



Literature and social belongingness: Assertion of blackness and femininity in the poetry of Aime Césaire and Audre Lorde

Leonard Obina **Onwuegbuche**

Department of English and Literary Studies

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Corresponding author: leonardonwuegbuche@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Black man was a victim of slavery, which dispersed him all over the world, colonization, which alienated him and assimilation, which depersonalized him. He was seen as subhuman by the White race, and he had worked hard to build their continent. With the realization that the divesting of culture would incinerate everything African from him and turn him into a kind of ghost, some diasporic African writers struggled for the rediscovery of the truth about the black man's existence and his acceptance as an image of God. Through literary analysis and postcolonial theory, this study examines Aimé Césaire's struggles to arouse in blacks all over the world an obsessive acceptance of blackness through his Négritude and Audre Lorde's redefinition of African womanhood through the Mawulisa figure. It aims at exposing the black man's re-affirmation of his true identity for the restoration of his dignity as well as the redefinition of African womanhood through a new paradigm from African culture. It also aims to re-educate blacks on the importance of continually embracing Africanness as an effective developmental tool in the 21st century.

Keywords: Blackness, Literature, Society, Négritude, and Femininity

Introduction

Given that the Europeans needed a strong breed of Africans to work in their plantations, they came down to Africa to capture and buy slaves in the 16th and 17th centuries. A great number of these slaves were transported to America, the West Indies, and other places where they were oppressed by the whites because of their skin colour. They were discriminated against, subjected to racist attitudes and treated as though they were subhumans. The whites did everything possible to make the blacks seem inferior; the oppression and torture were to make them feel inferior the more. Being disconnected from their families in Africa and oppressed by the slave masters in America and the Caribbean Islands, their lives were shattered and fragmented.

Colonialism is another issue that has succeeded in reshaping the cultural and political lives of the Blacks, both in continental Africa and in the diaspora, due to the racial and hegemonic educational system introduced by the Europeans. This form of cultural hegemony, established by the Europeans in Africa, America and the Caribbean, occurs when the colonizers teach the colonized the colonizers ethos of the colonizer rather than the culture and tradition of the colonized. This is the kind

of experience Jamaica Kincaid explores in *Annie John*, where the protagonist vigorously questions her birthplace, Antigua. Black people are portrayed as the cursed descendants of Ham, created to serve the whites; as slaves, they were forced to work on plantations. They are also taught that their own culture is primitive as to make them imitate the culture of the colonial oppressors. The Europeans teach Africans European culture so that they will not talk about their brutality. Aniakor (2011, p. 69 as cited in Nzegwu, 2003) describes it as the: "subtle practices of racial and hegemonic discourse of Western imperial dominance over the peoples by sustaining and displacing the epistemological voices of African people." The history of diasporic Africans is greatly marked by slavery and colonial rule, resulting in the search for self and identity. This search has spread widely and has become a dominant theme in African literature, both in oral as well as written African diasporic discourse, reflecting a deep longing for self-definition and cultural reassertion. Bjork (1994 p. vii) rightly asserts that their lives and literature, both past and present, have been frequently defined by the desire to create and uncreate themselves and the questions "'Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" often form the basis for their

traditional exegesis" which smacks highly of Frantz Fanon's calibration in *The wretched of the earth*.

Many Caribbean writers have written about their experiences and also about the struggle for the restoration of the black man's identity and dignity, but this study focuses on Aimé Césaire and Audre Lorde's ideas of the culture, history and identity of the enslaved audible through Negritude and Black Feminism. Literary analytical design is employed as the method for the analysis, while Postcolonial theory is the framework used for the analysis. Aimé Césaire's "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (1939) and Audre Lorde's *The black unicorn* (1978) are the selected literary texts that investigate the experiences and oppression of the black race in Paris and all over the world, and the systems of oppression observed by Audre Lorde that made her go into African culture as to redefine womanhood. Literary analysis is a type of textual analytic approach to criticism that treats texts as a structure of meaning. Abrams (1999, p. 315) asserts that textual criticism "establishes the principles or procedures that justify a literary text," and notes that the practice dates back many centuries, particularly in its application to biblical and classical texts. Urama (2017 p. 125) affirms that

literary analysis focuses on the various techniques a literary text employs to generate meaning, and the ways in which different literary, cultural, social and historical periods can be presented as backgrounds for understanding text. Mckee (2001 p. 4) asserts that: 'There is no such thing as a single "correct" interpretation of any text. There are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances.' Caulfield (2022) highlights that, in addition to the discovery of the author's intended meaning in the text, textual analysis also explores unintended connections between different texts. In this study, other texts and journal articles that have similar assertions to Aimé Césaire's 'Notebook' and Audre Lorde's *The Black Unicorn* are explored as secondary sources of data to supplement the selected texts.

Postcolonialism involves the analysis of literary texts produced in cultures or nations that were under the control of colonial powers at some time in their history. Said (1978 p. 28), a pioneer in postcolonial criticism and studies, stresses that "Postcolonialism focuses on the way the colonizing First World has invented false images and myths of the Third World; the stereotypical images of

myths that have conveniently justified Western exploitation and the dominion of Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures and the people" Prakash (1992 p. 8) asserts that it is "criticism formed in the process of the enunciation of discourses of domination." Ajinomoh (2017) also opines that Postcolonialism is a framework that emphasizes cultural assertion as a means of enforcing identity, especially amidst the threat of civilization. Bhabha (1992; 1994) confirms that Postcolonialism has shown how certain cultures misrepresent other cultures. This thought is echoed and re-emphasised by Ashcroft et al. (2002) in *The Empire writes back*. Aimé Césaire's radical vocalization of his beliefs and expression of his anger at the conditions of his race in Martinique and throughout the world, as the tenets of Negritude, are discussed in this study. Audre Lorde's exposition of the black woman's oppression, which made her look for a figure that gives her cultural specification to redefine African womanhood, is also analysed in this study. Therefore, Postcolonial theory is very relevant to the study.

Negritude, revitalization of nationality and appreciation of indigenous ancestry in Aimé Césaire's 'Notebook'

Aimé Césaire, born in Bosse-Pointe, Martinique, is one of the three founding

fathers of Negritude. In 1931, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal and Léon-Gontran Damas from French Guyana met as students in Paris. In France, they found themselves in an abnormal environment where the clamour for self-identity and recognition becomes inevitable. According to Okeh (2000), they are exposed to a new world where the colour of their skin is not good enough, where their behaviour is qualified as primitive, and where another race decides what they ought to do and what they ought not to do. They are in an environment where race presents itself as a universal model for imitation, and they are bound to have acute problems needing a solution in this abnormal environment. Such was the situation of many Black people who, through education or migration, found themselves in a world dominated by white values. Senghor introduced Césaire to the concept of Africanness. Urama (2016) points out that Aimé Césaire's collaboration with Senghor gives him (Aimé Césaire) his first insight into his African heritage and establishes links between him and other blacks of the literary world. Therefore, he learns about African traditions and values that have been lost to the New World (particularly the Caribbean). Urama (2016, p. 171) also stresses that "Aimé Césaire's

collaboration with Senghor to form the Negritude philosophy gives him a sense of rootedness, and as Senghor connects Césaire with his Africanness, it propels him to write about his Africanness."

Vaillant (1991, p. 91) affirms that the encounter between Césaire, Damas, and Senghor represents the encounter between Africa and its diaspora, emphasizing Césaire's expression: "In meeting Senghor, I met Africa".

Aimé Césaire defines Negritude as the affirmation of one's Black identity and pride in it, asserting that Black people are collectively suspended in space, bound by shared experiences and history. This implies that, in response to the white supremacist narrative of Black inferiority, Black people, often left without cultural or historical anchorage, must come together in solidarity and fight for their collective identity and dignity. Therefore, Negritude is seen as both an awareness of blackness and an assertion of black values. Césaire sees Negritude as a simple personal attitude, a recognition and acceptance of one's black identity. He declares this affirmation of blackness thus:

I accept ... I accept ... totally,
without reservation ...

my race that no ablution of
hyssop mixed with lilies could
purify

my race pitted with blemishes

my race a ripe grape for drunken
feet

my queen of spittle and leprosy

my queen of whips and scrofula

my queen of squasmas and
chloasmas (oh those queens I once
loved in the remote gardens of
spring against the illumination of
all the candles of the chestnut
trees!)

I accept. I accept. (Césaire, 2001,
p. 71)

The above excerpt suggests the acceptance of oneself and skin colour unreservedly, despite obvious and recognizable shortcomings: "my race pitted with blemishes", but he has come to; "I accept...totally without reservation." Thus, the march to greatness and development must first begin with the admission of their blackness as a prerequisite.

Aimé Césaire and his colleagues (the three luminaries of the Negritude Movement) fully recognized that the black community needs to come together

and fight for their rights. Hence, they instigated a new feeling of self-respect and communal strength/ethos. Accordingly, Darthorne (1975, p. 229) acknowledges the luminaries as "exponents of the literary creed of negritude." Seeing that the black race is a people bound together because of their sufferings, such as the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, whitocracy and pigmentocracy, Aimé Césaire and his pals worked tirelessly to create an awareness among the blacks everywhere about their African ancestry, African genealogy and nativity, and the conviction that their civilization is inherently worthwhile. For them, nobody has any right to pull black people down because of their skin colour. Following Mckee's (2001, p. 7) assertion that: 'whenever anyone claims that a particular test is "accurate" or "truthful" or "reflects reality" – what they are really saying is: "I agree with what the text is saying about the world"', many other Black writers have emphasized the urgency of Africans coming together to fight for their freedom. They call on all the blacks to accept their Africanness and fight against the evils of slavery and colonization. For instance, Baraka (1969), then known as LeRoi Jones, emphasizes the importance of this unity in his poetry collection the Black Arts Movement in America. In 'SOS,' he writes:

Calling black people
 Calling all black people, man
 woman child
 Wherever you are, calling you,
 urgent, come in
 Black People, come in, wherever
 you are, urgent, calling
 you, calling all black people
 calling all black people, come in,
 black people, come
 on in

Ratcliff (2009, pp. 31–32) affirms that 'Baraka's "SOS" is issued in response to the brutal treatment of Afro-descendant colonial subjects living in France' reminiscent of Claude McKay's poem, "If We Must Die." This implies that these founding fathers of Negritude influenced black writers all over the world.

The concept of Negritude is vividly expressed in Césaire's 'Notebook of a Return to the Native Land' through the themes of self and cultural identity. The poem depicts a nostalgic connection with the past and affirms the inherent dignity of being (Darthorne, 1975, p. 224). Therefore, Aimé Césaire's collaboration with Senghor marks a pivotal development in his poetry as regards his quest for his roots. In this poem, which is

a purposeful attack against Western colonialism and its effect on the black world, the radical vocalization of Aimé Césaire's anti-colonialist beliefs is exposed. The poem is a significant and revolutionary appeal to the black man to assert himself, an appeal to the black people all over the world to reaffirm their true identity. Césaire, in 'Notebook', represents a manifold point of departure, his obvious declaration of his intention to return to his home, Martinique:

To go away. My heart was
pounding with emphatic
generosities. To go away ... I
would arrive sleek and young in
the land of mine and I would say
to this land whose loam is part of
my flesh: 'I have wandered for a
long time and I am coming back
to the deserted hideousness of
your sores.'

I would go to this land of mine
and I would say to it: 'Embrace
me with fear ... And if all I can do
is speak, it is for you I shall
speak.' (Césaire 2001, p. 43)

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy posits that the voice of Negritude is the voice of revolution because it has permitted all blacks to 'raise relentlessly the great cry until the foundation of the

world shall tremble'
(<https://plato.stanford.edu/negritude>).
Wilder (2005; 2015) rightly emphasizes the cosmopolitanism of the Negritude authors, especially Senghor's politics of 'Federalism' as a means to transcend colonialism and achieve full equality among citizens, regardless of whether they are Black or white. He sees Senghor as a great thinker and a philosopher of totality. Lamola (2016) points out that this point of departure constitutes a critical awareness of colonial European cultural imperialism that has disfigured African self-image and expression. James and Steger (2010) stress that, beyond their talent and accomplishments as poets, Césaire and Senghor, through Negritude, establish themselves as theorists of cultural universalism.

Césaire also highlights the first clear-cut statement of his decision to disassociate himself from the European value system in 'Notebook' thus:

Leaving Europe utterly twisted
with screams
the silent currents of despair
leaving timid Europe which
collects and proudly overrates
itself
I summon this egotism beautiful

and bold

and my ploughing reminds me of
an implacable cutwater. (Césaire,
2001, p. 59)

Following Wumi Raji's definition of Postcolonial theory as "a counter-hegemonic discourse" (Raji, 1999), the anti-colonialist ideologies of Césaire as examined in 'Notebook' within the concept of **Négritude**, can be summarized as follows: firstly, the black man's heritage of slavery and his obsession with identity necessitates the restoration of his cultural identity by returning to his cultural heritage. This position is akin to that which Paule Marshall vigorously pursues in *Praise song for the Widow*. Secondly, Césaire's hatred and rejection of the white world, as the perpetrator of slavery, colonialism and racism, have caused black people intense suffering. This he portrays by his thinking about millions of black people who perished during the transatlantic slave trade and who nobody remembers:

So much blood in my memory! In
my memory are lagoons. They are
covered with death's-heads.

They are covered with water lilies.

In my memory are lagoons. No
women's loincloths spread out
their shores.

My memory is encircled with
blood. My memory has a belt of
corpses!

and machine gun fire of rum
barrels brilliantly sprinkling

our ignominious revolts, amorous
glances swooning from having

swigged too much ferocious
freedom. (Césaire, 2001, p. 59)

We the vomit of slave ships

We the vengy of the Calabars

what? Plug up our ears?

We, so drunk on jeers and inhaled
fog that we rode the roll to death!

Forgive us fraternal whirlwind!
(Césaire, 2001, p. 161)

Leopold Sédar Senghor's definition of Négritude in his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948) captures these Césaire's first two philosophical foundations of Negritude. Senghor argues that Negritude portrays both the individual and native self of the black man. He stresses that

"Negritude ... is neither racialism nor self-negation. Yet it is not just affirmation; it is rooting oneself in oneself, and self-confirmation: confirmation of one's being. It is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking Africans have called the African personality" (Senghor, 1948, p. 55).

Thirdly, Césaire's anti-colonial ideology is seen in his confidence in a future of a universal fraternity in which he advocates black fraternity; it aims at uniting the blacks all over the world to get together as brothers to love one another. He also includes the whites in the universal fraternity, but they do not believe him because they feel that his poem 'Notebook' voices hatred against them. Césaire's philosophy resonates with that of the Harlem writer, Countee Cullen who advocates the universality of mankind. Some scholars who support the whites' rejection of Césaire's proposed universal fraternity argue that Césaire should not have hated the white people for treating the blacks badly but should instead have shown love, as the Bible teaches that we love our enemies: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5: 44; Lk. 6:27; Acts 7:60; Rom. 12:20). However, these

same scholars who believe that there is a hollow in Aimé Césaire's preaching of a universal brotherhood forget that the same Bible preaches "there is neither free nor slave" (Rom. 3: 22, 6:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:13-18). Aimé Césaire emphasizes that his reasons for condemning the white race is not rooted in blind hatred but in a desire to make them feel remorse for their actions and seek forgiveness but instead of being remorseful, they blame him for hating the evil perpetuated by them. He dramatizes how the black slaves are whipped by the slave masters, and the slaves are still expected to thank the slave masters and beg them to forgive them. This, he suggests, reveals the height of the cruelty and hypocrisy of the white slave masters.

(nigger-are-all-alike, I-tell-you
vices-all-the-vices-believe-you-
me

nigger-smell, that's-what-makes-
cane-grow

remember-the-old-saying;

beat-a-nigger, and you, feed him)

among 'rocking chairs'
contemplating the
voluptuousness of quilts

I circle about, an unappeased filly
(Césaire, 2001, p. 59)

and the flogged nigger saying
'Forgive me master'
and the twenty-nine legal blows
of the whip
and the four-feet-high cell
and the spiked iron collar...
(Césaire, 2001, p. 73)

Urama (2016, p. 12) emphasizes that acceptance of African identity helps Continental/Diaspora Black Africans to start the process of decolonization. And this also helps the black Africans to begin to regain their lost voice. This leads to their fight for their independence. They achieved this by educating themselves, serving as examples for others and advocating sovereign indigenous rights. They exercise and defend their rights and their traditional territory. These activities provide experiences that instil a sense of purpose in them. Racial issues also help the indigenous people stand apart from the colonists. It also helps them to form their group, which results in the start of mass nationalism as a concept and practice.

Africans feel delighted to be involved in actions that make a positive contribution to their communities and their sense of self. This results in individual, family, community and national levels and the

healing process reduce irrational violence and aggression that colonialism fostered in them. Urama (2016, p. 13) asserts that: "They are involved in more purposeful acts rather than dwelling in the negative feelings frustration from colonization instilled in them." Negritude also helps the blacks to connect to their brothers in Africa and other parts of the world through their culture. These steps of recovery, unity and togetherness play a vital role in strengthening black African families, communities and nations. Wilder (2005) also affirms that Negritude promotes African humanism which is the philosophy that naturally enables the coexistence of all nations or races. This implies that Negritude rejects and challenges the idea that one race is superior to another.

African and Caribbean writers demonstrate the use of traditional images, local references, and symbols in their lyrical expressions, which harness the rhythm of their literary works in a bold declaration of those qualities that distinguish Africans from Europeans. "African ways of expression" become noticeable in speeches, storytelling, poetic chants and written literature. These writers proclaim traditional philosophies of respect for human life and the communal application of moral

values, emphasizing positive aspects of indigenous culture. Moreover, they emphasized both the positive and negative dimensions of the colonial experience. They choose to adopt the positive aspects while rejecting those negative ones that define them as inferior or less human. This makes them accept that their indigenous culture and ways are not static but change with time. Thompson (2002, p. 143) rightly emphasizes that the Negritude movement serves as an inspiration to writers and leaders within black cultures, marking a step towards 'the creation of a meaningful perspective of collective life and action for the African people in the modern world. In connecting the target of Negritude with issues of contemporary politics and culture in Africa, Madubuike (1974, p.1) asserts that 'the similarity of experiences throughout Africa during the colonial era created a common denominator for writing and a common identity in themes and inspirations for writers.'

The nationalist movements formed by black leaders with the help of universal fraternity fatally undermine the ideologies of imperialism. Woodruff (1998) presents some of the nationalists: Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) of Gold Coast (Ghana), Léopold Sédar Senghor

(1906-2001) of Senegal, Jomo Kenyatta (1891-1978) of Kenya, Ahmed Sékou Touré (1922-1984) of Guinea, Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961) of Belgian Congo (Zaire), Kenneth Kaunda (1924-2021) of Zambia, Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996) of Nigeria, and others. The colonists made deals with the nationalist elites, turning them into economic stakeholders, while the nationalists, in turn, demanded greater economic autonomy and control. As a result, colonial powers were not only forced out of political authority but were also gradually displaced from economic dominance in the formerly colonized societies (<http://anti-politics.net/distro/2009/decolonization.pdf>). Negritude is, therefore, an important aspect of the rejection of colonialism.

Wilder (2015, p. 8) rightly opines that Césaire and Senghor are more political poets. He argues that "decolonization should secure self-determination without the need for state sovereignty", and "Aimé Césaire and Leopold Sédar Senghor embraced politics in spite of embracing themselves." Wilder (2015, p. 3) asserts that:

They (Césaire and Senghor) attempted to transcend conventional opposition between realism and utopianism, materialism and idealism,

objectivity and subjectivity and universality, culture and humanity. The resulting conceptions of poetic knowledge, concrete humanism, rooted universalism and situated cosmopolitanism now appear remarkably contemporary. The insights, long treated as outmoded, do not only speak to people interested in black critical thought, anticolonialism, decolonization and French Africa and the Antilles. They also warrant the attention of those on the left now attempting to rethink democracy, solidarity and pluralism beyond the limitations of methodological nationalism and impasses of certain currents of postcolonial and poststructuralist theory.

Curto (2016, p. 6) affirms that 'Wilder gives Césaire and Senghor much credit for imagining political alternatives to independence and colonialism' and also 'sheds new light on the complex relationship between Césaire and Senghor's roles as poets and politicians, demonstrating the extent to which the elements of their thinking long considered contradictory are only so from a perspective that equates

anticolonialism and with State Sovereignty.' It is still this ideal of universal fraternity or the coming together of Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora to resist neocolonialism that holds the potential to enthrone effective democracy in contemporary African societies. Instead of coming together in this 21st century as African Nationalists did while fighting for political independence, Africans are involved in many criminal activities that mar sustainable development. Fanon (1967) points out that the oppressed usually learn violence from the brutality of the oppressors; however, this "liberating violence" is ultimately more harmful to the oppressed themselves. The call by Aimé Césaire and his contemporaries for unity in. Wilder (2005) affirms that Negritude and cultural nationalism provide black people with the tools to articulate their history and lived realities, rather than relying on interpretations imposed by white people. Senghor (1964, p. 84) emphasizes that: 'an authentic African thought system may not be realized by an artificial return to a traditional past which could not be lived today' and African traditions cannot be revived by merely copying foreign models (p. 84). Africans should desist from copying violence from the Western world and go back to the African heritage

of customary justice. This will help to bring criminals to book and promote the sustainable development of Africa.

Black Feminism and the African woman's experience in Audre Lorde's *The Black Unicorn*

Audre Lorde, a black feminist/womanist writer, not only presents the quest for female voice and subjectivity but redefines womanhood in her collection of poems, *The Black Unicorn*. She dramatizes the oppression of the black woman in her poems so well, as she writes out of her experiences. The black woman in the diaspora is subjected to multiple layers of oppression in addition to the general forms of oppression faced by women globally. She experiences three intersecting levels of oppression: oppression based on sex, just because she is a woman; oppression based on race, because of the colour of her skin; and oppression based on class, as the Black woman is often categorized as belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata. Moreover, the black woman in the diaspora is subjected to maltreatment within her own community by black men. Frustrated by their own dehumanization at the hands of whites, the black men express their anger and insecurity by exerting masculinity through violence against the women in their lives. This

dynamic is the central theme in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983a), where Celie is sexually and physically abused by Alphonso, her stepfather and Albert, the man she is married off to.

Audre Lorde joins other feminists in exposing how the dominant discourse (male discourse) silences women. Thus, her poetry decries what she aptly describes as "a war against tyrannies of silence." Burrowing into this in *Sister Outsider* (1984, p. 36), Lorde emphasizes that poetry is not a luxury for African American/black women because this act of speaking, of naming one's reality, constitutes an act of self-assertion as important as protests, lawsuits, and marches in redefining how African American/black women live in society. In *The Black Unicorn*, she demonstrates the vital link between narrative control and self-realization. It takes one who is self-actualized to tell one's own stories. In her poem "The woman at Dan with swords in their hands to mark the time when they were warriors", she presents women warriors dancing around the shrine of Mawulisa with swords in their hands. This imagery changed her perception of women. She realizes that the presentation of the Anglophone woman as the weaker sex, frail, faint-hearted, and incapable of doing hard work, is only

a way to suppress women. Her resolve is akin to Janie Crawford in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, who, as a black woman, was intent on achieving self-fulfilment despite glaring efforts by her various husbands to depict her otherwise. She is so excited to participate in this warrior dance, and through this Yoruba Orishan Mythology, she discovers a new image of womanhood. This implies that by participating in the warriors' dance she demonstrates that she is not the weaker sex of the whites' ideology but a warrior. She goes on to emphasize how recreating herself as a warrior has transformed her life and vision, and she is determined to broadcast it to the whole world rather than keep it secret. She, therefore, declares herself a warrior-poet:

I do not come like a secret warrior
with an unsheathed sword in my
mouth
hidden behind my tongue
slicing my throat to ribbons
of a silence with a smile
while the blood runs
down and out
through holes in the two sacred
mounds

on my chest. (lines 14-22)

She can redefine womanhood using imageries from African culture and traditional heritage because of the strength she gained from knowing her true self. The self-realization and actualization she attained through rejection of the Western-dominated culture in favour of her African/Black culture, an insight she derived from Amié Césaire's proposed acceptance of Africanness, are portrayed. In her poem, "The Black Unicorn" Lorde dramatizes the European misrepresentation and false notions of Africa and Africans and highlights the black woman's anger caused by the pains of her oppression.

The black unicorn is restless
the black unicorn is unrelenting
the black unicorn is not
free
(lines 13-16)

Cordray (2013, p. 29) asserts that Audre Lorde 'protested racial injustice and feminist issues and she was concerned with the situation of black women in South Africa during the apartheid'. She also points out issues about racism, sexism and homophobia, and this is why 'her writings are filled with passion towards injustices, feeling and

perspective'. The black unicorn she describes as 'restless and 'unrelenting' shows that the African Americans are angry and ready to fight. 'The black unicorn is not free' is an emphasis on the importance of their freedom (Cordray, 2013, p. 29). She declares that the black woman needs to be free from slavery and oppression; to be treated as a human being, an image of God, which she is. She also needs to construct her image, free from all the stereotypes that pigeonhole her. This is the kind of freedom that she finds in Africa which made her get deep into African myths to look for the imagery of Mawulisa and Seboulisa to reconstruct womanhood. Affirming this position, Chinsole (1990, p. 379), in what she refers to as "matrilineal diaspora", sees Audre Lorde's work as having the capacity to survive and aspire, to be contrary and self-affirming across continents and generations. She argues that "matrilineal diaspora defines the link among Black women worldwide, enabling us to experience distinct but related cultures while retaining a special sense of home as the locus of self-definition and power".

Audre Lorde discloses that she did not get the freedom she needed from the USA or the Caribbean Islands, but in Dahomey (Republic of Benin) in Africa. In her

poems, "'Dahomey" and "125th Street and Abomey", she incorporates the creatrix imageries – Mawulisa, a goddess who takes no nonsense from any man, and Seboulisa, the representation of Mawulisa – in her poetry:

It was in Abomey that I felt
the full blood of my father's wars
and where I found my mother
Seboulisa
standing with outstretched pals
hip-high
one breast eaten away by worms
of sorrow
magic stones resting upon her
fingers
dry as cough ('Dahomey'
lines 3-10)
Head bent, walking through snow
I see you Seboulisa
printed inside the back of my
head
like marks of the newly wrapped
akai
that kept my sleep fruitful in
Dahomey
bring me where my blood moves

Seboulisa mother goddess with
one breast

eaten away by worms of sorrow
and loss

see me now

your severed daughter

laughing our name into echo

all the world shall remember
('125 Street and Abomey'
lines 1-5; 31-37)

Recreating women in the image of Mawulisa, a warrior destabilizes the Western image of the woman as the weaker sex. This demonstrates how acceptance of Africanness gives one a voice and a sense of belonging in society. It also destabilizes the image of the white heterosexual woman – the notion that a woman should be white and heterosexual. Ezeigbo (2019, p. 142) asserts that 'postcolonialists have tried to break the hegemony of the West in thinking, in general, and in literature in particular'. The Black Unicorn is a postmodernist text because it prevents closure and the establishment of one dominant meaning in reading, understanding, and practising feminism.

Alice Walker's womanism promotes women loving fellow women sexually. Hence, she declares herself a lesbian who has nothing to do with men because men are not allowed to dance for Mawulisa (Walker, 1983b). Nemeth (2015, p. 54) posits that 'Lorde reclaims womanhood to herself and all marginalized women' by instilling a haunting image of rebirth and renewal wherein she grants agency to the goddess, reviving her spirit through women. Jehan (2020, p. 423), in a monthly analysis of works of Queen Mother, Audre Lorde, argues that 'Audre Lorde's continued insistence that the plight of black people, as queer people, as women is forever a timely issue'. This lesbian practice is the major difference between Alice Walker's and Audre Lorde's womanism and that proposed by other African feminists. Nevertheless, Struthers (1992) observes that Lorde insists on candour, on examining issues that are often viewed as divisive, and throughout her work, she calls for honesty, justice and bringing together divergent human perspective that seems to divide.

In "Chorus", Audre Lorde also exposes the deceptive nature of white feminists in their treatment of black feminists. She is so angered that white feminists who are fighting for women's emancipation still discriminate against black feminists

because of their skin colour. This point becomes a significant criticism of Betty Friedan's widely acclaimed book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which was written without considering women of colour. This is the major reason why Lorde turned to African mythology for a figure for the redefinition of womanhood; to prove that she is black and proud of her blackness.

Sun
make me whole again
to love
the shattered truths of me
spilling out like a dragon's teeth
through the hot lies
of those who say they love
me
when I am done
each shared will spring up
complete and armed
like a warrior woman
hot to be dealt with
(lines 1-13)

By declaring herself a warrior poet and not the Anglophone 'weaker-sex' woman,

Lorde demonstrates her strong will and ability to die happily ever after being diagnosed with Cancer of the Breast. Nemeth (2015) highlights that 'Lorde's spirituality honours the ancient strength and grace of goddess culture through her allusions to high priestess, solstices, full moons and pagan worship'. Cordray (2013, p. 32) points out that Lorde 'was not afraid to express her opinions even if many disagree; she was not afraid to express her opinions and heritage through her work'. This brings to the limelight Lorde's self-assertion as a result of her participation in the Yoruba Orishan mythology in Dahomey. This demonstrates that homecoming is important for all Africans in the diaspora for spiritual rebirth and reconnection to their root, as exemplified by Avey Johnson's 'Beg Pardon' Dance in *Praisesong for the Widow*.

Her poem "Harriet" refers to Harriet Tubman, a black incredible stupendous woman, a woman extraordinary who defies all odds from the oppressive zones - South America. She dramatizes the oppression of women based on class in Harriet, who accomplishes what men of the upper class could not do. Harriet transports black slaves from South America to North America, where racial discrimination is comparatively less

severe. Through this, Harriet demystifies class structure, showing that it is just a social and cultural construct by men to suppress women, embracing the thrust of the collection *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), which celebrates the last of Dahomean Amazons from where Lorde draws the strength to resist racism, to proclaim her individuality and beauty. Cordray (2013, p. 29) affirms that Lorde's poetry on freedom from 'racism and its impact on the people' while Jehan (2020, p. 72) posits that Lord's message is a 'challenge for white people to be better and do better by those whom they oppress'. With heightened language filled with symbols and metaphors, she proclaims a new social order for black women. She chooses poetry over other genres of literature because of her intention to create a new black feminism through the image of a cultural figure, a non-nonsense woman who is so powerful that her order is not disputed. In the poem, 'Power', she emphasizes that she has chosen to die fighting the oppressors of black women instead of allowing them to continue to kill the blacks.

The difference between poetry
and rhetoric

is being

ready to kill

yourself

Instead of your children (lines 1-5)

These lines resonate with her avowed stance that poetry is not a luxury and that the woman's place of power is neither white nor surface but rather dark, ancient and deep. Christian (1997, p. 207) echoes Lorde's position, stating that poetry is "the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, and then into more tangible action." Lorde asserts that it is through poetry that she derives the strength to confront the corrupt and oppressive systems embodied by white rapists and the killers of Black people. Through her poetic expression, Lorde channels personal and collective trauma into a transformative force for resistance and empowerment:

I have not been able to touch the
destruction within me

But unless I learn to use

the difference between poetry
and rhetoric

my power too will run corrupt as
poisonous mold

or lie limp and useless as an
unconnected wire

and one day I will take my
teenaged plug

and connect it to the nearest
socket

raping an 85 year old white
woman

who is somebody's mother

and as I heat her senseless and
set a torch to her bed

a Greek chorus will be singing in
¾ time

'Poor thing. She never hurt a soul.
What beats they are.' (lines 40-
51)

Rudnitsky (2003, p. 473) asserts that 'Lorde privileged poetry over other forms of expression because she believed that poetry alone had the ability to create a new order which would in turn, make possible a new social order' (p. 473). This new social order promotes African humanity and negates the superiority of any race over another. The claim to superiority by the white race distorts justice and perpetuates corruption and moral decay among white communities. By Ezeigbo's (2019, p. 142) assertion that postmodernist literature bridges 'the gap

between high and low cultures' and produces 'endless interpretations and etymologies', *The Black Unicorn* remains timeless.

Lorde admonishes women to be brave. It took bravery for Harriet Tubman to defy all odds and lead enslaved people from the American South to the North, where they would be safe. It also takes bravery for Harriet Tubman to fight all odds and take slaves from the South to North America, where they would be safe. It also takes bravery for Lorde to fight Western ideologies that silence women of colour by denying them access to the use of language. In the poem 'Harriet', Lorde emphasizes that women who display such courage are worthy of being called 'Warriors'. This is the reason why she chooses to be called a 'warrior poet.

I remember you, Harriet

before we were broken apart

we dreamed the crossed swords

of warrior queens

while we avoided each other's
eyes

and we learned to know lonely

as the earth learns to know dead

Harriet Harriet

what name shall we call ourselves
now

our mother is gone?
(lines 22–31)

Cordray (2013, p. 32) highlights that she 'admires Audre Lorde for her bravery, accomplishment and magnificent, yet her timeless poetry'. Audre Lorde's poetry still speaks for the marginalized black race, especially women who, in addition to facing the pains of discrimination from the white race, also face oppression from black men in a bid to show their masculinity. Nemeth (2015) exclaims that Audre Lorde's identity as a black woman manifests itself in her intersectional poetry in which she divulges the discrimination with which black women are faced. This experience, although pervasive and inhumane, becomes a social authority shared exclusively by the marginalized. If Black people across the world were to embrace bravery like Audre Lorde, accept their Blackness, and actively resist institutionalized racism and oppression, it could contribute to the sustainable development of Africa and the African diaspora.

Conclusion

This study affirms one's individuality as well as that of the black's community in their overall development. The act of

naming oneself, as evinced in Audre Lorde's work, particularly emphasizes self-assertion. For black people, this act alone delivers immense power, enabling them to change their narrative and harness all that has been deposited in them to guarantee a life that they can be proud of. From this analysis of Aimé Césaire's 'Notebook of a Return to the Native Land' and Audre Lorde's *The Black Unicorn*, the major conclusion drawn is that Negritude and Black Feminism promote the development of Black African literature both in continental Africa and the diaspora. They also help in decolonizing Africans' minds as African cultural images are employed as expression tools in written literature. They encouraged and motivated many Black African writers to fight the evils of slavery, colonialism and racism. They also give voice to the female writers and promote their culture-based feminist theories, which in turn help in the conceptualization of new images of African women. Variants of indigenous African Feminist theories are propounded to help solve gender-based problems because African culture is different from that of Europeans. Accepting oneself gives self-actualization and self-assertion, increases self-esteem, and gives one a voice and insight to fight for one's rights. It also gives one a sense of

belonging to the society where one finds oneself. A person who has a sense of belonging is a 'real human being' ready for the development of their society.

ORCID

Leonard Obina Onwuegbuche: Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1074-4740>

References

- Abrams, M.H. (1999). *A glossary of literary terms* (7th edition) Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Ajinomoh, S. O. (2017, May 22–26). Immortalising oral tradition through fiction: Achebe and the emerging of Nigerian fiction [paper presentation]. In *Chinua Achebe and the convolutions of immortality: Re-Assessing the writer in relation to new realities*, (pp. 329–334). Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- Aniakor, C. (2011). Global changes in Africa and indigenous knowledge: Towards its integration and contestations. In S. M. Onuigbo (ed.) *Indigenous knowledge & global changes in Africa: History, concepts and logic* (pp. 55–108). Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The Empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd edition) Routledge.
- Baraka, A. (1969). SOS. In *Black magic: Sabotage, target study and black art. Collected poetry, 1961–1969* (p. 115). Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill
- Bhabha, H. K. (1992). Postcolonial criticism redrawing the boundaries: The transformation of English and American literary studies. In S. Greenblatt & G. B. Gunn (eds.) *Modern Languages Association of America* (pp. 437–465).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Interrogating identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative. In H. K. Bhabha (ed.) *The location of culture* (pp. 40–65). New York: NY & London: Routledge.

- Bjork, P. B. (1994). *The novels of Toni Morrison: The search for self and place within the community*. Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Césaire, A. (2001). *Notebook of a return to the native land*, a translation of *Cahier d'un retour au pau natal* (1937). Trans./eds. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, with an introduction by André Breton. Wesleyan University Press.
- Césaire, A. (1953/1972). *Discourse on colonialism*. Monthly Review
- Césaire, A. (1995). 'What is negritude to me' *African presence in the Americas*. Carlos Moore (ed.) African World Press.
- Chinsole. (1990). Audre Lorde and matrilineal diaspora: Moving history beyond nightmare into structures for the future. In J.M. Braxton & A.N. McLaughlin (eds.). *Wild women in the whirlwind: Afra-American culture and the contemporary literary renaissance*. (pp. 379–394) Serpent's Tail.
- Christian, B. (1997). *Black feminist criticism: Perspectives on black women writers*. Athene
- Cordray, E. (2013, March 11). *Audre Lorde*. Prezi. <https://prezi.com/audrelorde/>
- Curto, R. N. (2016). Negritude revived: Gary Wilder on the postcolonial politics of Aime Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 13(1).
- Darthorne, O.R. (1975). *African literature in the twentieth century*. Heinemann.
- Ezeigbo, A. T. (2019). *A Companion of the novel* (2nd ed.) University Press PLC.
- Frantz, F. (1967). *The wretched of the earth*. Penguin.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. Penguin.
- Hurston, Z. N. (1937). *Their eyes were watching God*. Harper & Row
- James, P. & Steger M.B. (eds.) (2010). *Globalisation and culture*, Vol 4, Sage Publications.

- Jehan. (2022, July 27). *Year of Our (Audre) Lorde: July is a black unicorn*. Autostraddle.
<https://www.autostraddle.com/year-of-our-audre-lorde-july-is-a-black-unicorn/> Autostraddle
- Kincaid, J. (1985). *Annie John*. Vintage
- Lamola, M. J. (2016). Senghor, globalism and Africanity. *Phronimon* 17(2), 51-67.
- Lorde, A. (1978). *The black unicorn*. W.W. Norton & Company Inc.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider*. The Crossing Press.
- Lorde, A. (1986). *Our dead behind us*. W.W. Norton Publishing.
- Madubuike, I. (1974). The African novel in the 1970s: Basic identity and categorization. *African Issues* 4(4), 1-18.
- Marshall, P. (1983). *Praisesong for the widow*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Mckee, A. (2001). *Textual Analysis: A beginner's guide*
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/2747012> eprint 2003. London: Sage
- Nemeth, M. (2015). Intersectionality as the feminine aesthetics in Audre Lorde's *The black unicorn: Poems*. *TCJWW: The California Journal of Women Writers*.
- Nzegwu, N., (2003). 'Gender imperialism in academia' *Journal of African Philosophy* 2, 1-63.
- Okeh, P. I. (2000). Negritude and the issue of identity in African literature. In D. U. Opatá & A. U. Ohaegbu (Eds.), *Major themes in African literature*. (pp. 147-161) AP Express Publisher.
- Prakash, G., (1992). *Postcolonial criticism and Indian historiography*. Duke University Press.
- Raji, W. (1999). Modern literary theories and criticism. In A. Efuroshibina (ed.) *The English Language and Literature-in-English* (pp. 98-120) University of Ilorin Press.

- Ratcliff, A. J. (2009). Liberation at the end of a pen: Writing Pan-African politics of cultural struggle [PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts].
- Rudnitsky, L. (2003). The 'Power' and 'Sequelae' of Audre Lorde's syntactical strategies. *Callaloo* 2(2), 473-485.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon.
- Sénghor, L. S. (1948). *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache de langue française*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Sénghor, L. S. (1964). *On African socialism*. Pall Mall Press.
- Struthers, A. (1992). The poetry of Audre Lorde. In F. N. Magill (ed.) *Masterpieces of African-American literature* (pp. 423-442). Harper Collins Publisher.
- The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (1982). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc.
- Thompson, P. (2002). Negritude and a new Africa. *Research in African Literatures*, 33(4), 143-153.
- Urama, E. N. (2016). Self and identity in African and Caribbean literatures. [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nigeria Nsukka].
- Urama, E. N. (2018). The Yoruba Orishan mythological figures and the black woman identity in Audre Lorde's poetry. *Ikoro: Journal of contemporary African studies* 10(1&2), 133-143.
- Walker, A. (1983a). *The color purple*. Washington Square Press.
- Walker, A. (1983b). *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*. London: The Women's Press.
- Wilder, G. (2005). *The French imperial nation-state: Negritude and colonial humanism between the two worlds*, The University of Chicago Press.
- Wilder, G. (2015). *Freedom time: Negritude, decolonization, and the future of the world*. Duke University Press.
- Woodruff, W. (1998). *The decolonization of Africa in A concise history of the modern world*. Palgrave Macmillan.