Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

FEMINIST ACTIVIST POLITICS AND SISTERHOOD IN THE LIFE NARRATIVES OF AUDRE LORDE AND JUNE JORDAN

Ezgi İLİMEN

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2017

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Arş. Gör. Ezgi İLİMEN

To my parents…

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ÖZET

İLİMEN, Ezgi. *Audre Lorde ve June Jordan'ın Yaşam Anlatılarında Feminist Aktivist Politikalar ve Kardeşlik*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Ankara, 2017.

Afrikalı Amerikalı feminist aktivist yazarlar Audre Lorde'un *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* ve June Jordan'ın *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* eserleri kadın yaşam anlatıları geleneğinin örnekleridir. Karakterlerin gelişimini anlatan anı türündeki bu eserler, anlatıcılarının ırkçılık, cinsiyetçilik, sınıf ayrımcılığı ve etnosentrizmin gölgesindeki travmatik tecrübelerini anlatır. Genç anlatıcıların kimlik mücadeleleri, Karayipli Afrikalı Amerikalı çevrelerinde ve asimilasyonu teşvik eden beyaz toplumda yaygın olan çelişkili ve ön yargılı kadınlık tanımlarıyla daha karmaşık bir hal alır. Yaşadıkları çevrenin tutarsız ve aykırı kültür kodlarına rağmen, anlatıcılar feminist farkındalıkla toplumun kabul ettiği ırk ve cinsiyet normlarını yeniden tanımlayıp, kadın dayanışması ve kardeşliğiyle kendi kimliklerini oluştururken, ırk ve cinsiyet tabanlı konumlandırılmalarının da farkına varırlar.

Audre Lorde'un makale derlemesi *Sister Outsider*, onun hastalık anlatısı/anısı *The Cancer Journals* ve June Jordan'ın makale derlemesi *Civil Wars* otobiyografik feminist manifestolardır. Bu eserler, Afrikalı Amerikalı deneyimini başka yerlerde yaşayan toplumların deneyimleriyle ilişkilendiren feminist görüşleri ve gündemleri yansıtırlar. Lorde ve Jordan'ın ulusaşırı bakış açılarına göre, gelişen ve gelişmekte olan ülkelerde egemen ataerkil düzen içerisinde ırkçılık, kadın düşmanlığı ve sınıf ayrımı kesişen konulardır. Beyaz orta sınıf feminizmi ve ayrılıkçı kimlik politikalarının aksine, Lorde ve Jordan, umursamazlığa, sansüre ve kadın öyküsünün yok sayılıp tek tipleştirilmesine karşı, kadın sesini bir güç simgesi olarak kabul eden koalisyon politikalarını destekler ve işçi sınıfı kadınlarını, kadın bedeninin nesneleştirilmesini, özcü yaklaşımları savunan medyayı ve beden politikalarını, aile içi/toplumsal şiddeti ve ayrımcılığı incelerler. Yukarıda adı geçen eserler, çoğulcu, çok sesli ve çok yönlü feminizm(leri) teşvik ettiği için İkinci Dalga Feminizmin Üçüncü Dalga Feminizme evrilmesini örnekler.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yaşam anlatıları, Afrikalı Amerikalı Feminizmi, Kimlik, Kesişimsellik, Koalisyon, Kardeşlik.

ABSTRACT

İLİMEN, Ezgi. *Feminist Activist Politics and Sisterhood in the Life Narratives of Audre Lorde and June Jordan*, Master's Thesis. Ankara, 2017.

African American feminist writers Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and June Jordan's *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* are examples of women's life writing tradition. These coming of age memoirs describe the traumatic ordeals of their narrators under the shadow of racism, sexism, classism and ethnocentrism. The young narrators' struggles for visible identities are further complicated by the contradictory and prejudiced definitions of womanhood prevalent in their Caribbean African American background and in the assimilationist attitudes of the white community. Despite the contradictory and conflicting cultural codes of their environments, the narrators are able to come to an understanding of their racial and gender positionalities and form independent female identities through solidarity and sisterhood, while redefining socially constructed race and gender norms with a feminist consciousness.

Audre Lorde's essay collection *Sister Outsider*, her illness narrative/memoir *The Cancer Journals* and June Jordan's essay collection *Civil Wars* are autobiographical feminist manifestos. These works reflect feminist perspectives and agendas that connect African Americans to other communities around the world. Lorde's and Jordan's transnational views suggest that the dominant patriarchal outlook can cause the intersectionality of racism, misogyny and classism in developing and developed nations. Unlike white middle class feminism or separatist identity politics, they advocate coalition politics, which regards women's voices as powerful narratives against ignorance, censorship and the standardization of de-storied women, addressing working class women, sexual objectification, essentialist media and body politics, domestic/public violence and other discrimination. The above-mentioned works represent a shift from Second Wave to Third Wave feminist concerns by encouraging pluralistic, polyvocal and multi-issue feminisms.

Key Words: Life narratives, African American Feminism, Identity, Intersectionality, Coalition, Sisterhood.

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INTRODUCTION

The exclusion of women of color from the mainstream feminism of the 1960s and 70s, which prioritized the concerns of white middle class women and advocated their visibility and representation in the public and political spheres, paved the way for the African American Feminist Movement. Although prominent African American feminists such as Pauli Murray undertook crucial positions in the National Organization for Women (NOW), women of color remained outside Second Wave Feminism with their persistent and unresolved problems. The African American Feminist Movement, like other culture specific feminist movements such as Asian American and Chicana Feminism, emerged with manifestos that reflected shared experiences and unique perspectives which contrasted with the homogenizing tendency of mainstream white middle class feminism. White middle class feminists promoted an agenda that ignored the hardships of multicultural, biracial, working class and marginalized women who were victimized by racism, misogyny, violence, homophobia and conformist categorizations. They, in one way or another, benefited from white privilege. For this reason, African American feminists, activists and scholars like June Jordan and Audre Lorde reclaimed a racial, sexual and cultural identity by transforming differences into strengths through their politics. In other words, they engaged in the coalition politics of women-identified women.

June Jordan and Audre Lorde confirm the multiple and intersectional nature of female self and identity in their life narratives. Jordan's memoir and ethnic autobiography *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* (2001) is interwoven with June's attempts to articulate her Caribbean immigrant parents' conflicting aspirations and her encounters with racial and gender discrimination, along with domestic violence provoked by white supremacist culture. *Soldier* focuses on the roots of Jordan's radical feminism and activism and attempts to redefine race and gender in a new light by referring to her Jamaican American father and childhood in the African American community. On the other hand, June Jordan's essay collection *Civil Wars* (1981) is enriched with references to her childhood and adult life as a mother and scholar. *Civil Wars* illustrates her activist and feminist concerns, rooted in her

immigrant parents' insecurities, as well as rampant discrimination and the identity crisis of African American youth within the white education system. Jordan's essays offer solutions to end women's suffering through collectivism and internationalism, expanding African American Feminism in global and transnational directions.

Jordan's contemporary Audre Lorde was a poet, an essayist and African American feminist activist. *The Cancer Journals* (1980) is an illness narrative or autopathography, in which Lorde emerges as a one breasted amazon and a survivor of breast cancer while defying conformist feminine appearances. Lorde's biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1983) depicts her childhood, cultural recovery and a sexual coming of age narrative that describes her Caribbean immigrant parents' impact, specifically her mother's survival methods, together with the mythical and nurturing female bonding of the Carriacou women, or Zami. Zami attests to her faith in sisterhood and coalition politics among women due to the intersectionality of grievances.[1] Lorde's autobiographical essay collection *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) further explains her quest for sisterhood, woman-identified woman, the politicization of women's worries, and against systematic oppression and the excommunication of dissenting voices regarding racial, sexual or class-based differences. These life narratives and memoirs reflect the cultural (de)construction and feminist (re)construction of the female self and body and advocate a feminist agenda that repudiates epistemic violence and separatist normative categorizations of gender, race and sexuality. Thus, Jordan's and Lorde's life narratives are a form of activism. They are initiation stories against misogynoir, racism and sexism against African American women, and gender devaluation, and reflect a transnational turn of identity and perspective through African American Feminism. Both Jordan and Lorde assume a unifying feminist role for all women through global consciousness and identification, in spite of disparities among individuals, communities and cultures.

[1] Coined by African American scholar Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, intersectionality is a concept that describes the interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination such as racism, classism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and so on. Crenshaw particularly indicates racial and gender prejudice that overlaps in the lives of women of color.

ABOUT JUNE JORDAN AND AUDRE LORDE

Born in Harlem and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, June Jordan (1936-2002) was a feminist activist poet, journalist and an essayist. In an interview with Peter Erickson, Jordan talks about her family, especially her father, the roots of her race consciousness, intellectual growth and her concerns related to gendered occupations and expectations. Jordan states that her father trained her like a boy and demanded physical and mental stamina besides high academic achievements: "as a girl and as a black person in this country there were a lot of ways in which people might have tried to make me feel inferior or unable. But I never felt inferior or unable on an intellectual level. That, in a perverse way, was something my father gave me" (Erickson 134). Her works of poetry include *Things That I Do in the Dark* (1977), *Naming Our Destiny* (1989) and *Haruko/ Love Poems* (1994), with a foreword by Adrienne Rich. Jordan's essay collections are *Civil Wars* (1981), *On Call* (1985) and *Technical Difficulties: African-American Notes on the State of the Union* (1992). In the paperback version of *Technical Difficulties*, Toni Morrison refers to June Jordan as "our premier black woman essayist." Jordan's works account for the diversity of her concerns; namely, gender studies, African American studies, human rights, postcolonialism, consciousness raising, the politics of power and bisexual reflections on love. Jordan is notable for her fluid descriptions of racial and sexual identity without restrictive borders and divisions. Besides her former affiliation with black nationalists, she defends the rights of African Americans through coalition politics (Erickson 132). Her essays in *On Call* exemplify Jordan's transnational political ideas, activist tendencies and humanist approach while addressing the political regimes in South Africa and Nicaragua, African American poetry, African American vernacular and the intersectionality of race and class in the United States.

Jordan wrote poetry volumes, essays, libretti and children books devoted to human rights issues and liberal politics. Her poetry volumes deal with identity politics, self-portraiture, political struggles, reforms and the international collaboration of outsiders. *Some Changes* (1971), *Living Room* (1985) and *Kissing God Goodbye: Poems 1991-1997* (1997) deal with

issues concerning family relations, bisexuality, political persecution, ethnic identity and race discrimination through individual, cultural and communal memory. Jordan emphasizes the use of African American vernacular English in the African American community while seeking understanding and identification. She also participated in the Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Sexual Liberation Movements and gave lectures at Yale, the University of California, Berkeley and Stony Brook University ("June Jordan").

In *Civil Wars: Selected Essays* (1981), Jordan talks about her childhood in Harlem and her Jamaican parents as she recalls her constant struggle with domineering people, specifically her father. She attended prominent American schools where her interest in poetry was guided by teachers who actually ignored African American poets. She dropped out of New York's Barnard College due to their white dominant perspective and sexist educational program. Her book of poetry *Who Look at Me* (1969) was published for the African American youth to attract their attention to African American vernacular English, communal integrity and cultural unity. She encouraged African American students to use the black vernacular during her workshops. She was also co-editor of the publication of *The Voice of the Children* with Terri Bush, which was a compilation of her African American and Puerto Rican students' writings in 1970 ("June Jordan").

June Jordan's interest in African American youth is evident in her works. Her novel *His Own Where* (1971) describes Jordan's fondness of environmental planning, architecture and policies in relation to the African American communal life. In this work, she reflects her views through African American teenagers Buddy and Angela while using vernacular language. *Dry Victories* (1972), *New Life: New Room* (1975) and *Kimako's Story* (1981) also focus on the lives of African American youth. Subsequently, she delves into her own childhood in *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* (2000). Jordan's life narrative portrays her young self in a chaotic environment while dealing with an ill-tempered father who has visions of a tough and bright child. She claims that her motive in writing this work was to ennoble her father and draw attention to an exceptional girl. As critic Stephanie Zvirin states, *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* is an unforgettable autobiographical account because of Jordan's intense and antagonistic relationship with her father ("June Jordan"). In *Soldier*, Jordan provides a

view of hierarchical race and gender relations, the black masculinity crisis and the class struggles of Caribbean immigrants, from a child's perspective.

Jordan also wrote a column in the *Progressive* and essays in which she voiced her political views. *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (2002) includes Jordan's previously published essays as well as new ones. This essay collection addresses racial and sexual prejudices, African American vernacular, her visits to foreign countries, a critique of the American education system and the 9/11 attacks ("June Jordan"). According to Jewelle Gomez, Jordan's last work, *Some of Us Did Not Die* reflects her predictions and ideas, which were informed by the Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Pacifist Movements. Her progressivism as an activist feminist scholar was not deceived by the illusions of academia or politics. Gomez also states that her influential works keep her impassioned voice and ideas alive: "Her poems and essays remain as vibrant and as useful today as they were when she first hurled them into the air around us. They reverberate there still. She did not die" (718).

June Jordan is not acknowledged in the academic canon despite her appealing critical voice and didactic style and reflections on race matters, gender roles, communal bonds, world politics and postcolonial issues. According to Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, as a prolific essayist and poet, Jordan is excluded from many notable anthologies, which confirms that the canon is still influenced by identity politics. June Jordan's works have influenced other writers such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. Her wide spectrum of works from different genres are concerned with African Americans, people of color, ethnic groups, women's issues and the potential of language and activism.[2] As Brogan remarks, "There is always something of the warrior in Jordan, no matter what the form" (198-9). June Jordan's and Audre Lorde's commitment to defending women's rights as human rights by encouraging collaboration among women without discrimination is apparent. Jordan's internationalism and Lorde's intersectionality reformulate gender norms, cultural recovery and racial pride against ageism, sexism, racial bias, ethnocentrism, homophobia and colonial abuse. Their version of African American feminism goes beyond specific and

[2] People of color is a general term that refers to all non-white people, as a group.

separatist identity politics which promote conformism. In the light of their progressive feminism and activism, their literature becomes a means to reach a wide audience with faith and reassurance.

Scott MacPhail describes the significance of the historical events and the cultural transformation of the African American intellectual through June Jordan and her contemporaries who were active in the Civil Rights Movement and the subsequent Black Power era. The 1960s are notable for the politicization of African Americans who were working to change legislation, organizing protests such as the March on Washington in 1963, influencing the Voting Rights Act of 1964 and expanding the role of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC volunteers worked to raise consciousness for the Freedom Schools of the South, and these institutions helped develop a sense of community and awareness of African American history and culture. On the other hand, the Black Power Movement acknowledged a separatist agenda, nationalist politics and militant activism to reclaim African American identity. Alongside Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka became exemplary models for June Jordan's generation with their (un)compromising ideologies and political agendas (MacPhail 58-9). While James Baldwin dealt with social and cultural representations of African American identity, Amiri Baraka became the spokesperson of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements. Baldwin and Baraka questioned the position of the "black" intellectual whose cultural legacy and audience changed with the ideological tendencies of integration or the division of races.

Since June Jordan was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement and in Black Nationalism, her works were integral to the politics of the period, even though she was not as high profile as African American men. Still, according to Scott MacPhail, Jordan exemplified the new "black" intellectuals through her connection to social movements and the community (63). Jordan's *Civil Wars* (1981) contains essays published in *The New Republic* and *Ms*., among many others, and convey Baldwin's and Baraka's influences. Jordan addresses the African American community and white academics about African American studies, college curricula, the cultural value of black vernacular, the unpublished

facts related to the 1964 Harlem Riots and police violence, while advocating linguistic empowerment and public awareness for the African American community (63-4). Her *Technical Difficulties: African-American Notes on the State of the Union* (1992) depicts international issues and politics with the aim of reaching readers beyond America. As a self-defined "dissident" poet who identifies with the burdens of the oppressed and wrongly judged, she combines knowledge with experience. As a result, Jordan amalgamates her reclamation of power, global politics and her unique concerns and experiences while voicing different standpoints in her political writing (MacPhail 67).

For instance, she reflects the concerns of Black Nationalism with reverence to African American culture and experience, despite her criticism of the gender discrimination in the Black Power Movement. Moreover, Jordan restrains from supporting feminism that fails to acknowledge the class, race and gender specific politics of empowerment. She associates with diverse ideologies and political movements. As MacPhail indicates, "Jordan cannot fit herself to the simplicity necessary to promote a traditional nationalist argument, but shifts her position and tactics in order to better serve the interest of all three terms of the hyphenated moniker 'African-American Woman'" (66). Her unique approach to feminism acknowledges differences based on race, nationality and gender.

In "The Intimate Distance of Desire," Analouise Keating argues that June Jordan's poetry and prose state her "interactional identity," which connects individual improvement to social catalysts. Her "self-naming" is a deliberate act in presenting the interconnectedness of the self and the progress of the community. Jordan combines her bisexual African American identity of Jamaican descent with accounts of subjugated people who face discrimination due to their ethnicity, colonization and homophobia. She relates to the similarities and differences of the others while denouncing "restrictive notions of isolated self-enclosed individual identities and creat[ing] intimate dialogues between herself and her readers." Thus, Keating suggests that she invents an intersubjective and potentially transformational space that she invites readers to share ("The Intimate Distance" 82). Jordan gathers people on common ground through indiscriminate definitions, terms and views of the selves.

In terms of identity politics, June Jordan claims that the assertion of identity is crucial but that individual consciousness requires interaction with people for collective activism and resolution. Without taking initiative for change, the adoption of identity politics does not challenge an individual or yield some form of social benefit. According to Jordan, acknowledgement of one's background and roots is an individual project. However, such identity-based politics do not harbor reconciliation between people. Thus, she emphasizes the constructive and unifying function of a politics that centers upon actions instead of identity to accomplish "revolutionary potential" (Erickson 149). In other words, Jordan believes that belonging to a community or an ethnic group forges a pathway towards alliances with others for the politicization of struggle through self-will (149). Furthermore, clinging to a group identity obscures the differences among and individual characteristics of group members, which results in silence, division and failure in politics in the long term. To avoid such a result, June Jordan advocates coalition politics, in other words collaboration through mutual concerns, instead of a conservative and conformist unity around a single issue. This idea resembles the difference between the concepts of the melting pot and cultural mosaic. Multicultural and multiethnic societies are often explained through these terms. Identity politics, whether concerned with race, gender, sexuality or class consciousness, are identical to the melting pot concept, an amalgam identity in the name of an ideal, unified and well-conducted society. The melting pot metaphor, which idealizes "E pluribus unum" or "Out of many, one," is an assimilationist American ideal that meant to transform a nation of immigrants into a homogenous identity and harmonious existence through the annihilation of cultural differences. By the same token, identity politics strive to present a uniform picture and has a tendency to dismiss or extinguish multiplicity for the common good of the majority. The concept of the cultural mosaic, however, resembles the coalition politics of June Jordan and Audre Lorde because coalition politics promotes unity by preserving distinct backgrounds, in other words pluralism, in light of mutual concerns.

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was an African American feminist activist and a lesbian scholar of Caribbean descent, who wrote about "pride, love, anger, fear, racial and sexual

oppression, urban neglect, and personal survival" (Kulii, Reuman, and Trapasso). Lorde's works deal with ostracism, which is a common social response to diversity and a divergence from cultural homogeneity. Audrey Geraldine Lorde was born in New York as the third daughter of her Caribbean immigrant parents Frederic Byron and Linda Belmar Lorde. Raised in Harlem in the midst of the Great Depression, Lorde was unable to speak until she started to read and was visually impaired as a child. She grew up listening to her mother's stories of the West Indies. Lorde changed her name to Audre, dropping the last letter, an example of her consistent self-naming and the reformulation of her female identity as a writer and poet. She attended Catholic schools where she encountered implicit and explicit forms of race discrimination. Due to her disciplined parents and rampant racism, she sought relief in poetry and solidarity with discriminated students from her school. She received a Bachelor's degree from Hunter College and attended the National University of Mexico where she embraced her identity as a lesbian poet. Later, she obtained a Master's degree from Columbia University in Library Science (Kulii, et al.).

Audre Lorde's poems were widely published in anthologies and African American literary magazines in the 1960s, including Langston Hughes's 1962 *New Negro Poets USA*. At the same time, she was actively participating in the Civil Rights, Pacifist and Feminist Movements. Through a National Endowment for the Arts scholarship, she worked in Tougaloo College in 1968. The same year, *The First Cities*, her first book of poetry, was published. *Cables to Rage* (1970) consists of poems about love, deceit, motherhood and child rearing. As Ann E. Reuman remarks, this volume of poetry reveals her criticism of race and sex discrimination and touches upon her cyclical themes of "violence, hunger, cloaks of lies, dishonest silences, struggle for voice, faith in the capacity to love, growth through dreams, desperate hope and defiance amid dying and loss, and painful birthing" (Kulii, et al.). Reuman emphasizes that *Cables to Rage* reveals Lorde's international awareness and her preference of discarded subjects, unlike her contemporaries who were concerned about African American nationalist politics and urban realism at the time. Lorde feels indebted to her foremothers, women in her life and African and African American

influences. Her poetry, essays and life narratives avow the need of communal bonds, alliance of diverse groups and relief from persecution (Kulii, et al.).

Another collection of her poetry, *A Land Where Other People Live* (1973), is remarkable in terms of Lorde's poetic progress and feminist consciousness towards suffering and inequality in the world. She writes about being an African American woman, mother and sister. Her poetry reveals rage, fear, solitude and love, and these personal recollections are transformed into political and common experience. The same year, *A Land Where Other People Live* was nominated for the National Book Award for poetry. *New York Head Shop and Museum* (1974) deals with socio-political problems and is claimed to be a collection of Lorde's most progressive and uncompromising poems, describing misery and blight in New York City. Here, Lorde points to the political means of struggle and her words echo the critical revolt of the Civil Rights Era. *Coal* (1976) enables Lorde to address a large spectrum of readers and includes poems from *The First Cities* and *Cables to Rage*. Her poem "Coal" is an affirmation and valorization of African American identity in spite of a sexist, biased and violent society. She responds through women's solidarity and collaboration. *The Black Unicorn* (1978) pursues African history, myths and religions and their origins in her contemplation of women, racial dignity, maternity, piety, sexual orientation and politics. As critic Beverly T. Kulii claims, this book is viewed as Lorde's invocation of power, sagacity and patience as derived from African goddesses (Kulii, et al.).

Audre Lorde's life writing, *The Cancer Journals* (1980) is a notable divergence from her poetry and essays. The work narrates a lesbian non-white woman's perspective on terminal illness along with her choices and bodily self-autonomy. The chapters of the work consist of essays and journal sections in which she explains her struggle with breast cancer by candidly revealing details of her mastectomy and post-surgery. The chapter, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," describes her views on lesbianism and literature prior to the diagnosis.[3] "A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience" narrates the

[3] This essay was later published in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) and will be analyzed as part of that essay collection in the second chapter.

absence of guidance and role models for an African American cancer patient during medical examinations, surgical procedure and convalescence. She emerges a fighter, determined to overcome her illness and grateful for female assistance during that period. Finally, the "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis" section narrates her rejection of a breast prosthesis because of its cultural, medical and commercial interference with her body. The mission of her journal is to search for ways to embrace loss, agony and eventual death. Her approach to cancer affirms her view of difference through the new acceptance of her body without hiding or concealing deformation. As a breast cancer survivor, her journal provides a linguistic remedy for her wounds and allows access to other women with similar problems. *The Cancer Journals* was named the American Library Association Gay Caucus Book of the Year in 1981. The following year, her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* was published. *A Burst of Light* (1988) is Lorde's account of liver cancer. Nonetheless, the ignorance of these works by major publishers signifies Lorde's lifelong struggle with neglect and silence (Kulii, et al.). Critic Darryl L. Wellington comments on Lorde's opposition to oppressive "fixed definitions" in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. As Wellington states, her biomythography attacks patriarchal authority in two ways: the mythical sisterhood concept and the deconstruction of the genre. Lorde indicates the presence of unconstrained female societies within the American patriarchy. She re-directs "male-centered definitions of history, mythology, autobiography and fiction" and redefines female identity in African American feminist terms (Wellington 51).

The publication of *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986) and *Undersong: Chosen Poems Old and New* (1992) proves that Lorde continued to write poetry in her later years. She was dedicated to redefine naming and differences through women's solidarity, self-love and tolerance since she was marginalized due to her race, sex and sexuality. Lorde's articulation of her experience and ideas forms the center of *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984). As Beverly T. Kulii suggests, the work addresses antagonism and distance between African American community, feminists and lesbians, although the need to agree upon mutual issues exists (Kulii, et al.). As poet and critic Darryl Lorenzo Wellington claims, Audre Lorde had faith in "unity, not uniformity" with respect to feminist organizations,

which were supposed to collaborate and negotiate beyond separatist classifications and standardizations. According to Lorde, polyvocalism and multiple consciousness was supposed to secure the Civil Rights legacy (Wellington 51).

Lori L. Walk views Audre Lorde's life narratives such as *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, *The Cancer Journals*, *A Burst of Light*, *Sister Outsider* and her poetry in light of diversity and shifting identity. According to Walk, these works are the embodiment of Lorde's survey of "positionality," in other words her "politics of location," since her identity is (pre)determined by multiple roles, expectations and statuses in the context of restrictive notions of identity politics. Lorde's notion of identity encourages coalition politics to embrace culture, gender and ethnicity through mobile identifications and representations (Walk 815). Lori L. Walk also asserts that Lorde emerges as an advocate of collaborative action despite multiple and different affinities. In her poetry, life narratives and essays, Lorde brings forth "the erotic, the lyrical, and the mythological" realms as refuge from conformist expectations. Furthermore, she glorifies "lyrical and poetic energy," which nourishes her activist and resourceful spirit. She emphasizes the unifying aspect of difference as a woman of color, feminist activist, lesbian and cancer survivor. She overcomes the physical and psychological pain of mastectomy by redefining the surgery as a "battle marker" and reinterprets her body through her life narratives, poems and essays of positionality (Walk 816).

THE CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

To understand June Jordan's and Audre Lorde's contribution to the African American Feminist Movement, a brief survey of the development of feminism is necessary. First Wave Feminism covers the era from 1848 Seneca Falls "Declaration of Sentiments" to the Suffrage Amendment in 1920. Women's rights leaders, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott, drafted a diverse agenda based on the legal, political,

moral and social standing of the "feme sole" and "feme covert."[4] They fought for property rights, divorce and child custody, education and training, and employment in prominent positions. These women discussed issues openly and participated in different forms of activism such as the abolition movement, temperance movement and progressive politics, including access to birth control and improving women's legal working conditions (Kolmar and Bartkowski 62).

Second Wave Feminism rose into prominence by means of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and ended with conservative reactions to the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1970s. Friedan talked about the unspoken problem of white middle class suburban wives who felt suffocated in their domestic roles and expectations of 1950s society. According to Friedan, post-World War II baby boom politics and the conformist media defined the status of women merely as wives and mothers who were supposed to cherish housewifery, child-raising and femininity through essentialist interpretations, in other words, biological determinism for women. Suburban wives did not approve of their mothers' aspirations for careers, higher education or political activism since they were dedicated to marriage as an occupation (Friedan 198). Friedan states that suburban wives' depression was connected to the multi-functional roles and traditional duties of the "modern housewife" (Friedan 202). After the relative economic freedom provided by the war time economy, women were expected to adopt socially constructed gender roles under the illusion of self-choice. However, they only glorified motherhood, biological destiny and the comforts of middle class life. Friedan, who quickly became the spokesperson of these issues, laid the foundation of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

NOW's 1966 "Statement of Purpose" set the agenda of the mainstream feminist movement, which firmly reinforced the fight against sexism in the workplace, politics, courts, education and American households. The replacement of gender bias that targeted women's capacity and capabilities with equal education, employment and opportunity was prioritized. NOW addressed the cultural institutions and political authorities that limited

[4] According to British common law, which was inherited by the American colonies, "feme sole" refers to a single woman while "feme covert" represents a married woman.

women's status in society, but without defying traditional roles. The organization advocated state-sponsored childcare and job training for mothers who preferred to work (National Organization for Women 212). NOW also criticized male privilege and discrimination against women's admission to higher education, professional training and social indifference to drop-out rates, calling for scholarships and educational guidance. Equal partnership in marriage was preferred instead of the gendered division of housework and child-raising. Thus, equality of the sexes, and reformed marriage and divorce legislation was emphasized (National Organization for Women 213).

Radical feminist groups such as the Redstockings, the Furies Collective, a lesbian-feminist group, and the Lavender Menace were among the consciousness raising groups that emerged out of Second Wave Feminism. The National Organization for Women's appeal to white middle class concerns incited separate statements from these radical feminist groups. Radical lesbians emerged from a Lavender Menace protest in 1970 to denounce the exclusion of lesbians from NOW due to the movement's roots in white privilege and the preservation of oppressive heterosexist gender roles. According to their statement "The Woman-Identified Woman," a lesbian "acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society" and thus dares to question the accepted patterns of gendered behavior, norms and roles (Radicalesbians 239). In terms of women's reexamination of their conflicting inner desires and communal demands, radical lesbians concluded that: "The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women because we are all women" (Radicalesbians 240). Betty Friedan used the term "lavender menace" to condemn and eliminate radical lesbian feminists from mainstream white middle class feminism. Concerned about the problems of middle class housewives, Friedan seemed to be wary of any identification with radical feminist agenda because NOW's cooperation with radical lesbians, she believed, would endanger their struggles to reform the patriarchal system. In reality, Second Wave Feminism benefited from radical feminist groups since these groups challenged societal norms of gender, promoted women-identified women regardless of differences, and often received extensive media coverage.

Unlike mainstream, heterosexual feminists, radical feminists and lesbian feminists discussed the roles of sex, gender, sexuality, reproduction and patriarchy in relation to the suppression of women. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970) and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) are referential texts of the era claiming that the "personal is political" (Kolmar and Bartkowski 196-7). The 1970s was marked with progress in the field of women's rights. *Roe v. Wade* (1973) legalized abortion, but triggered debates about reproductive rights and birth control.[5] NOW was actively involved in politics, and radical and liberal activism helped to establish solidarity among some women. This form of sisterhood, however, remained questionable due to the neglect of women of color and working class women (197). Second Wave Feminism was successful in raising consciousness and turning persecution into political activism. The movement highlighted the concerns of white middle class women but neglected the racial problems and demands of the working class despite claims of sisterhood with women of color. The main separation from NOW began with statements from African American feminists and Chicana feminists. They triggered Third Wave Feminism through mutual and culture specific agendas. African American Feminism paved the way for a redefinition of racial, sexual and cultural identity, without stereotypical labelling and biased divisions. Therefore, African American feminists signified a global shift and a transnational turn of identity from Second Wave into Third Wave Feminism.

During this transition came a feminist backlash, or a conservative public and political reaction to the women's rights movement. The backlash (between the 1970s and 1980s) was a media supported response based on a reassertion of patriarchal power and conformist gender roles. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment, temporary legal victories such as the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, and the circulation of media stories about the declining birth rate, reproductive problems and women's takeover of male-dominated

[5] *Roe v. Wade* is a Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion during the pregnancy, although state laws could regulate the second and third trimesters. The decision triggered a fierce struggle between the pro-life supporters who advocate the rights of the fetus and the pro-choice groups who view motherhood as a reproductive right. Thus, the termination of a pregnancy is a constitutional freedom that considers the mother's health and fetal rights. Abortion is still a controversial and political issue lying on the axis of religion, biology and constitutional rights.

occupations contributed to the feminist backlash. American journalist Susan Faludi regards such anti-feminist stances as “outright propaganda—that has served to stir women’s private anxieties and break their political wills” (xviii).

According to Susan Faludi, the feminist backlash found supporters among evangelical fundamentalists and the neoconservatives of the 1970s. Due to the Republican influence in politics, the feminist backlash gained widespread public approval by the 1980s. Faludi states that the political and social atmosphere indicated a radical shift against gender equality just as women were taking active roles in politics and fighting against violence for protective laws and measures. Women’s shelters, rape centers, equal pay demands and reproductive freedom seemed defiant and irrelevant to a new surge of anti-feminists who stigmatized women’s rights (Faludi xix). Conservative women such as Phyllis Schlafly, came into prominence and attacked the corruptive influence of the feminism upon traditional womanhood and family. They blamed the feminist quest of women’s rights for masculinity crises and social imbalance, thus serving the agenda of the status quo.

As Faludi points out, such politics reversed women’s reproductive control and their quest for equal opportunities in traditionally male dominated jobs. Conservatives eradicated federal funding and weakened protecting legislation concerning abortion, planned parenthood and women’s working conditions. For this reason, the fetus was granted priority over the mother’s health, women were dismissed from certain fields of work, forced to undergo medical procedures and even imprisoned for being neglectful mothers (Faludi 55). The feminist backlash brought reverse discrimination against women through the patriarchal and political manipulation of motherhood. Women’s gains from the affirmative action era were assumed to be uncurbed while aggressive media and politics promoted fears of infertility, false or inadequate reports of low marriage rates, and radical feminists. Feminism’s popular notoriety either motivated women to retreat into domestic life or emerge as staunch opponents of women’s rights to the point of making a career out of discredited feminism. Phyllis Schlafly became the spokesperson of the conservative anti-feminist campaign. She took an active role in the feminist backlash regarding the Equal Rights Amendment and reproductive rights. Ironically, she praised the traditional division

of gender roles and white middle class housewifery while working as a devout activist and lawyer.

Between the years 1975 and 1985, the transition from Second Wave to Third Wave Feminism occurred, marked by the failure of Equal Rights Amendment which also symbolized the culmination of the feminist backlash. New activist feminist branches dealing with discrimination against Chicana, Asian American and African American women emerged with culture-specific agendas concerning stereotypical portrayals, their status in political discourse, problems in the workplace and their exclusion from the feminist movement. Women of color criticized their invisibility within women's studies as well as the ignorance of white middle class feminism through works such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (1982) by Akasha Gloria Hull and Barbara Smith. Differences in lesbian and straight feminists' view of heterosexuality and their agendas divided the feminist movement. Such separation and divisions lead to a need for global feminism as the publication of Chandra Mohanty's "Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" indicates in 1984 (Kolmar and Bartkowski 291). Moreover, together with these works, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) laid the foundation of Third World feminism, which contributed to Third Wave, Global and Transnational feminisms.

African American women's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and feminism are noteworthy. African American feminism addresses race and culture-specific problems on activist and political grounds. Members of the Combahee River Collective, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith and Demita Frazier wrote "A Black Feminist Statement" in 1977. The document reflects a dedication to fight against various forms of oppression including racism, sexism, heterosexism and class privilege from which all women of color suffer. The statement seeks legitimacy by referring to exemplary women such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Ida B. Wells Barnett, among many others, whose activist racial and gender concerns influenced African American feminism. This reference creates a historical

and an ancestral space without the patronizing attitude of mainstream white middle class feminism (Combahee River Collective 312).

The reasons behind organizing a separate movement without the limitations of the Second Wave Feminism and other African American political movements are explained in "A Black Feminist Statement." African American women and women of other developing countries are marginalized and their contributions within the general feminist movements are devalued because of racism, ethnocentrism and class privilege.[6] Although African American feminists also worked for civil rights among Black Panthers and nationalists, they experienced a subordinate status through sexist limitations (Combahee River Collective 312). African American women's demands for equal rights benefited the 1960s political struggle against race discrimination. However, their concerns were also linked to gender specific socio-economic conditions and patriarchal norms within the African American community. African American women needed to develop distinct perspectives outside mainstream white middle class feminism and the male chauvinism of Black Nationalism. As a result, they established the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973 and issued the African American feminist statement in 1977.

In "A Black Feminist Statement," the members of Combahee River Collective address the intersectionality of racial, sexual and class discrimination with respect to African American and white women. Their statement declares: "We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective 313). African American women focused on race discrimination since they were usually governed, represented and employed by white agents. Mainstream feminism's class consciousness and white privilege failed to address their working class struggle with poverty and race prejudice. Black nationalists and the Black Power Movement were inclined to privilege the

[6] "Black Feminism" and "Third World Feminism" are closely associated. Instead of these terms, African American feminism and women from developing countries will be used since these terms are preferred designations.

rights of African American men. Moreover, Civil Rights organizations incorporated male supremacy and a sexist hierarchy through their disparaging remarks about women. Sexual objectification, stereotypical portrayals, elitism and race discrimination, together with essentialist assumptions, laid the foundation of African American feminism. Despite their numerous disappointments, "A Black Feminist Statement" calls for cooperation with other African American organizations as long as they reject racial and gender prejudices (313). African American feminism challenged prejudiced views and accusations that regarded feminism as antagonistic towards African American men and communal unity. June Jordan and Audre Lorde saw racial, gender and socio-economic positionality as a motive, rather than a threat, to coalition politics within the African American community and between women of color and white society.

"The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (1995) is one of the foundational texts of Third Wave Feminism with its promise to represent a plurality of voices and multiple concerns such as world peace, domestic violence and the equality of sexes through the collaboration of governments and international organizations. The declaration employs a persuasive and global rhetoric regarding women's conditions and victimization, and it was the center-piece of the Fourth United Nations World Conference with the slogan "Women's rights are human rights" ("The Beijing Declaration" 522). The conference agenda included the feminization of poverty, equal education rights, health care services, sexist politics, media representations and girls' rights ("The Beijing Declaration" 524-5). The Beijing Conference was crucial in its transformation of local and regional concerns such as child brides, sex trafficking, ethnic violence and migration into global issues. The conference highlighted institutionalized gender inequality and demographic imbalance through government sponsored practices, such as the one-child policy and sex selective abortion in China and India. These transnational concerns, together with older Second Wave issues, became part of Third Wave Feminism. The "Third Wave Manifesta" by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards is concerned with the visibility of feminists and issues that were neglected by Second Wave Feminism such as the concerns of women of color, lesbian feminism and the "lavender menace." Baumgardner and Richards integrated the

voices of de-storied "radical feminism, womanism, *mujeristas* and women's liberation" into Third Wave Feminism as well as issues such as women in the military, the wage gap and the Equal Rights Amendment (Baumgardner and Richards 568-9). The statement calls for reorganization under a broad multi-issue agenda of polyvocal feminism after the backlash years and divisions due to self-interests.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMINISM, CRITICISM AND WOMEN'S LITERATURE

In *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*, Barbara Christian draws attention to the class differences between white and African American women that contributes to the racist and sexist positionality of culturally defined centers and margins.[7] Christian states that African American women's works acknowledge the influence of race and gender-based classifications and adds the impact of class to these norms. Like race and gender, class is a signifier of a specific cultural standing and interpretation of womanhood. African American women suffer from working class racial and economic stigmatization as the other. Christian maintains that the demeaning condition of African American women can be traced back to the antebellum southern belle. The southern belle archetype was the perfect woman, designated as prim and proper, always white and upper class. They were domestic women who were never deprived of economic, social or racial privileges and were under the paternalistic protection of southern honor and chivalry. African American women were their foils, and never benefited from the prosperity of domestic bliss or white-washed beauty standards. The survival of non-white women required hard work and skills that were deemed to be manly and pitiful, although their lives were shaped by conditions beyond their control. As Barbara Christian also asserts, "On the one hand, they [African American women] could not achieve the standard of womanhood; on the other hand, they were biologically females, with all the societal restrictions associated with that state" (*Black Feminist Criticism* 72). As dehumanized others, African American women could not

[7] Barbara Christian's *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1997) is the major focus of this section due to her detailed cultural, literary and ideological analysis of Jordan's and Lorde's works.

hold on to the security of upper class status or traditional views of motherhood due to their distance from the idealized southern belle. In order to challenge white patriarchal representation of African American womanhood, African American women's literature has reflected a racial, female and communal self-portraiture that presents the empowered position of women as definers rather than defined subjects. African American feminist critics have (re)interpreted a rich literary tradition with a newly gained critical voice that parallels African American feminism and scholarly activism.

Barbara Christian explains that slave women lacked insight and racial visibility before the twentieth century. They were of little value beyond their labor as a foil to the cult of true womanhood. Sexually objectified African American women not only relieved the plantation mistress's domestic duties, but they also secured the mistress's place on a pedestal as delicate and chaste trophy wives with higher social standing. Race specific gender roles defined the status and cultural expectations of African American women and other women of color. African American women were part of the abolition and women's rights campaigns "for a counter definition" that would radically change the concept of womanhood while acknowledging race and class. Christian further claims that women of color's quest for self-naming set an example for the mainstream women's movement. Instead of disowning their identity, as Christian suggests, African American women needed to promote an outspoken and all-embracing identity politics that embraced race, class and gender (*Black Feminist Criticism* 161).

Farah J. Griffin affirms that African American feminism, women's literature and criticism result from the disillusionment with the phallocentrism and parochialism of the Civil Rights Movement, specifically Black Nationalist organizations, and the supervision of white middle class women in the mainstream feminist movement. African American women's publications reflect a broad range of genres from novels, poetry, and plays to autobiographical works. These works give accounts of African American women's experiences and gender relations. Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970) focuses on political and feminist movements. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Mari Evans's *I Am a Black Woman* (1970), Toni Morrison's *The*

Bluest Eye (1970), Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (1975) and Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1976) are other early contemporary African American works of cultural and literary importance (Griffin 485-6).

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiographical work that describes an African American girl's experiences with race and sex prejudice during the 1930s and 1940s. The title alludes to Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Sympathy," and Angelou's book gives an account of her self-reliant grandmother who takes care of her and her brother as a prominent communal figure (Carr 15). Mari Evans's renowned book of poetry *I Am a Black Woman* addresses the dilemmas and fulfilment of African American women with a sense of dignity, which is also manifested in her other works (Allen 186-7). Ntozake Shange's poems, plays and novels introduce a new perspective and narrative method to African American literary tradition. In her "choreopoem" *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (1975), Shange created a new theatrical feminist expression by merging music, dance and poetry. Staged in both Off-Broadway and Broadway theaters, *for colored girls* brought her an Obie Award and a Tony nomination. Due to her play's defiance of traditional genre rules and patriarchal norms, some critics denounced her work. In *for colored girls*, she explicitly describes African American women's lives, trials and unity. Her choreopoem accentuates the intersectionality of race, class and gender since "decorum, tradition, and literary convention" failed to depict these issues satisfactorily (Creque-Harris). Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* criticizes the racism of the feminist movement and the sexism of civil rights campaigns, which discriminated against African American women. Wallace defends her cause through this work as she declares: "The history of the period has been written and will continue to be written without us. The imperative is clear: Either we will make history or remain the victims of it" (xvii).

An analysis of African American women's literature from the 1970s reveals the cornerstones of African American feminist ideology and criticism. As Barbara Christian argues, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of*

Grange Copeland (1970) condemn the African American community for integrating by highlighting racial degradation and gender discrimination, which contribute to the downfall of the female protagonists (*Black Feminist Criticism* 178). *The Bluest Eye* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* criticize the communal treatment of women. They illustrate the possibility of salvation through the characters' "self-definitions," which reject degrading and stereotypical labeling. In the 1970s, African American women's novels and plays depict community as inimical to women's development, status and roles. As Christian conveys, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gayl Jones and Toni Cade Bambara also disclose the communal sacrifice of women as a result of sex and race prejudice (*Black Feminist Criticism* 179).

Novels from the mid-seventies, such as Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), portray uncompromising gender roles and unconventional women. Both works depict self-determined women who transgress traditionally submissive and nurturing domestic roles to forge a path for themselves beyond communal expectations. Sula, for instance, is an egocentric and amoral African American woman who shuns selfless and caring feminine roles. Meridian, similarly, attempts to refashion her identity through the transformative Civil Rights era. As Barbara Christian confirms, these radical women embrace matrilineal heritage as a means of survival. Christian interprets these female protagonists of this decade as "socio-political actors" that subvert established gender and race profiles (*Black Feminist Criticism* 179). According to her, the community regards these women's rejection of marriage and motherhood as an abominable act so that even their homecoming represents their self-willed nature rather than conformism to or reconciliation with the community (*Black Feminist Criticism* 180).

During the 1970s, Audre Lorde, June Jordan and Alice Walker came to symbolize the radical spirit of change and reconceptualization of the African American experience in their poetry. Barbara Christian states that the connection between the African American struggle in the Civil Rights era and feminist politics is similar to the collaboration between the Abolition and Suffrage Movements a century earlier. These political and social movements reveal the interconnectedness of racism and sexism and invoke the eradication of both for a

lasting solution. Specifically, African American feminists' quest for identity seeks resolution in the recovery of the community whereas white middle class feminists address women and their concerns. Barbara Christian emphasizes African American women's historical entanglement with unattainable white gender standards and a lack of opportunity. As Christian also suggests, Audre Lorde, June Jordan and Alice Walker were able to recognize the necessity of communal renewal in relation to women's liberation (*Black Feminist Criticism* 124-25). By calling for African American communal healing, Walker, Lorde, Jordan and Ntozake Shange encourage women of color to collaborate. As Christian states, their poetry conveys the state of developing countries, gender and sex discrimination, female solidarity, gender relations, politics, African American traditions and women's experience (*Black Feminist Criticism* 125).

In terms of the development of African American women's literature, Barbara Christian draws attention to Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) as a quintessential text that exemplifies the African American literary movement's agenda to (re)interpret women's experience by and for themselves. In *Zami*, Lorde's narrated I, Audre, refuses the definitions of white cultural narratives that have manipulated and standardized race and gender around white male norms. As Christian argues, like other African American women writers, Lorde questions the American ideals of republicanism, independence and equality through race, sex and class-based discriminations (*Black Feminist Criticism* 159-60). According to Christian, June Jordan's *Civil Wars* (1981), Gloria Naylor's *The Woman of the Brewster Street* (1982), Ntozake Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* (1982) and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) are examples of African American literary tradition that follow in the footsteps of their literary foremothers. These works are concerned with the toil of African American women, rampant racism, poverty and race-motivated crimes. Because African American literature remained outside the canon for a long time, their literary tradition has been discredited and associated with immigrants, radical politics and various anti-American tendencies. Women of colors' works were deemed less sophisticated and less worthy of critical attention and were assumed to be more audience specific in terms of race, sex and class. However,

Barbara Christian defends these works in the name of "denigrated *Other*" (*Black Feminist Criticism* 160) who is marginalized due to his/her differences from the dominant culture. These works call attention to such infallible discourses, cultural standards and grand narratives by employing a multiplicity of experience and perspectives. Moreover, these narratives reveal a turning point in the authorial voice and legitimacy of working class and minority women's experiences.

For Barbara Christian, Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* along with Naylor's *The Women of the Brewster Street* are exemplary novels that question dominant discourses. Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Jordan's *Civil Wars* are these poets' first autobiographical works. They evoke "the diversity of language in contemporary Afro-American Women's literature." According to Christian, *The Women of the Brewster Street* notably uses the African American vernacular and *Sassafras* reflects African American rhythms and matrilineal traditions through "poetry, dreams, letters, and cooking recipes." Lorde's and Jordan's poetic language is also visible in their autobiographical works. *Zami* (re)interprets Lorde's life and growth in the context of traditional female solidarity and companionship while blending it with "history, myth, and biography." As Christian states, *Civil Wars* focuses on a feminist scholar and political activist's coming of age and narrates her successful politicization of the personal (*Black Feminist Criticism* 162).

The works of the 1970s comment on the connection between race and sex discrimination, including the homophobic labeling of unconventional feminist women. According to Barbara Christian, the "attributes" of lesbian women-boldness, freedom, lust and disobedience-are deemed to be unwomanly and improper, yet stereotypical for African American women. This perverse masculine characterization of lesbianism, feminism and African American women is based on patriarchal gender norms and racial and sexual power relations. Here, Christian points out the reformulation of womanhood and the rewriting of femininity in African American literature (*Black Feminist Criticism* 200). African American women's alliances with other women of color and lesbian feminists, as declared in "Black Feminist Statement," are promoted through feminist criticism. Despite

disparaging sex discrimination and strict gender roles defined by white society, the African American community celebrates difference and redefines "feminine" characteristics.

Barbara Christian valorizes the continuing influence of June Jordan's *Civil Wars* (1980), Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984), emphasizing the writers' fighting spirit, strong will and self-assertion. Christian praises Lorde, Walker and Jordan for "the charting of 'forbidden' paths that contemporary Afro-American women must travel." For her, these women writers not only deplore debilitating social rules, but they also present different portrayals of African American women through their organizations, common sense and even mistakes (*Black Feminist Criticism* 205). Thus, the essay collections of Lorde, Walker and Jordan share a pattern of awareness and life-long growth. *Civil Wars* narrates Jordan's experiences while she wrestles with her fears, aspirations of wholeness, and disempowered cultural positionality as an African American poet, journalist, activist and scholar. In her quest, Jordan discovers and writes about common female oppression through transnationalism. Walker's essay collection credits literary, activist and feminist African American foremothers as nurturing culture keepers. As Christian suggests, as an African American lesbian feminist scholar, Lorde embraced the regenerative potential of "difference," in other words diversity, which dissolves her inner conflicts and reconnects her to the female community in *Sister Outsider* (*Black Feminist Criticism* 206).

In "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," Patricia Hill Collins states that African American feminist criticism laid its foundations with 1970s intellectuals and activists such as Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Alice Walker Jordan and Lorde. According to Collins, through their works, these African American women gained an authorial voice which allowed them to redefine and discuss their communal stance during and after the feminist backlash ("What's in a Name?" 9). She adds that African American women needed to unite in sisterhood despite sexual, national and class differences. Their unity required consciousness and determination because they were trying to avoid stereotypes and standardization through their newly gained voice (9). Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* devises a plan which Walker defines as an

"archeological" effort to (re)member cultural and literary mentors through their inspiring works. As Farah Griffin states,

> In order to construct a tradition that led to contemporary writers such as Morrison and Walker, critics charged themselves with locating, teaching, and writing about earlier "lost" works by African American women. Second, they created a critical vocabulary and framework for discussing works by African American women. Third, they theorized that body of work as well as the critical practices of black feminist critics. (488)

African American feminists strive to reclaim their literary mothers and place within social and political movements to legitimize their voice and authenticity of experience. Through African American feminism, they trace a genealogy of scholars and activists, with an emphasis on Sojourner Truth. African American feminists operate with a generational, historical and canonical awareness that prioritizes African American community and a sense of dignity and integrity.

Patricia H. Collins argues that during this period, African American feminists strived for new definitions. "Womanism" and "Black Feminism" described their agendas with their relative ideologies. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* Alice Walker defines womanism through "womanish," a cultural remark on African American women who are independent, daring and assertive unlike traditional and subservient white women. Collins suggests that the break from white feminism by African American womanists came from a sense of racial pride and a rejection of the master-slave relationship ("What's in a Name?" 10). In a sense, womanism is a form of separatism, in other words self-willed segregation, which challenges the linguistic and discursive power of naming through a plea for authenticity and disaffiliation with white feminism. Thus, African American feminists' critical (dis)associations from white feminists emanate from womanist versus feminist arguments.

In contrast to mainstream white middle class feminism, womanism focuses on communal cooperation and, in their discussions of gender oppression, womanists avoid blaming African American men. As Patricia H. Collins says, womanism is associated with Alice Walker's garden metaphor which projects an edenic world where people of color live side

by side (“What’s in a Name?” 11). A womanist is a humanist and s/he celebrates multiculturalism, although certain political affiliations with separatist black nationalists do exist. Another definition of a womanist, according to Walker, is the love of women in a sexual or nonsexual way. As Collins emphasizes, her remarks on sexual identity acknowledge the presence of notable lesbian womanists who joined forces with African American feminists (“What’s in a Name?” 12). African American feminism disproves the idea of “for-whites-only” feminism by referring to their struggles and contributions to white women’s organizations. Collins states that African American feminism not only criticizes the dominance of white middle class feminism but also comments on race and gender in African American political organizations and cultural traditions (“What’s in a Name?” 13). Gendered politics, communal expectations and racism need to be prioritized, and divisions minimized, for African American women to be able to focus on concerns of women (of color) on a global scale.

In the 1980s, African American feminist criticism began to be acknowledged by scholars after the publication of “New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism” (1980) by Deborah McDowell. For African American feminists, being included in the canon and in curricula meant political and linguistic empowerment since canonical literature was established based on white cultural, political and patriarchal concerns. Barbara Christian, Beverly Guy-Sheftall and bell hooks are some of the foundational figures of African American feminist criticism (Griffin 491). In particular, Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s anthological works are regarded as foundational texts in African American women’s literature, feminist theory and African American men’s studies. She is notable for her outspokenness and unconventional views concerning the essentialist origins of racial, sexual, gender and class norms. Opposing dominant cultural and literary authorities, her works reassess the normalization of encoded meanings and messages behind social norms and vindicate neglected African American literary tradition. Her African American feminist perspective is conspicuous in *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature* (1979), “Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes toward Black Women, 1880-1920” (1990) and *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (1995) (Thomas 237-8).

African American feminist activist critic bell hooks is chiefly recognized for her confrontation with prejudiced representations of African American womanhood. One of her radical works *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) emphasizes the intersectionality of sex and race discrimination in the Civil Rights, Black Power and feminist Movement (Huey 274). In this work, hooks focuses on racist views within First Wave and Second Wave Feminism and the sexist treatment of African American women in white and black societies. As a quintessential work, *Ain't I a Woman* reviews African American historical and cultural perspectives while also acknowledging one of the earliest African American female theorists, Sojourner Truth, through the book's title. hooks argues that slavery traumatized men and women by creating an emasculated and "defeminized" African American community through the dominance of white patriarchal hegemony. In her article "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory" from *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984), hooks criticizes mainstream white middle class feminism. She integrates decentered concerns and issues pertaining to African American women into feminism by strengthening links between the movement and the community. Some of her other works are *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (1994), *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995) (Guy-Sheftall 269) and *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000).

The above mentioned African American feminist writers and critics have contributed to the evolution of African American women's representations in literature and the media. African American women's (un)acknowledged presence and role in socio-political and feminist movements prove their relentless struggle with ignorance and belittlement. African American women address their problems, claim their rights and search for alliances. This thesis will focus on these women's search for voice, identity and power through Audre Lorde's and June Jordan's selected life narratives.

Chapter 1, "Writing the Unspeakable: Race and Gender Bound Memory and the Quest for Female Voice and Identity in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and June Jordan's *Soldier*," will analyze the race, class and gender defined positionality of the narrators, Audre and June. Both Audre and June are of Caribbean descent. Therefore, they grow up witnessing their

immigrant families' racist and sexist encounters in their own quests for wholeness. They question the meaning of race and gender in the United States. Moreover, they are tested by the prejudiced white cultural hegemony and the male defined education system. One parent is a mentor, or at least a role model, to the narrators who bear the lifelong influence of parental warnings, fears and virtues. Audre and June follow a pattern of virtual or symbolic detachment from home and family to seek answers in alternative families and communities. As a result of their experiences and encounters with women, they unlearn socially constructed gender norms and begin to view race relations with a new sense of awareness. While *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* is a childhood trauma narrative, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* describes Audre's life from childhood to adulthood. These works indicate the roots of the activist feminist political consciousness of Audre Lorde and June Jordan through their reinterpretations and redefinitions of racial and gender identity, female self, voice and sisterhood.

Chapter 2, "The Autobiographical Manifestos: The Politics of Liberation in June Jordan's *Civil Wars* and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and *The Cancer Journals*," will analyze these works as feminist autobiographical manifestos. Jordan and Lorde encourage women to avoid silence, censorship and ignorance by discussing their personal concerns in politicized contexts using African American vernacular. Moreover, these works manifest transnational views of race and gender consciousness by connecting the African American community and people of color in developing and developed nations. Like the essays in *Civil Wars* and *Sister Outsider*, *The Cancer Journals* also provides insight into the performativity of race and gender politics through body politics and the mastectomy experience.

The abovementioned works also criticize separatist feminist movements and defends the cause of African American feminism, as a unified movement, by commenting on the connection between lesbianism and feminism. The role of media sponsored myths and representations of African American women and feminists will also be discussed in the light of patriarchal concerns. The racist, sexist and class-based definitions and depictions of women's bodies and roles promote essentialist views and women's silence and oppression.

Therefore, Lorde's and Jordan's feminist autobiographical manifestos move from narrating "I"s to narrating "we"s since they speak on behalf of women's rights and human rights by taking transnational stands.

By connecting cultural and literary foremothers to contemporary women's experience, African American feminism redefines female identity and gendered experience. In this respect, African American feminism experiences a global and transnational turn in June Jordan's and Audre Lorde's works. Their life narratives discusses the intersectionality of various dynamics such as race, sex, sexuality, class, nationality and identity politics along with the persecution and standardization of individuals. African American feminists Lorde and Jordan transcend their national concerns and race-specific history of servitude to reach all women of color, around the world, as women-identified women. Writer Carole Boyce Davies likewise reinforces the cross-cultural value of African American women's writing: "Black women's writing . . . should be read as a series of boundary crossings. . . . In cross-cultural, transnational, translocal, diasporic perspectives . . . 'Black Women's Writing' redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality" (qtd. in Griffin 494). As African American feminists, activists, scholars and writers, Audre Lorde and June Jordan confirm the global and transnational emphasis of Third Wave Feminism with their endorsement of diversity, solidarity across shared concerns and the reformulation of race and gender in progressive ways.

CHAPTER 1

WRITING THE UNSPEAKABLE: RACE AND GENDER BOUND MEMORY AND THE QUEST FOR FEMALE VOICE AND IDENTITY IN AUDRE LORDE'S *ZAMI* AND JUNE JORDAN'S *SOLDIER*

Forever after we have been in search of that self, "that" other and each other. And we return, in widening spirals and never to the same childhood place where it happened, first in our families, with our mothers, with our fathers. The writing is a tool for piercing that mystery but it also shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive.

Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers" from *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983)

How people remember, what they remember, and who does the remembering are historically specific. A culture's understanding of memory at a particular moment of its history shapes the life narrator's process of remembering.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography* (2010)

A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an "individual." Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color, have no such luxury.

Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" from *Women, Autobiography, Theory*

Racial, cultural, class and gender defined identity is constructed through discursive practices and interpretations of positionality. Literary works contribute to the perpetuation of naturalized views and values as a means to maintain hierarchical cultural and gender relations between the ideal and the other. The life writing tradition enabled masculine cultural hegemony to create and maintain encoded meanings, values and classifications by including self-stories, achievements and dominant perspectives of great men in the canon. Women autobiographers were denied critical and literary recognition as long as life writing remained as a privileged male tool which legitimized and ennobled the dominant white male gaze. Women's autobiographies, especially African American women's narratives,

not only indicate the long standing tradition of self-representation in their community, but also decode interpolated racial, gender and class positions and reinterpret devalued, yet politicized gender identities. June Jordan's *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* are coming of age and coming to voice narratives that describe their struggles with race, gender and class discrimination due to the enforced cultural positionality of dominant white masculine discourses, the relationality of the female self to the master gaze, and the performativity of gender.

Women's life narratives have gained prominence through the expression of women's lives and feminist points of view. Although, in previous decades, women's autobiographical works appealed to a limited audience, by the 1980s, these narratives attracted critical attention. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, the author of *Writing a Woman's Life*, women writers came to appreciate life narratives and the representation of the female self as a means to redirect their lives only after the 1960s. Women embraced their long silenced life stories and contributed to the personal narratives that challenged the grand histories of great men (Smith and Watson, "Introduction: Situating Subjectivity" 5-6). The life narratives of women of color highlighted their absence in the canon since the female experience and identity had been standardized through white women's experience. Therefore, counternarratives by women of color discussed their race and culture specific ostracism through newly gained voices and authority of experience (24-5). According to Stanford Friedman, (re)telling their life stories provided women writers with linguistic presence and allowed them to promote both communal and individual experiential history. Women's life narratives reflect the role of close communal bonds and socially constructed gender roles that form female experience and the self, but they also avoid deterministic and definitive notions of race and gender. Women's self-narratives challenge a "historically imposed image" and introduce "an alternate self." They denounce the white status quo in the literary tradition, which maintains allegiance to white male privilege (Friedman 76).

French Algerian feminist writer Hélène Cixous conceptualizes women's linguistic silence and empowerment through *l'ecriture féminine*. For Cixous, women's writing is a manifestation of independence, voicing and claiming the body since they write for women

and about women's experience. Despite the patriarchal hegemony that trivializes women's writing, it is an act of rebellion to disown internalized passivity and vulnerability through a rivalry with the canonical accounts of men. As she declares, "Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. . . . Women must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (875). Cixous cautions women writers against degradation by men, capitalist publishers and editors, and ignorant readers who are in a denial of women's potential and the impact of "female-sexed texts" (877). She argues that women's strength and capabilities have always been manipulated by patriarchal concerns, resulting in the perpetuation of bitterness, rivalry, jealousy and self-centeredness among women. According to Cixous, women are ignorant of their self-worth, potential and the meaning of solidarity: "We the precocious, we the repressed of our culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies—we are black and we are beautiful" (878). She states that women's writing liberates women's mind, body and soul because it is a reclamation of what they have been robbed of by patriarchal society. The female body, in particular, is a place of fragmentation and (de)construction with contradictory interpretations of sexuality, fertility, nudity, (im)morality, shame and servitude. She writes: "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (880). According to Cixous, the phallocentric construction of gender relations has a deep impact on both men and women. Women are taught to worship male authority, whereas men have to live with a lurking insecurity between pangs of castration and femininity. She believes Freud's psychoanalytic approach to male and female sexuality uses the fear of emasculation to legitimize the repression of women (Cixous 884). Audre Lorde's *Zami* and June Jordan's *Soldier* challenge socially constructed expectations from and dictations to a woman's identity, body, perceptions and writing. *Zami* and *Soldier* redefine race, culture and gender norms through women's quests for self-worth and voice.

In the African American literary tradition, autobiographical works have been granted high cultural and literary value. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, African

Americans appreciated the liberating role of language and literacy in addressing race relations. African American autobiographical narratives represented ingenuity and sophistication and described the communal suffering arising from various forms of discrimination. *The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglas, an American Slave* (1845) by Fredrick Douglas and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs are some of the earliest examples of African American life narratives. African American spiritual narratives focused on oppression, survival and the commodification and dehumanization of slaves by white institutions and their demands of political rights. In these narratives, the construction of the African American self was grounded in the community and the individual life story was incorporated into the communal struggle for rights and freedoms. Thus, they formed the core consciousness of the African American cultural and literary tradition (McKay "The Narrative Self" 96). Early African American life writers emphasized the "racial authentication of self" and the authenticity of experience which, as critic Craig Werner states, resulted from changing and fluid perception of self. African American life narratives rose from the self-indulgence in "individual worth, group pride and the humanity of black people." Their autobiographical narratives signified cultural and literary empowerment that confronted the prejudiced depiction of African American identity in grand narratives. Such slave and spiritual narratives exemplify the literary tradition that predated twentieth century writers such as W.E.B Du Bois, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou (McKay "The Narrative Self" 96-7).

In "Writing Autobiography," bell hooks explains the urge behind writing one's life story as "a gesture of longing to recover the past" and a need to acquire "a sense of reunion" and "a sense of release." She believes that life writing is triggered by a craving for the articulation of experience. At the same time, the act of writing comes with an awareness that reconnects one's past and present lives through "a living memory shaping and informing the present." Through the recollection of race discrimination and white supremacy in her own life writing, hooks acknowledges the value of re-memory and the authority of African American woman's experience. As she also suggests, African American life writing presents alternative historical narratives, enriched with forgotten, yet domineering,

memories in the midst of socio-economic class concerns and alienation from one's roots (431). Corresponding to the self-recovery of one's past and roots through a symbolic homecoming, which is depicted as acquiring power and emerging whole in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and June Jordan's *Soldier*, bell hooks returns to her childhood persona, Gloria, whom she silenced for years to protect her present self. For hooks, her life writing and memory function as symbolic recognitions of her censured multiple selves: "Remembering was part of a cycle of reunion, a joining of fragments, 'the bits and pieces of my heart' that the narrative made whole again" (*Writing Autobiography* 432). As Chicana Feminist Gloria Anzaldúa writes in "Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers": "To write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and to live to write about them. Fear acts like a magnet; it draws the demons out of the closet and into the ink in our pens" (171). Women's autobiographical narratives reveal traumatic repressed memories and fragmented selves, which prevents the unity of the past and present. However, those narratives are invocations to self-healing, in other words scriptotheraphy, and an acknowledgement of writing as voice and a source of power.

In the introduction of *Memory, Narrative, Identity*: *Remembering the Self*, Nicola King writes: "It is not only question of how and what individuals remember and how they represent their memories, but also . . . [a] cultural struggle over the construction and meanings of memory within culture, the ways in which we construct the very means and possibility of remembering" (5). Since identity is fragmented through spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries, personal memory and history are framed by cultural notions, narratives and struggle. In life narratives, the ideological "I"s of the narrator are reflections of race, gender, culture and even class bound concerns which cannot be separated from individual and communal politics. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state, "What is remembered and what is forgotten, and why, change over time. Thus, remembering has a politics. There are struggles over who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively" (*Reading Autobiography* 24). King, Smith and Watson explain the collective and cultural nature of

individual memory which leads to the politicization of the autobiographical "I" and cultural "we" in life narratives.

Regarding cultural autobiographies, Caren Kaplan states that the concept of "home" in autobiographical works functions as "a narrative space of familiarity" leading from "the individual to the universal." Life writing conveys the author's ideas to readers, whereas out-law genres revolutionize traditional associations between the self and the world; in other words, the individual and society.[8] In out-law narratives, "a struggle for cultural survival" is emphasized, while traditional autobiographical works focus on self-conceptualization (Kaplan 212). Counterlaw narratives are "cultural and personal survival" stories. Kaplan views communal cooperation narratives and the stories of coalition politics in the same light as cultural autobiographies. She argues that cultural autobiographies narrate an individual history in relation to communal history. In cultural narratives, the coalition politics that exist between individuals and community depersonalize the western autobiographical tradition, which rewards individual success. On the other hand, out-law or counterlaw narratives are cultural survival stories (Kaplan 213). Audre Lorde's *Zami* and June Jordan's *Soldier* reflect their narrators Audre's and June's survival in white and black communities. These narratives refer to historical "I"s that narrate personal trials with discrimination, violence and identity crisis, rooted in cultural and gender belongingness, self-worth and identification. Therefore, Lorde's and Jordan's individual experiences are related to cultural values, norms and definitions of (dis)placement, and they believe that personal survival is situated within historical experience and communal legacy.

Women's life writing narrates positionality, relationality and performativity of gendered "I"s that are conditioned and contested by naturalized cultural norms, roles and expectations. Women narrators are positioned into subordinate heterosexual roles of subservience by dominant discourses. In such examples, the female self and experience are defined in relation to voices, accounts and stories which reinforce the hegemonic power of

[8] Caren Kaplan refers to testimonial narratives, prison memoirs, cultural autobiography and biomythography as "out-law" or "counterlaw" genres which transgress the genre rules and grand narrative perspectives.

representation, labeling and claims to visibility. Individuals perform their roles and accept encoded statuses in a conformist manner; otherwise, they faced with marginalized positionality and alienation within society due to their transgressions of dominant cultural notions of race and gender. In *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, Leigh Gilmore writes about the fluid construction of gender, genre and identity in women's life writing. According to Gilmore, self-writing is closely related to "identity-constructing discourses" which interpret life writing and the self through the politics of the time. Theoretical meaning attributed to autobiographical works also defines the complex discursive nature of self-portraiture and the authority of experience, gender and genre. Women's autobiographical narratives trigger debates about the legitimacy of self-representation and experience (Gilmore 17). They indicate the constructed nature of gender and genre, thus reworking the construction of alternative gender and genre definitions and boundaries.

One of the most debated issues in the feminist agenda is body politics as associated with "historical and discursive formations." According to Gilmore, women's narratives contest such discursive portrayals though the power of self-invention. As she notes: "The body as the stable location of gender is vigorously resisted by the changing representations of gender, bodies, and identities in self-representational texts." In this way, the body is either a location for a fixed gendered self or emphasizes the embeddedness of a writer's identity in her body (Gilmore 149). Therefore, lesbian life writing and criticism which date back to the 1970s, focus on self-representations of non-heterosexual identities because the politics of identity and traditional life writing neglected their experience. Lesbian narratives promote decentered subjects and their recognition in the form of the bildungsroman. Displaced lesbian identities in feminist discourses and self-writing advocates a redefinition of their experience by and for themselves. Lesbian selves and narratives were usually viewed in heterosexual and non-heterosexual contexts through their difference from masculine and straight discourses. Thus lesbian identity was acknowledged through its oppositional subjectivity to heterosexual discourse (Gilmore 229).

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses the alternative readings of gender within feminist discourse. Butler focuses on the connection between gender, sex and culture as she asks, "If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?" She questions the norms that define heterosexual gender roles and the autonomy of self and identity embedded in cultural spaces. Traditional views of gender emphasize the biological determinism of sex and essentialist views of culture over unchanging gender identity because cultural and pseudo-scientific indoctrinations subordinate individuals to unquestioned gendered positionality (Butler 11). Butler defines performativity of gender as "gender parody," which assumingly replicates a primordial gender identity. She argues that socially constructed gender lacks an antecedent and performativity signifies only "an imitation without an origin" (Butler 175). She reinterprets changing and shifting notions of gender identity and its performativity to challenge and redefine idealized and normative gender. Thus, fixed gender identity is further delegitimized and demystified through performative practices and potential reconstructions (176). Following Butler's argument of "gender parody"—performativity—gender that is deemed to be fixed and authentic is relieved from the grasp of patriarchal cultural hegemony and is viewed as a liberating force.

For Judith Butler, identity formation and affirmation is linked to representation within discourses, which shape individual consciousness and give meaning to experience. She argues that identity is a combination of self-will and determinism, including the linguistic (dis)empowerment of people. Since language is a system that defines authority of experience and authenticity of voices, identity is (dis)placed by dominant institutions and norms. As she confirms, the "Hegelian modal of self-recognition," improved by theoreticians such as Marx and Lukacs, projects the self's awareness of its subject and object positions, which indicates a complex binary opposition at the core of western identity formation (Butler 183). Butler's theories on gender spare identity from the definitive role of sex and culture which predetermine gender identity by eliminating individual desire. She rejects a fundamental nature and culture analogy between sex and

gender because gender adopts an emancipatory function between free will and discursive practices.

In June Jordan's *Soldier* and Audre Lorde's *Zami*, the identity (re)construction and crisis of the narrating and narrated voices of Audre and June are linked to their immigrant families' traumatized experiences and relations with the white dominant community.[9] On one hand, the idea of self that they pass on to Audre and June as they grow up is under the influence of their projections, fears and multicultural background. On the other, June's and Audre's perceptions are mostly challenged and enforced by the race and gender defined discourses of cultural hegemony; in other words, how they are seen and defined. As the first generation of American born children of Caribbean immigrants, Audre and June share a pattern of family-projected isolation, the rejection of racism for survival, and confusion resulting from the discrepancy between American idealism, promises and reality. Their immigrant families protect their children through silence, education and class mobility. Still, Audre's and June's disheartening coming of age experiences lead to self, reality and community motivated awareness. Their experiences are shaped by multicultural and gendered positionality, communal and family expectations, and their desire for self-expression. During their quest for identity, they gain a critical voice and an insubordinate gender and racial identity. They become soldiers, amazons, fighters and bards of their individual memories and collective, cultural and family histories. As Biddy Martin says, "Self-worth, identity, and a sense of community have fundamentally depended on the production of a shared narrative or life history and on the assimilation of individuals' life histories into the history of the group" (384).

[9]In *Zami* and *Soldier*, the narrators Audre and June describe their quests for identity in the first person. The ideological and interpretive shifts between Audre's and June's narrated and narrating "I"s indicate a gradual passage from naivety and inexperience into self-growth and awareness, which is observed in their perceptions of their experiences and pasts. Therefore, Audre's and June's narrating voices also represent the authors Audre Lorde's and June Jordan's (re)views of their lives and selves through Zami women and soldier imagery.

1.1. THE ROLE OF THE IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: TRAUMA, DENIAL AND RACIAL UPLIFTING[10]

June Jordan dedicates her memoir *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* to her father, Granville Jordan, due to his influence on the formation and subversion of her racial and gender identity. Jordan's narrator, June, describes her childhood through non-chronological references to her parents' life before and after her birth. Granville Jordan wants to raise his only child June as a survivor in a racist world and intrinsically renounces her black identity and gender because he yearns for a white boy instead of a black girl. As June states, "I was his helper, his sidekick: His son" (*Soldier* Prologue). June's parents are Caribbean immigrants who cannot accept the condition of the black race in America. Granville Jordan's desire for a white son is the symbolic embodiment of his craving for an authority whites seem to possess. In this regard, he unceasingly tests June's physical endurance and cultural sophistication to the point of physical and psychological torture from which June and her mother Mildred suffer. Granville's hysterical obsession is the result of racial and social deprecation and his emasculation in the hands of white patriarchy. In exchange for his internalized racial inferiority, he demands unquestioned obedience from his educated wife and daughter to maintain control in his household. Accordingly, June is raised to be a replica of the white community in order to avoid her father's humiliation. She is torn between different parental expectations as her mother views her as a godsend aide for the African American community (*Soldier* 3). However, Granville's cultural identification with white supremacy and authority requires a denial of her Caribbean roots. In "A Feminist Survivor with the Eyes of a Child," Felicia R. Lee comments on June Jordan's emphatic inclusion of a child's voice and perspective in *Soldier*: "She decided that the best approach was to write the book with the consciousness of a child, without the filter of adult perceptions and judgments" (*The New York Times*).

[10] Uplifting the black race is an idea that gained popularity through the arguments of twentieth century African American intellectuals Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois. Washington interprets uplifting in terms of economic sufficiency and survival in a white world. Harvard educated Du Bois regards equal rights, education and upward mobility of African Americans as quintessential to their survival and struggles with white hegemony.

Through her life writing, Audre Lorde pays homage to the women in her life for their contribution in healing her fragmented and deluded selves through comradeship. As Lorde's narrator, Audre, states, "My father leaves his psychic print upon me, silent, intense, and unforgiving. But his is a distant lightning. Images of women flaming like torches adorn and define the borders of my journey, stand like dykes between me and the chaos. It is the images of women, kind and cruel, that lead me home" (*Zami* 3). Audre's self-inquiry, "*To whom do I owe the woman I have become?*" (4), leads her to acknowledge an African American lesbian feminist identity and turns the memoir into a confessional bildungsroman, a narrative of sexuality and racial life writing.[11] According to Leigh Gilmore, "In wishing to write a coming-out narrative and to represent the mutual complexities of race, culture and sexual orientation, Lorde discovers that she has no models and renames her text a 'biomythography'" (31). Through her parents' Caribbean roots and the cultural impact upon her upbringing, Audre recognizes the meaning of Zami and the value of women in her lifelong struggle. She owes her mythical, cultural and sexual awakening, in other words homecoming, to women from whom she sought assistance in times of distress: "To the battalion of arms where I often retreated for shelter and sometimes found it. To the others who helped, pushing me into the merciless sun—I, coming out blackened and whole" (*Zami* 5). In the prologue, she defines her redefined self through cultural and generational identification by defying the binary nature of masculine and feminine traits: "*I have always wanted to be both man and woman, to incorporate the strongest and richest parts of my mother and father within/into me—to share valleys and mountains upon my body the way the earth does in hills and peaks*" (*Zami* 7). In a confessional racial and sexually conscious tone, she views her multiple and shifting selves in a generational context that shapes the nature of the self through familial bonds and matrilineage: "*I have felt the age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the 'I' at its eternal core, elongate and flatten out into the elegantly strong triad of grandmother mother daughter, with the 'I' moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions as needed*" (*Zami* 7). Her female friends and lovers assume her mother's place, in other words Linda's

[11] In my primary and secondary sources, I have kept the authors' original language even if that may seem erroneous.

role, to keep her identity intact and encourage her self-growth. Audre states that among different female mentors, acquaintances and lovers, Linda is just as quintessential to her survival and endurance. She re-interprets her memories by finding connections between all women characters in her life: "*Their shapes join Linda and Gran'Ma Liz and Gran'Aunt Anni in my dreaming, where they dance with swords in their hands, stately forceful steps, to mark the time when they were all warriors*" (*Zami* 104).

As Anh Hua states, Audre Lorde constructs her self-representation through a web of "individual, collective, erotic and traumatic, and homeland memories." As an American of Caribbean descent, Lorde internalizes Caribbean culture, the experience of immigration and the sense of alienation through Linda's stories of the West Indies. *Zami* narrates the "intergenerational movement" of stories and family history between mothers and daughters through Linda's stories from the West Indies to Audre's life in New York. Audre reinterprets Linda's devalued voice, isolated self and longing for homecoming in her review of her stories. According to Hua, two forms of homeland memory observed in the works of women of color are also present in *Zami*. Audre is the medium of Linda's stories of Carriacou, but she finds a connection to her African Caribbean roots through myths and deities such as Afrekete and Mawulisa (121-22). In that sense, Lorde rekindles a cultural triangular trade between Africa, the West Indies and the New World in her self-creation of mythical foremothers. Moreover, *Zami* disrupts the traditionally constructed gender and genre rules through biomythography. Lorde, as Leigh Gilmore suggests, finds solace in "other textual forms for self-representation and other geography[ies] for identity." The western life writing tradition refers to the narrator's family lineage and community as a starting point for the development of a self-made man beyond familial or communal influence (Gilmore 29). However, Lorde reformulates her life in the constellation of her personal experiences and nurturing female community. Thus, she resorts to cultural, gender and racial self-positioning.

In *Soldier*, June lacks a female role model and dominant mother figure. Therefore, she is identified with Granville's idealism and masculine traits as a soldier, whereas Audre recognizes women's power through her exceptional mother figure. Linda's unconventional

dominant status within the family and community opens Audre's eyes to inspiring strong women and communal membership rather than isolation. Audre argues how American English uses descriptive terms which add definitive and judgmental connotations of physical impairment, insanity and racial stigmatization for those women who transgress normative gender roles. She questions the possibility of an alternative definition and social space for strong women like Linda without linguistic violence and derogatory naming. She seeks out "the third designation" (*Zami* 15) for gender identity and resists the traditional positionality of privileged masculine and subordinate feminine identities by using her mother as a model:

> As a child, I always knew my mother was different from the other women I knew, Black or white. I used to think it was because she was my mother. But different how? I was never quite sure. There were other West Indian women around, a lot in our neighborhood and church. There were also other Black women as light as she, particularly among the low-island women. *Redbone*, they were called. *Different how?* I never knew. But that is why to this day I believe that there have always been Black dykes around—in the sense of powerful and women-oriented women—who would rather have died than use that name for themselves. And that includes my momma. (*Zami* 15)

Linda has an aura of determination and authority that changes the nature of her marriage and her social status as the unofficial head of the family. Her assertiveness grants her a powerful decision-making role in household affairs, contrary to the lives, marriages and secondary positions of other women. Linda is Audre's earliest role model. She does not diminish womanhood and motherhood through submission and passivity, but creates an alternative empowering third space within the context of patriarchal authority and domestic duties: "Since my parents shared all making of policy and decision, in my child's eye, my mother must have been *other* than woman" (16). Therefore, Audre Lorde's quest for a redefined gender as an African American feminist is rooted in her childhood. Her inquiry of alternative gender identities is modelled after her mother. As Audre adds, "My mother was a very private woman, and actually quite shy, but with a very imposing, no-nonsense exterior. Full-bosomed, proud, and of no mean size, she would launch herself down the street like a ship under full sail, usually pulling me stumbling behind her" (*Zami* 17).

In *Soldier,* June's father Granville is her teacher, torturer and guide. Behind Granville's aspirations lie his race and class specific ideologies and cultural trauma. Granville's in-betweenness illustrates his conflicted self, which is ascribed to Marcus Garvey and African American poetry as he denounces any identification beyond the white community. As June describes, "Looking at him, you'd have to say that my father was extremely handsome, possibly white, and at least 50 percent Chinese" (*Soldier* 5). He is preoccupied with possessing better life standards and an educated daughter since he yearns for the sophisticated lifestyle of upper class American families. June continues to talk about him: "Believing that 'idleness is the devil's plan,' he stayed busy; reading through the night, his index finger tracking each syllable that he silently mouthed, or writing letters to government officials, or designing the next household or backyard project, or refining a schedule of forced enlightenment for me, his only child" (5). Granville believes that June might have a chance to overcome the race and gender barrier through the advantage of education and his defensive survival tactics. June emphasizes the absence of a mother figure: "As he [Granville] assumed control, he advised my mother that she, in effect, had been dismissed. He knew what had to be done" (15). In her childhood memories, June's conflicted race and gender identity and problematic cultural positionality of her immigrant parents create strife in the family. In "Favorite Son," as Deborah E. McDowell views, June's relationship with Granville is "a protracted battle, one-on-one" (3).

In the same way, *Zami* reflects the traumatized selves and memories of immigrant parents and their impact on American born children. Audre states the determining influence of her immigrant parents' concerns, experiences and sense of alienation in her childhood. They are subject to the social gaze, racial classifications and the color line, which shape their ideologies and self-worth. The ideological shift and awareness between Audre's narrating and narrated "I"s are viewed through re-memory, reinterpretation of Linda's struggle and mother-daughter relationship. Audre recalls Linda's racist employer: "The owner told my mother that she ought to be glad to have the job, since ordinarily the establishment didn't hire 'spanish' girls. Had the owner known Linda was Black, she would never have been hired at all" (*Zami* 9). She comments on the trials of being an immigrant mother in a

different cultural environment and Linda's efforts to create a home suitable to cultural tastes and West Indian rituals and prayers in the midst of poverty, rampant racism and dreams of returning home:

> In October 1929, the first baby came and the stockmarket fell, and my parents' dream of going home receded into the background. Little secret sparks of it were kept alive for years by my mother's search for tropical fruits "under the bridge," and her burning of kerosene lamps, by her treadle-machine and her fried bananas and her love of fish and the sea. Trapped. There was so little that she really knew about the stranger's country. How the electricity worked. The nearest church. Where the Free Milk Fund for Babies handouts occurred, and at what time—even though we were not allowed to drink charity. (*Zami* 10)

Linda's piety and dominant wife-mother role conceal and control her anxiety, sense of insecurity and homesickness. Audre's interpretation of Linda's dilemma implies her growth and acknowledgement of trauma.

Both *Soldier* and *Zami* depict immigrant families' zeal to provide a better life and opportunities for their children with the hope that they might override predetermined race and gender relations. For that reason, Granville Jordan embraces the contradictory promises of the American dream of social mobility and the survival of the fittest. That is why June is supposed to read Shakespeare, attend summer camp and internalize combative skills through her father's physical and verbal attacks. He tries to protect a vulnerable, yet smart, black girl from the belittling influences of racism, sexism and classism. June summarizes the whole situation in these words: "He taught me everything from the perspective of a recruiting warrior. There was a war on against colored people, against poor people. I had to become a soldier who would rise through the ranks and emerge a commander of men rather than an infantry pawn" (*Soldier* 18). June's upbringing evokes her father's disoriented race consciousness and deprived sense of black masculinity. June's obedience at home and success at school satisfy her father's parental authority and demands from a tough little soldier. She adds, "Probably it seemed easier to change me than to change the meaning and complexion of power" (18). In addition to Granville's obsessive aspirations and constant intelligence tests, she is further confused by Mildred's passivity which Granville associates with domesticity, femininity and fragility. He improves June's mental and physical

endurance with the help of militaristic methods and institutional tests. As she says, "from that downtown trip forward, anything like a regular childhood lay entirely behind me" (*Soldier* 19). However, Mildred's existence provides rare moments of domestic bliss and an opportunity to experience socially constructed gender roles since June is allowed to have her baby dolls and tea sets only in her presence (*Soldier* 21). Parental preferences and decisions dictate that June should embrace or redress certain aspects of her self in accordance with gender norms, race, social status and individual space at home. These circumstances and different parental views expose her to diverse and paradoxical expectations from tough soldier in school to prim and proper church abiding member of the African American community.

In *Soldier*, family is the primary source of June's perceptions, self-esteem and self-actualization. She grows up listening to "The Ugly Duckling." Intrinsically, she focuses on the meaning of ugliness and communal stigmatization as a result of difference. Ugliness is a disheartening label with which June identifies (*Soldier* 22). Within a race specific cultural context, the ugly duckling and swan analogy corresponds to the doll test ideology and the indoctrination of whiteness and beauty as a seal of approval.[12] Reading about the ugly black duckling and its transformation into a white swan, June questions the reasons behind such portrayals:

> What was *ugly*? It seemed to mean the wrong family and no friends and other ducks refusing to play with you and making fun of however you didn't look exactly like them.
>
> And I had never heard about *ugly* before. And *ugly* frightened me. I was afraid and then I became positive that I might be *ugly* (22).
>
> Why did the Ugly Duckling lose its mother?
> How could a duck turn into a swan?
> Why would that be a happy ending for a duck?
> The Ugly Duckling was depicted as a black baby duck.
> The swan was white.

[12] The doll test was a psychological study conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s which revealed the effects of white gaze and internalized racism on African American children. It was used as evidence in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision of 1954 to prove the dangers of "separate but equal" doctrine.

> How did the black baby duck turn white?"
> Why was that a happy ending? (*Soldier* 23)

June's story describes how an African American girl is oppressed by the white gaze and how white beauty standards lead to her confusion about representation and social approval. For Granville Jordan, June might turn into a white swan if she is accepted into the white community through education and class mobility. However, Mildred attempts to maintain her daughter's roots within the community. June wards off any suggestion of internalized racism and desire of bleached beauty: "I never wanted and I never got a Shirley Temple doll" (23). Instead, in light of Granville's ambitions to raise a fighter, she comes out as "'one crazy little girl'" in Harlem and she strikes back whoever threatens her (*Soldier* 26).

The sole trait that Granville and Mildred share is an ignorance of racism and the cultural positionality of African Americans. They either find excuses or directly avoid the attitudes of white people and June's upbringing emphasizes self-respect. Mildred's rationalization of white people's indifference illustrates her efforts to shield June from any form of hatred that contaminates her true self. Likewise, for instance, when June scolds an overweight white police officer, Granville is petrified without explaining (*Soldier* 29). June naively connects whiteness and fatness after seeing her father's fear and displeasure of her treatment:

> I already viewed fat people with something akin to contempt. This was a color-blind prejudice incubated by my father's maniacal dedication to soldierly fitness for me. Just about as soon as I could stand without immediately falling down, my father had launched his lifelong battle against what would become of me if I forgot to hold my head up, push back my shoulders, suck in my gut, and 'Stride straight ahead!' (*Soldier* 29-30)

Granville Jordan's inability to control his anger and his domestic violence result from his crippled sense of masculinity and marginalized racial identity. He struggles to outmaneuver the white hegemony and his working class life through June's promising future. Her account of childhood memories reflect Granville's unexpected outbursts and temper as he cries out, "'You damn black devil child!'" before he hits June (*Soldier* 37). He cannot override hierarchical and stereotypical race and gender politics and raises a soldierlike girl

to protect his working class Caribbean immigrant family from discrimination. He makes an effort to create an alternative space for a black girl through physical training, discipline and sophistication in (white) classical music and (white) western literature. June describes Granville's training program of self-protection that integrates "assault exercises" as training for the struggle with invisibility, discouragement, the lack of opportunity and race prejudice:

> By the time I was five years old, my father had begun regular assault exercises: He'd constantly test me by coming up from behind and wrapping an arm around my throat and telling me to "make me let you go." Or I'd be walking into the kitchen and he'd say something in a soft voice that I couldn't hear, exactly, and as I got nearer to him he'd throw a surprise left-and-right hook combination of punches I was expected to block.
>
> The point was to stay on the alert.
> The point was not to be beaten. (*Soldier* 42)

In the same way, Audre reflects several autobiographical moments about Linda's burden of passing as white when surrounded by her black family. Audre realizes that Linda's proud stature, manipulative decisions and precautions mask racial tension in their daily encounters: "But it was so typical of my mother when I was young that if she couldn't stop white people from spitting on her children because they were Black, she would insist it was something else. . . . If you can't change reality, change your perceptions of it" (*Zami* 18). Her family exerts unquestioned authority through the Protestant work ethic to protect their children from race discrimination. According to Lorde, Linda provides a sense of importance, visibility and authority in the community, while dominant narratives ignore their stories and experiences. Black children have white middle class idols such as Dick and Jane narratives which Audre resents: "Nobody wrote stories about us, but still people always asked my mother for directions in a crowd" (18). As Anh Hua confirms, *Zami* confronts the silence of de-storied postcolonial women and women of color through Linda's homeland memories. Remembering Carriacou women thus creates a legitimate female genealogy rooted in Caribbean history and cultural practices. Referring to the cultural view of Zami, Lorde emphasizes the legacy of loving and caring women and black lesbians. Carriacou becomes "a home space and home narrative" which represents her

racial and sexual orientation (Hua 123). Lorde's memoir also records the stories and contributions of comrades, lovers and ancestral women to her self-growth. Regarding Lorde's tribute to her Caribbean matriarchal lineage, Hua refers to critic Chinosole, also known as Patricia Thornton, concerning the "matrilineal diaspora" of women of color who join forces to cross barriers of cultural identification, strength and companionship (124).[13]

The concepts of racial prejudice towards people of color and color consciousness remain unspoken for Audre and June. In *Zami*, Audre adopts Linda's views as a woman: "I grew Black as my need for life, for affirmation, for love, for sharing—copying from my mother what was in her, unfulfilled" (*Zami* 58). She struggles with racial and social alienation because her family's protective measures against race discrimination leave her untrained to cope with maltreatment from the white cultural elite. In spite of her sheltered home, she is disillusioned with the American education system in Catholic schools where white nuns separate students as the "Fairies" and the "Brownies" according to the color of their skin. This racial hierarchy is also connected to the internalized white gaze. As Audre states, non-white children are associated with negative or inferior characteristics and manners: "I always wound up in the Brownies, because either I talked too much, or I broke my glasses, or I perpetrated some other awful infraction of the endless rules of good behavior" (*Zami* 28). Her childhood memories reveal her parents' perpetual disregard of racism which engendered an identity crisis and a sense of displacement. Her experiences eventually caused a reformation of her identity by challenging societal and cultural norms. Audre notes invisible and impenetrable borders among women who take shelter in an "immovable protective mask" and "programmed hate." According to Audre, this leads to women's vulnerability and self-inflicted isolation: "*I lie beside my sisters in the darkness, who pass me in the street unacknowledged and unadmitted*" (58). As Leigh Gilmore suggests, "Lorde, writing from the mutually marked subject position of poet and essayist uses an autobiographical *I* through which to represent the histories of communities of women, and

[13] Chinosole, "Audre Lorde and Matrilineal Diaspora: 'Moving history beyond nightmare into structures for the future.'" *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*. Ed. Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLauglin (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 379.

thereby dislocates the singleness of the autobiographical subject through her depiction of female influence and desire" (43-44). Lorde challenges distance and silence among women by integrating the stories and voices of other women into her self-story and quest.

In line with Granville's adoption of American Dream, Audre also learns the value of the work ethic and perseverance regardless of cultural, racial or gender classifications. She grows up to be a race-blind isolated child without much social interaction beyond her family members. Thus, she is confused when she is not elected class president even though she is a promising student. Despite her faith in meritocracy, her hopes are decimated by all-American candidates, gender roles and favoritism of a male president and a female vice-president. Linda's rage over her daughter's disappointment discloses her vain struggle to shield Audre from race and gender discrimination. Still, she consoles Audre: "'Child, why you worry your head so much over fair or not fair? Just do what is for you to do and let the rest take care of themselves'" (*Zami* 65). Parallel to June's situation in *Soldier*, Audre attempts upward mobility but experiences the excruciating reactions towards black students in a white neighborhood. As the only non-white student in a white missionary school, she has a traumatized childhood. Even the local newspaper blames their arrival for their Jewish landlord's suicide: "Their racism was unadorned, unexcused, and particularly painful because I was unprepared for it" (*Zami* 59).

In the Foreword of *Wild Women in the Whirlwind,* Leigh Gilmore states that Audre Lorde highlights the long disregarded cultural and literary presence of African American women. Lorde seeks acknowledgement of their cultural and linguistic disempowerment through radical "renamings" and "new spellings" of their experiences. Gilmore claims that Lorde overrides cultural oblivion by turning to re-memory of mythical legacy to revive cultural identity (*Autobiographics* 27). Lorde's mythical and female community-oriented identity is the harbinger of a meaningful, valorized and legitimate female voice. In *Soldier*, while Granville Jordan hides his racial suffering behind his terrorizing anger, self-education and his survival tactics for June, June's re-memory and reinterpretation of the past exposes manipulated truths, excuses and euphemisms about racism and segregation. In *Zami*, the family trip to Washington, D.C. was supposed to be "graduation presents" for the Lorde

sisters. Linda prepares food for the train ride that Audre regards as a "mobile feast" (68). In reality, the trip signifies Linda's efforts to compensate for the confining and demeaning segregation that denies the presence of African Americans in dining cars, hotels and many other public facilities and activities, including school trips. The restrictions of the Jim Crow laws are moderated as personal choice rather than a race barrier between white and African American students.[14] Audre views unacknowledged yet implied race politics which take the form of warnings in her individual and collective consciousness: "We were told we must never trust white people, but *why* was never explained, nor the nature of their ill will. Like so many other vital pieces of information in my childhood, I was supposed to know without being told" (*Zami* 69). A segregated ice cream and soda shop in Washington, D.C. does not serve her family, whom she describes as "proper caravan, mother bright and father brown, the three of us girls step-standards in-between" (*Zami* 70). Except for Linda, the rest of the family cannot pass the color line. This experience marks Audre's childhood and initiates her interrogation of the American promise. Audre naively attempts to resolve such an "anti-american" injustice with her "letter to the president" (70). She considers this experience as the passage from childish naivety to harsh adult reality:

> The waitress was white, and the counter was white, and the ice cream I never ate in Washington, D.C. that summer I left childhood was white, and the white heat and the white pavement and the white stone monuments of my first Washington summer made me sick to my stomach for the whole rest of that trip and it wasn't much of a graduation present after all. (71)

The perpetual silence and ignorance that maintain sanity and security as a survival strategy fall apart as this traumatic memory connects *Zami* to the cultural narratives of Jim Crow. Audre's shattering experience is transferred into the communal "we" through the cultural trauma of otherness and invisibility. In *Zami*, the realization of the power of naming and language, rather than passivity and silence, is embedded in Audre's childhood memories. As Analouise Keating argues in "Making 'Our Shattered Faces Whole,'" Audre reinterprets

[14] Based on postbellum Black Codes, the laws refer to segregation policies starting from the Reconstruction era after the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement (1865-1960s) and reinforced by the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy vs. Ferguson* which declared that "separate but equal" treatment of the races was constitutional.

Linda's silence as a way of stabilizing and normalizing her multicultural family's position in the prejudiced white society. Audre recalls Linda's vain efforts to hide unacknowledged race discrimination through excuses or differences between people and individualize racist and sexist public stands (Keating, "Making" 21). Keating also comments on the results of Linda's "selective silence," an act which encourages Audre to adopt the same strategy. For Keating, ignorance leads to a fragmented view of self that lacks racial, cultural and communal identification and appreciation. Thus, both Linda and Audre cope with the defamilarization of their African Caribbean roots (Keating "Making" 22). Audre is armed with words in her quest for acknowledgment and an urge to name, redefine and narrate her quest. Similarly, June is protected from ideas such as racism and inferiority through Granville's rejection of the African American community, her dark complexion and gender identity. His glorification of white elitism, the struggle for upward mobility, his masculinist testing of June's mental and physical fitness, and his tyranny at home are outcomes of his sense of inferiority. As a Jamaican immigrant father, he prepares June for her struggle with unavoidable discrimination and helplessness. Granville and Linda make every effort and take the necessary measures to protect their children from turning into dehumanized others due to hierarchical and gendered race relations. However, their repressed cultural and racial roots lead them to deny or misname race motivated inferiority, hatred and silence.

Silence and avoidance seem to be the only alternatives to the reality of racism in *Soldier* and *Zami*. Yet, Audre and June, along with their families, bear the impact of these survival tactics. In *Soldier*, for instance, to assert his masculinity and disempowered voice in public, Granville Jordan continuously declares his patriarchal position in private: "I am master of this castle!" (*Soldier* 71). The most compelling evidence of his inferiority complex and traumatized self is his use of physical superiority over June as a boxing trainer and his proud references to his self-taught education. He shows signs of self-denial, traumatic disassociation from his Caribbean roots and a disoriented sense of manliness. As a result, he resorts to verbal and physical abuse to satisfy his diminished sense of black masculinity. Looking for scapegoats, he blames his wife's ethnicity and skin color for the racist and ethnocentric treatment. Adopting a white gaze towards his family, he engages in mimicry

of the white community, which his wife regards as an insult: "White? Are you supposed to be a white man Granville?" (*Soldier* 73). As a result of Granville's denial of blackness and his glorification of whiteness, June views Africa through mainstream biased portrayals involving nudity, savagery and drum beating. Her impersonation of an African princess for a church gathering included these elements: "I went wild. I was dancing in the jungle. I was dancing in the desert. I was practically naked. I was free. I was laughing and whirling about and never losing the beat" (*Soldier* 115). Her performance reflects stereotypical portrayals of Africans, and resembles the notorious minstrel shows popularized in the nineteenth century.[15] Her performance evoked self-mocking messages about African ancestors which triggered a communal displeasure in church and a violent confrontation back home.

In *Soldier*, Mildred's and Granville's disagreements are the cause for their different treatments of June's cultural affiliation, race and gender identity. Mildred attempts to relieve June from Granville's constant trials and training through volunteer work for the African American church and community. Granville, however, plans to equip June with the privileges of a white male by removing the burden of her race, class and gender. He is obsessed with June's future because he wants to erase his sense of disillusionment and failure. Indeed, Granville's use of masculine pronouns in his references to June indicates his consternation:

> I'm not make all my sacrifice and save my pennies and spend me energies for the child to be like *what*—like me? The only ting I can do to get myself up in the world is to *what*? Ride the elevator up and down the day long? You want him to come up like me? So he can marry *what*—some woman tink like you?! And live *where*—in a trashy neighborhood like this?! (*Soldier* 151)

[15] Minstrel shows or minstrelsy was "an indigenous American theatrical form" which adopted a self-mocking view of stereotypical African American look and manners. Today, the reflection of minstrelsy is visible in vaudeville performances and popular media such as movies, cartoons and music. Originally, white performers used exaggerated black face make up and slapstick movements to replicate portrayals of slaves and mock African Americans. The creator of "blackface minstrelsy" was Thomas Dartmouth Rice or "Jim Crow," who was a notable white performer ("Minstrel Show: American Theatre"). Jim Crow laws (named after the act) and "Jim Crow" shows were both part of the racial caste system that operated between the end of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement.

Granville's fixation with June's upbringing results from his alienated self. On the contrary, Mildred acknowledges the value of belonging and challenges Granville's principles: "'A Rockefeller boy *should* grow up to be a Rockefeller man! But we are *not* Rockefeller people . . . and June is not a Rockefeller boy! She have to become a Black woman!'" (*Soldier* 152).

In *Zami* and *Soldier*, racial uplift, which is accompanied by silence and avoidance, is the core ideal of Audre and June's childhood memories and the possibility of erasing the color line causes the zealous efforts of these Caribbean immigrant families. According to Granville, racial improvement requires the rejection of one's roots and the acquisition of upward mobility and white privilege. He believes June will overcome obstacles standing in her way if she secures the educational and class privileges of white children. Granville aspires to have a white lifestyle and opportunities: "I love what the white people *have*! The house and the job and the garbage collection the good school and the policemon carrying the children them across the street!" (*Soldier* 154). Mildred's understanding of uplifting is linked to African American communal unity for improvement, whereas Granville feels trapped in his culture, race and a gender driven antagonism:

> I am sick and tired to struggle like this.
> Struggle is too slow!
> Struggle is what they leave to the slaves!
> I want the child walk and talking like a mon!
>
> I want her come to be a fighter and *win* sheself a life to be proud about. . . . Woman! I not gwine argue: My mind is made up! *This*! This place! This all of it! This! This is what she *have to* rise up above! (*Soldier* 154)

Mildred evokes the self-destructive results of disowning one's roots via her faith in a nurturing and protective community. She fears that June will go through the stages of demoralization and defamilarization in pursuit of white privilege: "'You gwine make her *afraid* to be sheself! You gwine make her hate you, Granville'" (154). June also lacks a positive African American role model until Uncle Teddy comes to live with them. He improves her self-esteem, self-knowledge and accomplishments by guarding her against Granville's outbursts. Granville is displeased with the presence of such an assertive and

exemplary man since he regards Uncle Teddy as a threat to his authority and as a risk factor who counters his efforts to isolate his family from the African American community. June confirms her father's feelings: "I knew that my father was afraid of dark skin. Or he despised it. I knew that anybody darker than my father became 'Black,' meaning low-down or despicable, if my father ever got angry" (*Soldier* 176).

In *Soldier* and *Zami*, the white education system represents the hopes and dreams of immigrant families for their children. June and Audre are the sole black students in their schools and they encounter American idealism and discrimination all at once. Their diplomas are viewed as a sign of Americanization, which partially erases the immigrant status of their families. However, as high achievers, they are also expected to represent their communities and race. June recalls Jackie Robinson, who was the sole African American major league baseball player as an exemplary forerunner, even though at the time he was a token. She feels uncomfortable about this position: "I was wondering why anyone had to be so good, so fast or smart, just to become the first and the only Negro" (*Soldier* 248). Correspondingly, in her school years, June is also expected to be the best student as the sole African American student among her classmates: "I felt small. I felt outnumbered. I was surrounded by 'them.' And there was no 'we'" (*Soldier* 248). Among white students, she feels like a "pint-sized mascot" (249).

Granville sends June to prominent American schools because he wants her to acquire a white American identity. She attends an all-white American school, Northfield, to refine her academic, social and gender skills: "My father said it was a 'finishing' school: I'd learn table manners, table conversation, grooming, and ladylike posture" (251). For Granville, the summer camps and schools away from home create new battlegrounds for June to test and prove her endurance. As she departs for Northfield, Granville adds, "'Okay! Little Soldier! G'wan! G'wan! You gwine make me proud!'" (261). June also represents her father's desire for success in life as well as its appreciation.

Audre's and June's failure to be popular students, despite their success and their families' commitment to ignoring racism, lead to their search for wholeness. They seek answers to

race and gender specific questions through alternative families, alliances and group memberships. Referring to *Zami*, Christopher Giroux says, the title implies "a wearing down (or breaking from) and building up of landscapes, some personal and some political, some literal and some metaphorical" (285). In the same way, in *Soldier,* June resists a combative home environment and hostile public sphere to re-work and re-form her individual space. Thus, both Audre and June reshape their identities, views and environments in their quests for wholeness.

Zami and *Soldier* reflect the ideas of creating a home, feeling at home and homecoming through the quest for identity, belonging and community. Linked to cultural, geographical and individual spheres of existence, space, place and identity are interrelated. In *Soldier*, the Jordan family moves between the white, African American and African Caribbean neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Harlem. Granville looks for a suitable home and community to overcome his traumatized experiences as a Jamaican immigrant and to place a distance between his family and the African American community. However, *Zami* narrates a craving for home and belonging by recreating, and not forgetting, the cultural abode. For Linda, an ordinary place is turned into an individual meaningful space through her storytelling and memories of her homeland. Linda partially recreates island culture in her kitchen where she cooks West Indian food with Audre. Thus, the idea of home, whether it is geographical or mythical, is nourishing and liberating for Linda, whereas Granville's notion of home is limiting, illusionary and deprived of cultural connections. Therefore, Audre and June search for the unrequited homes of Linda and Granville. For years, Carriacou remains as a fairyland in Linda's stories because even maps do not depict her cherished homeland. Audre looks for home in Linda's storytelling and ritualistic commemorations:

> *Carriacou* which was not listed in the index of the *Goode's School Atlas* nor in the *Junior Americana World Gazette* nor appeared on any map that I could find, and so when I hunted for the magic place during geography lessons or in free library time, I never found it, and came to believe my mother's geography was a fantasy or crazy or at least too old-fashioned, and in reality maybe she was talking about the place other people called Curaçao, a Dutch possession on the other side of the Antilles.

> But underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind up between the pages of a schoolbook. It was our own, my truly private paradise of blugoe and breadfruit hanging from the trees, of nutmeg and lime and sapodilla, of tonka beans and red and yellow Paradise plums. (*Zami* 14)

In contrast to Granville Jordan's struggle to belong to the white community, *Zami* narrates a resistance to forgetting by remembering the homeland and recreating home. Linda clings to West Indian culture, cuisine and rituals because she strives to build a microcosm of Carriacou in her household. Audre identifies Linda with her mortar and pestle, a unique symbol of homeland and a legacy of cultural history: "And whatever came from 'home' was bound to be special" (*Zami* 71). She adores the mortar and pestle, endowing it with a ceremonial and mystical value, as her words indicate: "The heavy sturdiness of this useful wooden object always made me feel secure and somehow full" (71-2). Food signifies cultural commitment and fills the hunger for self-affirmation and remembrance. Audre comments on her preference of local recipes and dedication to the mortar in contrast to her sisters' preference for American food. She memorizes the taste of her mother's special spicy sauce, which triggers sensational feelings and cultural rhythms (*Zami* 74). She accepts the cultural flavor, her mother's reveries of Carriacou and women's mythical solidarity as her guides during her quest for homecoming. Regarding this unique cultural, mythic, matrilineal and feminist redefinition of home in *Zami*, in "The Rewriting of Home" Antje Lindenmeyer states,

> By centering her version of the mythical past on the island of Carriacou and her mother's female ancestors, Lorde avoids the vagueness of an imaginary prehistoric matriarchy that is often the product of feminist mythmaking. Because Lorde's myth is created from the point of view of the immigrant parents' child that never lived in the homeland, it is at the same time utopian and precisely localised. (424)

Both Audre and June look for a welcoming home and an affirmation of identity through their family members, friends and a/n (dis)affiliation with certain groups in different social environments. In their search for belonging, they realize the meaning of home beyond

geographical locations and traditional connotations. Therefore, they create their own secure and nurturing abodes.

1.2. REFLECTIONS ON (UN)CONVENTIONAL GENDER IDENTITIES, SISTERHOOD AND AWAKENINGS: QUEER IDENTITY

In their search for racial, cultural and gender identity, Audre and June leave their familial homes to make their own judgements and interpretations. At home, June is surrounded by contradictory gender roles due to her parents' ambitions and expectations. Through Granville's guidance, June grows up to be a daring boyish girl who is involved in fights and accidents: "People used to say I was a brave little girl or that I was brave like a boy—a lot" (*Soldier* 213). The transgression of gender roles is caused by her father's intervention, and it eventually leads her to adopt her "proper" socially constructed female gender, however cautiously. Her singing and piano lessons, for instance, develop her feminine mannerism and talents. She voices social and gendered concerns: "They wanted me to learn how to sing *inside* the house. They wanted me to learn how to sing like a girl. So I learned. But I never give up the other way, my other way of singing" (*Soldier* 211). She performs socially constructed gender roles and expectations to survive, without relinquishing her principles and her fighting spirit.

Both June and Audre strive for distance from their families and replace their environment with alternative mentors and communities. By abandoning their families temporarily or permanently, they both physically and symbolically return to their homes with a questioning mind, knowledge and self-awareness. Their experience of "homing in" involves cultural, gender and sexual dimensions.[16] During their wanderings, they broaden

[16] The motif of leaving home and family in a quest to return with awareness and an intact sense of identity has many examples in American literature. Still, the concept of homing (in) is associated with Native American works. In "Native American Novels: Homing In," critic William Bevis refers to canonical American novels of mobility and quests such as *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Great Gatsby*. Bevis traces American examples of leaving home and the coming of age to St. Jean de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, which connects home to strict, unprogressive

their visions by competing with and contesting social, political and cultural realities and dominant perspectives. Elizabeth Alexander writes, "what the self is called and what it calls itself are not necessarily identical things" (703). Thus, the self's projection of who s/he is differs from cultural, gender, class and sexual positionality, and the naming and defining of the self. Audre's and June's quests for meaning, understanding and identity in *Zami* and *Soldier* result from the clash between the seeing "I" and the seen "I." Through the subtitle of *Zami*, "a new spelling of my name," Alexander refers to the tradition of self-naming, and re-naming in African American culture. Malcolm X, for instance, adopts a partial re-naming to dismiss the imprints of slavery and the master's legacy upon freed men.[17] However, as Alexander says, Lorde "empties language, even letters, of previous signifiers as she plays with these received symbols" (703).

In *Zami*, oppressive gender identity and body politics is also visible through Audre's menstrual experience and the ensuing change in the mother-daughter relationship. Instead of informing her daughter about her body or sharing her concerns about Audre's delayed menstrual cycle, Linda secretly consults doctors. Audre is left to her own devices to figure out the female body and pregnancy (*Zami* 74-5). Here, dominant discourses about the female body are confined by and embedded in patriarchal and medical discourses, which cause an unnatural distance between Audre and her body; in other words, such discourses added to her self-alienation. The menstrual cycle is associated with a symbolic passage into adolescence and indicates certain limitations and culturally constructed expectations. Yet, as Audre says, "Nightmarish evocations and restrictions were being verbalized by my mother" (*Zami* 76). Menstruation evokes a conformist gender identity and femininity, domestic responsibilities, cautious manners and warnings instead of a dignified social standing. Nevertheless, Audre feels that this experience is part of her bodily initiation into womanhood. She says,

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and backward views (581). For Bevis, however, Native American works reflect a regenerative physical and spiritual return to home, one's family, community and self (582).

[17] Malcolm X changed his name from Malcolm Little, which signified the master's name and his belittling authority through the institution of slavery.

> I hummed tunelessly to myself as I worked in the warm kitchen, thinking with relief about how simple my life would be now that I had become a woman. The catalogue of dire menstruation-warnings from my mother passed out of my head. My body felt strong and full and open, yet captivated by the gentle motions of the pestle, and the rich smells filling the kitchen, and the fullness of the young summer heat. (79)

In *Zami*, Audre's first true love and friend Gennie's death prompts her to leave home. Gennie commits suicide after her father's sexual abuse and her inability to find a safe place to stay. She is one of the inspiring women in Audre's life and opens her eyes to world politics such as the foundation of Israel, the independence of India and the rise of the communist regime in China. Both girls live through wartime threats and postwar bliss by hoping that change will bring better conditions. Audre affirms her stand regarding the politics and influence of her friend: "Thousands of american boys had died to make the world safe for democracy, even though my family and I couldn't be served ice cream in Washington, D.C. But we were going to change all that, Gennie and I, in our full skirts and ballet slippers, the New Look" (*Zami* 87). Through her relationship with Gennie, Audre's voice not only gains a political tone but she also experiments with gender performativity. They move back and forth between diverse roles and social statuses by changing their costumes in accordance with the names, manners and stories they invent for themselves: "Bandits, Gypsies, Foreigners of all degree, Witches, Whores, and Mexican Princesses—there were appropriate costumes for every role, and appropriate places in the city to go to play them all out. There were always things to do to match whomever we decided to be" (88). From Gennie, Audre learns the fluidity of gender and race. Thus, Gennie's suicide marks her struggle with traditional views of gender and gendered violence.

As the first step to her identity construction, Audre seeks answers and solutions to racism, which is obscured through the silence and ignorance of her family. Audre formulates her marginalized identity in a group, a high school clique, "The Branded." The members form a sisterhood because they are united in their oppression: they are belittled due to their different racial, religious or gender affiliations. Group membership secures some basic commonality, like-mindedness and protection in the face of discrimination from whites, Protestants, men and conformists. Audre recalls a well-known saying, "'Remember to be

sisters in the presence of strangers'" (*Zami* 81). This formulation of solidarity across difference indicates an understanding of her own multi-faceted identity, an awareness of feminist consciousness and a comradeship that denounces homogenizing labels and expectations. Moreover, group affiliation provides her with self-affirmation against the white gaze while she struggles with self-blame for ostracism:

> But sometimes, I was close to crazy with believing that there was some secret thing wrong with me personally that formed an invisible barrier between me and the rest of my friends, who were white. What was it that kept people from inviting me to their houses, their parties, their summer homes for a weekend? Was it that their mothers did not like them to have friends, the way my mother didn't? Did their mothers caution them about never trusting outsiders? But they visited each other. There was something here that I was missing. Since the only place I couldn't see clearly was behind my own eyes, obviously the trouble was with me. I had no words for racism. (*Zami* 81)

Unlike the conformist majority, the members of "the Branded" embrace and celebrate their marginality and queerness. They deal with discrimination by transforming antagonism into strength and a survival mechanism (82). After leaving the isolating yet protective sphere of her family home and dealing with an illegal abortion alone, Audre forms an alternative family with the members of "the Branded." Assuming a motherly role, she turns her house into a homosocial space and an unofficial women's shelter for college students and young poets who are confined by domestic violence, heteronormativity, economic disempowerment and gender roles. As an independent woman, Audre defies traditional expectations of commitment to family and marriage. Patriarchal society relates single women with corruption and indecency due to their rebellion against cultural expectations. During the McCarthy era, racial, sexual and political non-conformity, including Audre's racial integrationist life and the members of "the Branded," evoke the suspicion of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. As Audre says, "All of my friends knew we were a menace to the status quo, and defined our rebellions as such" (*Zami* 121). Christopher Giroux adds, "Beyond just spelling her name differently, she is breaking down the status quo, to create a new world, where she belongs, and to which all readers—male, female, black, white, straight, gay—are invited" (288).

In the same way, summer camp provides June with individual space and broadens her mind about freedom and the nature of gender and race relations. Looking up to American families as his role models, Granville sends her to the camp since white children spend their summer vacations there. Before leaving for the camp, Mildred and Nanny, her grandmother, embroider June's initials on her camp gear to help her identify her belongings. As June notes, "I lay there so happy. Maybe this was why they sewed my name on everything. Otherwise I might forget it. Otherwise I might want to forget my name" (*Soldier* 231). The camp provides her with insight into cultural definitions of race and gender, group affiliation and a critical space from which to speak. As a tomboy, June differentiates herself from the other girls, who are not fond of camp life and its activities (*Soldier* 232-33). She conceives a new gender category and space that integrates masculine attributes:

> Girls threw the ball funny.
> Girls complained about bugs.
> Girls got tired.
> Girls hated the cold lake water.
> Girls got homesick.
> Girls could never keep score.
> Girls discovered somebody had shorted
> their sheets so they couldn't get into bed.
> Girls found salamanders in their shoes.
> Girls collapsed in their cots that we
> rigged so that they would—collapse.
> A girl was probably not a good camper.
> For sure, a girl was probably not having a very good time at camp.
> It's not that the rest of us were boys. But we were not "girls," either. (232-3)

As Deborah E. McDowell comments on June's queer identity, "Not a boy and yet not a girl, she nevertheless absorbs the cultural rigors and requirements of masculinity, especially steeling herself against emotion, fear and pain" (3).

Camp life enables June to have a new sense of freedom of movement and thoughts outside of Granville's control: "I'd climbed the tree because it was there. And I could do that. It was free. I was free. I wanted to test myself" (*Soldier* 234). Furthermore, the camp introduces her to Miss Kitty, an African American music teacher. June hears about race

motivated crimes and discrimination from Miss Kitty. She enlightens her about southern racism, Ku Klux Klan violence and lynching (241). What June learns about the South triggers her inquiries about race relations: "Who were these white people around me? Why were they different from down South? What did it mean, 'the difference is only skin deep'?" (242). Camp life initiates June's transformation and maturity as seen through her shifting voice from child to adolescent narrator who feels safe in the homosocial camp community where she voices her own judgments and decisions as a member of a group. Similar to "the Branded" in *Zami*, "Daredevils" is a group of isolated girls in the summer camp, tomboys like June, who are united across their differences. In the camp, June gains critical race and gender consciousness as she is distanced from racism, police brutality and domestic violence back home:

> I felt myself far away from Valerie and her beautiful, tall boyfriend, Jeffrey Underwood, when the cops busted up his face and kicked out his teeth because they were cops and they were white people and Jeffrey lived on our block and he hadn't done anything besides that besides live on our block because he belonged there on our block and then the cops chased him to the roof and they caught him and they messed everything up and nothing was the same after that: Nothing. (*Soldier* 234-5)

According to Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "If the psyche functions as an internalization of heterogeneous social voices, black women's speech/writing becomes at once a dialogue between self and society and between self and psyche" (345). The camp enlightens June about the meaning of blackness and socially constructed gender roles. She starts to speak about violence against African Americans in public places and domestic spaces. Beginning with her observations and experiences, she addresses domestic abuse and the insecurity of African American women. She expresses her disappointment with the legal system and the indifference of legal "experts."

Thus, in *Soldier*, June's naive child persona transforms into a spokesperson with a feminist consciousness who addresses injustices, racism, sexism and linguistic violence. Although June is able to liberate herself from imposed limitations, her situation points out the dilemma of women who are trapped within the sexist patriarchy, oppressive cultural

institutions and an ineffectual law system which threatens women's lives and dignity. She remembers the police, who judged her behavior, rather than Granville's temper and manners: "I called the police one time to report my father because he kept beating me and the policeman told me I should 'try to be a good girl.'" She questions the patriarchal code of morals and its misogynistic stereotypes: "now my father was calling me 'a whore' because for Halloween I put some of my mother's lipstick on my lips as part of my costume and I am nine years old and how can I be selling my body with my mother's lipstick on it?" (*Soldier* 235).

Evoking Mitzi Myers and U.C. Knoepflmacher's definition of "cross-writing" in a special issue of *Children's Literature*, Richard Flynn applies this term to June Jordan's works. Jordan combines the voices and concerns of young and adult people by avoiding a traditionally oppositional or contesting view of different age groups (161-2). The view of Jordan's works as "cross-writing" explains both the narrative structure of *Soldier*, which (re)interprets June's childhood through the eyes of her adult self, June's shift from the child voice to young/adult tone and her concerns. As Flynn argues, Jordan's cross-writing in *Soldier* overrides literary and cultural traditions about the child's voice:

> *Soldier* builds on this experiment with nonstandard discourses, not by employing Black English but by attempting to find a language whereby the adult can render the child's perspective with greater immediacy. By depicting the child as both incipient artist and incipient fighter, Jordan hopes to lend that fictional child agency: to be a soldier, she implies, is to refuse to be victim. Jordan's work for adults, as much as her work for children, provides the necessary preparation for finding the poetic voice for *Soldier* that can come closely to accurately representing the child's experience. (172)

In this way, Jordan redefines the child's voice, experience and perspective beyond grand narratives.

As a narrative of sexuality in relation to cultural and racial recovery, *Zami* describes Audre's quest to assert her lesbian sexual orientation and gender identity through the stages

of denial, ignorance and reclamation.[18] During her quest, she moves between different places, views, people and selves. Ginger (Virginia), Audre's first lover, initiates her sexual awakening. Ginger is an urban educated streetwise lesbian who becomes instrumental in Audre's changing outlook. They work together in a crystal processing factory which hires African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Connecticut. Ginger challenges her historical knowledge and sexual identity with her expectation of stereotypical lesbian manners from Audre. She informs her about Crispus Attucks, who was the first person killed in the Boston Massacre of 1770, which causes her to question grand narratives and the dominant white education system (*Zami* 132-3). Avoiding heterosexism and roles associated with it, Audre is forced to define her sexual and gender identity and review her expectations and definitions of others.

Political and activist circles give Audre a chance to share her marginalized status with other nonconformists under common causes. Her activist feminist background is traced back to 1950s McCarthy politics: the Rosenbergs, red-baiting and segregation policy.[19] Audre regards Mexico as a land of freedom for American expatriates during the Red Scare witch-hunt for un-American dissidents. Through her activist friend, Rhea Held, and her friends in New York, she demonstrates marches and engages in propaganda to help the Rosenbergs (*Zami* 148). After the espionage trial, nonconformist writers, activists and citizens faced skepticism, unemployment, blacklisting and lifelong ostracism through their alleged affiliations with the Communist Party. Audre feels strongly about the victimization of the Rosenbergs during the Cold War hysteria because homosexuals were (and continue to be) persecuted as scapegoats of politics and national security. Non-heteronormative individuals challenge the conformist and conservative social order, which allies with fundamentalist

[18] In *Soldier*, June's gender awakening is limited to queer identity while in *Zami*, Audre first experiments with bisexuality then confirms her lesbianism. *Soldier* does not explore June's young adult life.

[19] In 1953, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed under the Espionage Act for sharing the secret atomic bomb documents with the Soviet Union. Despite controversial documents, accounts and arguments regarding their innocence, they were executed. Popular opinion was that they were the scapegoats of the ideological and militaristic Cold War hysteria and competition between the United States and the USSR. Their execution remains controversial with some still maintaining their innocence.

notions of race and gender. She becomes disillusioned as an activist and disoriented with her gender, cultural and sexual identity as a result of the injustices committed and her prevalent feelings of insecurity (*Zami* 149).

In search of a new home after her disillusionment with 1950s politics, Audre gains an improved sense of racial and social standing in Mexico: "Wherever I went, there were brown faces of every hue meeting mine, and seeing my color reflected upon the streets in such great numbers was an affirmation for me that was brand-new and very exciting. I had never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it" (*Zami* 156). In the United States, she encountered various forms of discrimination due to her race, lesbianism and activism, where she led a secluded life. In Mexico, she moves freely across multiple roles as a young African American lesbian activist poet. Most American expatriates are single women who were involved with the "anti-American" politics or ideologies denounced by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). As Audre claims, "For the american colony in Cuernavaca, the political atmosphere was one of guarded alertness. There was not the stench of terror and political oppression so present in New York" (*Zami* 159). Her American expatriate mentor and lover, Eudora, is a lesbian reporter, translator and political activist in Cuernavaca. Audre is impressed by Eudora's mastectomy experience, sexual assertiveness, daring activism, and her veneration of Mexican culture: "It was Eudora who showed me the way to the Mexico I had come looking for, that nourishing land of light and color where I was somehow at home" (*Zami* 170). Eudora encourages her to embrace her beauty and self-worth as a black lesbian. Audre realizes that Mexico initiates new insight into lesbianism, but not all the expatriates are sexually liberated. In Mexico, patriarchal norms force women to lead double lives as prosperous wives unlike their "young, obvious, and definitely bohemian" sisters in New York (*Zami* 160). Lavender marriages and bisexual American expatriates startle Audre.[20] They are able to secure social acceptance and benefit from heterosexual privileges by remaining closeted. Non-heterosexual practices are still concealed in Mexico where nonconformist politics and ideologies are permitted.

[20] This term refers to seemingly heterosexual marriage between closeted homosexual or/and bisexual couples.

Audre's pilgrimage to Mexico and her relationship with Eudora encourage her to affirm her racial and sexual identity. With this new self-assurance, she analyzes race and gender politics in Mexico and the United States. The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision at the time gives her hope about forthcoming integrationist policies as it reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision which legalized segregation.[21] She considers the decision as "a private promise, some message of vindication" for her (*Zami* 172). She juxtaposes the meaning of color and race in America and Mexico. For the United States, blackness is a harbinger of obscurity, internalized racism and socio-political displacement whereas, in Mexico, blackness means self-assurance, familiarity and a sense of sanctuary. Mexico broadens the meaning of race through its recognition of diversity, without apathy and contempt, which resembles the "Black is Beautiful" maxim of Civil Rights and Black Power Movements that would come later on. Audre's Mexican experience causes awareness that racial uplift is not only manifested by educated middle class African Americans, but it can also be claimed with a humane attitude and associated with beauty:

> It was in Mexico that I stopped feeling invisible. In the streets, in the buses, in the markets, in the Plaza, in the particular attention within Eudora's eyes. Sometimes, half-smiling, she would scan my face without speaking. It made me feel like she was the first person who had ever looked at me, ever seen who I was. And not only did she see me, she loved me, thought me beautiful (*Zami* 173).

Audre searches for alternative definitions of her ethnicity and sexual orientation to avoid existential crisis and self-estrangement. She is constantly drawn into questioning the meaning of being a black lesbian. With the exception of a few inspiring women, she leads a solitary existence without companions, guardians and social approval as a black lesbian:

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[21] In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision acknowledged a Louisiana State law's enforcement of segregated public facilities through "separate but equal" norm. In 1891, Homer Plessy worked with New Jersey "Citizens' Committee to Test the Constitutionality of the Separate Car Act." As a mulatto, only one-eight black, he was taken into custody for breaking the state law about segregated railroads. As a result, his case and trial led to 1896 decision that confirmed segregation in everyday life ("Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)"). In 1954, the Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren declared race segregated education as unconstitutional through his decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. States laws that created segregated public schools disregarded the Fourteenth Amendment rights of citizens. ("Brown v. Board of Education (1954)").

"There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone, like our sister Amazons, the riders on the loneliest outposts of the kingdom of Dahomey." Her deviation from straight white identity deprives her of the regenerative powers of community in times of pain, trouble or joy (*Zami* 176). Recognition and sustenance among lesbian women was limited in the 1950s. Consequently, Audre came to regard lesbian women as "exotic sister-outsiders" whose ignorance could result in vulnerability and disunity (177). She reformulates her identity through shifting, spatial and performative reconstructions of self: "Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and an invisible Black. Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder" (*Zami* 179). She views lesbians as the forerunners to radical feminist groups who promoted nurturing female solidarity and collectivism: "Lesbians were probably the only Black and white women in New York City in the fifties who were making any real attempt to communicate with each other; we learned lessons from each other, the values of which were not lessened by what we did not learn" (179). Racism within lesbian groups was unnamed due to their so-called liberalism. Therefore, African American lesbians lived with the double jeopardy of sexism and homophobia not to mention "polite" racism, which elided race altogether: "And we would all rather die than have to discuss the fact that it was because I was Black, since, of course, gay people weren't racists. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed?" (*Zami* 180). As a result, she does not assert her African Caribbean roots which was her "armor, mantle, and wall" (181) among her lesbian friends. In this context, racism meant ignoring racial difference.

Zami comments on the meanings, myths and images attributed to black lesbianism by heterosexist society, the conventional media, African Americans and lesbians. Their depictions indicate contextual, contradictory and sometimes similar biases about race and unconventional sexuality. In her quest, Audre realizes how she is different from members of the hegemonic American, African American and marginalized lesbian communities. She does not seek to fit into an approved category. She believes that her cultivation is linked to self-recognition:

> In a paradoxical sense, once I accepted my position as different from the larger society as well as from any sub-society—Black or gay—I felt I didn't have to try so hard. To be accepted. To look femme. To be straight. To look straight. To be proper. To look "nice." To be liked. To be loved. To be approved. What I didn't realize was how much harder I had to try merely to stay alive, or rather, to stay human. How much stronger a person I became in that trying. (*Zami* 181)

Audre lacks communal support and understanding regarding her sexual and cultural identity. In her relationships with African American men, she confronts sexual objectification, assault and derogatory naming, in other words, physical and linguistic violence from emasculated men. Her African American colleagues, for instance, give her a hot comb to straighten her natural hair to make it look more "white" (*Zami* 181-82). Her natural hair signifies her cultural and political reaction to ethnocentric beauty standards; however, it seems disdainful to her sisters who aspire to pass as white. During the McCarthy years, compulsory heterosexuality repressed unconventional gender because it was a punishable act. As she also adds, "Besides, there were always rumors of plainclothes women circulating among us, looking for gay-girls with fewer than three pieces of female attire. That was enough to get you arrested for transvestism, which was illegal" (*Zami* 187). The conformist and conservative politics of the Cold War years glorified white middle class suburban women through patriarchal heteronormative definitions that limited gender and desire. As Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*,

> The very entry into the cultural field deflects that desire from its original meaning, with the consequence that desire within culture is, of necessity, a series of displacements. Thus, the repressive law affectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and constructing the domain of the unspeakable), the legitimate from the illegitimate. (84)

Audre redefines "illegitimate" and "unspeakable" gender identity since heterosexual discourses either neglected or misnamed difference as deviance. As Butler says, "Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (*Gender Trouble* 178).

Regarding the multi-cultural positionality and relationality of Audre Lorde, Leigh Gilmore claims that Lorde goes against "a single, primary identity" as a non-white lesbian scholar descending from working class Caribbean immigrants. For Gilmore, the politicized self is challenged by homogenizing identity politics in the name of unity and survival: "One is permitted to be a member of a group; indeed, the force with which we are named and contained therein testifies to the compulsory nature of group identification" (32). Here, *Zami* offers a reformulation of African American ethnicity in (non)heteronormative communities since existing social spaces promote skepticism by, for and among African American women. African American lesbians hide their sexual orientation due to social disapproval and racism. Audre views the potential danger that race, gender and sexuality inflict upon her: "To be Black, female, gay, and out of the closet in a white environment, even to the extent of dancing in the Bagatelle, was considered by many Black lesbians to be simply suicidal" (*Zami* 224). Within the lesbian community, the butch and femme adopted conventional hierarchical norms of machismo and femininity to survive in both worlds.[22] However, Audre does not conform to either a dazzling, yet subservient, femme or assertive butch: "Non-conventional people can be dangerous, even in the gay community" (224). The butch and femme roles were safe because they replicated normative patriarchal discourses and gender binaries. Being in between, even in this world, was risky for Audre.

In *Zami*, the butch and femme images invoke gendered role playing and performativity in a lesbian "heteronormative" context. Audre moves between racially integrated bi/homo/hetero sexual groups and identities. She claims that her progressive and radical generation confronts the conformism of McCarthyism, punitive Red-scare politics and race discrimination. However, they still discriminate through their ingroup and outgroup norms: "*Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough*" (226). Lorde promotes the politics of difference to maintain an intact identity rather than sameness in the name of unity. Elizabeth Alexander writes that

[22] In lesbian communities, "butch" refers to masculine while "femme" stands for feminine gender performances.

Lorde views difference as "a strength to be called upon rather than a liability to be altered" (695). Alexander regards Lorde's biomythography as "collaged self-construction" in relation to a multiplicity of selves that she claims to have without dismissing, degrading or self-sacrificing her self (696-7).

In *Zami*, coming out whole and homecoming require cultural and sexual affirmation that motivates Audre's redefinition of female identity. She desires to embrace her multiple selves without sacrificing diversity. *Zami* discloses Audre's quest of self-naming with the help of her family, friends, lovers and mentors in a confessional and progressive tone. Leaving parental home behind is a necessity for growth and affirmation in her quest. One of her "childhood nightmares" symbolizes both Audre's resentment towards her distant family members and relief as she leaves her problematic home, past and self behind with self-assurance:

> *And then suddenly I realize that in this house of my childhood I am no longer welcome. Everything is hostile to me. The doors refuse to open. The glass cracks when I touch it. Even the bureau drawers creak and stick when I try to close them. The light bulbs blow out when I switch on the light. . . . This is no longer my home; it is only a past time. Once I realize this, I am suddenly free to go, and to take Rhea* [her activist friend] *with me.* (*Zami* 199)

No matter how challenging and stringent her family is, Audre keeps looking for a substitute home to fill their absence. That is why she adopts a parental attitude in her relationships and finds resolution in a redemptive form of sisterhood. The cultural and mythical naming of *Zami* reconnects Audre to an intergenerational society of women starting with Linda, the women in her life, her Caribbean matrilineage and African goddesses. The Zami story refers to Carriacou women who traditionally develop a life-long homosocial commitment to each other for the harvest, childbirth, child raising and survival:

> Here Aunt Anni lived among the other women who saw their men off on the sailing vessels, then tended the goats and groundnuts, planted grain and poured rum upon the earth to strengthen the corn's growing, built their women's houses and the rainwater catchments, harvested the limes, wove their lives and the lives of their children together. Women who survived the absence of their sea-fearing men easily, because they came to love each other, past the men's returning.

> *Madivine*. *Friending*. *Zami*. How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty (*Zami* 13-14).

Zami exemplifies redefining the self through the empowerment of women. According to Analouise Keating, Audre Lorde seeks out the power of naming and representing women's experiences and selves. Lorde's life narratives and poetry state that women have the authority to self-govern their future provided they have linguistic power of self-representation. Phallocentric language and narratives underestimate female self and voice. Lorde encourages women to speak about their patriarchal misnaming and displacement within dominant discourses that work through male granted labels and subordinate gender roles. *Zami* highlights "language, self-identity, and action" to liberate women and (re)member their experience. In that, Lorde's naming as biomythography defies traditional genres. Her redefinition of self, through African Caribbean myths, challenges western ideology and Christian theology (Keating, "Making" 20). Keating writes: "It is Lorde's revision of patriarchal mythology to rename herself which transforms *Zami* from autobiography into *bio*mythography" ("Making" 21). The interpretation of Zami and the presence of Afrekete/Kitty represent Audre's homecoming and her sense of feeling at home in her skin, body and within the community of women.

In *Zami*, Afrekete, Audre's intimate friend, is an African American lesbian. She strengthens her racial, cultural and sexual affirmation by means of her ethnic appearance, visits to West Indian markets and progressivism about loving women, regardless of cultural norms. She is open minded about loving whoever one wants to love. Thus, Audre appreciates Afrekete's teachings: "Afrekete taught me roots, new definitions of our women's bodies—definitions for which I had only been in training to learn before" (*Zami* 250). Afrekete is not only one of her lovers, but she also represents Audre Lorde's alter ego. Afrekete voices Lorde's reconnection to her roots, body and sexuality. Analouise Keating juxtaposes Audre's cultural, sexual and spiritual transformation with Kitty/Afrekete, who is representative of African myths and deities. As her lover and mentor, Afrekete leaves a deep impact upon her redefined self. Keating claims that Audre's appreciation of Afrekete signifies her reconciliation with mythical African women and her maternal ancestors. She stands for Audre's renewed self which acknowledges Linda's Caribbean family history (Keating

"Making" 26). Audre Lorde's integration and reinterpretation of Zami transcends her sense of awareness. As the embodiment of Audre's coming out and coming into voice, Afrekete has a liberating message for all women. As Keating writes, "Recognizing the sacredness of her own female power, Lorde defines herself and all women—physically, emotionally, spiritually—as divine." Keating states that this identification process is Lorde's reformulation of female strength, ingenuity and community ("Making" 31). Kara Provost notes that here, Audre Lorde uses a trickster figure to reflect the fluidity of gender and the presence of non-heterosexual practices. *Zami* and several of Lorde's poems, as Provost says, illustrate the characteristics of the tricksters, their "heterogeneous identity and ability to communicate, connect, and survive despite (and because of) difference." She regards Afrekete as an African Caribbean trickster figure due to her "verbal dexterity, indeterminacy, [and] gender ambiguity." Audre's "model survivor/fighter," Kitty/Afrekete guides her through communal, gendered and racial expectations and limitations (Provost 47).

According to Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, African American women's writing is distinguished with its "interlocutory" and "dialogic" style through its relationality to other inside and outside voices. Henderson asserts that female personality is directed by "an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self." The cultural positionality of African American women highlights their distinction from and affiliation with these "others" (344). *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* accounts for Audre's coming of age through female companions and the reformulation of diverse aspects of her identity such as race, sexuality, gender and culture. In this way, she celebrates every single woman who made an impression on her, provided her with a voice and helped her come out, despite the stigmatization of black skin, the female sex and lesbianism. As Audre sums up in "a bridge and field of women" in the epilogue, her experiences legitimize the presence and voices of Zami women (*Zami* 255). Her life is an embodiment of all these inspirational women's desires, yearnings, achievements and stories. They transform Audre in that process into the storyteller of silenced women: "*Ma-Liz, DeLois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda, and Genevieve; MawuLisa, thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her*

youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become" (255). In "The Rewriting of Home," Antje Lindenmeyer argues that Zami women indicate an alternative culturally approved space for women through "a straight line from matriarchal (Eden) to (lesbian) Utopia" (425).

During Audre's quest for homing, the interpretation of home is also transformed. In the beginning, she searches for home in her mother's memories, reveries and stories of Carriacou. At the end of her quest, she realizes that home is more than a faraway mythical place or an edenic destination. Homing-in is the quest, self-discovery and reconciliation that reaches the inner self, pays a visit to ancestors and emerges through cultural and sexual renewal: "Once *home* was a long way off, a place I had never been to but knew out of my mother's mouth. I only discovered its latitudes when Carriacou was no longer my home. There it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother's blood" (*Zami* 256). According to Yakini B. Kemp, Audre Lorde reformulates her heritage and home in the richness of the African Caribbean and American traditions, which provide her with the liberating linguistic tool of naming. With the introduction of Zami into the American context, Kemp views the reinterpretation of "lesbian organizations of the African diaspora." Kemp likens Lorde's naming of female solidarity and community to Alice Walker's term "womanism," which defines African American women's cultural identity, interconnection and communal links through a review of the female self. In a similar way, Audre combines her Caribbean, African and lesbian identity under the title of Zami through a "combination/juxtaposition/integration" of her multiple affiliations (Kemp 34).

Audre owes her survival to a redemptive form of sisterhood, love and reconnection. On the other hand, June owes her fighting spirit to her father's parental rules and her self-growth during her summer camp experiences. As Joan Scott notes, "It's not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (60). The defining characteristic of June's childhood memories is to fight for survival, which is naturalized in different institutional spaces including her home, school and other public places. Her struggle across race, gender and community lines reflects the roots of an activist feminist background in childhood. She is deprived of a stable notion of sex, gender and racial

identity. Thus, she is confused by her experiences, observations and contradictory expectations of her parents, specifically her father's aspirations. During her violent confrontations with Granville, she develops self-protective measures: "Toward the end of my seventh year, I took to sleeping with a knife under my pillow. So when my father rumbled those mahogany doors open and started to beat me in the middle of the night, I pulled out my knife and I asked him, 'What do you want?'" (*Soldier* 137). June owes her fighting spirit and resistance to her father's victim psychology and his survival training. Moreover, the time she spends at camp enables her to arrive at her own conclusions about African Americans, racism, sexism and gender norms.

June Jordan's *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* depict their narrated subjects, June's and Audre's, fragmented selves through their multicultural histories, traumatic experiences of their immigrant families and normative definitions of race, culture, sex and gender. They grow up as color-blind children of Caribbean immigrants who transfer their fear of and resentment of race discrimination, bigotry, class prejudice and white patriarchal cultural hegemony in the form of rules, warnings and discipline to their children. Audre and June are contested by and isolated through the American education system, gender roles and race relations. The immigrant families resort to survival methods like turning away, misnaming and following blindly the American dream. Audre and June leave their families and homes and find alternative families, mentors, group affiliations and communal links. They seek reinterpretations and redefinitions of race, culture and gender identity that contrast with cultural, familial and stereotypical positionalities. Thus, they relate their personal experiences and memories to communal/collective histories and stories instead of choosing a silent existence.

CHAPTER 2

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MANIFESTOS: THE POLITICS OF LIBERATION IN JUNE JORDAN'S *CIVIL WARS* AND AUDRE LORDE'S *SISTER OUTSIDER* AND *THE CANCER JOURNALS*

I am defined as other in every group I'm part of. The outsider, both strength and weakness. Yet without community there is certainly no liberation, no future, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between me and my oppression.

Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (1980)

All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women, and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental, and black American women whose oppression is tripled. . . . But we do have female's oppression in common. This means that we can begin to talk to other women with this common factor and start building links with them and thereby build and transform the revolutionary force we are now beginning to amass.

Mary Ann Weathers, "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force" (1995)

I believe feminist thinking is enriched by dissent. Opposing viewpoints should not be censored, silenced, or punished in any way. Deeply committed to a politics of solidarity wherein sisterhood is powerful because it emerges from a concrete practice of contestation, confrontation, and struggle, it is my dream that more feminist thinkers will live and work in such a way that our being embodies the power of feminist politics, the joy of feminist transformation.

bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (2008)

June Jordan's and Audre Lorde's feminist autobiographical manifestos question the conditions that silence women. Jordan's *Civil Wars* and Lorde's *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* and *The Cancer Journals* indicate that women's submission to the patriarchy and disempowered status due to difference or divergence from the dominant race, nationality, cultural politics, class, sex and gender are shared. Lorde's and Jordan's autobiographical "I"s are representative of autobiographical "we"s that arise from African

American communities and find echoes in developing and developed countries. Their autobiographical manifestos of coalition and identity politics through transnational perspectives provide insight and solutions to the intersectionality of oppressive forms. Françoise Lionnet argues that autobiographical narration aims to transcend the "dominant, 'national' picture that we have of ourselves." According to Lionnet, autobiographical narratives serve a cultural need that connects and radically changes people. She also adds that the life writing tradition reflects a complicated intersectionality between the individual and society and self and nationality without presenting a "simple formula for understanding the dynamics of subjectivity and identification." As she suggests, autobiographical narratives represent the conflicting impact of different forces from race to class, from education to popular culture (Lionnet 379). Nicki Hitchcott refers to Rita Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* regarding the mission of the feminist autobiographical voice. As Felski argues, feminist autobiographical narratives combine the self's desire for authenticity and articulation by defining the female self within a larger socio-cultural context. For her, the changing face of genre implies certain communal expectations through the transformation of the self and the autobiographical "I" and "we." She says:

> Feminist confession exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience. In other words, the shift toward a conception of communal identity which has emerged with new social movements such as feminism brings with it a modification of the notion of individualism as it exemplified in the male bourgeois autobiography. (qtd. in "African 'Herstory'" 16)

According to Hitchcott, the traditional perception of feminist ideology and the individual have changed because feminist autobiographical writing has transformed the self's separate existence and the genre itself. The self is now assumed to be part of "larger, collective identity." This constitutes the reworking of the bonds between "individual/collective" and "modernism/tradition" (Hitchcott 16).

In "Autobiographical Manifestos," Sidonie Smith states that autobiographical works are connected to "emancipatory politics" because they reconsider the value of individuality and critical voice (434). According to Smith, women's autobiographical manifestos re-view the

self, body and personal views in a politicized context. She adds that these works challenge the interpretation of history, grand narratives, communal voice, politics and identity: "Purposeful, bold, contentious the autobiographical manifesto contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, the old politics, the *ancient regime*, by working to dislodge the hold of the universal subject through an expressly political collocation of a new 'I'" ("Autobiographical Manifestos" 435). Autobiographical works are personal stories that seek public acknowledgement. Autobiographical manifestos, on the other hand, deal with the dichotomous relationship between the personal and the political. Through white middle class feminism, women's problems found place in criticism. Manifesto narratives exposed white middle class feminism and its "multiple differences" and "multiple oppressions," emphasizing individually experienced race, class and gender politics. Referring to Aida Hurtado, Smith states that diverse intersectional forms of oppression change the perception of the personal and political in minority women's autobiographical narratives.[23] As Smith suggests in "Autobiographical Manifestos," "Different autobiographers come at the private/public duality from different experiences of oppression, from different locales in discourse" (436). She notes "the performative aspect of the autobiographical manifesto" and regards the public as the addressee. She argues that autobiographical manifestos deal with socially and culturally defined selves to discuss "sanctioned and legitimated performances." The manifesto form raises awareness about space, place and time based positionalities and, thus, uncovers essentialist daily routines and behavior patterns (437).

In "Notes on the Feminist Manifesto: The Strategic Use of Hope," Felicity Colman defines the audience and function of the manifesto, which addresses "a broad spectrum of people coming from a range of divergent contexts, different backgrounds, various ethnic origins and political agendas" (375). Colman also says that manifesto writers have been labelled "demented or socially unstable people: artists, radicals, the disfranchised, the dispossessed, the migrant worker, the elite, queer or feminists." She adds that the manifesto appeals to various contexts and groups with sociopolitical messages such as Riot Grrrl, which had its

[23] Hurtado, Aida. "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Women and Women of Color." *Signs* 14 (1989): 849.

own manifesto.[24] Alternatively, the manifesto becomes both a form of "civil expression" and "public protest" as can be seen through the Italian Futurist manifesto.[25] Feminist manifestos state the conditions of women and seek solutions through radical steps and progress (Colman 376). That is why Colman regards it as "a recognisable agent for change" (378). As she states, the manifesto form uses the power of language to address both the past and the future in a meaningful and influential way:

> How the manifesto aims to achieve its action often engages an ambitious process that looks toward the future, as the organic platforms of our bodies are bound by a mortal span. The language of the manifesto is primarily given as an imperative command, but the wording of the manifesto is often couched in the future anterior–the language of hope–in its orientation toward shifting not only the future, but also changing the past: "We will do this"; "We can change this." (Colman 385)

Civil Wars, Sister Outsider and *The Cancer Journals* push Second Wave feminist agendas in the direction of the Third Wave concerns with the addition of transnational consciousness and activism. Benita Roth argues that although the Second Wave Feminism of the 1960s and 1970s has been recognized through the axis of white women, suburban wives, scholars and activists, multiple Second Wave "feminisms" existed. Roth views these as "organisationally distinct feminist movements" which included people of color and African American feminists. African American feminism is generally noted for its influence beyond the Second Wave feminist thought (Roth 46). Deborah L. Siegel states that Third Wave Feminism characteristically encounters and embodies "various challenges." Siegel argues that Third Wave feminist works emphasize the conflicted co-existence of separatist normative feminism and a desire for sisterhood. The movement attempts to avoid the Second Wave's white suburban "we," although the political need of collaboration persists. Third Wave Feminism is still rooted in the claims of Second Wave

[24] Riot Grrrl is a punk rock feminist movement. Published in 1991, their manifesto, written by the group Bikini Kill, revolts against oppression and traditional representations of women in popular culture.

[25] Written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and published in 1909, the "Manifesto of Futurism" preaches industrial power, militarism and action. Marinetti denounces classical literature, the arts and ideologies such as romantic poetry and feminism. He calls for a cultural, artistic and industrial rebirth of Italy through aggression and power.

Feminism, womanism and people of color (Siegel 57). For Siegel, Asian American feminist activist writer Jee Yeun Lee's *Beyond Bean Counting* reflects the contradictory yet desired Second Wave feminist urge for the definition of "we" and solidarity in the Third Wave feminist context:

> These days, whenever someone says the word "women" to me, my mind goes blank. What "women?" What is this "women" thing you're talking about? Does that mean me? Does that mean my mother, my roommates, the white woman next door, the checkout clerk at the supermarket, my aunts in Korea, half the world's population? I ask people to specify and specify, until I can figure out exactly what they're talking about. . . . Sisterhood may be global, but who is in that sisterhood? None of us can afford to assume anything about anybody else. (qtd. in "The Legacy of the Personal" 57-8)

Despite being historically situated at the end of Second Wave feminist activist writing, June Jordan's *Civil Wars* (1981) and Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980) and *Sister Outsider* (1984) discuss the above concerns and contribute to the reconsideration of "women" and global sisterhood. These works broaden "we" to include women of color. They also indicate the shift from Second Wave feminist concerns to the Third Wave feminist movement, which was just on the horizon. From this vantage point, these Second Wave feminist works are precursors to Third Wave narratives. As quintessential Second Wave feminist activists, Jordan and Lorde criticize the past and shape the future agenda of feminism, in other words, the Third Wave, through their autobiographical works that combine manifesto and memoir forms.

Comparing June Jordan's *Civil Wars*, Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) and Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, Barbara Christian states that Jordan's work narrates her early years in 1950s and 1960s New York as a struggle, a kind of civil war, for power and survival. As a working class African American woman of Caribbean descent, she tries to achieve wholeness while contributing to her diverse roles through journalism, activism, teaching and poetry. According to Christian, Jordan merges her "many-sidedness" under transnationality. She also adds that Audre Lorde seeks harmony and reconciliation of difference within and among people through her positionalities ("Review: Dynamics of Difference" 6). Christian regards Lorde's essays as a thorough

view of the self and social critique. She says that Lorde reveals the interconnected nature of race, sex, gender, class and age discrimination in a new light. Thus, she encourages people to discuss their differences because the exchange of ideas and (dis)approval bring them together. *Sister Outsider* promotes alliances and tolerance rather than "easy separatism" among alienated people due to sexual orientation, race, class or gender status. According to Christian, Lorde's feminist essay collection suggests commonality and strength behind differences in order to change the world ("Review: Dynamics of Difference" 7). Regarding the title of *Sister Outsider*, Michéle Aina Barale notes Lorde's paradoxical status through which she claims kinship out of difference and multiple selves, "As the oxymoron of that title suggests, what Lorde has to offer feminism comes from her differences from the whole which enable her vision as both sister and as outsider—as black, woman, lesbian, mother of a daughter and a son, poet, partner in a racially mixed relationship" (73). Through *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde not only adds her experience of mastectomy to her differences but she also broadens her activist feminist agenda by including her cancer treatment because she views illness in relation to socially constructed normative gender norms, traditional codes of sexuality and health concerns.

The Cancer Journals is a hybrid narrative of prose, poetry and journal entries in a non-chronological order which reverses the process of diagnosis and mastectomy. Audre Lorde shares her experience with breast cancer and post-mastectomy life through her illness and healing narrative. Lorde searches for strength and completeness within herself and among other women through shared suffering and mutual fears. Her survival is connected to her fight against cancer and its outcomes, which indicate both the fear of death and the determination to find her one-breasted figure a place beyond the standards of femininity. In the introduction, she states that the aim of her writing is to gain understanding from a reconnection to and a place among women: "I am a post-mastectomy woman who believes our feelings need voice in order to be recognized, respected, and of use" (*The Cancer Journals* 9). Lorde's journal entries reflect her need of healing while including other women who the feel the self-destructive burden of mastectomy. According to Lorde, pain brings women together despite their cultural differences. She transforms the insecurities

caused by her mastectomy into awareness for women. By writing about her pain, she demolishes the wall that traditionally oppresses women's bodies, words and outcries. She regards her illness as a means to sympathize and collaborate with women, rather than a weakness:

> I do not wish my anger and pain and fear about cancer to fossilize into yet another silence, nor to rob me of whatever strength can lie at the core of this experience, openly acknowledged and examined. For other women of all ages, colors, and sexual identities who recognize that imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness, and for myself, I have tried to voice some of my feelings and thoughts about the travesty of prosthesis, the pain of amputation. (9)

June Jordan's and Audre Lorde's feminist activist autobiographical essays transform the voice of the autobiographical "I" and personal experience into collectivism by merging memoir and manifesto forms. Jordan's *Civil Wars* and Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and *The Cancer Journals* manifest a transnational urge to break the silence with voice. Their works exemplify women's agency, strength and struggle across race, gender, sexuality, class and cultural politics. The intersectionality of oppression of African American women, and other women of color and people, brings an awareness that calls for coalition politics and transnationality beyond racial, cultural, gender and national borders. Therefore, Jordan and Lorde represent the shift from Second Wave Feminism towards Third Wave Feminism through multiple identifications and alliances with women against racism, sexism, elitism, homophobia, illness and postcolonial politics. Their works act as guidelines and maps for the psychological, physiological and communal suffering of people, particularly women. In this chapter, the meaning of language and voice as power in the struggle against silence and censorship, renewed race and gender politics, and the feminist movement are analyzed in relation to the concepts of intersectionality, coalition politics and transnationality.

2.1. LANGUAGE VERSUS SILENCE: VOICE, POWER AND STRUGGLE

Michael M. J. Fischer conveys the role of autobiographical voice in life writing as the revelation of "subject positioning" and "authorial perspective." As Fischer says,

autobiographical voices are traditionally associated with the self, thus first person narration. He maintains that autobiographical voice is not limited because it consists of "mosaic compositions." He argues that first, second and third person voices indicate both references to and representations of "cross-historical and cross-cultural others," whose contributions and presence should not be underestimated. He also suggests that the reading of voices require the articulation of various positionalities from which those subjects speak. He chooses the French word "*sondage*" to look at the different versions and meanings behind autobiographical voices and "'soundings'" (Fischer 79). Moreover, such attempts broaden the traditional limits of autobiography beyond its monolithic equivalent to grand narratives. Autobiographical writing encourages the reconsideration of generalizing dominant perspectives by showing the "changing, pluralizing, world" (Fischer 80). June Jordan and Audre Lorde rework their experiences to evoke the voices of African Americans, people of color, women and the world from a transnational point of view. They move from the individual to the world community by broadening the scope of race, nation, gender and culture specific communities.

Kathi Weeks comments on the motto of the Second Wave Feminism, the "personal is political," with regard to feminist autobiographical writing. Weeks argues that "competing interpretations of the slogan" have dominated the scene since the 1980s. She states that radical feminists viewed the message straightforwardly. However, cultural feminists regarded it as an obligation and emphasized personal struggle as a virtue instead of collectivism and the eventual transformation of society. Others encouraged "reduction of the political to the personal." Feminists tend to avoid personal life narratives including marriage and maternity, supposing that women may be ashamed or "'take it personally.'" The present approach among feminists indicates the devaluation of the personal life as a political, critical and activist ground (Weeks 742). However, African American feminists Audre Lorde and June Jordan highlight the politicization of the personal rather than silence. Their traumas and struggles are collectively shared and have politics in the background.

Lorde and Jordan view language and voice as means of power in their struggle with oppression and discrimination. In the foreword of *Civil Wars*, Jordan recalls her uncle's

advice and physical training for self-protection in fights, although she might be beaten. She learns that she must be courageous and defend herself, regardless of the reason or the result: "I learned, in short, that fighting is a whole lot less disagreeable than turning tail or knuckling under. It feels better" (*Civil Wars* ix-x). That is how she gains her reputation as a boyish girl which becomes her childhood armor and shield. As she grows up, her soldierly training and weapons are transformed into the power of words which guard her against opponents. As a feminist activist scholar, she affirms her stand through these words: "I loved words and I hated to fight. But if, as a Black girl-child in America, I could not evade the necessity to fight, then, maybe, I could choose my weaponry at least" (x).

In her interview with Charles H. Rowell, Audre Lorde states her fierce resistance to silence. She believes in the emphatic power of language in reaching people and rekindling communal fervor:

> Whenever a conscious Black woman raises her voice on issues central to her existence, somebody is going to call her strident, because they don't want to hear about it, nor us. I refuse to be silenced, and I refuse to be trivialized, even if I do not say what I have to say perfectly. What I write is important, and I insist that you feel out what you have to say about the subject, and then maybe you can say it better. But it must be heard. I refuse to be silenced, that's right. And I will not allow my work to be trivialized because what I am writing is not only about me, it is about the lives of many voiceless people, and the life of the planet that we share. (Rowell and Lorde 62)

In the same way, Lorde's "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" advocates linguistic and activist empowerment rather than the silence that results from intimidation and destructive forces. African American women suffer from racial and sexual objectification due to the white patriarchal gaze, which legitimizes and conceals race and sex discrimination. According to Lorde, African American women's struggle in the feminist movements centers upon their sense of racial and cultural difference. Although white supremacy oppresses African American women by targeting their differences, she regards their cultural identity as a means of self-empowerment. Therefore, collective action and politicization of the voice along with race pride save those women from being silent witnesses of systematic oppression and generational extermination. As she declares, "We

can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid" (*Sister Outsider* 42). She emphasizes the transformative power of language in the face of race and gender discrimination. Her writing has a mission and aims to reach people as she speaks her mind and her principles, which is akin to her lifelong struggle (*Sister Outsider* 43). In "On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action," Lester C. Olson questions the socio-cultural circumstances and discursive (dis)empowerment as the motivation behind speech and silence. According to Olson, Lorde's "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," delivered at the Modern Language Association in 1977, reveals "some margins of rhetoric" and essentialist views in the socio-cultural designation of the speakers, activists and silenced groups (49).

Since it addresses the silent victims of breast cancer, Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* is an autopathography[26] and functions as scriptotheraphy[27] for a community of patients and survivors together with all women who might find themselves in the same struggle with traditional measures of gender. Lorde says, "May these words serve as encouragement for other women to speak and to act out of our experiences with cancer and with other threats of death, for silence has never brought us anything of worth. Most of all, may these words underline the possibilities of self-healing and the richness of living for all women" (*The Cancer Journals* 10). She believes that cancer patients (un)consciously have "commonality of isolation and painful reassessment." She does not persecute women due to their use of prostheses, self-denial or ignorance. According to Lorde, women deal with breast cancer on their own terms but their conditions only provide temporary solutions: "Each of us struggles daily with the pressures of conformity and the loneliness of difference from which those choices seem to offer escape." She asserts the meaninglessness of those attempts as

[26] Prominent scholar in the fields of life writing and disability studies, G. Thomas Couser wrote *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (U of Wisconsin P, 1997). Couser calls illness narratives autopathography.

[27] A scholar of trauma studies, Suzette Henke calls healing narratives scriptotheraphy and wrote *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (Macmillan, 1998). Henke states that writing gives a sense of relief and recovery from disturbing experiences and memories.

long as women are afraid of seeing the situation as a source of transformation of "crisis into useful strengths for change" (10). Lorde tries to control her rage against the ignorance of society and defines treatment as a "stupid brutal lack of consciousness or concern." She challenges the devaluation of women of color whose voices and lives are worthless and unspeakable in public view. Thus, she asks, "*What is this work all for? What does it matter whether I ever speak again or not? I try. The blood of black women sloshes from coast to coast and Daly says race is of no concern to women. So that means we are either immortal or born to die and no note taken, un-women*." She feels more estranged from other women due to their distance, especially after the mastectomy (*The Cancer Journals* 12). Instead of forming a community, bias and categorizations separate women through false promises.

Throughout *The Cancer Journals*, breast cancer and the post-mastectomy period are viewed as a critical self-trial and the continual battle of neglected, separated and silent women who eventually create a community of women-bonded women. Silence and fear are Lorde's primary enemies, standing like walls of ideas and disruptive categorizations among women. She is concerned about the proper articulation of her experience, fears and her contribution to both African Americans and women in need of guidance. Thus, she asks, "How do I give voice to my quests so that other women can take what they need from my experiences? . . . And most of all, how do I fight the despair born of fear and anger and powerlessness which is my greatest internal enemy?" (*The Cancer Journals* 16-7). She states that breast cancer ironically opens her eyes to the urge for radical change because of the dire circumstances which encircle all women. She concludes that "teaching, surviving and fighting" are her weapons to detect "the enemy outside and the enemy within." By writing, Lorde feels that she is part of a grand body of literature, activism and organization within women's history and literature (*The Cancer Journals* 17). However, she cannot find any role models, examples or narratives that reflect her experience. In the chapter called "Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience," she bespeaks cancer patients' fear of solitude, "Off and on I kept thinking. I have cancer. I'm a black lesbian feminist poet, how am I going to do this now? Where are the models for what I'm supposed to be in this situation? But there were none. This is it, Audre. You're on your own" (*The Cancer Journals* 28-9).

Betty Ann Bergland argues that multiculturalism creates conflicted versions of historical facts and truth. Feminism and ethnicity also challenge sex, race and class prejudiced traditions of cultural hegemony. Bergland says that the validity of history, truth and experience are tested in autobiographical narratives. Reasonably, she asks, "what stories get told? whose truth is heard? which memories find legitimacy?" She views the situation as a "systematic denial of history and memory" of people whose stories and experiential histories are censured. These autobiographical feminist accounts pose a serious threat to dominant politics, narratives and views (Bergland 69). Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* differs as an African American feminist illness narrative because her memoir defies cultural and gender discourses which promote the sexual objectification of women through the disguise of heteronormative gender roles and the cult of femininity. Lorde criticizes the superficial concerns of the patriarchy which controls the media and the medical community. In her effort to maintain self-respect for her one-breasted body, Lorde encounters the warnings, stories and images of women who deny the presence of breast cancer, mastectomy and measures against metastasis. Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* thus speaks for intimidated women whose voices, fears and experiences are censured by prosthetic devices, plastic surgery and the threat of defeminization.

The discouragement of African Americans in various fields of study and employment and the exclusion of African American vernacular language from the mainstream media, publishing houses and academia are other measures of silence enforced upon African Americans. In "White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation," June Jordan analyzes the power behind Standard English and African American vernacular. She claims that those who hold cultural and political power in their hands also manipulate truth, ideology, political correctness and the means of communication. She states that, for an African American child, the glorification of the Vietnam War in the English language is meaningless when references to the My Lai massacre, the casualties, chemical attacks and

Agent Orange prove otherwise.[28] She warns the African American community about the rhetoric used in Standard English,

> It is the language of the powerful. Language is political. That's why you and me, my Brother and my Sister, that's why we sposed to choke our natural self into the weird, lying, barbarous, unreal, white speech and writing habits that the schools lay down like holy law. Because, in other words, the powerful don't play; they mean to keep that power, and those who are the powerless (you and me) better shape up—mimic/ape/suck—in the very image of the powerful, or the powerful will destroy you—you and our children. (*Civil Wars* 62-63)

Likewise, Alice Ashton Filmer indicates the political nature of the dominant language whose discursive power suppresses alternative means of expression: "*The distinction between a language and dialect is political. As the old adage goes, languages have armies, dialects don't*" (257). Lorde challenges Standard English with African American vernacular and centers her argument on the credit given to Standard English in African American households and the formal education of children. She criticizes the imitation of the oppressor's tongue because her language is explicitly linked to the white cultural imperialism that legitimizes white idealism and creates self-denial and the erasure of identity. She takes a stand against assimilationist assumptions such as seeking the approval of the cultural hierarchy and white privilege:

> We will not help ourselves into extinction by deluding our Black selves into the belief that we should/can become white, that we can/should sound white, think white because then we will be *like* the powerful and therefore we will be powerful: this is just a terrible, sad joke . . . we must cease this self-loathing delusion and recognize that power and happiness and every good thing that we want and need and deserve must come to us as we truly are: must come to us, a Black people, on our terms, respecting our definitions of our goals, our choice of names, our styles of speech, dress, poetry, and jive. (*Civil Wars* 64-65)

In "White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation," Standard English is regarded as a white political tool that is enforced through the public education system. Through primary education, African American children "first encounter the punishing force

[28] Agent Orange is a type of defoliant used during the Vietnam War to destroy forests, the hiding places of the insurgents against American forces. Later on, it was discovered that it was carcinogenic and mutagenic when both U.S. soldiers and the local Vietnamese were diagnosed with aggressive tumors and children were born with horrific birth defects.

of this white power." They experience discrimination against race and language at schools where white students' Standard English is appreciated. African American children are despised for using "non-standard" English because vernacular is deemed to be "*sub*-standard, and even dangerous, and must be eradicated" (*Civil Wars* 65). Language is associated with politics of representation and discursive power, in other words hegemonic categorizations, since Standard English is considered a metalanguage in contrast to African American vernacular. Anything beyond Standard English and whiteness characterizes difference and implies othering. As Jordan notes, "*Standard* means the rule, the norm. Anyone deviating from the standard is therefore 'wrong.'" African American children who are born into the African American vernacular are marginalized as are their struggles with injustice (*Civil Wars* 66). Echoing, June Jordan's analysis of Standard American English and African American vernacular English, Alice Ashton Filmer states the socio-cultural connotations of the (un)acceptable uses of English, which designates the status of speakers through hegemonic power relations. She says: "For example, the imperial legacy that has long privileged 'native' over 'nonnative' speakers of English is also evident in linguistic pecking orders that confer prestige on the speakers of standard Englishes while stigmatizing those of non-standard varieties" (256).

Similarly, Jordan's "Problems of Language in a Democratic State" informs African American students about historical female figures such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Mary McLeod Bethune. While trying to come up with other lesser known names, she realizes that these women challenged daily invisibility and silence among African American women which involved the "official erasure of their faces and their voices." An African American woman from the audience confirms Jordan's remarks with an experience of her own, saying, "A lotta times and I'm walking on campus and I see another Black woman and so I'll say '*Hi*' but then she won't answer me and I don't understand it because I don't mean we have to get into a conversation or do all of that like talking to me but you could say, '*Hi*.' If you see me you could say, '*Hi*.'" Jordan argues that African American women struggle with sexist violence, alcoholism in the family and racism. Their experiences are not discussed in the curriculum. They will neither find jobs nor

understanding after graduation (*On Call* 35). Nevertheless, they must focus on their recognition of each other, and the blindfolded existence and isolation within African American community. The situation becomes worse when enforced American English and grand narratives are added to the mix. As Jordan inquires, "Who can tell these Americans that they should trust the language available to them? Who will presume to criticize their faltering, their monosyllables, their alienation from a literature that condemns them to oblivion?" (*On Call* 36).

In "White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation," June Jordan expresses that African Americans need communal cooperation to guide their children through the use of African American vernacular. Jordan expects African Americans to describe their lives and expectations in this way. She views public schooling as a "ready-made battleground" because their survival is linked to the communal reaction to the "political intention to homogenize" them. She suggests that African Americans should not hide their identity during their interactions with publishers, colleagues and even readers. They should reclaim their own language and voice as scholars and communal members. Only then, will people view African American vernacular as an expression other than "a mistake, or a verbal deficiency" (*Civil Wars* 67). Language is inseparable from lifestyle, cultural production and the unique perspectives. Reflection of African American Vernacular English politically and sociologically distinguishes the white ideal from the black other, and Jordan addresses the issue in the following manner:

> Our Black language is a political fact suffering from political persecution and political malice. Let us understand this and meet the man, politically; let us meet the man *talking the way we talk*; let us not fail to seize this means to our survival, despite white English and its power. Let us condemn white English for what it is: a threat to mental health, integrity of person, and persistence as a people of our own choosing. (*Civil Wars* 68)

Ignorance, discrimination and eventual silence emerge from assumptions and generalizations about people. For the African American community, the denial of literary works, cultural practices and politics indicate another form of censorship. In Audre Lorde's "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," unacknowledged racial

difference is one of the major issues that prevents the coalition of women. As long as white women fail to recognize white supremacy and the dominance of white grand history, women of colors' histories and experiences will be "too 'alien' to comprehend" (*Sister Outsider* 117). Lorde regards the absence of non-white women in women's studies and literature as proof of such an approach. Stories of neglected and marginalized women are still not articulated in mainstream literature. While experiences of women of color pose an obstacle to white women, as she conveys, the white community continues to read canonized classics written by white male authors:

> All too often, the excuse given is that the literatures of women of color can only be taught by Colored women, or that they are too difficult to understand, or that classes cannot "get into" them because they come out of experiences that are "too different." I have heard this argument presented by white women of otherwise quite clear intelligence, women who seem to have no trouble at all teaching and reviewing work that comes out of the vastly experiences of Shakespeare, Molière, Dostoyefsky, and Aristophanes. (*Sister Outsider* 117)

Like Lorde's critique of white education, Jordan's "Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person" criticizes both the function and the value of the white education system, which systematically lacks African American perspectives. She demands the recognition of African American studies within the curriculum. Culture and history-based education improves communal and personal identity without crisis or confusion over mutual allegiances. She calls for the co-existence of history, community and identity: "We look for community. We have already suffered the alternatives to community, to human commitment. . . . Therefore, we cannot, in sanity, pass by the potentiality of Black studies: studies of the person consecrated to the preservation of that person" (*Civil Wars* 53).

In "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian emphasizes the political, discursive and hegemonic nature and control over literary works. Christian reviews the African American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through Charles Chesnutt, Richard Wright, Amiri Baraka and Alice Walker. She arrives at the same conclusion with Lorde and Jordan about the determinative and authoritarian position of the canon. She states that the Black Arts Movement, which nourished African American, feminist and women's studies, struggled with discursive power and grand narratives. She argues that the dismissal of

African American writers and works from critical and academic fields should be analyzed in relation to the race, class and cultural politics that define literature and experience. In order to survive, as Christian argues, the writers of silenced groups need to defend their place by uncovering "antecedents for the sophisticated arguments" ("The Race for Theory" 71).

In the same vein, in "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," Audre Lorde resents the omission of and generalizations about the African American matriarchy in *Gyn/Ecology*.[29] Daly's work overemphasizes white women's voices, stories and interests and takes little notice of black female deities. Lorde invokes African women warriors and goddesses as symbols of sisterhood and reconciliation and rediscovers the rich, yet long forgotten, female potential in ancient wisdom. She inquires the meaning of absence for African American women in *Gyn/Ecology*: "Why are her goddess images only white, western european, judeo-christian? Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan?" (*Sister Outsider* 67). Such close-knit female communities reinforce the power of women's cooperative survival and her mission to encourage women identified women. These mythical foremothers reveal ancient sources of female autonomy and solidarity, and by evoking them, Jordan is arguing for a reclamation of their strength in the face of white oppression.

Lorde's autobiographical works reinterpret women of color's experiences beyond master narratives and western gender norms. In *Gyn/Ecology*, the obscured voice of black women is decimated by stereotypical depictions and "examples of female victimization." Lorde concludes by referring to the ignorance and silence of women, "When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise" (*Sister Outsider* 69). Barbara Christian argues that marginalized and decentered people experience silence and censorship, even though their voices are crucial both for themselves and their underrepresented agendas and communities. Thus, Christian says, "Among the folk who speak in muted tones are people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers, who have struggled for much longer

[29] Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

than a decade to make their voices, their various voices, heard, for whom literature is . . . necessary nourishment for their people" ("The Race for Theory" 69).

In "Learning from the 60s," Audre Lorde states that African Americans fiercely criticize each other instead of focusing on the source of their problems. The reason behind this attitude is the fear of differences that may alter the conception of African Americanness. As Lorde says, the era dictated the characteristics of African American identity: "In the 60s, political correctness became not a guideline for living, but a new set of shackles." She argues that the community failed to understand that "unity" and "unanimity" were not identical. She suggests that people need to be aware of their past for their communal survival: "Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures. . . . So often we either ignore the past or romanticize it, render the reason for unity useless or mythic" (*Sister Outsider* 136). She defines the Civil Rights era with its promises, awareness and mistakes. Working with Black Power leaders created an opportunity for visibility and voice. Although they fought together and sought solutions for mutual problems, male leaders chose to silence unique differences. She says that people mistook differences as threats and feared anyone who was "too Black, too white, too man, too woman." This simplified and overemphasized approach to identity led to stereotypical ideas and discrimination on the basis of race, sex and sexuality (136). Lorde's responded by forging alliances and rejecting "silence and invisibility." She became the voice of women and communities from "South Africa, the Caribbean, throughout the USA, and in Germany and Britain," thereby encouraging African Americans and whites to change their perspectives ("Audre Lorde: Reflections").

2.2. RACE AND GENDER POLITICS: THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF OPPRESSION

Autobiographical essays from *Civil Wars* and *Sister Outsider* and the memoir *The Cancer Journals* describe race and gender-based discrimination within the context of the black masculinity crisis and white male heterosexual privilege. Jordan's and Lorde's works raise

awareness about the intersectionality of difference and oppression through transnational approaches to race, gender, class and human suffering. In "Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person," Jordan says, "Body and soul, Black America reveals the extreme questions of contemporary life, questions of freedom and identity: *How can I be who I am?*" (*Civil Wars* 46). Through her own experiences, Jordan identifies with African American youths who are deprived of a stable and intact identity. Disillusioned with a distorted sense of historical place and self, African Americans turn to the sanctity of the communal space while the white education system further splits their psyche and reinforces their double consciousness in a self-destructive way. She indicates African Americans' demeaning struggle for survival: "In America, the traditional routes to Black identity have hardly been normal. Suicide (disappearance by imitation, or willed extinction), violence (hysterical religiosity, crime, armed revolt), and exemplary moral courage; none of these is normal" (*Civil Wars* 48).

Jordan's "The Case for the Real Majority" notes the undisputable connection between race and class. According to Jordan, this fact grants the lowest socio-economic level to African Americans. She argues that the connection between gender and class also requires urgent action because the American lower class consists of African American women. Within the poor African American population, women form the majority with high unemployment rates and low wages. As wives and mothers, they gain "the least imaginable social and economic support" because the socio-economic and political order rests upon the shoulders of women who are "the unpaid as well as the deliberately lowest paid labor of more than half of its citizens" (*On Call* 37). She calls for action to change women's situation through urgent political intervention since their oppression contradicts the promises of America. Even if people support basic rights and freedoms for the well-being of the majority, they remain silent in the case of African American women's circumstances. According to Jordan, Americans cannot secure the nation's future, especially for African Americans and women of all colors: "As Americans we live in danger for our lives. As Black people we live in the valley of the shadow of death. I say look to the welfare of the majority—the women—if you would save yourself" (*On Call* 38).

Both Jordan and Lorde describe the motives behind the racist and sexist treatment of African Americans, people of color and women. Lorde's "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" states that different gender dynamics and the historical reality of male supremacy persists between women of color and white women. She argues that gender relations in white and African American communities differ on the basis of "whiteskin privilege" which respectively justifies patriarchal domination. African American women are oppressed by black cultural codes that demand the sanctity of black masculinity. Unlike white women, African American women have to state their rights and demands to both white and black society. African American men and women experience racism in (dis)similar ways and cling to "joint defenses and joint vulnerabilities." On the other hand, white women might defend the patriarchal power structure so they can have access to deceptive privileges through their submission to gender norms and relations (*Sister Outsider* 118). Conformism to male power is not a refuge for women of color whereas white women are deluded into shared supremacy with men. After the anti-ERA campaigns and conservative policies of the 1970s and 80s, white women were lured into the same temptations that deprived them of employment opportunities and bodily integrity. As Lorde says: "if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right men, then you will be allowed to co-exist with patriarchy in relative peace, at least until a man needs your job or the neighborhood rapist happens along." Women of color's priorities directly reflect their concerns of survival in the face of racism, race motivated violence and informal segregation in their daily encounters. Lorde points out how race and class create a contrast between white and African American women's situations: "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying" (*Sister Outsider* 119).

According to Lorde's "Age, Race, Class," people of color are unmindful of racial, gender and class based differences and their interpretation by cultural authorities. African Americans either underestimate or wrongfully judge the meaning of difference in the midst

of the rampant racism that targets their community. Thus, as Lorde claims, communal solidarity unfairly generates "a need for homogeneity" and African American feminists are assumed to be traitors to the community. African Americans' ongoing struggle with racism and ignorance change women's priorities and agendas, although they suffer from the sexist and misogynist treatment of white and black society (*Sister Outsider* 119). She defines African American women's suppression as "a disease striking the heart of Black nationhood," which cannot be solved without taking action. She also suggests that the discrimination and disempowerment of African American men triggers domestic violence and contributes to the black masculinity crisis. Moreover, the pleas of women and children are neither recognized nor named as "crimes against Black women" (*Sister Outsider* 120). In "Liabilities of Language: Audre Lorde Reclaiming Difference," Lester C. Olson comments on Lorde's speeches that address the intersectionality of differences such as race, gender, class, age and politics. Olson views that both differences and connections interact on the basis of historical and social circumstances. Lorde's speech "Age, Race, Class, Sex: Women Redefining Difference," for example, states that defining differences are inseparable from "political power, moral judgement, and social privilege" (Olson 449).[30]

Accordingly, in "Old Stories: New Lives," Jordan describes her childhood in Brooklyn, and her unnamed and unfair struggle with racial and gender disparity in the public and domestic spheres. In her child mind, insufficient public services, sanitation and security problems for African Americans and prestigious, yet inhospitable, schools in white districts seem contradictory in a land of plenty. Thus, she assumes that African Americans deserve this maltreatment. The denial of sexism and racism cannot keep her safe from the domestic violence her father inflicts upon her. Granville's fit of ill temper indicates his humiliation by the white authority figures for whom he works, and he takes it out on his family. Jordan draws attention to children, the unprotected and wrongful targets of such injustice and misfortune: "is it not crystalline to all of us, that the pain and the grief, the racist and sexist destructions of our possibilities, the incessant competition, the humiliating uncertainty,

[30] "Age, Race, Class, Sex: Women Redefining Difference" is a speech that Audre Lorde delivered at Amherst College in 1980. In 1984, the speech was published in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.*

impotence, and disappointment of our grownup existence cannot but punish those who are yet weaker than we: our children?" (*Civil Wars* 134-5).

Audre Lorde's "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface" evokes the mentality behind socially constructed, illusionary black masculinity as a reaction to white cultural imperialism. Provided with the promising yet fragile sense of patriarchal dominance, African American men hold women responsible for their impotence and subordination to the white authorities. She completely disagrees with the cultural and media sponsored lie concerning African American women who are supposed to bear sexist expectations, misogyny and violence to protect black masculinity. Therefore, she questions and blames male defined gender roles: "If this society ascribes roles to Black men which they are not allowed to fulfill, is it Black women who must bend and alter our lives to compensate, or is it society that needs changing? And why should Black men accept these roles as correct ones, or anything other than a narcotic promise" (*Sister Outsider* 61). She criticizes African American men who "blame the victim [African American women] for victimization," in other words for their problems and misfortunes. As a result, this "Great-American-Double-Think" becomes justification for racially motivated crimes, lynching and sexual violence: African Americans are disobedient and must be punished (61). In "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," Frances M. Beal responds to misogynist claims that blame women for the black masculinity crisis, as if African American women are immune to sexism and racism.[31] Beal argues that "By reducing the black man in America to such abject oppression, the black woman had no protector and was used, and is still being used in some cases, as the scapegoat for the evils that this horrendous System has perpetrated on black men." She adds that African American women have experienced sexual harassment, the

[31] Known as the Moynihan Report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" was written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan from the U.S. Department of Labor in 1965. The report blames black women for the disintegration of African American family, referring to divorce statistics, the number of black single mothers and female headed black families. It promotes the black matriarchy stereotype, in other words strong and educated working women, and regards these women as the source of black masculinity crisis ("The Negro Family"). Moreover, June Jordan's article "Don't You Talk About My Momma!" also notes how black men internalized the message of the Moynihan Report. (*Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*. Eds. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald. U of Pittsburgh P, 2001. 367-76. *JSTOR*.)

devaluation of their labor, and have been deprived of parental responsibility: "It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome" (168).

"Can I Get a Witness?" manifests June Jordan's response to the racist and sexist burden of African American women. Jordan defends Anita Hill against the patriarchy identified media, legal system, politics and cultural views.[32] Hill was silenced and ridiculed while testifying against Clarence Thomas, an African American Supreme Court nominee. Jordan directs her arguments and critique specifically to sexist African American and racist white communities, which sided with Thomas by symbolically excommunicating Hill. An African American professor of law, Hill was left alone under the close scrutiny of white FBI agents, politicians and legislators. Reasonably, Jordan looks for justice, communal response, support and action on behalf of Hill. Thus, she asks, "From those slavery times when African men could not dare to defend their sisters, their mothers, their sweethearts, their wives and their daughters—except at the risk of their lives—from those times until today: Has nothing changed?" ("Can I Get a Witness?" 56). She argues that this trial became "televised victimization of Anita Hill." Misogyny gained legitimacy in public places by broadening its recognition to government institutions, which confirmed Thomas' nomination and marginalized Hill's accusations of sexual harassment ("Can I Get a Witness?" 58).

African American cultural traditions continue to promote the role of nurturer and obedience for women through media images and archetypes. Mammy and a presumably strong African American matriarchy would keep the family together.[33] Self-sacrificing African American women, however, came to lack self-worth and self-love. Lorde addresses these

[32] In 1991, Hill accused Clarence Thomas, once her boss at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, of sexual harassment. Thomas was a Supreme Court nominee at the time of the accusations. Nevertheless, he became an African American justice of the Supreme Court, replacing Thurgood Marshall, despite his controversial relations with former employees.

[33] The mammy stereotype reflects historical, nostalgic and discursive representations of a matronly, benevolent and loyal African American servant and caretaker. She has been used as a symbol of paternalistic slavery and the plantation system of the Old South where mammy was assumingly a family member through her lifelong and willful commitment to her masters' well-being.

women as "Our scarred, broken, battered and dead daughters and sisters are a mute testament to that reality. We need to learn to have care and compassion for ourselves, also" ("Sexism" *Sister Outsider* 62). With respect to Audre Lorde's ironic "sister outsider" position, Patricia Hill Collins suggests the "outsider within" status. Collins argues that African American feminism promotes "self-valuation" of women through labels and stereotypes created by the white cultural hegemony. In that sense, the archetypal imagery of African American women reveals misrepresentations created by the white patriarchy. Resilient African American women are misnamed "Sapphires" because they defy the mammy-like portrayal African American femininity. In reality, African American women have crucial intergenerational and familial duties and responsibilities which challenge patriarchal domination and gender roles ("Learning from the Outsider Within" 17). Yet, they are stereotyped as subservient, reflecting a dysfunction between reality, historico-cultural necessity and patriarchal domination in the African American community.

In "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," Audre Lorde criticizes the adoption of white cultural norms of femininity and masculinity that neglect African American historical experience and cultural values. The appreciation and acquisition of white cultural codes do not grant the same power and hierarchical position to black people. African American men manipulate gender relations by adopting white patriarchal hegemony and assigning limited space to women. Thus, African American men mimic white masculine privilege through sex discrimination. As Lorde puts it: "Freedom and future for Blacks does not mean absorbing the dominant white male disease of sexism" (*Sister Outsider* 63). As a solution to racist and misogynist privileges, in "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger," Lorde states that self-love is what African Americans are craving for. Recognition of one's self-worth and love is necessary so that one can show love and respect to others. She says that it is hard to achieve self-love among people who praise "nonlover and cover-up" discourses and obscure the irreplaceable role of human contact. People need to think and act in progressive and nurturing ways (*Sister Outsider* 175). Likewise, bell hooks also evokes the politics of love to free people from forms of hate, discrimination and suffering. She says: "Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression

and exploitation are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination" (*Outlaw Culture* 289).

In "Sexism: An American Disease in Black Face," Lorde criticizes African American masculinity and white patriarchal codes. She argues that African American men should develop new tools of freedom and survival which eliminate discrimination and violence against women. The roots of race, sex and sexuality related prejudices are derived from the subjugation of one group by the empowerment of another. The lack of communication and understanding among African American men and women perpetuate such ill-treatment and misjudgment (*Sister Outsider* 64). Due to the master-slave relation and segregation in the aftermath of the Civil War, the African American community (un)intentionally internalized several myths and virtues of white hegemony that undeniably impacted race relations, gender roles, social status, and history. In this way, they re-worked dominant views into their traditions and cultural institutions. Seeing that the survival of the fittest necessitates cultural assimilation, or at least, the acknowledgement of racial subordination, those measures led to color consciousness, identity crisis and disillusionment. To avoid such undesirable circumstances, African American men need to withdraw from sexism in the name of male dominance, which white authorities have traditionally promoted. Men and women need to act jointly to emancipate themselves from restraints, instead of competing as rivals.

Diane K. Lewis notes African American women's doubts about forming alliances with men and white women with different cultural positionalities of race, gender and class. Lewis argues that "The variance in deference and access to power and authority between black and white women have proven to be critical factors underlying the black woman's perception of common group interests with black men and distrust of white women" (346). Focusing on the potential of community, in "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have," June Jordan endeavors to create "a well-defined organization" against racial, gender and political hegemony. Jordan summons leaders of the African American Movement for communal sustenance and calls them to address their poor sisters and

brothers: "But where can you find serious Black spokesmen, or women, for the impoverished, hungry, state-dependent Black peoples among us who still mount to more than a third of our total population?" Even if these leaders speak about the rights of African Americans, they represent white (men's) rights and concerns. The speakers embrace binary oppositions concerning African American liberation and women's rights, despite the fact that women have contributed to the community as "mothers, grandmothers and aunts." African American women's implorations must be acknowledged because their roles within the family, community and politics remain unfairly unrecognized, which is assumed to be "pre-ordained reality." African American men cannot draw parallels between their situation and that in developing countries on the basis of white imperialism, ethnocentric victimization and enslavement.[34] As Jordan says, "I cannot understand how we, Afro-Americans, have contended with racism, with life-denying exploitation, with brute powerful despising of our culture, our languages, our gods, our children—how we have grappled with such a bedeviled history" (*Civil Wars* 118). Consequently, she calls for transnational identification and action out of the shared shackles that bind marginalized people (*Civil Wars* 119).

The point mostly overlooked, as June Jordan argues in "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have," is the situation in developing countries where mostly people of color bear epidemics, starvation, economic problems and ill-treatment. They do not have dignity and basic human rights due to colonization and mal-nutrition. Jordan dedicates herself to end "such colossal exploitation and abuse." She adds that concerning women's social place, it is "serf, at best." She questions the effectiveness of financial aid and the outcomes of the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed, asking, "Will these funds reach the afflicted peoples of your concern, or will the dollar bills merely fill the pockets of neo-colonial bourgeoisie who travel through the countryside in Mercedes-Benz limousines, air-conditioned and bullet-proofed against the men and women they have been empowered to serve?" This is the western ideal of charity for the oppressed and the poor. She questions whether the post-revolutionary order will correct the wrongdoing, specifically for women:

[34] June Jordan intentionally uses the term "Third World" here to indicate misnaming.

"What will victory mean for the traditional outcasts, the traditional lowest of the low: the poor, and women, generally? Will the changing of the color of the guards bring about a verifiable change of policy and objectives?" (*Civil Wars* 119).

Jordan models her activist feminist manifesto after the language of "The Declaration of Independence." She defines her inalienable rights and status as an African American woman. She disowns persecutory norms and views of gender and race. She wants to live her life in accordance with her aspirations, without prejudiced restrictions. She has faith in the role of sisterhood and brotherhood to achieve a harmonious and cooperative existence:

> That I will be free to be who I am, Black and female, without fear, without pain, without humiliation. That I will be free to become whatever my life requires of me, without posturing, without compromise, without terror. That I will soon be able, realistically, to assume the dignified fulfillment of the dreams and needs and potentialities of most of the men, women, and children alive, today. That I can count upon a sisterhood and a brotherhood that will let me give my life to its consecration, without equivocating, without sorrow. (*Civil Wars* 121)

The lack of self-respect brings vulnerability to individuals who, in turn, view the community and the issue of difference with a critical eye. In "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," Lorde argues that behind racial and hetero/homosexual prejudice lies the fear of difference. Lorde suggests communal self-naming for a cultural redefinition of sex and gender by avoiding the positionality of white definitive codes and sexist patriarchal norms (*Sister Outsider* 45). In this way, African American women can gain their self-acclaimed power and self-worth. These values are assumed to be "a vital component in the war for Black liberation" for communal benefit and mutual concerns. She insists that men and women need to reject the traditional gender hierarchy for individual and communal progress (*Sister Outsider* 46). She has faith in the cultural struggle and shared experiential history of African American men and women. The acceptance and naturalization of the oppressors' virtues and values concerning race, class and gender will not reinstate black masculinity but will betray African American women.

Furthermore, Audre Lorde's "Scratching the Surface" emphasizes African American women's double discrimination through racist and sexist treatment. Despite disheartening

conditions, solidarity among African American women is deemed to be menacing and they become the object of male scorn within the community. Compared to African American men's struggle with racism and masculinity, women's concerns are more sexual and reproductive, reflecting sterilization abuses, sexual assault, reproductive insecurity and unsafe abortions. Still, female bonding across shared victimizations disturbs men (*Sister Outsider* 46). The patriarchy condemns women of color through labeling and associations with lesbianism (lesbian baiting). Men reclaim their authority by using racist, sexist and homophobic references. However dedicated they are to the humanist, communal and libertarian causes, African American women seem suspicious because of their "women-identified interests" that endanger patriarchal domination (*Sister Outsider* 47). Those who are devoted to improving women's social, cultural and political standing are ostracized with allegations of "unnatural" intimacy towards the same sex. As Lorde states, they fight against dysfunctional race and gender norms because they realize the commonality of their oppression and the value of self-help: "Yet women-identified women – those who sought their own destinies and attempted to execute them in the absence of male support – have been around in all of our communities for a long time" (*Sister Outsider* 49).

Margaret Kissam Morris regards Lorde's "Scratching the Surface" as her response to the crucifixion of women through homophobic fears and treatments. Morris regards this as another example of the "negation of black female body" due to competitive gender dynamics. Homophobia causes potential alienation and prevents women from fighting common enemies in white and black communities (Morris 171-2). Lorde urges African American women to look beyond superficial arguments that create distance, hostility and competition among them. Manipulative race and color consciousness, victimizing and lesbian-baiting prevent women from thinking clearly and acting collectively. Masculinity is an obstacle that stands in the way of women and obscures their voices, communal interests and socio-economic status through racial, sexual and gender difference. "Scratching the Surface" is Lorde's counter-manifesto to the patriarchal vision of the African American and white communities:

> As Black women we have the right and responsibility to define ourselves and to seek our allies in common cause: with Black men against racism, and with each

> other and white women against sexism. But most of all, as Black women we have the right and responsibility to recognize each other without fear and to love where we choose. Both lesbian and heterosexual Black women today they share a history of bonding and strength to which our sexual identities and our other differences must not blind us. (*Sister Outsider* 52)

Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" describes the intersectionality of race, class and sexuality together with oppressive and separatist interpretations of difference. Since they are neither avoidable nor ignorable, Lorde asserts the need for reconsideration of confining terms: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" (*Sister Outsider* 110). By converting such disparities into tools of strength and tolerance, women, people of color and individuals in developing countries collaborate against race, sex and class discrimination. Lorde promotes global sisterhood so that women can heal and support each other, which male cultural authorities discourage due to solidarity's potential threat to the status quo. In patriarchal societies, strong female bonding is defined as "pathological" rather than "redemptive" because women are traditionally assigned maternal roles within private homes and transgression of limits is forbidden. Lorde vigorously endorses the acceptance and appreciation of difference and the richness of voices, which she believes will result in a democratic interconnectedness of selves (*Sister Outsider* 111). Submission to racist white privilege and sexist male rule promote persecution of the other by encouraging homogeneity. However, women are expected to turn their faces to transformative and unifying promises. On the contrary, Lorde maintains that women of color should view difference as a weapon to guard themselves against white and black masters' tools of separatism and their marginalization of diversity.

With transnational consciousness, *Civil Wars* and *The Cancer Journals* manifest liberal race and gender norms. With respect to her race politics and activism, June Jordan's "Whose Burden" criticizes the Black Power Movement as nationalistic due to its concentration on communism and strict definitions of African American identity. Since Jordan's views have evolved into transnationalism, she is equally concerned about the distress of African Americans and African people who perish from malnourishment in

Sahel (*Civil Wars* 78). Supposing that African Americans view Africans as kinsmen, she encourages communal action to help them. Instead of searching for international charity, she broadens the scope of communal solidarity and activist commitment beyond national borders. With the collaboration of Inez Smith Reid from the Black Women's Community Development Fund, she establishes the organization of Afro-Americans Against the Famine (AAAF). In 1973, Inez and Jordan organize a meeting to introduce AAAF to African American public figures such as Jesse Jackson. They worked towards raising public awareness about the situation of Africans and to send food to Sahel through an African American lobby (*Civil Wars* 79). She admits the difficulty of persuading people to work for the benefit of Africans. Black Nationalist thought created strong links between African Americans without "pragmatic connections to the continental African struggle." AAAF developed a new perspective on Africa, yet failed to initiate lobbyist activities. She acknowledges the insufficient identity and identification politics: "It was then that my own ideas began to change, once again. It seemed to be true, like it or not, that skin was not enough: That color is not enough to save your life. Certainly it is quite enough to kill you" (*Civil Wars* 80).

Regarding African Americans' and Africans' connection as kinsfolk, Norma J. Burgess comments on the homeland and cultural traits of African and African American women. Burgess suggests that the leading role of African American women within domestic and communal spaces, their value as workforce and their sense of "independence and pride in womanhood" indicate inherited values from African cultures. In Africa, traditionally unbiased gender roles and relations were, during colonial rule, replaced by white patriarchally dominated and defined roles. African women's status and function in the family and society, contributions to well-being, and authority in private and public affairs passed on to African American women. At the same time, slavery introduced transnational interference, transformed gender roles and relations between African (American) men and women without protecting the previously gender neutral norms (Burgess 397).

Correspondingly, June Jordan's "On the Occasion of a Clear and Present Danger at Yale" reflects renewed race consciousness without culture and border specific political ideology.

Jordan points out a parallelism between the sufferings of women, especially African American women, and women in developing countries. She supports free will and freedom to live one's life indiscriminately: "Our lives are not debatable. We are, we have survived, we will be as we will choose for ourselves." Still, self-will and determination cannot protect people from victimization, given the violation of reproductive freedom, cultural extermination, malnourishment, poverty and illness. Jordan adds, "But if we are not debatable, and we are *not* debatable, we are, however, vulnerable. We can be killed. We can be sterilized. We can be kept out, pushed down, starved, shot, gassed, lynched, stunted, warped, and eliminated, altogether, from liberty, from our own pursuit of our own happiness" (*Civil Wars* 94). This statement refers to Jordan's activist feminist political statement of the interconnectedness of women and the urgency of female solidarity regardless of borders, race, nation, culture or class specific identity politics. Indeed, this is her manifesto; it neither discriminates nor leaves out any group or agenda concerning human suffering and individual rights. She summarizes her stand in these words:

> Right now, in America, we, Black people, Third World peoples, poor people, in general, are being sterilized: homogenized into non-existence, sterilized: made incapable of bearing children, sterilized: lobotomized into cooperative, peaceable, vegetable remnants, sterilized: punished for having a man in the house, a father, a lover, and punished for having babies. Children are reasons, right now, why the Black and Third World and poor peoples of America must suffer punishments even of starvation, illness, shockingly inadequate shelter, and death. (94)

In Jordan's "Notes of a Barnard Dropout," her cooperation driven politics and activism incorporate global suffering and injustice. Jordan fulminates against unequal distribution of world resources, which gives rise to high famine mortality: "It seems unreasonable that more than 400 million people, right now, must struggle against hunger and starvation, even while there is arable earth aplenty to feed and nourish." She judges race, color and gender discrimination that marginalizes certain disempowered ethnic and racial groups and promotes socially constructed status through dominant white patriarchal discourse. Such prejudiced views and classifications are only used to perpetuate human rights abuses. As she implies, "It does not seem reasonable that the color of your skin should curse and condemn all your days. . . . It seems preposterous that gender, that being a woman, . . .

should elicit contempt, or fear, or ridicule, and serious deprivation of rights to be, to become, to embrace whatever you choose" (*Civil Wars* 96-7). Her radical reconstruction of race and gender politics is rooted in the value of culture, history and life-based knowledge and education. She discredits college education for people of color due to high drop-out rates on the basis of her experience at Barnard College. She argues that her college education kept her blind to the social and racial dynamics of the U.S.A and in the world whereas that knowledge is quintessential to her survival. While studying in Barnard, she realized that she could not learn "the critical nature of conflicts between the powerful and the powerless." She pays homage to the informal education of her progressive activism and nonconformist views. Her life experiences transform her into an activist feminist scholar:

> And so I continue: a Black woman who would be an agent for change, an active member of the hoped-for apocalypse. I am somebody seeking to make, or to create, revolutionary connections between the full identity of my love, of what hurts me, or fills me with nausea, and the way things are: what we are forced to learn, to "master," what we are trained to ignore, what we are bribed into accepting, what we are rewarded for doing, or not doing. (*Civil Wars* 101)

The Cancer Journals narrates Audre Lorde's views regarding the performativity of gender and renewed gender politics. Ann Jurecic refers to Lisa Diedrich's *Treatments: Language, Politics, and the Culture of Illness*, which analyzes *The Cancer Journals*' feminist activist role as an illness narrative. Diedrich argues that the 1970s women's health movement led to the concept of the "politicized patient," which created counternarratives through the collaborative efforts of patients and authors. Those works transformed the perception, description and function of illness and its narratives. At that time, women's activism raised awareness about the "masculine medical establishment," women's reproductive rights and body politics, leading to the concept of women's self-control over their body. Diedrich views Lorde's memoir *The Cancer Journals* within that socio-political and historical context. In her illness narrative, Lorde declares breast cancer and mastectomy "an opportunity to redefine her body, her self, and her voice" (Jurecic 8). In the chapter called "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," Audre Lorde discovers a new strength through the acceptance of her body in the post-mastectomy process. She says, "As I slowly began to feel more equal to processing and examining the different parts of this experience, I also

began to feel that in the process of losing a breast I had become a more whole person" (*The Cancer Journals* 55). An adviser from the American Cancer Society's Reach For Recovery program comes to her rescue. She assumes that Lorde is afraid of losing her attractiveness to men or that she is scared of being a source of shame for her children (*The Cancer Journals* 56). Her mission is to convince Lorde to have a prosthesis or plastic surgery. After mastectomy, Lorde's desire to opt out is challenged by the medical authorities. They expect her to have a substitute for her loss so that she can adhere to the cultural codes of femininity. As she states,

> This emphasis upon the cosmetic after surgery re-inforces this society's stereotype of women, that we are only what we look or appear, so this is the only aspect of our existence we need to address. Any woman who has had a breast removed because of cancer knows she does not feel the same. But we are allowed no psychic time or space to examine what our true feelings are, to make them our own. With quick cosmetic reassurance, we are told that our feelings are not important, our appearance is all, the sum total of self. (*The Cancer Journals* 57)

As Isabel Durán also suggests, in *The Cancer Journals*, what is highly personal becomes irresistibly political and meaningful for women, "The particular becomes the general, the private the public. The enforcement of breast prosthesis on woman, as Lorde claims, only does a service to the world, not to the woman who receives it" (55).

In "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," Lorde writes in a confessional and instructive tone about her body, public image and self by turning her rejection of prosthesis into a cancer survivor's activism against gender norms. She believes that prosthesis and plastic surgery make it impossible to accept her new body features without illusionary assumptions. Advertisements and medical encouragement about prosthesis blur the profound results of breast cancer. The patients are forced to prioritize femininity and their body over precautionary efforts such as a healthy diet and psychological support (*The Cancer Journals* 57). Robina Josephine Khalid confirms that *The Cancer Journals* manifests identification among women with breast cancer as a critique of traditional perception of woman's body. She explains, "In fact, one of Lorde's primary goals in *The Cancer Journals* is to insist upon speaking the reality of her body: that is, she refuses to

wear a prosthetic breast because she believes that doing so polices women from forming valuable (but potentially disruptive) connections" (Khalid 708). In "Identity's Body," Sidonie Smith argues that body and self in autobiographical narratives have been traditionally represented by naturalized and generalized norms. Smith claims that autobiographical subjects and bodies have recently gained some subjective characteristics beyond Mikhail Bakhtin's "'classical' or classicized body" and its opposite the unconventional "grotesque body." She states an ideological turn towards subjectivity due to the historical and autobiographical body's and self's rootedness in space, time, context, culture and language. Concerning autobiographical situatedness, she says, "as the body of the text, the body of the narrator, the body of the narrated I, the cultural body, and the body politic all merge in skins and skeins of meaning" (Smith, "Identity's Body" 266-7).

Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* is a constructive self-discovery of gender in the midst of medical and cultural essentialist definitions of the female body; in other words, the sexual objectification of women. For Cynthia Wu, Audre Lorde's rejection of prosthesis and writing about mastectomy in *The Cancer Journals* indicate her revelation of her body and mind, without any form of censorship or erasure: "By refusing prosthesis, Lorde asserts control over her physical, corporeal being and the journal writing asserts control over her life. . . . In this sense, Lorde's decision to publish her journal is similar to her decision to appear visible to others without a prosthesis" (254). In "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," Lorde forges a path in search of her own description of the female body. Her efforts and ideology fix her status as a dissenting voice for women who remain bombarded by the weakening and demeaning male gaze. She advises women to embrace self-determination concerning their lives, appearance and needs:

> Self scrutiny and an evaluation of our lives, while painful, can be rewarding and strengthening journeys toward a deeper self. For as we open ourselves more and more to the genuine conditions unaltered, or to passively accept external and destructive controls over our lives and our identities. Any short-circuiting of this quest for self-definition and power, however well-meaning and under whatever guise, must be seen as damaging, for it keeps the post-mastectomy woman in a position of perpetual and secret insufficiency, infantilized and

> dependent for her identity upon an external definition by appearance. (*The Cancer Journals* 58)

When Lorde defies traditional femininity with mastectomy, medical authorities force her to normalize her appearance with prosthetic devices, regardless of her pain and trauma. Social and cultural demands are in conflict with her desire to bear the result of her surgery, without pretension. In "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," she is even chastised by a nurse who says, "'You will feel so much better with it [prosthesis] on'" and "'And besides, we really like you to wear something, at least when you come in. Otherwise it's bad for the morale of the office'" (*The Cancer Journals* 59).

In *The History of Sexuality*: *An Introduction*, Michel Foucault says, "And finally, power acts by laying down the rule: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse. . . . The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character" (83). As Foucault argues, the cultural hegemony uses language as a major tool to enforce dominant views and norms. By using the same communicative method, the distributors of the discursive powers discipline misfits and outcasts who manipulate or disobey cultural positioning. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde's refusal of prosthetic devices attracts various manifestations of linguistic and visual persuasion, from the media to the medical community.

Like in *Zami*: *A New Spelling of My Name*, Audre Lorde uses mythical female figures in *The Cancer Journals*. Lorde's amazons transcend popular conventional images of women, which cherish secondary social and gender status and punish transgressive pioneer women like her.[35] In "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," she regards herself as a "warrior" in the struggle with breast cancer and the male gaze. She rejects manipulation of her body through "lambswool or silicone gel" (*The Cancer Journals* 60). She is expected to recuperate her loss with aesthetic devices instead of being an outspoken survivor involved

[35] Particularly, Lorde mentions the Dahomey amazons of West Africa. She describes them as one breasted archers. As a general reference in this book, amazons are women warriors, conquerors and rulers who represent resistance to traditional gender norms.

in self-healing. She takes a stand against conformist sexual and racial double consciousness that worships white heteronormative womanhood. As she states, "I refuse to be reduced in my own eyes or in the eyes of others from warrior to mere victim, simply because it might render me a fraction more acceptable or less dangerous. . . . I refuse to hide my body simply because it might make a woman-phobic world more comfortable" (*The Cancer Journals* 60). Prosthesis promises sameness and adherence to a feminine appearance instead of celebrating recovery and newly-found resilience through difference. The awareness of other women in similar situations provides visibility and represents power. Prosthesis means alienation from the self and the community of women for it ignores a recognition of mutual concerns, fears and the transformative role of illness which are empowering for Lorde (*The Cancer Journals* 61). As Robina Josephine Khalid says, the motivation behind *The Cancer Journals* is to "take the private experience of illness and make it accessible to a public community which might then mobilize toward an anti-cancer activism" (700).

Prosthesis and plastic surgery are methods that maintain the performative role of gender. In "Breast Cancer: Power vs. Prosthesis," women with breast cancer and mastectomy internalize media images that depict cancer patients as "fading and desexualized figures." Audre Lorde transforms femininity and measures of beauty through her illness and mastectomy, which result in "knowledge and eventual strength, fuel for a more dynamic and focused existence." Female cooperation and the exchange of experience and information is blocked by the prosthetic interference of the medical community and the sexist media (*The Cancer Journals* 63). Lorde's refusal of surgical or prosthetic measures, or the literal insertion of a foreign object into her discourse, confirms her status as the other in comparison to predictable and controllable women who follow socially constructed gender roles:

> Where "normal" means the "right" color, shape, size, or number of breasts, a woman's perception of her own body and the strengths that come from that perception are discouraged, trivialized, and ignored. When I mourn my right breast, it is not the appearance of it I mourn, but the feeling and the fact. But where the superficial is supreme, the idea that a woman can be beautiful and one-breasted is considered depraved, or at best, bizarre, a threat to "morale." (*The Cancer Journals* 64-5)

Allison Kimmich argues that Lorde's mastectomy creates a choice for women through her marginalized body and self: "Lorde forges her sense of self through abjection's power to initiate disorder. Indeed, from the disruptive role that cancer plays in her life, Lorde can see the ideology at work in determining which bodies are the right ones and redefine herself in spite of its oppressive force" (228). Regarding the domination of body politics, Sidonie Smith maintains, "communities surrounding us normalize certain bodies and render abnormal or grotesque other bodies, thereby situating our body somewhere in the field of bodies" ("Identity's Body" 268). Audre Lorde creates an alternative place for women with her mastectomy experience, beyond the traditional borders of normality and acceptability. As she reworks race and gender norms in her works, she redefines essentialist body politics in a progressive manner.

2.3. THINKING ABOUT FEMINIST MOVEMENTS: AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMINISM AND COALITION POLITICS FROM COMMUNITY TO TRANSNATIONALITY

Kimberly Springer argues that feminist movements which are identified with the "'wave' model" ignore the "historical role of race" in feminism. Springer says that First Wave Feminism is associated with the suffrage struggle while Second Wave Feminism is defined by the feminist activist politics of the 1960s. In that aspect, as she maintains, feminist movements discriminate against "race-based movements" which were active throughout and paved the way for feminist activist organizations. She believes that First Wave Feminism cannot be separated from the abolition, suffrage and anti-lynching campaigns of African Americans. They inspired and instructed other women and movements through "oration, organizing, writing, and agitation skills." She mentions these African American women as pioneers in their fields: Maria Steward as a public orator, Mary Shadd Cary as the editor of an antislavery newspaper and Anna Julia Cooper as the author of an African American feminist book. For Springer, Cooper's *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (1988) is a quintessential text of African American feminism. This work describes African American women's communal standing and independence from

mainstream white middle class feminism. African American women have individually dealt with race prejudice and ignorance on political grounds, and Kimberly Springer indicates the historical interaction within and between feminist movements, organizations and groups (1061). Jordan's and Audre Lorde's feminist activist manifestos and politics interpret and strengthen relations between white middle class feminism, African American feminism and women of color.

Jordan's "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have" advocates the struggle for "equal rights of fulfilment and exploration." After reading about female oppression and the political, legal and socio-economic reactions to it, Jordan becomes disillusioned with the rigid and uncompromising program of the feminist movements. She criticizes white women's dominance and their middle class concerns: "The Women's Movement did not seem as large, in its avowed concerns, or as complicated, as I believe the world is large and complicated." She emerges as a spokesperson for neglected working class, people on welfare, African American women's economic hardships and children, whose apprehensions have neither place nor representation in mainstream white middle class feminism, which lacks equal support for men and women. Moreover, white middle class feminism does not have a political perspective concerning the independence movements and the assassinations of leaders of color such as Patrice Lumumba, Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Allende of Chile (*Civil Wars* 120). In response to mainstream feminism's indifference, Jordan questions the meaning of "liberation of women" and whether it shows respect for women's domestic duties or denies their empowerment:

> Will we liberate ourselves so that the caring for children, the teaching, the loving, healing, person-oriented values that have always distinguished us will be revered and honored at least commensurate to the honors accorded bank managers, lieutenant colonels, and the executive corporate elite? Or will be liberate ourselves so that we can militantly abandon those attributes and functions, so that we can despise our own warmth and generosity even as men have done, for ages? (*Civil Wars* 120)

She also addresses the issue of women-identified women and the function of labeling within the feminist movements which, at the time, had not problematized terms such as

lesbian and "nigger." She believes that the acceptance of these labels leads to "submission to an enemy concept" (*Civil Wars* 120-21). As Patricia Hill Collins suggests, "Black feminists have questioned not only what has been said about Black women, but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define" ("Learning from the Outsider Within" 17).

Audre Lorde's "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface" is a response to the criticism of African American feminism. She argues that African American feminism is linked to cultural assimilation that discredits the struggle to voice their problems. However, their feminist agenda does not sever their connection to, and communication with, the African American community. In the face of such degrading comments and efforts, she says "BLACK FEMINISM is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less Black" (*Sister Outsider* 60). As Benita Roth states, African American women in feminist circles were forced to choose between race or sex discrimination with the absence of communal and activist support. African American feminist activists denounced "the myth that feminism was a white woman's 'thing.'" In reality, African American women in the 1960s and 1970s had more zealous feminist and activist fervor than white women. Unlike white feminists, African American feminists used their daily lives as a standpoint to indicate "interlocking oppressive systems" (Roth 46-47). Lorde challenges African American men's uneasiness about feminism and its critique of male privilege. She works for women's empowerment to break the long-standing subordination of women through exploitative economic systems, class divisions, cultural expectations and gendered violence. She considers these sexist efforts as "the rape of Black women by Black men" (*Sister Outsider* 60).

In her critique of the white feminist stance towards women of color in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde argues that women tend to repel differences which are assumingly "causes for separation and suspicion" instead of "forces for change." For her, the resolution is communal power and the acknowledgement of distinctions among women. The only way for nonconformists to survive, she states, is by

forming alliances with other displaced groups to transform the world into a more liberal and humane place to live. She disowns any identification with or benefit from authority figures, social norms and categorizations that serve the interests of the cultural elite. She stands for a radical shift towards an all-embracing and progressive society instead of seeking short-term personal gains from authority figures. She says, "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (*Sister Outsider* 112). Lester C. Olson argues that Audre Lorde claims a position by redefining her affiliations and differences as a "human, but not male; woman, but not white; black, but not straight; lesbian, but not childless; living with cancer, but not a passive victim" ("On the Margins of Rhetoric" 66).

Barbara Christian asserts that any movement, group or alliance that blindly desires power and privilege falls into the same trap of corruption. The African American Arts Movement challenged the hegemonic rule over the community, but through an equally discriminatory agenda. As Christian says, "The nature of our context today is such that an approach which desires power single-mindedly must of necessity become like that which it wishes to destroy." She adds that radical reform or transformation of the system is sometimes sacrificed to the desire for authority, or at least alliances with authorities. Jordan and Lorde disapprove of such politics, preferring to fight for voice, power and a sense of communal strength against individual causes and antagonizing views of difference (Christian "The Race for Theory" 77). In "Master's Tools," Lorde draws attention to personal experience, which is explicitly connected to cultural and gender identity politics. She believes that individual and communal struggle must be integrated into political activism. She criticizes feminism in academia because it falls into the patriarchal trap of separatism. Through her cooperative feminist stand, she suggests: "In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower" (*Sister Outsider* 112). According to Lorde, the only way people can re-view differences is the politicization of the personal through individual and communal awareness: "*I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge*

inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices" (*Sister Outsider* 113).

"Age, Race, Class" dismisses persecutory, classifying and repressive interpretations of race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and age. In this essay, Lorde evokes women from developing countries, as well as working class, elderly, African American and non-heterosexual women. According to Lorde, nonconformists face difficulties in asserting their personal and group identities within mainstream culture. They encounter either public detachment or decimation because divergence is perceived to be heretical. They experience improper treatment, wrongful assumptions and estrangement. As Lorde says concerning the potential reactions to difference, "ignore it, if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate." She says that the most common approach is the ignorance of differences, of the outcomes of prejudiced blindness and the loss of rewarding diversity: "Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or they do not exist at all" (*Sister Outsider* 115). Obviously, cultural domination draws strength from hierarchical and stereotypical racial, gender and class privileges. Lorde indicates a "*mythical norm*," which legitimizes "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure," and mainstream America denounces deviations from this standard. She states that this norm is as illusionary as mainstream white feminism's presumable female bonding which only pays attention to white heteronormative middle class women's concerns (*Sister Outsider* 116).

Lorde's "Age, Race, Class" also notes the suspicion of African American lesbians and lesbian feminists. The label of lesbian often forces women to take conflicting and self-incriminatory stands against each other. According to Lorde, they are either drawn to "destructive alliances" or "despair and isolation." She argues that white women often embrace heteronormativity to absorb dominant patriarchal views instead of "interdependence between women-identified women." In this way, they lose the chance for "the self to be, rather than to be used in the service of men." Women need to unlearn

naturalized skepticism, rivalry and insecurity within and among themselves (*Sister Outsider* 121). Ironically, within African American female communities, discrimination against and condemnation of homosexual relationships exist, although "woman-bonding" also has a prominent traditional place that has its roots in African societies. Lorde attests that the visibility and contributions of women-identified African American women have been undermined in politics and society. One of the reasons behind this is the fear of African American men who may use lesbianism to condemn strong women and declare lesbians to be "unworthy of the attention or support of the scarce Black male." African American men can manipulate women's solidarity and undermine their accomplishments because, as Lorde suggests, lesbians have the power to reform socio-cultural relations (*Sister Outsider* 121).

June Jordan's "Where Is the Love?" states the core of the African American feminist agenda. Jordan acknowledges African American women's struggle with socio-economic inferiority and class divisions. When it comes to hetero/homo/bisexuality and lesbianism, she regards sexuality to be an issue of privacy. Reasonably, she says, "whatever sexuality anyone elects for his or her pursuit is not my business, nor the business of the state." Sexuality is irrelevant to the movement, unlike the association between feminism and lesbianism. She is devoted to the promotion of affection and esteem among people that originates from the recognition of one's own worth (*Civil Wars* 144). According to Jordan, African American feminism needs to be concerned about women's real trials with violence, abuse, derogatory naming, misogyny and employment since

> the sole parents, the mothers of hundreds of thousands of children, the desolation and the futility of women trapped by demeaning, lowest-paying occupations, the unemployed, the bullied, the beaten, the battered, the ridiculed, the slandered, the trivialized, the raped, and the sterilized, the lost millions and multimillions of beautiful, creative, and momentous lives turned to ashes on the pyre of gender identity. (*Civil Wars* 144-5)

Regarding African American women's trials with racism, sexism and class consciousness, Bonnie Thornton Dill argues that women are forced to prioritize issues of race, sex or class discrimination. She adds that "insistence on such a choice continues largely as a result of

the tendency of groups of Blacks and groups of women to battle over the dubious distinction of being the 'most' oppressed" (Dill 136). June Jordan's "Declaration of an Independence" indicates the necessity of coalition and identification across a shared feminist and humanist agenda. She has faith in forming a community to reform the current state of affairs through revolutionary and progressive efforts. As she states, "I know I am not alone. There must be hundreds of other women, maybe thousands, who feel as I do. There may be hundreds of men who want the same drastic things to happen." She needs to reach those obscured voices and masked faces behind "stereotype and/or generalities of 'platform.'" She also suggests that "radical or positive change upon the heinous status quo" requires the unity of powers, intentions and collaboration (*Civil Wars* 115). She asks people whether they take any action, empathize with or ignore the millions of people who struggle with hunger or famine, or starve to death. She searches for responsible people and functional platforms for solutions: "No matter how intense your wrath may be, no matter how personally knowledgeable you may be about the cause and the conceivable remedies for this monstrous and unnecessary curse upon innocent human beings, you, by yourself, can do damned little, if anything, to destroy these facts of abject experience" (*Civil Wars* 116). She argues that individual consciousness and action make people feel better without real change or radical movement: "You wrote poems, free-lance exposé articles, essays proposing remedies, even novels demonstrating the feasibility of solutions that you ardently trusted as possibilities for activist commitment. . . . What did this yield?" (*Civil Wars* 117). Jordan's manifesto is a critique of Second Wave Feminism and activism based on a homogenous group identity. Through self-criticism regarding her political commitments, feminist writing and collectivism, she is the messenger of the Third Wave feminist agenda against human suffering and for activism that actually makes a difference.

June Jordan's "Where Is the Love?" epitomizes the core of her views by combining transnationality and African American feminism. Jordan advocates reconciliation and harmony within and among people so they can come to terms with each other. She purifies her soul from bitterness and hostility, which enables her "the movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination" (*Civil Wars* 142). She measures the feminist movement's

effectiveness through power relations and its approach to the helpless and marginalized. She questions the encounter between the authorities and people under rule:

> Virtue is not to be discovered in the conduct of the strong vis-à-vis the powerful, but rather it is to be found in our behavior and policies affecting those who are different, those who are weaker, or smaller than we. How do the strong, the powerful, treat children? How do we treat the aged among us? How do the strong and the powerful treat so-called minority members of the body politic? How do the powerful regard women? How do they treat us? (*Civil Wars* 142)

She feels connected with poor, oppressed and degraded women, particularly women in developing countries. Similar to African American women, those women are subdued by the white male heteronormative hegemony. She defines herself as an African American feminist in the context of gender, race and class: "I am powerless as compared to any man because women, per se, are kept powerless by men/by the powerful; I am powerless as compared to anyone white because Black and Third World peoples are kept powerless by whites/by the powerful. I am the majority because women constitute the majority gender." She becomes "someone twice stigmatized" and "twice kin to the despised majority" in her search for sisterhood, love and reconnection. Through self-love, she expects the transformation of the self through "socio-psychic strength." According to Jordan, she can transfer her love and reverence to other women, even if they differ from her in ideology, class, age and race. She says, "If I am a Black feminist serious in the undertaking of self-love, . . . I may, without fear, be able and willing to love and respect women, . . . who are not feminists, women who are not professionals, women who are not as old or as young as I am, women who have neither job nor income, women who are not Black" (*Civil Wars* 143).

In "Thinking about My Poetry," June Jordan's transnationalism stands at the core of her humanist activism and feminism, embracing worldwide suffering of men, women and children regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or religion. She develops "a progressively political self-assertion" which surpasses the "victim mentality." Her feminist perspective is unique in the sense of her contemplation about the oppressors' banality and their transformation into kinsmen rather than a pure embodiment of villainy or depravity. Her scheme of coexistence eliminates separatist views, seeing the whole world as a global

community through the exchange of views and opinions. Therefore, partial resolutions, progress or healing cannot be serviceable to humanity. As Jordan unequivocally denotes,

> As a woman, as a Black woman, as a Black woman poet and writer, I choose to believe that we, women and Third World peoples, will in fact succeed in saving ourselves, *and* our traditional assassins, from the meaning of their fear and their hatred. Even more deeply, I believe we can save ourselves from the power of our own fear and our own self-hatred. This is my perspective, and this is my faith. (*Civil Wars* 129)

In conclusion, June Jordan and Audre Lorde represent the ideological feminist turn from Second to Third Wave Feminism with their transnational evaluations of race, gender, community, voice and African American feminism. The autobiographical essay collections, Jordan's *Civil Wars* and Lorde's *Sister Outsider*: *Essays and Speeches*, along with her memoir *The Cancer Journals*, discuss the conditions of women, including women of color and in developing countries. As activist feminist manifestos, these works indicate the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class-based discrimination by moving from the local to the global community of the world. Their manifestos not only broaden the borders of community, but they also transform the feminist agenda to include famine, politics, human rights and illness. Each work emerges as voices of women against silence, censorship and subjugation in developed and developing countries. They forge strong kinship alliances among women around the globe. Thus, Jordan and Lorde replace identity politics with coalition politics by embracing differences among people, cultures and nations. Differences are viewed as pathways to multiplicity and renewal, rather than separatist excuses for fragmentation and othering.

CONCLUSION

When women separate (withdraw, break out, regroup, transcend, shove aside, step outside, migrate, say *no*), we are simultaneously controlling access and defining. We are doubly insubordinate, since neither of these is permitted. And access and definition are fundamental ingredients in the alchemy of power, so we are doubly, and radically, insubordinate.

Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" (1983)

Subordinated people can and do participate, sometimes even subverting the naming process in empowering ways. One need only think about the historical subversion of the category "Black" or the current transformation of "queer" to understand that categorization is not a one-way street. Clearly, there is unequal power, but there is nonetheless some degree of agency that people can and do exert in the politics of naming. And it is important to note that identity continues to be a site of resistance for members of different subordinated groups.

Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991)

Audre Lorde's and June Jordan's life narratives explore African American women's experiences, status and voice within historical, cultural and feminist discourses. As African American feminist activist scholars, Lorde and Jordan are the voices of the shift from Second Wave to Third Wave Feminism since they broaden the feminist agenda with communal and global concerns. They forge connections between the African American community, people of color and women and children in developing nations through a redefinition of kinship and female solidarity under coalition politics rather than strict identity politics. In "June Jordan's Legacy," Paula Finn contends that June Jordan's diverse roles and status become her stepping stones as a feminist scholar who appreciates the meaning of difference and diversity: "Her multiple identities—Black mother of a biracial child, working-class student at elite schools, bisexual, poet—kept her from easy assumptions" (124). Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Jordan's *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood* are memoirs and coming of age narratives. Both works describe Caribbean immigrant working class families' struggles in racist, sexist and class conscious

America. Their American born children grow up on the borders of the antagonistic white, African American and Caribbean communities. *Zami* and *Soldier* describe a clash in the axis of the self, community and white hegemony. Dominant interpretations of race, gender, culture, sexuality and class across a white heterosexual male privileged identity provide African American women with racist, sexist, elitist, homophobic and ethnocentric stereotypes, myths and expectations. Audre Lorde's essay collection *Sister Outsider*: *Essays and Speeches* and her illness memoir *The Cancer Journals* along with June Jordan's essay collection *Civil Wars* are autobiographic feminist manifestos that claim the voice and mutual concerns of silenced, neglected and de-storied African American women, people of color and women in developing countries. These works reform the concepts of race, gender norms, sexuality, community consciousness and women's rights through Lorde and Jordan's reconceptualization of solidarity, women-identified women, feminism, difference and personal politics. The essays in *Sister Outsider* and *Civil Wars* enlarge the Second Wave feminist agenda by addressing intersectionality, working class people, famine, starvation, sterilization abuse, human rights and colonialism. *The Cancer Journals* addresses the deconstruction of essentialist notions about a woman's body and femininity through the medical, media and cultural interpretations of breast cancer and mastectomy.

Audre Lorde's *Zami* and June Jordan's *Soldier* are cultural narratives in which the communal "we" is explained through the narrative voices of Audre and June. Their autobiographical "I"s address (Caribbean) immigrants, their first generation American born children and the African American community. Audre's and June's experiences are interpreted in the light of white cultural domination and discrimination against non-European immigrants. Traumatized parents raise children with problematized racial, cultural and gender identities. Jordan's and Lorde's families seek protective measures of silence, ignorance and the denial of white male privilege, which trigger Audre's and June's quests for answers. When they leave the protected spheres of their homes, they are confused by race and gender discrimination. Their cultural and gender positionality face two layers of discrimination with racist and sexist views. In *Zami* and *Soldier*, the immigrant parents rely on the promise of racial uplifting and class mobility through

education. Therefore, Audre and June are expected to be representatives of their un-American families and the African American community.

In *Zami* and *Soldier*, Audre and June search for inclusion in different environments such as school, domestic spaces and the community. Their identities are shaped by their parents' views until they meet inspiring role models. In *Zami*, Linda, Audre's mother, teaches her Grenadian recipes, virtues and stories to maintain their Caribbean roots in the United States where she finds excuses for racist treatment, segregation laws and color consciousness. In "A Painful Growth into Selfhood," Nellie Y. McKay connects Audre's homing to her need for "belonging," which is contested by her parents' designs, Linda's dreams of Grenada and the African American community. Through her initiation, Audre creates her own version of Carriacou within a community of sexually and politically radical women who support each other in times of joy and distress (McKay 494). In *Soldier*, however, Granville, June's father, neither accepts his Jamaican roots nor the African American community which he associates with slavery. He pushes June to seek the American dream and wants her to become Americanized. According to him, June might be able to overcome racism and sexism if she follows the steps of educated white men. His survival methods for June dictate physical training, memory tests, reciting poetry and attendance in prominent American schools.

In *Zami* and *Soldier*, Audre and June find affirmations of their gender, racial and cultural identities when they are away from their homes and dominant parents. Audre's high school clique, "The Branded," enables her to embrace difference through this group of marginal girls. "The Branded" is one of the first examples of female solidarity and women-identified women in Audre's life. Starting with Gennie and Ginger, her friends and first loves, she gains a critical perspective regarding the absence of the African American experience from the canon and curricula and the performativity of gender. During her quest and awakenings, women become Audre's guides, mentors, lovers and comrades. Through her visit to Mexico during the McCarthy years, Audre acknowledges her black lesbian feminist activist stance through Eudora, an American expatriate lesbian journalist. With her increasing awareness, she compares conformist and conservative American politics and the social

status of African Americans with the relatively tolerant politics of sexually liberated Americans in Mexico. In *Soldier*, June explores her racial and gender identity in the summer camps where she becomes a member of the "Daredevils," a group of tomboys. She accepts her identity and acknowledges her difference from girls who are bored with camp life and activities. Moreover, her African American music teacher in the camp, Miss Kitty directs, her attention to issues that her parents have neglected to mention such as segregation, hate crimes and life in the South.

In *Zami* and *Soldier*, place and racial identity, women and group affiliations have a crucial impact on Audre's and June's consciousness. After her camp experiences and interactions with Miss Kitty, June gains a critical view of race relations, police brutality, domestic violence and misogynoir. Thus, the shift from the child to young adult voice reflects June's growth. Similarly, Audre's relationship with Eudora in Mexico indicates a similar sexual, political and cultural growth. Audre is drawn to activist and lesbian circles of white and African American women where she observes the constructed nature of gender and manipulative identity politics. Within these assumingly liberal circles, she is expected to pose either as a butch or femme. Among her straight African American friends and colleagues, she is supposed to act like a heterosexual African American woman who respects the codes of racial passing. However, Lies Xhonneux argues that *Zami* focuses on racial and sexual means of performativity by African American women and black lesbians. Audre's lifestyle integrates her nonconformist racial, cultural, sexual and even political identity, thus defying essentialist and predictable identity categorizations. As Lies Xhonneux says, "The novel devotes so much attention to those who can 'pass' racially and sexually because such instances destroy the basis for a hierarchy of visible markers of difference. Through their act of passing, such figures reveal the existence and validity of an identity that cannot, and does not have to, appeal to the fiction of natural essences" (102-3). Audre and June need to act according to their cultural and gender roles for survival.

Audre and June redefine their identities and broaden their perspectives through sisterhood. In the face of conformist and homogenizing gender, racial and cultural norms, not to mention their immigrant parents' traumas, the narrated subjects' experiences reflect a desire

for homing. In *Soldier*, June's homecoming is tied to culture, race and gender. Observing her father's obsessive, violent and contradictory views of blackness and womanhood, June embraces her biological gender in a nonessentialist manner after her camp experience. In *Zami,* Audre redefines her African Caribbean lesbian identity and women's solidarity through Linda's Grenadian stories about Zami women. In a way, she inherits Linda's desire for homecoming. Unlike Linda's reveries of homeland and isolationist attempts to recreate a Caribbean household in the United States, Audre unites her African Caribbean roots with her lesbianism in her quest: "While she moves out, the maternal and familial home are not repudiated, but Audre attempts to create a new relation to them so as to be able to blend her Caribbean heritage with lesbianism" (Bolaki 782). Through Zami, Audre valorizes women's contributions to her life beginning with Linda. One of the differences between Audre's narrating and the narrated "I"s is her reinterpretation of Linda's homeland stories and myths. As Margaret Homans suggests, Zami represents Lorde's redefinition of her self by paying tribute to her mother's Caribbean ancestry. She juxtaposes the women-identified women in her life with her African Caribbean heritage, "Lorde spells her name in various ways, but *Zami* seems to spell her truest and deepest name, for 'Zami' means, in her mother's mother-tongue, 'women who work together as friends and lovers.' Lorde identifies her mother as the origin at once of her work (her poetry) and of her love of women" (Homans). In *Zami,* Audre realizes that Carriacou and Zami are not purely mythical or geographical; she finds them through her awareness of women-identified women in her life. Zami reconnects Audre to her Caribbean roots without severing her connections to the African, African American and lesbian communities.

Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and *The Cancer Journals*, together with June Jordan's *Civil Wars,* are analyzed as autobiographical manifestos that address women's multiple liberations. These works represent African American feminists Lorde and Jordan's shift from the community specific politics of Second Wave Feminism to the global concerns of Third Wave Feminism through a transnational reconnection between people. *Sister Outsider, The Cancer Journals* and *Civil Wars* emphasize the politicization of personal issues and claim that voice means power while silence perpetuates the victimization of

women. In *Sister Outsider*, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" is Audre Lorde's discussion of women's problems concerning sexism, racism and the meaning of cultural difference. As autopathography and scriptotheraphy, *The Cancer Journals* becomes a post-mastectomy guide for women. Lorde comments on the uses of prosthetic devices, which obscure breast cancer patients' physical pain and psychological trauma. The patriarchal system, images in the media and the medical profession favor traditional femininity since prosthetic devices are related to the male gaze and the sexual objectification of women through gender roles. According to Sharon L. Barnes, Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* emphasizes empowerment and voice gained through breast cancer and mastectomy instead of a recovery from a weakening and painful process through prosthesis and conformism to body politics. She concludes that "Lorde rejects the 'european centered' powerlessness associated with illness and death in favor of a non-western, woman-centered celebration of the power that awareness of mortality brings" (Barnes 777).

Enforced forms of silence are also visible in dominant language and historical, cultural and literary narratives. June Jordan's "White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation" in *Civil Wars* addresses the denial of African American vernacular in literature and media since language is part of the white hegemonic politics. Standard English is a tool of white privilege embedded in the education system, political discourse and daily encounters. Jordan's "Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person" in *Civil Wars* further analyzes the exclusion of the African American voice and experience from the white education system. African American children are forced to accept the dichotomous relationship between Standard English and African American vernacular. Moreover, they learn the dominant white experience and perspective through grand narratives, the canon and the curriculum, which prevents cultural orientation and a communal sense of integrity. Audre Lorde's "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" resents myths and generalizations about African (American) women which are used as postcolonial tools to silence and marginalize non-European people and cultures. Radical Feminist Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* represents stereotypical depictions of the African matriarchy rather than reflecting women's voices,

powers and roles in African communities. This ethnocentric view of developing nations indicates the disregard of western feminism and politics towards people of color.

The Cancer Journals and the essays in *Sister Outsider* and *Civil Wars* manifest a renewed sense of race and gender politics through the intersectionality of multiple oppressions. Racial discrimination needs to be viewed in the same light with sex, sexuality, class and culture-based prejudices. Differences from idealized portrayals and dominant narratives create hegemonic categorizations and roles between women of color, people of developing nations and paternalistic western societies. In the African American community, racism and white male heterosexual privilege result in sexism, misogyny and the black masculinity crisis. Lorde's and Jordan's above mentioned works tackle the situation of women through the communal and global intersectionality of female oppression. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde's "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" addresses shared differences and race privilege between white and African American women. Women endure numerous forms of violence, insecurity and discrimination, but white women still have racial privilege. However, women of color are deprived of such an advantage and struggle with injustices in the white and African American communities. African American men have their own agendas and are given male priority, which contributes to gender inequality. Women of color need to seek coalition politics with men and white women for collaboration rather than isolationist benefits. The devaluation of women through feminist and lesbian labeling, myths and subordinate positionalities do not solve problems.

In *Sister Outsider*, Lorde's "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface" questions the black masculinity crisis and sexist media images about women who are victimized by patriarchal hegemony. Sexism does not recuperate deprived black manliness. One part of the community cannot claim liberty and rights while the other half is suffering. In "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving" in *Sister Outsider* Lorde views lesbian-baiting as a counterattack to women's solidarity and the equality of the sexes. Any homophobic blame on women not only censures the feminist agenda, but it also indicates the inner workings of cultural hegemony.

June Jordan's essays in *Civil Wars* integrate a transnational approach to African American feminist writing since they bind African American women, people of color and developing nations through similar experiences and oppressions. Jordan's essays analyze the intersectionality of human suffering without generalizations about people. In *Civil Wars*, "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have" is Jordan's transnational race and gender manifesto in which she tries to raise awareness about human rights abuses as a result of imperialist and capitalist measures in postcolonial nations. Jordan creates a new race and gender consciousness beyond national, cultural and traditional borders while broadening the concepts of kinship, sisterhood and brotherhood. In *Civil Wars*, Jordan's "Whose Burden?" narrates her activist struggles to create African American communal ties with Africans against famine in Sahel. Due to the difficulties of forming a coalition as opposed to cultural and nation-based identity politics, Afro-Americans Against the Famine (AAAF) failed to provide necessary political, monetary and media support.

Audre Lorde's and June Jordan's solutions to separatist identity politics reveal the meaning of difference and the intersectionality of oppressions because Lorde and Jordan encourage self-affirmation and a transnational coalition among women. Thus, difference, discrimination and isolation cannot be used against women. *Sister Outsider*, *Civil Wars* and *The Cancer Journals* become warnings to women to cease struggling with each other. In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in *Sister Outsider*, Lorde calls for an alliance between women of color and women in developing countries to remove race, class and gender discrimination. Instead of submitting to the masters' homogenizing doctrines and using them against other women, women-identified women reevaluate their differences and mutual concerns. Similarly, Jordan's "On the Occasion of a Clear and Present Danger at Yale" in *Civil Wars* emphasizes women's toil on a global scale since women of color and women in developing countries experience at least one form of sexual violence, forced sterilization, poverty, race discrimination and gender subordination. Global ignorance and victimization requires women to take collective action against assumptions and circumstances that enslave them in a cycle of wrongs and abuses. As Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan argue, women's problems need to be discussed in a transnational context

due to common injustices and crimes against women, regardless of their racial, gender, class or cultural differences:

> In modernity, identities inevitably become global. Indeed, few things remain local in the aftermath of the rise of capitalism. Just as goods and people come to circulate in new ways, so too identities emerge and come into specific relations of circulation and expansion. In this globalized framework of encounter and exchange, sexual identities are similar to other kinds of identities in that they are imbued with power relations (Grewal and Kaplan 663).

Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* provides a map to deconstruct patriarchy-devised body politics, the male gaze and the sexual objectification of women through essentialist beauty norms and gender relations. Lorde challenges the victim psychology encouraged by the media and doctors through her rejection of prosthesis. Her one-breasted amazon figure is a redefinition of her mastectomy experience which transforms her loss into awareness. As William Major states, Lorde's struggle with breast cancer challenges the discursive formations that manipulate the normative views of women's bodies and patriarchal demands,

> But, as a manifesto, The Cancer Journals makes clear that resistance to ideological models of identity can in fact be partially liberating, if not from the physiological fact of cancer, then from that social nature of self that pathologizes difference. The way around that gaze is by theorizing and organizing simultaneously, by taking one's story and making it into a template for other women. (Major 39)

In *Sister Outsider* and *Civil Wars*, Audre Lorde and June Jordan also criticize feminist movements and organizations which deny the existence and efforts of women of color. White cultural hegemony maintains the domination of white middle class feminism and its ignorance of women of color. African American feminists Lorde and Jordan legitimize the status and agenda of people of color by opening transnational pathways to African American feminism. In *Civil Wars*, Jordan's "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have" addresses mainstream white middle class feminism and the discussion of their problems which generalize the view of "woman" without considering concerns in race, culture and class specific contexts. White middle class feminism either neglects working class women and women of color or develops a paternalistic view towards them. Jordan believes in collective well-being and recovery without separating races, cultures and

sexes. Women encounter the masculinity crisis and the patriarchal tool of the derogatory naming of strong women-identified women as lesbians. In *Sister Outsider*, "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," Lorde legitimizes African American feminism for the black community and white feminists. For the African American community, feminism poses a threat with its potential of female solidarity and the recreation of identification among women. African American feminism is deemed to be an imitation of white middle class feminism and rebellion against the patriarchy. Thus, African American feminists assumingly lack the capacity to discuss their issues due to their racial and cultural identity crisis. In both cases, African American women are offered a place in the shadow of sexist men or racist white idealism. These claims have ignored the presence of African American feminist activists starting with the Abolition, Progressive and Suffrage Movements in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

The essays in *Sister Outsider* and *Civil Wars* are manifestos against the charges of betrayal of traditional gender norms and white feminists' indifference which has undermined African American feminism's contributions to women's movements. The sisterhood of women-identified women has been controversial due to labeling and misnaming as the lavender menace. Women's groups and agendas strive for homogeneity as a form of immunity against patriarchal attacks of women-identified women. In *Civil Wars*, in "Where Is the Love?" Jordan addresses the popular association between lesbianism and feminism. Lesbianism becomes a patriarchal tool of intimidation in the power struggle with strong and independent women. Lesbian baiting within the women's movements disempowers women's alliances and their expression of problems such as violence, abuse, misogyny, poverty, the inequality of the sexes and a lack of opportunity. As long as the male hegemony and gaze define the codes of gender and sexuality, labels like lesbianism will trivialize the feminist agenda and threaten women using the price of nonheterosexuality and difference. Jordan's solution to this antagonism is self-love and transnational reconnection. She encourages harmony within and among people for a politics of understanding, identification and coalition building, without limitations of borders and cultural concepts.

In conclusion, the abovementioned epigraphs from Marilyn Frye and Kimberle Crenshaw indicate the value of self-determination and language, which are both tools of domination for authorities and a means of liberation for the oppressed. As long as naming and labeling belong to the patriarchal hegemony, intricate discursive relations will sustain a hierarchical western view of white male privileged race, sex, gender and cultural relations. As neglected and subjugated people, women need to redefine their selves, bodies and stories. Audre Lorde's and June Jordan's memoirs and autobiographical essays are racial, cultural and sexual coming of age narratives and manifestos with a feminist activist fervor. In Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Jordan's *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood*, the narrating "I"s trace the gradual growth and self-naming process of African American children Audre and June. Cultural, racial and gender norms, limitations, and vulnerabilities lead the narrated subjects into a quest for voice, identity and self-acclaimed power. They respond to essentialist and discriminatory constructions of race and gender through their alternative reconstructions in homosocial alliances with women. Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and *The Cancer Journals* and Jordan's *Civil Wars* are autobiographical manifestos that encourage women to stand as speakers, writers and feminists in a transnational context of race and gender. These works describe the intersectionality of oppressions, the value of difference and the regenerative powers of sisterhood between African American women, people of color and women in developing nations. Separatist identity politics are challenged by empowering coalition politics with the removal of borders among women, whether they are feminists, hetero/homo/bisexuals, (non)European immigrants, people of color or (non)conformists.

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APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
THESIS/DISSERTATION ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Date: 28/06/2017

Thesis Title / Topic: Feminist Activist Politics and Sisterhood in the Life Narratives of Audre Lorde and June Jordan.

According to the originality report obtained by my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options stated below on 28/06/2017 for the total of 133 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled as above, the similarity index of my thesis is 5 %.

Filtering options applied:

1. Approval and Decleration sections excluded
2. Bibliography/Works Cited excluded
3. Quotes excluded
4. Match size up to 5 words excluded

I declare that I have carefully read Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Guidelines for Obtaining and Using Thesis Originality Reports; that according to the maximum similarity index values specified in the Guidelines, my thesis does not include any form of plagiarism; that in any future detection of possible infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility; and that all the information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

28/06/2017
Date and Signature

Name Surname: Ezgi İlimen
Student No: N13238603
Department: American Culture and Literature
Program: American Culture and Literature
Status: ☒ Masters ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Integrated Ph.D.

ADVISOR APPROVAL

APPROVED.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
YÜKSEK LİSANS/DOKTORA TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 28/06/2017

Tez Başlığı / Konusu: Audre Lorde and June Jordan'ın Yaşam Anlatılarında Feminist Aktivist Politikalar ve Kardeşlik.

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 133 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 28/06/2017 tarihinde tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 5 'tir.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler:
1- Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç,
2- Kaynakça hariç
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Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orjinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

28/06/2017
Tarih ve İmza

Adı Soyadı:	Ezgi İlimen
Öğrenci No:	N13238603
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DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.

Bilge Mutluay

Doç. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

APPENDIX 2: ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM FOR THESIS WORK

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM FOR THESIS WORK

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE TO THE DEPARTMENT PRESIDENCY

Date: 28/06/2017

Thesis Title / Topic: Feminist Activist Politics and Sisterhood in the Life Narratives of Audre Lorde and June Jordan.

My thesis work related to the title/topic above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.
4. Is not based on observational and descriptive research (survey, measures/scales, data scanning, system-model development).

I declare, I have carefully read Hacettepe University's Ethics Regulations and the Commission's Guidelines, and in order to proceed with my thesis according to these regulations I do not have to get permission from the Ethics Board for anything; in any infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility and I declare that all the information I have provided is true.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

28/06/2017
Date and Signature

Name Surname: Ezgi İlimen
Student No: N13238603
Department: American Culture and Literature
Program: American Culture and Literature
Status: ☒ Masters ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Integrated Ph.D.

ADVISER COMMENTS AND APPROVAL

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ETİK KURUL İZİN MUAFİYETİ FORMU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 28/06/2017

Tez Başlığı / Konusu: Audre Lorde ve June Jordan'ın Yaşam Anlatılarında Feminist Aktivist Politikalar ve Kardeşlik.

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne müdahale içermemektedir.
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Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullar ve Komisyonlarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre tez çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kuruldan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

28/06/2017
Tarih ve İmza

Adı Soyadı: Ezgi İlimen
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DANIŞMAN GÖRÜŞÜ VE ONAYI

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