



RESEARCH PAPER

Re-articulation of Black Motherhood: Black Feminist Standpoint on Mothering in *Girl, Woman, Other*

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ABSTRACT

The research paper explores what it means to be a Black mother or daughter in the contemporary world through a black feminist study of different female characters, mostly mothers and daughters situated across multiple contexts and times in Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. Patricia Collins' ideas regarding Black women's standpoint on mothering are employed to explore the narrative as a potential site of agency and self-actualization for Black women. The paper establishes that Evaristo's fiction deterritorializes the White feminist discourse which has ignored the experiences of Black women and stereotyped Black mothers through controlling images of Black womanhood. By contextualizing Black feminist standpoint within Black motherhood, this article suggests that *Girl, Woman, Other* reconfigures Black motherhood, already problematized by racism and sexism, in a global flux of gender, binaries and multiculturalism and thereby decentres and deterritorializes White feminism.

KEYWORDS Black Feminism, Black Motherhood, Black Feminist Standpoint, White Feminism

Introduction

Myriad debates in critical studies, when cross fertilized and cross-interrogated by transcultural and transnational studies, favour an interdisciplinary trajectory which emphasizes a relational, polyphonic and contrapuntal approach against a Eurocentric conception that dichotomizes human literatures and cultures. Such a study enables to move across borders and texts, theories and paradigms combining aesthetics and politics as well as global and local. This paper is one such attempt to offer an analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) which decenters and deterritorializes White Feminism where the later claims to offer a universal view of gender imbalance across the globe yet fails to theorize and project the role and place of marginalized, non-white and non-Western women. White Feminism has been criticized by women of colour as an aid in reinvigorating the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004, p. 17; Kaifa, et. al., 2024). It is against this milieu that Black feminist discourse situates its positionality, radically refuting the concepts and assumptions based on universal experience for all women, and recognizing myriad forms of oppressions and crises in the lives of women of colour. In this regard Black women's experiences as mothers, community othermothers as well as leaders, educators and church representatives reconceptualize not just power relations but the construct of motherhood too thus deterritorializing feminist thought as well. In contrast to the individualistic market model of the dominant culture, which sees the community as "arbitrary and fragile" and subject to "competition and domination" (Collins, 2000, p. 181),

the Afrocentric models of community are rooted in collectivism, care and personal accountability which is most prominently reflected in motherhood.

Girl, Woman, Other is Bernardine Evaristo's award winning novel that reflects her staunch activism and advocacy for the inclusion of women of colour and artists into the contemporary British world. The very title of the novel stands for different generations of Black girls, women and mothers who have been othered. The story follows the lives of twelve major characters who are Black British women, over the course of several decades, through intergeneration stories of different spaces and heritage as they navigate their lives and the world around them: African, Caribbean, European, multi-racial, half-caste, immigrants. The narrative retells and rewrites the personal hi(stories) of these women that interconnect with the history of the country at different points. They are artists, teachers, bankers, cleaners, housewives, and are at various stages of womanhood. All women belong to different age groups, class, background, sexuality, yet all represent resistance and a re-articulation of motherhood, which is the focus of this research.

Literature Review

Despite the claims of mainstream western feminism to be for all women, unfortunately that has not been the case. Traditionally, only the Eurocentric perspective and view has been positioned as universal or as the point of reference with which all other concerns had to be measured (Scheurich & Young, 1996). Thereby the British and American version of feminism has always been accepted and established in both academy and politics. From Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which is termed as the pioneering study in French or modern feminism to *The Feminine Mystique* (1965) by Betty Friedan which is the foundational text of second wave feminism and Simon de Beauvoir's seminal *Second Sex* (1988), the feminist criticism and discourse has been mainly silent about the diversity and multiplicity of feminist concerns in favour of a certain absolutism and generalization. Elizabeth V. Spelman (1990) asserts in *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* that exclusion is the biggest scandal of feminist theory. She has criticized Beauvoir and Chodrow for only talking about a certain kind of woman, that is to say a white woman in a white society. Consequently, and quite logically, this Eurocentric notion has been debunked in the recent feminist criticism and the feminist assumption that the issues faced by all women are similar has been hugely criticized.

In contrast to White feminist discourse, Black feminists have had to "restage many of the battles of White feminist criticism within the terms of both feminist and anti-racist activism" (Robbins, 2000, p. 191). That Black women face both a woman question and a race problem dates back to Anna Julia Cooper's writing in late nineteenth century which is a seminal work within Black feminist writings (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 1). Black women had to struggle with white women's supremacist attitude as well as fight to end the misogynist tendencies of Black Nationalism. It was women like Mary Church Terrell, sojourner Truth, and others in the late 19th century that voiced and registered the oppression and experiences of Black women (hooks, 2015, p. 16). Black theorists like bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Patricia Hill Collins stressed the marginalization of Black women due to intersection of race, sex, class, and gender. Inspired by Truth's speech bell hooks titled her 1981 phenomenal book of Black feminist thinking and scholarship as *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. The work serves both as a history and an investigation of the effects of racism as well as sexism on the lives of Black women since the 17th century slavery to the twentieth century. Hook saw Black women as being oppressed and silenced by the white and Black men as well as white women and thus "doubly enslaved" (hooks, b. 2015, p. 27). Hooks can be termed as one of the most prominent and influential voice who brought the question of black "womanhood" or "femaleness" (hooks, 2015, p. 14) to the table. She

insisted in *ain't I a woman* that unlike the 19th women who take active part in struggle for racial equality as well as the movement for women's rights, the Black women of the 20th century have been forced and conditioned to consider race as the only marker of their identity without realizing that their womanhood is an equally important part of their being. While she refused to accept 'woman' and 'black' as two disintegrating phenomenon, pointing out that Black women are dually oppressed by racist and sexual oppression, she asserted that sexist oppression has been as real a factor as the racial oppression. Hence hooks exclaimed "When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women" (p. 21). Disappointed and deceived by the white feminists, who complacently separated the question of race and sex, she wrote with the main intent of showing the impact of sexism on the social status of Black women, insisting that any discussion on the status of Black women is interconnected with and incomplete without the discussion on sexism and cannot be understood by discussion on racial hierarchies only. In effect, Black feminism has to deal with a White feminist agenda with its racism, as well as a Black nationalist one resistant to addresses its own sexism (White 1990). Finding a position that conjoins these seemingly contradictory agendas remains elusive so far (Christian 1989, p. 91). Suffrage and the later civil rights movements of 60s and 70s had nothing to say to and about Black women. That is why the Black feminist literary criticism, incepted in Barbara Smith's ground-breaking essay, *Towards a Black Feminist Criticism* (1977), has always been more politically situated than the white feminist critiques.

Heidi Safia Mirza contends that this othering of Black women characterized by racialized and gendered domination marks the impetus of Black feminism and its postcolonial impulse to chart counter narratives (Mirza, 2105). Through an analysis of double problematics of the so-called post-race and post-feminist sensibilities, she dismisses the assumptions that we are 'beyond race and gender'. Critiquing the way masculinity is perceived, 21st century feminism does not aim to reverse the biological roles of men, rather it wants to secure an all inclusive future for women and men alike by revolutionizing sexism and creating equal opportunities for everyone. Feminisms is not an insult but a label that everyone should embrace.

Being the Booker prize winner by the first ever Black woman, *Girl, Woman, Other* has deservedly so been the subject of various studies and reviews that have mostly explored the narrative as a feminist work. Micha Frazer Carroll in her review for *The Guardian* views the novel as creating "positions of empathy" (Carrol, 2019), and a drive of togetherness through experiences of Black women in Britain. Will Gompertz, while reviewing it for the BBC criticizes the novel for its monotony and formulaic narrative while applauding it for its "readability" (Will Gompertz, 2019) and contemporary and feisty nature that has a plenty to say. *Intersectionality and Fourth-Wave Feminism in Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other* (2023) explores the novel as a contribution to contemporary feminist movement positing it as a contrast to any post-feminist discourse. Calling it a foundational text of fourth wave feminism the writers view the intergenerational and intersectional experience of women characters in the novel in an historical-comparative perspective. The work adds weightage to relevance of contemporary feminism with an ongoing and systematic persistence of misogyny and sexism and a criticism of post-feminism. Another work which uses intersectionality to explore GWO is *Inequality Experienced by Black Women Characters in Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other: A Black Feminism Study* (2024) investigates the novel as reflecting the disparities and inequalities in society by applying Kimberley Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality. The article analyses six major characters Amma, Dominique, Bummi, Carole, Shirley, and Megan striving for

equality, as proposed by Marsham (Crenshaw, 2013), while battling intersecting identities of ace, sexuality, class and career.

Nicola Abram locates the novel within the sociopolitical history and written lineage of the Black women movement in Britain in her essay "Being/together": Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and the Black British Women's Movement" (2024). The study traces intertextual connections with Evaristo's earlier works, including theatre, radio story and verse fiction, along with the periodicals and newsletters of the 1970s and 1980s and argues for the novel as a reanimation of the Black feminist principle as Evaristo herself acknowledged. The compression of time in past and present, the hybrid form of its fusion fiction and the narrative lineage all represent a connection to Black feminist 'speaking out' that makes the novel a "political aesthetic" (2024, p.) in Abram's words. This article devotes the major part of discussion to the narrative and syntactical polyvocality of the text as an attempt to represent Black British women and their diversity. Wang and Nan also consider the blending of postmodern literary genres, that allows Evaristo to fuse reality with creative imagination as her artistic privilege. Their "Polyphonic Narrative, Feminist Utopia, and London Imagination: Artistic Experimentations in *Girl, Woman, Other*" (2024), views the stylistic experimentation by Evaristo as a demonstration of fluidity of race, culture, space and identity, linking London and its ethnicities to other times and places. Another piece that views *Girl, Woman, Other* as exposing the genealogy of Black British women is "Reconfiguring Feminism: Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*" (2021) by Sarıkaya-Şen. The article discusses the novel as a transtemporal, transnational and transmodern narrative with a networked structure where the solidarity and connectedness of women becomes the source of strength and resilience of the marginalized women. Apart from the above mentioned critiques, which are limited in scope, there is a dearth of extensive research especially with regard to motherhood as explored in the current article.

Methodology

Analyzing the "subjugated knowledge of subordinate groups" (2000, p.252), Collins introduced distinctive Black feminist standpoint in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. This distinctive Black feminist standpoint is developed by using Black feminist epistemology, which Collins refers to as "collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that U.S. Black women sustained based on our particular history" (1998, p. 256). While accepting to rely heavily on standpoint theory especially in her later works *Fighting Words* (1998), Collins refused to label herself as a "standpoint theorist" or unilaterally dismiss other social theories. Examined primarily as a feminist epistemology and a methodology for feminist researchers in the social sciences, Collins suggested Black feminist standpoint as the collective wisdom of Black women who share common experiences and perspectives as the subordinate group of society (2000). She critiques the assumptions that oppressed groups have no consciousness of their oppression or that they cannot understand or voice their experiences.

As a standpoint theory, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes identities as organic, fluid, interdependent, multiple and dynamic socially constructed "locations" (2000, p. 252) within historical context. This standpoint maintains that oppressed by the economic exploitation of their labor, political denial of their rights, and the use of controlling cultural images which created damaging [stereotypes](#), Black women have become equipped with an epistemic advantage regarding their position. In *Black Political Economy* (2000) Collins contends that the intersections of [consumer racism](#), gender hierarchies, and disadvantages in the labor market can be centered on Black women's unique experiences. Collins (2000) envisions this standpoint as placing "U.S. Black women's experiences in the center of analysis without privileging those experiences" (p.

228) and this is what differentiates it from the narrow and Eurocentric vision of western feminist thought.

Collins emphasizes that since different patterns of oppression project differential experiences and in turn individual responses to common issues, “no homogeneous Black woman’s standpoint exists” (2000, p. 28). Instead Black women’s group standpoint is heterogeneously composed each black woman has her unique and authentic experiences. Acknowledging the differences among Black women, however, Collins stresses that “a Black women’s collective standpoint does exist”, but it is one that is “characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges” (p. 28). Instead of an “elusive group unity” (p. 28), such a standpoint focuses upon differences and heterogeneity which makes up Black women’s oppositional knowledge and a growing sensibility that all Black women “may be victimized by racism, misogyny and poverty” (2000, p. 26). This legacy of struggle constitutes several core themes, which are central to the Black feminist standpoint, like work, family, sexual politics, motherhood and political activism.

Prior to the rise of Black feminism, the study of Black motherhood was mostly done by the men that held Black mothers in negative light and in other extreme glorified them as “super strong Black mother” (2000, p. 174). Collins points out that while feminist scholarship, being the perspective of middle class white women, did not offer a significant critique of these views, Black discourse on motherhood has also been complacent in strengthening the concept of Black motherhood. Calling out the patterns of omission and emphasis within Black feminist archetypal analyses of motherhood, Collins draws attention to the fissures that resist internal dissent. To fight institutionalized racism, many African-Americans attempt to offer a unified picture of Black men and women, thus not attacking Black men’s description of Black women. Also, by dint of perceived whiteness and antifamily politics, which by implication means feminism to be anti-motherhood, Black women hesitate in offering their analyses of motherhood. Hence, Black women need an analysis that challenges and questions the idea of “happy slave,” (p. 176).

In developing her notions of Black women’s standpoint, Collins devotes an important consideration to Black women’s standpoint on mothering. As a major part of Black women’s lives and experience, Collins describes Black Motherhood as an institution with a “constantly renegotiated relationship that African-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African-American community, and with self” (p. 176). At the one hand black motherhood can lend hand to the controlling images of the mammy, matriarch and the welfare mother, which is used to oppress women and control their sexuality and fertility. On the other hand, it can serve as a site of “self-definition [...] and a belief in Black women’s empowerment” (p. 176). This contradictory spectrum, in turn leads to diverse and contradictory “continuum of responses” (p. 176). For some women, thus, motherhood becomes a burdensome labor, making them “partners in their own oppression” (p. 176) while for others it offers self-actualization. Within this scope, Collins identifies five themes that describe Black women’s standpoint on Black motherhood, varying historically with the degree of oppression and the resistance it is met with and thus “continually refashioned in response to changing contexts” (p. 177). These themes are Community Othermothers and Political Activism; Mothers, Daughters, and Socialization for Survival; Bloodmothers, Othermothers, and Women-Centered Network; Motherhood as a Symbol of Power; The View from the Inside: The Personal Meaning of Mothering. This theme of bloodmothers and othermothers, has faced considerable loss since the late 20th century owing to the racial desegregation and class stratification of Black civil society, Black middle class women and their households found themselves influenced by the lifestyle of white middle class families. This includes isolation and privatization of lives, even children. In this context Black women, by trying to retain and reclaim the

community child care challenge capitalist property relations where helping others, one is not related to rejects the basic capitalist values.

The relationship between Black mothers and their daughters as they teach them to socialize or physically survive the sexual politics of intersecting oppressions becomes another major concern of Black feminist standpoint. Collins points out that this dilemma has led black mothers to integrate economic self-reliance with mothering, since unlike traditional family ideal work is an important part of motherhood for Black women. So while being oppressed and overworked themselves, black mothers wanted a better future for their kids. This answers several complexities and “apparent contradictions in Black mother-daughter relationships” (p. 185). Teenage pregnancies are one of an important area of studies for Black motherhood studies which adds to the complexity where daughters couldn’t understand mothers and vice versa. It is this gap that the othermothers step in to bridge. Collins also discusses the role black community othermothers have and can play in political activism. In contrast to white capitalist individualism, othermothers’ bond with community children and fictive kin reflects an “ethic of socially responsible individualism” (p. 189). Owing to the factors like class and racial discrimination in housing, schooling and job, this bond and tradition has taken various forms. It further sheds light at “mothering the mind” (p. 189), a special bond that is developed between black teachers and their male and female students. “Like the mother-daughter relationship” Collins asserts that, “this “mothering the mind” among Black women seeks to move toward the mutuality of a shared sisterhood that binds African-American women as community other mothers” (p. 191).

Another major theme of Black standpoint on motherhood is seeing motherhood, of both blood mothers and othermothers, as a symbol of power within Black civil society. Such power is different from the ones in dominant white culture in that it is “transformative” (p. 192), generating and enabling rather than controlling or dominating. Collins also critiques the tendency within North American and European influenced mainstream feminism to label the community mothering traditions as “maternal politics” (Wells, 1998, p. 251) and a “politically immature vehicle” (p. 194). Such rhetoric undermines the activist mothering of black mothers setting up a hierarchy of feminism, where the black women’s feminist movements get a secondary status. She emphasizes the approach to view Black women’s concept of motherhood as “a symbol of power” (p. 194). Collins also criticizes the Western feminists for their failure “to develop a so-called radical analysis of the family as the site of oppression similar to that advanced within Western feminism” (p. 194). This results in a failure to see the potential political power within Black women’s activist mothering and becomes a very contending site for different shades of feminism. At the same time, from an insider view of mothering, Collins believes these empowering shades and features of Black motherhood, can come at a personal cost. Collins doesn’t overlook the fact that Black motherhood is a contradictory institution which has a range of contradictory responses from Black mothers owing to its ambivalent relation with them. She asserts that “African-American communities value motherhood, but Black mothers’ ability to cope with intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation should not be confused with transcending the injustices characterizing these oppressions” (p. 195). The demands of the traditional family ideal, the strong pronatalist values in African-American communities, the need to mother while coping with the intersecting oppression of race, nation, gender and class and repeated and unwanted pregnancies make mothering very problematic site for the Black women. It is within this rich theoretical problematics of Black motherhood, that this paper attempts to explore Evaristo’s text.

Results and Discussion

Motherhood, “the seeming core of family, culture, and community” (Collins, 2000, p. 175) is a prominent thread that binds all characters and stories in Evaristo’s novel. However, distinct from the traditional and historical value that has been attached to motherhood in African communities, and the condescending glorification and stereotyping in the Western feminist discourse, Black women problematize the concept and institution of motherhood. The subsequent analysis of mothering and motherhood in *Girl, Woman, Other* displays this variance and distinctiveness. Belonging to different age groups, classes, professions, ethnicities, religion and sexualities, all Black women are connected in some way or other, directly or indirectly, as mentioned above, and motherhood is the strongest link that interconnects all of them. In each chapter, a mother daughter duo is presented, each of whom offers a different set of relationship and complexities of ties forming a “continuum of responses” (Collins, 2000, p. 176). It is *Ma* for Grace and Hattie, *Mum* for Yazz and Carole, *Mother* for Shirley, Bummi calls herself and her mother *mama*, *Mummy* for Latisha. The text represents different sets of experiential knowledge as well as different attitudes to mothering and being mothered which are grounded in and informed by lived experiences.

The concept of mothering in the novel is best understood within Black feminist standpoint of how Black motherhood, a “fundamentally contradictory institution” (Collins, 2000, p. 195), has been generally addressed and theorized, by both White feminism as well as within Black discourse. In case of white feminism, it has been coloured with race and class biases, while in the case of later it has either been critiqued by Black men as lacking and inadequate or glorified into stereotypical sacrality attached with motherhood. White feminism has also shared this glorification, after an earlier ignorance of black motherhood within feminist scholarship. In contrast to viewing motherhood as a “burdensome condition” (Collins, 2000, p. 176), and a hindrance to emancipation, this glorification of motherhood reinforces male supremacist ideology, offering a sexist and romanticized mythologization of motherhood. This deification of mothers as “inherently life affirming nurtures” (hooks, 1984, p. 135) rested on the “cult of domesticity” (p. 135) and “true womanhood that accompanied the traditional family ideal” (Collins, 2000, p. 72). However, Collins assures, this sanctification does not delineate Black women’s experiences on mothering. Approaching the text from this standpoint, the study finds that there is no simplistic mother-daughter relationship in the text. The text deals with complex mother-daughter relationships intertwined with the struggles with racism, poverty, class and sexuality. This configuration of race, class, Black motherhood, all at one site encapsulates the oppositional experience and knowledge that marks the Black feminist standpoint. In another reflection on this theme, Evaristo depicts characters like Winsome, Shirley’s mother, who represent the older generation of Black women; wives and mother from sixty years ago. These women had it most tough as at one hand they could not say no to their husbands because “a woman had to obey her husband in those days” (p.224). At the same time, they had to suffer from extremely harsh attitude by the racist Whites who were “downright hostile” (p, 225) to these “monkey people” (p, 225) arriving at their town. Winsome and her husband Clovis were not allowed to sleep in lodges for the fear that their colour might come off on the sheets. They got donkey work, were served last in every shop, while abuses and curses were hurled at them as they “wasn’t wanted” (p. 230). This alienation, racism and colourism experienced by the first generation immigrants in the novel offers a complex tale of oppression that deals with cross cutting layers of racism, patriarchy and classism.

Interspersing such tales of intersecting oppression through the text, the narrative encapsulates the dialectics of double bind, double jeopardy and multiple jeopardy (hooks, 2015, Beale, 1969 Deborah King, 1988) in the lives of Black mothers and daughters. The writer

discusses “the view from the inside” (2000, p. 195) as Collins calls it, for not just the mothers but also the Black daughters. Instead of “victim versus winner” binary, as Debele (2023) calls it, or view of African women as victims or actors (Christian, 1985), Evaristo projects a complex and ever changing concept of motherhood. Defying definitions and delinking motherhood from fixations into both victimhood and sanctification, the novel serves as a rhizomatic and nomadic intervention. The rhizomatic thought in Deluze and Guattari’s explication analyses these fixed or rigid lines as ‘rigid segmentary lines’ which marks normalized and binarized definitions. By decentering these definitions and fixed identities theorized by white discourse, the text becomes a deterritorializing movement. Amma is a woman who didn’t agree with her mother’s ways of conceding to patriarchy and now her heterosexual daughter Yazz doesn’t agree with her radical feminist ideals. Yazz proves to be the “miracle she never thought she wanted, and having a child really did complete her, something she rarely confided because it somehow seemed anti-feminist” (p. 26). Collins ascribes this long held perception of feminism being “antifamily, and by implication, antimotherhood” (p. 175) as a major contributing factor in Black women’s reluctance to critically theorize motherhood within feminist studies. Amma continues with her career as a Black, single, gay mother and doesn’t let her daughter be a hindrance in her career and unconservative love life. Yazz, opinionated, free spirit who symbolizes the future in the text, has a complicated relationship with her parents. Ambivalently both disapproving and loving, she is her mum’s “emotional caretaker” (p. 38), as being the only child and that “especially a girl” (p. 38) she carries the burden of being “naturally” (p. 38) more caring. Amma’s friend Dominique also had to “mother the younger ones” (p.93) in her home being the oldest when her own mother was producing baby after baby. This left Dominique “subconsciously looking to be mothered” (p. 93) and that let her draw towards stronger women in her gay relationships who could take care of her as a mother would. This problematics of Black motherhood is situated within a deep and complex system of interpersonal relations intersected with the dynamics of class, sexuality and racism where Black mothers and daughters have to cope with emotional destruction at the cost of physical survival (Collins, 2000)

Teenage pregnancies and the rising issue of Black single mothers marks another important part of Collins’ theoretical standings of Black feminist standpoint on mothering. She refers to Kaplan’s (1997) study on teenage pregnancies which refuted the sociological assumptions that adult Black mothers support their daughters’ pregnancies garnering help from extended kin network. Kaplan’s research, however, gathered that teen mother lacked kin support and were outcaste by their mothers as they had disappointed their already suffering and hard working mothers. Collins extends on the study and the conflicting complications between mother and daughters, pointing at the rising presence of othermothers who diffuse the tension between blood mothers and daughters. Carole’s thought process after her rape also sheds light on the fate of “teenage mothers” (p. 116). Her school was known to produce, “babymothers, pushing prams, pushing fatherless timebombs” (p.112). Grappling with “low-paid jobs” (p.112) at the one hand and raising their children alone at the other hand, these young mothers cannot even afford a home or holiday or even movies or zoo with kids, like Carole’s mum. Carole resolves to avoid this future and her mother becomes her biggest support, telling her to “fight the battles that are your British birthright, Carole, as a true Nigerian” (p.116). Although Carole does not get along with her mother’s passion for her Nigerian heritage and does not want to be labeled as the “student with the mad African mother” (p. 114), yet she draws strength from her nonetheless. Grace’s mother Daisy, poor girl of poor parents, is also abandoned by her Ma and family when she had Grace. Similarly, Grace’s daughter Hattie becomes a mother at the age of fourteen and is forced by her father to give her baby up. LaTisha’s Mummy’s calls it having a “*babymother* for a daughter” (p. 183) which highlights fate of young Black girls who themselves are raised without fathers and then become babymothers raising child after child as a “baby machine” (p.189). LaTisha’s is the only tale without explicit

mention of racism, and the writer has specifically used her to underpin a significant theme of Black feminist thought; the plight of young Black girls who are working single mothers and are being treated as “useless article” by men. Signifying yet again, as delineated in theoretical framework, that black women are not a homogenous group and their definitions cannot be defined through an either/or approach. While the race question is paramount in any discussion on Black women, the narrative rhizomatically underscores that Black women cannot be confined within the category of race only.

Yet another equivocal angle to the theme of motherhood is portrayed through the character of Winsome; a mother who eroticizes her son-in-law and sleeps with him. Countering the traditional attributes of “devotion, self-sacrifice and unconditional love” (Collins, 2000, p. 174) associated with archetypal motherhood, Winsome’s sexuality gets the best of her. She represents the women belonging to older generation of black women, wives and mothers who suffered the most at the hands of sexism and racism and is now exposed to new experiences, spatially, temporally and sexually. She has never been a person in herself, “first she was a daughter, then a wife and mother, and now also a grandmother and great-grandmother” (p. 222). Feeling stuck within her roles, Winsome gets “completely out of her mind and inside her body” (p. 233) and cheats her own daughter with her son –in law. She finds herself “bursting sexual desire, passion” (p. 231), a feeling she is unable to comprehend, a side of herself she was unfamiliar with. “Who was this woman” (p. 233), she wonders. Though she continues to be a doting mother and grandmother, she envies her daughter for getting all the opportunities in life, even the man she herself longs for. Collins notes that the strong Black grandmothers of prior generations are declining in number owing to the changing socioeconomic and cultural conditions. As compared to the earlier generation who valued motherhood and womanhood, the latest generation feels overwhelmed and powerless by motherhood with their emotional needs unmet by both their mothers and their children (2000, p. 63).

Through Penelope, who mistakes herself being White till the epilogue, Evaristo offers a deep analysis of what Collins termed as the personal cost of motherhood (p. 195). Collins views the power that this relationship entails as coming at a personal cost owing to the convoluted existence of Black women at the intersecting oppressions of gender, sexuality, patriarchy and ethnicity etc. Penelope has limitless love for her babies and she does not mind holding her career for them, but after three years she starts feeling “sucked dry by them ... a tad *vampiric*” (p. 278). While the rest of the world is exploding with cultural revolutions and women liberation, she is still at the “gurgling-dribbling stage of human evolution ... knee-deep in kiddie poo and vomit” (p. 278). Her husband, Giles, insists her to stay at home as it is the natural order of things

me hunter –you homemaker
Me breadwinner---you breadmaker
Me child maker--you child raiser (p. 280)

Similarly, when Hattie is born, the mother Grace, distraught by the death of her newborns, rejects her body and the baby. In Grace and Hattie’s episode, the mother Grace, distraught by the death of her newborns, rejects her body and the baby. Evaristo charts the pain, of child bearing and child rearing, and the loneliness that makes motherhood a burdensome condition for women (Collins, 2000). She uses the word “demon” (p. 409) to describe Grace’s feelings for Hattie, “it was a demon screaming throughout the night, determined to wreck her mother’s life from her cot” (p. 410). Moreover, the narrative is not limited to matrifocal lens and focuses a lot on how Black daughters feel within different family dynamics. Daisy cut ties with her mother “who was too weak to stand up to a father” (p. 373). She cares more about society than helping her daughter who has given birth to a baby at a young age. The narrative also details how heterosexism as a system of oppression victimizes Black women. Megan experiences this

form of oppression by her own mother and other women when she is forced to wear frocks, play with Barbies and appear cute because that is “an end in itself” (p.306) whereas she feels uncomfortable with her “womanly curves” (p. 309). She finds her mother “unthinkably repeating pattern of oppression based on gender” (p. 306), emphasizing cuteness and prettiness to conform and be “compliant” (p. 306). Megan, on the other hand, gets a haircut and starts wearing trousers to disown her female body which turns everyone against her. As a result, she starts engaging with people on trans spectrum and meets Bibi who was born as Gopal and is now transitioned to a woman. In this way, Evaristo highlights how mothers can become instrumental in normalizing oppressive patterns of patriarchy and heteronormativity, another major premise of Black feminist thought.

In this way the concept of motherhood unfolded in the text offers a renegotiation of the analysis of Black motherhood. Debunking the conventional image of essentialized super strong and self-sacrificing Black mother mostly presented in white feminism, it highlights the historically, culturally and epistemologically contrasting views of Black and White world regarding mothering. These instances from the narrative serve as rhizomatic instances that dissociate and deterritorialize the normative views of motherhood.

Conclusion

Without glorifying motherhood as traditional western or Black patriarchies do to confine and control women, their bodies and roles, or vilifying it as western feminism does, the analysis shows the novel displaying it as a site which is complicated and yet not essentializing. *Girl, Woman, Other*, without secularizing the mother-daughter relationship in the text, paints a picture that though becomes enabling, is far from being a simplistic relationship that positive studies on motherhood claim to be. Unlike the traditional discourse on motherhood, Evaristo suggests that motherhood can comprise complex and ambiguous set of relationships and expectations. The text, thus, highlights that the Black culture though values motherhood but the family ties and mother-daughter relationships are not a naturalized relationship. They also offer a nuanced stance of motherhood, producing a fragmented site where mothering becomes both creative and destructive as is the case with Amma, Bummi, Latisha or Winsome. Thus motherhood, as discussed in the novel, displayed a challenge to White discourse. Resisting all efforts to subdue their agency and self-determination, the female characters offer a reactionary spirit to rigid attempts of stereotyping or stratifying and reclaimed their bodies and sexualities. The protagonist of the novel, along with other female characters, transgresses the definitions and roles that the patriarchal assumptions mark for them, challenging the personal, political, imperial (mis)interpretation and even the feminist constructs that are normatively established for them by White feminism. Articulating rhizomatic perspectives, these characters build a diverging narrative which assuages the feminist narrative by reconstructing definitions and reterritorializing white feminism.

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