Suzanne Scafe

London South Bank University

Reading intersections of race, class and gender in fiction by black British women writers.

.

Abstract

This chapter identifies two cultural periods or ‘moments’ in black British cultural production and, using a selection of fiction by women writers, argues that each of these texts intervenes in discourses of race, gender and class to interrogate easy assumptions about black British identities in the post-war and contemporary periods. Using a concept of ‘ethical criticism’, derived from the work of Michael Mack (2012) and Stuart Hall (2008/2018), I argue that the fiction analysed in this chapter provides a ‘certain kind of learning’ about how identities emerge in representation and how these representations are contested (Hall 2008). I begin with a discussion of Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and Joan Riley’s *Waiting in* *the Twilight* and conclude with an analysis of the novels of Bernardine Evaristo. In my reading of this work, I demonstrate the ways in which this fiction exposes both the constructed nature of race and gender and the extent to which gender identities and roles are raced.

I argue that the significance of these texts as counternarratives is that they serve to remap the national imaginary, presenting identity as irredeemably plural. Gender categories in these texts are shaped by culture and class but also by historical discourses, themselves determined by contemporary framings of ‘race’ and gender and the power structures within which these categories are formed.

KEYWORDS

Buchi Emecheta *Second-Class Citizen*, Joan Riley *Waiting in the Twilight*, Bernardine Evaristo *Lara*, *Mr Loverman*, race, gender identities, sexuality.

**Reading intersections of race, class and gender in fiction by black British women writers.**

In Tate, Shirley ed. 2020. *The Race and Gender Reader*. London: Routledge.

**Introduction**

This chapter focuses on two significant moments in black British women’s literary production, the mid-1970’s to the 1980’s and the contemporary period, the first decades of the twenty-first century. My use of ‘moments’ is provisional. As Stuart Hall remarks, as he attempts to identify a ‘significant shift that has been going on (and is still going on) in black cultural politics’ (265), historical moments, periods or phases cannot be discretely defined. They seep into each other, bearing characteristics of, or self-consciously signalling their indebtedness to that earlier, unfinished, moment. I begin with an analysis of Buchi Emecheta’s semi-autobiographical novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1974/1982) and Joan Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) and use these texts to argue that black British women’s literary production during this earlier period can be defined by its documentary register and its commitment to what Riley terms ‘writing reality’ (1994: 547). Determined to resist the silencing and marginalisation of black women subjects in Britain and to control the form and language in which those subjects would be represented, this fiction brings to the attention of a wide reading public the conditions of black women’s erasure. Their narratives demonstrate the extent to which black women are repeatedly subjugated by the racist practices of public institutions, the normalised racism of everyday encounters, and by patriarchal structures that govern personal and domestic relations. These practices have not, of course, disappeared or even significantly diminished but an expanded body of literary and cultural representation by black British women produced over the last fifty years has resulted in the creation of new discursive spaces in which contemporary writers are able to reconfigure how intersections of race, culture and gender are complicated by class, sexuality, place and generational concerns, producing a more nuanced and differently textured conception of blackness.

Hall argues that cultural production is central both to the formation and the transformation of social and political institutions, and to the ways in which identities are constituted by those institutions. Identities are thus politically constructed. In his 1988 essay Hall defines a politics of representation as one that problematizes essentialist conceptions of blackness, and a ‘politics of criticism’ as a mode of criticism that ‘locates itself inside a continuous struggle and politics around black representation’ (274) but which is, crucially, open to questioning the forms, subjects and ‘regimes of representation’ (274). The political struggle for black representation and for criticism that reflects and participates in that struggle is ongoing. The language of such forms of criticism, however, has shifted away from a self-consciously ambiguous or slippery use of concepts of the ‘political’, towards a more explicitly political and materialist concern for the social validity of art, expressed as ethical criticism or an ethical reading of literature and culture. This new emphasis in cultural criticism prioritises an examination of how culture intervenes in the everyday to make a difference, and how criticism better facilitates that intervention. Speaking in 2008, Hall strikes a radical note. He defines ‘cultural diversity’ as a ‘certain kind of learning … through culture and the arts’. He argues that culture, the terrain of the imagination, ‘teaches us in ways in which pure information, knowledge of the rational and logical kind, cannot supply’ (np).

It constitutes in practice that acknowledgement of our radical dependence on ‘the other’; on ‘the other’ who completes us, who is our ‘constitutive outside’… It may stop us from projecting our fears and anxieties – the ‘bad’ parts of ourselves – into the other. This is a kind of ‘knowledge’ which teaches us how to listen and look, to learn through listening and looking, and vice-versa (np). (<http://politicalcritique.org/opinion/2019/stuart-hall-cultural-diversity/>)

Here Hall returns to the importance, expressed in earlier work, of engaging with the complexities of and in black representation, but his emphasis on culture’s role in teaching and learning about difference, on its potential to intervene and transform relations, signals a radical departure and a new emphasis. An emphasis on the transforming potential of literature is also evident in the work of other critics such as Rosemary Jolly (2010) who, focusing on contemporary South African literature, theorises ways in which literature can create spaces for ‘ethical thought’, or Michael Mack (2012) whose work attempts to create a ‘new literary theory that combines aesthetics with ethics’, to ‘forge[s] a tie between life and literature’ (72). In an echo of Hall’s words, Mack writes: ‘Literature is capable of changing the most basic coordinates of our awareness’ (80).

This return to thinking about the ‘social validity’ (Mack 78) of art and culture, and its responsiveness to urgent contemporary conditions, is particularly timely, and clears a theoretical space for some rethinking about how black British women’s writing continues to speak to and differently represent issues of identity and the intersections of gender, class and culture. It helps to relocate Black women’s writing in the world, while not losing sight of literature’s role within ‘regimes of representation’. As Mack argues, ‘literature’s interstitial location outside and at the same time inside substance prepares it not just for the narration of what is fictive but in doing so for a critique of the fictions that may have come to shape reality’ (78). Privileging the interconnection of ethics and aesthetics provides a framework for a radically intersected critique of black fiction’s value both as representation and as a means of counter-writing fictions of patriarchal dominance, of black invisibility or the hypervisibility of the singly-defined black subject.

**COUNTERWRITING COLONIAL FICTIONS**

Emecheta’s first two novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) share a locational and temporal context with Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987). Both writers’ novels are migrant narratives, focusing on the arrival of their female protagonists in London in the late 1950s, the African and Caribbean contexts of their arrival and the poverty, degradation and abuse they encounter on arrival. Both texts counterwrite Britain’s fictitious status as the colonies’ ‘Mother Country’, and both, in different ways, oppose patriarchy’s raced fictions that construct black women either as mere victims or as s/heroes of mythical proportions. Adah, the protagonist of Emecheta’s second novel, *Second-Class Citizen*, is given the name “Ibo tigress” (21) after an incident at her village school where a group of “four tough-looking boys” (21) were ordered to carry Adah to the teacher for a caning. Furious, she bites one of the boys so forcefully that fragments of his flesh become stuck between her teeth. Thus discourses and practices of women’s subjugation and male dominance, as perpetuated within Nigerian Ibo culture, are opposed and contested from that space of resistance that the narrative creates through the characterisation of its protagonist as a “tigress”, a woman who is powerful and empowered, but who functions within the context of her Ibo cultural heritage.

The novel begins with Adah’s birth, using it to critique the patriarchal culture of her home-town Ibuza. Her family and her tribe had thought she would be a boy and as a result, ‘nobody thought of recording her birth’ (7). Adah’s response ‘now that she was grown up’ is to mock those prejudices: ‘… it was their own fault; they should not have had her in the first place’ (7). The ‘Ibo tigress’ brushes aside traditional expectations, refuses the marriage offers she receives from older men, ‘whom she would have to serve … on bended knee’ and chooses Francis instead, a boy of her own age who lived in Lagos. This marriage and relocation would allow her to continue studying while married. Nonetheless, it seems, Adah intuits that she had been trapped: ‘It was the saddest day in Adah’s whole life’ (26) and later determines to leave the control of her parents-in-law by migrating to England, thus fulfilling the dream of young Nigerian professionals of this period. As the novel progresses, her husband’s idleness, philandering and violent abuse is, the narrative suggests, rooted in Ibo culture but is consistently resisted by Adah’s resolute commitment to independence and her determination to succeed first as a librarian, then as a writer. When the seemingly successful, middle-class Mr. Okpara intervenes to mediate in Adah’s failing marriage and advises Adah to ‘go and beg for forgiveness’, Adah responds: ‘Typical Ibo psychology; men never do wrong, only the women; they are bought, paid for and must remain like that, silent obedient slaves’ (170). Despite the narrative’s denouncing of Ibo ‘superstition’ and misogyny, Adah does not completely reject her own Ibo identity, but uses some of its practices to frame her own nascent feminism. She sees aspects of polygamy as potentially liberating for women, though this perspective is a response both to the ‘savage’, animalistic sexuality (43) that, in men like her husband, borders on abuse, and their refusal to countenance birth control. Adah does remind herself, however, that whereas in the Christian myth of origin the woman emerges as secondary to and dependent for her origins on man, among the Ibo, the word ‘woman’ bears no relation to the word ‘man’ (109).

The novel situates Adah’s instinctive rebelliousness within the context of a growing understanding of women’s structural inequality and the ways in which the subordination of women in social and cultural contexts is experienced also and often first in intimate sexual and domestic relations. In the same way, Adah’s understanding of racial inequalities develops from a position that is experiential – her experiences of schooling in Nigeria, being refused adequate housing, childcare and employment – to one that is theoretical. Her dream of going to the UK is fostered by her early education in Nigeria: the schools are neat, clean and orderly; the children are taught only in English; the head-teacher was trained in England, and from Adah’s cultural references, it would seem that the curriculum was in English. She first learns that she is constructed as ‘black’ from her husband Francis, who explains: ‘ “Everybody is coming to London. The West Indians, the Pakistanis and even the Indians, so that African students are usually grouped together with them. We are all blacks, all coloureds, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these”’ (41). This cultural homogenising of the post-colonial subject does not, in the novel, represent a basis for affiliation. Throughout the narrative, black is white’s fragmented other; its subjects second-class but separate from each other. White spaces, such as the library, are clean and orderly. They are for ‘first-class’ citizens and it is within this taxonomy of black negations that the novel’s other characters are constructed negatively; the ‘half-caste’ girl who is ‘too white to be black’ and ‘found it difficult to claim to be black’ (167); and more problematically, the ‘fish and chips’ girls, the white women in relationships with black men who, in their proximity to blackness, are negatively defined (54). They are, like Mrs. Noble, ‘filthy’ and dishonest or like Babalola’s girl-friend, Janet, allegedly promiscuous, or like Adah’s childminder, dirty, dishonest, and promiscuous.

Critics have described aspects of Emecheta’s fiction as feminist but I would suggest that her early, London fiction falls short of such an identity.[[1]](#endnote-1) Her protagonists are strong, empowered and resilient. They successfully resist patriarchal structures that threaten their growth and survival and their resistance secures a better future for their children. I would argue, however, that a black feminist position is defined by its commitment to actions that are transformative for more than just the individual. Black feminist action might be motivated, like Adah’s, by the personal and the intimate, but its target is structural change. There is no doubt that Emecheta’s vision for herself as a writer involves, almost inevitably, the transformation of the British cultural landscape. The narrative also points to a future where its details of the everyday struggle against racism and misogyny would create the basis for a transformation in the lives of subsequent generations: Adah’s children, are ‘going to be different. They were all going to be black, be proud of being black’ (154). These early novels, however, fall short of creating the kinds of social, cultural or even textual affiliations that might signal an awareness of shared experiences and the need for institutional, as well as personal change.

The direct, unadorned style of Emecheta’s prose encourages a transparent reading of the text as documentary, as a narrative that records and documents the experiences of racism and abuse that confronted black migrants in England during the 1950s and 60s. Emecheta constructs a ‘biomythographical’ (Griffiths 2016: 2) narrative, whose autobiographical events can be used to locate materially, theoretical concepts of ‘race and ethnicity within the existential imperative of foregrounding human agency’ (2-3). Each event in the novel serves a dual purpose: it marks the protagonist’s development, self-awareness and agency within the bildungsroman structure of the fictive narrative, and it displays the workings and effects of ‘real’ political and socio-cultural institutions and practices that make black life impossible. Whereas Emecheta’s documentary style, focusing on surface, on action and on the appearance of people and things, is enlivened by humour and of course the protagonists’ energy and her capacity to engage with others, Joan Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* is unrelenting in its focus on the debilitating effects of racism and male brutality. Riley has suggested in her essay ‘Writing Reality in a Hostile Environment’(1994) that her fiction intervenes in dominant narratives about black British experiences in order to correct assumptions about black disadvantage, and more specifically about the experiences of black women who, Riley writes, ‘have given unstintingly of their lives to flesh my creative world’ (552). Her female protagonists are used to confront readers with the effects of ‘certain adverse situations’ that are intentionally ‘disturbing’ and unsettling (449). In contrast to Adah they are, in the words of the author, ‘women considered losers’, unable to withstand the ‘appalling’ circumstances of their lives – racism, violence and personal betrayal (449).

The character Adella is one such protagonist. She is almost defeated by her ‘endless struggle’ to be respectable, and the ‘disappointments, bad housing, raw deals’ she experiences in Jamaica and Britain (Riley 1994: 552). The restricted, controlling point of view of the narrative reflects and underscores Adella’s entrapment in colonial fictions of female respectability, harnessed and perpetuated by the colonial religious, cultural and educational institutions used to maintain class and gender divisions in the Jamaican settings that stage Adella’s coming of age. Central to fictions of the ideal, respectable woman is the conception of the ideal family with marriage and legitimate children as its defining characteristic. Much has been written about the Caribbean family by early twentieth-century scholars and moralists, concerned by what they regarded as a high level of dysfunction: the alleged promiscuity among men and women, illegitimacy, ‘ a high level of non-legal unions, the prevalence of “household” over “family” units and a high level of households headed by women’ (Senior 1991: 82). As Senior notes: ‘A great deal of the efforts of early missionaries – and later governor’s wives – was directed at increasing the marriage rate and decreasing the illegitimacy rate’ (82). Writing in 1953, the Trinidadian Roman Catholic cleric, Dom Basil Matthews notes approvingly the upsurge in the rate of marriage recorded in the year of the cholera epidemic in 1845 and the continued rise in the incidence of marriage in the following decades, the result, he claims of the good work of the church and ‘crucial evidence of the receptivity and sensitiveness to the Christian moral ideal developed by the Negro in two generations after slavery’ (in Reddock 2005: 41). A similar, though failed, attempt to coerce couples into marriage was made by the Mass Marriage Movement, an island-wide campaign launched in 1944-45 by the Governor General’s wife, Lady Huggins, initiated in response to a Royal Commission that demanded a solution to what it defined as the ‘evils of promiscuity’ (Barrow 1999: 151-2). This campaign as well as contemporary policy studies by priests and social welfare workers constructed the Caribbean family within frameworks of ‘social pathology,’ where family and household groups were measured as deficient against the European ideal of the nuclear family (150).

Riley’s Adella is shaped by this construction of women and female sexual identity. Alone with two children by a married policeman, Adella finds her work as a dressmaker abruptly curtailed: her wealthy middle-class customers become unwilling to allow her to climb the hills to their suburban houses, claiming that she had become a ‘bad influence’ (14). Her pregnancy and then the appearance of her children are for her clients, her family and herself, signs of her promiscuity: ‘She had several rich women who came to her from the hill and she knew her cousin’s wife was proud of her, that Granny Dee and Aunt Ivy boasted about how well she was doing to the people of the village’ (103). She considers: ‘Now she had to shame them all by telling them she was pregnant’ (103). Adella resents but absorbs their condemnation, and is positioned as innocent or unaware of the systems of patriarchy that continue to subjugate her. Despite these experiences, her world-view and understanding of herself continues to be shaped by her adherence to the colonial-derived concepts that define female identities: shame and respectability. She is filled with shame by the birth of her ‘fatherless’ children and forever indebted to her husband Stanton for marrying her and making her and her children respectable (70). As one of the women interviewed in Olive Senior’s (1991) work says of the possibility that her seventeen-year old daughter would get married: ‘you know things can happen and before I come to shame and our house come down to shame, I’ll let her get married’ (87). She would prefer a teenage marriage to a pregnancy outside of marriage. After Stanton leaves her to live with her cousin, Adella remembers ‘[h]ow ashamed she felt at the gossip it caused’ (94); Adella is filled with shame at the ‘disgrace’ of her daughters’ teenage pregnancies. Shame is the corollary of the respectability that Adella craves, the hollow mantra that shapes her world-view and that, as John McLeod argues, makes her ‘complicit with the very hypocritical and judgemental attitudes which fuel [the] scandalous gossip’, of which she is often the subject (116).

The novel’s characters are situated in overlapping discourses of ‘respect’ and ‘respectability’, colonial discourses that, in Adella’s experience, govern the social practices and relations of the novel’s Caribbean setting:

Kingston. Always you had to respect the older heads … All those years of studying how to be good and Christian, listening to the white Baptist minister and praying to the white god. How she had wanted to come to England where white people lived. Now she was here, had found out too late that it was only in the islands that respect for the old existed (3).

Respect, as this quotation shows, structures relations of authority, dominance and subordination in the novel and authoritarian concepts of respect silence women’s suffering. When, following his assault on Adella, she removes herself from Pastor Brown’s company during his visit to her house, her grandmother slaps her ‘hard across her face’ saying, ‘ “Yu doan know to have respeck fa a servant of de Lord?”’ (33), only to later confess to Adella that ‘“Everybady in de village know de pastor have a weakness fa de young girl dem”’ (33). In London, her children witness her husband’s abuse and neglect: they go hungry in order that Adella can feed him his favourite food. He repeatedly beats her son, Mikey, from a previous relationship, with the result that as a boy he had started to wet the bed, had always walked with his head hanging, and talked with a stutter. Yet despite this she feels hurt that her children do not ‘respect’ Stanton because having grown up in a culture that does not respect its elders, they had, inevitably, ‘got infected with white people’s ideas’ (133). Her longing for Stanton, years after he had left her and had continued to abuse other women and young girls, reflects her continuing desire to be rescued by the respectability that marriage once offered her.

In her discussion of concepts of respectability as they operate in the Caribbean Rhoda Reddock (2005) critiques a dominant perspective developed by sociologist Peter Wilson (1973), that genders respectability. ‘Reputation’ Wilson observes, was of ‘a particular concern to men while respectability was especially important to women’ (80). Reddock argues, however, that respectability functioned as a form of social control, reinforcing class and colour difference and a ‘patriarchal construction of women’s lives, based on control of their sexuality and male privilege’ (2005:78). Most of the prestigious schools in colonial Jamaica, for example, did not allow entry to girls whose parents were not married (Ford-Smith 1994/5: 5). Thus poor, aspiring black women, like Adella, might aspire to marriage in order to become respectable, and as a way of overcoming the lack they experienced because they were not white:

Respectability has been especially important for poor black women, lacking the respectability which colour automatically gives in a colour-stratified social system. Whites were by definition respectable but blacks, especially black women had to earn respectability through behaviours, language, skills, practices and one might add family forms (80).

Of course, given the low rate of marriage among working class women in Jamaica, and the spectacular failure of the Mass Marriage campaign, it would seem the case that many ‘poor black women’ continue to refuse marriage and its alleged social advantages. Citing the comments of her women respondents, Senior (1991) argues that ‘Many women prefer their freedom to an ill-advised marriage for they know that “marriage have teeth” as the proverb says’, and she cites a popular Jamaican folk song celebrating women’s freedom and opposing marriage: ‘Before me marry and go hug up mango tree/me wi’ live so. Me one’ (88). Adella’s narrow vision excludes the option of freedom, celebrated in this folk song and embraced by her friend Lisa, and by Cheryl, whose response to her husband leaving is ‘good riddance’ ( 94). The colonial discourses that inhibit women’s freedom and disfigure family relations write her suffering and finally her death. She is literally and figuratively ‘crippled’ by the racism she faces, by her husband’s violence and neglect and by her inability to withstand the cold, deadening climate of mid-twentieth-century England.

Riley(1994) writes that her female characters force us to confront ‘weakness as well as strength in black women as an integral part of their humanness’ (449): that kind of ‘reality’ is, she argues, ‘out of step with perception’ but if ‘uncovered’ can create the possibility for change (552). This is an important statement about the ethical function of her own fiction and its potential as a vehicle for understanding ‘the other’. Despite the novel’s flaws, its Rhysian [[2]](#endnote-2)protagonist, ‘the other’, of the strong, knowing and resisting black women is uncovered and made to demand recognition. At the same time, as the novel itself demonstrates with its glimpses of Adella’s own strength and courage and its inclusion of more resistant women characters, this is a qualified reality. It is Adella’s reality, one that is shaped by historical and contemporary discourses of class and colour, and by gendered, colonial ideologies of respectability that have denied her subjectivity.

**COUNTERWRITING ‘REALITY’: BERNARDINE EVARISTO’S *LARA* (1997/2009) AND *MR LOVERMAN* (2013)**

In ‘Writing Reality’ Joan Riley laments the absence of black British literature and black criticism that ‘surveys works in its [sic] own context and on its own terms’ (551). Towards the end of her novel, Buchi Emecheta writes that the first novel her protagonist had written, *The Bride Price*, and which her husband Francis had burned, represented an achievement that was ‘twenty years before its time’ (185). Both novels use their younger characters to point to the possibility of transformation. Although, as Charlotte Beyer (2012) notes, the older generation of black Britons such as Adella, have not experienced the respectful treatment they had expected and felt they had earned, the younger generation, such as her successful, professional daughter is, Adella observes, treated with respect by white society while all the while honouring traditions of respect for elders such as her mother (Riley 1987:102).

In the second half of this chapter, I focus on two novels by Bernardine Evaristo; her first novel *Lara* (1997, 2009), written exactly a decade after *Waiting in the Twilight*, but whose protagonist and narrative preoccupations more comfortably belong to another, more contemporary moment in black British literary production, and a more recent novel, *Mr Loverman* (2013). Evaristo writes within a cultural context that includes a an increasing number of award-winning black British women novelists, many of whom also began writing in the 1980s and 1990s: Jackie Kay, Andrea Levy, Helen Oyeyemi, Diana Evans, Zadie Smith, Laura Fish, Aminatta Forna among others, as well as a diverse range of black women poets and dramatists. This context also includes a strong body of ‘black criticism’, including political criticism that interrogates black representation. Evaristo’s work uses, revises and reflects the rich variety of black cultural production that has become more easily available and more visible in the first decades of the twenty-first century, including cultural production from the Caribbean and Africa that continues to inform British discourses of race, culture and representation. As black cultural resources, they represent new possibilities for black British women writers and create new spaces within which blackness is constructed as multiple, complex, contradictory and diverse. They provide contemporary black British women writers with the opportunity to constitute ‘new kinds of subjects’ and ‘new places from which to speak’ (Hall 1994: 402). In these texts, blackness is not a negation, a deficit identity or whiteness’s ‘other’ but an epistemological framework for new kinds of subjectivity. I position Evaristo’s writing in relation to an earlier generation of black British women writers exemplified by Emecheta and Riley, and argue that, in addition to her work’s use and revision of this earlier fiction, Evaristo’s novels both speak to and critically engage with black diasporic literary production, specifically the work of Sam Selvon and Caribbean women writers Olive Senior, Jamaica Kincaid and Lorna Goodison.

Each of Evaristo’s novels constructs a new set of preoccupations and ever more complexly intersected identities. Evaristo’s first novel, *Lara* (1997,2009) revisits some of the more marginal characters in Emecheta’s early fiction, bringing into clearer focus the figure of the white parent of black children, who has continued to feature in so much black British cultural production that investigates issues of race, cultural placement and belonging. This novel-in-verse is described by Evaristo as a ‘semi-autobiographical fictionalized story of my family history’ (Gustar 2015:442), and was written, it would seem, after the author’s first visits to Lagos in 1993 and Brazil in 1995. The first edition, published in 1997, is a narrative of becoming plotted around the autobiographical protagonist’s physical and metaphorical route to her Nigerian father’s past and her own African identity. Although both editions begin with portraits of the father, of his ancestral past on a slave plantation in Brazil, and of his own arrival in England in 1949, the second edition intersects the father’s past with a more detailed account of the mother’s lineage. The emphasis on the father’s story in the first edition reflects what might be characterised as a younger writer’s response to how her protagonist is defined by her young contemporaries and by society as a whole. Lara’s identity is flattened and stereotyped: all ‘coloured’ people are Jamaican:

‘My dad says you must be from Jamaica,’ Susie insisted.

I’m not Jamaican. I’m English.

Then why are you coloured?’

The protagonist’s skin colour defines her as not ‘English’, that is, not white, yet her early experience is of growing up in a home dominated by the everyday culture and practices of her white mother, Ellen, and her mother’s Anglo-Irish family. This, the white British side of her ancestry that is overwritten as ‘black’ in popular taxonomies of race and colour, is recovered in the second edition, and used to add texture and complexity to Lara’s blackness.

In both editions, the rediscovery of her father’s past is more urgent but also more difficult. Her father, Taiwo, is distant and unwilling to reveal anything about his family. He is locked both in grief at the separation and loss of his mother and family and in anger and bitterness at the racism he faces in England. Whereas Emecheta’s Adah sees two-dimensional stereotypes when she encounters black African men such as Pa Noble, who demeans himself and is demeaned because of his relationship with his white English wife, the character of Evaristo’s Taiwo is recovered from what became, in the mid twentieth-century, a popular stereotype, and given an interiority and a history. The relationship between him and his wife Ellen is described as founded on love. Ellen says of her feelings for her husband: ‘I love him with every limb, every bone, each beat of my heart’ (26). And Taiwo confronts and confounds the racist stereotypes her family have constructed:

These British think they are so superior to coloured,

they believe those stupid Tarzan films from America.

Sweet Ellie, you do not see evil in this world.

That is why I love you (95).

In this narrative, their marriage is fuelled by erotic desire and by a determination to break from tradition and create new identities, new versions of Britishness.

The character of Taiwo can be further mapped on to the African characters in Emecheta’s fiction: like Adah’s, Taiwo’s journey to England begins in Liverpool but Evaristo layers African history into his experience of arrival: ‘I’ve met elders/in the Yoruba club in Croxteth Street who came/ in the last century as stowaways and seamen,/fought in two world wars for Britain…’ (20). And similarly, the narrative explains, interracial marriage has characterised the experience of arrival and settlement that began in the ‘last century’. The mother’s history is used to emphasise the parallel and overlapping histories and experiences of colonialism – hers Irish and Taiwo’s West African – as well as of migration, poverty, prejudice and racism. Throughout, however, Lara is affected by her father’s violent silencing of her efforts to imagine her ‘Daddy people’ (134), or the people from whom she inherited her ‘colour’. Evaristo revisits the scenes of male aggression and abuse depicted in the earlier novels of Emecheta and Riley, but by juxtaposing scenes of domestic violence with scenes of racism in the public sphere, the narrative connects the violence the father inflicts on his children to his own experience of racial abuse, his fear or experience of his own failure and his fear of his children’s failure. His experiences of ‘otherness’ are immediate. When he arrives in Liverpool, he is asked, ‘Do you people still live in trees in the bush?’ (20) and like Emecheta’s Francis, Taiwo comes to understand that race is a construct made real through everyday experiences of racism: ‘… in this country I am coloured./Back home I was just me’ (20). In later scenes, these experiences in Liverpool and London distort his understanding of who he is. He becomes a ‘boxer’, aching with ‘invisible bruises’ (104). He transfers those bruises to his children: ‘The Seniors get 15 strokes, the youngest a mere tap./… If the boys cry, I hit harder … I know how to raise my children./This is a harsh, harsh world’ (105). This scene illustrates the traditions of patriarchy within which gendered identities emerge in Nigerian Yoruba culture, yet this narrative, like Emecheta’s novel, refuses to allow its protagonist to be constrained by patriarchal traditions supported by acts of violence.

Both Emecheta’s novel and Evaristo’s novel-in-verse end by registering an expanded concept of what it means to be black and British. Lara’s encounter and reconciliation with her father’s Brazilian-West African inheritance and with her own Britishness, concludes both versions of the text. In the ‘Epilogue’ subtitled, ‘Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1995’, Evaristo writes:

I am baptised, resolved to paint slavery out of me,

the Daddy People onto canvas with colour-rich strokes.

…. Back to London, across international time zones.

I step out of Heathrow and into my future (188).

‘Colour’ in these lines gives a rich dimension to her identity, one that allows the protagonist to evolve from a past that essentialises black victimhood. These textual echoes, interconnections and revisions both speak to and problematize the concept of ‘moments’ or literary periods that frames this chapter. While Evaristo’s experimental style signifies the text’s occupation of a new cultural and literary space and signals the arrival of new voices and registers, its content suggests that the experiences of difference, of racism, of patriarchal aggression and misogyny, have not yet been fully mapped or articulated in black British cultural discourse.

Evaristo’s sixth novel, *Mr Loverman* (2013), provides yet another perspective on the black British experience, distancing the novel’s protagonist, Barrington (Barry) Walker, from the prototypical ‘Windrush’ arrivant in almost every way. As the author has said in a recent interview, she wanted to use Barry’s character to disrupt the stereotypes that have emerged in the wake of the so-called ‘Windrush era’ of migration, from the 1940s to the 1960s. Using a very pointed series of negations, she says of her protagonist: ‘He is not impoverished. He is not a victim. The novel is not about nonbelonging … Some people expect it to be a sob story but it isn’t’ (Gustar 2015: 444). Her character is also not interested in sexual, racial or any form of campaigning politics and thus he emerges as both unique and extraordinary, ordinary yet unrepresentative. As such the novel counterwrites the impetus of an earlier generation of writers and critics to construct narratives and meanings that were allegorical or representative of a collective experience or ‘reality’, and in this way the novel intervenes into expectations of what black British literary texts will produce.

*Mr. Loverman* is set in East London in 2010 but looks back to the characters’ childhoods in early 1960s Antigua and their arrival in Britain later in the decade. The novel’s protagonists, Barrington and his lover Morris, are two aging homosexuals who have been together ‘discreetly’ as Barrington describes it, since they were teenagers in Antigua. The opening pages reflect Evaristo’s characteristic humour and the optimism evident in most of her work but also an awareness of the different voices that have characterised previous generations of black British writing. Narrated in the first person, the conversational lyricism of the first few paragraphs, depicting a conviviality and ease between the two male characters, self-consciously echoes the narrative style and register of Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956, 2004), a now canonical Caribbean novel that shares a context with the texts that are a focus of this chapter[[3]](#endnote-3). Barry reflects:

Morris is a sensitive fella but not hypersensitive, because that really would make him more woman than man – especially at a certain time of the month when they get that crazed look in they eyes and you better not say the wrong thing, or the right thing in the wrong way. Actually, even if you say the right thing in the right way they might come after you with a carving knife’ (Evaristo 2013: 3).

The repeated use of ‘fella’ in the early paragraphs of Evaristo’s novel echoes the homosociality that binds together Selvon’s African and Caribbean arrivants. In addition, Evaristo uses her characterisation of Barry to repeat and critique the casual misogyny that characterises Selvon’s text, the careless promiscuity of his male characters, as well as their vanity and their fastidious use of dress as a mask.

Such vanity is particularly evident in Selvon’s Harris and Sir Galahad, where the characters’ dress and attention to style are signs of their split selves but also of their bid for agency through gestures of self-fashioning. On most Sunday mornings, the ‘fellars’ would congregate in Moses’s tiny room, for small talk, to reminisce but often to recount the horrors of the everyday acts of racism they encountered. For Moses, these Sunday morning acts of ‘confession’ (138) become overwhelming and his exhortation to ‘Dress, go out, coast a lime in the park’ (140) is meant as an instruction to his companions to resist the routine assault on their persons, and to be ‘a man’: ‘Walking that way, he might meet up Harris and Galahad, both of them dress like Englishmen with bowler hat and umbrella, and the *Times* sticking out of the jacket pocket’ (140). Their impeccable dress mimics a British version of accomplished masculinity, financial success and conformity. Sir Galahad’s evening dress, however, involves another layer of shape-shifting, another kind of mask. *The Lonely Londoners’*  narrator describes Sir Galahad emerging from the underground as he returns from his nightshift: ‘He have on a old cap that was brown one time but black now with grease and fingerprint, and a jacket that can’t see worse days, and a corduroy trousers … [and] shoes [that] have a big hole’ (86). In the summer evenings, however, he dresses like a ‘lord’ (87), or a creolised version of an English aristocrat, with his hair greased and brushed flat, his trousers with seams that ‘could cut you, and the jacket fitting square on the shoulders’ (86). He pays whatever the tailor asks for the suit, ‘tell[ing] the fellar is all right, you cut that jacket so and so, and don’t forget I want twenty-three bottom on the trousers … And the crowning touch is a long silver chain hanging from the fob’ (87).

In both Selvon’s and Evaristo’s texts, the male characters’ dress is a carnivalesque celebration of the West Indian dandy whose genealogy originates with the returning ‘Colón man’. His years spent labouring on the Panama Canal during the early decades of the twentieth-century bought him the appearance of what Olive Senior, in her poem ‘All Clear 1928’, describes as a ‘Spanish/ grandee’ (Senior 1995:55), with ‘his fine /leather boots … his saddle,/ his grey mare, his three-piece suit,/ his bowler hat, his diamond tie-pin, his fine manicured hands, his barbered/hair’ (57). At the same time that these characters’ dress attempts to register a version of accomplished masculinity, their detailed attention to their bodies, the ‘manicured hands’ of the ‘Colòn man’, or Sir Galahad’s elaborate efforts to tame his long bushy hair reflect a blurring of gender boundaries and an incorporated femininity, in the achievement of a perfect, masculine mask. In Evaristo’s narrative, the characters, Barry and Morris step out in their ‘smart fifties suits, spats, fedoras and, in my case, a chunky gold chain around my neck’ (Evaristo 2013: 246). Barry’s wearing of ‘gartered socks’ (140) and his carefully maintained ‘Derek Rose silk monogrammed pyjamas … the same pair I have to hand-wash’ (14), are modes of dress that both conceal and signify his homosexuality.

As several critics have noted, Selvon’s narrative does not explicitly censure his characters’ misogyny[[4]](#endnote-4), though their masculinity is precariously positioned. Curdella Forbes argues that sex in the novel, like work, represents ‘the avoidance and expression of panic’ (52) whereas inhabiting a socially constructed gender identity involves ‘adult responsibilities and relations’, primarily the ‘ability to provide for a family but also the legitimation of authority over a family’ (62). In Evaristo’s novel, however, the male characters’ financial success and responsibility to their family act as a further layer of disguise that the novel problematizes: their fulfilling of adult male responsibility is both real, and a veneer.

In addition to its echoes and revisions of Selvon’s novel, *Mr. Loverman* revises and critiques representations of gender roles evidenced in the texts discussed in the first half of this chapter in significant ways. Unlike the husbands and fathers in Riley’s and Emecheta’s novels and in Evaristo’s *Lara*, the protagonists Barry, his wife Carmel and Morris determine not to direct violence at the women and children in their families, and take a liberal approach to parenting and family hierarchies. The male characters assume a duty of care and that duty, however problematically enacted, is integral to their conception of their own masculinity and finally, although Evaristo’s characters are not “out” they are unambiguously and unashamedly homosexual. The narrative’s presentation of its main character, Barrington (Barry) Walker, is structured around a productive tension between his, for the most part concealed, homosexuality and his unquestioning commitment to a heteronormative, patriarchal ideal of which he is both a standard-bearer and beneficiary. He is an autodidact and an intellectual; he is wealthy, independent and thus freed from the kinds of employment that compromise the masculine identities of Selvon’s characters, Emecheta’s Francis or the other Nigerian male characters referred to in her novel who, on arriving in England as qualified professionals were then forced to do manual labour. Barry’s refusal to use the ‘Pardner System of community lending’ in order to acquire the deposit for his first house, preferring instead to borrow the money from his wealthy father-in-law and pay him back along with 20 per cent interest (116-17), reflects a conscious distancing from the Caribbean migrant community and its traditions. Most arrivants of Barry’s generation did not have access either to bank loans or to wealthy relatives in the Caribbean: they had come from relative poverty and, though determined to be successful, were starting with nothing. Having acquired his first property Barry then goes on to buy more derelict property, renovate it and ultimately to benefit financially from the gentrification of Stoke Newington, a culturally mixed, but previously working class area of East London.

For this character, his care for his family is in part evidenced by his generosity. His benevolence confirms and legitimises his patriarchal authority, as is evident in the following description in which he surveys [his] ‘*my’* home and its contents. His self-regard is both tinged with irony, evident in his exaggerated diction, and a reflection of a seemingly unshakable self-belief:

Me and Morris are at my spacious dining table, which can comfortably seat eight people, in my capacious kitchen with its Victorian ceiling and stately church-like window that looks out on to my amplitudinous, tree adorned garden … I am enthroned at the head of the table on my carved antique chair with tapestry upholstery (31).

Barry relishes the comfort that his wife’s subservience brings. When coming in in the early hours of the morning he throws his clothes into the corner of the bedroom for his wife to wash, and when, for the first time she goes away, he struggles with the laundry, cooking and washing up: ‘I look in bewilderment at the dishwasher Carmel bought in 1998, but, seeing as she’s never bothered to show me how to operate it, it’s no flaming use, ehn?’ (167). When he says to Morris, ‘You know we don’t business with this gay liberation stuff’ (136), he is also expressing his reluctance both to relinquish his patriarchal status and to encourage his wife’s liberation from domestic subjugation and marital penance. He is a conservative, an imagined eighteenth-century aristocratic dandy (14) and it is in this context that his ‘discreet’ sexuality is situated.

As in Joan Riley’s novel, concepts of shame, respect and respectability as they operate within Caribbean and black British communities and cultures, form a subtext of the novel and shape the narrative’s representations of parenting and family relations, sex and sexual identities. In Evaristo’s novel, however, ‘respect’ is disentangled from colonial concepts of respectability, re-appropriated by the Caribbean community in the novel, and adapted to better fit new, settled generations of black British subjects. Rather than an unquestioning respect for authority, respect, as Lorna Goodison writes in her poem ‘My Will’, is a form of entitlement and a gesture of love and belonging. It is ‘…the right to call/all older than you/ Miss mister or mistress/in the layered love of our/simplest ways’ (1986: 19). When Barry’s younger daughter takes him out for the first time to meet her gay friends, she insists that they address her father and Morris as ‘Uncle’, yet at the same time, in the context of family relations, respect has to be earned and is constantly subject to negotiation. Barry is proud of his older daughter Donna’s ability to ‘nose-dive’ into an argument with her elders ‘without a parachute’ (57), and of his younger daughter, he remembers, ‘I always made Maxine feel her opinions was important. I never slaughtered my child in an argument’ (109). Yet in preface to Donna’s assault on her elders, she repeats, ‘With respect. With *respect*, Drusilla, Merty’ (57).

Marriage, for both Barrington and Carmel, provides a cloak of respectability. On the night of her wedding, even as she registers the fact that they still have not had sex, Barry’s wife Carmel relishes her new identity as ‘a respectably married woman’ (26), an identity constructed within a framework of feminine subjugation, loss and negation. She has been taught to retain a childlike sweetness: ‘Sweet Girl – became his pet name for you, and once you knew that you was sweet deep down inside, you couldn’t backchat him no more’ (23). The chapter describing her preparation for the wedding and the day itself, can be read as a dialogic response to Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid’s short narrative ‘Girl’ (1978/1984), where the ‘girl’ is instructed to ‘always eat your food in such a way that it won’t turn someone else’s stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are bent on becoming’ (Kincaid 1984:3). Kincaid’s young protagonist is instructed into a colonial code of feminine respectability that the speaker senses she will resist and thus overthrow the colonial strictures that disempower women. In a similar gesture, Evaristo inserts Barry’s homosexuality into a code of ideal womanhood dependant on a heteronormative ideal, thus subverting the gendered assumptions of the code itself. His refusal of the advances of the island’s eligible girls and his reluctance to have sex with his wife makes him a ‘real gentleman, unlike some of the boys round these parts, who can’t keep their things in their pants’ (Evaristo 2013:26). In response to his gentlemanly mask, she will dutifully absorb and follow the rules that define a good wife: ‘when your husband gets back from work, home will be *a haven of rest and order/*you goin’ *touch up your make-up and put a ribbon in your hair* and have dinner ready in the oven’(20).

Shame emerges in the narrative as the problematic underside of respect and respectability, and is the reason Barry continues to conceal his sexuality. It is significant, therefore, that his homosexuality is also revealed within a discourse of shame. In his daughter’s absence, Barry’s grandson, Daniel, has come to stay with him. Late one night, Barry is awoken by the sound of loud music being played by his grandson and his friends. He recognizes the artist: ‘that Buju Banton fella is being played inside *my* house? *My house* …’ (194). He says to Daniel’s friends: ‘Now get out and take your … homo … homophobic music with you …’ (196). Buju Banton’s popular, homophobic lyrics thus provide the context for his coming out. As Barry continues to rail against Banton’s lyrics, one of Daniel’s friends confronts him:

You are, aren’t you? He says quietly, sinisterly.

Something in me snaps, the way it does when folk hold things in so long that they start acting beyond common sense, beyond reason.

Yes, I am a cocksucker,’ … not quite knowing how those words exited my mouth.

…

‘But you’re disrespecting me,’ Daniel pleads faintly …

‘All of you youths go on about being disrespected all of the time because you pussies. Acting all tough on the outside and saying battyman have to *dead* when inside you is pussies. Pure and simple. *Pussies*.

You’re shaming me, Grandy.’

And *you* have shamed me you *rass* punk. Now take your friends out of my yard (196-7).

The reference to Banton’s lyrics in this scene situates Barrington’s sexuality within discourses of sexuality and sexual identity that are specifically Caribbean. These dance-hall lyrics are explicitly homophobic yet, as Barry and Morris’s enjoyment of the‘homophobic doggerel’ of other dancehall lyricists demonstrates, simultaneously gesture towards a homosexual identity (243). Barrington’s reluctance to be open about his sexuality is connected throughout the narrative to his fear of being shamed and of losing respect, derived in the main from his identity as a patriarch and the responsibilities that have confirmed him in that role. His grandson’s white friends’ celebration of lyrics that are designed to shame him, however, perform an opposite function, and serve to propel him out of the ‘closet’. Banton’s homophobic lyrics, paradoxically, free him from the discourses of shame that have resulted in his concealed identity.

In their discussion of the aggressively homophobic linguistic ‘rituals’ that characterise Jamaican popular culture, Michael Bucknor and Conrad James have argued that ‘this very hyperbolic verbal exhibition is an attempt to mask men’s anxiety about and investment in the changing norms/roles/expressions of masculinity’ (1). Their use of the Jamaican Creole expression ‘cock mouth kill cock’ [what comes out of your mouth condemns you] for the title of the article, with its implications for masculine sexuality and hubris, exposes the slippage inherent in these verbal displays of sexual aggression. These verbal displays, Bucknor and James argue, reflect the artists’ own ‘embrace of the very subjectivities they appear to condemn’ (2). In addition, their condemnation of homosexuality as sexual deviancy is dependent on an articulation of the feminine as a ‘site of deficiency and the boundary line of legitimate masculinity’ (2). As Clinton Hutton argues, the lyrics of artists such as Bounty Killer express disbelief at the ‘gyalification’ of men in Jamaican society: he sings ‘Mi cyaan believe some Rasta man a turn pussy hole’, in other words that they have become like women, where the feminine ‘pussy hole’ is a deficient identity. Making a similar verbal gesture, Barry’s response to the boys, claiming that they are ‘pussies. Pure and simple. *Pussies*’ confirms his misogyny. As several critics have noted, however, focusing on what Donna Hope (2006) has termed, ‘Fashion Ova Style’, or a dancehall aesthetic which is both aggressively heterosexual and ‘boasts a feminised aesthetic and a high degree of homosociality’ (Anderson and McLean 2014:24), the appearance of many dancehall artists, including Buju Banton and Bounty Killer, is what is popularly described as ‘feminine’. Like Senior’s grandee or Selvon’s Sir Galahad, dress marks their sexual identity as ambiguous. As Anderson and McLean note, ‘these men wear tight pants, tight shirts, shape their eyebrows, have their hair styled into intricate African-derived designs, and many bleach their skin’, while all the while, like Elephant man with his pink and yellow hair, singing, ‘batty man fi dead … shoot them like bird (24). The spaces created by the disjuncture between the artist and his lyrics allows for the performance of homosexuality within a cultural form that expresses homophobic masculinity. As Jeffrey Q. McClure explains with reference to the participation of black gay men in flagrantly heterosexist, homophobic hip-hop spaces: ‘The queer subjects who yelled “faggot-ass nigga” could feel part of a larger black masculine sphere – one that usually excluded them.” Taking possession of the ‘faggot’ or the ‘nigga’ reduces ‘the legitimacy of such assumptions being made on the speaker’s body’ (87). When Barrington prepares to make love to Morris, accompanied by Shabba Ranks’s lyrics, he parodies and exposes the ambivalence of Ranks’s aggressively heterosexist assumptions. He also mirrors the DJ’s preening self-regard, and positions Morris, like the woman in Ranks’s lyrics, as the passive, feminised sexual partner. [[5]](#endnote-5)

In Evaristo’s text, therefore, Barrington’s homosexuality and the black characters’ response to homosexuality is complex and resists easy categorisation. Morris himself says, I am individual, specific, not generic. I am no more a pooftah than I am a homo, buller or antiman … I ain’t no homosexual, I am a Barrysexual’ (138) and although he enjoys being among the young black gay crowd to whom his daughter Maxine introduces him, he resists being incorporated into the centuries-long lineage of African, Caribbean and African-American homosexuality with which they affiliate. His own care for his daughters during his wife’s long periods of post-natal depression is both a mirroring of his own father, who was a good husband and father, and a rejection of his father-in- law, who was a ‘brute and a buffoon’. These acts of care do not, however, overwrite his misogyny. He imagines that he has been a committed father and husband because he presides over a nuclear family structure and has refused other versions of masculinity that are dependant on fathering several children by as many different women (48) but in other ways he conforms to prototypes of Caribbean hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Anderson and McLean (2014). He is sexually promiscuous, has enjoyed a large degree of domestic freedom and makes financial provision for his children (Anderson and McLean 2014:20). The narrative too presents the black community’s response to homosexuality as varied. Its response is ambiguous and slippery, as suggested by the dancehall artists and their lyrics. It is tolerant, as evidenced in Barry’s brother’s reaction when, while they were young men in Antigua, he discovers that Barry is gay; and it is unambiguously homophobic, as illustrated by Pastor George’s denouncing of ‘homsicksicals’ (51). Evaristo’s *Mr Loverman* thus confronts and problematizes cultural fictions about the identities of the so-called ‘Windrush generation’ of arrivants; about the homogenous character of this community, and more specifically about black homosexuality and homophobia. Her fiction, like the other texts analysed in this chapter, intervenes in regimes of black representation and ‘outdoes the oppositional structure with which the social norms of the colonizers set out to colonize what they desire to be marked as deficient’ (Mack 2012: 85). Situating Evaristo’s work in a context that includes black British writing in the post-war period, Caribbean women writers, and other forms of cultural production serves to emphasise the resources that have enriched contemporary cultural expression and cleared the space for new positions from which to speak.

**CONCLUSION**

An approach to black British fiction that locates these texts in the world, or within historically and materially specific contexts, is a form of political criticism that uses literature to critique the fictions that flatten and reduce our identities as black British subjects. The fiction selected for this chapter ‘prepares us for new beginnings by revealing the non-obligatory, or, in other words, fictitious nature of that which has shaped social practices in the past and in contemporary society’ (87). They expose the racist nature of British society and the dominant structures and ideologies that marginalise or exclude its black female subjects. In so doing, this work also represents an opposition to those structures and ideologies and provides alternative frameworks within which black subjectivity can be configured. Emecheta’s Adah and Francis, Riley’s Adella, Evaristo’s Lara and Barrington are characters whose gender identities are shaped by culture, class and a history of colonialism, and they reflect the power relations within which such identities emerge. Their work attends to the complex historical and cultural discourses that construct identities and cultures as raced and gendered and in so doing these texts both expose the fictional nature of those discourses, and creates spaces from which to resist. By representing characters’ complex interiorities, this fiction offers new ways of reading the effects of marginalization and subjugation, ways that in turn reflect the complexity and plurality of black Britishness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson M and McLean N (2014) “Straighten up yu argument”: language

as shibboleth of Jamaican masculinity. *Caribbean Quarterly* 63(3):19-38.

Barrow C (1996) *Family in the Caribbean: themes and perspectives*.

Kingston: Ian Randle.

Beyer C (2012) Representations of the Ageing and Black British Identity in

*Twilight.* *Entertext* 9:105-121.

Bucknor M and James, C (2014) “Cock Mouth Kill Cock”: language, power and

sexual intimacy in constructions of Caribbean Masculinities. *Caribbean*

*Quarterly* 63(3): 1-7.

Emecheta B (1974/1982) *Second-Class Citizen*. Glasgow: Fontana.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (1972) *In the Ditch*. London: Allison and Busby.

Evaristo B (1997/2009) *Lara.* Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe.

Evaristo B (2013) Mr. Loverman. London: Penguin.

Forbes C (1997) Rethinking Samuel Selvon’s trilogy of exile: implications for

gender consciousness and gender relations in the Caribbean. *Caribbean*

*Quarterly* 43(4): 47-63.

Ford-Smith H (1994/5) Making white ladies: race, gender and the production of

identities in late colonial Jamaica. *Resources for Feminist Research*. 23(4):55-67.

Goodison L (1986) ‘My Will’ in *I am becoming my mother*. London: New Beacon

Books.

Hall S (2018) On cultural diversity. In: Lafleur B, Mors S, and Wietske, M (eds)

*Courageous citizens: how cultures contribute to social change*. European Cultural Foundation: Valiz.

Hall S (1988) New Ethnicities. In: Procter J (ed) *Writing black Britain 1948-1998*.

Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Griffith GA (2016) Blackness unbound: interrogating transnational blackness.

*Small Axe* 29: 1-3.

Gustar J (2015) Putting history in its place: an interview with Bernardine

Evaristo. *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 9(3): 433-448.

Hope, D (2006) *Ina di dancehall: popular culture and the politics of identity in*

*Jamaica.* Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.

Houlden K (2012) Sam Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners (1956): white sexual

desire and the calypso aesthetic. *Journal of West Indian Literature* 20(2):

24-37.

Hutton C (2014) The “gyalification” of man: the expression of male-male conflict

in Jamaica and the roots of homoeroticism in the political ideology,

ontology and praxis of white supremacy. *Caribbean Quarterly* 63(3): 21-

45.

Jolly, R (2010) *Narrative, Social Suffering and Engendering Human Rights in*

*Contemporary South Africa*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP.

Kincaid J (1984) ‘Girl’ in *At the Bottom of the River*. London: Picador.

Mack M (2012) *How literature changes the way we think*. London: Continuum.

McCune, JQ Jnr (2014) *Sexual discretion and the politics of passing*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

McLeod J (2000) *Postcolonial London: rewriting the metropolis*. London: Routledge.

O’Brien L (2001) Buchi Emechata and the “African Dilemma”. *Journal of*

*Commonwealth Literature* 36(2): 95-106.

Odinye IE (2010) Feminism and Self-Assertion of Female Characters in Buchi

Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and Zeinab Akali’s *The Stillborn*. *Unizik*

*Journal of Arts and Humanities* (11(1): 40-53.

Reddock R (2005) Rethinking common-law unions: towards a critical re-

evaluation of Caribbean family sociology. *IDEAZ* 4(1/2):72-85.

Riley, J (1987) *Waiting in the Twilight*. London: Women’s Press.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ (1994) Writing Reality in a Hostile Environment. *Kunapipi* 16(1):547-52).

Selvon S (1956/2004) The Lonely Londoners. Essex Longman.

Senior O (1991) *Working miracles: women’s lives in the English-speaking*

*Caribbean*. London: James Currey.

Senior (1995) ‘All Clear, 1928’ in Gardening in the Tropics: Poems. Newcastle

upon Tyne: Bloodaxe.

Wilson P (1973) *Carib antics: the social anthropology of the English-speaking*

*Negro societies of the Caribbean*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

1. See for example I.E Odinye’s essay on feminist agency in *Second-Class Citizen* or Louise O’Brien’s more nuanced analysis of the intersection of race, gender and African feminism in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The female protagonists in the fiction of Dominican writer Jean Rhys have also been considered ‘losers’, but there is a substantial and growing body of postcolonial feminist criticism that attempts to challenge this identification. A sustained, feminist reconsideration of Riley’s work has not been undertaken. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. In her interview with Gustar, Evaristo discusses the sexism that characterises Selvon’s narrative. She also refers to her PhD , explaining that ‘The creative text was *Mr. Loverman* but the academic text was ‘The Representation of Men in Black British Fiction; (446). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Curdella Forbes’s essay used in this chapter and Kate Houlden’s analysis of race and sexism in Selvon’s texts. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In this example from the text Evaristo conflates dancehall artist Shabba Ranks, whose 1998 song *Mr Loverman* was a massive hit, with Buju Banton, who was widely condemned for his homophobic anthem ‘Boom Bye Bye’ (1993). Banton originated the popularity of the homophobic death chant. The lyrics of *Mr Loverman* are aggressively heterosexist but not homophobic, thus the title is used by Evaristo as an ironic reference to Barry’s promiscuity. Ranks’s support for the homophobic content of other dancehall artists resulted in the collapse of his recording career. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)