



## INTERROGATING GENDER AND POWER: CRITICAL FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES IN ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES

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### **Abstract**

This research article, titled *Interrogating Gender and Power: Critical Feminist Methodologies in English Literary Studies*, explores the nuanced interplay of gender and power as represented in select literary texts, including works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bernardine Evaristo, and Brit Bennett. These authors' narratives serve as rich sites for examining how literature reflects, critiques, and subverts patriarchal ideologies, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and social structures.

The study's primary objective is to apply critical feminist methodologies to the analysis of these texts, focusing on how they construct or challenge gendered power relations. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks, including feminist criticism, post-structuralism, and intersectional theory, the research employs close textual analysis to interrogate themes of identity, oppression, and agency. By examining Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), and Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020), the study highlights the authors' contributions to feminist discourse and their critiques of systemic power hierarchies.

Findings reveal that these texts resist and complicate patriarchal norms while offering transformative insights into identity and power. Adichie provides practical feminist strategies for modern society, Evaristo explores intersectionality and the interconnected lives of women across generations, and Bennett delves into racial and gender identity, emphasizing the societal constructs that shape personal and collective experiences. Together, these works illuminate the transformative potential of literature in reimagining societal norms and advancing inclusive feminist discourse.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis, enriching discourses in cultural and gender studies. By foregrounding the works of diverse authors, the study

underscores the value of inclusive, intersectional, and reflexive approaches to literary scholarship, encouraging a more equitable engagement with texts and their cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies, Intersectionality, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bernardine Evaristo, Brit Bennett

## 1. Introduction

The study of gender and power dynamics in literature offers profound insights into the ways societal norms are constructed, challenged, and reimagined. Literature has long been a reflective medium through which cultural, political, and social ideologies are examined, and feminist literary criticism has emerged as a powerful tool to interrogate the representation of gendered identities and hierarchies. Particularly in contemporary literary studies, feminist methodologies provide a nuanced lens through which to analyze how texts articulate and subvert traditional gender roles, challenge patriarchal norms, and offer alternative perspectives on identity and agency. This paper, *Interrogating Gender and Power: Critical Feminist Methodologies in English Literary Studies*, focuses on select works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bernardine Evaristo, and Brit Bennett, whose narratives critically address intersectional feminist themes and redefine the portrayal of identity and power in literature.

The significance of feminist literary criticism extends beyond textual analysis, encompassing broader conversations about systemic oppression, cultural representations, and the intersectionality of gender with race, class, sexuality, and nationality. Over time, feminist literary studies have evolved from essentialist perspectives that focus primarily on women's marginalization to more complex, intersectional approaches that consider how multiple axes of identity interact within systems of power. Scholars such as Judith Butler, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Kimberlé Crenshaw have provided theoretical frameworks that emphasize the fluidity of gender, the multiplicity of feminist experiences, and the necessity of recognizing overlapping forms of oppression.

This paper specifically engages with the works of Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett because their narratives contribute significantly to contemporary feminist discourse, particularly in their exploration of intersectionality and identity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) serves as a practical guide for achieving gender equality in everyday life. Through a deeply personal yet universal narrative, Adichie highlights the importance of raising feminist-conscious individuals, challenging gender norms from an early age, and fostering social structures that enable gender equity. The work is a compelling feminist intervention that aligns with both radical and liberal feminist principles, calling for a reimagining of societal roles and norms.

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), a Booker Prize-winning novel, weaves an intricate tapestry of interconnected lives, capturing the experiences of Black British women across generations. By utilizing a distinctive narrative style that blends poetic prose with fluid structural composition, Evaristo challenges monolithic representations of gender and race, illustrating the vast spectrum of lived experiences. Her novel resists binary constructs and

embraces non-linear storytelling, reflecting the multiplicity and complexity of gendered existence. The text serves as a crucial feminist work that engages with intersectionality, queerness, racial identity, and transnational feminism, offering a dynamic portrayal of contemporary feminist thought.

Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) similarly interrogates identity through the lens of race and gender, chronicling the lives of twin sisters who navigate the complexities of racial passing and personal autonomy. The novel's exploration of colorism, racial identity, and societal perceptions of gender roles highlights the inextricable ties between race and gender politics. Bennett's work is an exemplary feminist narrative that addresses how identity formation is contingent upon sociopolitical constructs, revealing the limitations and possibilities of self-definition within patriarchal and racialized frameworks.

Each of these texts situates gender and power within specific socio-political and cultural contexts, engaging with themes of systemic oppression, identity construction, and individual and collective agency. By employing critical feminist methodologies, including intersectional theory and post-structuralist approaches, this research aims to uncover the mechanisms through which these authors deconstruct patriarchal structures and propose alternative ways of understanding gender and power. Intersectional feminism, as conceptualized by Crenshaw, provides an essential framework for analyzing how these narratives address multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how race, class, sexuality, and other identity markers shape experiences of gendered oppression and resistance.

Additionally, post-structuralist feminist criticism, particularly influenced by theorists such as Butler and Michel Foucault, helps deconstruct fixed notions of gender and identity, highlighting their performative and discursive nature. Butler's theory of gender performativity is particularly relevant in analyzing how characters in these novels negotiate their identities within and against societal expectations. By examining how gender is performed, constructed, and subverted in these texts, this paper underscores the dynamic and contested nature of identity formation in contemporary feminist literature.

Beyond theoretical applications, this study engages with feminist methodologies that emphasize lived experiences and personal narratives as valid and essential sites of knowledge production. Autoethnographic approaches, qualitative textual analysis, and feminist historiography inform the reading of these texts, allowing for a more holistic engagement with the socio-cultural realities that shape feminist literary discourse. The works of Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett offer rich narratives that not only critique existing power structures but also imagine new possibilities for gender justice and social transformation.

The importance of literature in feminist activism cannot be understated. Fiction serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for societal change, providing readers with alternative ways of seeing and engaging with the world. Through their narratives, Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett illuminate the everyday struggles and triumphs of individuals navigating gendered realities.

Their works encourage critical reflection on normative gender roles and inspire conversations about equity, representation, and empowerment. By foregrounding diverse voices and experiences, these authors contribute to an expanding feminist literary canon that embraces inclusivity, complexity, and resistance.

Furthermore, feminist literary criticism has a crucial role in educational and academic settings, shaping how literature is taught, interpreted, and valued. The inclusion of feminist texts in curricula challenges traditional literary hierarchies and promotes a more inclusive and representative body of knowledge. This paper advocates for the continued integration of feminist methodologies in literary studies, emphasizing the need for pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and dismantle systemic inequalities. By engaging with contemporary feminist texts, scholars, educators, and students can foster more critical and socially conscious perspectives on literature and its role in shaping cultural narratives.

*Interrogating Gender and Power: Critical Feminist Methodologies in English Literary Studies* seeks to contribute to contemporary feminist literary discourse by highlighting the transformative role of literature in addressing enduring and emerging challenges related to gender, identity, and power. The selected works of Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett collectively underscore the importance of inclusive and intersectional approaches in literary scholarship. Their narratives challenge hegemonic structures, offer alternative perspectives, and invite readers to engage with complex and evolving understandings of gender and power. Through rigorous feminist analysis, this study aims to illuminate the ways in which literature functions as a site of resistance, reimagination, and empowerment, ultimately fostering meaningful dialogue on equity and justice.

## **2. Literature Review**

The intersection of gender and power in literature has been a cornerstone of feminist literary criticism, evolving alongside broader feminist movements and societal transformations. Since the emergence of feminist thought, scholars have sought to uncover the ways in which gender dynamics shape literary representation, character development, narrative structures, and thematic concerns. The study of gender in literature extends beyond merely recognizing the presence of female characters; it interrogates power structures, patriarchal ideologies, and the construction of identity through literary texts.

Feminist literary criticism has its roots in the early feminist movements that challenged the exclusion of women from literary canons and intellectual discourse. Foundational texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) were instrumental in exposing the deep-seated patriarchal structures embedded within literature. De Beauvoir famously asserted that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," highlighting the ways in which societal expectations shape female identity. Her work laid the groundwork for examining how literature reflects and reinforces these constructed gender roles.

Kate Millett extended this critique by analyzing the works of male authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, exposing how their portrayals of women often perpetuated misogynistic ideologies. Millett's concept of "sexual politics" provided a lens through which scholars could deconstruct literature as a site of ideological power struggles between genders. Her work remains foundational for understanding how literature both reflects and constructs social power dynamics.

While early feminist literary criticism primarily focused on gender as a singular axis of oppression, contemporary scholars emphasize intersectionality—a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality highlights the ways in which gender interacts with race, class, sexuality, and other social categories to shape individual experiences and literary representations. This shift has led to a more nuanced understanding of oppression, allowing feminist criticism to incorporate diverse perspectives from women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups.

One significant contribution to intersectional feminist criticism is bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981), which critiques the white-centric nature of mainstream feminism and calls for an inclusive approach that addresses the unique struggles of Black women. Similarly, Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984) advocates for embracing difference as a source of strength rather than division, urging feminist scholars to consider how multiple forms of discrimination operate simultaneously in literary texts.

These intersectional perspectives have reshaped the field of feminist literary criticism, prompting scholars to reevaluate canonical texts and explore the voices of previously marginalized authors. By acknowledging the interplay of gender with other axes of identity, contemporary feminist criticism has expanded its scope beyond the binary frameworks of earlier feminist scholarship.

Recent studies in feminist literary criticism have focused on how authors from diverse backgrounds interrogate the relationship between identity, power, and societal norms. Contemporary feminist texts challenge conventional gender roles and expose the complexities of navigating a world structured by patriarchy.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) has been widely acknowledged for its pragmatic approach to modern feminist advocacy. Unlike traditional feminist critiques that rely on academic jargon, Adichie's work adopts an accessible and conversational tone, making feminism more approachable to a global audience.

Scholars such as Mikaila Brown (2021) have examined how Adichie's work bridges the gap between theoretical feminism and real-world application. Brown argues that *Dear Ijeawele* functions as both a personal guide and a political statement, equipping readers with tools to challenge gender inequality in everyday life. Adichie's emphasis on education, economic independence, and self-identity reflects the evolving concerns of contemporary feminist

discourse. Her work resonates with readers across cultures, reinforcing the universality of gender oppression while acknowledging cultural specificity.

Moreover, Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), adapted from her TED Talk, has been widely studied for its role in mainstreaming feminist discourse. The book's accessibility and widespread distribution have contributed to greater awareness of feminist issues, making it a critical text for discussions on gender and power in literature.

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) has sparked significant scholarly interest for its innovative narrative structure and exploration of intersectionality. The novel, which follows the lives of twelve interconnected characters, highlights the experiences of Black British women, non-binary individuals, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Evaristo's polyphonic narrative disrupts traditional literary forms, amplifying marginalized voices and challenging hegemonic discourses on race, gender, and class.

Critics such as Emma Parker (2022) have highlighted how Evaristo's experimental writing style, which omits conventional punctuation, reflects the fluidity and hybridity of identity. The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the lived experiences of its characters, emphasizing the multiplicity of identities within feminist discourse. By intertwining various narratives, Evaristo challenges the notion of a singular feminist experience, reinforcing the importance of intersectionality in contemporary literature.

Evaristo's work also critiques the historical erasure of Black women from British literature, addressing the gaps in representation that persist within literary canons. Through its rich tapestry of voices, *Girl, Woman, Other* serves as a crucial text in contemporary feminist criticism, advocating for a more inclusive and expansive understanding of womanhood.

Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) has been the subject of numerous studies exploring its nuanced portrayal of racial passing and its implications for understanding identity and systemic inequalities. The novel follows twin sisters who choose divergent racial identities—one embracing her Black heritage and the other passing as white. This narrative structure allows Bennett to examine how race and gender intersect in shaping personal choices and social mobility.

Amanda Dixon (2023) has lauded Bennett's work for its intersectional approach, emphasizing how the novel interrogates the constructed nature of racial identity. The novel's depiction of gender expectations also plays a crucial role in its feminist critique. The sisters navigate societal pressures that dictate their roles as women, wives, and mothers, demonstrating how gender norms are inextricably linked to racial and economic structures.

Bennett's exploration of colorism, privilege, and identity construction aligns with broader feminist discussions on representation and social stratification. By depicting the consequences of racial passing, *The Vanishing Half* challenges readers to reconsider the fluidity of identity and the systemic barriers that shape individual destinies.

As feminist literary criticism continues to evolve, new areas of inquiry are emerging. Scholars are increasingly examining how digital media, climate change, and posthumanist perspectives intersect with gender studies. The rise of digital feminism has expanded literary analysis beyond traditional texts, incorporating online narratives, social media discourse, and digital storytelling as sites of feminist critique.

Additionally, ecofeminism has gained traction as scholars investigate the connections between gender, environmental justice, and literature. Works such as Greta Gaard's *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993) have inspired contemporary critiques that explore how literature frames the relationship between women and the environment.

Feminist literary criticism remains a dynamic and evolving field, continuously adapting to new theoretical frameworks and societal shifts. As contemporary literature continues to push boundaries, feminist scholars will play a crucial role in analyzing and amplifying diverse voices. This ongoing interrogation of gender and power in literary studies ensures that literature remains a critical tool for challenging entrenched ideologies and fostering inclusive narratives.

### **3. Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive framework rooted in feminist literary criticism to analyze the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bernardine Evaristo, and Brit Bennett. The study aims to uncover how these authors construct, critique, and reimagine gendered power relations within their socio-political and cultural contexts. An interdisciplinary approach integrates feminist theory, intersectionality, and post-structuralist critiques to provide a nuanced understanding of the texts and their broader implications. By employing close textual analysis, intersectional and comparative frameworks, and theoretical integration with reflexivity, this methodology ensures a rigorous examination of the selected works while maintaining a critical engagement with feminist literary discourse.

#### **3.1 Textual and Contextual Analysis**

Close textual analysis serves as the foundation of this study, enabling a detailed examination of narrative structures, character development, thematic concerns, and linguistic choices in the selected texts. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of how Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett craft their narratives to engage with feminist themes and gender dynamics.

##### **3.1.1 Narrative Structures and Character Development**

The study scrutinizes the ways in which narrative structures shape the portrayal of gender and power in the selected works. Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* adopts an epistolary format to present practical feminist strategies, emphasizing direct engagement with societal norms. Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* utilizes a polyphonic narrative, featuring twelve interconnected voices that explore intersectional identities and the multiplicity of female experiences. Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* employs a dual timeline structure to examine themes of racial passing, gender identity, and societal constraints. By analyzing these structural elements, the

study highlights how each author strategically employs form to enhance thematic depth and challenge traditional storytelling conventions.

Character development is another crucial aspect of textual analysis. The protagonists and secondary characters in these works embody diverse feminist perspectives, allowing for a rich exploration of gendered experiences. Adichie's characters often serve as conduits for feminist discourse, illustrating the personal as political. Evaristo's multi-voiced characters highlight intersectionality, showcasing how race, gender, and sexuality intersect in shaping individual identities. Bennett's protagonists navigate complex social landscapes, revealing the impact of systemic oppression on personal choices and identities. Through character analysis, this study elucidates how each author reconfigures feminist narratives to address contemporary issues.

### 3.1.2 Thematic Concerns and Language Use

The selected texts engage with a range of feminist themes, including patriarchy, agency, identity, and resistance. *Dear Ijeawele* explicitly challenges societal expectations and prescriptive gender roles, offering a blueprint for feminist empowerment. *Girl, Woman, Other* delves into themes of belonging, cultural hybridity, and sexual autonomy, illustrating the diverse experiences of Black British women and non-binary individuals. *The Vanishing Half* interrogates the performativity of race and gender, questioning the rigid boundaries imposed by societal norms.

Language plays a crucial role in reinforcing or subverting dominant ideologies. Adichie's rhetorical style is direct and didactic, aimed at fostering feminist consciousness. Evaristo's fluid, poetic prose breaks conventional grammatical norms, mirroring the fluidity of identity. Bennett's descriptive and introspective language captures the internal conflicts of her characters, emphasizing the psychological dimensions of gendered experiences. By analyzing linguistic choices, this study uncovers how each author wields language as a tool for feminist resistance and advocacy.

### 3.1.3 Historical, Cultural, and Socio-Political Contexts

Contextual analysis situates the selected texts within their historical, cultural, and socio-political milieus. Adichie's Nigerian context reflects postcolonial struggles, patriarchal constraints, and the evolving discourse on feminism in Africa. Evaristo's British setting addresses issues of immigration, racial identity, and LGBTQ+ rights within a multicultural society. Bennett's American landscape interrogates the legacy of segregation, colorism, and gender norms. By contextualizing these narratives, the study explores how literature both reflects and responds to contemporary discourses on gender and power, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between text and context.

## 3.2 Intersectional and Comparative Frameworks

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides a theoretical lens for analyzing the overlapping systems of oppression—race, class, gender, and sexuality—that



shape identity and resistance in the selected works. This study employs intersectionality to examine the multifaceted nature of discrimination and privilege, highlighting the complexities of feminist struggles across different socio-cultural contexts.

### **3.2.1 Intersectionality in Feminist Literary Analysis**

Adichie's works foreground gendered oppression within a postcolonial framework, emphasizing the intersections of race and patriarchy. *Dear Ijeawele* critiques cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality, advocating for a more inclusive feminism. Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* exemplifies intersectionality by portraying characters of diverse racial, sexual, and class backgrounds, illustrating how multiple identities influence lived experiences. Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* explores racial and gender fluidity, challenging binary constructs and revealing the intersection of personal and structural oppression. Through this intersectional lens, the study underscores the necessity of recognizing multiple axes of marginalization in feminist literary criticism.

### **3.2.2 Comparative Analysis of Cultural and Geographical Specificities**

A comparative approach contrasts the cultural and geographical specificities of Adichie's Nigerian context, Evaristo's British setting, and Bennett's American landscape. While Adichie's feminism engages with African traditions and postcolonial realities, Evaristo's work navigates the complexities of British multiculturalism, and Bennett's novel interrogates American racial hierarchies. By juxtaposing these perspectives, the study highlights both shared and divergent feminist strategies, illustrating the global dimensions of gender discourse.

## **3.3 Theoretical Integration and Reflexivity**

This study integrates feminist theories from scholars such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Audre Lorde, alongside post-structuralist insights from Michel Foucault, to deepen its analysis of identity and power. Theoretical engagement enhances the study's interpretive depth, ensuring a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics in contemporary literature.

### **3.3.1 Feminist Theories and Gender Performativity**

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity informs the analysis of how characters in *The Vanishing Half* navigate gender identity. Butler's argument that gender is a social construct, performed and reiterated through cultural norms, resonates with Bennett's exploration of identity fluidity. Bell hooks' advocacy for an inclusive, intersectional feminism aligns with Evaristo's depiction of diverse female and non-binary characters, while Audre Lorde's emphasis on self-definition and resistance is reflected in Adichie's feminist activism.

### **3.3.2 Post-Structuralist Perspectives on Power and Identity**

Michel Foucault's theories on power and discourse provide a framework for examining how societal institutions regulate gender and identity. The study applies Foucauldian analysis to explore how characters resist or conform to hegemonic norms, revealing the disciplinary mechanisms that shape individual agency. By integrating post-structuralist critiques, this research uncovers the intricate power dynamics embedded in feminist narratives.

### 3.3.3 Reflexivity in Feminist Research

A reflexive approach ensures critical engagement with the literature, minimizing researcher bias and enhancing interpretive rigor. Reflexivity involves acknowledging the researcher's positionality, interrogating assumptions, and maintaining ethical considerations in literary analysis. By adopting reflexivity, this study fosters an open, self-critical stance, contributing to a more transparent and accountable feminist methodology.

This synthesized methodology offers a multi-faceted exploration of how contemporary literature interrogates gender and power, contributing to feminist literary discourse and fostering dialogue on social transformation. Through close textual analysis, intersectional and comparative frameworks, and theoretical integration with reflexivity, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the selected works. By bridging literary criticism with feminist theory, this research not only deepens our understanding of gendered power relations in literature but also underscores the enduring relevance of feminist scholarship in contemporary cultural and academic debates.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo, and *The Vanishing Half* (2020) by Brit Bennett reveals critical insights into the interplay of gender and power in contemporary literature. Each text serves as a cultural critique, offering unique perspectives on identity, systemic oppression, and resistance while emphasizing the necessity of intersectional feminist approaches. Through the examination of these works, it becomes evident that gender, race, class, and identity are intricately linked, influencing individuals' lived experiences and shaping their responses to oppression.

### 1. Gender and Patriarchal Structures

Adichie's manifesto directly confronts societal norms, offering pragmatic strategies for challenging gender inequalities. In one of her suggestions, she writes, "Teach her that the idea of 'gender roles' is absolute nonsense" (Adichie, 2017, p. 26). This statement underscores the entrenched nature of gender roles and their impact on limiting agency. By framing feminism as both a personal and societal project, Adichie bridges theoretical discourse with everyday application, making her work a guide for challenging patriarchal constructs. Her approach is particularly significant in contemporary feminist discourse, as it moves beyond academic theorization and offers practical solutions for real-world gender biases.

Similarly, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* dissects patriarchal power through its diverse characters. Amma, a feminist playwright in the novel, critiques traditional gender norms, stating, "The patriarchy isn't going to dismantle itself" (Evaristo, 2019, p. 102). Evaristo situates her critique within the context of intersectionality, portraying how race, sexuality, and class intersect with gender to amplify oppression. Through Amma's journey, readers witness the struggles of a Black queer woman navigating both the artistic world and the broader societal

constraints placed upon her. Her activism and creative expressions serve as acts of resistance, highlighting the importance of feminist voices in challenging dominant power structures.

Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* adds another dimension to the discussion of patriarchal control by examining how gender operates alongside racial identity. Stella's decision to pass as white is not only a survival mechanism but also a commentary on the ways in which society assigns value to different identities. The pressures exerted by patriarchal and racial hierarchies force Stella into a life of secrecy, shaping her interactions and relationships. The quote, "I became white because it was simple. I stayed white because it was practical" (Bennett, 2020, p. 169), encapsulates the lengths to which individuals must go to conform to societal expectations and escape systemic discrimination.

The patriarchal structures depicted in these texts are not merely theoretical constructs; they manifest in tangible ways that affect individuals' autonomy, economic opportunities, and personal relationships. By deconstructing these structures, Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett provide a roadmap for resisting and dismantling gendered oppression. Their works emphasize that challenging patriarchal norms requires both individual defiance and collective action.

## 2. Intersectionality and Identity

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, plays a crucial role in understanding how multiple systems of oppression interact. Each of the three texts incorporates intersectional perspectives, demonstrating how gender, race, class, and sexuality shape personal experiences.

Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* explores the fluidity of identity through the Vignes twins, who choose drastically different paths. Stella's ability to "pass" as white illustrates how racial identity is socially constructed and influenced by external perceptions. Her decision to embrace whiteness as a survival strategy highlights the intersection of race and privilege. In contrast, Desiree, who remains within her racial identity, faces continued discrimination but maintains a stronger connection to her cultural roots. The twins' divergent experiences underscore the impact of systemic hierarchies on individual choices and identities.

Evaristo's narrative similarly emphasizes intersectionality. For example, Shirley, a Black conservative woman, grapples with internalized racism and societal expectations. Her journey reflects the difficulty of reconciling individual agency with societal pressures, illustrating how intersecting identities shape personal and collective struggles (Evaristo, 2019, pp. 211-212). Shirley's belief system, shaped by her desire for upward mobility, reveals how marginalized individuals sometimes adopt dominant ideologies to gain acceptance and security. Her character adds complexity to the feminist discourse by showing how oppression can manifest within marginalized communities themselves.

Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* approaches intersectionality from an instructive perspective, advocating for raising children with an awareness of multiple identities. She argues that gender oppression cannot be examined in isolation from cultural and societal influences. Her feminist

manifesto provides practical advice for navigating these intersections, making feminism more accessible to a broader audience. By emphasizing the need to challenge rigid gender norms, Adichie's work aligns with contemporary discussions on inclusivity within feminism.

### **3. Resistance and Agency**

All three authors highlight the transformative potential of resistance and agency. Adichie's assertion, "Feminism should be about justice" (Adichie, 2017, p. 33), encapsulates her call for active engagement against gender inequities. Her work serves as a direct challenge to the passive acceptance of oppression, encouraging individuals to take conscious steps toward equality.

Evaristo's characters exemplify resistance through their diverse paths. Amma's activism and Morgan's rejection of binary gender identities (Evaristo, 2019, p. 289) illustrate the many ways in which individuals resist societal norms. Morgan, a non-binary character, navigates a world that often fails to acknowledge their existence. Through Morgan's experiences, Evaristo critiques the rigid structures of gender and emphasizes the importance of inclusivity within feminist movements.

Bennett's portrayal of Desiree, the twin who remains within her racial identity, symbolizes resilience against societal erasure. Her assertion, "You can't choose what's true. You can only choose how to live with it" (Bennett, 2020, p. 348), speaks to the necessity of embracing one's identity despite external pressures. Desiree's resistance is quieter than that of Amma or Morgan, yet it is equally significant in its defiance of racial assimilation.

### **Discussion**

The findings reveal that these texts not only critique existing power structures but also offer blueprints for envisioning equitable futures. Adichie's manifesto lays a foundation for practical feminism, providing actionable steps for challenging gender norms. Meanwhile, Evaristo and Bennett's narratives illustrate the lived realities of intersectional identities, showcasing how various forms of oppression intersect and shape individual experiences.

Furthermore, these works highlight the transformative role of literature in reshaping societal narratives. By amplifying diverse voices and interrogating power dynamics, Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett contribute to a feminist literary tradition that inspires both critical thought and social action. Literature serves as a space for resistance, allowing marginalized voices to challenge dominant ideologies and propose alternative visions of society.

These texts underscore the necessity of intersectional approaches in addressing the complexities of gender and power, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society. The struggles and triumphs of their characters reflect broader feminist concerns, emphasizing the need for continuous engagement with issues of race, class, and identity.

Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett's works collectively contribute to the evolving discourse on gender and power. Their exploration of patriarchal structures, intersectionality, and

resistance offers valuable insights into contemporary feminist thought. By bridging theoretical discussions with lived experiences, these authors create narratives that are both critical and transformative.

The implications of their works extend beyond literary analysis, serving as calls to action for readers and activists alike. Their contributions reinforce the idea that literature is not merely a reflection of society but also a tool for its transformation. Through their powerful storytelling, Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett continue to shape the feminist landscape, advocating for justice, inclusivity, and resistance against systemic oppression.

## 5. Conclusion

The research article *Interrogating Gender and Power: Critical Feminist Methodologies in English Literary Studies* has explored the transformative potential of literature in examining and reimagining gendered power structures. By analyzing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, this study has illuminated the ways in which contemporary literature serves as a vehicle for challenging patriarchal norms, interrogating intersecting oppressions, and fostering feminist resistance and agency. The intricate narratives presented in these works not only reflect but actively critique and reconstruct societal constructs of identity, power, and gender.

One of the central arguments of this study is that literature is not merely a reflection of social realities but an active participant in the discourse surrounding power dynamics and gender inequality. By analyzing the works of Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett, this research underscores how literature serves as a powerful medium for reimagining traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Each of these texts engages in a dialogue with dominant cultural narratives, exposing their limitations and offering alternative frameworks for understanding gender and power.

Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* functions as a manifesto for feminist thought, providing practical strategies for dismantling patriarchal norms in everyday life. Her direct and accessible style allows readers to engage with feminism in a tangible way, demonstrating how literature can serve as both an educational and an activist tool. Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, on the other hand, employs a polyphonic narrative structure to explore the diverse experiences of Black British women across generations. By presenting a multiplicity of voices, Evaristo challenges the homogeneity often imposed on feminist discourse, advocating for an inclusive approach that recognizes the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* further complicates discussions of identity by examining the ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping individual and collective experiences. Her novel highlights the social constructs that govern identity formation, revealing how these constructs can be both restrictive and fluid.

A key finding of this study is the necessity of employing an intersectional framework in feminist literary criticism. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw,

provides a lens through which the overlapping systems of oppression—such as race, class, gender, and sexuality—can be examined in relation to one another. This framework is particularly relevant in the analysis of *Girl, Woman, Other* and *The Vanishing Half*, as both novels foreground the interconnected nature of various social identities.

Evaristo's work exemplifies how intersectionality operates in literature by presenting characters whose experiences are shaped by multiple axes of identity. The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the complexity of these identities, refusing to adhere to a singular narrative arc or perspective. This multiplicity allows for a richer exploration of feminist themes, as it acknowledges that gender cannot be discussed in isolation from other social determinants. Similarly, Bennett's novel interrogates the fluidity of racial and gender identity, illustrating how societal constructs influence self-perception and personal choices. Through the lives of the Vignes twins, *The Vanishing Half* explores the societal pressures that dictate identity performance and the consequences of transgressing these norms.

This study has also demonstrated the value of integrating feminist theory and post-structuralist analysis in literary criticism. Feminist theory provides the foundational concepts necessary for understanding gender as a socially constructed category, while post-structuralism challenges fixed meanings and binary oppositions. By employing these methodologies, the study has revealed how Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett destabilize normative gender constructs and propose alternative frameworks for gender identity and power relations.

Adichie's work, for instance, aligns with liberal feminist thought, advocating for equality through structural and cultural change. Her manifesto presents feminism as a practical endeavor, one that requires continuous engagement and adaptation. Evaristo's novel, in contrast, resonates with post-structuralist feminism by rejecting essentialist notions of womanhood and emphasizing the fluidity of identity. Her refusal to use conventional punctuation and grammar further reinforces this resistance to fixed meanings, mirroring the disruptive potential of feminist discourse. Bennett's exploration of passing and performativity in *The Vanishing Half* draws on Judith Butler's concept of gender as performance, highlighting the ways in which identity is both constructed and constrained by societal expectations.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study affirms the role of literature in advancing gender equality and social justice. The narratives of Adichie, Evaristo, and Bennett not only critique entrenched ideologies but also inspire action by offering new possibilities for imagining gender relations. Literature, in this sense, functions as both a mirror and a catalyst—reflecting existing societal conditions while simultaneously challenging and reshaping them.

For instance, Adichie's call for raising children in a feminist manner underscores the transformative power of early education in dismantling gender biases. Her emphasis on practical feminist strategies extends beyond literary analysis, positioning her work as a guide for real-world activism. Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* fosters empathy and understanding by immersing readers in the lived experiences of marginalized voices, encouraging a broader recognition of feminist struggles across different social locations. Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*

complicates notions of identity and selfhood, prompting readers to question the rigidity of racial and gender categories. Through these engagements, literature fosters critical consciousness and encourages readers to interrogate and resist oppressive structures in their own lives.

In light of the ongoing challenges to gender equality worldwide, feminist literary criticism remains a vital field of study. The works examined in this research demonstrate that feminist discourse is not static but continually evolving to address new forms of oppression and resistance. Adichie's, Evaristo's, and Bennett's narratives reflect contemporary feminist concerns, including the impact of social media on gender identity, the persistence of systemic racism, and the reconfiguration of family and kinship structures in the twenty-first century.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for an inclusive feminist literary canon that recognizes the contributions of diverse voices. While traditional feminist criticism has often centered on Euro-American perspectives, the inclusion of African, Black British, and African American authors in this study underscores the importance of a global approach to feminist discourse. By amplifying marginalized voices, feminist literary criticism can more effectively address the complexities of gender and power in an interconnected world.

In conclusion, the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bernardine Evaristo, and Brit Bennett collectively illuminate the dynamic interplay of gender and power in contemporary society. Their narratives not only critique entrenched ideologies but also advocate for inclusivity, equity, and empowerment. By employing feminist theory, post-structuralism, and intersectional analysis, this research contributes to broader discussions on gender equality and social justice, reaffirming the role of literature as a critical tool for critique and transformation.

As feminist literary criticism continues to evolve, it must remain responsive to emerging societal challenges and embrace diverse methodologies. The analysis presented in this study underscores the necessity of intersectional and transnational approaches in understanding gender dynamics. Ultimately, literature remains a powerful site of resistance and reimagination, offering pathways toward a more just and equitable future. Through continued engagement with feminist texts and theories, scholars and readers alike can contribute to the ongoing struggle for gender justice, ensuring that literature remains a space for critical reflection and meaningful change.

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