

## **'Through the Flower': On Audre Lorde and Intersectionality**

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### **Abstract**

The article aims to explore the origins of intersectionality through the legacy of Lorde's feminism and her radical thinking. The concept of intersectionality has taken on a complex position in feminist scholarship over the past decade. Many scholars have also considered the contributions of Audre Lorde to the discussions around intersectionality. It draws parallels between her ideas and it shows how her ideas are influenced by both rebellious literary forms and political writing styles. Lorde's radical feminist works have often been regarded as both a reflection of identity politics and a shift in situational perception. Intersectionality is in addition said to be a movement that is trying to reclaim the ideas of identity politics and develop new ways to understand the decentred structures of power. The article uses historicocritical and analytical approaches to argue that the oeuvre of Lorde's feminism provides a new perspective on the subject. In her works, Lorde describes a world that is definable only in terms of its relational terms, a world that is torn apart by the divisions between race, class, sexuality, and gender. She also describes a world that is capable of being understood only through its destructive divisions. The world that she is talking about is a place that needs to be changed through a process of transformation. This world is also a place where history has been made through the multiple movements and revolutions that have occurred in it. These are the contours that define the complex ground that third world feminist politics are based on.

**Keywords:** Audre Lorde, Intersectionality, Power and politics, Identity politics, Coalition.

## Introduction

In 1851, Sojourner Truth challenged the use of sexist imagery by male critics. During a Women's Rights Conference in Ohio, white men argued that women were too frail to perform political activities. When Truth rose to speak, many white women urged her to be silent in the anticipation of diverting the attention from women's suffrage to emancipation. Truth, when permitted to speak, delineated the horrors of slavery and its impact on African-American women.

Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have born thirteen children and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me—and ain't I a woman?"

The value of feminist theory to Black women is diminished by the fact that it is rooted in a white racial context, which is seldom acknowledged. Not only does this prevent African-American women from being fully included in the discussion, but it also reinforces the exclusion of them from being able to speak for themselves. The universal voice of white men masquerading as non-gendered, non-racial objectivity is transferred to those who share the same cultural, economic, and social characteristics. When feminist theory talks about the experiences of women, it often fails to address the role of race in their development. This is because, instead of focusing on how race can help mitigate some of the sexism that occurs in their lives, feminists tend to ignore how it can also contribute to the domination of other women. This is why the theory is still white. Its potential to expand and deepen its analysis is still largely unrealized. However, like our understanding of the world around us, which has been a constantly-shifting phenomenon, feminism or what has been called "womanism" in some climes (Evwierhoma, 2009, 2014; Omoera, 2020) has been on a shifting ground as a theoretical concept. In other words, it "is a heterogeneous and complex ideological perspective" (Loke, Bachmann & Harp 2017, p.122), which has been transmuted, adapted, transposed, converted, translated, migrated, and remediated at various times. But central to all its various nomenclatures is the affirmation that gender equity is a global craving, which in more senses than one, is a work in progress. Meaghan Morris's observation, though in a slightly different context, also provides some insights: "compositional

perspectives allow you to look at heterogeneous matters and make sense out of them in terms of positionality and solidarization” (cited in Omoera, 2020).

During the 1960s, many people believed that an interracial movement could eventually lead to racial equality. However, this optimism was quickly replaced by racial separation. During this period, many people became activists and organizers of the Black Power movement. One of the movement's goals was to create a more equal relationship between black women and black men. While the loyalty of black women in the liberation movement was primarily focused on their race, how did it change them as individuals and as activists? Some of the problems that women face are due to the fact that men are more likely to be the center of attention and concern than they are to be the ones receiving it. This is because men are viewed as more damaged by racism and slavery than women are. The racial solidarity that women had hoped for, however, was lost due to male dominance and sexism.

The Black Power movement was able to empower women while simultaneously disappointing and angering them. This article explores the experiences of women in the movement and their path toward becoming more feminist. The Black Power movement was influential among women, young men, and black youth. Some groups supported its ideas, but others were affected by the political and cultural movement, which was focused on attaining power and freedom for African-Americans. According to historian Komozí Woodard, the movement was about self-defense, self-respect, and self-determination. The Black Power movement was a multi-faceted political and cultural organization that spanned various emphases. Some of these included the Black Arts movement, which sought to articulate Black Power's cultural perspective, the Black Panther party, and the Nation of Islam. Black Nationalism is regarded as the most inclusive term for the various political and cultural aspects of the movement during the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the debate between postmodern constructivism and essentialist identity politics became increasingly heated. Among the individuals who contributed to this discourse was poet and feminist icon, Audre Lorde. For some scholars, she is an essential feminist who is devoted to the search for the mythical woman warrior, while for others, she is a postmodernist who is more interested in positionality. But scholars have also drawn on her thinking in various contexts. The goal of this essay is to explore the various roles that Lorde

played in the development of intersectionality. I also talk about the politics of writing style and how it relates to the concept of intersectionality. For me, the idea of intersectionality is a complex political and identity-centric concept, and I try to envision its potential to be activated again.

### **Revisiting Intersectionality**

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, introduced the concept of intersectionality to the world when she discussed the issues of African-American women's employment in the US. She was then invited to introduce the concept at a special session at the World Conference Against Racism, which was held in September 2001 in South Africa. During the WCAR's NGO Forum, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN's special rapporteur on violence against women, noted that the concept of intersectionality had gone extremely popular among various UN and NGO forums. In spite of the fact that the term intersectionality did not show up until afterward, a few dialogue records on intersectionality (such as that of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights at the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in Rutgers College [in 2001]) point to the UN Beijing Platform for action on the inclusion of the components of an intersectional approach. They call for governments to ensure that all women and girls have equal enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms and human rights, the Center for Women's Global Leadership calls for intensified efforts to address the various barriers that prevent them from being able to fully participate in their development. These include their race, age, language, culture, disability, or because they belong to the indigenous group.

Intersectionality is a critical component of identity politics that takes into account the various intra-group and inter-group differences. It can be used to argue that African-American women are worse off than their white counterparts due to both racism and sexism. It can also be perceived as a more accurate alternative to the claims that working-class black women are more prone to experiencing triple jeopardy due to poverty and sexism. Intersectionality argues that the complexity of social inequality and individual identification cannot be captured by standard arithmetical frameworks. Instead, it is the various ways that these categories co-construct themselves that are dependent on historical, symbolic, and social factors. There are significant differences in how intersectionality is studied on both sides of the Atlantic. On the US side, scholars focus on the structure or system that affects the formation of identities, while those in Britain consider the relational and dynamic aspects. According to Crenshaw (1991), the intersection of gender and race

makes the experiences of women of color qualitatively different from those of white women. Class, race, and gender are systems of oppression and domination that are designed to determine or structure identities. Mari Matsuda's 'Besides my Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition' spun her method of asking the 'other question'. She so does in systemic terms that when she sees something that looks racist, she asks, "Where is the patriarchy in this?" On the other hand, when she sees something that looks sexist, she asks, "Where is the heterosexism in this?" Social identity categories are exclusively concerned with the effects of discursive and social subordination on individual identities.

### **On Audre Lorde**

Lorde doesn't limit herself to one aspect of her identity. Her identity is constructed using a sense of corporeal materiality, which is expressed in both her poetry and prose. In her use of the body as a metaphor for oppression, Lorde is attempting to reclaim the balance between the written and the embodied. There is no way to talk about the body as it is before signing without resorting to signification, as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*. As a writer, Lorde is aware of the indissolubility of signification. She regards her body as a medium through which she expresses herself, and she is conscious of her texts emerging from it. While Lorde's writing doesn't necessarily imply that she identifies with one particular subject, her awareness of her surroundings and the world around her mirrors her own experience. When she identifies herself by name, Lorde typically begins with the term race. This is the reason why she privileges the term, which has been the source of her early experiences with prejudice. Her poetry and prose are also influenced by her awareness of the world's attempts to devalue blackness. In her book "Eye to Eye," Lorde talks about her experiences with racial discrimination and how it affected her. For instance, when she was five, her mother placed her on a subway with a white woman wearing a fur hat.

Suddenly, a woman approaches the seat between us and begins to look at her surroundings. She has communicated her horror to me, and I pull my coat closer to her as she continues to stare at me. Suddenly, I realize that there is nothing crawling up between us. She also has huge eyes and nose holes, and I don't want her coat to touch me. In "Eye to Eye," Lorde talks about her experiences with racial discrimination and how it affected her. She also talks about the effects of racism on black women. She also expresses her grief at how it has affected her and other black women. In "Eye to Eye," Lorde appeals to other black women by saying that they

must first know that they are worthy of touching before they can reach out to each other. In *Black Looks*, bell hooks argue that her book "constructs a monolithic image of African-American female experience." She also fails to take into account the various traditions of African-American women. Although this criticism is accurate, Lorde's insistence on the mutual support of black women is also notable. Hook also acknowledges her courage in addressing the issues of sexism and racism that she has experienced. Lorde's goal in writing this essay is to raise awareness of the effects of racism on self-esteem.

The concept of breaking bread was presented by Hooks & West in 1991 as a way to critically analyze the production of Black women in contemporary society. It is based on the idea that Lorde's work is a theoretical lens that can be used to examine the ways in which women of color are produced. The scholarship that follows Lorde provides an enhanced, nuanced, and detailed re-reading of her work, but it also raises the question of appropriation and scholarship in general. In 1991, Aidoo asked what is post-colonialism and post-modernism. In 1994, Boyce Davies argued that in the 'post,' people are automatically assigned to ideologies of posting or postponing. In 1990, Mukherjee re-framed the question to ask, "Whose Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism?" This debate has moved the discussion on from the problematic intersections of Black feminist theory and the production of art. The concept of appropriation as a maneuver of colonization has been regarded as a fundamental part of Black feminist theory's failure to maintain a level playing field for women and minorities. It is also a function of the disavowal of Black feminist theory in relation to the present.

In her essay 'Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface', Lorde argues that black feminism is not a white feminist movement in blackface. Lorde critiques Staples' work, stating that the intersection of racism and sexism creates a system that prevents Black women from being able to interact with other people in their communities. She also argues that black feminism is not a white feminist movement in blackface. The statement acknowledges the various issues that affect Black women's lives, and it includes key debates and themes. The point is that the various issues that Lorde tackles are central to the political and critical movements against the psy-complex. These include the intersection of racism and sexism, the use of diagnostic categories, and the politics of stratification. The challenge that Lorde and other feminists face is how to advocate for the recognition of difference while also addressing the power of collective action.

The vision of wholeness beyond the effects of oppression has also been heavily influenced by Lorde's work. Her ability to show her own inner strength and clarity has also been demonstrated in her work. The issues surrounding one's existence in a black body are also intensified by one's gender. In her work, Lorde has also addressed her own internalized racism against African-American women. This is shown in her songs "Eye to Eye" and "An Interview with Adrienne Rich". In her works, Lorde also addresses the various forms of white feminism's unexamined racism. She has written about this in her various essays, such as "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "An Open Letter to Mary Daly." Lorde also talks about how anger can help one survive. Throughout their lives, women of color have experienced a symphony of anger. It is a world that takes for granted their lack of humanness, and where they feel like they are not being valued. Rather than describing the symphony as a series of furies, Lorde refers to it as a way to describe how we have had to learn to manage our anger and put it to use in order to bring about a better world. For women of color, anger can become the life force that allows them to fight against oppression. It is an essential part of their survival mechanism as they are forced to face racism and silence. This is why it is very disappointing that white feminists would still hold this belief that they are only speaking for women. Lorde also asks why feminism is not about all women.

Through her body, Lorde has been able to address the resistance she has been experiencing. One example of this is her essay, "I Am Your Sister," which talked about how black women were organizing across sexualities. Lorde addressed an audience of African-American feminists and talked about the importance of solidarity. She identified herself as a black lesbian feminist, and she acknowledged the discomfort that her announcement might cause. It is not always easy for me to talk about myself as a Black lesbian feminist, as some of the ways in which my identity makes it hard for people to hear me make it hard for me to be heard. However, meeting across differences is still possible, and until I can hear myself as a Black feminist, my strengths will not be fully realized. In this essay, Lorde talks about her sexuality and body on the line as she stands before a group of women, in her essay. She aims to raise the consciousness of her fellow heterosexual black feminists by talking about her involvement in the fight against racism and sexism. She also mentions a number of African-American lesbians who could be lost in the heterosexist movement. Lorde also aims to create a collective agency for

African-American women, by talking about her experiences and her involvement in the fight against sexism and racism. She says that unity does not require that women be identical to each other. Although she uses the term "we," Lorde explains that a collective is not a monolithic one.

In her article, Ana Louise Keating states that Lorde's "we" is a performative act, which allows her to create a collective voice that she can share with her readers. As she has done in other essays, Lorde uses this performance as a bridge between her identity and the movement. In her essay, Lorde talks about gender and sexuality, and she doesn't confine herself to one specific sexual orientation. She also states that she is a feminist who believes that a sexual repression is a tool of patriarchy that can be used to oppress women. She claims that every form of oppression must be corrupt in order to provide energy for change. Lorde states that the erotic is a source of creativity and power and that it is important for women to reclaim their lost eroticism. This is because it allows them to connect with the material, spiritual, and emotional aspects of their lives. While Lorde talks about the erotic nature of her music, she also identifies herself as a lesbian feminist. According to Waldrep, she's writing about her own material existence in order to examine her place in society. In "The Uses of the Erotic," Elle talks about her experience as a woman in a patriarchal society, which prevents her from fully experiencing her own erotic energy. Estella Lauter argues that Lorde's depiction of an erotic wellspring provides a framework for believing in female authority. Lorde stated that acknowledging the power of erotic expression allows women to affirm their feminine identity and fight against the oppression of women in society. She also stated that it allows them to tap into their creative energy.

The erotic is a vital part of every experience, and mortality is the theme of Lorde's writing. She expresses her grief at the oppression of black people at the hands of white oppressors. In her conversations with Baldwin and other writers, Lorde has also expressed her concerns about the vulnerability of African-American women in the hands of white men. In *The Cancer Journals* and *The Burst of Light*, Lorde explores her own mortality by talking about her experiences with breast cancer. She draws parallels between her illness and the oppression endured by black people at the hands of white oppressors. There are also various kinds of power that can be used and abused, and the erotic is one of these. It is a resource that is deeply rooted in our spiritual and female nature, and it can serve as a powerful source of energy for the oppressed. Unfortunately, due to



the oppression that has been carried out against women, the erotic has been suppressed as a means of gaining information and power. In western society, the erotic has been regarded as a sign of female inferiority, and women have been made to suffer due to its existence.

On the other hand, it has been used as a tool of oppression and exploitation. The idea that women can be strong only by suppressing the erotic is also a false one. In reality, the strength that women can actually achieve is actually achieved through the male models of power. We have become distrustful of the power that comes from our nonrational knowledge, and it is why we are afraid to explore the possibilities of this resource. The male world values this level of feeling so much that it is used to keep women around. The erotic can also be used to strengthen and provocatively attract women who do not fear its revelations. The erotic has been misnamed by men, and it has been used against women. For most people, the erotic is a trivial and plasticized sensation, and they have turned away from its potential as a source of information and power. The erotic is not a requirement for excellence, nor should it be misconstrued as demand for the impossible. Instead, it is a question of how we feel about doing what we do. The more we can feel that we are capable of doing what we are doing, the closer we can be to attaining the fullness of ourselves.

Lorde states that she is not identifying with the irrational and the intuitive with black women only and that she is not identifying with white men only. Instead, she is referring to the concepts of the black mother and white fathers as metaphors for the various tendencies within each person's psyche that need to be balanced. Despite the existence of rational and nonrational elements in the human psyche, the European-American male tradition still regards women as objects of repression. It has imposed its values on the erotic, which is regarded as the deepest source of power and joy, in an effort to make women more powerful. Despite the powerful and profound emotional drive that women have, patriarchal tradition still encourages them to suppress it. This is despite the fact that it is also reflected in the stereotypes that women are incapable of rational thought. In light of recent theories about the formation of the subject, it is important to study how the concepts of embodied knowledge and Enlightenment can co-exist. While it is important to note that Lorde is not surrendering to the traditional essentialist vision of the black mother and white fathers, she is actually advocating for the re-essentialization of the feminine form. She is referring to the concepts of the black mother and white fathers as metaphors for the various tendencies that need to be balanced. Lorde aims

to reverse the terms of discrimination and racism by portraying the various sub-groups of black, lesbian, and gay people as powerful, while at the same time subordinating the dominant categories of white, heterosexual, and male. She repositions marginal groups in her discourse. In "A Woman Speaks," Lorde combines Greek mythology with West African religious traditions. She feels that these traditions are very real to her, and she is able to connect to them through her imagination.

### **Lorde's Intersectionality Perspectives**

Intersectionality is a concept that aims to capture the dynamic and structural aspects of multiple forms of discrimination. According to Kimberly Crenshaw, it can help inform both theory and practice. This concept involves looking at interactive structures that can serve as markers of marginalization. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality is about the structure and functioning of discrimination. For instance, a woman who is a welfare recipient is often disadvantaged by her power hierarchies and policies that reinforce her domination. The metaphor of an intersection can help illustrate how different forms of discrimination are not mutually exclusive. As a movement that aims to be inclusive, feminism must reach out to the many oppressed individuals. Crenshaw uses an example of a traffic intersection as a framework for describing the multiple dimensions of intersectionality.

Intersectionality was a central issue in the feminist discourse during the second wave of feminism, which somehow seems to have been overlooked. This paper aims to explore how Lorde's introduction of this concept into feminist discourse has evolved. Lorde was able to articulate the various forms of oppression that women experience in a way that made feminism pay attention to the issues. She was a self-defined feminist, a lesbian, a mother, and a poet who called for a multi-issue feminist movement. One of the most prominent women who emerged as a second-wave critic during the feminist discourse during the second wave was Lorde. There are several reasons why it is important to isolate Lorde from the group of women of color who are often vocal about Black lesbian feminism. She was a figurehead for this movement, she left an accessible canon, and she was often marginalized.

According to Lorde, women should be able to bring their whole selves to the feminist movement. She believed that inclusion and diversity were the foundations of the movement. Lorde was born in the 1930s to a working-class family in the Caribbean, and she was considered to be blind at birth. She also identified as lesbian, black, and a woman. Lorde

identified herself as Black and Lesbian. Throughout her work, she had made a conscious effort to address these intersections. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a rash of violent crimes against African-American women in the Boston area. There were thirteen murders in just a short time. Black males in the community then started labeling these crimes as a race issue. Lorde was able to see injustices in a more clear and direct way because she had been on the fringes of society. She was also able to critique the white women's movement in a way that held it responsible, calling it the most accurate and broadest ideals of the world. According to her, there is no such thing as a 'single-issue struggle' because everyone does not lead 'single-issue lives.

### **Conclusion**

Intersectionality claims that belongingness is an essential component of ethnicity. According to Yuval-Davis and Anthias, ethnicity is about the construction of a collective identity or destiny, which provides people with a sense of roots. This concept is often used to describe people's identities and is often used to explain their sense of belonging. The concept of ethnicity is to dissociate itself from racist and essentialist references to the ties of 'blood' and 'earth.' It is also to affirm the idea that everyone is a subject. In these redefinitions, belonging is regarded as exclusively linked to ethnic membership. However, in Lorde's narratives, belongingness was not only related to the ethnic community but also included other factors such as belonging to a particular social class or family or identifying with a particular region or landscape. Being able to fit into certain intersectional locations is a process that can be described as belonging. It can be influenced by various hegemonic discourses, such as race, ethnicity, and religion. However, it does not refer to a state of being. Instead, it is a longing to belong. This article addressed the question of how intersectionality can be so successful in feminist theory. It was argued that that the concept can be explained by its very own paradox. Most feminist scholars find intersectionality very frustrating when they try to use it in their own inquiries. At the same time, it appeals to their desire to engage with it. The concept's many missing pieces and lack of precision make it an ideal tool for critical feminist theory. Some feminist scholars believe that intersectionality should be improved by having a more clear-cut definition. Others, however, are concerned that the concept has been embraced by feminists despite its lack of clarity. Intersectionality needs to be focused on the various logics and outcomes of its intersections. This can

be done through more sustained attention to the multiple social divisions and inequalities that exist.

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