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EXAMINING INTERSECTIONALITY THROUGH AMMA BONSU'S NARRATIVE IN EVARISTO'S FUSION FICTION NOVEL, *GIRL, WOMAN, OTHER*

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Abstract
This study investigates the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality in Bernardine Evaristo's acclaimed fusion fiction novel *Girl, Woman, Other*. Fusion fiction, a genre distinguished by its amalgamation of various literary styles and cultural traditions, offers a unique perspective for examining the novel's diverse characters and scenarios. Focusing on the character Amma, this study employs Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality framework to explore the multifaceted aspects of her identity and experiences. The critical study highlights how Amma's transition from a fringe theatre activist to a prominent figure in the mainstream cultural sphere exemplifies the intricacies of discrimination and underscores the significance of an intersectional approach to feminist and antiracist politics. Evaristo's narrative vividly portrays Amma's systemic oppression, stressing the necessity of considering multiple identity factors to comprehend and address these challenges effectively. This research demonstrates how Evaristo's novel, with its rich social tapestry and varied character portrayals, creates a compelling narrative space for exploring the intersections of various forms of oppression within the context of fusion fiction. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of Black women's lived experiences and underscores the pivotal role of intersectionality in contemporary feminist and antiracist discourse.
Keywords: Amma, black, intersectionality, fusion fiction, oppression.

INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, exploring intersectionality within the narrative structure of fusion fiction provides profound insights into the complexities of identity. This research aims to dissect the layers of intersectionality in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, with a focus on the portrayal of its female characters. Through critical analysis, this study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted experiences of these characters, shaped by overlapping social categorisations.

Kimberle Crenshaw invented the term "intersectionality," which has been instrumental in literary criticism for investigating how race, gender, class and other identification markers intersect to shape the lives of individuals and communities. In literature, intersectionality allows for a holistic reading of characters and narratives, revealing how various forms of oppression and privilege interrelate within the overall structure of the story. Fusion fiction, marked by its blending of genres, styles, and voices, emerges as a powerful medium for representing the diversity of human experience. By defying established literary rules, fusion fiction encourages readers to think about identity in multidimensional ways, leading to a more inclusive perspective of the human experience. In this context, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* serves as a classic example, providing rich narratives that reflect the intersections of identity. Novels with detailed social environments, like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, or Toni Morrison's *Sula*, are especially suitable for this comparative approach to intersectional reading (Kentoff 2,3).

The intersectionality belief has been recognised as the "most significant advance that women's studies have provided so far" (McCall 1772). While it is important to address contemporary feminist movements, its roots can be traced back to the political action of Black women, Chicana and Latina women, and other women of colour, a majority of whom identified as lesbians. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, a black feminist legal scholar, originated and expanded the idea of intersecting patterns of discrimination. This concept of intersectionality substantially impacted the course of Black feminist thought, widening its reach and cementing it as a critical part of contemporary feminist discourse.

Bernardine Evaristo, an esteemed British author of Anglo-Nigerian heritage, has been celebrated for her innovative narrative techniques and her commitment to representing a multiplicity of voices. Her book *Girl, Woman, Other,* with its colourful depictions of characters whose lives are affected by overlapping identities, epitomises fusion fiction. The conversation on intersectionality and diversity in literature has been greatly enhanced by Evaristo's creative contributions.

The female characters from Evaristo's last work, *Mr Loverman* (2013), which is centred on seventy-four-year-old Barrington Jedidiah Walker, a closed homosexual Caribbean man who resides in London, his wife in her sixties, their two middle-aged children, and his lover Morris, are reflected in this novel. Reflecting on these characters, Evaristo, in an interview with Hannah Chukwu, questioned whether older Black women are written about, concluding, "I'm not sure, but I don't think

anybody does" (Sethi). In 2013, Evaristo penned *London Choral Celestial Jazz*, a short story in verse commissioned by BBC Radio to celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas's birth. This story features four Black women, including Carole, who later becomes a central character in *Girl, Woman, Other*. Drawing inspiration from the female characters in Mr Loverman and from Carole, Evaristo expressed that she felt compelled to focus on "women's stories" in her subsequent work (Capitani 4).

Girl, Woman, Other paints a fluid perspective of the lives of twelve womxn (a substitute spelling used in intersectional feminism to avoid a charge of sexism and to be consisting of trans and nonbinary women), aiming to highlight and overwhelmed the interconnected effects of race, class, gender and sex that influence the lives they lead. Evaristo writes the histories of women who have been erased by patriarchal narratives. In authentic postmodernist manner, she challenges the grand narrative of history and its validity, rebuilding the forgotten tale of Black women in England. She argues that traditional representation in literature has centred solely around the constitutive male subject. Evaristo's release of these twelve women serves as a stark reminder of their exclusion from popular narratives. She breaks down the unitary conceptions of womanhood, female identity, and gender, claiming that they are complicated and unstructured. The power of her stylistic choices and the novel's unconventional structure resides in its capacity to immerse readers in the memory channels of these people. Evaristo's fusion fiction serves as a site of conflict for asserting and challenging the narratives of previously suppressed groups, particularly women, lesbians and transgender persons, inside the apparently monolithic Western civilization. Evaristo establishes a double narrative by politicising these experiences in terms of sexuality, gender, race, and class, speaking out against every form of oppression.

In this study, the analytical lens zooms in on the character of Amma within Bernardine Evaristo's text. Amma, a radical lesbian playwright, occupies a central position in the novel, both as a character and as a symbol of intersectionality. Her multifaceted identity – shaped by race, gender, sexuality and artistic expression – serves as a microcosm of the broader themes explored in the book. By delving into Amma's experiences, we aim to unravel the intricate threads that connect her to the larger tapestry of intersectional narratives. Amma's journey is one of resilience, creativity and defiance. As a black woman in Britain, she grapples with the legacies of colonialism, the challenges of motherhood, and the complexities of her own sexuality. Her artistic endeavours, particularly her groundbreaking play, become a site of resistance, where she confronts societal norms and amplifies the voices of marginalised communities. Through Amma's story, the article delves into the nuances of intersectionality, examining how her various identities intersect and shape her path. We are encouraged to consider the wider ramifications of intersectionality in modern literature as we follow her development throughout the book.

The Bush Women Theatre Company was founded by Amma and Dominique, her closest friend. The purpose of this group was to elevate the voices and stories of women of colour by challenging the established, white-dominated theatre industry. But there was sometimes conflict due to Amma's uncompromising dedication to dramatic transformation. She was distinguished from her childhood companion Shirley, who followed a more reformist route, by her steadfast principles. Their unwavering relationship in spite of their divergent ideologies highlights the novel's main point, which is that radical and reformist strategies are both required to bring about societal change.

Amma's life now that she is in her middle years shows a change of viewpoint. She ends up in a polyamorous relationship with Jackie and Dolores, two white women. This appears to be at odds with her previous position opposing social and ethnic barriers. The biggest shift, arguably, is Amma's long-overdue breakthrough in the mainstream theatrical industry. "The Last Amazon of Dahomey," her play, debuted to great reviews at the esteemed National Theatre. After achieving this, Amma finds herself questioning her changing identity. This internal tension will be explored throughout Amma's journey in the book, providing a complex image of a woman who is always trying to figure out who she is and where she fits in the world.

AMMA BONSU'S INTERSECTIONAL STRUGGLE IN EVARISTO'S NARRATIVE

The protagonist of the book, Amma Bonsu, personifies the difficulties in negotiating both identity and societal change. Amma was raised with a strong sense of social justice by her biracial English mother Helen and her Ghanaian immigrant father Kwabena. Her early years were characterised by a strong and extreme feminist viewpoint, which inspired her to tenaciously oppose her parents' opinions. During her high school years, Amma's fire passion manifested itself in action, and by the time she reached her twenties, she had completely embraced a radical political identity.

It's possible that her first radical approach, which was influenced by her marginalisation, paved the door for more inclusive theatre practices. Her own popularity, though, begs the question of whether the mainstream has really accepted her message or has just appropriated her once-radical viewpoints. This internal conflict reflects the ongoing struggle for true equity within institutions and highlights the challenges faced by those who advocate for change:

> Amma's play, The Last Amazon of Dahomey, opens at the National
>
> tonight she thinks back to when she started out in theatre when she and her running mate, Dominique, developed a reputation for heckling shows that offended their political sensibilities their powerfully trained actors' voices projected from the back of the stalls before they made a quick getaway they believed in protest that was public, disruptive and downright annoying to those at the other end of it she remembers pouring a pint of beer over the head of a director whose play featured semi-naked black women running around on stage behaving like idiots before doing a runner into the backstreets of Hammersmith howling
>
> Amma then spent decades on the fringe, a renegade lobbing hand grenades at the establishment that excluded her until the mainstream began to absorb what was once radical and she found herself hopeful of joining it which only happened when the first female artistic director assumed the helm of the National three years ago. (Evaristo 9, 10)

Amma's early theatre days, characterised by public protest and disruption, reflect her strong political convictions. Her and Dominique's acts of heckling and direct confrontation signify a form of activism that is both performative and revolutionary. This aligns with intersectional feminism's call for visibility and vocal opposition to oppressive structures. Their strategy of using their powerful actors' voices to disrupt shows that offended their political sensibilities exemplifies a proactive approach to

activism. This method is both direct and confrontational, aimed at challenging and unsettling the status quo. It underscores the importance of public visibility and audibility in the fight against systemic injustices. Pouring beer over a director's head who showcased semi-naked Black women in a demeaning manner is a radical act of resistance. It highlights Amma's refusal to accept degrading representations of Black women, which intersect with issues of race and gender. This defiance is a protest against the objectification and stereotypes that are pervasive in the artistic community. However, the selection of a female artistic director signifies a significant change in the theatre's direction towards inclusivity and diversity. The removal of patriarchal barriers and the creation of chances for women and other marginalised groups are symbolised by this change in leadership. The conversation between Amma and her mother exemplifies a feminist discourse between generations, highlighting varying perspectives on comprehending and challenging patriarchy.

The conflict between third-wave feminism, which promotes individual agency and intersectionality, and second-wave feminism, which frequently focuses on institutional change, is highlighted by Amma's forthright confrontation and her mother's more resigned acceptance:

> Dad's a socialist who wants a revolution to improve the lot of all of mankind
> literally
> I tell Mum she married a patriarch look at it this way, Amma, she says, your father was born male in
> Ghana in the 1920s whereas you were born female in London in the
> 1960s and your point is?
> you really can't expect him to 'get you', as you put it
> I let her know she's an apologist for the patriarchy and complicit in a system that oppresses all women she says human beings are complex
> I tell her not to patronize me
> Mum worked eight hours a day in paid employment, raised four children, maintained the home, made sure the patriarch's dinner was on the table every night and his shirts were ironed every morning meanwhile, he was off saving the world
> his one domestic duty was to bring home the meat for Sunday lunch from the butcher's – a suburban kind of hunter-gatherer thing (Evaristo 17, 18).

This discussion is representative of larger public discussions concerning the most effective methods for attaining gender parity, as well as the intricacies of real-life events that mould feminist identities. Amma offers a nuanced perspective on the tension that can arise between political ideology and personal practices when she criticises her father's socialist goals and traditional patriarchal behaviour. Amma's interaction with her mother, who manages her own complicated place within the patriarchal system, sheds more light on this tension. As a fervent socialist, Amma's father supports a revolution to make life better for everyone. His political views are contradicted by his personal life, where he upholds patriarchal traditions and traditional gender roles. This contradiction draws attention to a criticism that is frequently made in feminist discourse: some progressive males fail to live up to their egalitarian ideals in their personal lives. The gendered division of work is highlighted by Amma's father's obsession with saving the world at the expense of his household duties. Revolutionary aspirations do not always translate into just and equal domestic practices.

Amma's father, who was born in Ghana in the 1920s, was raised in a very different environment than Amma, who was raised in London in the 1960s. Their perception of feminism and gender roles is impacted by this generational and cultural divide. The difficulty of bridging these divergent viewpoints is shown by Amma's dissatisfaction with her mother's explanation, which she saw as justification for patriarchal actions. Her mother raised four children, ran the home, and provided for her husband's necessities all while putting in eight hours a day of paid work. This representation highlights the dual pressure that many women bear in juggling their home and work obligations. Amma's opinion, however, might ignore the constrained options that her mother's generation of women had since they frequently had to navigate and negotiate their responsibilities within inflexible cultural institutions. The suburban hunter-gatherer metaphor exposes men's low participation in household chores and parodies the way patriarchal conventions assign major work to women while elevating men for smaller accomplishments. It criticises the flimsy equality in homes where gender roles are still essentially the same despite cosmetic modernisation.

Evaristo uses Amma's personal experiences to shed light on broader social issues, while also deepening the reader's understanding of Amma's character and her world-view:

> Amma nonetheless had to admit she'd had a spectacularly good run as she'd never paid a single copper penny in rent in what had become one of the most expensive cities on the
> planet
> she cried when she left her former office with its jogging sized dimensions and windows overlooking the trains that rolled into the station from the north of England
> she couldn't afford commercial rents and wasn't eligible for subsidized housing
> Amma sofa surfed until she was offered someone's spare room she'd come full circle
> then her mother died, devoured from the inside by the ruthless, ravenous, carnivorous disease that started off with one organ before moving on to destroy the others
> Amma saw it as symptomatic and symbolic of her mother's oppression
> Mum never found herself, she told friends, she accepted her
> subservient position in the marriage and rotted from the inside she could barely look at her father at the funeral
> not long after, he too died of heart failure in his sleep; Amma believed he'd willed it upon himself because he couldn't live without her mother, who'd propped him up since his early days in England she surprised herself at the strength of her grief (Evaristo 33)

This narrative explores themes like economic precarity, familial obligation, and the lasting impacts of structural oppression in a moving way through Amma's reflections on her housing condition, her parents' deaths, and their connection. Her heartbreaking departure from her large, old office, which she could no longer afford, highlights the fact that many people, particularly those in creative fields, live in unstable homes. Amma's battle to find cheap accommodation, which ultimately resulted in her couch surfing and residing in someone's spare room, serves as an example of the instability that many city people experience. This situation reflects broader systemic issues of economic disparity and the gentrification that displaces long-term residents, exacerbating housing crises in major cities. Amma's interpretation of her mother's illness as symbolic of her internalised oppression provides insight into the emotional toll of a subservient life. Amma perceives her mother's acceptance of her subservient role in the marriage as leading to her ultimate

demise, suggesting that unaddressed emotional and psychological burdens can manifest in physical illness.

Amma's inability to look at her father during the funeral signifies her complex and unresolved feelings towards him. Her father's subsequent death from heart failure, which Amma believes he willed upon himself, further complicates her understanding of their interdependent relationship. This interpretation suggests that her father's identity and sense of purpose were deeply linked with her mother's presence and support, reflecting traditional gender roles where men rely on women's emotional and practical labour for their well-being. Amma's battles with housing and her parents' passing are not separate events; rather, they are part of broader stories about gender and economic injustice. The text criticises the systemic problems that mould people's lives, like housing inequality and the widespread effects of patriarchal norms on the autonomy and health of women. Amma's observations show tenacity and a critical conscience that enable her to traverse and examine the systems that have moulded her life, despite her challenges. Even in the face of hardship, her ability to recognise her lucky run with housing demonstrates her level of appreciation and practicality.

CONCLUSION

Evaristo presents the stories of twelve women, showing how their overlapping identities influence their lives and the society in which they live. Through an intersectional analysis of Amma's character, this study sheds light on the complex interplay of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and how these factors impact her life. A fundamental framework for comprehending these complications is provided by Kimberle Crenshaw's groundbreaking work, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," which emphasises the need to take into account many axes of identification in order to fully understand the lived realities of Black women.

Crenshaw's critique of anti-discrimination doctrine underscores the inadequacies of single-axis frameworks that fail to account for the compound effects of race and gender. Evaristo's narrative exemplifies this by presenting characters whose lives cannot be understood through a singular identity lens. For instance, Amma's experiences as a Black lesbian woman in the theatre world reveal the compounded discrimination she faces, which cannot be fully explained by considering her race or gender alone. This aligns with Crenshaw's argument that the intersection of multiple identities creates unique vulnerabilities and challenges that are often overlooked in traditional feminist and antiracist discourses.

Moreover, Crenshaw's analysis of feminist theory's limitations in addressing the needs of women of colour is reflected in Amma's activism and her critique of both patriarchal and white feminist structures. Amma's journey from the fringes of the theatre world to its mainstream highlights the struggle for recognition and inclusion that many Black women face within feminist movements that predominantly centre the experiences of white women. Evaristo's portrayal of Amma's political engagements and her confrontations with both racism and sexism illustrate the necessity of an intersectional approach to feminist activism, as advocated by Crenshaw.

Crenshaw also critiques the antiracist politics that regularly marginalise the voices and experiences of Black women. Amma's narrative exposes this marginalisation within the context of the arts and activism. Her father's socialist ideals, while advocating for broader social change, fail to address the specific oppressions faced by women within their private and public lives. Amma's mother's subservient role within the marriage, despite her economic contributions and labour, highlights how antiracist efforts can sometimes perpetuate gender inequalities. This underscores Crenshaw's point that antiracist politics must incorporate a gendered analysis to be truly inclusive and effective.

Evaristo's characters, including Amma, embody the complexities of intersectionality by living at the crossroads of various social identities and structures of oppression. The novel's richly textured portrayal of these women's lives provides a narrative space where the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality are explored in depth. This narrative strategy aligns with Crenshaw's call for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to understanding the lived realities of marginalised groups, particularly Black women, whose experiences are often rendered invisible in mainstream discourses.

Through Amma's character and her interactions with other women in the novel Evaristo effectively demonstrates the interconnectedness of systemic oppressions and the importance of intersectional analysis. Amma's reflections on her parents' lives, her own struggles in the theatre world, and her efforts to carve out a space for herself and others like her, reveal the layered and compounded nature of discrimination and resistance. This mirrors Crenshaw's argument that recognising and addressing the intersections of various forms of oppression is crucial for achieving social justice and equity.

In conclusion, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* provides a compelling narrative that exemplifies the principles of intersectionality as articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw. By exploring the lives of its characters through the intersecting lenses of race, gender, class and sexuality, the novel underscores the necessity of an intersectional approach in both literature and social theory. Evaristo's work not only enriches our understanding of intersectionality but also highlights its critical importance in addressing the complex realities of Black women's lives, thus contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive feminist and antiracist discourse.

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