Identity Politics Revisited:
On Audre Lorde, Intersectionality, and Mobilizing Writing Styles

"I kept thinking of Audre Lorde and how I wished she were here to help us describe the moment."

-Sara Ahmed in *On Being Included*

1. Introduction

During the last decade, "intersectionality" has taken on a complex position in the field of feminist scholarship. The concept has been debated back and forth, from buzzword to harsh critique. In the midst of these discussions, I too, like so many other feminist scholars, have kept thinking about Audre Lorde and the role of her writings in the debates over Intersectionality. Lorde's radical literary feminism has often been seen as both: on the one hand as reflecting a politics of identity, on the other as shifting and situational. Intersectionality too has been claimed either to be recycling the ideas of identity politics or to be creating new ways of grasping de-centered identity positions and power structures. My purpose in this article is to tell a story about the roots of intersectionality through – and in tandem with – the legacy of Lorde's feminism, by revisiting certain identity-political ideas. The radical nature of Audre Lorde's thinking is in many ways connected to politicized writing styles and rebellious literary forms. My focus in the article is therefore extended to cover the role and implications of radical writing styles for intersectionality. I argue that the oeuvre of telling the story of intersectionality through Lorde's feminism opens up a new perspective on the genealogy of intersectionality.

The contemporary debates over intersectionality have many different genealogies, and each scholar maps them a bit differently. Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattyama, for instance, distinguish between US-based systemic intersectionality and more UK-based constructionist work – while also referring to "the burgeoning Scandinavian work" (2006, 188).[1] However, questions of experience, systems of oppression, and multiple identities – often derived from Lorde's arguments – remain the common ground of intersectional debates. This article is an attempt to examine this common ground, from three points of view: those of Audre Lorde,

of the politics of writing, and of the legacy of identity politics. In so doing, I am also able to address Lorde's role as an "exception" in telling stories about feminism: her trickster-like, "exceptional" legacy seems to feature in several feminist epistemologies beyond intersectionality.

This article has been written at two Nordic Universities, those of Turku and Uppsala, and as a Nordic-educated feminist my training has taken place within the European debates on intersectionality. Nevertheless, for more than fifteen years I have been working in the field of US-based Caribbean studies and Feminisms of color. From this partial and situated perspective, I am particularly interested in Audre Lorde's role in the discussion of genealogies of intersectionality, and in the politics of writing style in the feminist theoretical debate on intersectionality. My aim is to identify and accredit uses of poetry in the corpus of writings presaging intersectional modes of theorizing identities and systems of oppression. My case study in this article involves Lorde's well-known essay, published in *Sister Outsider* in 1984 under the title "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", and combining both poetic and manifesto-like writing styles, along with two of her poems, "Recreation" and "Between Ourselves", from the collection *The Black Unicorn* (1978) and her novel *Zami: The New Spelling of My Name* (1982). The larger frame of reference here is one of a feminist "identity poetics" dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, the period of so-called essentialist, identity-political writings by feminists of color.

The turn of the 1980s and 90s came to be a time of heated debate between essentialist identity politics and postmodern constructivism (see e.g. Fuss 1989 and Alcoff 1988). Audre Lorde held a strangely dual position in this debate. For some scholars she is recalled as an essentialist feminist in her search for the mythic woman warrior: for others she presages postmodernism – and intersectionality - in her emphasis on positionality. (See e.g. Smith 1991, Garber 2001, Chancy 1997, Carr 1993.) However, feminist scholars have drawn on Lorde's poetic thinking time and again, in various contemporary contexts. Sara Ahmed, for one, is inspired by Lorde's thinking in many of her books (Ahmed 2012; Ahmed 2010; Ahmed 2004). Here, my purpose is to mobilize the poetic legacy of Audre Lorde and its varying role in the process of articulating the theory of intersectionality. I revisit identity politics, to see whether its supposedly stable legacy might be activated anew. I first say a little more about identity politics in Lorde's *Zami* -novel; I then try to envision the identity-

poetical and political roots of intersectionality. Finally, I discuss the politics of writing style, using Lorde's essay and poetry as my primary examples.

2. From Identity Politics to Story of Intersectionality

The multiply burdened concept of 'identity politics' usually refers to the shared experience of oppression by certain subjugated groups, whether defined by gender, class, political status, sexuality, ethnicity, race or some other characteristic, which provides a basis for group politics. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination." (SEP online). Identity politics thus presumes a shared subjective experience of the members of the particular group, an essence of identity. This view has been contested by more constructivist conceptions of identity; these describe such identity-political ideas as 'essentialist' (cf. Hemmings 2011, 38-42), conceptualizing identity a kind of a 'frozen object' – obsolete and old fashioned, "the necessary error".[2] Jennifer Nash has argued that the contemporary use of "intersectionality" provides "a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics" and its tendency to transcend differences (Nash 2008, 2). In contrast, however, identity politics may also offer something germane to the discussion of intersectionality.

There is an immense corpus of research recognizing Audre Lorde's legacy in articulating multiple identities and diverse positioning, whereas Barbara Smith, for example, values Lorde for articulating the "Black lesbian experience with both verisimilitude and authenticity" (1991, 122). In her *Zami* -novel's epilogue Lorde writes:

> Recreating in words the women who helped give me substance.
>
> *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.* (Lorde 1982, 255.)

She must embody the female heritage of her cultural *herstory*. In *Zami*, Afrekete is Kitty, the protagonist Audre's lover at the very end of the novel. Kitty's character intertwines with Goddess Afrekete, and this wavering between the Goddess Afrekete and a lover Afrekete is marked by the use of italics:

> *She brought me live things from the bush, and from her farm set out in cocoyams and cassava* – those magical fruit which Kitty brought me from the West Indian markets [---].
>
> There were green plantains, which we half-peeled and then planted, fruit-deep, in each other's bodies until the petals of skin lay like tendrils of broad green fire upon the curly darkness between our upspread thighs. *There were ripe red finger bananas, stubby and sweet, with which I parted your lips gently, to insert the peeled fruit into your grape-purple flower.* (Lorde 1982, 249.)

Here the African heritage, female erotics, West Indian produce, and the black lesbian body materialize the very essence of zami-identity which *she must become*.

Furthermore, the first section of poems in *The Black Unicorn* consists of poetry emphasizing the essence of black warrior woman's eternal soul, bearing Dahomey traditions throughout historical periods. In the poem "From the House of Yemanja", the West African heritage is needed like the consoling arms of a mother (/mother I need your blackness now/ pp. 6). In "125th Street and Abomey", a city in today's Benin and New York are juxtaposed when the speaker finds Seboulisa, a mother of all the Youruba orisha, printed inside the back of her head (pp. 12). She finds /those ancient parts of me/[---]/like my warrior sisters/who rode in defense of your queendom/ (pp. 12). This kind of collective power within herself connects Lorde to the essentialist identity politics of black lesbian feminism. Such features seem to be ways, in Lorde's texts, to "reclaim ways of understanding her distinctiveness" – to quote the aforementioned definition by the SEP. This seemingly stable position, however, is not the whole story.

There are a number of feminists who appreciate Lorde in terms of exceeding the limits of identity politics. For Linda Garber, Lorde "draws on the poetics of lesbian feminism and prefigures the politics of postmodernism" by always claiming multiple self-positioning (2001, 97). Analouise Keating names Lorde's work, along with that of Gloria Anzaldùa and

Paula Gunn Allen, as “transformational identity politics”: “a complex interactive process that displaces conventional boundaries between apparently disparate social groups” (1998, 35). Lorde is also discussed in terms of envisioning “multiple and changing identities in the field of identity politics” (Ryan 2001, 5), in “rethinking identity politics” (Phelan 2001, 309), in the context of “coalitional differential consciousness” (Sandoval 2000, 61), or in picturing “coalitional identity politics” (Fowlkes 2001, 282). Lorde has the ability to talk about identity politics while changing it − she is the *sister* and an *outsider*. These complex processes, multiple positionings, and changing identities do not fall too far from intersectionality.

Writing about feminist theories, particularly intersectionality, also includes storytelling. Clare Hemmings (2011) has made an important contribution by mapping what kinds of stories feminists tell, why these stories matter, and what kinds of political grammars are inherent in our story-telling. Hemmings argues that “feminist theorists need to pay attention to the *amenability* of our own stories [---] we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself“ (2011, 2). My story here is amenable to stories told about intersectionality; I am referring to its ambiguity, dependence on analysis of power, social constructions, and the crucial role of Black feminist thought. However, Hemmings emphasizes that “we can interrupt the amenability of the narratives that make up Western feminist stories and tell stories differently” (2011, 2). One central element in telling a story about intersectionality is to correct it somehow: in the titles on the topic, terms such as “revisited”, “re-thinking”, or “blind spots” often appear (see e.g. Lykke 2010, Nash 2008, Brah and Phoenix 2004; Prins 2006, to name a few). This pursuit of correcting must not create the illusion that Intersectionality can somehow provide us with truer knowledge the more we revisit it, or the more axes of oppression we add. However, rather than truer knowledge, Intersectionality offers us more situated knowledge, to use Donna Haraway’s terms, the more we revisit it. That is why it is interesting to see whether Audre Lorde can help us “describe the moment” in debating intersectionality.

As the story goes, intersectionality emerged from the critique directed at the excluding paradigms of identity politics in the late 1980s. The term was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law scholar who wanted to raise awareness of the pit of invisibility reserved for black women, marginalized from critical discourses on both race and gender. (See Crenshaw 1989.) This, however, was not entirely unprecedented: a number of Black feminist authors

and activists, such as Audre Lorde, developed "intersectional" perspectives already in the early seventies by combining class interests with gender-specific issues in racial categorizations, thus articulating the problems of multiple simultaneous oppressions (without actually naming such combinations as intersectional). Currently, intersectionality is a "vibrant" concept in discussions of transnational feminisms, critical race studies, disability studies, queer studies, transgender studies and globalization studies. In the most common articulations of intersectionality identities are viewed in more constructivist terms: they are culturally and historically constructed within the social structures of power including a variety of positions – gendered, national, cultural, religious and the like. These positions can be ambivalent, overlapping, or even mutually exclusive – and the individual is forced to negotiate among them. However, as Kathy Davis argues, intersectionality became a feminist buzzword precisely because it is ambiguous and open-ended: on the one hand it sought to understand "the social and material realities of women's lives", while on the other it "fit neatly into the postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple and shifting identities" (Davis 2014, 18). In this respect, intersectionality befits the legacy of Audre Lorde, which is always too slippery, fluid and ambiguous to allow it to fit neatly into one particular epistemological niche.

An analysis of Lorde's political project casts a particularly strong light on the both identity-political and poetical roots of intersectionality. Lorde's seemingly essentialist identity-political positionings also invite her readers to imagine commonalities and possible coalitions. In Keating's words, "Lorde extends her experience outwards to include all – regardless of color, sexuality, gender, age, or class − who do not fit this country's 'mythical norm' "(1998, 27). Lorde turns identity politics' project of essential difference into a coalitional effort across the systems of domination. This same ethos is pivotal to intersectionality, which by definition questions logics of domination and creates transformative social models (see May 2015, 4). I claim that the 'nodal point' of Lorde's project and intersectionality studies lies in their common attempt to theorize domination rather than defining the sameness of "outsiders".

In the recent discussion of intersectionality, Lorde's writings and activism are also often recalled when it is felt that intersectionality has been depoliticized or to have lost its radical coalitional potential. (See e.g. Bilge 2013.) Several generations of feminist thinkers have

been inspired by Audre Lorde's investment in creativity: As Barbara Christiansen put it, Lorde "enlarged the race-feminist theory of that period [the 1980s], so much so that the concept of difference as a creative force" is today as natural in our texts as the analysis of oppression (cited in Garber 2001, 100). In the following, I situate Audre Lorde's poetic and creative knowledge within the field of intersectionality, with the purpose of mapping her position in feminist story-telling – more particularly in stories of intersectionality.

3. Identity poetics of Intersectionality

During the early 1980s, many US-based or Caribbean feminists of color, such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldùa, Paula Gunn Allen, Michelle Cliff, Barbara Smith, or Alice Walker, started to conceptualize expressions which would more comprehensively capture the experiences and lived realities of women of color. It was felt that neither critical race studies nor the mainly white feminist criticism could provide an adequate means of self-expression for those encountering multiple simultaneous oppressions. The writers and artists belonging to the literary movement following these conceptualizations, the Black Feminist Aesthetics, included a group of activists called the Combahee River Collective, who claimed in their statement that it was "difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (1982/1977, 16); they were thus articulating, as early as 1977, the principles of the intersectional ethos. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a wide corpus of fiction − essays, novels, manifestos, short stories, poetry − began to emerge, with Alice Walker and Toni Morrison in the forefront, in an attempt to express the forms of multiple oppression experienced by women of color. Even before eighties, several women authors of color, such as Nella Larson, Zora Neale Hurston, Una Marson, Lorraine Hansberry, or Rosa Guy to name a few, were exploring complicated intersectional themes. This plethora of Black Feminist fiction is reminiscent of Giovanna Covi's view that feminist discourse enables forms of literature and philosophy to mix in a way which pushes language to the very limit, "attempting to utter what so far has remained unnamed, but not for this reason non-existent" (Covi 1997, 26).

The writers of Black feminist aesthetics invite us "to discover 'theory' in 'poetry'" and vice versa (Covi 1997, 26) emphasizing both a fiction and a theory in seeking new intellectual realms. Such intertwining of intellectual and creative discourses was used for example by Alice Walker, who declared her principles of *Womanism* in her collection of short fiction called *In Search of our Mother's Gardens* (1983); by Michelle Cliff, in *Claiming an Identity They taught Me to Despise* (1980), and by Audre Lorde, who spoke of a 'Zami-consciousness' in addressing the particular experience of women-loving-women-of-color in her aforementioned novel; they needed art to articulate intersecting identity positions. This corpus of literature provided an intertext for theory which has too rarely been recognized as one of the routes[3] leading to subsequent academic intersectionality. Linda Garber, in her influential study, refers to such identity-political literary writings as 'identity poetics'. Garber views identity poetics as a third term, arising out of the texts of working-class/lesbians of color and situated between "grounded identity politics and fluid positionality" (Garber 2001, 1).

While Garber has demanded the full recognition of identity poetics as the root of later constructivist queer theory, I am interested in its role in auguring intersectionality. Identity poetics, she argues, consists of pivotal identity-political writings which articulate "multiple, simultaneous identity positions and activist politics", belonging to lesbian feminism as well as presaging queer theory (Garber 2001, 8). One of the problems, for Garber, was queer's theoretical commitment to poststructural philosophy. It is not approachable by an activist readership, and its textuality is inaccessible for those without academic credentials. Thus queer theory marginalizes activist and other radical writings, which opened up "free spaces" for queer theory in the first place (Garber 2001, 197). Similar problems have been located in the recent debate on intersectionality. It has been said to face trends that neutralize its political potential making it an academic exercise of metatheoretical musings (see Bilge 2013). While scholars of intersectionality have made serious attempts through the politics of positioning and situating knowledge to criticize all forms of universalizing tendencies and historical vacuums,[4] the prevailing claims regarding intersectional methodology and its more discipline-centered use have nevertheless pushed Intersectionality in more academic directions. The inaccessibility of some of this theory, which has been disciplined out of its radicality, might therefore be redressed if the politics of writing styles and identity poetics is

taken into consideration. In this sense, the rethinking of intersectionality might incline us toward the use of poetry.

4. The Politics of Writing Style in Studies of Intersectionality

The genealogy of intersectionality brings to the fore the issue of politics embedded in writing styles. If we are open to accepting the invitation by the writers of Black feminist aesthetics "to discover 'theory' in 'poetry'", we must also acknowledge a variety of writing styles – such as fiction, essay, poetry and manifesto – so as to avoid the ivory tower of academically validated discourse. After all, even in the case of intersectionality, which is seen as an ethical tool for the study of those who are multiply marginalized, it comes down to the question, what kinds of epistemic knowledge are favored and what is ignored, what kinds of writings are being taken into account in academic knowledge production (see e.g. Hornscheidt 2009, 40).

Sometimes radical yet visionary literary texts come to be overshadowed by the disciplinary demands of academic writing. Even feminist scholars are sometimes so "disciplined" by our own disciplines, under so much pressure to formulate the standardized kind of impeccable journal article, that these radical texts become hard to accept. Antje Hornscheidt, for one, has noted that Intersectionality needs to be established as a master concept by situating earlier traces and ideas in the background rather than foregrounding them. Hornscheidt asks: *why* has identity-political black feminist knowledge been excluded from academia even within feminist studies? Radical black feminist thinking has become an appropriated knowledge, obscured in the background of academic intersectionality. In other words, intersectionality has been established as a "Master concept", situating itself "above" the more radical textual corpus and integrating it into "white knowledge production on intersectionality" (Hornscheidt 2009, 39).

One such radical writer has been Audre Lorde, self-acclaimed "Lesbian, Mother, Poet, Warrior" of Caribbean origin. The politics of writing style is a focal issue for Lorde, who in her essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" articulated several kinds of "Interlocking systems of power" and many of the basic goals of Intersectionality as early as 1980.[5] While this visionary piece of writing is often cited by scholars applying

intersectionality as a methodological apparatus, its radical theoretical implications are seldom analyzed at length. This may be because in the context of traditional academic constraints her text is not "good": One might say that its argumentation is not coherent as it jumps about and avoids making connections, ignoring the Aristotelian ideals of a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. Its arguments are not founded on scholarly studies but on personal experience. Furthermore, it is a manifesto-like text, addressing the reader directly and with the purpose of appealing to the latter's emotions. It uses polemical language, dismissing the demands of objectivity and utilizes colorful metaphors and poetic language, mixing genres and co-opting styles, thus politicizing the academic writing form.

In her essay, Lorde gives expression to the experience of the multiply oppressed. To achieve this goal, she had to "transform the silence into language" as she puts it (Lorde 2007, 40). Throughout her writing, Lorde has tried to find new tools to express her political vision – for example, in the subtitle of her aforementioned ground-breaking novel *Zami: the New Spelling of my Name* – a *Biomythography.* The subtitle foregrounds the cultural framing of the biographical elements of her novel, always already imbued with localized mythic narrative features. It can thus be argued that the genre chosen by a writer is as plausible a way of doing politics as the content itself. It is no coincidence that in the essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" too she is taking a poetic stand in order to illustrate her intersectional vision of class. Lorde explains that "even the form our creativity takes is often a class issue" (pp. 116). For her, it is prose which appears as a middle-class art form, demanding "a room of one's own, reams of paper, a typewriter and plenty of time" (p. 116); poetry is the genre accessible for example to working-class mothers, who have very little time and only the corner of a kitchen table. Thus Lorde intersectionalizes the genre of writing itself, harnessing style to carry her emancipatory visions. Lorde argues that "we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectations and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984, 123). This much-quoted argument also provides the background for claims regarding poetic routes for contemporary intersectionality. Poetry and more artistic forms of writing were used by The Black Feminist Aesthetics movement to dismantle the blueprints of academic feminism of the time to "transform the silence into language".

It is interesting to consider radical poetry as a means of opening up a way to grasp the level of experience in intersectional analyses. According to Elizabeth Grosz, the unwillingness to theorize the role of the concretely embodied knower in scholarly knowledge production constitutes a blind spot in the epistemology of traditional science (1993, 192). In the history of feminism, the creative force of artistic language has sketched the revolutionary ideas of the women's movement, and the dualism between "creative" and "critical" has long been challenged. For example, both Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir wrote fiction along with more philosophical work. Women poets have also utilized the bodily and material qualities of poetry – rhythm, speech-sounds, onomatopoesis, and the kinesthetic qualities of rhythmic language –to incorporate the materiality of the female body in the text (see Stevenson 2000). The embodied way of knowing and creating in feminist writing is graspable in Audre Lorde's poem "Recreation", from the collection *The Black Unicorn* (1978). Here the bodily experience of women-loving-women becomes the site of textual (re)creation:

Coming together
it is easier to work
after our bodies
meet
paper and pen
neither care nor profit
whether we write or not
but as your body moves
under my hands
charged and waiting
we cut the leash
you create me against your thighs
hilly with images
moving through our word countries
my body
writes into your flesh
the poem
you make of me.

Touching you I catch midnight
as moon fires set in my throat
I love you flesh into blossom
I made you
and take you made
into me.

Here “my body” is concretely transformed into a poem, as “I” am created “against your thighs”. In “Recreation”, poetic language is needed to express the corporeal experience of black lesbian women, which had no expression in the theorizing feminist knowledge of 1978.

What is interesting in Audre Lorde’s use of language is in particular her unique, situated and embodied textuality, mobilizing the poetic truth about the experienced particularities of multiple oppressions – something which was only later given the name in academic discourse of “Intersectionality”. Nina Lykke has included the issue of shifting boundaries between academic and creative writing practices in questions of ideologies, intersectionalities, and situated knowledges (2010, 163-183). For Lykke, feminists need to challenge the perspective of traditional academic knowledge by committing ourselves in our academic texts, by shifting narrator’s position and perspective, by making ourselves accountable “in terms of partial perspectives” (165) and by giving our “objects” voice and agency on their own terms (167). In her own work, Lykke has drawn on Laurel Richardson’s books *Writing Strategies* (1990) and *Fields of Play* (1997). For both Lykke and Richardson, “a poetic representation makes it possible to get closer to the embodied, individually specific and unique dimensions of the research participants’ speech act”; Lykke concludes that “the poem mobilizes a ‘poetic truth’” (Lykke 2010, 175).

5. *The Black Unicorn* as Situated Knowledge

The epistemological key to intersectionality and intersectional ways of knowing is based on situating both oneself and the knowledge produced: historically, spatially, and culturally. Intersectionality is about partial perspectives and culturally related epistemologies. As Lykke argues, “if ‘we’ (= white, Western, middle-class feminists) do not carefully reflect on our positionality in an intersectional, global perspective, and revise our ways of doing both theory and politics, ‘we’ will end up supporting rather than breaking down the global and local power structures against which ‘we’ claim to fight” (2010, 54). Intersectionality embraces the ethos of situated knowledge and the politics of locations for both: the researching subject and the researched “object”. Lorde’s poetical knowledge as situated

knowledge, as a partial perspective, challenges white feminists to understand, negotiate and dialogize with perspectives not personally embodied (cf. Haraway 1988).

Lorde's situated knowledge, *her poetic partiality,* provides a culturally and historically situated perspective from which to perceive the intersectional experiences of Black/Lesbian/Women. Her poetic partiality challenges Western cultural narratives about scholarly objectivity, transcendent perspectives and conquering gazes from nowhere constitute a "God trick", an illusion of infinitive vision (Haraway 1988, 581-583). In *The Black Unicorn,* Lorde deals with such themes as mother-daughter relationships, the African heritage, woman-warriors, racism, lesbianism, social oppression, sacrifice, pain and in-betweenness. Yet the lyrical "I" of the poems often finds solace in sisterhood and remembering. The point of view, however, is always that of an "other", an outsider, never able to completely blend in. In the poem "Between Ourselves", Lorde speaks of the multiple suppressions and fluid subject-positions occupied by an African-American woman. While the title addresses people belonging a particular community, it may also be referring implicitly to the spaces within oneself, reminding us that "myself" or "ourselves" are also composed of many fragments. The self, too, includes the otherness within:

Once when I walked into a room
my eyes would seek out the one or two black faces
for contact or reassurance or a sign
I was not alone
now walking into rooms full of black faces
that would destroy me for any difference
where shall my eyes look?
Once it was easy to know
who were my people.

[---]

Under the sun on the shores of Elimina
a black man sold the woman who carried
my grandmother in her belly
he was paid with bright yellow coins
that shone in the evening sun
and in the faces of her sons and daughters.
When I see that brother behind my eyes
his irises are bloodless and without colour
his tongue clicks like yellow coins

tossed up on this shore
where we share the same corner
of an alien and corrupted heaven
and whenever I try to eat
the words
of easy blackness as salvation
I taste the colour
of my grandmother's first betrayal.

[---]

Armed with scars
healed
in many different colors
I look in my own faces
as Eshu's daughter crying
if we do not stop killing
the other in ourselves
the self that we hate
in others
soon we shall all lie
in the same direction
[---].

Here the lyrical "I" negotiates between the different axes of identity one carries within oneself, including the otherness within her. She seeks to know who her people are, and finds "faces that would destroy me for any difference". She seems to be always out of place: as a lesbian, as a woman and as someone of African origin. She carries her African heritage with her, her grandmother's "first betrayal" also echoing the violent history of women. She is scarred and healed "in many different colors", crying out for respect on all sides of herself – intersectionally. Her desire to belong – or *longing-to-be* – is produced in and through the narrative enactment of multiple selves (cf. Prins 2006, 288).

For Haraway, situated knowledge requires that the object of research is always seen as "an actor and agent" (1988, 592). Haraway emphasizes the conversation with the agent/object, which should not be seen merely as material for the scholar's discoveries. She refers to the agent/object as "Coyote" or "Trickster", enabling unsettling possibilities (593). The interesting thing here, however, is the route Haraway takes in order to reach the principles of world-as-actor. She bases her argument on Katie King's study *The Passing Dreams of*

Choice … Once Before and After: Audre Lorde and the Literary Apparatus (1987).[6] As a poet, Lorde provides particular embodied ways to know about the multiply marginalized perspectives and experientiality of those seen as marginal. Her poetry unravels the "god-trick" of traditional science and empowers the object as agent by forcing the reader to engage *with* the poem.

In the poem above, the lyrical "I" draws on African mythology, embodying the history of slavery. Such an approach might easily sound essentialist. The seemingly essentialist and stable poem, however, may be transformed into the intersectional negotiation of complexity and relationality by respecting its agency in creating unsettling possibilities. Lorde's legacy surpasses the epistemological positions of what is already known and superseded, whether we are concerned with her writings presaging constructivist intersectionality or more materialist idea of her poems being the object/actors. What if we recall her role in predicting the "affective turn" in feminist studies, with the essays "Uses of the Erotic" and "Uses of Anger" in *Sister Outsider* (1984)? How about her position as an identity poetical writer, anticipating queer theory in Linda Garber's thinking? Or the studies foregrounding the politics of writing style in feminist studies? In analyzing feminist narratives, Hemmings comments as an aside that it is frequently Lorde who is positioned as a "notable exception" (Hemmings 2011, 48).

6. Conclusion

I conclude by claiming that the legacy of Audre Lorde is much less fixed than it seems, and that her role as an exception deserves to be studied further. Her legacy becomes a fluid and ambivalent, ever changing agent – Coyote, or Trickster. Or better yet, a Black Unicorn. Feminist scholars have time and again claimed that writing style is "the method of inquiry" itself, and that "mainstream textual formations are often related to a system that privileges certain kinds of knowledge over other, subjugated knowledge" (Livholts 2012, 3; Richardson 2000). In her volume, *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies* (2012), Mona Livholts envisions an *intersectionalized writing*; this refers to several kinds of situated knowledges and to perspectively narrated versions of the world. Livholts amplifies this: "intersecting dimensions of power are intimately related to methodologies of textual

forms", challenging "researchers to grasp complexity in their studies" (2012, 9). For me, the most interesting feature in Livholts's intersectionalized writing is that once again it is Audre Lorde's writing which is pointed to as an example (2012, 10).

Polemical and poetic feminist writings articulating the principles of intersectionality have been published over the last several decades. This genre of identity poetics is nevertheless often insufficiently recognized in the debate over the genealogy of methodological intersectionality, probably because of its non-academic mode of argumentation. I am tempted to 'discover theory in poetry', to quote Covi's words, and to suggest that the poetry of the black feminist aesthetic remains insufficiently recognized in the theorizing of contemporary European uses of intersectionality. Even though at the turn of the millennium Intersectionality became "a trendy" concept, it might benefit from recognizing its own roots/routes in the corpus of poetic texts by radical feminists of color. These routes can be traced by following Audre Lorde's fluid and trickster-like legacy. I propose that intersectionality is not something that came after identity politics; on the contrary, identity politics is inherent in intersectionality. The linearity in feminist epistemological storytelling is a narrative (and as such political) structure to which we are often amenable without even noticing. Addressing Lorde's multifaceted epistemological position echoes Hemmings' challenge that we can disrupt the amenability of the narratives that make up Western feminist stories "and tell stories differently". However, as Audre Lorde proves, it is poetry we must turn to, in order to see what blind spots need to be illuminated. As Hemmings claims, in feminist storytelling it is not only feminist theory that is disputed, but also its proper subject (2011, 5). Lorde's exceptionality makes her a proper subject of all our stories.

[1] It is perhaps not an overgeneralization to claim that while US-based work, from Kimberlé Crenshaw onwards, has in many ways based its arguments on Black Feminism while the European debate has relied more on Marxist and constructionist frameworks. Another feature of the European debate has been a claim of wider recognition of Black feminist thought as grounds of later academic intersectionality. (See e.g. Brah and Phoenix 2004: Hornscheidt 2009.)

[2] Butler 1993, 229. For more on this labeling see Hemmings 2011, 31-57. My timeline here recalls the narrative form Hemmings refers to as "Progress narrative". In her interest in the grammars of feminists' narratives, Hemmings considers the over-all structure in feminist story-telling: working backward, the 1990s are seen as a decade of poststructuralist advances in feminism, the 1980s were concerned with analyzing identity-political differences, and the 1970s are seen as an era of naïve universal sisterhood.

[3] Here I am referring to a widely used metaphor in Caribbean literary scholarship: addressing routes rather than roots, in order to problematize the idea of originality and turn to movements, processes, and mixtures. The metaphor itself, however, originates from James Clifford's book *Routes* (1997).

[4] See e.g. Hill Collins 1998, pages 201-228; Davis 2014; Marx Ferree 2012; Yuval-Davis 2006; Lykke 2010; Lykke 2014.

[5] Although *Sister Outsider* was published in 1984, this essay is based on a paper Lorde delivered at the Copeland Colloquium at Amherst College in April 1980.

[6] Haraway applies King's idea of poems as sites of literary production to bodies, asking: whether "biological bodies [are] 'produced' or 'generated' in the same strong sense as poems", and understanding bodies as "material-semiotic actors" (1988, 595). Interestingly enough, the "poems" referred to, are those of Audre Lorde's.

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