

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Reconstruction of Individual Self in Gloria Naylor's "*Linden Hills*"

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### Abstract

Gloria Naylor is an author who feels that only an upheaval in perception can set aside the black community from looming calamity. If the picking is involving soul and coup, she wants the black community to select the soul. She wants that her people should thrash about to keep their dreams from getting contaminated at every cost. Gloria Naylor in her second novel *Linden Hills* presents the description of the lives of the white wives of needed who were persistently dominated and marginalized. These women repeatedly faced doubled coercion as they were shunned by their own race for their marriage to a black man and by the blacks, as the Nedeeds were upper middle class blacks, thus finer to the typical blacks. In the representation of *Linden Hills* and its dwellers Naylor puts forward a figment of the imagination of hell as it is revealed in the current quests of black community.

**Keywords:** Domination, upper middle class blacks, quest of black community, resistance and reincarnation.

Gloria Naylor is an author who feels that only an upheaval in perception can set aside the black community from looming calamity. If the picking is involving soul and coup, she wants the black community to select the soul. She wants that her people should thrash about to keep their dreams from getting contaminated at every cost. Naylor expresses her views:

*"For the Afro-American, regardless of where you climb on the ladder of Success there will be racism. Under these conditions, if you give up what centers you, what is unique in you, then you are lost. The greatness of this country is the uniqueness of its people. But there is pressure to amalgamate. And that is suicidal when it happens to the Afro-American."*

In her novel *Linden Hills*, published in 1985, the equivalents between the troubles of the Afro-American community and that of the occupied civilizations of Asia and Africa have been focused upon. Very skillfully Naylor portrays that the colonization of the Afro-American society by the white majority is both cultural and monetary. The Afro-American's are tending to lose their uniqueness by submitting to the white molds of art and beauty, lifestyle and accomplishment. *Linden Hills* underscores the aggression which is internalized by this scheme of authority. To re-label the Afro-American identity Naylor recommends that a sadistic conflict with those very powers which have organized this organism of slavery in the modern times is inevitable, and this resistance should come from those segments of the black society which have endured acutely from scarcity and denial. Though not in direct and clear words but it is advised in the very configuration of the narrative by the mystifying passages in a diverse manner.

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Gloria Naylor in her second novel *Linden Hills* presents the description of the lives of the white wives of needed who were persistently dominated and marginalized. These women repeatedly faced doubled coercion as they were shunned by their own race for their marriage to a black man and by the blacks, as the Nedeeds were upper middle class blacks, thus finer to the typical blacks. The novel starts with the story of Luther Nedeed who bars this wife Willa in the cellar only because he suspects that his son is not his because he does not resemble him. The child dies in the hands of his mother Willa survives only to learn more about the wives of the Nedeeds who too suffered alike till death. Willa learns that the Nedeeds were of high social status and were a respected family. She came across many unsent letters written by these women who either died in exile or in isolation – unseen and unheard even by the neighbors. In an interview with Toni Morrison, Naylor remarked about Willa Nedeed – “I wanted her to learn from those lessons in history”. As her name implies, Willa has a sufficient amount of motivation power to come out of her captivity to face her husband, but before she could converse with him and something is sorted out, he puts the complete house on flames. Shortly, a massive bulk was recovered and carried to the ambulance”. *Linden Hills* is an excellent sample of gender – oppression and hostility in Afro-American society. Gloria Naylor has expressed the rage and discontent of black women in her fictional works loudly and intensely. She surveys the intricacies and a variety of man-woman correlation from new-fangled aspects and very intensely illustrates the female experience of subjugation and misuse in a male conquered Black society. Naylor displays in the novel that a community can be held in reserve in slavery for ages without chains and without fear of anyone ever discerning it. The magic of capitalism with its

understated dishonesty of human aspirations, can enchain the modern psyche successfully.

The makeup of *Linden Hills* is based on the arrangement of *Inferno* by Dante. Many critics opine that Naylor’s work relies on traditional literary work by great author like Dante the neighborhood in *Linden Hills* are expressed to be an inspiration from nine circles of hell described in Dante’s *Inferno*. In this narrative souls are damned not because they have affronted or have dishonored a devout system but for the reason that they have snubbed themselves. In their singled minded chase of uphill mobility, the occupant of Linden Hills, a black, middle-class commune, have turned away from their earnest sense of who they are. The fiction features two young street poets Willie and Lister who reside in a suburb on a hill. During the week before Christmas these two poets work their way from the poorer to the richer segments of this hierarchical society doing peculiar works to gross cash for Christmas. They both opt for a life of paucity and verse. They have an exceptional insight into the psyche of the residents of the urban hell. Norman has a loving wife but he is ill with periodic attacks of insanity. The reverend Michael Hollis who gives stimulation sermons is himself an alcoholic. The famous and booming lawyer whose marriage was celebrated with immense ordeal is a homosexual. As Mel Watkins examines in a review:

*...the novel can be read as a take of lost black souls trapped in the American Dream. Linden Hills has also been described as a perverted Eden and a cautionary tale about the whole dilemma of the black middle class in America.*

In the representation of *Linden Hills* and its dwellers Naylor puts forward a figment of the imagination of hell as it is revealed in the current

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quests of black community. The original Luther Nedeed purchased the enormous plot of land which soon after developed into Linden Hills in 1820, after he had sold his wife and six children into slavery. Hence at the very core of Linden Hills is buried this brutal attitude towards humanity. Luther opens a funeral parlour which becomes a flourishing business very soon. But when he observes that his wife has produced a white child – he bolts her with the child in the cellar. Willie and Lister, who were engaged by Luther to adorn the Christmas tree in his house on the Christmas Eve, are the only people who take notice of this moaning as the child wastes away to death and the mother goes insane. As the mad wife of Luther, Willa are comes out of the basement with the dead body of her son; Willie and Lister are asked to leave at once. Within a short while Luther Nedeed’s house is swallowed up by the fire and the entire community stares at the demolition of an esteemed family unit with absolute stillness.

In *Linden Hills* of Naylor, clear acknowledgements to Dante’s *Inferno* are realized... as Dante visualized – the former morgue in a basement where Luther Nedeed, the Lucifer of this tale, detains his wife and their five year old son, without even food stuff and drug, to “turn her into a wife” – is to rebuke her for bearing a child who does not bear a resemblance to his father. Here Luther Nedeed duplicates his forefathers, trying to wear away his wife as three generations of previous Luther Nedeeds had done to their wives. But in the end Willa Nedeed is victorious in giving incredible birth to her and to a radical intention:

*The amber germ of truth she went to sleep with, [the truth that she does exist, that she has her own name, and that she can walk up out of the basement] conceived and received itself, splitting and*

*multiplying to take over every atom attached to her being.*

Her son is already dead and she too will pass away by the end of the novel, but the story of the resistance and reincarnation of Willa Nedeed echoes not only with classical and later Western accounts of unbeaten effacement of women but also with feminist critiques. The Nedeed wives are depicted by Naylor as pale-skinned octoroon women fully inferior to their dark-skinned husbands. Each of the ladies is known as only and only Mrs. Nedeed, thus sustaining the rank of the name of the Nedeeds. These women are the producers of future Luther Nedeeds, but their husbands are blind to the mother and producer function of these women and assert their sons as their own, only as the embodiments of the indispensable blackness of the Nedeeds. As the story reaches its climax, in the finale struggle that follows, the Christmas tree collapses to the ground, its illuminated candles setting the house on fire. Lester compels Willie to escape the scene. The smoldering of the house extends light all over Linden Hills. Willie and Lester apprehend that this scene which they are witnessing at this particular moment is no longer administered by the rules of...black and white. The house is turned into ashes with the Nedeeds embraced in a single mass inside, and the entire community watches the house burn – and lets its burn; an ultimate act of hypocrisy and oppression that is certainly the only possible reaction worthy of Luther Nedeeds and his community.

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