



The Evolution Of Womanhood: Feminist Narratives In *Girl, Woman, Other*.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolution of womanhood through feminist narratives in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. The novel weaves together the lives of twelve diverse characters, offering a multifaceted portrayal of women's experiences across generations, races, and social classes. By examining the intersectionality of gender, race, sexuality, and class, this paper analyses how these personal stories reflect the dynamic nature of feminist identity and empowerment. Each character's journey provides insight into the broader struggles women have faced, from the restrictive norms of past generations to the more fluid, intersectional feminist identities emerging today. Through these varied narratives, Evaristo critiques conventional feminist frameworks, presenting a more inclusive and expansive vision of womanhood. The study also examines the novel's structural choices, highlighting how the interwoven stories underscore the evolution and transformation of feminist thought, demonstrating the ongoing redefinition of womanhood across different eras.

KEYWORDS: Gender Identity, Feminist Narrative, National Identity, Intersectionality, Cultural Trauma, Social Justice, Identity Crisis, Subaltern Voices

INTRODUCTION

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* offers a dynamic and multifaceted portrayal of womanhood in modern-day United Kingdom. The novel is introduced through the lives of twelve highly different women, each belonging to a different background, race, and social class. Through their interrelated stories, Evaristo demonstrates the richness and diversity of womanhood and how it has evolved over time and in social settings. They are Amma, the Black lesbian militant playwright, to Yazz, her daughter, who is representative of a new generation and their new definitions of feminism. They speak across a broad span of experience, in them, and the novel offers a careful consideration of the construction of identity by intersecting forces—gender, race,

class, and sexuality—and the ways in which they intersect and move along the constantly shifting ground of feminist politics.

Of course, *Girl, Woman, Other* is concerning an interrogation of feminist ideology that is profound. Evaristo unpicks the changing definition of feminist identity and shows us how women's struggle has been conditioned by all kinds of different contexts within society. The novel leaves behind one, monochromatic vision of womanhood and instead celebrates a multi-coloured diversity of feminist experience. Through the lives of the twelve women, Evaristo shows us how womanhood is not one homogenous static entity but a living and fluid one influenced by forces both from without and from within.

Also, *Girl, Woman, Other* is radical in its critique of longstanding restrictive and exclusionary traditional feminism. By portraying such diversity of characters, the novel refuses the classic structure of feminism, which has historically been white and middle-class. Through protagonists like Dominique, who reads the world as a working-class Black woman would, and Shirley, whose narrative functions through respectability and race tropes, Evaristo subverts the mainstream feminist trope. Evaristo demonstrates how these quintessential feminist ideals summarily disregard the concerns of minority women.

Hence, Evaristo offers a more intersectional and inclusive brand of feminism. While the novel only deals with gender equality, it is interested in the need to move beyond the gender factor and also include others such as race, class, sexuality, and age when one writes about the lives of women. By its multiracial cast and their varied lives, *Girl, Woman, Other* challenges readers to expand their definitions of feminism so it is an integrated, inclusive movement centred in the lives of all women, whoever they are and wherever they are.

By interlacing these disparate yet related stories, Evaristo presents an entire history of how womanhood evolved and why feminism must evolve with the new world. The novel questions a broader, more elastic definition of what it means to be a woman in the 21st century and proves that womanhood is a fluid concept that permits a diversity of experience, failures, and successes.

This essay will discuss these themes in detail, exploring the way Evaristo employs her characters and their narratives to undermine traditional feminist forms and provide a wider understanding of womanhood. The essay will also examine how *Girl, Woman, Other* shows the progressive nature of feminist thought, tracing the path of the struggle for gender equality and how it has changed and will change in response to shifting women's realities.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINISM

One of the central problems evolved in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* is intersectionality, a central idea of modern feminist theory. Intersectionality is an awareness that individuals' identities are not constructed by one factor, i.e., gender, race, or class, but by the multifaceted interaction between numerous factors conditioning a human being's life in society. Such factors include gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and other social categories. The novel, rich and complex in characters, shows the need for knowledge regarding how these variables intersect and converge to create a woman's self and her experience of oppression and empowerment.

One of the most powerful depictions of intersectionality in *Girl, Woman, Other* is that of Amma, a Black lesbian playwright. Amma's identity is created by multiple layers of experience that intersect in ways that make her struggles distinct. As a Black woman in a white and frequently patriarchal society, Amma must contend with systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. But her issues are made worse further by the aspect that she herself chooses to be lesbian in a culture that has broadly shunned queer individuals. Her narrative puts the spotlight on the fact that women who come from more than one minority will face a double and complex mix of discrimination. Amma's voice here is assertive in that she isn't going to let some solitary aspect of herself determine her altogether; instead, she insists to be regarded as a whole entity, with a multitude of self that all have to be factored into account of her work and life.

Evaristo employs Amma's story to challenge feminist narratives which have historically revolved around white, middle-class women. The novel forces readers to frame feminism in expansive and nuanced ways through Amma's experience. Evaristo recalls that feminism will collapse if it cannot incorporate the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality—because these determine how women experience the world. To single out gender alone would be to ignore the unique and frequently more complicated issues women with multiple forms of oppression have.

Amma's experiences also point towards a more general critique of the feminist movement as a whole, which has itself been accused of not being responsive to issues like race and sexuality. By foregrounding Amma's intersecting status, *Girl, Woman, Other* denies the idea of a monolithic, universalized feminist experience and demands a feminist paradigm constructed that is more representative of all women, but most particularly of those in marginalized groups.

In contrast to her mother Amma, Yazz has grown up with a younger generation more open to an alternative gender, sexual, and feminist understanding. Yazz's ideology is representative of the more fluid and open concept of identity. She believes in rebelling against the older, more binary ideology of gender and sexuality that dominated earlier feminist movements. For Yazz, feminism is not about following some prescribed roles or set of principles, but freedom of the self and finding oneself unjudged. She resists the gender constraints imposed on her and desires a wider, more expansive definition of what it means to be a woman.

The characterization of Yazz also departs from the formal and radical form of feminism practiced by her mother. Feminism for Amma, as central to political and personal selves as a Black lesbian, is diminished against the characterization of Yazz as symptomatic of the adaptive potential of feminist ideology. Yazz's generation is gender- and sexuality-aware in being mindful of their multiplicity and that marks feminist activism elsewhere. Today, the bulk of young feminists like Yazz believe in the possession of several, fluid selves that go beyond traditional definitions of gender and sexual identity. Modern feminism, according to Yazz's introduction to it, believes not in adhering to being cast in expected roles but rather in accepting and embracing diversity and individuality.

In *Amma and Yazz*, Evaristo illustrates the evolution of feminist ideology from a more contained, protest-oriented movement to a more inclusive, identity-based movement. Amma's feminism is activist-oriented and oppositional in tone, while Yazz's feminism is freedom-oriented and focused on the freedom to narrate one's own tale. This is a testament to feminism itself evolving, whereby struggles undertaken by past generations

for basic rights and dignity have given way to the broader contention of the complexities of identity, liberty, and self-expression.

Lastly, *Girl, Woman, Other* uses the intersectionality approach to show that feminism can't be just one ideology. The novel illustrates that women's existence cannot be separated from the various other factors race, sex, class, etc.—upon which their existence is conditioned. Intersectionality, as it is revealed in the lives of Amma and Yazz, shows that a feminist struggle must recognize the diversity of women's existence and accommodate all women's voices to be heard and valued.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FEMINISM

One of the central themes of Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* is the changing face of feminism, specifically how successive generations of women engage with and perceive the fight for gender equality. Through the opposing figures of Amma and Yazz, the novel underlines the generational split in feminist ideology, showing how the concerns and tactics of feminist movements have shifted throughout history. The changing perceptions between these two women mirror the wider changes in feminist ideologies as women's struggles have developed and evolved to fit the changing social and political terrain.

Amma's feminism is rooted in her own experiences as a Black woman who has lived much of her life struggling for equality, justice, and social change. As a lesbian playwright and activist, Amma's perspective is informed by the battles of previous generations of feminists who were forced to fight against systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. Her strategy is radical and revolutionary, not just fighting for legal equality for women but for a radical reorganization of society itself. For Amma, feminism is not just about women gaining individual rights or accessing opportunities; it is about creating a world where gender, race, and sexuality can no longer be employed as weapons of oppression. Amma's feminism demands revolution, revolution that disassembles entrenched power structures and builds a more egalitarian and inclusive world. Amma's activism and conviction in collective action come from the struggles that past generations, particularly the Black civil rights movements and second-wave feminism, went through. She believes in feminism as a continued struggle that needs to be conducted in unity, solidarity, and a resolve for radical transformation. Social and political transformation and working towards addressing the structural inequalities still looming over marginalized communities are the emphasis in Amma's understanding. Her own feminism is one echoing the anxiety in many of the women around her generation that did not seek mere equal rights, but instead complete transformation within social norms.

Meanwhile, daughter Yazz signifies an individualist generation of femininity. Growing up in a more liberal and progressive society, Yazz's feminism is influenced by her own experiences as a young woman navigating a world that, while still imperfect, offers more opportunities to women than the one Amma struggled in. Yazz's feminisms are less politicized and more about individual agency, self-expression, and personal identity. For Yazz, feminism is about the right to define herself on her own terms, to live authentically, and to express her gender and sexuality without fear of judgment. This shift towards individualism reflects broader changes in feminist discourse, where the focus has increasingly moved towards embracing diverse identities and allowing for personal agency and freedom.

Whereas Amma's feminism is activism and resistance, Yazz's feminism is exploration and empowerment of self. She does not see herself as belonging to a movement, but as finding herself as an individual and speaking for herself. Her feminism is guided by the wider, intersectional feminist ideologies of the time, which emphasize the worth of identifying with individual identity while also observing the bigger issues present in society then. Feminism to Yazz is not a matter of resisting the system at all but locating a place where women can exist and become free and in themselves.

The gap between the generations of Amma and Yazz is also a powerful metaphor for the changing nature of feminism itself. In the earlier generations, women were fighting for basic rights to vote, to work, and for equal treatment at the workplace. Feminism in the earlier generations was defined as a fight for equality within the prevailing institutions of society. Women were fighting against blatant forms of discrimination, and the movement was meant to achieve legal and institutional reforms that would allow women to have a larger part in public life.

Now, as in Yazz, feminism has turned more personal and individual. Although women continue to struggle for equality in numerous spheres, the argument has widened to encompass concerns of personal freedom, identity, and self-expression. Contemporary feminism sees that the issue of gender equality cannot solely be resolved with institutional and legal reform but that one must go after the interior, personal concerns of women as well, such as how women think about themselves and how other people think about them. The struggle is about welcoming diversity in its many guises be that about accepting differing gender, sex, or simply being female in the world.

Evaristo uses this generation gap to point out how even though the fight for women's rights has come a long way throughout history, it is still not over. The fight for freedom, equality, and self-expression goes on and with the evolving society, it keeps evolving too. Even though for Amma and her generation the fight was survival and that was it, for Yazz and her generation it is liberation and becoming herself. Despite these variations, both approaches are part of the larger feminist agenda in the novel and both generations have their contribution to the general discussion of what it is to be a woman in this world.

By pointing out such generation-to-generation differences, *Girl, Woman, Other* reveals the dynamic nature of feminism. It is not a fixed ideology but a dynamic, breathing movement that changes according to the needs and conditions of women at a particular time and location. The novel's articulation of such changing feminist concepts encourages us to view feminism as a complicated, living force that asserts itself in reaction to the hardships encountered by women from time to time.

CRITIQUING TRADITIONAL FEMINISM

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo gives a critical assessment of traditional feminism, i.e., its initial bias towards documenting the lives of white middle-class women alone. By offering identification of a group of distinct characters, Evaristo prevents the tendency to stick to one model of feminism, demonstrating that women's issues are the outcome of a collection of multiple interacting variables such as race, class, and economic status. This kind of criticism not only informs us about feminism but also calls for more expansive,

intersectional theory better aligned with the experience of all women, and women in particular of marginalized communities.

One of the strongest arguments concerning this criticism can be made regarding the character of Dominique, a working-class woman who becomes estranged from the mainstream feminist movement. Dominique's story sheds light on the failure of mainstream feminism, one it has been unjustly criticized for more often than need be of being responsible to the interests of white, college-educated, and fairly wealthy women. While these women's lives are certainly profound, they are only a small percentage of the female population. Dominique's issues, however, lie very deeply at the nexus of gender and class. As a working-class woman, she must deal with not only society's deeply ingrained sexism but with economic poverty as well as systematically rooted injustice which readily fall off the radar screen for mainstream feminist accounts.

Dominique's disaffiliation with feminism indicates that there is the overall problem of exclusion of classes from mainstream feminism. For women such as her, feminist activism focusing on gender equality in workplaces or reproductive rights appears far from addressing the more immediate and critical issues that she has, i.e., insecurity of jobs, poverty, and color-based discrimination. In a culture where race and class are themselves secondary to gender, working-class women or women of colour themselves may feel silenced within feminist ranks. By means of the example of Dominique's disillusionment, Evaristo depicts how successful as it is, dominant feminism has always not heard the intersectional concerns that women from innumerable different circumstances face.

In addition to reminding us of differences in class, Evaristo uses Dominique's character to illustrate how mainstream feminism has occasionally been insensitive to the suffering of women of colour, and to Black women, specifically. Whereas feminism as a cause has traditionally been focused around issues like suffrage, equality in the workplace, and reproductive rights—issues which cut across both racial and class boundaries and affect women—women of colour are afflicted by a double standard of oppression in the form of racism and cultural marginalization. By doing so, Evaristo is rejecting dominant feminist discourses based on placing some women's voices and histories at a privileged level above others' without acknowledging their entanglement. This is how she maintains a sensitive and generous feminism keen on keeping an eye out for the multifarious manners in which women experience oppression.

The internal critique of liberal feminism within the novel is also difficult to the assumption of one universal experience of femaleness. In the lives here projected of women of various backgrounds, races, sexualities, and class positions, Evaristo demands the radical multifaceted Ness of women's lives and the complexity of the means by which feminism can be constructed. This critique demands a broader, more extensive definition of womanhood—one which recognizes that the struggle for gender equality is deeply rooted in the struggle for racial, economic, and social justice.

For example, Amma, a Black lesbian playwright, is faced with a different type of problem than a middle-class white feminist who has the privilege of considering gender equality alone. Amma's experience is defined by race and sexual orientation, both of which are central to her definition of womanhood. And then there's Yazz, daughter of Amma, a new, individual kind of feminism, where women can have more room to create themselves and their own position in the world. Evaristo shows with these women that feminism itself must

evolve to fit the new picture of women's lives, to accept complexity of identity and experience that is being a woman in the world today.

Evaristo's depiction of these different characters and their struggles forces readers to challenge the dominant stories of feminism and take more earnestly the ways that women's voices are systematically erased in feminist discourse. Instead of presuming that there's a "right" or "universal" means by which to be woman, *Girl, Woman, Other* encourages a more textured and complex feminism—one that acknowledges the intersection of gender, race, class, and other sociological forces in structuring women's lives.

By this critique of liberal feminism, Evaristo invites a more responsive and inclusive feminism that is sensitive to the complexity of women's lives in various social, cultural, and economic contexts. The novel intimates that, to be most empowering, feminism needs to be flexible, varied, and responsive to how women are simultaneously oppressed and resistant on various levels. In doing so, *Girl, Woman, Other* mounts a powerful call to action for a feminist movement intersectional and inclusive, responsive to the richness of women's lives.

CONCLUSION

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo offers a highly nuanced and energetic tale of womanhood, tracing the struggle with feminist theory along classes, racial boundaries, and generations. Tracing the sparkling interconnectedness and various lives of twelve women, *Girl, Woman, Other* pushes against the complex politics of feminism, reversing the arrival of feminist theory and its reinterpretation vis-à-vis the transformation of society.

In bringing out intersectionality, Evaristo uncovers how race, sex, and class construct women's lives in various ways. Amma and Yazz embody two different generations and imaginations of feminism—Amma's activist/radical generation-based imagining against Yazz's fluid, subjective reading of identity. The generation-splitting brings out how feminism has expanded its site of practice to encompass newer challenges and questions brought in, from elementary rights to subject liberty and personal expression.

Moreover, Evaristo is opposed to the traditional mainstream feminine forms that tend to be white, middle-class women's experience. In women such as Dominique, a working woman, she satirizes the possibility of a uniting female experience and instead advocates for a representative form that accounts for the struggle of each woman regardless of her identity or background.

Finally, the novel compels readers to challenge what it is to be a woman and what feminism is. Because of its layered quality and textured characters, *Girl, Woman, Other* needs a broader, more extensive feminist discussion that celebrates difference and acknowledges the continued unfolding of womanhood. It invites the reader to put aside the constricting, bounded formulations of gender of earlier periods and adopt in their place an active, intersectional model responsive to the discrete experiences of all women.

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