Erotic, Anger, the Woman-identified-Woman, Invoking the African Deities in Audre Lorde’s Writing

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Abstract: Women, women in complete autonomy of their body, self, sexuality has always been perceived by the “male-fied” society as a danger. Therefore, beautiful, self-willed, immensely gifted women have therefore been suspected as “witches.” And “witch-hunting”, literally and metaphorically speaking, is still found in galore. Women who want to speak the truth, therefore is silenced by the supremacist, Alfa-male dominated society. And, women, who are Black, therefore on the last loop of racial-gendered hierarchy have become “tongue-tied”. Female subjectivity, in terms of her preferred sexuality, has been denied to her. Anger and Erotica— conceived as evil in the Judeo-Christian metaphysics and propounded by the supremacist, racist, hegemonic, patriarchal world order, has left no place for the Colored, sexually marginalized women. Audre Lorde here, emerges as an assertive figure, exploring the possibility of the power of Eros, Anger and Difference in her life-writing.

Keywords: Biomythography, bildungsroman, kunstlerroman, Orisha, Womanism, Gyno-criticism, Subculture, Self-inscription, xenophobia, Homophobia.

Since this is a research paper, and it incorporates a thorough process of ordering, selecting, deleting, documenting, then perhaps reordering—in a sense an endeavour towards a system, an order, a cosmos out of chaos—an unnamed heap of writings, let us remember what Audre Geraldine Lorde(1934-1992) herself had to say about such a perfection attaining goal. In an interview with Adrienne Rich, Lorde remarked: “But documentation does not help one perceive. At best it only analyses the perception.” (Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches:104)

But according to Rich , Lorde herself used a good deal of documentation in the “long prose piece”(Sister Outsider 104). In reply to that, Lorde buttresses the superiority of unlimited and diversified and multiplied knowledge over limited and narrowed down “documentation.” And in this connection, she thinks, that it is the poet inside her, who is responsible for this urge of un-scanned, non-spanned orientation of her psyche and her creative faculty. She reminds us and Rich that she had been a librarian because she really believed that she would gain tools for ordering and analysing information. That is the reason why she did not document the goddess of Africa celebrated throughout The Black Unicorn much(1978), much to the irritation of critics and scholars: “I had to laugh. I am a poet, not a historian. I’ve shared my knowledge, I hope. Now you go document it, if you wish.”(Sister Outsider 105)

No wonder, Lorde was and still is, never-ever an acceptable model; neither she created any progeny nor she left any legacy. She never dictated a monolithic path. Yet I find her to be a beacon of protest and a strong voice, whose creative presence is much needed in today’s hegemonic, patriarchal, white, very American, racist, supremacist, homophobic, xenophobic, misogynist, socio-political situation. Therefore it is necessary and worthwhile to “document” her creative writings, in a way to introduce Lorde, the 1970’s Black, lesbian, poet, mother, critic, thinker, writer, cancer survivor who lived and wrote in a time when all the
homosexuals/gays/lesbians/queers evoked a profound, concentrated connotation of xenophobia—not to mention the “Black” tag. The process would be interesting and intriguing as, Lorde seems to be in a continuous “peeling off” process—shading and revealing her multiple identities—yet she is all of those.

The main thrust being the transformation of silence into effective speech and the African mythological terrain working in the sub-textual level in each of Lorde’s works it is essential to define the process of unfolding her poetic and creative agency. First about Zami: this text could be studied as a mode of cultural resistance as--firstly this is a “biomythography”—the genre moulded by a Black radical, female, subject challenging the U.S racist ,supremacist discourse while providing an alternative way of self-inscription. Secondly, as it explores the transformational power of language and speech through a self-naming process which is a mythical conversion—it converts the Eurocentric essentialist totalizing telos of myth; myth which so far has been inscribed in the “white” psyche in the very Judeo-Christian-Greeko-Roman standard.Thirdly,while dealing with the poetry I would like to observe and interpret them as a form of social and political protest , her aversion of racism being the major content and the myth working in the sub-textual level as well. The poems have a lot to do with the autobiographical details and similarities in thought and development are to be found between ZamiandThe Black Unicorn as both concentrates on racial and maternal silence, and repetitive, anguishing, agonising, encounter with a silent and righteous mother—thus the call for the African mother-goddess figures—“Orishas” as they are called in Igbo and Yoruban cosmology. Definitely what unites all the works of Lorde is the quest for power , subjectivity, a call for female bonding and an open sisterhood (albeit colored) which go side by side the mythical paradigm.

This line of thought would prove instrumental in understanding Lorde’s poetics. Lorde had a difficult time to make her own perceptions verbal and she finds that in this transformation from silence to voice, documentation is useless. Because “Perceptions precede analysis just as visions precede action or accomplishments.It’s like getting a poem…”(Sister Outsider105) Neither does Lorde hesitate to confess that she spent a long time questioning her perceptions and her interior knowledge, “not dealing with them, tripped by them.” (Sister Outsider 105)Lorde , as a poet came to deal with these problems as and when she was sent to Tougaloo , a Black college in Mississippi. The experience at Tougaloo,for an instance made her conceive, the poem “Black Studies.”( New York HeadShopand Museum:52-56)—the knowledge essential for that poem “born five years later.”(Sister Outsider 91) Inwords of Lorde , though her students needed her own perceptions, her perceptions of their “need” was different from what they were saying. What they were shouting was “We need strong Black people.” But what they were also pointing at was, according to Lorde, that their ideas of what strong was had come from their white oppressors and it “didn’t jibe with their feelings at all.”(Sister Outsider91)

As Lorde revealed her black soul to Rich, it was through poetry that she, a black, lesbian, poet began to deal with those problems formally—one of them being, to define and distinguish that of the “master’s tools” and one’s own tool. She knew nothing about poetry initially. That she had never read a book of poetry. Her own muse came to possess her when she read Karl Shapiro—he had written “Poetry doesn’t sell Cadillacs.”(Sister Outsider 91) It was the first time she thought about making herself heard—earlier, she only listened to part of her being “inarticulate, inscrutable”.( Ibid 91) She never conceived anything before in terms of verbalization, and it was in Tougaloo that she got the first copies of her book( TheFirst Cities). It would not be wrong to assume Lorde’s poetic journey as from “silence to articulation” or seen through a different perspective from “oral to written”—specifically here
‘oral’ does not really correspond to ‘silence’ but ‘articulation may very well parry with ‘written’ or ‘testimonial.’

For Lorde “Poetry is not a Play-Doh” (Sister Outsider 89) and is definitely not a luxury. And she accuses herself for revising and re-polishing her early poetry too much. Lorde on practical level could never organize her thoughts, it was always a stream-of-consciousness for her, the problem being a lack of focus. “I remember feeling I could not focus on a thought long enough to have it from start to finish, but I could ponder a poem for days, camp out in its world.” (ibid 87) The root lies in the deepest level of the artist’s psyche—the forming years (as it happens in any bildungsroman or kunstlerroman) were painful bearing the burden of inarticulation. But poetry started to serve as her mouthpiece—the process is reversed; instead of making her poetry a tool for finding her voice, it is the poetry itself, which made Lorde a tool, a spokesperson for letting itself out. It happened in the very supple age. Being asked “How do you feel” etc., Lorde would recite a poem “and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, the vital piece of information. The poem was my response.” (Sister Outsider 82) The poem had proved itself to be Lorde’s language. And the reason why Lorde started to write her own poetry was: “But this was the first reason for my own writing, my need to say things I couldn’t otherwise when I couldn’t find other poems to serve.” (ibid 82) So she had to invent her own voice. And it is in this connection that Lorde brings up the importance of nonverbal communication which she had learnt from her mother—this to be dealt exclusively later on the chapter on Zami; the bio-mythography. She used to memorise her poems and recite those aloud; she never found it necessary to write them down, she had a long fund of poetry in her head. And amazing though it may sound, when she was in high school she tried not to ‘think’ in terms of poetry. The way people communicated—normally, verbally, seemed a wonder to her. “I saw the way other people thought ...step by step, not in bubbles up from chaos that you had to anchor with words...I really do believe learned this from my mother.” (Sister Outsider 83) It is Lorde’s and Lorde’s mother’s “strange way with words.” (ibid 83) Word—that is for Lorde, experience and perception executed as symbol; each painful encounter formed its own symbol for Lorde—mute suffering, pent up rage, erotic urges, expression of love and most evidently tortured-shattered-battered Black souls, specifically women living a lie in darkness, shame and silence.

When it comes to finding voice amidst and against silence, in her recent work Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence, Irene D’Almeida problematizes the silence and voiceless-ness of African women and her position is a good starting point in discussing the emergence of African Women’s ‘feminine’ (not necessarily ‘feminist’ ideology: “Silence represents the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status.” (D’Almeida 1)) She reiterates that one reason behind African women’s silence was that those women were vocal in oral culture, but silent in literature. Therefore, she emphasizes the role of literature for self-expression, self-definition, self-discovery and as a liberating force. It has been exemplified through the writings of Audre Lorde—fiction or prose would restate self-consciousness for her, her poetry is that of self-healing, self-restoration, self-inscription, self-realization, self-discovery—this preoccupation with ‘self’ will lead to the ‘biomythography’ where Lorde would mythically transform, transcribe and inscribe herself.

When we are discussing autobiographical writings and the imminent urge to inscribe one ‘self’ it might seem unjust if Lorde and her creative agency are not placed in a juxtaposition with other exponents of African-American literature, contemporary women or rather ‘womanist’ writers—like Alice Walker, Zora Neal Hurston, Tony Morrison, Tony Cade
Bambara, Maya Angelou and then thinkers and progressive writers like Angela Davis, Barbara Smith, bell hooks,—to name only a few. It seems sensible to begin with Alice Walker, not just because she coined the term ‘womanism’ as a more radical version of feminism just as violet is the more flamboyant version of purple—but also because of the fact that in her seminal and enlightening work *In Search of Our Mothers’ Garden* Walker did mention a Christian woman spiritualist named Rebecca Jackson who in modern day world could have been termed and segregated as a lesbian. Being a member of the shakers group, she, just like Audre Lorde could not read or write initially. She did believe that Christ endowed her with the power to read the holy words of *The Bible*. (Walker 17) With this work and the term ‘womanism’ Walker asserted a self-conscious integrative struggle to bring forth the issue of the self-dependent, matured, intellectual, affirmative, self-empowered Africana women.”A Black feminist or feminist of color...who loves other women, sexually and/or asexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture...sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female...Womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender.”(Walker 12) According to Mary E. Modupe. Kolawole this consciousness transcends the barrier of individual awareness and is not new to the African women; however this attempt by Walker is a part of the awareness that confirms the need for a unique identity building process for African women’s separate consciousness. (Kolawole24) Whatever had been Walker’s objective, it can be presumed following the line of thought of Madhu Dubey that womanism can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate Black nationalism into feminism, to lend voice to a particularly Black feminism that shares some of the objectives of the Black nationalist ideology. However Walker was far sighted enough as to make it an objective fruitful for all Black folks male or female. In this connection Kolawole mentions an African thinker named Chikwenye Okonjo who also used the term around the same time. (Kolawole 24) Lorde has always expressed her support for the issues raised by Black nationalistic programmes and had been an avid follower of Malcolm X—in a transcript of a talk given at Harvard University’s Malcolm X weekend, February 1982 she brings it in “Malcolm X is a distinct shape in a very pivotal period of my life. I stand here now—Black, Lesbian, Feminist—an inheritor of Malcolm and in his tradition, doing my work, and the ghost of his voice thorough my mouth asks each one of you tonight: Are you doing yours?”(Sister Outsider 134). In this talk Lorde merges the issues of lesbian and gay rights with that of a consolidated Black Nationalist issue as she finds the issues to be fought as multi-layered (just like her multiplied-diversified identity)—“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives. Malcolm knew this. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew this.”(Sister Outsider 138)

When it comes to the academic circle a classic novel by Ann Petry entitled *The Street* could be mentioned to show how unabashedly the white, racist, pseudoscholarship can affect the black experience which they themselves have never experienced and so far only attempted to present it in a distorted form. Barbara Smith finds this text to be an authentic depiction of the three-tiered exploitation of black women-hood—how the three tired social tools (sex-class-race) operate to annihilate them. And yet the text has been dismissed as a superficial social analysis by white male critics like Robert Bone and Alain Locke. (Smith 10) No wonder then Tony Morrison’s *Sula* (1974) a novel depicting the subtle womanly love between two girls had been scorched by the contempt of white feminism—a white feminist Sara Blackburn asserted in her review of *Sula* in the *New York Times Book Review* that Morrison could possibly allure a larger readership had she not dealt with exclusively black characters and situations. Elaine Showalter, a massive figure when it comes to gyno-criticism and yet she refers to black and other non-white cultures as ‘subcultures’ and she assumes that she could use the ‘black literary history’ as a precedent to feminist scholarship! Barbara
Smith writes about it: “The idea of critics like Showalter using Black literature is chilling, a case of barely disguised cultural imperialism.”(Smith11). It can be further mentioned how Zora Neal Hurston’s work was condemned by Darwin Turner as artful, coy, irrational, superficial, shallow etc. Not much astonishingly then Ishmael Reed comments, only to prove himself as a misogynist, that to sell books one has to be a black woman writer and just filling the book with descriptions of ghetto victimized women would do the trick. Alice Walker supplies the reason of the increasing hostility towards Black female writers: “There are two reasons why the black woman writer is not taken as seriously as the black male writer. One that she is a woman....And since, black women writers are not ...very likeable—until recently they were the least willing worshippers of male supremacy—comments about them tend to be cruel.”(Smith12)

Setting the academic-literary-cultural background (which though quite barren, hostile and unfriendly did help in the sprouting of a group of enthusiastic intellectual Black female writers, Lorde being one among them), we can move on to some writers and their respective works which might have guided Lorde like a predecessor. And these Black women writers have created a distinct style in their writing where they have shared their very common social-political-cultural-literary experiences—for an instance writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Alice Walker and Tony Morrison have all assimilated in their writings a network of female bonding through social networking, herbal medicine, midwifery and they have done it consciously. And they do use a distinctive black female language to express their anguish and in a sense have created a new tool. This new language accommodates the lesbians and lesbianism. In these regard two well-known and critically acclaimed novels of Tony Morrison could be referred to—*Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*; these two texts explores the constructive relationship between girls in their formative years. The first one is worth mentioning not because it is a ‘lesbian’ novel but because it talks about the worthlessness and decadence of heterosexual social institutions such as marriage, respecting patriarchal family values through bearing children etc. It is not a passionate tale of lesbian love story; the message lies deeper as it teaches women to stand against male oppression, black or white whatever the colour is, it imbibes a new value system in women which instructs them to become self-independent by all means—that is why Sula escapes the conventions of marriage and frequently goes to bed with other men in the town which earns her a bad name , at the same time asserting the dynamic, free-flowing, male-authority denying rebellious and empowered symbol of women. The novel explicitly posits and exposes the ‘norlmalcy/heterosexuality’ and juxtaposes it with ‘lesbianism.’ The opening paragraph of the essay entitled “The Woman-Identified-Woman” in *Lesbians Speak Out* is a case in point and well explains the predicament of protagonists like Sula or Lorde’s own vulnerable self in her own bio-mythography: “What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.”

Lorde writes about racism and sexism and the destruction of Black female force by Black men and maintains: “No reasonable black man can possibly condone the rape and slaughter of Black women by Black men as a fitting response to capitalist oppression. And destruction of Black women by Black men clearly cuts across all class lines.”(*Sister Outsider*64)Lorde mentions the Black sociologist Robert Staples and the destructive criticism he has offered much in the line of white racist propaganda in his study *The Black Scholar*. According to Staples Black women in 1979 have only served to threaten to overtake the positions of Blackmen . Lorde’s reaction is: “Black feminists speak as woman because we are women and do not need others to speak for us...What correct analysis of this capitalist dragon within which we live can legitimize the rape of Black women by Black men?”(*Sister Outsider* 60)Lorde further makes a mockery of Staples’ compassion for misguided and subjugated
Black men when she retorts rhetorically: “If this society ascribes roles to Black men which they are not allowed to fulfil, is it Black women who must bend and alter our lives to compensate, or is it society that needs changing?...One tool of the Great-American-Double-Think is to blame the victim for victimization.”(ibid61) Lorde provides a few basic examples of the conditions which might attract racial and sexual abuse—that Black people could avoid lynching by knowing their place; that Black women do invite rape and sexual abuse as/when they deny to become submissive or by being too seductive etc. Lorde figures out the root of the agony of black women—they have compassion for everyone, beginning from their white masters outside to the Black masters at their home, except themselves, that they need to incorporate self-love and self-value systems in their daily lives. And it is not the Black women’s problem that the Black male viewpoint is not reasonable and inarticulate. Lorde once again throws her dart against the black male academicians by pointing out that it will serve no good to the Black people in America by merely criticising Black women’s works for the absence of the worldview of Black male. “Oppressors always expect the oppressed to extend to them the understanding so lacking in themselves.”(Sister Outsider63) Lorde cautions the Black males from repeating the white America’s mistakes, that Black folks could never attain freedom and a prosperous future by adopting the colonial, racist, supremacist America’s ‘male disease of sexism.’(ibid 63)

And yes, without hesitation, Lorde does utter her vulnerability which she has experienced in course of emerging as a lesbian-poet. Lorde finds it ridiculous when Staples formulates justification for polygamies by ascribing them the name of ‘creative relationships’ and it goes without saying that this works to the benefits of Black male. If polygamy is creative, what offence could lesbianism probably cause? Of course, in the later the Black male can never assume or rather resume the superior position of a master, here lies the problem in giving the lesbians a positive recognition and paying their due. “This is much the same as how the ‘creative relationships’ between master and slave were always those benefiting the master.” (Sister Outsider65) Lorde is determined to survive in a society that is homophobic and xenophobic. The Black poetess who is a lesbian is clubbed together with other menacing categories as such a ‘communist’ and/or a ‘militant.’ Well, these typical reactionary manifestations of the hatred and fear of the Black male/White male and female are the most pejorative terms that could be hurled against at a Black woman as these kind of abuse will totally paralyse her spiritually robbing off her creative agency. Unfortunately, to their distress, there are, and coming up quite a handful of enthusiastic radical Black female (not necessarily lesbian always) writers who have put everything they have on stake. Audre Lorde has got peers with he—a mixed group of Black radical writers and thinkers have prepared and still preparing the foreground for making the so-far unheard voice heard. They have faced and are still facing the anxiety of developing the radical-Black-female-subjectivity; according to bell hooks as found in her workBlack Looks “they attest to the joy and triumph of living with a decolonized mind and participating in ongoing resistance struggle.”(hooks56)

Now, what have we got so far out of the representation of the Radical black female self? What about the interconnected and socially-collective issues of victimization and self-empowerment? Let us again rummage ourselves up for another set of assessment of Morrison’s novel Sula. We see that the way towards achieving un-constrained subjectivity is literally breath taking as the death of the protagonist would assert. The protagonist dies at her youth and alas without any obtained degree of self-empowerment. Rather the woman who has fallen prey to the bankrupt social institutions like marriage and childbearing, Nel survives albeit with a sense of the loss her ‘girl’. She does not seem to create her own radical agency in a world which is hostile to such notions. And though she has proved herself to be a rule-breaker and game-maker, the journey proves to be menacing and
threatening, she does not really emerge as a triumphant figure. In her *Black Looks* bell hooks asks in a complaining mode: “...Toni Morrison, why does she appear on the page as an ‘artist without an art form? Is it too much like ‘treason—like disloyalty to black womanhood—to question this portrait of (dare I say it) ‘victimization’ to refuse to be seduced by Sula’s exploits or ignore their outcome?”(hooks 49)

This primary complaint makes us face the hare and bitter reality—that so far the representations made in Black American literature have only been of victimized self—where the self is either outrun by a confrontational society, or where the self is subjugated and ‘adjusted’ within the patriarchal framework, getting used to the internalized racism and sexism, leaving no space for the evolution and development of the female subjectivity. It points to another dangerous fact that still many progressive Black ‘radicals’ male or female, do conceive the black female identity as synonymous with ‘victimization.’ Hooks again as she recalls a gathering of suffering Black women: “the Black female voice that was deemed ‘authentic’ was the voice in pain; only the sound of hurting could be heard. No narrative of resistance was voiced and respected in this setting.”(hooks44) And thus the dream of a free establishment of female subjective self goes haywire as instead of the white racist essentialism, another set of essentialism is ‘reproduced’—the change in skin colour does not make the matter in any way better or worth of empathy. Because it does not leave any space for “difference”—all colored female experience cannot be that of victimization always. Where are the rebellious, individualistic, unique voices? Then what is the difference with white hegemony and homogenous orientation? Where is the voice of resistance? Let us consider some other works by some other radical subjective self. What is the symbolical value of wildness and eroticism if not the very much bustling life-force of the Black woman? These are the metaphoric expression of the black female subject’s desire to rebel, to outstand the conventional notions of feminine passivity and of course, yes, her subjectivity. I believe, right now, it would not be improper to remember what Lorde had to offer on eroticism and wild-rebelliousness in her path-breaking essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”:

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives....

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world.(Sister Outsider53)

Lorde attests to the fact that whenever she celebrates the erotic, that ancient wildness within her consciousness, (which is not and should not be taken as synonymous with mere sexual urge) she emerges as a new and empowered woman. And very truly as she writes, women so empowered are dangerous and threatening for the male-chauvinistic empire. So the male, white or black dominant ideology will always instruct women, to become suspicious of this kind of power, and most significantly not to recognize it as a source of power at all. And men did not have to stop women from exploring this site—the women did that to themselves. Thus erotic in today’s world became just a cheap variety of pornography. But how does erotic become power? Lorde answers that effectively taking her queue from the original Greek derivation ‘Eros’, which is the manifestation of love in a very broad, generous way. Eros of course is born out of chaos, at the same time personifying creative prowess and harmony. “
When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives." (Sister Outsider 55) and Velma outright rejects this, causing herself a fall. Bell hooks mentions one law professor Regina Wilson who calls Black women to cultivate this creative wildness as a survival strategy in her work “Sapphire Bound.” (hooks 49).

One thing is clear—if the writers are to represent real-life radical subjective females in their texts, first they themselves have to be aware of this tension ingrained in their mind. If they themselves are not able to create the wilder, broader, truly empowered and enlightened dimensions of themselves, it is unlikely that they will be able to represent their subjective selves in the guise of characters in an honest and solid way. A gap would always be there between the imagination or desire for freedom and the reality of confinement. Perhaps that is why, Ruth, the female protagonist in Alice Walker’s The Third Life of Grange Copeland, in spite of being well educated by her grandfather in critical thinking and intellectual activity, is receded into the background and leaves her grandfather to fight against the white oppressors alone. Then what is the use of developing a political consciousness? Getting involved in a movement actively might be more effective than submissively reading a paper in a seminar, sometimes. In walker’s Meridian the protagonist chooses a self-confinement in domesticity and allows herself to be subjugated. Why talk about radical female selves then? The pattern is quite prominent from the beginning of the history of self-inscription by Black women in America—take for an example the slave narrative by Harriet Jacobs—she does insists on becoming a subjective self-defined ontological symbol in her true autobiography. But the point often missed is that, she later succumbs to the lure of a male-dominated society and replaces her original self with a much refined “Linda Brent” who has no similarity with the earlier rebellious self who dared question and transgress the set boundaries of patriarchy and racism.

The ultimate problem remains how to place oneself in diaspora. To do so, most of them has actually tried and annihilated the inherent “difference” in each of them. Let us see what Trinh-T-Minh-Ha has to offer on womanism and difference though she talks specifically about third world women.

Difference in such an insuitable context is that which undermines the very idea of identity, deferring to infinity the layers whose totality forms “I.”...The difference(within) between ‘difference’ itself and ‘identity’ has so often been ignored and the use of the two terms so readily confused, that claiming a female/ethnic identity/difference is commonly tantamount to reviving a kind of naive “male-tainted” romanticism.”( Minh-Ha 95-96).

For Minh-Ha women can never be defined; there are just too many categories. And she does mention the politics of categorization. She refers to an anthology edited by Patricia Bell Scott, Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith entitled “All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave.”(Minh-Ha 96-97) She makes a clear point. But how does Lorde herself respond to this crisis, to this tension?

To conclude now, Lorde’s ultimate stance as a radical woman of Color, as a Woman-identified-woman, has been a motto to her life-writing and her “An Open Letter to Mary Daly” (Sister Outsider 66) is a case in point. Mary Daly the much famous author of Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism in this very text, constructs an opposite and alternative concept of “God-the-Father” by simply replacing it with “God-the-Mother”—
a mother who is no doubt white and bears acute resemblance to the Judeo-Christian-Greek-Roman angels and mythical female beings, thus excluding the mythical-feminine figures of other cultures—African or Chinese or Indian. Thus maintaining the homogenising hegemony of superior, white, female category and “universalising women’s oppression” in Minh-Ha’s words. (Minh-Ha 97) Lorde’s response in directing a need for the representation of African Mythology is not very complex even to the western eye:

So I wondered, why doesn’t Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are hregoddess images only white, western European, judo-christian? Where was Afrekete, Yemenje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dohomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western European women.

...you were dealing with non-European women, but only as victims upon…To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how these tools are used by women without awareness against each other...

I feel you do celebrate differences between white women as a creative force towards change, rather than a reason for misunderstanding and separation. But you fail to recognize that, as women, these differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share, and some of which we do not. ” (Sister Outsider67-70)

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