



“MAPPING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE FROM INDIVIDUAL SURVIVAL TO COLLECTIVE HEALING IN BERNARDINE EVARISTO’S *GIRL, WOMAN, OTHER*”

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of psychological resilience in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), focusing on the movement from individual survival strategies to models of collective healing. Contemporary trauma narratives increasingly challenge the traditional emphasis on isolated suffering by foregrounding communal processes of recovery. Through qualitative textual analysis and close reading, this research investigates how Evaristo’s polyphonic narrative structure enables a reconceptualization of trauma within an intersectional feminist framework. Drawing on trauma theory, intersectionality, feminist psychology, and collective trauma theory, the study demonstrates that resilience in the novel is not merely personal endurance but a socially mediated, relational process. The findings suggest that storytelling, intergenerational memory, and community recognition function as key mechanisms of healing. The paper argues that *Girl, Woman, Other* represents a significant shift in twenty-first-century trauma fiction by mapping resilience as a continuum from individual coping to collective restoration.

Keywords: Psychological Resilience, Collective Healing, Trauma Theory, Intersectionality, Black British Literature, Feminist Trauma Studies

INTRODUCTION

The representation of trauma in contemporary literature has undergone a significant transformation in the twenty-first century. Earlier trauma narratives frequently emphasized the solitary suffering of individuals, often framing recovery as a private psychological process. Recent literary works, however, increasingly foreground the social, cultural, and political dimensions of trauma.^[1] Within this evolving landscape, Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) stands as a landmark text that reconceptualizes trauma and recovery through an intersectional and communal lens.

The novel traces the interconnected lives of twelve Black British women and non-binary characters across generations.^[2] Rather than presenting trauma as an isolated psychological wound, Evaristo situates suffering within broader structures of patriarchy, racism, migration, and historical marginalization. Equally important, the narrative refuses the notion of singular healing. Instead, it constructs a polyphonic model in which resilience emerges through relationships, storytelling, and collective recognition.

This study argues that *Girl, Woman, Other* maps psychological resilience as a continuum that begins with individual survival strategies and culminates in forms of collective healing. By synthesizing trauma theory, feminist psychology, intersectionality, and collective trauma theory, the paper demonstrates how Evaristo’s narrative expands the conceptual boundaries of recovery in contemporary literature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing scholarship on *Girl, Woman, Other* has primarily focused on its formal innovation, intersectional politics, and representation of Black British identities.^[3] Critics have widely acknowledged Evaristo's experimental narrative style, particularly her use of a polyphonic structure that disrupts conventional linear storytelling. Feminist readings emphasize the novel's challenge to monolithic constructions of womanhood and its celebration of plural, fluid identities.

Trauma studies scholars such as Cathy Caruth conceptualize trauma as an experience that resists full representation, often returning through fragmented memory.^[4] Judith Herman expands this understanding by situating trauma recovery within relational and social contexts, emphasizing safety, remembrance, and reconnection.^[5] Kai Erikson's notion of collective trauma further shifts attention from individual pathology to the ways communities experience and respond to shared disruption.^[6]

Despite these theoretical developments, limited scholarly attention has been paid to how *Girl, Woman, Other* structurally maps the transition from individual coping mechanisms to collective resilience. Most studies treat trauma and identity as thematic concerns rather than as part of a dynamic healing continuum. This research addresses that critical gap by foregrounding the movement from personal survival to communal restoration as the novel's central organizing logic.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present study seeks to:

1. Analyze the representation of psychological trauma in *Girl, Woman, Other*.
2. Examine the individual survival strategies employed by key characters.
3. Explore how personal trauma transforms into collective resilience.
4. Investigate the role of storytelling, community networks, and shared memory in the healing process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopts an interdisciplinary framework integrating trauma theory, feminist psychology, intersectionality, and collective trauma theory.

Trauma Theory

Cathy Caruth's formulation of trauma as belated and fragmented provides a foundation for understanding the narrative disruptions present in the novel.^[4] Judith Herman's three-stage model of trauma recovery - safety, remembrance, and reconnection - offers a useful lens for tracing character development.^[5]

Feminist Psychology

Feminist psychology highlights how trauma is shaped by gendered power structures. In Evaristo's text, experiences of sexual violence, emotional neglect, and systemic marginalization are deeply embedded within patriarchal contexts.^[2]

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is central to the novel's analytical framework. The characters' experiences of trauma are mediated by overlapping identities of race, gender, class, sexuality, and migration status.^[7]

Collective Trauma Theory

Kai Erikson's theory of collective trauma enables the study to move beyond individual pathology. The novel repeatedly demonstrates that healing occurs through communal acknowledgment and shared narratives.^[6]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach. Close reading of the primary text forms the core method, supported by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of trauma, resilience, and healing. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and theoretical works, are used to contextualize the literary analysis.

The methodology is interpretative and comparative in nature. It does not attempt clinical psychological evaluation but instead focuses on literary representation and theoretical synthesis. Particular attention is paid to narrative voice, character interconnections, and moments of communal recognition within the text.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Individual Trauma and Survival Strategies

At the individual level, Evaristo's characters initially respond to trauma through personal coping mechanisms such as emotional withdrawal, hyper-independence, silence, or identity reinvention.^[2] Characters like Amma, Yazz, and Dominique demonstrate different survival responses shaped by their socio-historical contexts.

These strategies align with Caruth's understanding of trauma as an experience that resists immediate integration into conscious narrative.^[4] Many characters initially manage their suffering privately, reflecting the traditional model of individualized resilience. However, the novel deliberately exposes the limitations of purely personal coping.

Fragmentation and Narrative Form

The novel's distinctive stylistic features - lack of conventional punctuation, fluid sentence structures, and shifting focalization - formally mirror the fragmented nature of traumatic memory.^[1] This narrative experimentation also disrupts hierarchical storytelling, allowing multiple voices to coexist.

Importantly, the polyphonic structure performs a therapeutic function. By placing diverse experiences in dialogue, the text creates a literary space where isolated suffering becomes relationally intelligible.

Movement toward Relational Resilience

As the narrative progresses, characters increasingly move toward relational forms of resilience. Herman's concept of reconnection becomes especially relevant here.^[5] Healing begins when characters encounter recognition from others who share similar histories of marginalization.

Interpersonal relationships - friendships, mother-daughter bonds, queer partnerships, and intergenerational connections - serve as crucial sites of emotional repair. The novel repeatedly suggests that resilience is strengthened through witnessing and validation.^[2]

Storytelling as Collective Healing

One of the most significant contributions of *Girl, Woman, Other* is its emphasis on storytelling as a communal healing practice. The theatre production within the novel functions as a meta-narrative device, symbolizing the public articulation of previously silenced histories.^[2]

Through shared storytelling, private trauma becomes part of collective memory. This process reflects Erikson's theory that communities recover by reconstructing meaning together.^[6] The characters' stories intersect not merely for narrative complexity but to model a networked form of resilience.

Intersectionality and Distributed Resilience

The novel demonstrates that resilience is unevenly distributed across social locations. Intersectional pressures - particularly racism and sexism - shape both the intensity of trauma and the accessibility of healing resources.^[7]

By foregrounding Black British women and non-binary experiences, Evaristo challenges universalized models of trauma recovery. Instead, the text proposes that effective healing must acknowledge structural inequalities and cultural specificity.

From Survival to Collective Restoration

The culmination of the novel occurs not in a single character's recovery but in the recognition of interconnected lives. The closing sections emphasize community gathering, shared histories, and intergenerational continuity.^[2]

This shift marks the transition from survival to collective healing. Resilience becomes a communal capacity rather than an individual trait. The novel thus redefines recovery as an ongoing, socially embedded process rather than a finite psychological endpoint.

FINDINGS

The analysis reveals several key insights:

- Psychological resilience in *Girl, Woman, Other* evolves progressively rather than appearing as a fixed trait.
- Individual coping strategies, while necessary, are portrayed as insufficient for long-term healing.
- Polyphonic narration functions as both aesthetic innovation and therapeutic model.
- Storytelling and community recognition emerge as primary mechanisms of recovery.
- Intersectionality fundamentally shapes both trauma exposure and healing pathways.
- The novel advances a distinctly collective model of resilience in contemporary trauma fiction.

CONCLUSION

Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* represents a significant intervention in twenty-first-century trauma narratives. By mapping the movement from individual survival to collective healing, the novel challenges earlier models that privileged solitary recovery. Through its polyphonic structure and intersectional focus, the text demonstrates that resilience is fundamentally relational, socially mediated, and historically situated.

This study contributes to feminist trauma studies by foregrounding communal resilience as a central analytic category. It also positions Evaristo's novel as a key text in the emerging field of collective recovery narratives. Future research may extend this framework to other contemporary works that similarly blur the boundaries between personal trauma and communal healing.

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