

Not the Master's Tools:

Audre Lorde's Decolonial Alternative to Eurocentric Masculinist Knowledge

Introduction

“If the university wields the norm of excellence and objectivity in order to exclude and marginalize black feminists, this is also the terrain on which we struggle to reimagine the university as a site where different kinds of epistemological, methodological, and intellectual projects, as represented in black feminism, might emerge. Such projects challenge, rather than reproduce, the norms of the university.”¹ -Grace Kyungwon Hong

The university in the United States has historically excluded black women from its gates, while simultaneously creating violence towards them at the epistemic level², through the validation of Eurocentric masculinist knowledge, which demeans black women's knowledge production. For this reason, the university has been and continues to be a site of struggle and contestation³. Taking Grace Kyungwon Hong's piece, “The Future of Our World's Black: Feminism and the Politics of Knowledge in the University under Globalization” as a point of departure, I will investigate the possibilities that alternative knowledges can create for black women, both inside and outside of the university. Drawing largely from black feminist scholar Barbara Christian, Hong argues that the university is a, “crucial site for contemporary transnational capital's management of race”, and commits a double violence towards black

¹ Grace Hong. “The Future of Our Worlds: Black Feminism and the Politics of Knowledge in the University Under Globalization,” *Meridians* 8.2 (2008) : 107.

² Gayatri Spivak, “Can The Subaltern Speak.” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. L. Grossberg C. Nelson. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313. Spivak uses the term “epistemic violence” to refer to the process in which European knowledge was used to create the colonized, non-European, the subaltern, making them “the Other” of Europe. At the same time, alternative knowledges were destroyed. The example of colonization in India is used, as the replacement of the Hindu law system, with a European one, changed the way that people in India understood the world.

³ See Chandra Mohanty. *Feminism Without Borders Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Grace Hong (2008).

women, through the actual exclusion of them and through the production of knowledge, since “economic or demographic processes” are organized by knowledge produced and validated in the university⁴. I chose to depart from Hong’s piece for two reasons. First, the discussion around black women’s oppression has largely been focused on economic and material forms of inequality, such as the exclusion from decent jobs, education, housing, healthcare, ect., and these should, without a doubt, be central concerns. However, if we take up Hong’s suggestion that these very material conditions are always connected to a way of knowing that allows for such conditions to exist, then we must also look to knowledge production. I believe the discussion of black women’s oppression must be a part of a larger discussion of epistemic violence, primarily, for the sake of understanding the possibilities of resistance at the level of knowledge. This brings me to the second reason that I chose to begin with this work, which is that Hong argues that because violence can occur at the epistemic level, resistance must also be able to occur at this level. Stemming from this possibility of resistance, this paper seeks to examine the ways in which black feminist thought does and can challenge hegemonic ways of knowing.

The study of knowledge itself, as well as sites of knowledge production, is significant because as writer Bouventura Sousa Santos argues, “There can be no global social justice, without cognitive justice.”⁵ Santos understands that the “epistemic privilege” given to Western ways of knowing, has shaped the world today, and made Western supremacy possible. I should clarify that the term “eurocentric knowledge” denotes the hegemonic way of knowing that was

⁴ Hong, 1.

⁵ Bouventura Sousa Santos. *Another Knowledge Is Possible*. (London: Verso, 2008), xv.

produced through colonialism, which was used as a tool of power by “the west”⁶. This knowledge was understood to be “universal”, and assumes the superiority of “scientific knowledge”, and notions of “objectivity”, “reason”, as well as dualisms such as reason vs. irrational, objective vs. subjective, civilized vs. savage, modern vs. traditional⁷. This knowledge claimed universality and divided the world in such a way that european/male were always superior to all things non-european/woman.⁸ The term eurocentricism then does not refer to, “all the modes of knowledge of all Europeans and all epochs [but rather] a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledges, as much in Europe as in the rest of the world.”⁹ There are and always have been multiple ways of understanding the world, beyond this eurocentric way of knowing. In order to undo the global inequality produced through epistemic violence, the assumptions of Eurocentric knowledge and its effects must be understood, as well as its alternatives to it.

This question of epistemic resistance led me directly to the works of poet Audre Lorde, whose words inspired me, with their unapologetic directness and dedication to speaking whatever she felt must be spoken, regardless of the risk that it entailed. Lorde, a black lesbian feminist poet, theorist, activist, mother, and leader, who never saw these parts of her identity as

⁶ This conception of knowledge draws from the “coloniality of power and knowledge” perspective, developed by Anibal Quijano. I use “the west” in parenthesis, because I understand it as a constructed concept; created through colonialism, to divide the world into the powerful “West”, and not powerful, “non-West”, (Stuart Hall 1992).

⁷ Edgardo Lander. “Eurocentrism, Modern Knowledges, and the “Natural” Order of Global Capital”. *Nepantla: Views from South* (2002).

⁸ I will define “eurocentric knowledge”, its origins, and effects, in more depth in the following chapter.

⁹ Anibal Quijano. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”. *Nepantla: Views from South* (2000): 549.

separate, understood her identity to be whole and complex. Lorde herself said, “I am a Black, Lesbian, Feminist, warrior, poet, mother, doing my work. I underline these things, but they are just some of the ingredients of who I am. There are many others.”¹⁰ Born in 1934, the daughter of West Indian immigrants in New York City, she experienced the marginalization of being a young black woman in the United States. After beginning a career as librarian, Lorde began teaching in Tougaloo College in Mississippi, where she experienced the deep racism of the south, as well as the black students’ resistance to it, as well as struggling to embrace a gay identity within the black movement. From then on taught, she at various schools, and eventually became a full professor at Hunter College in New York, but continued to be a poet, writer, and activist engaged in multiple communities, locally and globally¹¹. Lorde passed away from cancer in 1992, but her work continues to breathe life into people and movements around the world¹².

One of the reasons Audre Lorde’s work is particularly special to be is because I believe she engages in a process of decolonizing knowledge by allowing us to think about different ways of producing knowledge, and then actually puts an alternative into practice in her own work.¹³ Lorde’s black lesbian feminist poet knowledge, values the use of emotion, experience, and poetry, and rejects the superiority of scientific knowledge, reason, objectivity, and hierarchical dualisms. Lorde’s work engages in a process of decolonization, as it not only critiques eurocentric ways of knowing, but also provides an alternative: an alternative that blurs the

¹⁰ Audre Lorde, *Above the Wind* Charles H. Rowell. Callaloo 23.1(2000): 61.

¹¹ Alexis De Veaux,. *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*.(New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ I borrow the term “decolonizing knowledge” from the works Chandra Mohanty and Walter Mignolo. I believe Lorde engages in the process of decolonizing knowledge because she directly challenges eurocentric knowledge, the hegemonic way of knowing since colonialism.

boundaries between personal narrative, poetry, “fiction”, and “non-fiction”. Latin American scholar, Walter D. Mignolo states,

decolonizing knowledge requires the author to place their work and themselves at risk; it necessitates a method of border thinking, and must not only reveal the history of Eurocentric knowledge (or hegemonic knowledge), while at the same time they must produce knowledge that may be considered irrational, savage, and primitive,¹⁴

and this is precisely what Lorde aims to do. By embracing the “irrational, savage, primitive”, non-hegemonic forms of knowledge, she challenges the binary of rational/civilized/modern vs. irrational/savage/primitive. While Lorde’s work provides rich theories of difference and intersectionality, there has been little written about Lorde’s theory of knowledge and her methods, therefore, I will focus largely on what she says about knowledge, and equally important, how she says it.

More specifically I will draw from works of *Sister Outsider*, *The Cancer Journals*, *Our Dead Behind Us*, *A Burst of Light*, *Coal*, *A Land Where Other People Live*, *The First Cities*, as well as some of Lorde’s unpublished works, recently released in, *I am your Sister*, as these texts all address issues of epistemology and methodology¹⁵. Because Lorde’s methodology values the use of experience, emotion, and poetry to produce theories, she challenges some of the key assumptions of Eurocentric knowledge. While many scholars have discussed an alternative way of producing knowledge, few have actually used it to present their own alternative theories.

¹⁴ Walter Mignolo. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ I wanted to narrow my focus down to a few of Lorde’s works, but I purposely chose to use both Lorde’s books of poetry and prose, because I did not want to reproduce the privileging of prose over poetry, which is found in a eurocentric knowledge. I focus largely on *Sister Outsider*, because Lorde spends a large amount of time discussing eurocentric knowledge quite explicitly.

Why Audre Lorde?

“The white western patriarchal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think – between poetry and theory... Audre Lorde’s writing is an impulse toward wholeness. What she says and how she says it engages us both emotionally and intellectually.”¹⁶ -Bereano

Bereano’s claim encapsulates all of the reasons why I chose Lorde’s work, out of all other black feminist works, and why it is ideal for discussing issues of knowledge and resistance. As Bereano reveals, Lorde challenged eurocentric ways of knowing and being, which exclude and devalue women of color. Secondly, this claim reveals that the way in which Lorde presents her theories, “what she says”, and “how she says”, are not in opposition. Lorde’s work is powerful because it does not contradict her own theories because of the creative ways that she presents her knowledge. This may be related to the fact that Lorde did some of her work outside of the university, as well as within it, and she was able to avoid some of the constraints that many black feminists within the university have, such as the need to present knowledge in a way that is acceptable in a eurocentric male knowledge validation process¹⁷. While Audre Lorde is recognized as being a feminist poet/theorist important for discussing issues of intersectionality or difference, her work is often missing in discussions of knowledge production, yet she explicitly address issues of knowledge production in her work. This speaks to the way in which non-eurocentric forms of knowledge are often times not legitimized and accepted within the university, while at the same time works like Lorde’s are often take up and used in the name of multiculturalism.

¹⁶ Nancy K Bereano. "Introduction." Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. (Berkeley: CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁷ Collins.

"For The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" were the powerful words delivered by Lorde in 1979 at the international conference for the thirtieth anniversary of Simone De Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*¹⁸. Lorde boldly critiqued white feminists for their partial critique of patriarchy, and not other systems of oppression, such as racism. Therefore, Lorde argues that they were merely using the tools of patriarchy, white supremacy specifically, while trying to dismantle patriarchy. In the same way that Lorde has applied this statement to the white supremacy of the mainstream feminist movement, she also used this analysis of "the master's tools" when discussing issues of knowledge. For Lorde, eurocentric knowledge greatly limited black women's, and all women's potential, devalued their lives and their "erotic", "poetic", and "creative" knowledges. Referring a to society dictated by eurocentric ways of knowing, Lorde says that,

In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematic oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women,¹⁹

indicating that eurocentric knowledge creates the categories of "the inferior", in order to benefit "the superior", or "the West", the bourgeois, and the male. Furthermore, Lorde understands this knowledge, not only to be eurocentric, but also patriarchal and heteronormative. For me, this concept of challenging the master's tools signified that Lorde's work served as the perfect

¹⁸ Lester C. Olsen The Personal, the Political, and Others: Audre Lorde Denouncing "The Second Sex Conference". *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33.3 (2000): 259-285.

¹⁹ Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007).

example of resistance thought. I believe she provides what has been called a “subaltern”, “border thinking”, or “outsider within” perspective, because of her position as a radical, black, lesbian, feminist within academia.

A Black Feminist and Decolonial Framework

“Rather than exclusively acknowledge the subalterns, we need to acknowledge that their cosmologies, thinking processes, and political strategies constitute foundational elements to dismantle and transgress dominant perspectives in the process of knowledge production.”²⁰ -Ramon Grosfoguel

In line with the quote from scholar Ramon Grosfoguel, I hope to acknowledge the “thinking processes” of both black feminist thought and decolonial thought, the two perspectives that I will use as a framework for this paper. Just as Lorde sought a holistic understanding of oppression and resistance, I attempt to understand knowledge, power, and resistance in a more complete way, by drawing from very different histories of thought, crossing disciplinary boundaries. While black feminist thought and decolonial thought have different historical trajectories, they are also not mutually exclusive. Both perspectives are important to me because they critique eurocentric knowledge and its problematic underpinnings, including notions of rationality and objectivity²¹. Both require not only a critical understanding of domination, but also resistance to it, and necessitate the creation of something new²².

Black feminist thought refers to a way of thinking developed by black women, which values collective standpoint, the “linking of experience and ideas”, the connection of thought and

²⁰ Ramon Grosfoguel, Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez. "Unthinking Twentieth-Century Eurocentric Mythologies." *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002

²¹ Collins; Grosfoguel.

²² Mohanty.

practice, and lastly a connection to social justice projects around the world²³. Because Black women theorists have always been marginalized in academia, they have a long history of challenging Eurocentric Masculinist theories of knowledge, using a variety of methods. Dating back to works such as Ida B. Wells', *The Red Record*' in 1895, the Cohambee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement", in 1977, and bell hooks', *Aint I a Woman, Black Women and Feminist* in 1981, have all challenged racism, sexism, and capitalism simultaneously. Black feminist thought contributed greatly to the theory of intersectionality, which claims that oppression operates on multiple axis, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, and so on, to be essential to any analysis of power. Responding to a lack of respect and understanding of black feminism, from both to black men and white women, in "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface", Lorde states that, "Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our live as Black women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less Black"²⁴. Here Lorde defines black feminism as its own movement: one with very particular intersectional oppressions, but also one that shares commonalities with black liberation and women's' struggles. She then accounts for the importance of black feminist thought in particular by saying, "Black feminists speak as women because we are women and do not need others to speak for us"²⁵. The ability to "speak" and to produce knowledge that is particular to concerns of black women and that is produced by black women is crucial.

²³ Collins.

²⁴ Lorde.

²⁵ Ibid.

“Decolonial thought”, largely coming from Latin American scholars, seeks to challenge eurocentric knowledge as the hegemonic way of knowing in the world, while also embracing alternative ways of knowing. When I say “decolonial thought”, I am referring to the modernity/coloniality perspective largely developed by scholar Anibal Quijano, which understands coloniality as “structural and persisting”, even after colonialism ended²⁶. Quijano argues that “the coloniality of power”, and “modernity”, are the two axes of eurocentric capitalist power, which dominates the world today²⁷. Decolonial thought recognizes that the hegemonic/Eurocentric way of knowing and being has been maintained and reproduced, since colonialism, through coloniality, which divided the world into racial categories, and which reproduced inequality today. However, in many ways discussion of decolonization are still dominated by male scholars. Using the theory of intersectionality, feminists who have embraced a decolonial framework, such as Maria Lugones, have argued that gender is another central aspect of coloniality, as well as race and class²⁸. Like Lugones, and inspired by feminist scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, M. Jacqui Alexander, I hope to cross disciplinary boundaries, and provide an analysis of Lorde’s work, with a decolonial black feminist framework. Especially because Lorde’s work crossed so many boundaries, and drew from many strains of thought.

How is Eurocentric Knowledge Related to Black Women?

²⁶ Julia Suárez-Krabbe. “Introduction: Coloniality of Knowledge and Epistemologies of Transformation”. *Kult 6 Special Issue Epistemologies of Transformation: The Latin American Decolonial Option and its Ramifications*. (2009).

²⁷ Quijano.

²⁸ See Maria Lugones “Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System” in *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007).

Eurocentric knowledge affects the lives of black women of various backgrounds and in multiples ways. First, it largely allows for the exclusion of black women from the university (with exceptions of course), the major legitimizer of knowledge. And when black women are accepted in University spaces, they are usually devalued within that space. Second, it serves to devalue any non-Eurocentric way of knowing, including forms of knowledge usually produced by black women (which are not homogenous). Third, the Eurocentric perspective not only caters to white male interests, but it automatically devalues black women, and serves as a form of epistemic violence. And it is this epistemic violence produces the conditions for other forms of violence towards black women.

The Eurocentric knowledge validation process, in which institutions, particularly the university, make Eurocentric knowledge legitimated, excludes black women from producing knowledge that will be as valued²⁹. Even today, the process of legitimization is dominated by white men, and “one way of excluding the majority of black women from the knowledge-validation process is to permit a few black women to acquire positions of authority in institutions that legitimate knowledge and to encourage them to work within the taken-for-granted assumptions of black female inferiority shared by the scholarly community and the culture at large”³⁰. Returning to Donna Wilshire’s chart, which displays the ways women have been considered to be associated with “ignorance”, “inferiority”, “irrationality”, and “subjectivity”; black women are especially connected with the “ignorance” side of the divide in eurocentric thought. Because black women are oppressed by race and gender, they are understood to be even

²⁹ Ibid.,253.

³⁰ Ibid, 188.

less human. And because they are understood to be less than human, the structural, physical, and sexual violence towards them is justified.

The *reality* of Western male domination is only a possibly because of the *idea* of Western male domination has been reinforced through this eurocentric way of knowing. Therefore, it could be argued that the reason black women are able to be forced to live in poverty or denied quality education is directly connected to this system of knowledge which devalues black women. Because black women are simultaneously excluded from the eurocentric processes of knowledge validation, and devalued through eurocentric ways of knowing, it is pertinent to understand the history of eurocentric knowledge and how it has shaped the reality of black women's lives. However, understanding eurocentric knowledge in terms of black women's lives is above all important because, it also opens up the possibility of resistance at the level of knowledge. To reiterate Grace Hong, "if violence toward black feminist bodies happens through epistemological means, then the obverse also must be true: a different kind of knowledge production can carve out space in the academy for black feminists."³¹ Beyond the possibility of producing space for black feminists within the university, this alternative epistemology can also produce change outside of the university. Because eurocentric knowledge is connected to every aspect of society, alternative forms of knowledge have the ability to transform society.

Lorde's Decolonial Black Feminist Knowledge

"A feminist vision of knowledge must not continue the dualistic either/or pattern," –
Donna Wilshire³²

³¹ Hong, 2.

³² Wilshire, 96.

Wilshire's quote hints that an alternative knowledge must not reproduce the same limiting dualisms that Eurocentric knowledge has produced. These hierarchical dualisms have produced the conditions for the oppressor/the oppressed, the colonizer/the colonized, the superior/the inferior. Feminist scholars have been at the forefront of critically investigating knowledge and the university, because of their own marginalization in institutions of knowledge production. They suggested that gender be used as a category of analysis in discussion of knowledge, as women have historically been excluded from such discussions. They have exposed the ways in which the constructions of the notion of rationality, objectivity, and hierarchical dualisms have been essential to epistemic projects that have devalued women.³³ Lorde herself understood the danger of these dualisms, as one of *the master's tools* for dividing the world. In her words, "Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior"³⁴. Therefore she seeks to reject this in her writing by offering an alternative holistic knowledge that does not completely reject or claim any two sides of these binaries. Instead, Lorde was interested in reclaiming the inferior, the emotion, the erotic, but quite differently from other feminist scholars. This validation of the "inferior" form of knowledge is a crucial first step in using an alternative knowledge, because in doing so, the people deemed "inferior" are also validated. After this reclaiming "inferior" and solidarity with all those who have been delegitimized for not being "rational" or "objective", she then pushes us to move beyond the dualistic way of thinking completely.

³³ See Marianne Janack entry on Critiques of Rationality and Dualisms, Feminist Epistemology, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-epis/>, (2004). She mentions the works of Susan Bordo (1990), Genevieve Lloyd (1984), and Susan Hekman's (1990).

³⁴ Lorde 1984, 114.

Much of the critiques of western patriarchal epistemology have reproduced binaries, and this is especially evident in debates over whether or not a feminist epistemology should be based in “reason” or “emotion” (usually operating under the assumption that the two are opposites). Mary Daly argues that rationality has been an ideological weapon used by men and that women must disassociate from rational based kinds of knowing.³⁵ While others, such as Judith Grant, critique this perspective, in her piece, “I Feel Therefore I am: A Critique of Female Experience as the Basis for a Feminist Epistemology”, and argues that a focus on only emotion and experience reproduces an essentialist understanding of “woman”, in which “reason” is connected to maleness, and that women know differently than men (Grant 1987). Even the scholars who have challenged this binary, such as Wilshire and Grant, still remain within a eurocentric perspective, in that non-European ways of knowing are completely ignored in their herstories of knowledge.

Audre Lorde enters into this debate, particularly in her book *Sister Outsider*. as she thinks through an alternative and transformative feminist epistemology; one that seeks to transcend dualistic thinking, and values various and multiple ways of knowing. While eurocentric knowledge is based on hierarchical dualisms, “reason”, and “objectivity”³⁶, Lorde challenges these notions, through her discussion of the use of experience as a means of producing knowledge, especially for marginalized women, as well as the use of emotion, and poetry, as a means of theorizing. Entering Lorde’s work in the feminist debate of *reason vs. emotion*, is very fruitful, as she provides us with a way to begin thinking about knowledge outside this binary, and moving beyond the dilemma of being essentialist.

³⁵ Judith Grant. "I Feel Therefore; I Am." *Women & Politics* 7.3 (1987): 99-114.

³⁶ Wilshire 1989; Lander 2000.

Creating Out of Our Experience

“When we create out of our experiences, as feminists of color, women of color, we have to develop those structures that will present and circulate our culture.” -Lorde

For Lorde, experience was a source of knowledge for women of color, even though, experience is not valued in a eurocentric epistemology. Life experiences have been an essential tool of theorizing for black women, particularly in regards to issues of domination and resistance, because it has been essential to their survival³⁷. In an interview with Charles Rowell, Lorde exclaims that, “A poem grows out of the poet's experience, in a particular place and a particular time, and the genius of the poem is to use the textures of that place and time without becoming bound by them. Then the poem becomes an emotional bridge to others who have not shared that experience.” In this statement, Lorde sites experience as a tool of knowledge production, rather than something that leads to a “biased” understanding of the world. For Lorde, knowledge is not neutral, because the poets experience shapes their work. In fact, within Audre Lorde alternative knowledge, no knowledge to be neutral. Rather life experience is a necessary and crucial for creating theories that remain true to black women.

Feelings as paths to knowledge

“Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.” - Lorde

Lorde also understood emotions, or feelings, to be essential in creating knowledge. This is evident in her use of language which says feelings are “genuine”, paths to knowledge. Emotions are typically associated with femininity, weakness, and a lack of intelligence, and the ability to “control”, or “put aside” emotions is a sign of masculinity, strength, and power. Within a eurocentric epistemology, scientific knowledge is valued over feelings and emotions. This is

³⁷ Collins 2000, 192.

based on the assumption that scientific knowledge is neutral, while emotions are subjective. However, as Lorde has pointed out, no one has the ability to completely control or remove their emotions or feelings. As Alison Jaggar argues, “western epistemology has tended to view emotion with suspicion and even hostility. This derogatory western attitude toward emotion...fails to recognize that emotion, like sensory perception, is necessary to human survival”³⁸.

Audre Lorde felt strongly that emotions and feelings were not only appropriate for black women, but were absolutely necessary. In her piece titled, *Poetry is Not A Luxury*, Lorde states that,

When we live in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come more into touch with our ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of power from where true knowledge and, therefore lasting action comes.”³⁹

For Lorde, the denial of emotion as a valid piece of knowledge is not only false, but harmful, because emotion is a source of power; a source of power specifically for women of color who have been excluded and confined by a eurocentric way of knowing. With her use of the words “white fathers”, she locates the privileging of “rational” thought, in a Eurocentric knowledge, alluding to the construction of “rationality” produced by Western domination. She then reclaims “feeling”, not only as something that is a legitimate way of producing knowledge, but as a powerful way to move beyond Eurocentric epistemology.

³⁸ Jaggar 1989, 155.

³⁹ Lorde, pg 37.

In “Uses of Anger”, Lorde explains that emotion, specifically; anger must be used by black women to create theories about racism. She claims that it is anger, which doesn’t always consume, but creates growth, that can help black women battle the pain of racism and other oppression. Again, Lorde offers an alternative way of understanding knowledge, which values emotion. However Lorde’s focus on emotion moves beyond the Eurocentric binary of reason versus emotion. It is important to note Lorde’s use of words closely, as she says that we have been taught to rely “solely” on our thoughts, however, Lorde is not arguing that “emotion” is the only way to produce knowledge. Lorde does more than reclaim “feeling” as a way of producing knowledge, but she also challenges the binary of thinking versus feeling all together. Lorde states that she doesn’t see “feel/think as a dichotomy”⁴⁰. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that, “Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory or research or Western knowledge” and this is exactly what Lorde wants to attain (Smith 2002, 39). Lorde seeks to shift the way we know from a purely Eurocentric perspective, to one that focuses on a black feminist perspective. She seeks this shift for more than mere “inclusion” of black women’s knowledge. Rather, she seeks to create change the structures of inequality that effect black women’s lives, which requires a shift in our understanding of knowledge. Lorde does more than critique Eurocentric Epistemologies by rejecting claims of “rationality” and reclaiming emotion as a valid way of knowing; she provides an alternative epistemology which challenges this often reproduced binary of reason versus emotion...

⁴⁰ Lorde, 101.

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