INTERNATIONAL PREMIER JOURNAL OF LANGUAGES & LITERATURE (IPJLL)
VOLUME 3, ISSUE 5, 2025 p-ISSN: 3007-2336 e-ISSN: 3007-2344

BODY POLITICS AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN REID'S *SUCH A FUN AGE*

Khadija Akram khadijaakram477@gmail.com — Mphil scholar Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

Ms. Sahar Javaid Saharjavaid@gcuf.edu.pk — Lecturer Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract

This paper explores body politics in Such a Fun Age (2019) by Kiley Reid, examining how race, class, and gender intersect to shape contemporary Black womanhood while exposing the contradictions of white liberal ideology. Drawing on intersectionality, Black feminism, transnational feminism, and feminist phenomenology, the study interrogates the novel's portrayal of systemic oppression and performative allyship within everyday social relations.The analysis centers on Emira Tucker, a young Black babysitter employed by a privileged white family, and maps how her racialized, gendered, and classed identity produces a precarious yet evolving subjectivity. Through close textual reading of character development, dialogue, and narrative voice, the paper reveals the subtle circuitry of racial subjection operating through microaggressions, commodification of Black identity, and liberal self-fashioning. The ambivalent complicity of the white liberal class is most visibly embodied in Alix Chamberlain and Kelley Copeland, whose professed progressivism masks the reproduction of racial hierarchies.Engaging foundational insights from bell hooks and Sara Ahmed, the study constructs a conceptual framework to interpret Emira's movement across social and racial matrices. Ultimately, the novel emerges as a nuanced critique of liberal racial discourse, foregrounding interiority, self-determination, and quiet resistance. By centering a Black woman's lived experience, Reid destabilizes dominant representations of Black womanhood and intervenes in the intertwined politics of race, class, and gender in contemporary America.

Keywords*: Body Politics, Black Feminism, Intersectionality, Womanhood, Phrnomenology*

Corresponding Author: Ms**.** Sahar Javaid (Lecturer Department of English Literature .)
Email: Saharjavaid@gcuf.edu.pk

1. Introduction

This study investigates an intersectional analysis of body politics and representation of women in terms of colorism in Reid's, *Such a Fun Age* (2019). This research focuses on race, gender and class not as separate chains of inequality but as overlapping parts of identity that shape everyday experience and access to power. Set against this analytical backdrop, Reid's *Such a Fun Age* (2019) offers a timely and pointed exploration of how society sees, regulates, and often misrepresents women of color, especially Black women. Its pivots on Emira Tucker: the protagonist Black babysitter, who finds herself at the center of both public attention and private judgment after a white stranger falsely accuses her of kidnapping the white child in her care. The viral footage of that encounter, along with the cascading social-media responses it elicits, lays bare the entrenched racial assumptions that can shadow even those spaces claimed to be progressive.

Kiley Reid is an award-winning American novelist and screenwriter celebrated for her sharp, honest look at race, class, gender, and privilege in twenty-first-century life. After earning an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers Workshop, she held the Truman Capote Fellowship and she now teaches creative writing. Reid blends crisp, contemporary dialogue with millennial sensibilities while relentlessly probing covert power plays that unfold both at home and in offices. Her first novel, *Such a Fun Age*, appeared in late (2019) and quickly became a critical and commercial hit. It landed on the Booker Prize longlist, received a NAACP Image Award nomination, and spent weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. Alongside *Such a Fun Age*, Reid has placed shorter fiction in Ploughshares, New South, and Lumina. These pieces frequently examine domestic work, motherhood, and the nuances of racial identity. Her second novel, *Come and Get It* (2024) promises a similar depth, centering money, desire, and moral uncertainty within a university environment.

Across this expanding portfolio, Reid forges a distinctive presence in American fiction, offering insightful takes on race, labor, and privilege in the twenty-first century. At the center of Reid's story lies body politics, the constant way Emira's physical presence is watched, judged, and racialized by people around her. Her body becomes a canvas on which public fears about race, motherhood, surveillance, and unpaid work are sketched. "Emira Tucker's profile did not come with a picture. It did however come with a description: she was a Temple University graduate, she knew beginner sign language, and she could type 125 words per minute. Alix said, 'Huh,' and requested an interview" (Reid, 2019, p. 31). Such a dynamic echoes a long record of Black women's bodies being marketed, sexualized, and controlled by structures built and policed by white privilege. Reid's novel therefore provides a rich site for asking how fiction represents women of color—not only through characters' speech and action, but through the

external gaze that interprets, frames, and often commandeers their bodies. Reid uses these recurring acts of surveillance to remind readers that the Black female body is a fraught site where overlapping systems of work, judgment, and subtle dissent collide. In this way, Emira becomes both employee and evidence, performing care for a white child while constantly negotiating whether the care of her own dignity will be granted or denied. Framed within the larger literary discussion on intersectionality, Reid's debut engages ideas made famous by scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw yet translates those theories into everyday scenes, showing how a shattered parking-lot moment can index decades of systemic exclusion. By keeping Emira's story tightly anchored to both her financial reality and her social circle, Reid creates a narrative space where race, gender, and class do not operate in isolation but as interlocking gears shaping each decision, each glance, each hesitation. Readers see how a late-night shift pays rent but also erases quiet hours, how a casual invitation feels generous yet also retroactively moralizes Emira's need for paid work. Through Emira's awkward encounters with Alix, the self-proclaimed progressive employer whose virtuous talk never quite matches her implicit judgment, Reid stages a pointed critique of white liberalism, exposing the ways well-meaning policies can still police Black mobility. As in the text, "There were moments like this that Alix tried to breeze over, but they got stuck somewhere between her heart and her ears … after seeing her paused songs with titles like 'DopeBitch' … and then hearing her use words like connoisseur, Alix was filled with feelings that went from confused and highly impressed to low and guilty" (Reid, 2019, p. 79). Alix helps by offering a job, yet her help hinges on controlling the narrative; Emira must learn quickly that gratitude can slide into erasure.

1.1. Literature Review

Body politics and the portrayal of women of color in twenty-first-century fiction, concentrating especially on Kiley Reids *Such a Fun Age* (2019). By situating Reid within debates over race, gender, work, and selfhood, the review shows both the novel's continuities with and its departures from earlier literary and cultural conversations. Interdisciplinary feminist theory, Black studies, critical race theory, and general literary criticism provide the frames through which intersectional questions in recent fiction are mapped

Jana Severová (2023) wrote a thesis which zeroes in on young African American women, asking how the streets, homes, schools, and unseen laws around them are woven into the fabric of who they think they are and who the world says they are. These pieces are tested against three stories written by Black women now in their twenties and thirties: Kiley Reids *Such a Fun Age*, Leila Mottley's *Nightcrawling*, and Zakiya Dalila Harris's *The Other Black Girl*. By following the heroines through city lights, office corridors, and late-night phone calls, the paper hopes to show how deeply place, gender, and daily risk

brush against hope, humor, and, sometimes, rage. One of the small but telling results is a side-by-side reading of three high-pressure moments when the characters run head-first into the limits of safety, "giving talk of theory a pulse that anyone who's felt the city's gaze will recognize" (Severová, 2023, p. 4). This introduction lays out basic vocabulary and key ideas that underpin the entire study. Once these terms are settled, attention shifts to the three recent African American novels named earlier. The analysis then links the stories to wider issues such as police violence, digital culture, reproductive rights, and environmental racism that women of color routinely confront. By putting fiction in conversation with real-world pressures, the thesis deepens our understanding of how race and gender intersect. In short, the project argues "that serious study of contemporary literature must center the voices of young Black women if it hopes to capture the complexities of twenty-first-century America" (Severová, 2023, p. 5).

Conclusively, while babysitting Briar in an upscale supermarket, Emira is shockingly--and falsely—accused of abducting the little girl. The episode shakes her to the core and illustrates "the everyday racism many Black Americans endure" (Severová, 2023, p. 79). That episode deepens her awareness of how race and class shape political life in the United States. Instead of soft gestures, she longs for a clear reckoning with the laws and policies that sustain wealth gaps by color. She regularly criticizes the Chamberlains; "shallow efforts, Alix's brand of white feminism and the family's wider refusal to confront those hard truths" (Severová, 2023, p. 79).

Further, Aiman Zahra, Sadaf Bashir, *Nasir Abbas* and Muhammad Nasir (2025) interprets Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age* (2019) through a Marxist feminist lens, examining how capitalism, patriarchy, and racism overlap to shape the lives of marginalized women. Using close reading and textual analysis, researcher map Emira Tucker's daily struggles as a twenty-five-year-old African American babysitter in a wealthy Philadelphia family's household. The novel reveals "the systemic barriers that force women of color to juggle gender bias, class division, and racial violence while performing low-paid care work" (Zahra, Bashir, *Abbas* and Nasir, 2025, p. 2). Drawing on Friedrich Engels, they argue that Emira's exploitation springs from the twin engines of economic profit and male control. Reid's plot thus shows that genuine freedom demands not only personal resolve but also the structural dispersal of wealth and the security of an independent income. The text's realistic, if sometimes painful, portrait of urban womanhood reminds readers that legal gains have yet to translate into universal equality for racial minorities. By centering class-based oppression in a contemporary American setting, this reading aims to "deepen feminist literary scholarship and open new avenues for anti-capitalist organizing" (Zahra, Bashir, *Abbas* and Nasir, 2025, p. 2).

Similarly, Calsey Marie Carolissen (2023) discusses the phrase *White Savior Industrial Complex* which gained traction after Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole

lambasted the high-profile documentary Kony 2012 on Twitter, sparking a viral discussion. This project interrogates that figure within African American culture and politics across three recent novels-Kathryn Stockett's period piece *The Help* (2009), Angie Thomas young adult break-out *The Hate U Give* (2017), and Kiley Reids cutting satire *Such a Fun Age* (2020). The first text, for instance, pairs a white would-be author with black maids, illustrating how she exploits their stories chiefly to win herself literary acclaim. The two novels center on the African-American view of how "the savior figure damages Black daily life, as well as the ties between each Black hero and the White savior present in that story" (Carolissen, 2023, p. 68). In *Such a Fun Age* the fallout from Alix's White Savior complex is far less catastrophic than the blunt racism that drives the plots of Reid's other two novels, yet the satire still pulls the idea apart at the seams. By switching between Alix's and Emira's viewpoints the novel shows readers why Alix ca not stop meddling: her over-the-top eagerness to fix things comes from a real urge to be helpful, even when it also reads as racist. Just like Kelley, she jumbles Emiras Blackness with tired stereotypes and feels fully qualified to lecture Emira on what a proper Black woman should or should not do, never pausing to ask whether Emira already knows that for herself. Because Alix's loud and clumsy show of solidarity bulldozes over Emiras choices, "the White savior appears not so much heroic as ignorant, manipulative, and oddly empty" (Carolissen, 2023, p. 68). By employing satire to portray the consequences of racial profiling and to construct over-the-top, often absurd portraits of white people more terrified of being called racist than they are of the underlying prejudice, "the writer captures the clumsy and comical moments that arise when each side tries to save face in their exchange" (Carolissen, 2023, p. 69).

Besides, Marie Dücker (2022) investigate *Such a Fun Age* (2019) and quickly sets up the plot's main tension. From this moment Reid forces her readers to reckon with interlinked questions of race, class, gender, white fragility, and the clumsy, often painful effort at cross-racial understanding between Emira and Alix Chamberlain, her wealthy white employer. The author brings these competing voices to life through a careful third-person narration that shifts its focus, letting readers hear each woman's fears and hopes while revealing how deeply both are etched by racial inequality and by DiAngelo's concept of white fragility. argue that Reid's technique does not simply expose these forces; it amplifies the very fragility it shows and, in doing so, reinforces the larger system of white supremacy and the ongoing divide it feeds. Drawing on Bonilla-Silva's notion of color-blind racism, researcher explore how assumptions of innocence and neutrality undercut Emira's claim to autonomy and contend that "Harris's idea of white ownership traps her in the enduring role of the Black babysitter and the painful status of 'racial loser'" (Dücker, 2022, p.1).

In conclusion, Emira's story only becomes fully legible when it is placed beside those of Alix Chamberlain and Kelley Copeland, because all three plots are woven together by a single blind spot: "the characters refusal to see how their presumed whiteness keeps them from taking real responsibility" (Dücker, 2022, p.18). That failure, which reads as a familiar form of color-blind racism, feeds the fragile protectiveness that runs through the book and ends up smothering Emira's development. She wins some measure of agency when she lands a new gig, "yet the reader never watches her seriously entertain an option that far exceeds either the babysitting role or the modest Green Party post she picks up afterward" (Dücker, 2022, p.18). Her boss presses her about sitting in an entry-level position for over two years, and Emira replies, "I can't believe I'm saying this . . . but I actually think I am okay" (Reid, 2020, p. 301)

2. Theoretical background

To guide this inquiry, the researcher turns to Intersectional Theory, a lens crafted for examining how overlapping hierarchies work together and deepen the hardships people face, especially those already pushed to society's edges. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", the term was meant to reveal how Black women fall outside both mainstream feminism and equal-race campaigns when each treats race and gender as solitary lines. Intersectionality thus helps scholars see that identities like race, class, and sex do not stack neatly but cross in ways that give rise to distinct and often hidden forms of harm. Along with Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins has shaped contemporary intersectional thought, especially through her idea of the "matrix of domination," which shows how racism, sexism, and classism lock together and prop up one another. In her landmark book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Collins argues that the insights and everyday realities of Black women must be placed front and center if scholars truly wish to understand how power works.

For a framework, this study relies on Intersectional Theory, a lens used to unpack how different forms of disadvantage sit on top of each other and shape everyday life for people who sit at the margins of society. In carrying out intersectional work, theorists like bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Sara Ahmed add crucial layers of clarity and urgency. hooks shows that Black women's lives cannot be fully grasped unless race, gender, and class are treated as a single, tangled reality rather than separate boxes (hooks, 1981). Arguing that "white feminists often overlook this truth and that some Black politics dismiss gender, she chastises both camps for leaving people vulnerable" (hooks, 1984, p. 337). Her call to root feminism in broader struggles for justice therefore becomes a touchstone for later scholars who trace power across multiple axes (hooks, 1984). Mohanty's essays, especially "Under Western Eyes" (1984) and "Feminism Without Borders" (2003), look closely at how much Western scholarship assumes that

"all women share the same problems and ignores the specific histories, economies, and resistances faced by women from the Global South" (Mohanty, 1984, 2003, p. 37). From a decolonial angle, she shows that even theories are produced inside unequal power relations that always travel with empires. Situating Emiras story inside those overlapping circuits of global whiteness and local privilege owes much to this insight; without it, the narrative risks being read as an isolated incident rather than as part of a larger pattern.

Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) shows just how deeply racism and sexism get woven into our daily talk, rules, and the way places feel. Her idea of the "feminist killjoy"-the friend who runs a pleasant moment by naming an unfairness-hits home when we watch Emira walk into mostly white, liberal settings and suddenly make the hidden lines of power visible (Ahmed, 2017, p. 42). In *Such a Fun Age (2019)*, reading the story alongside Ahmed lets us see Emira's brief exchanges with Alix and Kelley in a sharper light. Both women say they back Emira, yet their choices keep old racial and class ladders standing, showing care as a cover for control, and wonder as a shield for staring. Emira's body, her work, even the small decisions she thinks are private, turn into the rough canvas where they paint their own stories of virtue.

Eventually, by using an intersectional lens, this study digs into the ways those mixed-together forces shape Emira's day-to-day life, the stories told about her, and how the public judges her in cafes, in cars, or inside gated homes. That frame makes plain the endless puzzle Emira faces: she can act honestly and still pass as either trouble or a random stranger, all while others line up to interpret her moves. Through this lens, *Such a Fun Age* gains a deeper, subtler meaning; Emiras dealings with white strangers Alix and Kelley stop being simple good-intentioned gestures and start showing how the same old racial and class lines survive behind a mask of caring, curiosity, or personal outrage. Emiras body, her part-time job, and even the small decisions she thinks are hers become public property, as these characters quietly turn protection and sympathy into a quieter kind of control.

3. Result and Discussion

Intersectionality, first named by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), reaches beyond theory and becomes a praxis-a working method-for spotting how interlocking systems of oppression shape people's lives, especially the lives of women of color. The present framework draws from Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, weaving their insights into a single ground for exploring how race, gender, class, and colonial histories mark bodily visibility and voice. Each scholar offers a distinct angle: hooks interrogate the blind spots of white feminist circles, Mohanty urges transnational solidarity and a decolonial feminist vision, and Ahmed directs attention to feelings as embodied resistance inside and outside formal power. When read together, these voices form an intersectional lens that is both descriptive and politically alive.

This chapter analyzes Kiley Reid's debut novel, *Such a Fun Age* (2019), in order to conduct a close reading that centers on body politics and the intersecting lives of women of color. Drawing on ideas of intersectionality of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sara Ahmed, the analysis uses an integrated feminist lens to show how Reid both presents and questions the everyday realities of Black womanhood under neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and performative collaboration. The analysis deployed here is qualitative and interpretive, relying on traditional close-reading techniques that track diction, character arcs, spatial arrangement, narrative voice and speech patterns. By following these formal elements, the inquiry seeks to reveal both subtle and explicit ways in which Emira Tucker and other women of color in the text are located within overlapping regimes of power. "These friends, to Emira's indisputable surprise, were all black" (Reid, 2019, p. 64). In particular, it looks at how their bodies are watched, labelled, or turned into capital, as well as how they maneuver issues of identity, work, race, and gender in mostly white, affluent spaces.

Throughout this study, intersectional theory—especially hooks on marginality and resistance, Mohanty on decolonizing representation, and Ahmed on feminist disorientation—serves as the main analytic lens. By centering these arguments, the project reads the formation of racialized gendered bodies as an effect of everyday encounters and the wider political structures that circulate through both public and private space. The feminist focus on lived experience, in particular, opens a path to chart the ebb and flow of visibility, surveillance, and agency that Reid stages across her narrative. The inquiry deliberately avoids the temptation to treat race, gender, and class as stand-alone boxes; instead, it traces their mutual dependence. Reid's novel therefore becomes a site for complicating tidy identities, revealing how Black women's bodies are read, misread, and rendered legible-and illegible-in kin, leisure, and institutional settings. Close attention to scenes of emotional labor, bodily presentation, aesthetic performance, and ordinary exchange places these tensions between selfhood, surveillance, and survival into plain view.

This chapter also orbits the main questions that drive the larger project. By reading key scenes side by side, researcher shows how ordinary moments reveal hidden power rules in daily exchanges, aesthetic judging, job demands, and feel-good displays of liberal awareness. This close reading not only reveals the choices Emira and other women make under these pressures, it also shows how Reid criticizes those pressures and imagines a different, freer way for Black bodies to exist in the late-capitalist, racially divided world we live in.

Reid's (2019) text begins with a jarring scene that highlights how the bodies of Black women in the United States are constantly monitored and controlled. Reid tracks Emira Tucker, a Black babysitter, as she takes Briar Chamberlain, the white daughter of

her employers, out for a late-night grocery run. That simple errand quickly turns into an accusation that Emira has kidnapped the child, demonstrating both legal suspicion and everyday racial watching. The incident at the upscale market becomes a small but potent lens through which readers see the deeper, institutional violence shaped by racial capitalism and white supremacy that Black Americans, and Black women in particular, routinely endure. Brutality is generally understood as the application of force that "exceeds what is necessary to subdue a suspect or respond to a genuine danger" (Albrecht, 2011, p. 30). Emira's run-in with security personnel does not involve a blow or a chokehold, yet it sits firmly within the same chain of violence, one that stretches from physical assaults to quieter, daily acts of racial surveillance that wound Black people in emotional and institutional ways. When she is confronted and filmed while minding a white toddler, the gaze of the bystander turns her presence into the presumption of guilt, even though she has done nothing wrong. Reid captures the moment, "What had felt loose and tired now hardens; her hands begin to shake" (Reid, 2019, p. 8). That shake, a muscle memory of dread, shows how Black bodies are yanked into alertness by a threat, forced into a defensive stance in places that should simply feel ordinary.

4. Conclusion

This chapter established a careful reading of Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age*, with special focus on body politics, intersectionality, white liberalism and the subtle ways that Emira Tucker moves through and pushes back against racial and gendered expectations. By showing these dynamics, the study argues that the novel adds important weight to ongoing discussions about how women of color are represented in fiction and to larger debates about race, class, gender, and neoliberal ideals in a world that claims to be post-racial. The theoretical tools borrowed from intersectionality, Black feminist theory, and postcolonial feminism have revealed that even in seemingly liberal households or progressive public spaces, systems of power still aim to regulate, commodify, and police Black women's bodies.

Across the preceding chapters, we have traced a sustained analysis of Reid's *Such a Fun Age*, attending to the novel's depiction of the Black female body, its critique of white liberal benevolence, and the intersecting pressures that shape Emira Tucker's everyday life. In the introduction, we laid the theoretical groundwork by engaging intersectionality, bell hooks' Black feminism, Chandra Mohanty's transnational lens, and Sara Ahmed's feminist phenomenology. Building on that foundation, researcher proposed to investigate how Reid invigorates Emira's story as a means of questioning structural racism, gendered hierarchies, and class presumptions in present-day liberal culture. The methodological chapter then outlined a close-reading approach attuned to literary form and symbolic politics, enabling us to ask not only what the text asserts but

also how it curates Emira's subjectivity against a wider socio-political backdrop. Taken together, these earlier sections set the stage for the central argument: that Reid wields Emira's daily encounters to expose and unsettle the comfortable fictions sustaining white-led liberalism.

References

Carolissen, C. M. (2024). *The white savior complex in three contemporary American novels* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape).

Reid, K. (2020). Interview with Electric Literature. Retrieved from https://electricliterature.com/kiley-reid-such-a-fun-age-interview/

Reid, K. (2020). *Such a Fun Age*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sastry, M. (2020). The economics of empathy in millennial fiction. *Journal of American Literature and Culture*, 15(2), 78–91.

Severová, J. (2023). Young African American Women and Their Environment: Contemporary African American Feminine Identities, Political Views and the Sense of Security.

Zahra, A., Bashir, S., Abbas, N., & Nasir, M. (2025). ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION AND GENDERED STRUGGLES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVES: A MARXIST FEMINIST STUDY OF REID'S *SUCH A FUN AGE*. *Al-Aasar*, *2*(2), 1253-1263.