intensifying urge. Peaches becomes tired to protect her more sacred self and she is played by her beauty because men constantly flirt with her, accost her, or leer at her. Believing she has no other recourse, she engages in one affair after the other. Finding it difficult to see her father tormented in this way, she leaves home only to find herself living on the seedy side of town and prostituting in order to survive. Peaches begins to hate herself. Peaches’s journey to Eve’s place reveals the dynamics of the young women’s attempts to distance herself from the harmful, controlling images present in the larger society. By the time she lives with one man who tries to save her in the way that her father did. In an effort to rescue. Her boyfriend moves her city to city. Nothing seems to remedy the situation. She even refuses to meet any man. For two whole weeks, she refuses even a delivery man to answer. She almost drives herself mad, Believing that her beauty will forever plague her, Peaches takes a beer can opener to cut her face. Now she is no longer beautiful Peaches feels relieved of the physical torment that has been a part of her entire life.

Upon her release from the hospital peaches enters a train for no predetermined destination. She lands in Bailey’s and she soon directed to Eve’s where she has remained until the present. Peaches father has come to Eve’s house to take her back to Kansas City. However Peaches life, has changed so much since she last lived in Kansas city that she cannot simply return so easily. Eve’s declaration to Peaches’s father, “Go home, my friend. I’ll return your daughter to you whole” (114) reveals the transformation the young woman is to undergo. As the chapter ends, her father is sent to Eve’s, but when he arrives there, Eve will not allow him to cross the threshold. Peaches remains at Eve’s for now; at the very least, she knows that she can return home whenever she wishes.

Then Jesse Bell, who has come to Bailey’s. Like the other women’s stories, Jesse Bell’s is a story of survival despite the obstacles placed before one. Jesse Bell marries into one of Manhattan’s most prominent black families, the Kings. Uncle Eli King doesn’t like Jesse Bell, so he destroys the relationship of her husband and Jesse Bell by saying of her lesbianism. According to Jesse Bell, Uncle Eli was obsessed with lifting the black race to the level of (upper class) white acceptance. Because of his obsession, Uncle Eli even criticizes the soul food that Jesse Bell prepares for her family, referring to it as slave food. Uncle Eli doesn’t give any room for Jesse Bell’s family at rainy season. So her mother catches a cold which leads to pneumonia, and then she dies a month later. This turns Jesse Bell to seek solace in the only friend she can ultimately trust—her heroine. When a lesbian baby is raided, Uncle Eli sullied her entire reputation in the local newspapers. So Jesse Bell becomes an incarcerated junkie. Only when Eve, who visits the women’s detention center periodically out of a sense of civic duty, offers her the possibility of hope does Jesse Bell begin to recover from her devastating ordeal. Jesse Bell’s story ends with the hope that she will be strong enough to withstand temptation.

The chapter entitled “Mary (take two follows Jesse Bell’s saga). It is an unbelievable story of a woman who is different from the earlier Mary (peaches), Naylor calls this second character Mariam. Mariam has come to live at Eve’s house after having been

thrust from her own country. Ethiopia, because others believe she has sinned. She finds herself pregnant though she swears that she has never been with a man. Those in her village believe Mariam to be lying, and when she refuses to name the father of her child, she is cast from the village. She arrives in Addis Ababa, and from there, she finds Gabe's shop. Gabe takes her to Eve's house, who is also Jewish, the owner of the pawnshop. He knows that Mariam will be treated with respect only at Event.

Naylor's longest and most comprehensive chapter, "Miss Maple's Blues", follows. Miss Maple is actually Stanley, Stanley becomes Miss Maple after suffering a series of set backs in America. Hailing from a multicultural heritage, Stanley is destined to succeed in life. Stanley got degree in Stanford University, ultimately earning his Ph.D., but not before he is drafted. He was not consider as a full pledged citizen in America. This incident makes his transformation from Stanley to Miss Maple, Stanley tries to get a blue-collar job but no one is willing to hire a black man for the job. Continuing his travel from west to east, Stanley soon discovers that he cannot get job by wearing stuffing men's clothing. He then decides to wear loose fitting women's clothes, figuring that his chances of landing job. Later he finds a job as a housekeeper at Eve's. Living at Eve's for two years, the brother housekeeper has become finally successful at the expense of corporate greed is the ultimate defiant act and represents Stanley's continued intellectual development. His story ends with the hope that he will be able to start his own company and finally chart his own course.

In the final chapter, entitled "The wrap", Bailey attempts to conclude what has been an unconventional story. Constructing a neat package at the end is all but impossible. In this final chapter, Bailey allows greater insight into his love-hate friendship with Gabe, the Russian Jew. Mariam who prepares for the birth of her child. As a black and a Jew, Everyone tries a good solution for Mariam. Gabe seeks passage for her to Israel but her entrance is denied. Bailey asks to give shelter for her and her child but no one comes forward to assist. Soon after she delivers her robust son, Mariam dies, the child named George- to a shelter for homeless boys. The ending is neither happy nor sad; it is just matter-of-fact. Bailey submits, "I don't believe that life is supported to make you feel good, or to make you feel miserable either. Life is just supposed to make you feel" (219)

Naylor explores the idea of defying boundaries and discarding labels. Naylor forces the reader to reconsider these characters only in the context of their individual lives. Naylor sums up with a harmonious ending when all the characters come together for the birth and the ritual circumstances of Mariam's baby boy. However, the mother and the child are pretend, Mariam is a permanent resident of Eve's and the baby send to an orphan home. It is a sad ending in the play. Naylor clearly portrayed the character and the cafe not only mentioned to consume the inneram of the people but also it is the place to share and disclose the stories of the pity and poor soul in United States.

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