

Masculinity, Migration, and Queer Identity in Mr. Loverman

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Abstract— In her book *Mr. Loverman* Bernardine Evaristo explores the issue of masculinity, migration and queer identity in the context of the Black British diaspora with a deep and critical insight. Barry Walker, a gay man of advanced age of Caribbean origin who lives in London and keeps hiding his homosexuality in the course of his heterosexual marriage for many years, becomes the protagonist of Evaristo's novel. This paper discusses Evaristo's undermining of stereotypes about masculinity through the conflict between public presentation and private desires. Using the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, diaspora, and queer identity, the paper examines the role of migration in formation of experience of belonging and negotiation of culture and identity. In particular, it explores how Barry's identity is influenced by Caribbean cultural traditions, race-based social structures, and the pressure to be heterosexual that forces him to hide his true nature. At the same time, Evaristo shows how queer desire becomes a source of resistance against rigid gender roles and social conventions. Thus, by means of depiction of secret life, confrontation of emotions and finally self-acceptance, the novel *Mr. Loverman* reveals the complex reality of Black queer migrants. The paper argues that through her novel Evaristo contributes significantly to rethinking of Black masculinity as vulnerable, emotional and diverse. At the same time, she makes a valuable contribution to the contemporary discourse on diaspora, sexuality, and identity as she reveals the interconnection between race, migration, gender, and queer identity in multicultural Britain.

Keywords— Bernardine Evaristo, *Mr. Loverman*, masculinity, migration, queer identity, Black British literature, diaspora, sexuality, hegemonic masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

In its recent development, British literature has begun paying attention to the issues of identity, belonging, gender, sexuality, and migration in light of the complexities characteristic of multicultural societies. In this regard, Bernardine Evaristo can be considered among those contemporary authors who have greatly contributed to this discussion with her innovative

approach to the representation of the marginalized voices and their unique social experiences. The story of *Mr. Loverman* (2013) written by this author is remarkable for its intriguing exploration of the issues of race, masculinity, sexuality, and diasporic identity through the story of the life of the protagonist. The story revolves around Barry Walker, a seventy-four-year-old Caribbean immigrant living in London, who faces a conflict between his public identity and his desire.

Barry has been leading a double life all his adult years trying to conceal his homosexuality and the existence of a secret relationship with his lover Morris from society and even family members. However, now at the age of seventy-four, he decides to come out of the closet and confront his public and his private identity. This story raises numerous social issues characteristic of the situation of the migrant, as well as the issue of gender in the context of the life in diaspora. Being an elderly and Black queer man in this story, Evaristo provides an unusual perspective on the issues of social life and gender roles.

Masculinity is the core topic in *Mr. Loverman* since the novel critically explores the concept of hegemonic masculinity as it is understood in society as the connection between heterosexual behavior, emotional control, and power. The public image of Barry built by him in accordance with the requirements of cultural norms serves as an illustration of the pressures of these expectations and norms. At the same time, the personal life and experience of the main character reveal the price one may have to pay to live in line with the expectations of society.

Migration also plays a significant role in the novel, influencing characters' relationships with culture, family, and identity. The Caribbean migrant experience in Britain creates a complex social environment in which individuals must negotiate between inherited traditions and changing social realities. For Barry, migration is not merely a geographical movement but a process of cultural adaptation that affects his sense of self and

belonging. The novel illustrates how diasporic identities are continually shaped through interactions with race, class, nationality, and sexuality.

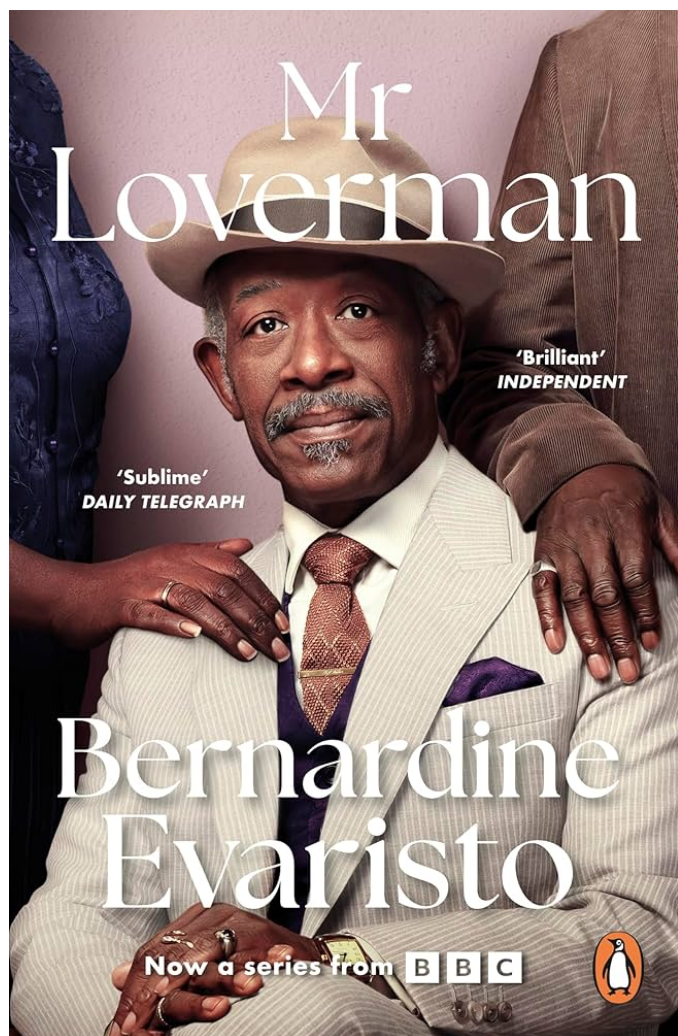


Fig. 1. Mr Loverman [Source: <https://www.amazon.in/Mr-Loverman-Bernardine-Evaristo-ebook/dp/B00BQ4NJRK/>]

Just as significant is the study of queer identity and visibility politics. Barry's quest for self-acceptance highlights the problems that queer people face in societies where homosexuality is stigmatized. The fact that he eventually becomes ready to accept himself can be perceived as a form of resistance against rigid social norms and demonstrates the potential for personal liberation even after years of silence and invisibility.

In Mr. Loverman, this study examines masculinity, migration, and queer identity and argues that Evaristo uses Barry's story in order to challenge conventional gender and sexual roles in diasporic societies. In view of its sophisticated depiction of race, migration, and queerness, Mr. Loverman offers a major contribution to current debates about identity and transformation in multicultural Britain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on Bernardine Evaristo's Mr. Loverman highlight its importance in representations of Black British, Caribbean diasporic, older, and queer identities. According to Hinz, the novel queers the Bildungsroman genre by focusing on an elderly, Black, and gay protagonist in a coming-out narrative and thus challenges conventional associations of identity with youth, whiteness, and heterosexuality. Likewise, Weber analyzes queer kinship, aging, masculinity, and closet and regards Mr. Loverman as one of the most important texts to explore the strategies of older Black queer men to navigate love, secrecy, and social belonging in their diasporic environments.

There is also previous research dealing specifically with queer identity in Mr. Loverman and focusing on Barry Walker's inner struggle between his own desire and public respectability. According to Nenonen's thesis, the protagonist's formation of his queer identity is influenced by Caribbean attitude to homosexuality. Kaur considers Mr. Loverman to be the story of Barry's struggle from self-denial to self-acceptance and shows how the author exposes the painful effects of prejudices on elderly members of Britain's Caribbean community. These studies illustrate the double life that the main character leads not only as a personal deception but also as a means of survival.

The issue of masculinity plays an important role in this discourse. The theory of hegemonic masculinity offered by Connell and Messerschmidt describes the process when dominant varieties of masculinity become socially accepted and privilege women and other kinds of masculinities. Barry, who plays a number of roles of respectable father and patriarch while being homosexual, represents this problem. In addition, Pasura's research on black transnational masculinities provides valuable insights into the phenomenon of "respectable masculinity" that migrant men demonstrate in their family,

work and social environment in order to win respect in racially hierarchized societies.

The discourse on diasporic masculinity is helpful to understand Barry's burden of respectability. According to Farahani, masculinities in diasporic societies are defined by gender, race, class, sexuality, and migration, and therefore, Barry's experience of formation of his identity in the intersection of Antigua and Britain, tradition and modernity, secrecy and visibility becomes clear. In addition, the research by Kiang of the literature on West Indians illustrates the formation of Black male consciousness in post-war London in the context of migration, modernity, and belonging.

Respectability politics is another valuable concept for the analysis of the novel. Lee and Hicken define Black respectability as a way to regulate behavior in order to survive in racially hierarchical societies, whereas Pitcan et al. show how self-representation often requires editing identity according to racial, class, and gender norms. Thus, respectability works both as a source of security and a restriction in Barry's life: his marriage, clothing, family background, and charisma help him to seem acceptable in society while requiring him to hide his queer identity.

Furthermore, the theory of queer studies provides the basis for the interpretation of the text. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is performed by means of repetition of certain acts, so Barry's masculinity is artificial rather than natural and is performed in the context of marriage, fatherhood, heterosexuality, and patriarchal power. The concept of the closet offered by Sedgwick is appropriate for Barry's story because his life is defined by secrecy, revelation, and the threat of societal sanctions.

Diaspora theory is also helpful in analyzing Mr. Loverman. Hall's conception of cultural identity implies that it is dynamic, historically constituted, and constructed in the context of difference. Brah's definition of diaspora space implies that identities are created at the intersection of race, gender, class, generation, sexuality, and migration. Barry's burden of respectability is related to this intersection: he is not only a queer person but also an elderly Caribbean immigrant, Black Briton, a husband, and a father.

Scholarly studies on the topic of black queer diaspora support this framework and illustrate the complicated intersection of sexuality and migration. The concept of Black/queer/diaspora suggested by Allen proves that it is necessary to understand Black queer life beyond the categories of a single axis. Hsu's research on queer diaspora and alternative kinship relations is also useful considering the fact that the long-term relationship of Barry and Morris creates a hidden kind of queer kinship beyond the traditional family structure. All these studies prove

that Mr. Loverman challenges the idea that diasporic belonging must be heterosexual, patriarchal, and respectable.

On the whole, previous literature proves the importance of Mr. Loverman as a study of masculinity, migration, aging, race, and queer identity. Nevertheless, much of the previous research usually addresses the issues of queer identity or diaspora in general. This study concentrates specifically on masculinity and respectability, showing that Barry's respectable masculine image protects and burdens him at the same time. The author uses Barry to show how heteronormative masculinity destroys intimate relations, suppresses queer desires, and delays self-acceptance in diasporic societies.

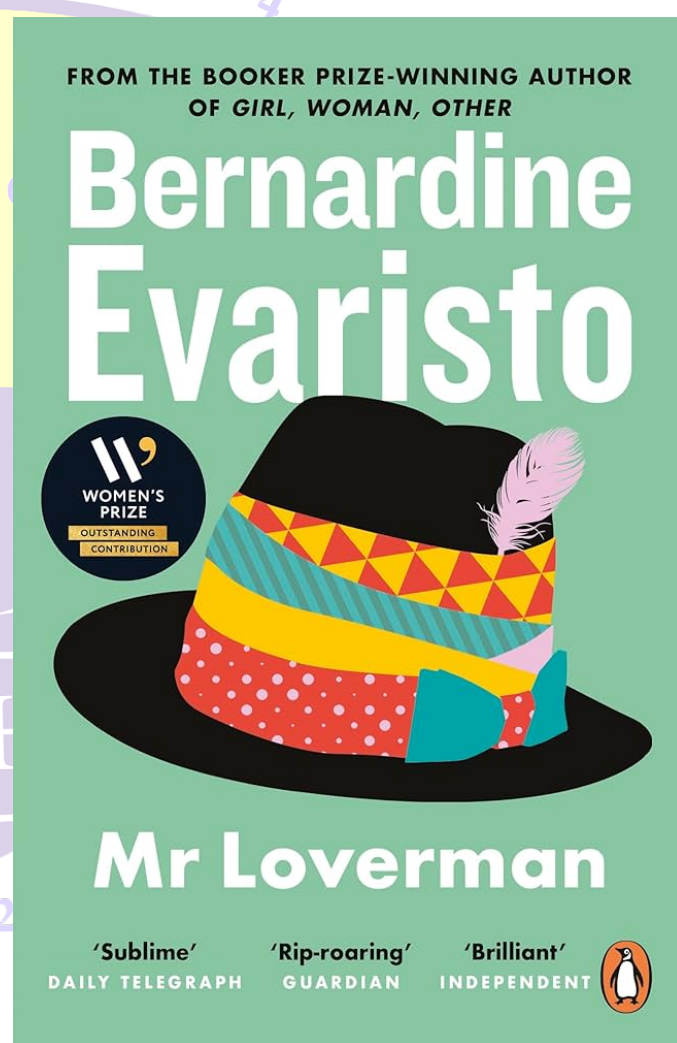


Fig. 2. Mr Loverman Book [Source: <https://www.amazon.in/Mr-Loverman-Bernardine-Evaristo/dp/0241145783>]

MASCULINITY AND THE BURDEN OF RESPECTABILITY

The relation between masculinity and respectability is one of the key themes that Bernardine Evaristo addresses in her book titled *Mr. Loverman*. Through the character of Barry Walker, the author demonstrates how the social norms of masculinity may be perceived as confining and oppressive especially in case when individuals cannot identify themselves with heterosexuality norms. Barry Walker's story shows how there is a contradiction between the social perception of masculinity and its actuality in the life of a person belonging to diasporic society.

Barry Walker possesses all characteristics that are usually associated with hegemonic masculinity: he is a man, husband, father, and grandfather, and he is well-respected among his fellow Caribbean migrants living in Britain. All his appearance expresses confidence and respectability which are common features of a successful and authoritative man within a patriarchal society. However, behind all the facade there hides another identity of Barry which was formed through his love affair with Morris, a man.

In this regard, Evaristo demonstrates how respectability is used to create privileges and exercise control over individuals' behavior. In particular, Barry enjoys all the advantages that he gets from being a respectable family man. At the same time, his social position imposes certain limitations on him, which require constant self-surveillance and self-censorship. As a result, the need to hide the real personality makes the person feel guilty, anxious and isolated both personally and socially.

Furthermore, this example shows that the idea of emotional silence is used in the construction of masculinity. Barry is afraid to tell his wife about his feelings due to the cultural stereotype that men should be emotionally restrained. In order to challenge this stereotype, Evaristo describes the experiences of fear, affection, uncertainties and self-reflections that help to show a different image of man and masculinity as a flexible and changing process.

Additionally, through Barry's experience, Evaristo examines the intersection of various aspects of identity, including race, migration, age and sexuality. As an elderly Caribbean immigrant living in Britain, he has to deal with several kinds of expectations, shaping his understanding of manhood. Respectability politics in such a situation becomes a powerful tool of oppression and discrimination.

Thus, through *Mr. Loverman*, Evaristo shows that masculinity is constructed and performed socially, imposing certain obligations on people that sometimes lead to personal restrictions and discomfort. Using the story of Barry Walker's self-realization, the author uncovers the burdens created by the idea of respectability and the social construction of masculinity.

MIGRATION, DIASPORA, AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATION

Migration and diaspora appear as major issues in Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Mr. Loverman* which revolves around the problems of cultural identification, interpersonal relationships and living within a diaspora experienced by such characters as Barry Walker and other members of the Caribbean diaspora community settled in Britain. In particular, the author discusses the issue of cultural hybridity experienced by individuals who migrate from one place to another and undergo transformation of their cultural identification and relations due to that migration.

First of all, Barry belongs to the so-called Windrush generation which refers to the Caribbean people who migrated to Britain after World War II in order to find themselves decent work places. Being a part of that community, Barry carries the cultural background of the Caribbean nation, at the same time

Intersection of Masculinity, Migration, and Queer Identity in *Mr. Loverman*

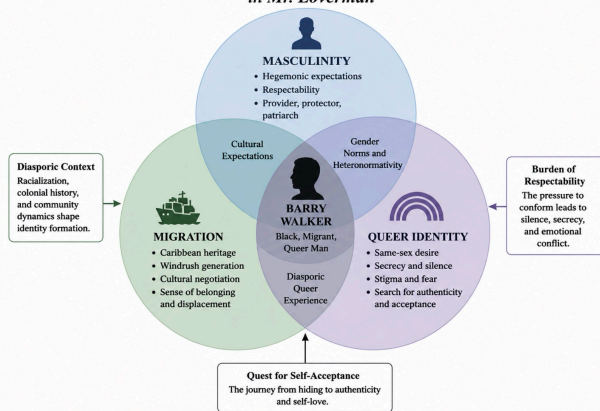


Fig. 3. Conceptual Framework Diagram

The necessity to maintain one's respectability arises from the necessity to meet cultural norms and stereotypes related to gender roles and sexual orientation. In many traditional Caribbean societies, masculinity is tied to heterosexuality, patriarchy and emotional constancy. Often homosexuality is considered as a trait that does not fit into the current understanding of manhood, creating a range of problems for queer individuals. This way, for most of his life, Barry is trying to hide his true identity in order to keep his good reputation and be socially accepted. His marriage to Carmel is used not only to satisfy personal needs but also as a performance to protect himself from discrimination.

he has to adapt to the reality of living in British society. As a result, Barry's identity becomes shaped by the continuous negotiation of his cultural heritage and the British cultural environment which he has to accept.

In the book, the issues related to migration and cultural negotiation become important for the formation of personal and collective identities of diasporic communities. Namely, Caribbean immigrants try to preserve their culture by holding to their traditions, languages, religions and family structures in order to keep connections with their homeland. Thus, there appears a strong feeling of community and unity which is created because of these actions. At the same time, the preservation of their values leads to conflicts with younger generations who have a different view on some aspects of life which comes from modern British society.

The experience of diasporic life is additionally complicated by racial marginalization and social exclusion which immigrants encounter in the foreign country. These factors lead to the creation of ethnic communities which give them support and comfort of the familiar culture. However, these communities impose certain rules concerning acceptable behaviors and identities. Barry's life is an example of this phenomenon because although he is dependent on this community in terms of belonging to it, he experiences certain pressure due to its macho and heteronormative identity requirements. In such way, the problem of cultural preservation comes into contradiction with the problem of authenticity of personal identity.

Further, Evaristo expands her discussion of the problem of cultural negotiation by showing how immigrants adapt to changes in social environment without losing their cultural background. Namely, Barry and his generation continuously negotiate various aspects of their identity such as Caribbean identity, Blackness, migrant status and their family identity which are fluid and changeable depending on the social interaction and historical experience. Thus, the author shows the idea of diaspora as processes of constant adjustment, reinterpretation and construction of identity rather than simple assimilation to the host society. From this perspective, the migration appears to be a source of many challenges.

One more significant problem of cultural negotiation concerns changing attitudes towards sexuality in the diasporic communities. The fact that Barry feels uncomfortable about the expression of his queer identity is due to traditional values coming from the Caribbean society. At the same time, the contemporary British society gives opportunities to develop different sexual identities. Such contradictions between the inherited values and the modern environment give Barry an opportunity to find himself and solve the problems of cultural negotiation through his personal growth.

Additionally, Evaristo shows the importance of London as the multicultural metropolis which becomes the center of ongoing negotiations of belonging and otherness experienced by migrants. While migration may lead to displacement, it also opens new opportunities for identity formation and development. Through the example of Barry, the author argues that the belonging does not depend only on birthplace and ethnic background but on the ability to negotiate between various cultural aspects.

To sum up, migration and diaspora are presented in Mr. Loverman as complex phenomena which shape the identities of individuals. In particular, the author shows how migrants continuously negotiate their cultural heritage, social norms and emerging values while constructing their identities in new environment. Through the discussion of the interconnections between migration, race, culture and sexuality, the author presents a nuanced picture of diasporic life.

QUEER DESIRE AND THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

One of the main features of Mr. Loverman by Bernardine Evaristo is the focus on queer desire and the silencing politics surrounding its articulation in certain social contexts. Through the example of Barry Walker, the novel shows how same-sex desire is silenced in favor of heteronormative expectations, cultural traditions, and social stigma. Silence in the work is not just the absence of speech but an instrument of social control that determines how people identify themselves, form their relationships, and gain visibility in the society. Through the revelation of the emotional and psychological costs of this phenomenon, the work provides a critique of the situation queer individuals face.

Barry's relationship with Morris forms the emotional center of the book. While the two of them share an affectionate and committed relationship for decades, they cannot publicly admit to being together because this acknowledgment would compromise their status and put them at the risk of facing prejudice. This way, queer desire gets silenced and stays in the privacy of private spheres. This technique allows the author to show how the norms of the society can force people to separate public and private parts of their lives.

This silencing politics is very much tied to the cultural understanding of sexuality. The Caribbean diasporic community described in the work associates traditional ideas of masculinity with heterosexuality and patriarchal families. In such conditions, homosexuality can be stigmatized as challenging the accepted values, making it difficult to openly discuss the topic. Barry has internalized these perceptions during his childhood, learning to suppress his feelings to avoid the risk of social rejection. That is why his silencing does not

happen voluntarily but comes from the need to maintain his reputation and status in the community.

Besides, Evaristo shows the personal price paid for the silencing. As a result of it, Barry experiences emotional stress, guilt, and frustration as his ability to express his identity is compromised. While having intimate relations with Morris, he is deprived of the right to openly celebrate and confirm his identity. Besides, the negative impact of silencing goes beyond his own experience and influences other people. His marriage to Carmel, based on the same principle of silencing, becomes a source of emotional suffering and misunderstanding. Thus, the work shows how silencing can ruin people's personal lives and prevent them from open communication.

At the same time, Mr. Loverman undermines the perception of silence as an expression of weakness and passivity. Being resilient in the face of the hostile social environment, Barry shows his adaptability skills. For many years, silence becomes his method of protection helping to survive under contradictory expectations. However, Evaristo implies that such protection has a high price to pay. In the end, self-disclosure becomes a means that enables him to take control of his life and identity again.

One more interesting feature of the work is the fact that it questions the historical invisibility of older queers. Literature and popular culture tend to portray the experience of queer individuals through the lens of youth. It leads to the underrepresentation of elderly LGBTQ+. Breaking this trend, Evaristo focuses on the story of a seventy-four-year-old man whose sexual desires are alive and important. Barry's experience shows that the issues of sexuality, identity, and self-acceptance are relevant for people of all ages.

Besides, the novel shows queer desire as a normal and eternal part of the human experience rather than something that contradicts the established norms. Showing the relationship between Barry and Morris, the author focuses on such aspects of it as love, devotion, loyalty, and emotional connection. In doing so, it breaks the stereotypes about the reduction of queer identity to sexuality and shows the richness of queer human relationships.

To conclude, Mr. Loverman shows the nature of queer desire as both personal and political. The silencing of Barry's identity is a reflection of the larger structures of exclusion that control sexuality and define social legitimacy. Exploring the issue of secrecy, stigma, and self-disclosure, the work reveals the human costs of heteronormative pressures while valuing the idea of authenticity and visibility.

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: BLACK, MIGRANT, AND QUEER

Among the novel's main contributions there is its analysis of intersecting identities via the example of the character of Barry Walker. Race, migration, and sexuality of the individual are not independent from each other in this case. In the example of Barry Walker, they interrelate and define one another. The identity of the character becomes an intersection of these dimensions of social position and experiences.

Firstly, it should be noted that the identity of being a black person is crucial for Barry. He is a representative of the Windrush generation and a member of a community that experienced racial discrimination and exclusion. Caribbean migrants contributed much to Britain and yet faced difficulties in job and housing market. Such experiences created a sense of strong community that was devoted to preserving cultural traditions. Yet, there were specific expectations regarding the behaviour, the way the family should be like, and certain roles assigned to the members of these families and communities. Barry's racial and cultural identity gives him both sense of belonging and expectations to live up to them.

Secondly, the identity of being a migrant is also important in the example of the character of the novel. The fact that Barry lived between cultural traditions of the Caribbean and social reality of Britain gave rise to his diasporic identity. It means that it is formed through interaction of the past of the homeland and present in the new country. This kind of life makes Barry experience the process of cultural negotiation and adaptation that defines his identity.

Finally, the queer identity of Barry makes him particularly vulnerable both in terms of being in the British society and in terms of his community. Traditionally, the notion of masculinity is quite narrow in the Caribbean diasporic community. Therefore, Barry experiences the double marginalization as a black migrant and as a gay man. Being a part of the marginalized racial and migrant community, Barry experiences barriers to enter wider society as well as barriers to enter his community due to the nature of his sexual orientation.

Evaristo shows that these identities are not independent. They relate to one another and create the intersection that influences the everyday life of the individual. Barry hides his sexuality not only because of the personal fears but also due to the necessity to save family's reputation and community's acceptance. At the same time, the pressure on the individual increases as it is hard to become respectable when being a part of the marginalized social group.

Mr. Loverman presents a rather complicated picture of the Black masculinity that is different from the stereotypes. Barry

is neither simply defined by race nor reduced to his sexuality. Instead, he is a multifaceted subject whose identity is shaped via different dimensions including race, culture, migration, family, and personal experiences. The path towards acceptance and self-identity shows that it is possible to accept different identities together.

Therefore, the novel by Bernardine Evaristo makes us understand that identity is rather complicated and dynamic issue that includes intersections of several dimensions of the social and personal experience. Barry's experiences show how the system of race, culture, migration, gender, and sexuality interact.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Mr. Loverman indicates that Bernardine Evaristo relies on the life story of Barry Walker to explore the complexities of the intersections of masculinity, migration, and queerness among Black Britons. It becomes clear that one's identity is not static but a fluid concept which depends on cultural expectations, historical background, and personal aspirations.

One of the main findings that emerges from this analysis is that masculinity as a social performance in the novel is associated with respectability and heterosexuality. Being recognized as the husband, father, and respected member of the community reflects dominant expectations about the masculine identity in the context of both Caribbean and British cultures. However, such social construction excludes queer identity leading to the continuous confrontation between one's true personality and external perceptions. In this way, the novel criticizes hegemonic masculinity since the strict gender norms limit personal freedom and expression.

Migration is another important aspect that plays a significant role in the formation of identities. The experiences of Barry demonstrate how migrants balance between the impact of different cultures while trying to create ties with their new society. Diaspora is depicted as a sphere of both preservation of tradition and adaptation to new realities. It leads to the changes in people's attitude towards gender relations, sexuality, and other aspects of social lives making migration an essential element in understanding Barry's experience. Thus, Evaristo depicts how the identity of diasporic individuals evolves through the interaction of their heritage and the social realities of the host country.

It is also crucial that the problem of the politics of silence is explored in the novel. Barry's decision to conceal his queer sexual orientation during many years illustrates how strong the influence of social stigma and cultural expectations on people's

behavior can be. Being silent becomes Barry's survival strategy allowing him to stay respectable but creating emotional separation and dissatisfaction at the same time. Therefore, Mr. Loverman reveals the psychological consequences of the existence of an individual in the framework of heteronormative structures which neglects queer identity. Barry's transition from silence to openness symbolizes his resistance to these oppressive social norms.

At last, it should be emphasized that the representation of the intersectionality of identities in the novel makes the use of intersectional perspective in literary analysis necessary. It means that Barry's experiences cannot be discussed only through the prism of race, migration, or sexuality. Rather, all these elements form the identity of a Black, migrant, and queer person making him vulnerable to various kinds of pressures and helping him to find ways of adaptation.

In summary, Mr. Loverman has a great contribution to make into contemporary debates about gender, sexuality, race, and migration. Focusing on the story of an elderly Black queer man, Evaristo enlarges the literary representation of marginal identities and discusses the dominant cultural narratives. It turns out that personal liberation may imply struggle against deep-rooted expectations and the exploration of the complexity of one's identity.

CONCLUSION

Bernardine Evaristo's Mr. Loverman provides a critical inquiry into the intersections of masculinity, migration, and queer identity within the framework of the Black British diaspora. The analysis of the figure of Barry Walker, presented by the author in the novel, allows revealing how social norms, cultural traditions, and heteronormativity affect individuals' lives and determine the ways of construction, performance, and negotiation of identities. The example of Barry shows what emotional and psychological problems people face trying to maintain their respectable appearance and hiding one of the key aspects of their identity.

This research identifies that masculinity in Mr. Loverman is connected to the notions of respectability, family duty, and heterosexuality. The example of Barry Walker proves that hegemonic masculinities impose serious limitations to personal freedoms and encourage people to remain silent about the non-normative forms of their sexual identity. In this way, Bernardine Evaristo challenges stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and proposes a more inclusive notion of this term.

Also, this research emphasizes the role of migration and diaspora in the processes of identity formation. Being a migrant from the Caribbean living in Britain, Barry finds himself in the

multicultural environment, where traditional cultural values are combined with the progressive attitudes towards life. Therefore, the example of Barry shows that diasporic identities are never static, but rather dynamically created through the interaction of heritage, communal expectations, and reality. Migration turns out to be an important component of both intimate relations and wider identity issues.

Besides, this novel raises questions concerning the influence of silence, stigma, and marginalization on individuals. Barry's path from secrecy and shame to openness and self-acceptance proves that there is nothing shameful in revealing one's true self and breaking the silence. Thus, the readiness to accept his queer identity helps Barry to overcome the existing social constructions that have been holding him back for such a long time.

Furthermore, in *Mr. Loverman*, one can see the importance of adopting the intersectional perspective. As it becomes evident from Barry's example, different aspects, such as race, queerness, gender, age, and migration interact and create particular kinds of marginalization and resilience in his case. This way, Bernardine Evaristo contributes to the discussions of diversity and belonging of marginalized groups in contemporary society. *Mr. Loverman* is an important piece of literature that challenges the existing restrictions and expands the borders of possible conceptions of identity, love, and self-expression.

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