

Inclusive Memory: The Power of Collective Remembering in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*

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This essay considers how collective memory works to develop and sustain a group identity in Gloria Naylor's 1980 novel, The Women of Brewster Place. Using post-structural theorist Bronwyn Davies's collective biography project as a model through which to understand Naylor's work, it becomes clear how collective remembering in the novel prompts the women characters to become aware of the hegemonic forces shaping their lives. As Naylor's characters voice the variable, otherwise-silenced stories of the African American women who reside in Brewster Place, Naylor emphasizes the importance of the personal memories and stories of each resident, while at the same time illustrates the need for communal support and shared remembering in each woman's life. Indeed, being part of a community that shares collective memories and histories can provide a nurturing, legitimating experience that fosters a sense of belonging, but it can also be limiting of an individual's personal recollections that stand in opposition to or outside of the official collective memory. Ultimately, it is the characters' recognition of the collective nature of the women's memories and dreams that creates the possibility of active resistance and supports them in their quest for enhanced agency within the broader society.

Gloria Naylor wrote *The Woman of Brewster Place*, winner of a 1983 National Book Award, in response to a silenced history. Growing up in New York during the Civil Rights and women's movements, Naylor became acutely aware of the absence of African-American authors and characters while reading traditionally canonical literature in her college courses. Reflecting back on this realisation, Naylor notes,

we were all working with this benign ignorance of what was out there in Black America. ... And I realized that I had been deprived through benign ignorance of knowing about this literary history. I decided that, if I had one book in me, I wanted it to be all about me, and the me in this case was a multifaceted me. So that's how *Brewster Place* began.¹

This 'multifaceted me' comes to readers of the novel through the stories of seven black women who create the community in Brewster Place, a walled-in housing project defined by its exclusion, seclusion, and poverty, for, as Naylor explains:

I knew that one character, one female protagonist, could not even attempt to represent the richness or diversity of the black female experience. So, the women in that work you find consciously differ, beginning with something as simple as skin color, and they differ in their ages, their religious backgrounds, their personal backgrounds, their political affiliations, even their sexual preferences. And my whole thing with that work is to give a tiny microcosm of the black female experience.²

While the stories of *The Women of Brewster Place* emphasise the diversity of black women's individual histories and experiences, stories that would otherwise be silenced, this collective of multifaceted characters also serves to celebrate their 'common lives and common love' while confronting 'what it mean[s] to be a black woman' as part of a community.³ Thus, even as Naylor 'refuses to portray one uniform image of the black woman or the black family'⁴—even in the first pages of the novel, Naylor tells of her characters who are 'nutmeg ... ebony ...

¹Gloria Naylor, interviewed by Charles H. Rowell, 'An Interview with Gloria Naylor', *Callaloo* vol. 20, no.1, 1997, pp.185-186.

²Gloria Naylor, interviewed by Kay Bonetti, 'An Interview with Gloria Naylor' [1988], in Maxine Lavon Montgomery (ed.), *Conversations with Gloria Naylor*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2004, pp.53-54.

³Naylor, qtd. in Virginia C. Fowler, *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*, Twayne, New York, 1996, p.21.

⁴Celeste Fraser, 'Stealing B(l)ack Voices: The Myth of the Black Matriarchy and *The Women of Brewster Place*', *Critical Matrix: The Princeton Journal of Women, Gender, and Culture*, vol. 5, 1989, p.74.

saffron,⁵ highlighting their differences—she demonstrates the connections developed and maintained through shared communal experience, specifically heightened through both interpersonal and collective memories, memories which move beyond the exclusive boundaries of the self to ground themselves in collective history and experience. Prompted by collective remembering, these diverse women find new modes of understanding and managing the horrors of their own personal pasts, while also garnering the strength to claim agency within a racist and sexist hegemony.

Existing readings of *The Women of Brewster Place* emphasize the importance of women's community and women's bonding and friendship as a means to survival and empowerment. While I agree that this emphasis is vital in Naylor's work, in this essay, I aim to extend the understanding of such connections beyond friendship to a shared, collective mode of remembering and history-making, one that considers, as Paul Ricoeur does, that

People do not remember in isolation, but only with help from the memories of others: they take narratives heard from others for their own memories, and they preserve their own memories with help from the commemorations and other public celebrations of striking events in the history of their group.⁶

As the women join their individual memories and stories through the larger act of interpersonal remembering, they begin to more thoroughly understand their individual subjugation through a framework of collective memory, which then prompts communal support, reclaimed agency, and resistance. To investigate this role of memory in Naylor's work, I first provide a brief overview of the possibilities for resistance through collective remembering by considering the work of Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues. I then discuss the important balance between the individual and the community of women established within Brewster Place, before turning to the nature of the systemic racism and sexism these women face. Finally, I examine how specific characters learn to frame and connect their individual memories to the larger collective and show how the conclusion of the novel enriches our understanding of how women can be (re)empowered through collective memory.

Collective Biography: The Power of Remembering Together

To understand how Naylor engages collective memory in *The Women of Brewster Place*, it is necessary to understand some of the basic precepts of the psychology of autobiographical memory. Our autobiographical memories are what make up our personal life histories and, therefore, help us to constitute a sense of self, but they also help us to understand and connect with others. According to psychologists Susan Bluck, Nicole Alea, Tilmann Habermas, and David C. Rubin, who emphasize the social, interpersonal function of autobiographical memory, memory is important in 'developing, maintaining, and nurturing social bonds' and 'maintaining warmth (e.g. empathy) and social bonding in existing relationships'.⁷ Similarly, Alea and Bluck maintain that we rely on our shared experiences and autobiographical memories to 'elicit *empathy* from others or provide empathy to others'.⁸ It is shared memory, then, that reinforces many of the bonds between the characters in the novel. More interesting, though, is not only Naylor's emphasis on individual memory sharing but how the text contributes to feminist understandings of collective memory. I turn here to the work of post-structural theorist Bronwyn Davies who has developed a method of collective remembering modelled after the work of Frigga Haug and her colleagues, who studied personal memories and experiences as a way to respond to a gap between Marxist theory and their experiences as women.⁹ Davies's process, called

⁵Gloria Naylor, *The Women of Brewster Place*, Penguin, New York, 1980, p.4. (Naylor's italics)

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory—History—Forgetting', in Jorn Rusen (ed.), *Meaning and Representation in History*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2006, p.11.

⁷Susan Bluck, Nicole Alea, Tilmann Habermas & David C. Rubin, 'A Tale of Three Functions: The Self-Reported Uses of Autobiographical Memory', *Social Cognition*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2005, pp.94 & 110.

⁸Nicole Alea & Susan Bluck, 'Why Are You Telling Me That?: A Conceptual Model of the Social Function of Autobiographical Memory', *Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2003, pp.165-166.

⁹Bronwyn Davies & Susanne Gannon (eds.), *Doing Collective Biography: Investigating the Production of Subjectivity*, Open University Press, Berkshire, 2006, p.4.

collective biography, involves a group of women coming together to recall, write about, and subsequently analyse their life experiences with the goal of making 'visible, and therefore revisable, the discourses through which we make meanings and selves; and it powerfully deconstructs the ideas of the individual as one who can exist independent of various collectives, of discourse, of history, of time and of place'.¹⁰ Indeed, by focussing together 'through a very intense . . . gaze' on their individual memories, Davies and her collective hope to

arrive at an understanding of the social, of the way individual subjectivities are created and maintained through specific kinds of discursive practices, within particular historical moments, in particular contexts that in turn afford particular interactions and patterns in meaning making.¹¹

After identifying the very 'real' patterns and discursive practices that shape women's lives and experiences, and by making 'visible, palpable, hearable, the constitutive effects of dominant discourse,' Davies and her colleagues go on to argue that the effects of such discourse are not 'inevitable.' As women, they need 'not [be] determined by those dominant discourses.' Instead, 'in examining how discourse and practice work on us, we open both ourselves and the discourse to the possibility of change'.¹² Davies's work demonstrates the possibility for acts of collective remembering to create both heightened awareness of the dominant forces that shape women's lives, while also demonstrating the possibility for resistance or change.

I suggest that *The Women of Brewster Place* can be seen as a literary version of Davies's collective biography project. While Davies's actual process of collective biography is quite different than the collection of memories in the novel—the characters do not sit together in a large group sharing their memories, nor do they consciously work to analyze the ways that they are 'subjects who constitute themselves and are constituted as experiencing subjects'¹³—their individual stories, read together, do create a similar sort of memory project. Through the act of sharing memories, Naylor's characters, as well as her readers, begin to recognize the hegemonic forces shaping the character's lives, and through this, they begin to act upon those forces in ways that expand personal agency and subjectivity.

The Individual and the Collective: Genre, Setting, Character

As Naylor describes the women of Brewster Place, she emphasises their similarities, bringing them together into a community of hard-working, damaged, wonderful women. Additionally, she immediately emphasises the importance of sharing their stories, histories, and memories:

*Their perspiration mingled with the steam from boiling pots of smoked pork and greens, and it curled on the edges of the aroma of vinegar douches and Evening in Paris cologne that drifted through the street where they stood together—hand-on-hips. Straight backed, round bellied, high-behinded women who threw their heads back when they laughed and exposed strong teeth and dark gums. They cursed, badgered, worshiped, and shared their men. ... They were hard-edged, soft-centered, brutally demanding, and easily pleased, these women of Brewster Place. They came, they went, they grew up, and grew old beyond their years. Like any ebony phoenix, each in her own time and with her own season had a story.*¹⁴

The emphasis on story and memory—connected to resistance and survival in the image of the phoenix—is made particularly vital in the opening of the novel, as readers are given a short history of Brewster Place. Described as '*the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company*', the housing units were simply '*an afterthought*'; Brewster Place's '*true parentage*', an important

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.7.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.7.

¹² *ibid.*, p.5.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁴ Naylor, *Women*, pp.4-5. (Naylor's italics)

element of its history, 'was hidden'.¹⁵ From the first page, *The Women of Brewster Place* is a novel about what stories are told and what stories are silenced and hidden by those in power.

The individual stories in the novel, then, work to give voice to what would otherwise be silenced histories. Besides the final chapter, which tells of the women coming together as a collective unit, the book is comprised of six chapters, each named after and focused on different Brewster Place residents, leading critics to approach *The Women of Brewster Place* as 'a short story sequence, a contingent novel, a composite novel, short story composite, anthology novel, integrated short-story collection, a hybrid novel'.¹⁶ The way one reads the text is particularly important in judging how interconnected the stories are, and thus, how important community and the collective are to the book. Some critics have argued that the stories in the novel remain fragmentary, denying community and collective storytelling. In the view of Michael Awkward, for example, 'Naylor's novel ... clearly recognizes the richness of its narrative fragmentation, a recognition that is exhibited in the intentional failure of its moment of totalization'.¹⁷ Rocio Davis, too, argues that 'the actual fact of the stories' independence, their individual closure and completion, may suggest the incapacity to form community'.¹⁸ Others, like Kimberly Rae Connor, have claimed that while 'each story stands out as a case study of a particular rite of passage ... cumulatively the stories add up to a social drama that has the potential to lead to *communitas*'.¹⁹ Likewise, Carol Bender and Roseanne Hoefel assert, '*The Women of Brewster Place* ... is collective, communal and collaborative, rather than "individual."²⁰ To be sure, it is the collective nature of their stories that allows for connection through shared experience and shared remembering.

Through her interconnected stories—what some critics like Karen Castellucci Cox call a short story cycle—Naylor emphasises the individuality of the women characters, while demonstrating their interdependence and emphasizing collectivity. As Cox explains,

Where more conventional narratives emulate 'real time' experience in moving forward toward a conclusion, the fragmentary story cycle progresses erratically and nondirectionally, looping forward and backward, often omitting causal links between physical and psychological events. This irregular movement among episodes mirrors the associative patterns of human consciousness.²¹

She adds, 'Such storytelling patterns underscore the selective process of remembering and retelling where concrete events are sometimes occluded by the less tangible visions of diverse memories and imaginations.'²² Thus, the short story cycle is a particularly appropriate form for Naylor to work with as she presents the seemingly individual stories and memories of the women, but also 'submit[s] each story to the larger goal of characterizing unity or disruption of community',²³ inviting her readers to view them as a collective narrative. Cox also observes that the short story cycle is particularly 'apt' for 'projects of historical revision,' because the format 'has already disrupted our tendency as readers to look for unity and chronology, confronting us instead with the unknowability of gaps between stories.'²⁴ Cox therefore argues that Naylor points readers 'to a larger truth

¹⁵ibid., p.1. (Naylor's italics)

¹⁶Laura Nicosia, 'Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*: Evolution of a Genre', in Roxanne Harde (ed.), *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007, p.193.

¹⁷Michael Awkward, 'Authorial Dreams of Wholeness: (Dis)Unity, (Literary) Parentage, and *The Women of Brewster Place*', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & K. A. Appiah (eds), *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Armistad, New York, 1993, p.60.

¹⁸Rocio G. Davis, 'Identity in Community in Ethnic Short Story Cycles: Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*', in Juline Brown (ed.), *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*, Garland, New York, 1997, p.9.

¹⁹Kimberly Rae Connor, 'Spiritual Geography: Ritual Transformation in the Fiction of Gloria Naylor', *The Literary Griot*, vol. 14, no. 1-2, 2002, p.56.

²⁰Carol Bender & Roseanne Hoefel, 'Toward a Literacy of Empathy: Inhabiting Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café*', in Shirley A. Stave (ed.), *Gloria Naylor: Strategy and Technique, Magic and Myth*, University of Delaware Press, Newark, 2001, p.182.

²¹ Karen Castellucci Cox, 'Magic and Memory in the Contemporary Story Cycle: Gloria Naylor and Louise Erdrich', *College English*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1998, p.151.

²²ibid., p.152.

²³ibid., p.155.

²⁴ibid., p.158 & 160.

about the women characters' by embracing once silenced histories.²⁵ These newly voiced histories derive from 'the stories the members share' which create a 'communal identity, a reservoir of beliefs, memories, stories, and visions from which any member can recover a past.'²⁶ It is the combination of the personal memories, then, shared through each story, that create the collective history and a collective biography, of sorts, of Brewster Place. And in *The Women of Brewster Place*, as Laura Nicosia argues, 'the sum' of the individual stories becomes 'greater than the individual, polyfocal parts,'²⁷ just as they do in Davies's collective biography project, allowing readers to see how individual storied memories become part of a larger collective memory, as well as exposing the underlying ideologies that have shaped these women's life experiences.

In addition to the format of the novel, the setting of Brewster Place, itself, emphasises the collective situation of the residents, primarily African American women, who live there. Brewster Place is walled off from the rest of the world, creating an isolated space in which the residents struggle to survive. Sociologist Ron Eyerman, who studies the impact of cultural trauma on collective memory, explains that the historical past 'may be embodied in material objects, in the way a town or city is structured'.²⁸ The wall remains a reminder of a history of race and gender oppression. As Christian reminds us,

Because women usually have little access to power in the larger society, it is not surprising that black women, doubly affected by their racial and gender status, are the central characters in poverty-stricken Brewster Place, [a place that was] started by men for the purpose of consolidating power.²⁹

But even as the wall signifies oppression, it also serves to create a community within Brewster Place. As Naylor explains in an interview, the wall becomes, for the women, a symbol of their collective nature as well as their collective oppression. As she puts it,

there is a reason for the wall at the dead-end street: regardless of how diverse we may be, as black women we all share two things in this country—and that is racism and sexism. And so that's what that wall represented for me, and in each of those stories that particular woman will somehow relate to that wall.³⁰

Indeed, the wall commemorates the women's histories as it becomes a public representation of their collective identity. As Charmaine N. Ijeoma asserts, 'As long as these "walls" are used as barriers of exclusion, each [woman] will continue to exist not only individually but also collectively.'³¹ Moreover, Christian suggests that 'the wall that separates Brewster Place from the outer world becomes their mark of community as well as their stigma.'³² The wall helps both to form the collective, which denotes a source of power and agency in the novel, while also symbolizing the residents' past of oppression stemming from racism and sexism.

(Re)claiming Memory

In response to the racism and sexism that has shaped their history, Christian says of African-American women, 'How we negotiate the relationship between the past, as it has helped to form us, and the present, as we must experience it, is often a grave dilemma for us,'³³ and it is this negotiation of personal past and shared present that moves *The Women of Brewster Place* from a focus on individual memory to an examination of collective memories and histories. The women of Brewster Place must invent their personal selves and find individual ways of sharing their autobiographical memories, but they must also create a

²⁵ibid., p. 160.

²⁶ibid., p.160 & 159.

²⁷Nicosia, p.186.

²⁸ Ron Eyerman, 'The Past in the Present: Culture and Transmission of Memory', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2004, p. 162.

²⁹Christian, pp.110 & 109.

³⁰Naylor, interviewed by Bonetti, p.53-54.

³¹Charmaine N. Ijeoma, 'The Significance of the Wall in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*', *BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1999, p.41.

³²Christian, p.111.

³³Christian, p.106.

communal identity that allows them to navigate the negative restrictions placed upon them by the sexism, racism, and poverty that define Brewster Place. They must move beyond an exclusive understanding of the self to one that is bonded to others and is thus more powerful. Such collective identity building is fostered by the first character introduced in the novel—Mattie Michael. Mattie is the character who is most connected to memories of her personal past; most of the first chapter finds her, as she moves into Brewster Place after losing a home that she lived in and owned for years, contemplating the memories of her life that have led her to her move. Interestingly, what prompts her to recall her past as she moves into Brewster Place is the smell of ‘freshly cut sugar cane’ that brings back memories ‘that lay under the graves of thirty-one years that could only be opened again in the mind’,³⁴ reminding readers of the connection between memory and smell, while also suggesting that Mattie has some control over when and how she ‘opens’ her memories. She recalls herself pregnant at a young age, leaving her home in Tennessee after her father beat her for not sharing the name of the baby’s father. As she sits on the bus, leaving Tennessee, ‘She just wanted to ... suspend time, pretend that she had been born that very moment ... and that this was all there was and ever would be’.³⁵ From a very early age, then, Mattie comes to understand how the past can haunt an individual, and so she desires to forget, to hold it at bay. But as the baby moves, she comes to realise, ‘This child would tie her to that past and future as inextricably as it was now tied to her every heartbeat’.³⁶ She cannot simply forget the past—there are too many traces of it that will surface in the present and the future. Thus, she chooses to remember the past—specifically her encounter with Butch Fuller, the baby’s father, in the sugar cane near a basil patch—in a positive, loving way: ‘When her mind would reach out behind, she forced herself to think only of the back road to the house, the feel of summer, the taste of sugar cane, and the smell of wild herbs.’³⁷ She chooses to focus and frame her memories in ways that are hopeful rather than damaging and oppressive.

After Mattie has her baby, a little boy named Basil, she struggles with poverty and lack of help, but ultimately finds an older woman, Miss Eva, who allows Mattie and her son to move into her home. Mattie develops a very close relationship with Miss Eva, and upon Eva’s death, Mattie has saved enough money to buy the house. However, after a grown Basil gets into trouble with the law—he kills a man in a bar fight—Mattie loses the house when she uses it to pay for bail and Basil skips town. She is forced to move to poverty-stricken Brewster Place, where all that remains are her memories of her home: she ‘was to die with the memory of the smell of lemon oil and the touch of cool, starched linen ... of the thirty years of nights ... she would spend in that house’.³⁸ Likewise, all she has are tenuous memories of her past with Basil:

She tried to recapture the years and hold them up for inspection, so she could pinpoint the transformation, but they slipped through her fingers and slid down the dishes, hidden under the iridescent bubbles that broke with the slightest movement of her hand.³⁹

Fowler sees Mattie here as a character ‘defeated in her efforts to understand the past largely because she wishes to avoid such knowledge’.⁴⁰ I would argue that this defeat is temporary, and Mattie’s more important lesson is that it can be a struggle to make sense of the past. It is Mattie, then, who most understands the power of memory, for she knows both how a person can frame a memory in a positive, useful way, and she has grasped, again and again, how hard that process of interpretation and memory framing can be. Thus, within the novel, as she becomes a long-time resident of Brewster Place, in the other women’s stories, she grows to be what critics have called ‘the central connecting force in this text,’ ‘the foundational matriarch,’⁴¹ ‘the primary agent of female coalescence,’⁴² and ‘the moral agent in the novel’.⁴³

³⁴ Naylor, *Women*, p.8.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.25.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.25.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.25.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.34.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.42.

⁴⁰ Fowler, p.41.

⁴¹ Nicosia, p.180 &182.

⁴² Davis, p.20.

Additionally, Mattie is the ultimate rememberer, and she comes to embody the role of narrator of their collective memories and histories. Mattie finds a way to channel her memories of the past into her understanding of the lives of other Brewster residents, and she ultimately finds a way to use her memories in a redemptive, empathetic form. It is Mattie who helps connect others to a collective history and memory, and it is Mattie who demonstrates the power of resistance held within such forms of remembering.

Mattie's role is most clearly demonstrated in the lives of her long time friend, Etta Mae, and in Miss Eva's granddaughter, Ciel Turner.⁴⁴ Mattie has known Etta Mae since they were girls and their close bond, demonstrating lasting female friendship, is highlighted throughout the novel. As Connor notes, 'In spite of the different roads they have taken, Mattie and Etta Mae keep returning to one another',⁴⁵ and it is true that with Mattie, Etta Mae

had no choice but to be herself. The carefully erected decoys she was constantly shuffling and changing to fit the situation were of no use. ... Etta and Mattie went way back, a singular term that claimed co-knowledge of all the important events in their lives and almost all the unimportant ones. And by rights of this possession, it tolerated no secrets.⁴⁶

In *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs describes one of the distinctive features that differentiates history from collective memory:

When it considers [remembers collectively] its own past, the group feels strongly that it has remained the same and becomes conscious of its identity through time. History, I have said, is not interested in these intervals when nothing apparently happens, when life is content with repetition in a somewhat different, but essentially unaltered, from without rupture or upheaval. But the group, living first and foremost for its own sake, aims to perpetuate the feelings and images forming the substance of its thought. The greatest part of its memory spans time during which nothing has radically changed.⁴⁷

It is the status in their friendship, the fact that over time, 'nothing has radically changed' between them even though their lives have radically changed, that creates in them a sort of group identity and provides for them a sense of shared memory. Additionally, it is their history together that helps them to overcome any problems in their relationship. For instance, when Etta Mae speaks negatively to Mattie, Mattie turns to memories of their past to resist the impact of her friend's words: 'They shared at least a hundred memories that could belie those cruel words. Let them speak for her.'⁴⁸ Mattie, here, is shown again to be connected to memories of the past, and she uses these memories to help her cope with present circumstances, an ability which extends to Etta Mae. And so, even after their fight, Etta Mae knows she has her friend to return to, and so 'she climbed the steps toward the light and the love and the comfort that awaited her.'⁴⁹ In this way, we see the power of female friendship and connection, depicting 'the ennobling power of love as women sustain each other'.⁵⁰

However, this is not the only important component of their relationship. Mattie also takes Etta Mae to church, showing Etta Mae the power of collective community and shared ritual. In church, the congregation is taken beyond their personal histories and memories to something collective:

⁴³Linda Wells, "'What Shall I Give My Children?': The Role of the Mentor in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*', *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1990, p.44.

⁴⁴I will not discuss Cora Lee or Kiswana here, not because they are unimportant to the novel, but because their interactions with Mattie are less extensive.

⁴⁵Connor, p.59-60.

⁴⁶Naylor, *Women*, p.58.

⁴⁷Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, Trans. Francis j. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter, Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1980, p.85-86.

⁴⁸Naylor, *Women*, p.70.

⁴⁹ibid., p.74.

⁵⁰Wells, p.45.

The words were as ancient as the origin of their misery, but the tempo had picked up threefold in its evolution from the cotton fields. They were now sung with the frantic determination of a people who realized that the world was swiftly changing but for some mystic, complex reason their burden had not.⁵¹

Members of the congregation are converted from individuals to one larger, communal body, for, 'The song ended with a huge expulsion of air, and the congregation sat down as one body.'⁵² Although Etta Mae does not yet fully grasp the power of community put forth within the church—she spends much time focusing on the desirability of the minister, whom she later sleeps with—she does get a hint of what Mattie knows, that communal connection and collective memories of the past can be uplifting, healing, and even resistant to limited or oppressive versions of that past. What Etta does learn is the power of shared community to help one contemplate and interpret one's own past. As she sits with the rest of the church congregation, she sees her life 'reeled out before her with the same aging script; but now hindsight sat as the omniscient director and had the young star of her epic recite different brilliant lines'.⁵³ She begins to see how the power of a collective history can impact and even change her own personal history.

Just as Mattie provides Etta Mae with a collective space through which Etta Mae can re-evaluate her storied memories, she does the same for Ciel, Miss Eva's grown granddaughter, who now lives in Brewster Place. In Ciel's story, we learn that her desperate choices have led her to a point of utter despair. Ciel is involved with a man, Eugene, who is constantly abandoning her and then returning. When she shares the news that she is pregnant with a second child, Eugene tells her that there is no way he can support a second child and threatens to leave. In order to avoid this, she has an abortion, a decision with which she is never comfortable. In response, she compartmentalises the events in order not to remember them:

All the activities of the past week of her life were balled up and jammed on the right side of her brain, as if belonging to some other woman. And when she endured this one last thing for her, she would push it up there, too, and then one day give it all to her—Ciel wanted no part of it.⁵⁴

Unlike Mattie, who frames her memories in a positive light and shares her memories with others, Ciel's inability to confront her past helps lead to the desperation and lack of utter well-being she later endures. When, again, Eugene threatens to leave, she realises she should tell him of the emotional pain of her abortion, but

that would require that she uncurl that week of her life, pushed safely up into her head, when she had done all those terrible things for that other woman who had wanted an abortion. She and she alone would have to take responsibility for them now.⁵⁵

As she searches 'desperately for the right words'⁵⁶ to story her memory, she fails. Her inability to narrate her memory is unsurprising, as traumatic memories rarely fit our standard memory schemas or frames for understanding experience. As Holocaust survivor and trauma theorist Dori Laub explains, trauma is defined by its 'radical *otherness* to all known frames of reference,' which situates the experience of trauma 'beyond the limits of human ability (and willingness) to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine'.⁵⁷ Even as Ciel tries to face her past, she is unable to narrate it in a way that truly conveys her experience and sense of loss. Unfortunately, Ciel's traumatic experience is not limited to her abortion. As she

⁵¹Naylor, *Women*, p.63.

⁵²ibid., p.64.

⁵³ibid., p.64.

⁵⁴ibid., p.96.

⁵⁵ibid., p.100.

⁵⁶ibid., p.100.

⁵⁷Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, p.68.

watches Eugene pack, from the other room she hears a scream from her daughter, a toddler named Serena, who, attempting to follow a roach, has stuck a fork into an electrical socket.

Serena's death, in addition to the abortion that Ciel never emotionally deals with, leave her with no will to live. Sociologist Kai Erickson chronicles the effects of trauma and its impact on memory:

The classic symptoms of trauma range from feelings of restlessness and agitation at one end of the emotional scale to feelings of numbness and bleakness at the other. Traumatized people often scan the surrounding world anxiously for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages and reacting with a start to ordinary sights and sounds, but at the same time, all that nervous activity takes place against a numbed gray background of depression, feelings of helplessness, and a general closing off of the spirit, as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm. Above all, trauma involves a continual reliving of some wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances. Paul Valery wrote: "Our memory repeats to us what we haven't understood." That's almost it. Say instead: "Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us."⁵⁸

As Ciel experiences a 'closing off of the spirit' in response to her trauma, it is Mattie who helps bring her through her grief, leading many to read their encounter as a prime example of the healing power of women's friendship and community. For instance, as Fowler suggests, 'This story thus presents the pain of grief and betrayal, including self-betrayal, as inescapable but bearable when women bond together.'⁵⁹ But Mattie provides more than simple friendship or bonding, or even the sharing interpersonal memories of loss. In fact, this act of sharing interpersonal memories is proven ineffectual by the neighbour woman who tries to comfort Ciel:

A neighbor woman entered in studied certainty and stood in the middle of the room. "Child, I know how you feel, but don't do this to yourself. I lost one, too. The Lord will ..." And she choked, because the words were jammed down into her throat by the naked force of Ciel's eyes. Ciel had opened them fully now to look at the woman, but raw fires had eaten them worse than lifeless—worse than death. The woman saw in that mute appeal for silence the ragings of a personal hell flowing through Ciel's eyes. And just as she went to reach for the girl's hand, she stopped as if a muscle spasm had overtaken her body and, cowardly, shrank back. Reminiscences of old, dried-over pains were no consolation in the face of this. They had the effect of cold beads of water on a hot iron—they danced and fizzled up while the room stank from their steam.⁶⁰

Shared interpersonal memory is simply not enough to help Ciel find agency within her suffering. What Mattie does bring, in addition to friendship and women's bonding, is a connection to a collective history of an imagined community of women⁶¹—a community constituted by their shared pain, suffering, and loss. And so as Mattie rocks Ciel:

into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time. She rocked her over Aegean seas so clean they shone like crystal, so clear the fresh blood of sacrificed babies torn from their mother's arms and given to Neptune could be seen like pink froth on the water. She rocked her on and on, past Dachau, where soul-gutted Jewish mothers swept their children's entrails off laboratory floors. They flew past the spilled brains of Senegalese infants whose mothers had dashed them on the wooden sides of slave ships. And she rocked on. She rocked her into her childhood and let her

⁵⁸Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, pp.183-184.

⁵⁹Fowler, p.44.

⁶⁰Naylor, *Women*, p.102.

⁶¹ I draw on Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities here. Anderson asserts 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983, p.6.

see murdered dreams. And she rocked her back, back into the womb, to the nadir of her hurt, and they found it—a slight silver splinter, embedded just below the surface of the skin. And Mattie rocked and pulled—and the splinter gave way, but its roots were deep, gigantic, ragged, and they tore up flesh with bits of fat and muscle tissue clinging to them. They left a huge hole, which was already starting to pus over, but Mattie was satisfied. It would heal.⁶²

This is, as Nicosia argues, an ‘act of maternal love’ that is ‘one of the strongest and most successful expressions of female-bonding and kinship in the sequence’.⁶³ But it is also more than this. What Mattie does is help Ciel connect with something larger than herself; she connects her to a collective memory and history of women’s oppression and loss. Ciel’s experience moves from an exclusive individual pain, to a pain endured by centuries of women. As Wells argues,

through human touch, Mattie rocks Ciel across history. She becomes not an individual mother who suffers the loss of her child, but one of the multitude of sufferers, collectively connected to mother suffering. ... Mattie, in the images of mother and midwife, assists Ciel in rejoining the world by binding her to other victimised women who too had to find a way to exorcise the pain.⁶⁴

These women are no longer individuals for Mattie or Ciel, and though important, their individual stories would be as ineffectual for Ciel as the neighbour woman’s story. But as Mattie helps Ciel to experience this collective memory of loss, Ciel, like Etta, is able to face her own memories of loss which will allow her to heal. Ann Fowell Stanford describes the rocking scene as a movement from a ‘larger unframed history of women’s brutalization and oppression into the specific frame of her [Ciel’s] own life.’⁶⁵ It is appropriate that she uses the language of framing, as what Mattie helps Ciel to do is to frame her memories of loss in a much larger narrative of women’s pain and suffering. With this larger perspective, Ciel can regain a sense of agency, even as she experiences great pain, by seeing her ‘own collective enmeshment in that fixed world’,⁶⁶ a goal of Davies’s collective biography projects. Ciel is thus able to recognise that she is not alone in her suffering, and there are larger systems of power working to shape her life experiences. And just as Davies and her colleagues use knowledge attained through the process of collective biography to ‘set out to make it [their enmeshment] more fluid, more open to other possibilities’,⁶⁷ so, too, does Ciel. Ciel ultimately leaves Brewster Place to start a new life in San Francisco, away from the conditions of poverty, racism, and sexism that so directly structure Brewster Place.

Denied Memory

For Naylor, then, collective memory can provide characters with comfort, hope, and a sense of group connection and belonging, as well as a larger lens through which to understand their life experiences. This need for community becomes even clearer when we consider what happens to Lorraine, a character who is denied her place in the community and must endure as her own life experiences and memories are rejected and silenced. Lesbians Lorraine and Theresa move to Brewster to get away from the discrimination they faced in a middle-class neighbourhood. Although it is not important to Theresa, Lorraine desperately desires to be part of the fabric of Brewster Place:

No, it wasn’t her job she feared losing this time, but their approval. She wanted to stand out there and chat and trade makeup secrets and cake recipes. She wanted to be secretary of their block association and be asked to mind their kids while they ran to the store.⁶⁸

⁶²ibid., p.103-104.

⁶³Nicosia, p.184.

⁶⁴Wells, p.46.

⁶⁵Ann Fowell Stanford, ‘Mechanisms of Disease: African-American Women Writers, Social Pathologies, and Limits of Medicine’, *NWSA Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, p.40.

⁶⁶Davies & Gannon, p.5.

⁶⁷ibid., p.5.

⁶⁸Naylor, *Women*, p.136.

Likewise, Lorraine believes that 'Black people were all in the same boat ... and if they didn't row together, they would sink together.'⁶⁹ Unfortunately, once rumours spread through the community that Lorraine and Theresa are lesbians, the other women reject them, denying any hope Lorraine has of acceptance and love. At a community meeting, Mattie and Etta Mae discuss the general resistance to Lorraine and Theresa. Mattie ponders, 'But I've loved some women deeper than I ever loved any man.' When Etta responds 'It's still different,' Mattie argues, 'Maybe it's not so different. ... Maybe that's why some women get so riled up about it, 'cause they know deep down it's not so different after all.'⁷⁰ Her support, however, is never directly extended to Lorraine, which may have helped prevent the tragedy that follows.

Lorraine is attacked and gang-raped in an alley next to the wall. According to Naylor, Lorraine's rape is linked to her lack of communal support: 'In the case of Lorraine there was no woman on that block willing to help her and she *was* in trouble. ... And she had no one to go to.' Naylor continues, 'It was her alienation from the other women that put her in that alley'.⁷¹ Clearly, rape does not happen because of a lack of community support, but the fact that none of the women are there to help Lorraine is significant, and Mattie's absence is most telling. Unlike Ciel, who has Mattie to rock her back to life and help her face her memories, Mattie, keeper of memory, is not there for Lorraine,⁷² and so it is Lorraine's memory that is lost. As Lorraine is raped, her 'screams tried to break through ... but the tough rubbery flesh sent them vibrating back into her brain, first shaking lifeless the cells that nurtured her memory'.⁷³ Additionally, Naylor reminds readers that even if Lorraine's memories were preserved, even if she was able to share her storied memory of trauma, no one would believe her. When one of the rapists asks what will happen if Lorraine remembers it was them, the ringleader responds, 'Man, how she gonna prove it? Your dick ain't got no fingerprints.'⁷⁴ Her story of trauma and her memories of the rape would be ignored by a racist, misogynistic system. After the rapists have run away, Lorraine sees an innocent man, Ben, walking towards her. Confused and alone, in an attempt to reclaim agency through action, she picks up a rock and beats him to death. Interestingly, Mattie sees Lorraine, but she is too late; she cannot get there quickly enough. As she arrives, she is unable to prevent further damage:

Mattie's screams went ricocheting in Lorraine's head, and she joined them with her own as she brought the brick down again, splitting his forehead and crushing his temple, rendering his brains just a bit more useless than hers were now. Arms grabbed her around the waist.⁷⁵

Nicosia does observe an intimate connection made here between Mattie and Lorraine:

In what may be read as a melding of terrors, Mattie's screams are not merely heard by Lorraine, but are absorbed and mingled with "her own." The women become unified in horror—Lorraine at her gruesome victimization and Mattie at witnessing a murder—through their shared acts of primal screaming.⁷⁶

But their connection comes too late to prevent tragedy. Mattie's attempt to bring Lorraine to the collective fails because of its extremely delayed nature.

Shared Trauma, Shared Resistance

⁶⁹ibid., p.142.

⁷⁰ibid., p.141.

⁷¹Gloria Naylor, interviewed by William Goldstein, 'A Talk with Gloria Naylor' [1983], in Maxine Lavon Montgomery (ed.), *Conversations with Gloria Naylor*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2004, pp.5-6.

⁷²My train of thought here follows that of Fowler, who argues, 'Just as Mattie's love brings Ciel back from the death to which her pain is taking her, so the absence of that kind of caring and protective bond is, by implication, responsible for Lorraine's vulnerability to C.C. Baker and his gang. ... It is doubly significant, then, that Mattie, who has been a life-saving agent for Ciel, sees Lorraine crawling down the alley toward Ben but is unable to arrive in time to stop the murder' (pp.53-54).

⁷³Naylor, *Women*, pp.170-171.

⁷⁴ibid., p.171.

⁷⁵ibid., p.173.

⁷⁶Nicosia, p.185.

It is not only Mattie, however, who failed Lorraine. All of the women feel their complicity in and guilt for the horrific events that have transpired at the wall. At the same time, they finally come to understand their connection with Lorraine. As Fowler argues, 'what happens to Lorraine could happen to all of them and has indeed happened to many of them, albeit in milder forms.'⁷⁷ Indeed, Lorraine's trauma makes legible the dominant racist, sexist, and homophobic ideologies that have shaped their own histories and memories, and it becomes a collective reminder of her struggle for agency and connection, as well as their own. Thus, as rain begins to fall on Brewster Place, every woman

dreamed that rainy week of the tall yellow woman in the bloody green and black dress. She had come to them in the midst of the cold sweat of a nightmare, or had hung around the edges of fitful sleep. Little girls woke up screaming, unable to be comforted by bewildered mothers who knew, and yet didn't know, the reason for their daughters' stolen sleep. The women began to grow jumpy and morose.⁷⁸

Mattie's dreams were also 'troubling.'⁷⁹ Even Ciel, who has left Brewster Place and never knew Lorraine, is connected to Lorraine and dreams of her:⁸⁰

Oh, I don't know, one of those crazy things that get all mixed up in your head. Something about that wall and Ben. And there was a woman who was supposed to be me, I guess. She didn't look exactly like me, but inside I felt it was me. ... And something bad had happened to me by the wall—I mean her—something bad had happened to her.⁸¹

Usha Bande suggests that Naylor demonstrates women's 'bonding through dreams,'⁸² and Fowler emphasises that 'Ciel's identification with Lorraine is one of the most explicit statements the novel makes about the very real sisterhood that binds black women together.'⁸³ But, the fact that they are dreaming of events that they weren't present for suggests more than simple bonding—it suggests that they are sharing a collective memory, similar to Marianne Hirsh's concept of postmemory. Hirsh argues,

Memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. At the same time—so it is assumed—this received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence, the insistence on "post" or "after" and the many qualifying adjectives that try to define both a specifically inter-and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma.⁸⁴

The women experience the collective memory of Lorraine's rape, as well as their own histories of oppression, and Eyerman explains that to mediate such trauma, 'Its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation. A cultural trauma must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse'.⁸⁵ This is what the women must do, as they finally become connected, sharing collective memories of Lorraine's trauma through their dreams.

Ultimately, the women of Brewster Place do not talk about their connection through dreams—'only a few admitted it'⁸⁶—and it is Mattie who must bring them, as she brought Etta Mae and Ciel, to become active participants in the collective body of the community, where they can manage not only the collective memories of Lorraine's trauma but also their shared experiences of sexism and racism. Thus, Mattie, our narrator of collective memories,

⁷⁷Fowler, p.54.

⁷⁸Naylor, *Women*, p.176.

⁷⁹ibid., p.176.

⁸⁰It is only fair to note that Ciel returns in Mattie's dream of the block party, an issue that I will consider shortly.

⁸¹Naylor, *Women*, p.179.

⁸²Usha Bande, 'Murder as Social Revenge in *The Street* and *The Women of Brewster Place*', *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1993, p.5.

⁸³Fowler, p.56.

⁸⁴Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, p.106.

⁸⁵Eyerman, p.160.

⁸⁶Naylor, *Women*, p.175.

dreams the final chapter, 'The Block Party,' and her dream demonstrates the guilt and complicity the women feel, but also their desire to resist the racist and sexist conditions that plague their lives. Thus, although the final chapter's main focus remains on Mattie and her dream, the ending of *The Women of Brewster Place* becomes the collective story of all of the residents. Still, readers must consider that the final chapter is Mattie's dream, and although 'the reader initially assumes [Mattie's dream is] part of the progressive narrative temporality,'⁸⁷ and 'many readers fail, in their first reading of the novel, to recognize it as a dream,'⁸⁸ once readers realise that it is simply a dream, it is easy to dismiss the power of community and collective memory demonstrated within it, as many critics have done. For instance, Nicosia suggests that the fact that the ending chapter is a dream may be Naylor's punishment for the women's 'lack of faithfulness to the cause of black feminism, or for their deeply ingrained homophobia.'⁸⁹ More significantly, Awkward argues that

Instead of serving to unite the text's individual stories, Mattie's dream increases *The Women of Brewster Place's* sense of disjunction. ... Because its presentation of female community is not offered as an actual narrative event, Mattie's dream is perhaps most profitably understood as an illusion that serves to perpetuate the text's content and formal disjunctions.⁹⁰

Still, others disagree, arguing that Mattie, 'as the community's best voice and sharpest eye ... is well-qualified to express the unconscious urgings of the community and dream the collective dream.'⁹¹ And because it is Mattie who dreams the final dream, and Mattie who has effectively brought women to collective memories for redemptive means, the dream cannot be dismissed as simply a failure of community. Nicosia agrees:

Frankly, Mattie's dream may seem even *more* vital to the readers who, after 176 pages of witnessing events that lead only to suffering and suppressed or transferred anger, finally witness the women in a victorious act. Whether these emotions are, or only seem to be purged for the women is moot; the narrative act and its reception are vehicles for community building.⁹²

As Mattie has been the collective *leader*, she must use her dream to know the collective possibility of the women, and as collective narrator, bring their group resistance to fruition.

Thus, Mattie's final dream is better understood as a 'symbolic act'⁹³ that 'enact[s] the "communal memory"'⁹⁴ that the women desperately need. As Cox argues, 'these women all share the same consciousness' and therefore, Mattie's dream becomes an 'episode lying outside time and space in the collective consciousness of all the female characters.' She continues, the women 'share a common terror and rage, and it is out of this aggregate memory that a fantasy of communal alliance finally emerges, where the women are galvanized into action by the blood-like stain of rain on the brick wall.'⁹⁵ And this is exactly what happens. Moved by a collective consciousness enabled by Mattie in her dream, the women turn upon the wall that has become, over the years, an external representation of oppression, and in recent weeks, the site of Lorraine's terror, and recognise that there is 'Blood—there's still blood on this wall. ... Blood ain't got no right still being here.' Led by Mattie, who calls, 'We gonna need some help here,' the women of Brewster Place break down the wall, passing the bricks 'hand to hand, table to table, until the brick[s] flew out of Brewster Place'.⁹⁶ In this act, as Connor observes, 'Naylor demonstrate[s] that freedom from

⁸⁷Jill L. Matus, 'Dream, Deferral, and Closure in *The Women of Brewster Place*,' *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1990, p.63.

⁸⁸Fowler, p.54.

⁸⁹Nicosia, pp.191-192.

⁹⁰Awkward, p.62.

⁹¹Matus, p.52

⁹²Nicosia, p.192.

⁹³Matus, p.54.

⁹⁴Cox, p.151.

⁹⁵ibid., p.164.

⁹⁶Naylor, *Women*, pp.185 & 186.

oppression is seldom an individual pursuit.⁹⁷ Instead, the women must come together and act, prompted by their collective memories of pain, oppression, grief, but also of solidarity and connection. Likewise, as Cox asserts, 'The history of the women's oppression is written nowhere, so they find its story in the blood-which-is-not-blood [it is rain].'⁹⁸ Then, by tearing down the wall, they actively change the story and rewrite the history, claiming their oppression and standing against it in a realization of power and agency that they have always already had. Just like the women in Davies's collective, by joining together in collective remembering, the women make 'the mechanisms of power at work in oneself and on oneself ... available for inspection',⁹⁹ and in turn, they throw bricks as an act of awareness and resistance.

In an interview, when Naylor was asked if Mattie's dream of collective resistance would ever become a reality, she responded,

This is going to depend on the reader. When she [Mattie] wakes up, the party is going to take place, but the clouds are coming and you know it's going to rain. Is this going to be a deferred dream? Well, I decided to let each reader decide. Will they tear down the wall? Or won't they? ... It's an open ending.¹⁰⁰

And although it is an open ending, as Mattie awakes and looks out the window, she sees Brewster Place 'bathed in a deluge of sunlight' and perceives it to be 'just like a miracle,' suggesting that miracles could occur that very day.¹⁰¹ Likewise, we must turn to a lesson Mattie learned from Butch Fuller, the father of her child, a lesson that Mattie returns to in memory. As Butch teaches Mattie to eat sugar cane, he instructs her to

spit it out while the wedge is still firm and that last bit of juice—that one the promises to be the sweetest of the whole mouthful—just escapes the tongue.¹⁰²

It seems that Mattie has passed this lesson on to Naylor, who leaves readers with the promise of something sweet that just escapes us. Still, there is an epilogue to the novel, where Brewster Place, itself, has been closed, its residents evicted, and this epilogue demonstrates how far the residents have come. Naylor tells us, there is 'no eulogy' when a street dies—no one is there to officially tell the story of its history and the people who lived there—and yet, what finally allows a street to die is 'when the spirit is ... fading in someone's memory.'¹⁰³ Thus, although Brewster is now abandoned and empty, it is not yet dead. It 'still waits to die' because the women carry the memories and the stories of the place and of the community they created there. Their storied memories help them to sustain themselves, but also help them to not forget the collective history of their lives in Brewster Place, a history that would otherwise be silenced.

Ultimately, Naylor depicts the potential for resistance prompted by shared remembering. It is as the women are joined through collective memory that they best learn to re-see their personal identities and memories, while also sharing in a larger group identity. This shift allows the women to find hope for their personal futures as they join with a group that allows them to validate their own experiences in the context of collective experience and memories. At the same time, by joining their personal memories with others, they begin to identify the ideological systems in place that shape their life experiences. This realization prompts them to act and to exhibit their newly identified agency as they fight against their racist and sexist oppressors. Their realization of a shared history through collective remembering provides the impetus for agency and action. French historian Pierre Nora notes, 'To claim the right to memory is, at bottom, to call for justice'.¹⁰⁴ Each of the characters

⁹⁷Connor, p.45.

⁹⁸Cox, p.165.

⁹⁹Davies & Gannon, p.11.

¹⁰⁰Gloria Naylor, interviewed by Angels Carabi, 'An Interview with Gloria Naylor' [1992], in Maxine Lavon Montgomery (ed.), *Conversations with Gloria Naylor*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2004, pp.119-120.

¹⁰¹Naylor, *Women*, p.188.

¹⁰²ibid., p.18.

¹⁰³ibid., p.191.

¹⁰⁴Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', in Jeffrey K. Olick, Vard Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Daniel Levy (eds.), *The Collective Memory Reader*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 2011, p.441.

in Naylor's text claims her right to memory by telling her story, and thus, calls for justice. Through the women's stories, then, Naylor demonstrates the potential of collective memories that extend beyond individual memories and identities to change and better the lives of her women characters.