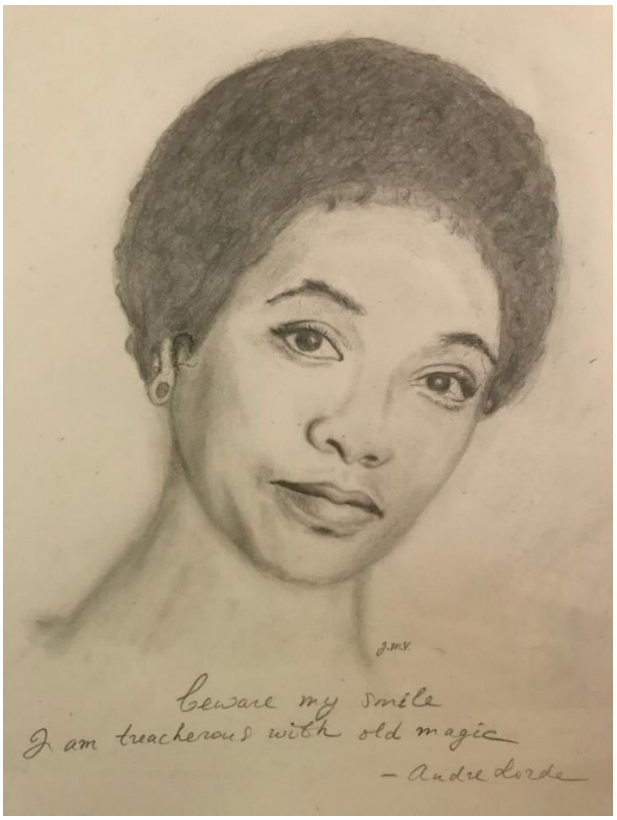
Audre Lorde's embodied encounter with the Black goddess: 'embodied mythology' as a way of healing, freeing, (re)defining and empowering a damaged narrative identity

Towards a sociogenetic principle of narrative identity in healing racial, sexist and homophobic trauma and reaching renewed self-definition



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Hierbij verklaar en verzeker ik, Johanna Maria Verkaart, dat deze scriptie zelfstandig door mij is opgesteld, dat geen andere bronnen en hulpmiddelen zijn gebruikt dan die door mij zijn vermeld en dat de passages in het werk waarvan de woordelijke inhoud of betekenis uit andere werken– ook elektronische media – is genomen door bronvermelding als ontlening kenbaar gemaakt worden.

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Abstract

According to Paul Ricoeur, founder of the narrative identity theory, we are “the narrator of our own story, without becoming the author of our own life”, since we are always already defined by cultural narratives and stories others tell about us. This means that oppressed and discriminated individuals or groups are subject to a damaged identity. Amongst the solutions offered in narrative identity scholarship I miss the role of the body as an inscriptive surface of racial, sexist and homophobic trauma. Parting from Frantz Fanon’s concept of sociogeny and Sylvia Wynter’s sociogenetic principle and epistemology of the human as bios/mythoi, I argue that narrative identity and the body always interact. Through the case study of Audre Lorde’s work, which I bring into conversation with Aimé Césaire’s paradigm of poetry as (self)knowledge, I investigate how ‘embodied mythology’ contributes to the healing, freeing and (re)defining of Lorde’s narrative self.

Contents

1. Introduction

Audre/y Geraldine Lorde was born in New York on the 8th of February 1934 and died in Saint Croix on November 17, 1992. She was the daughter of immigrants of the Caribbean; Barbados and Carriacou. She was a writer, poet, and professor of library science. She was also a feminist and civil rights activist. She famously described herself as 'black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet'. Her written work consists of essays, non-fiction prose and poetry. She called her very personal book *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* a biomythography, a genre she coined herself. Her work can be considered an activist statement written to fight the dominating narratives of racism, sexism and homophobia. She refused to be silent any longer and fought for self-definition, recognition and agency. Besides an activist statement, I consider Lorde's work to be an example of a personal as well as political intervention in a case of a wounded narrative identity. Lorde's work as an entwinement between her life stories and African mythology is her means of healing, defining and empowering her damaged narrative identity, but also to make way for other silenced voices. To speak in philosopher Hilde Lindemann's terms of 'master narratives' and 'counterstories', which she discusses in her book *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, Lorde's biomythography, in fact all of her work, can be considered a counterstory created to resist dominating master narratives. According to Lindemann, counterstories can help repair damaged narrative identities. This is precisely what Lorde is doing in her work; she is finding healing and empowerment in defining herself through her very own story fused with African mythology.

However, what I consider to be of major importance in the repair of a damaged identity and seems to be lacking in narrative scholarship so far, is the interaction between narrative identity and the body. Paul Ricoeur, founder of the narrative identity theory, refers to the body in relation to the epistemological and ontological status of the narrative self as a boundary condition between self and world, which is according to him, however a necessary tool for action. It seems that Ricoeur thinks of the body as vessel or tool rather than a site of narrative and cognition. Also, even though much is written about the interaction between language/text and the body and identity and the body by other scholars, the relation between narrative identity and the body and how they influence each other is understudied. Positing that there is a constant interaction between narrative identity and the body, it seems crucial to include the body in the process of healing and (re)defining one's narrative identity. For Lorde, African mythology as a source of (embodied) healing is a spiritual reality that transcends the material world and the body, but is also present in it. This makes the mythology immanent, embodied, lived. This incorporated mythology helps her in overcoming the painful consequences of racist, sexist and homophobic co-authoring. On the basis of this healing and redefining 'method' of incorporating mythology, which I call 'embodied mythology', I will present and analyze Lorde's work not merely as an illustration of a narrative identity in the process of healing and self-definition, but as an intervention that is to be added to the scholarly discussion of narrative repair. Hence, my research question is: in what ways do Lorde's narrative identity and body

interact in her work and how does 'embodied mythology' contribute to self-definition and the freeing, healing and empowering of her narrative self?

In order to answer the first and very crucial part of the question, I have been laying out the theoretical foundation for my argument that narrative identity and the body interact, so I can demonstrate (the nature of) this interaction in Lorde's work. This research has by no means been straightforward, yet has taken me on the most fascinating and illuminating academic adventure. It led me to a quest of deciphering the innovative and intricate thinking of psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon; novelist, dramatist and philosopher Sylvia Wynter; and poet, author and politician Aimé Césaire. Wynter's concept of the sociogenetic principle - the idea that sociogenic phenomena trigger a physiological response and take root in ontogenesis - building on Fanon's theory of sociogeny (the onset and developments of phenomena within the cultural symbolic system) has been the catalyst to view the concept of narrative identity in an entirely new light. Fanon and Wynter's groundbreaking thoughts on what it means to be human are enough cause to reconsider the ontological status of the narrative self. In fact, it has provided me with a way to demonstrate not only the interaction between, but even the merging of narrative identity and the body. It is not possible and beyond the scope of this thesis to cover all of Fanon and Wynter's utterly complex reasoning on what it means to be human, but I will draw from it what I need to support my own argumentation in linking narrative identity to the body and what that means for internalized damaging narratives, bodily trauma, and then healing.

In order to answer the second part of my question I will enter into a conversation with Aimé Césaire's thoughts on poetry as knowledge as theorized in his essay "Poésie et Connaissaince" (1945). In her article "Aimé Césaire: Poetry Is/and Knowlegde" Ronnie Scharfman applies Césaire's theory of poetry as knowledge to self-knowledge as she points out that for Césaire "poetry lies at the crossroads of ontology and epistemology" and is "a locus of being and a means of knowledge" (2010, 109- 110). So, within this frame of thinking, poetry can be a way to know and define the world and oneself. In fact, Jason Allen-Paisant posits that, in line with Césaire's thinking, "poetry offers paradigms of humanness that accommodate more-than-human worlds, and which suggest, if not offer, what Sylvia Wynter calls "an alternative process of making ourselves human"" (2021, 205). Thus, Poetry could be the site for renewing our stories and our entire selves, including the body. Within this alternative paradigm of knowledge (to Euro-western-centric epistemologies) where poetry is a "means of [self]knowledge" and "a locus of being" - and possibly becoming - I will conduct my research on Lorde's work and investigate in what way her poetry and biomythography are the site for her body and mythology to merge, and how this merging fosters the process of freeing, healing and empowering her narrative self. Jason Allen-Paisant's thinking on Aimé Césaire's essays and poetry will be key in the investigation and discussion of poetry as a locus of "embodied mythology" in Lorde's work.

First, I will discuss the applied methodology in chapter 2. Then, I will present the state of the art as regards the scholarly discussion on Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity in relation to the damaging narrative effects of what Maxwell Racine refers to as "recognition

deficiency" (borrowed from Jose Medina), or of what Hilde Lindemann calls the dominating "master narratives", followed by their offered solutions and what I believe is lacking here in chapter 3. In chapter 4 I will discuss my theoretical framework; based on Fanon's theory of sociogeny and Wynter's concept of the sociogenic principle which push towards alternative theories of what it means to be human and therefore, in my view, the concept of narrative identity, I will demonstrate a way in which the body and narrative identity are intertwined and why the role of the body is crucial in the process of narrative repair and self-definition. In chapter 5 I will investigate ways in which the body and narrative identity interact in Lorde's work. Finally, in chapter 6 and 7, I will investigate if and how 'embodied mythology' contributes to Lorde's healing and renewed self-definition of the narrative self by entering into conversation with Césaire's paradigm of "poetic knowledge". As regards Lorde's oeuvre, I will mostly focus on her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), her essay collection *Sister Outsider* (1984*)* and her poetry collection *The Black Unicorn* (1978*)*.[1] Throughout this research, I will opt for a sociogenetic principle of narrative identity.

[1] From now on I will refer to *Zami* as Z, *Sister Outsider* as SO and *Black Unicorn* as BU. In an interview with Charles H. Rowell, Lorde mentions that the sequence of *The Black Unicorn* was started when she visited Dahomey with her children in 1974 and continued for three years after that (Rowell 2000, 58).

2. Methodology: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

2.1. Black studies and Black feminist thought

> So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? (SO, 59).

This is a question Lorde asked radical feminist, theologist and philosopher Mary Daly in her essay "An Open Letter to Mary Daly". She asks her why she never included Black women's thoughts and ideas in her books *Gyn/Ecology* and *Beyond God the Father*, except when it concerns African genital mutilation. Daly never replied.

Lorde suffered from the consequences of "recognition deficiency" in both her personal and academic life. In several of her essays in *Sister Outsider*, such as "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", she brings forward the issue that the marginal voices of Black, Third World women and lesbians are not heard within feminist theory. She makes the point that if the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy, there is hardly any space allowed for change (SO, 103). In her poem "Blackstudies" she takes the reader with her in showing that Blackness is a lens, a way of looking at life, and how important it is to teach blackness. In her interview with Charles Rowell (conducted in 1990) she points out that Black studies is not just about history, but that "Blackness is an approach, a way of taking in the world, and a way of giving back what we get" (2000, 58). Lorde's struggle to make her voice heard within feminist academia, came from a desire for other feminists to see that difference is not just to be tolerated, but can be "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (SO, 104). Innovative and creative insights can flourish in a place where differing, even opposing modes of thinking are included and examined.

Scholar of Black studies, critical theory and gender and sexuality studies Alexander Weheliye explains that even though Black studies became a more mainstream disciplinary formation in the 1960s, it has existed since the eighteenth century as a set of "intellectual formations" and "liberation struggles" which sprung from hierarchical distinctions between groups of humans (2014, 3). In this sense Black studies represents a critique of western modernity and ways of thinking, offering alternative epistemologies in social, political and cultural areas. Black studies as intellectual enterprise, Weheliye explains, is the examination and understanding of racialization, with a focus on the (shifting) meaning of blackness in light of hierarchical structures and power relations (3-4). Overall, Weheliye says that Black studies sheds light on "the essential role that racializing assemblages play in the construction of

modern selfhood, works toward the abolition of Man,[2] and advocates the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human" (4). Black studies thus offer an alternative epistemology of humanness. Since I think that the problem of "recognition deficiency" regarding marginalized voices is rooted in outdated thoughts about what it means to be human, I am basing my analysis of Lorde's work on an alternative epistemology of humanness (the human as "bios/mythoi", body and story intertwined) offered by Sylvia Wynter.

2.2. Intersectionality

Intersectionality has been gaining ground in its use as a research method since the 1990s. It is in fact closely related to critical race theory. Social theorist (specialized in issues of race, gender, social class, sexuality, nation) Patricia Hill Collins and sociologist Sirma Bilge devoted a book on the matter and define intersectionality as follows:

> Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in daily life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences (2020, 2).

In Lorde's time this analytic tool was not yet applied in academia or anywhere else in such an explicit way. She was one of the activists and thinkers who had to pave the way in drawing attention to the dynamic interactions between issues of race, gender, sexuality, class and power. As a lesbian woman of colour, she came across numerous situations in her personal life, work, and academic career, where she experienced the full force of the accumulation of all these aspects of her identity that made her feel completely unacknowledged. In Zami she says: "*Being woman together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different"* (Z, 268). Besides looking at how intersecting power relations hurt Lorde's sense of self, I will also be focusing on how these different selves (black, lesbian, warrior, poet) empower her. According to Hill Collins & Bilge, intersectionality is just as much as an empowering tool as it is a method of doing research (2020, 43). Using intersectionality as a research tool is also my way of shedding light on the fact academic thought is intertwined with social and political issues. There is no real division between academics and activism (2020, 38-39), which is what Lorde's work is an example of.

[2] "Man" means Sylvia Wynter's concept of Man2 where the idea of what man is, is defined by Darwinist thinking and the belief in man as an economic being. I will provide further explanation of this idea in my theoretical framework.

"Recognition deficiency" regarding marginalized voices should be addressed in both societal and academic spheres.

2.3. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a method of expressing, translating, interpreting (Gilhus 2011, 314). Lorde's texts, her poetry and voice recordings in particular, are layered in meaning and can be read through a literal, metaphorical, symbolic psycho-analytical, spiritual, religious, erotic, embodied lens. Also, I will have to stay aware of the fact that I will be reading and interpreting these within the context of my own cultural and social background. It will matter that I am a woman, white, bisexual, and have a catholic background. I will be studying the relation between narrative identity, the body and mythology in Lorde's work (which was written in the 1970s and 1980s), while my own (narrative) identity is shaped by intersections between the different parts of myself, a self that lives many years later in a very different world. I will find myself in "the hermeneutic circle" of moving back and forth between the horizon of the texts and my own horizon (314). It is in fact Ricoeur who speaks of "the correlation between explanation and understanding, and understanding and explanation" as the "hermeneutical circle" (quoted in Gilhus 2011, 319). According to Ricoeur, explanation brings forth rather than limits new interpretations.

As regards the hermeneutical approach of myth, Ricoeur places the same emphasis on the relevance of multi-layered interpretation; he thinks myth needs to be interpreted on the basis of a "hermeneutics of affirmation" rather than a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Kearny 1991, 66-67).[3] He considers Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to be the "three masters of suspicion" as they focused on myth's ideological function as a mystifying consciousness (66-67). Ricoeur thinks that even though we do need to be critical towards the ideological dimensions of myth, this "*demythologizing"* must not be confused with "*demythizing"* (1991, 69). Ricoeur stands for "saving myth", which means that he thinks myth must be appreciated for its concealed possibilities not only as regards the release of new information about the past, but also to provide us with new horizons of meaning aimed at liberating consciousness (1991, 67-70). Even though I will be adopting Césaire's and Allen-Paisant's understanding of myth (which reaches beyond Ricoeur's understanding of myth as an origin story (1991, 64)) in my analysis of Lorde's work, I will be applying a "hermeneutics of affirmation", looking for new horizons of meaning in (African) mythology, with the possible implication of myth opening up new realities for the individual, groups, humans.

[3] In an interview given shortly after the French publication of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur stated that "one of the pressing tasks facing contemporary culture is to ensure a creative relationship between tradition and utopia". (Kearney 1991, 55). Richard Kearney, the conductor of the interview, wrote the essay "Between Tradition and Utopia , The hermeneutical problem of myth" to examine this statement. Words in quotations in this paragraph come from Ricoeur himself.

3. State of the art: narrative identity and co-authoring: (damaging) master narratives and counterstories

3.1. Silenced voices

Paul Ricoeur, founder of the narrative identity theory (which applies to both the individual person and the historical community) (1991, 188), said that the gap between life lived and stories told can be bridged through relating to the plots and identifying ourselves with the heroes of the stories of our culture. These stories and imaginations help us to gain a narrative understanding of ourselves and give us an insight into our identities that are subject to change because of life lived. Narrative identity lies between this change inherent to our lives and absolute identity (Ricoeur 1991, 32-33). Ricoeur thus argues that we understand ourselves in the context of the "traditionality" through which we understand a literary work and that this is how we come to be "the *narrator* and hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming *the author of our own life*" (1991, 32). We can decide what stories we tell about ourselves and what meaning we give to them, but there are certain aspects of life itself that are beyond our control, such as the actions and words of people around us. That makes us merely the co-author of our lives (Ricoeur 1992, 160). It is thus through telling our story and the meaning we give to the events in the story, we can decide on who we are.

However, even here are some limitations that Ricoeur does in fact address in his later work; not everybody is able to tell their story because of limitations in speaking and acting. There is often no or the wrong narrative space for what philosopher and scholar of healthcare ethics Joan McCarthey describes as "the silenced voices and neglected pain of marginalized individuals and groups" (2007, 238). When individuals or groups are oppressed or silenced, it is likely that others tell their stories for them; stories that are not representative of who these individuals really are or even false and slanderous. Ricoeur thinks that the silenced voices could be retrieved and our collective story can be repaired (quoted in McCarthey 2007, 238), however it does not become clear how exactly this is meant to take place. Even if these individuals or even groups speak for themselves, the false stories, such as stories of racism and discrimination, might still be dominating society as the new stories are simply not integrated enough into the dominating narrative. Moreover, it is remarkable that Ricoeur never even speaks of the matter of racialization in any of his work, so it remains unclear in what way he thinks the deeply ingrained hierarchical structures and distorted power relations that are the product of racism should be addressed. The repair of this collective story which leads us all the way back to the Middle Passage, needs more than the retrieval of silenced voices.

3.2. (Damaging) master narratives and the limitations of counterstories and positive co-authoring

Professor of philosophy and bioethics Hilde Lindemann takes the problem of silenced and damaged narrative identity to the next level. She devoted a book to the matter called *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair.* Lindemann calls the stories that dominate our culture 'master narratives'. It is through these master narratives we share understandings that we have of ourselves and each other. According to Lindemann, this is also what identity is: "the interaction of a person's self-conception with how others conceive her" (Lindemann 2001, 6). Our identity is a dialectic between the understanding of ourselves and the understanding that others have of us. This is why identities are damaged when other people's understandings of them are sexist, racist and/or homophobic. Lindemann's answer to the damaged identity is the concept of the counterstory;

> Counterstories, typically told within the moral space of a community of choice, are stories of self-definition, developed in response to the twin harms of deprivation of opportunity and infiltrated consciousness. Through their function of narrative repair they resist the evil of the diminished moral agency (2001, 9).

Counterstories are a way in which the damaged individual or group can define her or itself. Through the counterstory the person or group can alter the perception of her or itself and of the other. Hildemann thus shows how Ricoeur's problem of the wounded and marginalized individual and/or group can be addressed in terms of identity. She makes sure to explain that the repair of the damaged identity is not restricted to narrative; she clarifies in steps how "counterstories thus open up the possibility that the person could attain, regain, or extend her freedom of moral agency" (2001, 150). Repair of narrative identity and self-definition with the help of a counterstory thus implies a person reclaiming her agency. Hence the link to Audre Lorde and her work is not a farfetched one to make.

Professor of philosophy and religion Maxwell Racine in fact already discussed Lorde's work within the context of both Ricoeur and Lindemann's ideas on narrative identity and recognition in his article "Narrative Identity and Recognition Deficiency" (2023). Borrowing Jose Medina's term of 'recognition deficiency', he addresses the problematic implications of the lack of other people's recognition for the oppressed individual's narrative identity (2023, 317). Other people's stories about us partly define who we are, even more so when these stories are then internalized by the individual or entire group. He finds (part of) the answer to how this oppression and its negative implications for narrative identity can be faced in Doug McConnell's work on co-authoring. Specialized in philosophy of action and moral psychology, McConnell addresses the role of the vulnerability to co-authoring in victims of trauma and addiction and argues that recovery is dependent on the recognition of this co-authoring by

others, both abusers and therapists. Racine recognizes the importance of McConnell's work on co-authoring, however in his eyes it does not suffice in the case of victims of structural oppression (2023, 321-322). This is because oppressed people have been dealing with deeply ingrained recognition deficiencies for generations and much more is needed to resist this (322). Racine then brings Audre Lorde into the conversation demonstrating that her work is an exposure "of the ways in which Black women and other women of colour are vulnerable to and harmed by recognition deficiencies" (2023, 325). Their self-narration is not accepted by dominant groups. Racine finds the answer to the vulnerability of women of colour to racist co-authoring in Lorde's essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action": breaking the silence and speaking out is not only Lorde's way to overcome negative co-authoring, but also to find strength in the connection with other women who may not be the same, but experience the same (Racine 2023, 326). In his conclusion, Racine pleads for support from co-authors, especially ones in positions of privilege, "standing still" to listen to hear the stories of oppressed people and to put "epistemic trust" in what these marginalized groups have to say (2023, 330). This is basically what McConnell proposes when working with traumatized individuals, but Racine applies the concept of co-authoring to the larger scale of oppressed and discriminated groups of people.

Racine arrives at a valuable conclusion, however the question remains to what extent the standing still, listening and epistemic trust can actually contribute to these groups of people not occupying a marginalized position anymore. In fact, Lindemann addresses this problem; master narratives can be so strong that they resist or 'naturalize' counterstories before they have any chance to bring about change (2001, 162-163). "Naturalizing", which she considers to be a type of 'epistemic rigging', means that different groups of people are assigned specific places in society, for example to make a distinction between the "civilized man" and the "subhuman" based on concepts of Enlightenment morality and politics (2001, 162-163). People who hold power are thus trying to legitimize treating the 'subhuman' groups - who in their eyes do not meet the criteria of the Enlightenment understanding of what a human ought to be - on the basis of a different moral code. "Epistemic rigging" is thus a persistent way of upholding the dominating master narrative as the only "right" narrative.[4] According to Lindemann "any master narrative -even a benign one - possesses the Borg-like capacity to assimilate resistance by wrapping a narrative tendril around people or facts that call the master narrative into question" (2001, 162). In short, the tendrils of master narratives

[4] The "civilized man" vs the "subhuman" distinction based on ruling master narratives and epistemic rigging, is not unlike what Sylvia Wynter calls the "Man vs Human struggle", a struggle that is based on the idea of a new inclusivist model of the human (Human) as opposed to an outdated model of the human (Man2). A governing "master code" that upholds this outdated model of Man2 causes all sorts of distorted power relations. Because Wynter takes this problem to the next level into the (neuro)biological sphere, her thinking forms the bridge between the state of the art and the role of the body in narrative identity scholarship, a lacuna that needs addressing.

are far-reaching, strong and manipulative and counterstories, even with privileged co-authors involved, have to be extremely convincing to bring about change.

This is even more complicated when master stories have been absorbed by oppressed people, which brings me to the matter I will focus on and missed in the discussion on narrative identity and recognition deficiency so far; the far-reaching consequences of absorbed and *internalized* discrimination and oppression narratives, specifically by the body. Before oppressed humans are even able to promote a counterstory, they need to be freed and healed from false internalized stories about who they are and replace them with their own. Support from co-authors can bring some of that healing, but not all the healing, thereby not implying that this is what Racine is claiming. Much of the healing of the wounded narrative identity starts in the depths of the (narrative) self. Racine does point out that Lorde states that internalization of hatred of white people is harder to confront and handle than hatred projected from the outside (2023, 327). To confront this internalized hatred seems to be essential to the healing and self-definition of one's narrative identity. Lorde's work addresses both the societal and political problem of oppression and discrimination and the personal handling of a broken identity. For Lorde, this broken narrative identity includes the body; the body is the site of narrative and narrative effects the body. Narrative identity and the body are intertwined, so both narrative and body need repairing and healing. By way of researching Lorde's work I wish to make the connection between narrative identity and the body and highlight the importance of the body in narrative repair. As I will demonstrate later, this connection involves both the personal and social spheres. In fact, social dynamics are a necessary condition to be able to make this link in the first place. So, before diving into Lorde's work, I will present a theoretical framework through which narrative identity can be linked to the body. I think that Frantz Fanon's theory of sociogeny and Sylvia Wynter's concept of the sociogenetic principle provide a way in which to do this. Their reasoning points us towards an alternative epistemology of humanness. Using this entirely new epistemological framework or paradigm might be the only way forward to structurally root out and stop 'epistemic rigging' from taking place.

4. The human as "*bios and mythoi*": stories and myths alchemically made flesh

4.1. Ricoeur's views on the epistemological and ontological statuses of the narrative self

It serves to clarify Ricoeur's considerations of the ontological and epistemological statuses of the narrative self, before discussing my reasoning behind stepping from the narrative self to the body and why I think this is essential as regards narrative healing and self-definition. Also, diving deeper into these statuses, helps gaining a better understanding of narrative identity and how Ricoeur bridges the gap between narrative and life.

In "Life in quest of narrative" Ricoeur says that "fiction contributes to making life, in the biological sense of the word, a human life" (1991, 20). So, based on this statement, one could say that fiction generates experience; narrative and human life are intertwined. To establish the relation between life and narrative Ricoeur brings in the concept of *emplotment* borrowed from Aristotle's *Poetics*; "what Aristotle calls plot is not a static structure but an operation, an integrating process, which, as I shall try to show later, is completed only in the reader or in the spectator, that is to say, in the *living* receiver of the narrated story" (1991, 21). Emplotment as an integrating process forms the bridge between narrative and human life. The narrative does not exist in itself; it comes to life through the experience of the reader or spectator. This narrative coming to life and being "completed" in the reader in turn also constitutes human life. Ricoeur says that the critical moment is "the act of reading" as "on it rests the narrative's capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader" (1991, 26). At the "*intersection of the world of the text* [5] *and the world of the reader*" (26) lies the *act* of reading. This is also where hermeneutics, the interpretation of the text, is placed. The act of reading thus requires an act of interpreting which accounts for the "refiguration" of the text into life. Interpreting might then be understood as the merging of the acts of reading and experiencing; the text comes to life as it is "completed" by the reader, while also an experience is generated in the act of giving meaning to the text, keeping in mind that this reader has her own specific context and past experiences. This experience of the text speaking to and coming to life in the self, this "refiguration by narrative", says Ricoeur, "confirms this aspect of self-knowledge which goes far beyond the narrative domain, namely, that the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action and, among them, the narratives of everyday life" (1991, 198). So, the text is completed in the self, that in turn knows and experiences itself through the mediation of cultural signs and symbols.

[5] It is important to clarify here that Ricoeur considers a text to be "not something closed in upon itself, it is a projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live" (1991, 26). In this sense, a text is not a strict representation of reality (fact), but pregnant with possibilities and imagination (fiction); it offers an alternative reality that we might wish to integrate with our own.

As regards the self's ontological status, Ricoeur thus takes a clear phenomenological stance as he thinks of the self in the region of Heidegger's Dasein, a being-in-the-world. In fact, in "Narrative Identity" he explicitly argues that selfhood "is one of the existentials that belong to the mode of being of Dasein" (1991, 191). He considers the self to not be a pure thinking being, a "pure Cartesian ego" (193), but also an experiencing being with a "corporeal condition assumed to constitute the unavoidable mediation between self and the world" (196). Ricoeur thus posits conditions that precede the taking of a naturalist objectivist stance (McCarthey 2007, 248). In fact, his thoughts on personal identity oppose Derek Parfit's reductionist thinking about the self (Ricoeur 1991, 192) [6] in emphasizing that human experience is always mediated by symbolic systems and stories (1991, 29). He calls this the *"pre-narrative quality of human experience"* (1991, 29). Not only this pre-narrative quality, but also the "corporeal condition" are prior to a human's self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. So, with regard to the self's epistemological status, Ricoeur believes a priori (self)knowledge is not possible. A person gains (self)knowledge through being-in-the-world and within that has to deal with the "corporeal condition" as "an unavoidable mediation between self and the world". The fact that Ricoeur acknowledges that the self "simply does not belong to the category of events and facts', but also has a body that acts (the "capable self"), implies that he believes the narrative self to not just be fictional (Ricoeur 1991, 193; McCarthey 2007, 248). However, even though Ricoeur clearly does not settle for dualist or reductionist explanations of the self, it remains questionable to what extent he considers the self to be a holistic entity where the body is not just a mediating factor (and therefore as it seems a boundary condition) in, but possibly even a source of (self)knowledge. As mentioned earlier, Ricoeur thinks human *actions* and events are always already articulated by symbolic mediations and can therefore be read as a text (Ricoeur 1991, 28-29; McCarthey 2007, 248-249). However, in placing narrative quality prior to human experience and action, yet not in equal conversation with it, Ricoeur seems to view the body as a vessel through which a story is lived, rather than an actual site of narrative and cognition. In introducing the concept of sociogeny, psychiatrist Frantz Fanon bridges the gap between symbolic mediations and stories and the effects of these on the body.

[6] Parfit's thesis "denies that we are entities existing separately, distinct from our brains and our bodies and our experiences" (quoted in Ricoeur 1991, 193).

4.2. Frantz Fanon's concept of sociogeny

> Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny (Fanon 1952, xi).

Fanon refers here to the importance of "sociodiagnostics" in dealing with pain and suffering as a consequence of the "alienation of the black man" (1952, xi). An individual ontogenetic approach, such as psychoanalysis,[7] is not the appropriate method to deal with the damage of racism because racialization has its origins in social dynamics. This is why, besides ontogeny (the genetics and development of an individual being) and phylogeny (the origins of species), Fanon introduces the concept of 'sociogeny', social genesis. Social genesis refers to the onset and developments of phenomena within a society as a realm of symbolism, culture and (master) narratives. To clarify further, Alexander Weheliye calls sociogeny a "symbolic register, consisting of discourse, language, culture, and so on" (2014, 25). Sociogeny as a "symbolic register" distinguishes itself from ontogeny as the genetic and biological dimension of the human being. Fanon argues that racialization has its origins in sociogeny. He builds on sociologist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness", a state of a dual sense of self that is experienced by colonized and oppressed people living in Western society.

In his book *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon describes the experience of what it is like to be both the black Antillean and the colonized black man who has lived in France and returns home a transformed man. The black man has put on a "white mask", assimilated himself to the white man through the appropriation of the white man's language. Fanon emphasizes the power that lies in the possession of language; "to speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" (1952, 2, 21). The black man feels that when he adopts this language and thus the white man's world and culture , he comes closer to "becoming a true human being" (2).

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[7] Ricoeur in fact heavily draws from Freudian psychoanalysis in his account of the "self-examining" self. Yet, as McCarthey points out, by placing the focus on "working through" memories as a way towards self-knowledge and eventually agency, Ricoeur implies that anyone who applies these ways of self-examining has mastery and control over her own narrative (McCarthey 2007, 226, 229). Ricoeur in fact posits that "to be autonomous one must be a subject capable of leading one's life in accord with the idea of narrative coherence" (quoted in McCarthey 2007, 230). Autonomy only follows after the creation of a coherent narrative of the self and the capability of leading one's life according to it. However, a self is surrounded by many co-authors. This means that the self is not always in absolute control of its own narrative, no matter how much psychoanalysis it is practicing. So, in arguing for narrative coherence as a prerequisite of autonomy, Ricoeur is forgetting once again about the individuals and/or groups who are not capable of creating any narrative coherence because of their suffering and/or inability to speak, or because of others in positions of power speaking for them. Fanon calls for "sociodiagnostics" in addressing racist damage exactly because it is rooted in social dynamics.

As a colonized and suppressed person he has not felt fully human, which is why he aims at becoming fully human in the eyes of the white man (which according to Euro-western standards are the only 'right' eyes) and adjusts his behaviour accordingly, which changes his sense of self including his body. He has started to *embody the white man's narrative of what it means to be fully human*. Fanon says: "The black man who has lived in France for a certain time returns home radically transformed. Genetically speaking, his phenotype undergoes an absolute, definitive mutation" (3). In the footnote Fanon clarifies this as follows: "By this we mean that the black man who returns home gives the impression of having competed a cycle, of having added something that was missing. He returns home literally full of himself" (3). However, there is a major paradox; he is not the man he was before he left as his phenotype underwent a definitive mutation, but he will also never be a white man born in France. The completed cycle creates a state of "double consciousness"; he has black skin and wears a white mask. The experience of this dual sense of self as a consequence of moving between language codes and cultures,[8] makes the black man question who he is and what it means to be fully human. For, not being fully human in the eyes of the white man and becoming conscious of this phenomenon, the black man internalized the white man's gaze on him which mutated his true self, including his body. The social construct of race has now taken root in ontogenesis.

4.3. Sylvia Wynter's theory of the sociogenetic principle

Playwright, novelist, cultural theorist and scholar of Black studies and colonial and postcolonial studies Sylvia Wynter builds on the concept of sociogeny when she argues that sociogenic phenomena both "contrast with" and "relate to" ontogenic phenomena. She calls this the "sociogenetic principle" (Wynter 2001, 31). This concept of the sociogenetic principle is the building block in her development of an alternative epistemology of humanness. As Wynter's academic projects and writings draw from knowledge from the natural sciences, (neuro)biological sciences, cultural studies, philosophy, literature, art and religion, it is also across this range of disciplines that her concept of the sociogenetic principle was developed. Whereas Frantz Fanon's concept of sociogeny was rooted in Freudian thinking, Wynter's sociogenetic principle was developed in conversation with neurobiological science.

[8] Sylvia Wynter refers to the space between cultures as the "*transcultural space"*. I will return to this concept in my discussion of Lorde's experiences of a dual sense of self.

In her essay "Towards a Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be "Black"" she explains how racialization, which has its origins in sociogeny, is transmuted into an ontogenic phenomenon through neurobiological mechanisms. Based on neurobiologist Avram Goldstein's thinking, she argues that "the phenomenology of subjective experience (what *feels good* and what *feels bad* to each organism) is neurochemically determined in species-specific behaviour motivating systems" (Wynter 2001, 50). So, the organism behaves according to a reward and punishment mechanism, which is only possible because it has a subjective experience of what it is like to be that organism. The subjective experience is needed to "perceive, classify, and categorize the world" and to adapt its behaviour accordingly for the good of its species (Wynter 2001, 50). However, Wynter argues that in the case of humans, subjective experiences such as pleasure and satisfaction are not only rooted in biology (51), because, in line with Fanonian thinking, humans are also always culturally programmed; "all humans wear cultural masks" (53). Based on this cultural and "semantic" programming, the "human conscious experience" is "the expression of the culturally constructed mode of subjective experience specific to the functioning of each culture's sociogenic *sense of self*" (53). This means that the human conscious experience cannot be separated from its culturally defined framework of what it means to be human.

A very crucial part of her reasoning is that the expression of the "culture's sociogenic sense of self" (sociogeny) and the expression of the "species-specific sense of self" through the "genomic principle" (ontogeny) are analogical, inseparable states of being, thereby linking the phenomenological experience, which is always culturally programmed, to a physiological response (53-54). Wynter's theory of the human as a hybrid being capable of having conscious experience as the expression of both the sociogenic and the genomic principle is her way of arguing against reductionist views. It could be argued that Wynter's sociogenetic principle dissolves the distinction between the epistemological status of self and the ontological status of self and therefore gives rise to alternative thinking of what it means to be human. In many of her writings, such as "Towards the Sociogenic Principle" (2001) and "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self)Cognition" (2015), she sheds light on how the value of the added neurobiological dimension to the concept of sociogeny becomes explicit in racialization. Weheliye says that Wynter wishes to "provide a transdisciplinary global approach to the study of human life that explains how sociogenic phenomena, particularly race, become anchored in the ontogenic flesh" (2014, 27). She thus wants to provide an explanation of how race as a social construct is ontologized. This ontologizing takes place as, in Weheliye's words, "racialization figures as a master code within the genre of the human represented by western Man", meaning that "a global colour line is instituted by cultural laws so as to register in human neural networks" and which "clearly distinguishes the good/life/fully human from the bad/death/not-quite human" (Weheliye 2014, 27). Racialization is thus paired with neurobiological processes and responses. In the situation where a human perceives he is on the "wrong" side of the colour line, a physiological reaction is triggered as he experiences that, according to the dominating "master code", [9] his

[9] Wynter introduced this concept of the "master code" herself, I will return to it later.

colour is associated with being "bad/death/ not-quite-human". As Wynter wanted to completely overturn[10] this dominating master code or narrative of the human genre represented by western Man, she pushes us towards an alternative epistemology of humanness; she wishes to "abolish Man and liberate all of humanity rather than specific groups" (Weheliye 2014, 29). Returning to Lindemann's concepts of master narratives and counterstories this might mean that before counterstories even have a chance of being listened to and acknowledged at all, the ruling master narrative of what it means to be human must be dealt with first. With that comes a revision of Ricoeur's narrative identity theory and the meaning of narrative repair.

4.4. *Homo narrans* and "the law of cognitive closure" or problem of "circularity"

> In my own terms, the human is *homo narrans*. This means that as a species, our *hybrid* origins only emerged in the wake of what I have come to define over the last decade as the Third Event. The First and Second Events are the origin of the universe and the explosion of all forms of biological life, respectively. I identify the Third Event in Fanonian-adapted terms as the origin of the human as hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species: *bios/mythoi.* The Third Event is defined by the singularity of the *co-evolution* of the human brain *with* - and, unlike those of all the other primates, *with it alone*- the emergent faculties of language, storytelling. This co-evolution must be understood concomitantly with the uniquely *mythmaking* region of the human brain, as the brain scientists Andrew Newburg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause document (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 25).

The above quotation is from a conversation between Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, scholar of black studies and gender studies, written up as a book chapter "Unparalleled catastrophe for our species?" as part of the book *Sylvia Wynter On being human as praxis*. Leading up to this fragment, Wynter explains how Fanon's overturn of the biocentric conception of the human (phylogeny, ontogeny *and* sociogeny) called for a "reconceptualized human" as a hybrid being - *"mythoi and bios"* - which implies that "*being human is a praxis*" (2015, 23). The praxis lies in the idea of the human as *"homo narrans*", a storytelling species; storytelling is being and becoming. Storytelling is an ontological process because of the earlier explained dynamic between the "first set of instructions" ("biological genetic codes") and the "second set of instructions" ("nongenetically chartered origin stories and myths") (27). These origin stories and myths function as an explanation of who and what the human is in a particular culture, and take on a "law-like" character, which Wynter also calls a "code" or "master code" (1997, 521; 2001, 47; 2003, 279). The particular culture functions as a "genre-specific autopoietic field" (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 30),[11] which

[10] Wynter calls this overturn the "Autopoetic Turn/Overturn", which she discusses in the aforementioned article (2015).

[11] Wynter bases her theory of "*the autopoiesis of being hybridly human*" on the concept of autopoiesis developed by the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, writers of the book *Autopoiesis and*

means that the culture is a self-governing closed system governed by origin stories and myths, which are ontogenically implemented through neurobiological mechanisms. This causes for the members of the specific culture to experience a sense of "*referent-we"* (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 33). The human as part of a culture thus always understands and comports herself on the basis of the cultural and symbolic code, as it provides the human with a feeling of belonging. This *"semantically-neurochemically induced* performative enactment*"* (based on the reward and punishment mechanism) means that both human individual and collective behaviours are defined by what is acceptable in this specific culture in order to belong (2015, 32-33). Thus, sociogenic phenomena are transmuted into ontogenic phenomena, or as Wynter says, origin stories and myths are "alchemically *made flesh*!" (27).

In this line of thinking, it becomes clear that *bios and mythoi* interact neurochemically, and that both collective and individual behaviours and narratives have physiological effects. Therefore, the human exists inside a closed system, or as Weheliye calls it, inside "the culture and biology feedback loop" (2014, 25). Wynter identifies this loop as "the law of cognitive closure" (2015, 33); the culturally defined systems of knowledge "institute and stably replicate our genres of being hybridly human with the also communitarian viability of each respective societal order" (32). So, the respective knowledge system and what it means to be human within that system are strongly related to communitarian feelings, implying that a person who experiences, for instance because of racism, that he does not meet the criteria of what it means to be human within this system, will try to adjust his behaviour in order to feel like he/she or they belong. This dynamic is demonstrated by Fanon in his book *Black Skin White Masks*, where, as described in paragraph 4.2, the black Antillean adopts the language of the white man's world in order to "come closer to becoming a true human being" (1952, 2), using language to transform himself. Fanon in fact quotes poet and philosopher Paul Valéry who describes language as "The god gone astray in the flesh" (quoted in Fanon 1952, 2) supporting his concept of sociogeny. The question arises how it is possible for the human like the Antillean, who is subject to damaging stories and laws, or any human for that matter, to break out of this "culture and biology feedback loop" in order to free himself from the governing master code that is clearly held up by power relations. Or, in other words, how is it possible for the body to be un-inscribed and re-inscribed by an entirely different semantic code?

Before moving onto Wynter's suggestion of how to rise above a knowledge system or paradigm, if at all possible, it is relevant to note that also Ricoeur, since he argued for the "*pre-narrative quality of human experience*" which he explains as "life as a story in its nascent state" and "life as an *activity and a passion in search of a narrative*" (1991, 29) - not unlike Wynter's idea of the human as "*homo narrans*" - acknowledged the problem of the closed "symbolic systems" in relation to "personal identity" and "self-understanding" (1991,

Cognition. Wynter takes "the idea of biological organisms as *autonomously functioning, living* (i.e. autopoietic) systems" and applies it to human social systems; "our human eusocial systems are instead *hybrid languaging cum storytelling (if biologically implemented)* living systems; but they function according to laws analogous to those regulatory laws of the supra-autopoietic system, which is the beehive" (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 27-28).

29-30), asking himself: "how can we then speak of the narrative quality of experience and of a human life as a story in the nascent state, since we have no access to the temporal drama of existence outside of stories recounted about this by people other than ourselves?" (1991, 29). Also in a discussion with David Carr and Charles Taylor, Ricoeur speaks of this loop or, as he calls it, "circularity", as a real problem (Carr, Taylor, Ricoeur 1991, 182).

In "Life in Quest of Narrative", he answers his own question by suggesting to look towards "*stories that have not yet been told*", which according to Ricoeur can be found in two ways/situations: psychoanalysis and the situation where a person is "'tangled up in stories' which happen to him before any story is recounted" (1991, 30). However, it seems to me that what feeds the subconscious and these background stories are the stories from the very same "symbolic systems" a person is already in.[12] Also, which is the point of this entire thesis, Ricoeur in no way addresses the body as part of, in fact a site of, semantic coding. It is therefore not only the narrative self, but also the body that is to break away from "all sorts of symbolic systems" and "all sorts of stories that we have heard" (1991, 29). However, what sparks interest within the context of Wynter's and Cesaire's thinking, is the solution that Ricoeur offers to this problem of "circularity" in his discussion with Carr and Taylor. He says: "is it not art, in the largest sense, *poiesis*, a function of both revelation and transformation? So that one may say both that *poiesis* reveals structures which would have remained unrecognized without art, *and* that it transforms life, elevating it to another level" (1991, 182). Ricoeur thinks that art and poiesis might be ways to question and move away from this "symbolic system" where "action is already symbolically mediated". In assigning *poiesis* a "function of revelation" and the means to "reveal structures" previously unrecognized (182), Ricoeur hints at the idea of art and *poeisis* as alternative ways of (self)knowledge. This (self)knowledge could then even lead to transformation or redefinition. Unfortunately, Ricoeur does not explain how exactly this uncovering of hidden structures and/or transformation through art and poiesis are meant to take place. This could be the point where Césaire's vision of "poetic knowledge" as alternative epistemology comes in.

[12] Ricoeur explains that this entanglement in stories "appears as the pre-history of the story told, the beginning of which is chosen by the narrator" (1991, 30). This pre-history of the story told is "the vaster whole" and the "background made up of the living imbrication of all lived stories" (30), which is why Ricoeur believes that fiction is so essential to the process of a person's "*self-understanding*" and is "only completed in life" (30-31). It is thus in the "background made up of the living imbrication of all lived stories" where the unspoken stories reside. The question arises how the "background" solves the issue of a closed symbolic system, since this background and fiction are part of this very symbolic system, thereby reinforcing the loop. As regards psychoanalysis, where the patient takes his "scattered fragments of lived stories, dreams, 'primal scenes', conflictual episodes" to the psychoanalyst in order to understand what constitutes his personal identity, the unspoken stories are repressed stories that might be just as much part of what constitutes his identity as the actual stories (30). However, in the context of Fanon's thinking and critique of psychoanalysis, ontogeny does not stand alone; there is also sociogeny. The unspoken stories that reside in the depths of the subconscious exist as a result of a being in the world, as a result of being part of a cultural symbolic system. This is why it is hard to imagine how facing the repressed stories is a way out of this system. This is not the case if one should turn to Carl Gustav Jung's thinking on archetypes, which are imageries/ thoughts/ behavioural patterns that are not bound to any specific culture, but exist in the "collective unconscious" of all humans. Even though the goddess Afrekete could be interpreted as the representation of one these archetypes (the trickster), it is, although another fascinating entry point, beyond the scope of this thesis to include Jungian psychology and archetypes in the discussion.

4.5. Old biocentric white Man models vs. the new inclusivist Human model and a "(New) Science of the Word"

To recap, Wynter's concept of the social system as an *autopoietic* self-governing system meant that she was able to link the culturally programmed perceptions of the self and the world to a neurochemical response. This is because, as scholar of literary theory and semiotics Walter Mignolo explains, "Maturana made the connection between the ways in which human beings construct their world and their criteria of truth and objectivity and noticed how their, our nervous system processes and responds to information" (2015, 107). These criteria of truth and objectivity are then also applied to the epistemology of humanness. The respective origin stories about who or what the human is, take on this "law-like" character (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 30, 38) since we (neurochemically) experience that our cosmogonies have always already been there. Wynter says: "*we cannot/ do not preexist our cosmogonies,* our representation of our origins - even though it is we ourselves who invent those cosmogonies and then retroactively project them onto a past" (2015, 36). We invent our own stories and think that they have always existed somewhere outside of us. This is the loop that also Ricoeur was trying to think his way out of by means of psychoanalysis, the idea of stories as the fabric of our lives, and art and poiesis.

According to Wynter, these cosmogonic stories are invented to be *"extrahumanly mandated"*, either by a supernatural agent - or as Wynter calls them, "donor figures" or "entities"- or a secular entity, such as evolution or nature (2015, 36) and produce correlating models of the human. At the onset of the Renaissance, when theocentrism was questioned and the human found himself in the process of moving away from any sort of supernatural explanation of who he is (Wynter 2003, 263-264), two models of Man were developed, which Wynter calls Man1 and Man2. These models respectively represent a "*symbolic life/death*" coding based on "our *genre-specific* or *pseudo-species-specific* human groupings", such as "our class, our tribe, and so forth" and the outsider (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 25). This means a clear distinction is made between the earlier mentioned "referent-we" and the *"Human Other"* (Wynter 2015, 187). Man1 as the "Renaissance humanism's *Man"* (187), driven by rationality, the belief in the white man as superior and the need to expand and colonize, projected their symbolic death coding on the colonized, indigenous peoples. In doing so, many of the earlier distinctions made, such as "mortal/immortal", "natural/supernatural", "the gods/God" that contributed to Man1's understanding of what or who he is, were now replaced by the "human/subhuman" distinction (Wynter 2003, 264). This meant that the colonized man came to represent the symbolically dead and subhuman man. In the case of Man2, the bourgeois, Liberal-humanist variant of Man1 and *"homo oecomonicus" (*Wynter 2015, 187; Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 38*),* it was the "religion of Darwin's neo-Malthusian biocosmogony" (2015, 37) that made Black people the embodiment of "(*racialized) Human Otherness*" (2015, 187). In other words, in the case of Man2, Darwinist thinking and belief in man as an economic being led to the symbolic death coding of the "black" man and the poor.

The above master codes of the human genre form the battleground of the "Man vs. Human struggle" (Wynter 2003, 260- 261), which Wynter believes to be at the ground of all of our struggles related to racism, discrimination and the environment today (2003, 260-261). To clarify, "Man" here means the old Man2 model and "Human" means a new inclusivist model of the human. The necessity of adopting a completely new model of the human requires, according to Wynter, we address "the great silence of [natural] scientific thought" (quoted in Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 64), described as such by Aimé Césaire. Wynter thus turns to Césaire's speech called "Poetry and Knowledge" held at a conference in 1946. For, what Césaire proposes here is a (new) "Science of the Word", which is "poetic knowledge", thereby, according to Wynter, pushing us to move and think beyond the epistemological framework of biocentrism (64- 65). Knowledge's source is not merely the natural sciences, but also poetry, the Word. This means that it is time for the human to become aware of her origin as both nature and Word, the co-evolution of *bios and mythoi*, of which Africa is the *"human origin geography"* (70). It is in southwest Africa where Wynter traces back the so-called "Third Event" (70), the origin of the human as *bios and mythoi* functioning according to the sociogenetic principle, meaning that origin stories and myths are "alchemically made flesh" within a particular social structure that functions as an autopoietic system. This new "Science of the Word" or "poetic knowledge" might also be the way to liberate flesh and find words (or sounds or images) of knowledge and freedom much deeper within.

4.6. "A (New) Science of the Word" in relation to "demonic ground" and its (para)religious traces

At this point it is important to get a better grasp on Wynter's understanding of a "New Science of the Word" as it is this "poetic knowledge" as discussed by Césaire in "Poetry and Knowledge", which, in my argumentation, forms the means for Lorde to liberate her body from inscripted racist, sexist and homophobic stories and heal and redefine it through embodied mythology. I will therefore look at ways in which Wynter's reasoning so far converges with or diverges from the way in which I will be using the idea of poetic knowledge in my argumentation later on.

The question arises whether Wynter's interpretation of a "New Science of the Word" implies becoming *conscious* of the origins of our humanness as hybrid, bios and mythoi, thereby necessitating the dialectic between natural sciences and poetic knowledge, or, if it should be understood as a means to truly transcend conventional knowledge systems and categories, almost as if we were positioning ourselves outside history? Since Wynter argues that we can never preexist our cosmogonies and origin stories, the latter interpretation seems unlikely. And yet, Wynter's concept of the "demonic ground" discussed in her essay "Afterword: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" (1990) very much hints at a search for an observer position outside the "culture biology feedback loop", where a human can know himself and the world completely anew. In this article she speaks of the term "demonic ground" as a position "outside of our present

governing system of meaning, or theology/ontology in de Nicolas' sense of the word"[13] and a "cognitive inquiry; one which goes beyond the limits of our present "human sciences", to constitute itself as a new science of human "forms of life" (1990, 365). This shows that Wynter does in fact aim to move beyond any conventional epistemologies and ontologies in search for "a new science of "human "forms of life"", and it seems that a New Science of the Word is the way in which she hopes to achieve this.[14]

In the context of this thesis discussing the importance of Lorde's drawing from, as she refers to it herself, "African myth/legend/religion" (SO, 58) as an intervention regarding self-definition, it is important to gain a better understanding of Wynter's interpretation of the phenomenon of religion and how it relates to the concept of demonic ground and a New Science of the Word. Even though Wynter hardly ever wrote about religion, at least not explicitly, there are many traces of it throughout her work. Studies and writings of the role of religion in Wynter's oeuvre are in fact on their way to being published in 2025, in the form of the book *Words Made Flesh: Sylvia Wynter and Religion*, edited by Justine M. Bakker and David Kline. For a better understanding of the way in which the above mentioned concepts all relate, I am relying on the book chapter "(Para)religious traces in Sylvia Wynter's Demonic Ground" (part of the aforementioned forthcoming book), written by scholar of comparative religious studies Justine M. Bakker, who has an expertise in the area of intersections between race and religion and Sylvia Wynter's oeuvre. Bakker analyzes the concept of demonic ground whilst looking for (para)religious traces, making way for the phenomenon of, what she calls, "parareligion".

Even though Bakker detects the presence of several religious traces in Wynter's demonic ground, I will focus on one that I think sheds more light on Wynter's vision of a "New Science of the Word". She finds this trace in Wynter's reference to philosopher Antionio T. De Nicolas' article "Notes on the Biology of Religion" (1980). De Nicolas gives a biological explanation for the phenomenon of religion, thereby cancelling the possibility of, in Wynter's terms, any "extrahuman" "donor figures" or "entities". De Nicolas argues that "the biological study of religion could liberate humans from codings in the nervous system" as these are "the shackles of human freedom" (quoted in Bakker 2025, 11-12). The focus on an agency outside of ourselves, which forms the explanation of who we are as humans, stands in the way of being our own agents and setting our own intentions on who we want

[13] Bakker discusses the meaning and importance of Wynter's reference to philosopher Antionio T. De Nicolas's article "Notes on the Biology of Religion" (1980) in her essay "(Para)religious Traces in Sylvia Wynter's Demonic Ground" as this is one of the ways in which religion can be traced back to the "demonic observer ground" (2025, 10-13). I will return to this later.

[14] In "Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be "Black"" Wynter calls this new science a "new language" (based on Fanon's idea of language as the appropriation of a (new) culture and world). What she says here is that "a new language able to convey what *it is like* to be conscious outside the terms of each-culture-specific order of consciousness, would also have to be one only findable within the term of the postulate of autonomously functioning laws of culture, as laws specific to the third (beyond the physical and the purely biological) and hybrid level of ontogenic/sociogenic existence - at the level that would be the specific domain of inquiry of this new language" (2001, 55). This shows again that Wynter is aiming to find an entirely new language that is specific to the human as a hybrid being and that this language should express what it is like to experience a conscious state that is free from the imprints of a specific culture.

to be as humans. So, Bakker demonstrates how Wynter's thinking of religion is developed in conversation with De Nicolas' line of reasoning, where the shift from "agency outside" to "agency within" is crucial in the understanding of the concept of demonic ground (11). This is because, if Wynter's objection to religion as focusing on "extrahuman donor figures" is linked to her term demonic ground, it must mean that this outside observer position is definitely not about finding knowledge in any transcendental realm or other extrahuman entity, but is all about immanence or "agency within". Or as Bakker explains: "unearthing the religious traces in demonic ground also underscores, precisely because it encourages a careful consideration of De Nicolas, the ways in which Wynter considered this "outsider position" a site for epistemic intervention, or "cognitive breakthroughs" that would push beyond religion" (Bakker 2025, 11). Religion thus stands in the way of an alternative epistemology and ontology that is free from extrahuman agents. It also implies that Wynter considers religion to be an important part of the master codes (including the ones that lie at the root of racialization (13)), which humans refer to in order to make sense of all sorts of epistemological and ontological questions. In the interview with McKittrick, where Wynter actually mentions religion explicitly (though briefly), she refers to it as the "behavior-regulatory phenomenon of religion" (2015, 26), thereby indicating that it is as much part of the culture and biology feedback loop as any other story or myth (see also Bakker 2025, 13-14).

Wynter first and foremost assigns a destructive role to religion, specifically building this argument around "Man's roots in medieval European Christendom", where the "Redeemed Spirit/Fallen Flesh" "master code" finds its origin and correlates with the earlier discussed "symbolic life death coding" (Bakker 2025, 14-17). This, and many other such dualisms with roots in religion, made humans subject to what Bakker calls "categorical distinction"; the distinction of "We/Other" based on the symbolic life death coding (15). This categorical distinction, along with, what Bakker calls "displacement", meaning the "outside agency" or "extrahuman agents of determination" (19) are two mechanisms that, according to Wynter, are tied with religion, and the reason why we must go beyond it in the form of a "New Science of the Word" (20). Hence, it can be concluded that, apart from whether or not Wynter believes in anything to do with a transcendent reality (which remains questionable) (23), Wynter's notion of a New Science of the Word has nothing to do with religion, in fact, it must go *beyond* religion. This New Science of the Word must shake the human, so he can actually become conscious of the idea that he is bios and mythoi, and is therefore, as Bakker explains, in a position to defy "master codes" altogether (21-22). This then sheds more light on Wynter's understanding of a New Science of the Word; it seems that Wynter truly wishes to inhabit a completely alternative epistemology and ontology, free from any categories or distinctions (23). The question still arises what this "new science of human forms of life" or "new language" (Wynter 2001, 55) looks like.

Also, what about those stories that do question or even defy these mechanisms of distinction and displacement? For Bakker, this question opens the possibility of "modes of storytelling (...) that embrace their invented nature" or "stories that wrestle with ontological and existential questions by inhabiting the liminal positions that the necessarily futile desire for "pure difference" opens up, and explode binary distinctions from the inside out" (2025,

24-25). These stories do what religion does: they "wrestle" with questions about who or what defines us as humans, with the difference that this "wrestling" takes place from the position of the "agent within" only. Bakker calls these stories "parareligion" (24).[15] She makes sure to point out that parareligion "does not and cannot refute religion altogether", but that it "troubles and destabilizes the grammar of religion", which opens up "the possibility of something alternative" (29). Parareligious stories as invented, immanent, non-binary, chaotic, non-categorical, fluent, ever-changing, thus leaving the sphere of conventional ideas about religion, fit in well with Wynter's concept of the demonic ground as an outside observer position that is aimed at moving away from the transcendent and absolute in the search of an alternative epistemology of humanness, yet also demonstrate that the human as homo narrans can never completely free herself from stories in this very search. Parareligious stories highlight the ambiguity of Wynter's desire for a "new science" in her acknowledgment that leaving the "culture biology feedback loop" is impossible.

What comes to my mind next is: what about those *religious or mythological* stories that question or even defy these mechanisms of distinction and displacement? What if these offer "the possibility of something alternative"? I am getting to the point where my reasoning diverges from Wynter's; her interpretation of a New Science of the Word as moving beyond religion. This is because in my argumentation, it is exactly the Science of the Word, or "poetic knowledge", that forms the means by which Lorde connects, relates to and embodies myth/religion. It is the "space" where the gap between immanence and transcendence is bridged, and through which the African goddess as "outside agent" becomes in fact an "agent within". For Lorde, the extrahuman, metaphysical realm of the Sky and Thunder Pantheons and her embodied encounter with the goddess Afrekete (and desired embodiment of Afrekete (Z, 303)) exist simultaneously. At the same time, poetry for Lorde is also a way to unearth feelings that were hidden inside the body, yet have always been there; it is a knowing that comes from the inside out. This knowing, the Black mother, the poet, is ancient, dark and deep and exists in all women and men (Z, 5; SO, 26-27, 92-93). So, in that sense, a New Science of the Word might not have to mean discarding religion altogether (which is not what Bakker argues, as in her view, parareligion does not/ cannot refute religion, but it clearly seems to be Wynter's viewpoint), but present us with a way to question, relate to, connect with religion or myth in ways that defy old categories and dualisms. By entering into conversation with Jason Allen Paisant's understanding of "poetic knowledge", I will demonstrate how Lorde's drawing from African religion and mythology moves beyond all sorts of binaries.

[15] Bakker presents artist Ellen Gallagher's "Watery Ecstatic" (2005) as an example of a parareligious story as its rich oceanic imageries unearth, or rather 'unocean', a new, non-categorical way of thinking about who or what the human is; this "visual epistemology" is all about "chaos, possibility, mutation, change" (29-30), thereby "exploding binary distinctions from the inside out".

4.7. Concluding note: a "sociogenetic principle of narrative identity"

So far, I have been working on the foundational arguments for what I call a "sociogenetic principle of narrative identity". Ricoeur said that "it is [..] by means of the imaginative variations of our own ego that we attempt to obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves" (1991, 33) and that "fiction, in particular narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of *self-understanding*" (30). In his thought, narrative fiction is the fabric of human experience (29) and the source self-knowledge. This becomes even more apparent when he says that "a life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted. And in interpretation, fiction plays a mediating role" (27-28). A human life lived is a story told. Ricoeur thus argues, like Wynter, for an epistemology of humanness that transcends biology. The difference however, is that for Ricoeur the "corporeal condition" is a restriction in the process of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world that needs to be worked around and is thus the opposite of functioning as a site of information and semantic inscription. This is where Fanon's concept of sociogeny and Wynter's theory of the sociogenetic principle come in. The concept of the human as *homo narrans*, as "hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species: *bios/mythoi" (*Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 25)*,* implies the body is a source of information about the world around it and the self. This is because of the neurochemical response that takes place in the brain as the human constructs her world and criteria of truth within the autopoietic symbolic system.

Therefore, I am suggesting a "sociogenetic principle of narrative identity", meaning that our personal narratives that draw from the already existing collection of stories and cosmogonies, interact with the body through neurochemical and physiological responses.[16] The stories that reside in our bodies thus become a source of self-knowledge and part of our narrative identity. Once the awareness of our humanness as hybrid kicks in, an opening is created in the process of liberating the entire narrative self of internalized damaging stories. This is because, even if the damaging stories are replaced with ones of self-definition, there is no true repair if the body is not included, as both narrative and the body are ways/sites of self-knowledge and transformation. So, I will base my study of Lorde's work on the concept of the sociogenetic principle of narrative identity and investigate how her (physical) liberation from internalized damaging stories takes place.

[16] Although Fanon's concept of sociogeny and Wynter's theory of the sociogenetic principle have been developed decades ago, I think they were ahead of their time in demonstrating the effects of sociodynamic processes and traumatic (racist) narratives on the body. Derek Hook, scholar and practitioner of psychoanalysis with expertise in the areas of Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-colonial theory (the work of Frantz Fanon in particular), the psychology of racism and critical social psychology, still incorporates Fanon's work in his thinking and practice. He wrote the article "Racial ontologizing through the body", as part of the book *Fanon, Phenomenology, and Psychology* published in 2022. Also psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk developed theories on the effects of the social environment and traumatic events on the body. He presents these ideas in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, published in 2014.

5. Audre Lorde: language, narrative identity and the body

Before I present my investigation of how Lorde finds (physical) liberation from damaging stories through embodied myth in chapter 6 and 7, I will discuss ways in which her body and narrative identity are connected in her work. Lorde demonstrates how language functions as a tool in the shaping and carving out of her narrative self, both story and body. At the same time, the body itself is a locus of language and information. The power of language and the "appropriation of its world and culture" as described by Fanon had a negative effect on the Caribbean man adopting a sense of self that was not his own. Although Lorde discusses the damaging effects of racist and homophobic language in her own work (discussed in 5.3), she also shows that the power of language can work the other way. It can open up a creative space inside our bodies; a space where we can find the language and knowledge about who we truly are. Lorde considers feelings to be a type of language in the sense that they provide us with (self)knowledge and power (discussed in 5.4). Her use of language is connected to her entire being. It is both a tool of self-definition and a way of becoming as she directly links it to action in her essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"; language instigates and makes, in Wynter's terms, being human a praxis. I will do some more unpacking as regards the various ways in which language, text and narrative interact with the body in Lorde's work.

5.1. Discovering the power of language within transcultural space

As she started writing poetry from a very young age, Lorde became aware of the power of words very early in her life. This awareness increased as she found herself moving between cultures, either in her mind or in real life (as Fanon demonstrated in *Black Skin White Masks*). In what Wynter refers to as a "*transcultural"* space - [17] which is "the space opened between different cultures", that can "free us from our subordination to the categories of the single culture" (Wynter 2001, 33) - Lorde becomes aware of a dual sense of self that has been there since she was little, which makes her feel the urge to define herself in her own (mythological) language. In her biomythography *Zami,* she describes how she finds herself moving, thinking, feeling between the American society she lives in and her ancestral home in the Caribbean. She feels a deep connection with Carriacou, an island that she cannot find on any map or in any Atlas, which turns it into an all the more faraway and magical place; "underneath it all as I was growing up, *home* was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind up between the pages of a schoolbook. It was our own, my truly private paradise of blugoe and breadfruit hanging from the trees, of nutmeg and lime and sapadilla, of tonka beans and red and yellow

[17] In her essay "Towards the Sociogenic Principle, where Wynter's line of arguing eventually leads to a "New Science of the Word" or a "new language", she posits that it is *"transculture" (*a term she borrows from literary scholar and cultural theorist Mikhail Epstein), which is "the space opened between different cultures", that can "free us from our subordination to the categories of the single culture: through the mediation of transculture we come to realize ourselves as human beings" (Wynter 2001, 33).

Paradise Plums" (Z, 13). This place across the Caribbean Sea, rich in smells, colours and tastes, is her true home; a place of safety and refuge in her mind. Thinking of and connecting with Carriacou is a way for her to free herself from the "categories of a single culture", the American culture. It is where the transcultural space opens up. In a way, the island Carriacou can be seen as Lorde's piece of "demonic ground"; a place that is not marked on a map, but that she still hopes to find, thus symbolizing a liminal space which offers a viewpoint outside of the master codes she knows.

Spending time in Mexico opens up another transcultural space for her. Here, she feels herself unfolding and becoming visible, which is something she has never experienced before, since she is used to having to create space for herself. In Mexico she feels she is not the woman defined by others, but the woman she feels she is deep inside. She is a black woman without the "white mask"; "wherever I went, there were brown faces of every hue meeting mine, and seeing my own color reflected upon the streets in such numbers was an affirmation for me that was brand-new and very exciting. I had never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it" (Z, 182). She becomes aware of the fact that she has been living in a state of "double consciousness", managing different *senses of selves*. This realization shakes her and opens up a new horizon. She gains "insight into what poetry could be" (187) and comes to an even stronger belief in the power of words. She finds the courage to listen to and voice her own desires; "desire gave me courage, where it had once made me speechless" (195). She experiences how voicing her desires towards the beautiful and enigmatic woman called Eudora, is self-defining and affirming; "As I spoke the words, I felt them touch and give life to a new reality within me, some half-known self come to age moving out to meet her" (196). *Voicing* her needs and desires is opening up a space deep inside where her authentic, true self resides. Voicing is giving life. This connection between finding her very own language and giving physical space to it, is an underlying theme in her biomythography, essays and poetry and will receive more attention in the next paragraphs.

5.2. The body as text and embodiment in text

> What does my blood, or my heart or my eyes have to do with my writing? They are all inseparable (Lorde 2000, 61).[18]

By way of Lorde's work I mean to demonstrate that the body does not only stand in relation to narrative identity because the narrative *about* the body - for instance the sick body - [19] is

[18] This is what Lorde said in an interview with Charles H. Rowell called "Above the Wind: An Interview with Audre Lorde (2000). I will return to this interview more frequently.

[19] In fact, Lorde also wrote the *The Cancer Journals*, which is a narrative about her experiences of having breast cancer and what this illness does to her body (image). Although this could have been a valuable source in my study of her work, and extremely meaningful in relation to narrative identity theory, unfortunately the limited amount of space did not allow me to discuss all of her work. *The Cancer Journals* book is deserving of an entire thesis on its own.

part of our over-all story, but because language and stories have an effect on our body (sociogeny and the sociogenetic principle and the idea of the body as a site of semantic coding) and our bodies produce texts and information about who we are, which in turn have an effect on the choices we make and our narrative identity. In Lorde's work, both these dialectics between the language and the body are present; all throughout her work she speaks of instances of her body that suffers as a consequence of narratives of oppression and discrimination, and she explicitly describes how her body, feelings and eroticism are a source of information (SO, 43-49; Z, 98). Her body is marked by other people's stories about who she is, yet is also, after reaching underneath the painfully scratched surface, a source of self-knowledge. Language has the power to both damage and open up and liberate her body. This is also why Lorde's writings *about* language and her embodied self are *interwoven* with the embodied self. As she writes, she expresses and releases, whilst offering the reader her deeply lived through experience. An example of a narrative of such a deeply felt experience is her heartbreak over her lover Muriel described in *Zami*; "all the pains in my life that I had lived and never felt flew around my head like grey bats; they pecked at my eyes and built nests in my throat and under the center of my breastbone" (Z, 281). The pain of heartbreak is mental, physical, existential all at the same time. As regards the destructive forces of racism, which I will discuss in more detail in the next paragraph, an example can be found in her poem "Outside"; "And how many times have I called myself back, through my bones of confusion, black, like marrow meaning meat, and how many times have you cut me, and run in the streets, my own blood (BU, 63). These are words of internalized racism, so the physical destruction seems to take place from the inside out. Both these examples of powerful and layered narratives contain descriptions of lived, embodied experiences that are key in the constitution of her narrative identity, whilst invoking and communicating these embodied experiences through text.

The notions of the body as a text and embodiment in text in Lorde's work are discussed or referred to rather extensively by scholars such as scholar of literature and women's studies Margaret Kissam Morris; poet, writer and literary scholar Elizabeth Alexander; scholar of multi-cultural women's and gender studies AnnLouise Keating; and scholar of women's studies M. Charlene Ball. Morris explicitly discusses the dialectic between Lorde's body and the written text in her article "Audre Lorde Textual Authority and the Embodied Self". Calling to mind Rosi Braidotti's idea of the embodied self, which is that the body is "situated at the intersection of the biological and symbolic" (quoted in Morris 2002, 168), Morris posits that Lorde uses "embodiment to reverse the balance of power between the oppressed body and the written text (2002, 168). Her black female body as a site of destructive, racist narrative is also the site of a liberating and resolving narrative (169-170). Morris demonstrates how Lorde's weapon in what I would call the re-appropriation of her own body is thus language, text, discourse; [20] through "embodying oneself in one's discourse" she sheds light on the destructive effects of racism on the body while also

[20] Morris points out that Lorde's use of language is not restricted to the written text, but is also very much about speaking and hearing her poetry as Lorde explains in the documentary *A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde*; she speaks about how the loss and weakening of her voice makes it difficult for her to continue writing poetry (2002, 176). Again, it shows how Lorde's use of language and text is related to, even merges with, bodily experience.

emphasizing its power (2002, 182-183). Lorde's use of embodiment in text is thus a way to free herself and other voiceless people as she attempts to re-balance power structures through the presentation and poetic performance of her lived through experiences. In Lindemann's terms; Lorde's strategy in countering master narratives and preventing epistemic rigging from happening is the inclusion of her body in her narrative, as it is literally the site of both destruction and liberation. Through language she is making a renewed physical space for herself (Alexander 1994, 696). The creation of this space and the process of self-definition started in fact at her discovery of the wonder of letters. It was then Lorde broke her silence - she did not speak until the age of five - and changed the spelling of her name from Audrey to Audre (Z, 21-26). Alexander describes how for Lorde "to spell one's name is to create oneself in language", thus linking literacy to self-expression and freedom (1994, 705-706). Since the very moment Lorde decided she wanted to learn how to read and write, language became the equivalent of self-revelation (SO, 30), becoming, action, praxis. With the coming of the goddess Afrekete, trickster and linguist, language became a liberating force, awakening the "erotic as power" (SO, 43-49). Deep inside her body, (self) knowledge was there all along. As I am working my way towards demonstrating the workings of 'embodied mythology' through poetry and incantation, I will first present two ways in which Lorde's body can be seen as the locus of information and (self)knowledge; through the markings of the flesh as a consequence of traumatic narratives, and the erotic as a source of deep and ancient knowledge and power.

5.3. The body as a site of racist, sexist and homophobic narrative and pain that must be named

> Every black woman in america has survived several lifetimes of hatred, where even in the candy stores cases of our childhood, little brown niggerbaby candies testified against us. We survived the wind-drives spittle on our child's shoe and pink flesh-colored bandaids, attempted rapes on rooftops and the prodding fingers of the super's boy, seeing our girlfriends blown to bits in Sunday School, and we absorbed that loathing as a natural state. We had to metabolize such hatred that our cells have learned to live upon it because we had to, or die of it (SO, 152).

In the essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger", where the above quotation is from, Lorde describes the complex mechanisms of internalized racism, or as she calls it, "metabolizing hatred like a daily bread" (SO, 148). Also her biomythography and poetry contain narratives of experiences of internalized racism and sexism. The mechanisms she describes are an illustration of Fanon's concept of sociogeny; she often experiences a sense of self as seen through the white, sexist and/or homophobic person's eyes, a self that needs to try hard "to stay human" (Z, 212; SO, 166). In line with the sociogenetic principle, her sense of self as 'subhuman' and target of hatred is incorporated and "genetically implemented", as her "cells have learned to live upon it". This internalized hatred is not

'only' the result of "several lifetimes of hatred" lived in a black woman's life, [21] but is deeply ingrained in the ontology of all black women as a consequence of "Hatred, that societal deathwish directed against us from the moment we were born Black and female in America" (SO, 142); sociogenesis transmuted into ontogenesis over the course of generations. Lorde thus explicitly illustrates how, in Wynter's formulation, the "*symbolic life/death coding*", [22] which in the black woman's case is symbolic death coding, has nestled itself in the black woman's being, even affected her cells. As the hatred is swallowed and "neutralized" (SO, 152), the body is destroyed from the inside. [23]

For Lorde, from a very young age, black did not only come to mean death, but also '*bad*', even within the spheres of her childhood home. She was darker than her two sisters, who, according to her mother, were always well-behaved, while Lorde was told to be 'full of the devil' (SO, 145). She had to scrub her cracks and crevices with lemon juice as her dark elbows, knees, gums, nipples, armpits and folds of her neck were considered sinful (145). Even in the places, such as her own home, where she is hoping to find acceptance and love simply because she exists, she never truly belongs. As she describes in *Zami* that she is feeling like "an only planet, or some isolated world in a hostile, or at best, unfriendly, firmament" whilst growing up (Z, 36), Lorde is setting the stage for many years to come. Being Black, female and gay is like living on a lonely, isolated death planet fit for those who are 'full of the devil'. Even in the gay bar scene, many black lesbians considered being black, female and gay and out of the closet in a white environment to be "suicidal" (Z, 265-266). From a very young age, Lorde is acutely aware that within a white, patriarchal society, still defined by the human genre of Man2, she was never meant to survive; "So it is better to speak/remembering/ we were never meant to survive" (BU, 33). Even amongst white

[21] Lorde specifically refers to the black woman; "What other creature in the world besides the Black woman has had to build knowledge of so much hatred into her survival and keep going?" (SO, 146).

[22] According to literary critic and black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers this symbolic coding, which she calls "marking", has been carried over from generation to generation since colonial times and the New World when "African and indigenous peoples" were taken "captive" and their bodies were actually violently mutilated; "these undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually "transfers" from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moment" (Spillers 1987, 67). Once, the "captive body" was the site of actual violation and mutilation. This literal "branding and marking" of the flesh, the "hieroglyphics of the flesh", was hence symbolically substituted, forever holding the black body captive, thereby making it the site of both destruction and liberation and freedom (see also Weheliye 2014, 138).

[23] In a passage discussing the relation between racism and the body in Lorde's work, also Morris points out that for Lorde, racism means both emotional destruction and "destruction of the living matter of the body" (Morris 2002, 169), thereby specifically referring to her literally destructive work with X-ray machines processing X-ray crystals in the factory. All people working there, except the foreman and forewomen, were of colour (Z, 146). If she increased her crystal count, she was able to earn bonuses on top of the low wage. She ended up hiding the crystals in her socks every time she went to the bathroom, chewing them up and then flushing them down the commode in little bits (Z, 170). It meant her body was damaged by the X-rays and had to most probably metabolize the accidentally swallowed shards of crystals. She did it because she saw no other way out of the only job she was able to find as a woman of colour who could not type. "Metabolizing hatred like a daily bread" (SO, 148) is materialized, or as Alexander refers to this bodily destruction; "the body, then, makes visible also what has been metaphorically imbibed (1994, 709). This is then, in a way, again the materialization of the "symbolic substitution" that started with Spiller's "hieroglyphics of the flesh", turning it into a never-ending loop.

lesbians, discussing her blackness and what that meant in terms of acceptance, was not tolerated (Z, 212). Tragically, this meant that black lesbians were often alone in their fight for survival and self-preservation (Z, 268), which was an altogether different battle from (yet completely interconnected with) racism in white people (SO, 160; Z, 268); "this cruelty between us, this harshness, is a piece of the legacy of hate with which we were inoculated from the time we were born by those who intended it to be an injection of death. [...]. How do I alter course so each Black woman's face I meet is not the face of my mother or my killer?" (SO, 155-156). Considered the embodiment of all that is bad and not-quite-human by society, before being capable of loving each other, black (lesbian) women had to learn to love themselves (SO, 171).

Yet, Lorde testifies in both *Zami* and "Eye to Eye" how hard it is for herself and other black women she knows to even know how to feel self-love. This self-love does not stand a chance before the pain of feeling as if you never even had the right to exist is acknowledged and named. As even her own mother taught her to fear her own Blackness and whose silence caused her to have no words for racism (Z, 93; SO, 142, 145-146), Lorde asks: "how can we expunge these messages from our consciousness without first recognizing what it was they were saying, and how destructive they were?" (SO, 161). Pain must be named, acknowledged and looked in the eye, or as her lover Eudora said; "*Waste nothing, Chica, not even pain. Particularly not pain*" (Z, 281). Lorde pushes us to see pain as something that needs to be felt and lived through at same time as a source of information about ourselves. Acknowledging and naming the pain, thus knowing the pain, means creating space for even deeper self-knowledge, self-definition and empowerment (SO, 142-143, 168-169). This is also what the transformation of silence into language and action means (SO, 30). Reaching for self- definition, self-knowledge and empowerment means creating the conditions for self-love and love for others. As Lorde mostly feels suspicion and hostility between black women, she longs for powerful and loving connections, a Black sisterhood, fighting each other's battles and healing each other's wounds (SO, 148). She longs for "Black goddesses" and "black heroines" (SO, 161) to be part of her narrative. In *Zami* and her poetry, she is taking us with her on her journey in search of these. Along the way she discovers that none of her friendships and romantic relationships with women can truly fill this deep, dark, gaping hole inside of her, before she can fill it with love herself. This is the revelation that is the result of her encounter with Afrekete; self-knowledge and self-love. This is how Lorde knows that, in Racine's terms, the healing co-authoring of other Black (lesbian) women that she so much longs for, is only possible after facing and dealing with the trauma of internalized racism.

This is also why, before support from other co-authors in the reconstruction of narrative identity can mean anything to marginalized groups such as these Black women, they have another battle to fight; they need to be able to name, acknowledge, process and heal the deep-seated pains of trauma for and between themselves in order to redefine themselves. The importance of this battle and underlying deep longing is conveyed in many of her poems such as "Between Ourselves", "Never Take Fire from a Woman" and "Sister Outsider". In the poem "Sister Outsider", she makes a reference to hatred as "daily bread" (SO, 148) again; after "never touching/each other's hunger/ never/ sharing our crusts/ in

fear/ bread became the enemy" and thus not sharing each other's pain, she now wants the other to courageously face her darkness and the message it holds for her, "to know/ your darkness also/ rich/ and beyond fear" (BU, 111). She hopes that Black women can come to support each other in their feelings of devaluation and loneliness. In "Eye to Eye" Lorde says: "white people can never truly validate us", because they do not share the same traditions, history, knowledge and therefore the Black women's need for each other (SO, 160). Lorde most definitely acknowledges the value and necessity of political work and the fight for recognition and acceptance in society all throughout her work, yet she also says that "political work will not save our souls, no matter how correct and necessary that work is" (SO, 166). In order to "save [their] souls", it is necessary for Black women to stop "acting like an insider and feeling like an outsider" (166), or, in Fanon's formulation, to stop white masking. They need to reach for and face what is underneath the racist constructs; to unearth that knowledge and "old magic" (BU, 5) that come from a place deep inside.

As mentioned, that did not mean that Lorde did not also crave the support from co-authors who were not Black women. This was her way of saying that there is the weight of a long history of both sexism and racism, that only Black women share. However, she also felt the urgence of naming this pain in the face of other co-authors, in her circle of white lesbians. Unfortunately, there was no willingness to acknowledge this pain. As regards white feminists in academia in Lorde's time, who in Racine's terms would have been those "in positions of privilege" and whose acknowledgment (at the least) Lorde had hoped to receive as she expressed in her essays "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", and in an open letter to theologist and philosopher Mary Daly (SO, 57-62), they were, as theologist Karen Baker-Fletcher points out, busy "deconstructing self", before Black women even had the chance to reclaim the self that remained unacknowledged because of living in a racist, sexist and classicist society (2004, 199). It is not clear why Daly never replied to Lorde's letter and thus impossible to know her thoughts about it, but it would have been an opportunity, during what was a crucial time in feminist thinking, for a co-author in a position of privilege to listen and express "epistemic trust" in Lorde's story and Black women's true narrative self. It would have been an opportunity for Daly to explain why she wrote about white, western european, judeo-christian goddess images in her book *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), whilst omitting the black warrior goddesses and "our Black foremothers, where european women learned to love" (SO, 58-59), thus creating a distorted image of Black women's heritage and narrative identity.

5.4. The erotic as resource of knowledge and power

> When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (SO, 45).
>
> Of course, women so empowered are dangerous (SO, 45).

In Lorde's writing, explicitly in her essay "Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power", the erotic is interpreted as an all-encompassing and creative life force that erupts from the core of one's being. This force is both knowledge and power. It is information about what it means to be human and its power is strong and touches all areas of our lives. Baker-Fletcher interprets Lorde's understanding of the erotic as "examining wisdom regarding *eros*" (2004, 199) and women's power (204). In this line of thinking, according to Baker-Fletcher, "Eros is the desire for union with the other. Eros satisfies body and soul. It has the power to heal the spirit as well as the body" (202). Baker-Fletcher adds the footnote here that she uses "body" and "soul" synonymously as this is how they are often used in "black folk literature". It also points us towards a non-dualist mindset in thinking about the erotic. The erotic as the gateway to mythological wisdom makes it a healing force for Lorde. In *Zami*, her erotic encounter with Afrekete means finding self-knowledge deep inside her body. Keating says: "in their erotic lovemaking Lorde renames herself and becomes the Black goddess" (1992, 29). This Black goddess or "Black mother", who I will discuss later on, is the poet and carrier of ancient knowledge. Also her erotic encounters with other women before that pivotal moment with Afrekete are important in her quest for (self)knowledge and healing. All of these experiences, whether positive or negative, contribute to the shaping of her (erotic) narrative self.

However, Lorde's (and also Baker-Fletcher's) understanding of the erotic is not limited to sex, but permeates all areas of life. For Lorde, it is the resource of power and information that was devalued, abused and vilified by western society, but which women need to revalue and reclaim for themselves in order to fight oppression (SO, 43). The erotic as "nonrational knowledge" (SO, 43) has nothing to do with the stereotype of the irrational, emotional or hysterical female, but is an obliterating female energy force that cuts through layers of conventional ideas of what it means to be human. It illuminates and extracts parts of ourselves that might have been previously hidden and changes how we experience, understand and relate to the world and people around us. Or as Lorde describes it: "when released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience" (SO, 47). The erotic provides Lorde with (new) information about herself as well as the world around her. Understood within the context of the sociogenetic principle, where narrative and body interact, and in line with Lorde's thinking, the erotic as coming from the deep, creative,

knowledgeable pit in the body, may well be the energy force that expels damaging narratives, purifies, transmutes, heals, helping to renew the self and its relation with the world.

Through understanding the erotic as a way of knowing, Lorde's interpretation of what it means to be human opposes old Man models in two ways. She defies "the negative legacy of Adamic Original Sin", referred to by Wynter as the "Redeemed Spirit/ "Fallen Flesh" "master code" (2003, 274) - which specifically in the context of medieval Latin-Christian Europe, has come to correlate with a "symbolic life (spirit) /death (flesh) coding" - by way of lifting the erotic body up as the locus of life force and healing. The body, the erotic and sex are sites of/ ways in which to experience life as colorful, heightened and joyous and can foster experiences of deep connection and healing. Also, the erotic as alternative epistemology challenges the importance placed on rationality by Man1. According to Lorde, our feelings provide us with knowledge. In her essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" she writes:

> The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us- the poet- whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free, Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom (SO, 27).

Descartes, the "white father" of rationalism and a priori knowledge, who saw no epistemic value in knowledge acquired through sensory experience (a posteriori), needs to make way for the Black mother, the poet, the "homo narrans", dissolving a strict epistemology/ontology distinction. In an interview with poet, essayist and feminist Adrienne Rich, Lorde expands on what she means by the Black mother existing in each of us (male or female, black or not black). It does not mean that rationalism is unnecessary; on the contrary, according to Lorde it actually serves "the chaos of knowledge" and feeling. Yet too often, rationalism and "circular, academic, analytic thinking" are put on a pedestal and the importance of alternative ways of knowing are ignored (SO, 92). Lorde does not see thinking and feeling as a dichotomy but as "a choice of ways and combinations" (92). In this sense, the Black mother as poet is in line with Wynter's idea of knowledge as a dialectic between scientific and poetic knowledge (based on Césaire's "Poetry and Knowledge"). At a certain point in the interview with Rich, Lorde calls the Black mother "the name for a humanity" that, even though it "evolves through women" (93), implies a *way of being human* where each human (male, female, black, white etc.) carries a poet inside herself, opening up insight into the information and power that feelings and emotions hold. [24] This poet points the way towards self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, (re)definition and ultimately freedom.

[24] It is worth mentioning that amongst others who specifically thought and wrote about the "intelligence" and power of emotions, is philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum. She did so in her book *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions (2001)*. She draws on philosophy, psychology, anthropology, music and literature explaining the role of emotions in our thinking and acting. Emotions such as love and compassion and the importance of relating these to our narratives in order to interpret them are central to Nussbaum's thought.

6. Audre Lorde: poetry as (self)knowledge and definition and locus of being and becoming

After shedding light on the relation between language, the body and narrative identity in Lorde's work, I will discuss the ways in which her poetry (as a 'place' of intersection between body and myth and therefore the site of 'embodied mythology') forms her means of (self)knowledge, self-definition and possibly liberation. I will be entering into a conversation with Césaire's "Poetry and Knowledge", whilst also drawing from Jason Allen-Paisant's explanations and interpretations of Césaire's others works,[25] complemented with Allen-Paisant's own insights.

6.1. "Poetic [self]knowledge"

> And what emerges as well is the old ancestral foundation. Hereditary images that only the poetic atmosphere can bring to light again for ultimate decoding. The buried knowledge of the ages. The legendary cities of knowledge (Césaire 1990, Iiii).
>
> It is that mild autumnal nostalgia that threw mankind back from clear light of scientific day to the nocturnal forces of poetry. Poets have always known (Césaire 1990, xliv).
>
> These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us hold an incredible reserve of creativity and power; of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep (SO, 25-26).

Both Césaire ("Poetry and Knowledge") and Lorde ("Poetry is not a Luxury") speak of poetry as knowledge; a knowledge that is dark, ancient, a "nocturnal force" and needs "decoding". This "poetic knowledge" has been deeply hidden inside humanity since its first days (Césaire 1990, xliii), withstanding time and history. As discussed earlier, for Lorde this poetic knowledge is linked to her idea of emotions holding knowledge. These feelings and emotions as knowledge find their expression through the poet within; the poet helps naming the "nameless and formless" (SO, 25). But the deeper layer to this knowledge is that it is the Black mother (SO, 92); it is "ancestral" and "hereditary". In her poem "A Woman Speaks", where her sisters are the "witches in Dahomey", she speaks of "old magic" that is "unwritten" (BU, 4-5); "Moon marked and touched by sun/my magic is unwritten/but when the sea turns back/it will leave my shape behind" (4). This hidden ancestral knowledge that is as dark and ancient as an unlit moon (the lit moon possibly symbolizing the Black human

[25] It has been extremely difficult to get a hold of Césaire's work. One of the reasons is that much of his oeuvre has not been translated from French to English yet. Allen-Paisant often refers to the book *Aimé Césaire: Poésie, Théatre, Essais et Discour*s (2013), edited by Albert James Arnold. I have not been able to find a translation of this book.

wearing the white mask or the Black human as "marked" by the white human's destructive gaze) is her source of self-definition and her way to leave an imprint[26] in the face of racism.

In fact, poetry has been her means of (self)knowledge and self-definition since she was very young. In her interview with Adrienne Rich, she explains that from a very young age, poetry functioned as a way to express what she was feeling and thinking; it would contain her emotions and "the vital piece of information" (SO, 72). Poetry was the next stage of what she experienced pre-verbally. The desire to give shape to "so many complex emotions for which poems did not exist" (SO, 73) led to creating her own poems. These poems were a way for her to carve out a space fit for own unique feelings and self. She would not write the poems down, but say them out, which shows how important it was for her to be able express through her voice what was inside of her. Poetry was first and foremost a vocal and embodied expression rather than written words. Poetry became her ontology, the fabric of her narrative identity: "the skeleton architecture of our lives" (SO, 27).

Speaking of ontology, in her article "Aimé Césaire: Poetry Is/and Knowledge" (2010), Scholar of postcolonial French and Francophone literatures Ronnie Scharfman interprets Césaire's "poetic knowledge" as self-knowledge based on its interface between epistemology and ontology. I will quote the following sentence in full, as I think it completely aligns with Lorde's poetry as means of self-definition: "Poetry lies at the crossroads of ontology and epistemology for Césaire, a locus of being and a means of knowledge, and in the very language of this early piece we watch the poet being born as he struggles with the issue of identity that will haunt all of his work" (2010, 110). Also for Lorde, poetry is a locus of being and becoming through struggle; it is the site of a battleground where she fights as an Amazon warrior with her ancestor's weapons for self-definition in the face of racism, sexism and homophobia. These weapons symbolize ancient knowledge and language. Also Keating refers to language itself becoming Lorde's weapon, "enabling her to cut through restrictive definitions" (1992, 28). This earlier discussed dialectic between body and text, makes Lorde's counterstory all the more powerful. Poetry for Lorde, is the locus of both struggle and positive transformation; "it lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been" (SO, 27). Poetry thus carries pain and joy, fear and courage, vulnerability and strength; it carries life.

Lorde's first realization of the true power of poetry took place when she was in Mexico, the place where she felt herself unfolding and becoming visible for the first time. At some point, she suddenly hears the birds singing in the "unbelievable sweet warm air". It is so beautiful and unexpected as she feels "shaken by the waves of song" (Z, 187). At this very moment, she realizes poetry is not so much about "creating a dream", but about capturing a feeling such as being "shaken by the waves of song" (187). In her interview with Rich she refers to this very moment as the "first intimation" that she could "infuse words directly with what [she] was feeling" (SO, 75). Poetry in that sense is not a fictional story, but it is

[26] The poem implies that "leaving her shape behind" is dependant on the presence of the sea and the tides. It is therefore suggestive of a reference to Afrekete in particular who, as the youngest daughter of the sea god Agbê, resides in the sea (Herskovits 1938, 152).

lived through experience, or as Lorde says in "Poetry is not a Luxury", it "hints at possibility made real" (28). In an interview with scholar of English and founder/ editor of the journal Callaloo Charles H. Rowell, Lorde's explanation of this process of poetry capturing a feeling, an experience, information echoes her experience in Mexico. Lorde says: "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. The poem evokes its own world" (2000, 55).[27] This way, poems have the power to unearth knowledge, but also to transfer this knowledge as a fully lived experience, almost as if the reader can taste, smell, hear, see and feel with the poet. The poem is the world's passing through the poet. Or as Césaire says: "there we see resolved - and by poetic state - two of the most anguishing antinomies that exist: the antinomy of one and other, of Self and World" (..). So, pregnant with the world, the poet speaks" (1990, xlix). According to Césaire and as illustrated by Lorde, poetry links self, world and other.

6.2. Poetry as the junction where body meets myth

> Poetry is that process which through word, image, myth, love, and humor establishes me at the living heart of myself and of the world (Césaire 1990, lv).

In the following paragraphs I will have a closer look at how "poetic knowledge" - a knowledge that, according to Césaire, is "the old ancestral foundation", "hereditary images", "mythologies" (1990, liii) - relates to the body and how this is illustrated by Lorde. I will do this by way of drawing from both "Poetry and Knowledge" and Jason Allen-Paisaint's interpretation of Césaire's work. Allen-Paisant is scholar, writer and award-winning poet and explores the ways in which Afro-diasporic artists and communities shape their futures through embodied, living philosophies. In his recently published book *Engagements with Aimé Césaire, Thinking with Spirits* (2024) he enters into a conservation with Césaire's work to discuss the idea of poetry as philosophy and its implications for our thinking about humanness and human's relation with the earth and the environment. He parts from the definition of "poiesis" [28] as "*spirit-knowing*"; "a knowing of 'things' as actors, communicators, beings that know and reach out to us' (2024, 2). Poiesis is not knowing a thing by observing it from a distance, but through communication with a thing in its own right. This is why he considers poiesis to be "presence", where "the thing is not other to a thought that invokes it" (15). Poetry dissolves the distinction between subject and object.

[27] This interview was conducted by telephone between Charlottesville, Virginia, and St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands on August 29, 1990, and published in 2000.

[28]Allen-Paisant points out that "poiesis" is an ancient Greek word, which the pre-classical Greeks understood as having to do "with hands doing things, with the spirit of creativity, with the messiness of living in the world" (2024, 4). Important to note here is that "'the world' meant something different in that context; earth and earthly consciousness were far more central to the worlding of the pre-Socratics, and therefore to their conception of making (poïein)" (4).

Allen-Pasaint thus calls 'poetry' "the human collaboration with 'things'" (15). It is what Césaire calls "pregnant with the world, the poet speaks" (1990, xlix). Hence, the "spirit" in "spirit-knowing" does not imply any kind of distinction between transcendence and immanence, on the contrary, the entire world and anything that is beyond are infused with spirit. Allen-Paisant refers to "Spirit" in the context of African/diasporic cosmologies, where it "appears as the plenitude that is wholly in the here-and-now of each earthly thing; it may denote the acting power of the universe itself, 'that which has no name, no place, that which cannot be made a sign'"(16).[29] "Thinking with spirits" is grounded in the earth, yet encompasses the entire universe. So, even when it denotes what is beyond the body, "thinking with spirits" is essentially a very earthly and embodied activity. Allen-Paisaint says: "with the idealist flight into the disembodied mind begins the flight from Earth" (13-14). Poetry as naming, what Allen-Paisant refers to as "the Real" (67), results from poetry as "a thinking through the body, an account of vital embodied engagement that remains central to the African/diasporic tradition" (14). This way, Allen-Paisant connects poetry, spirit-knowing and body.

Turning back to Lorde, I see two ways in which body and myth meet through her poetry, thus becoming the site of "embodied mythology". First, she places herself within myth through poetic language. This placing is embodied. Alexander interprets Lorde's use of language as "making a physical space for herself in a "hybrid and composite language", which "allows the self-invented body to name itself and to exist" (1994, 707). In positioning herself in the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey, placing her body in an entirely different world, the world of myth, Lorde seems to reclaim and free her body from the damaging context it has been existing in. Even though language is obviously her most important tool, I would say that this placing of the body in myth also functions by way of imageries; the words invoke strong and powerful images of Lorde fighting, hating, loving, freeing herself amongst the goddesses. The second way in which myth and body meet is through the spoken word, which has always been very important to Lorde; hearing Lorde speak, she seems to be invoking her inner poet, who is the Black mother, through sound and incantation. I will discuss this power of sound in the next paragraph.

Positioning herself within myth means that Lorde takes herself to the West-African Kingdom of Dahomey: she is one of the Amazon warriors in "Dahomey" (BU, 10-11) and "125Th Street and Abomey" (BU, 12-13); lives in the House of Yemanja, goddess of oceans (BU, 6-7); and is daughter of Seboulisa (BU, 10-13), goddess of Abomey - [30] "The Mother of us all" (BU, 127). In her interview with Rowell, Lorde says that the poems in *The Black Unicorn* have always felt like a conversation to her between herself and "ancestor Audre" (2000, 58). Seeing herself as one of the ancestors of the Kingdom of Dahomey, implies she considers the goddesses and warriors of Dan to be ancestors more than anything else - possibly in the same way as Césaire refers to "ancestral foundation" - as she experiences they are part of her whilst also desiring to become them (specifically Afrekete, Z, 303). In her

[29] Quotation from Yves Bonnefoy, *Poems of Yves Bonnefoy*, ed.and trans. Anthony Rudolf, John Naughton and Stephen Romer (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2017), 143

[30] Abomey is "the inland capital and heart of the ancient kindom of Dahomey. A center of culture and power, it was also the seat of the courts of the Aladaxonu, the famed Panther Kings" (BU, 124).

poetry, she meets these ancestors as her equals and takes up an embodied space amongst them. I use the word "embodied" as her experiences regarding her dealings with her ancestors and their world become close to tangible through her use of bodily and fleshy language. The poem "The Winds of Orisha" [31] from her poetry collection *From A Land Where Other People Live* is an illustration of this intertwining of her body with these mythological, divine figures, analogous to a loving and wrestling with the forces of nature they command. I consider this poem to be an example of "spirit-knowing"; a knowing of the world through the communication with these mythological beings. Their presence passes through Lorde as the poet: "Impatient legends speak through my flesh/changing this earth's formation/spreading/I become myself an incantation/dark raucous characters/leaping back and forth across bland pages" (Lorde 1973, 37). She experiences her entire being becoming an incantation through voicing the presence of the goddesses, becoming them. Keating refers to these lines as Lorde "metaphorically becoming the poem" (1992, 29). Yet, interpreting the poem within the framework of "spirit-knowing", I argue this becoming is not metaphorical, but can be understood as real "presence", where "the thing is not other to the thought that invokes it". Lorde's becoming is not a representation, but a "human collaboration" (Allen-Paisant 2024, 15). This collaboration by means of embodiment does not only concern her own body, but also the bodies of the goddesses, which creates a sense of them being close to or even inside the human realm, rather than giving the impression that it is Lorde who journeys to the Sky and Thunder pantheons to meet purely metaphysical beings, or in Allen-Paisant's words, is on an "idealist flight" away from Earth. For instance, in the poem "From the House of Yemanjá", Lorde describes Yemanjá's breasts as "huge exciting anchors/in the midnight storm" (BU, 6). She longs for these breasts [32] to give her the stability in a way that she did not receive this stability and sense of safety from her own mother. Invoking Yemanjá is a longing cry for love and comfort.

6.3. Poetry and incantation: the power of sound

A discussion on the power of the voice in relation to Lorde's poetry is in my view necessary as it forms a vital component of all of her work. Lorde's fight for self-definition takes place through both the written and spoken word. In this sense voicing can be interpreted as taking up physical space through sound. As discussed earlier, Lorde's poetry started first and foremost as sound. Reciting and voicing were the way for her to invoke her inner poet, the knowledge of the Black mother (SO, 72). I therefore consider resonance as one of the ways in which mythology is embodied through poetry. This (mythological) knowledge is older than

[31] The *Orisha* are the goddesses and gods - divine personifications- of the Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria. There are close to six hundred *Orisha*, major and local, with greater and lesser powers (BU, 125).
[32] In BU it is explained that rivers flow from Yemanjá's breasts. One legend says these flows started after a son tried to rape her. Another legend says it happened after she fled away from her husband who insulted her breasts. It was then all the other *Orisha* sprang forth from her body. River-smooth stones are her symbol, and to her followers the sea is sacred (BU, 127).

the body itself, yet the body is carrier of it. Lorde ends her epilogue of *Zami* with the following words:

> Woman forever. My body, a living representation of other life older longer wiser. The mountains and valleys, trees, rocks. Sand and flowers and water and stone. Made in earth (Z, 5).

These words deserve special attention as they explicitly show how Lorde experiences her body to be connected to, part of, the natural world around her. Her body is the portal to this older, longer and wiser life. [33] Spoken poems are the way in which this ancient life can be summoned, invoked, conjured, thereby turning poetry into a form of incantation. The incantation Lorde speaks of in "The Winds of Orisha" is the summoning of the goddesses and gods, and with them the forces of nature. Also her poem "From the House of Yemanjá" can be understood as the summoning of Yemanjá. Her reading of this poem [34] sounds like an incantation, especially as she repeats the words "Mother I need" whilst increasing the volume of the sound of her voice, her tone remaining mostly even. Her timbre is dark and low - "Mother I need/mother I need/mother I need your blackness now/as the august earth needs rain" - creating a sense of urgency. When she speaks the lines "I am the sun and the moon and forever hungry/for her eyes" she drags her voice, darkening her timbre, slowly spreading the words out. Her emotions and desires are expressed through voicing the forces of nature.

In the aforementioned book, Allen-Paisant devotes an entire chapter, "Sound and Otherliness", [35] to the centrality of resonance in African/diasporic poetry and what it might reveal about "its metaphysics of livingness" (2024, 75). What he means is that as sound is invisible and physical at the same time, it suggests the presence of extrahuman agents. What is incredibly illuminating is Allen-Paisant's thinking of sound as *mimetic* in the same way the first acts of naming the unnameable must have been (77). Based on Cesaire's understanding of *mimesis,* [36] which is *not* about imitation, Allen-Paisant explains mimesis as" fram[ing] being as, at once, self and other than self: I am myself and another", thus moving away from the idea of mimesis as "an occupation of the body (demonic or otherwise)" (2024, 78). This idea of being simultaneously oneself and another is to be understood through "a principle of

[33] Allen-Paisaint explains that in Afro-Caribbean cosmogony the idea of a self exists that is "older than the body and will outlast it". It is what the plant-woman or plant-man experience when they "abandon themselves to a world which pulsates infinitely and in every dimension" (2022, 198).

[34] On February 23, 1977 Lorde's reading of some of her poetry with her own comments was recorded in the Recording Library for the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. This recording can be accessed at the Library of Congress website: https://www.loc.gov/item/91740794/. Her reading of "From the House of Yemanja" including comment starts at 45:32.

[35] Allen-Paisant defines "otherliness" as "what is more than us, beyond us, and yet organic to us, that continuity of being which ultimately nullifies the border between subject and object" (2024, 91).

[36] Allen-Paisant took this information from Césaire's "Discours sur l'art africain", where Césaire links the idea of mimesis to "'pre-modern' traditional cultures in which the human has not yet severed itself from nature" (2024, 78).

inter-energetic exchange" which Césaire sees applied in traditional African art, where the artist identifies with nature through seeking to "become-similar to it" rather than objectifying it through representation (78). This idea of mimesis brings us back to Allen-Paisant's idea of poetry as a "human collaboration with 'things'"(15), an exchange between beings or a "participation" (77). Poetic sound is a way in which this exchange, collaboration, participation can take place. Allen-Paisant describes (poetic) sound as "intrinsically 'oceanic', as it "operates beyond the signifier, defying the boundaries constitutive of 'meaning'" (77). For Allen-Paisaint, the 'oceanic' seems to be a state of being which implies a completely different way of knowing. Sound belongs to this 'oceanic' state, a state of being and knowing that although it "operates beyond the signifier", must also somehow contain both the signifier and the signified, breaking up the distinction between subject and object. [37] The creation of "incantatory, 'oceanic' poetic states" is made possible through, what is also very present in Césaire's own poetry, the sound elements of rhythm, anaphora and beat acquiring a "trance-like quality" (77, 87). This trance-state or "non-theistic ecstasy" is created in the space of "the unknowable, the un-languageable" (87-88). The 'oceanic' thus seems to denote an invisible space that cannot be captured by any language, but that one can participate in through sound.

Considering that Lorde invokes the goddess of oceans and refers to the divinities of the ocean(s)/sea/rivers/water [38] quite regularly in her poetry, makes this idea of sound as 'oceanic' all the more interesting. Also Afrekete, the trickster goddess and most beloved, youngest daughter of Agbê (son of Mawŭ/Sogbó) and Naétê (who both went down from the Thunder pantheon to reside and rule over the sea) is said to reside in the sea (Herskovits 1938, 151-156). The idea of sound as "attunement to otherliness" (91) through the act of mimesis sheds a new light on Lorde's poems and her recitation of them. As she conjures these mythological beings and identifies, fuses with the elements of nature they reside in, she is both them and herself. Through the various ways of using her voice (timbre, volume, velocity), rhythm and anaphora, she places herself amongst these beings as she enters the poetic, 'oceanic' state; in here, she is both "otherliness" (what is "beyond us, and yet organic to us" (91)) and herself. Her body transforms into a gateway to other worlds, physical and metaphysical. Hearing Lorde reciting her poems, is hearing her turn the poems into, as Allen-Paisant calls it, "an enlivened space, one of invocation and ceremony". Her voice and its resonance have a command, a presence. This is possibly how she re-appropriates her

[37] It must be noted here that one of the (para)religious traces Justine M. Bakker detects in Wynter's "demonic ground" is the "oceanic experience" in Hindu philosophy (2025, 7). In her earlier article "Locating the Oceanic in Sylvia Wynter's Demonic Ground" (2022), she argues that the term "ground" is fundamentally oceanic, and thus coins the term "demonic ocean" (2). The notion of "oceanic experiences" can be traced back to Alex Comfort, a scientist and physician known for his work *The Joy of Sex*. He links the "demonic" to quantum physics and these "oceanic experiences" (3-4). Bakker defines these "oceanic experiences" as "altered states of consciousness in which the boundary between self and other disappears" (2022, 4). This understanding of the "oceanic experience" resembles Allen-Paisant's implied meaning of the "oceanic".

[38] For instance in the poem "A Woman Speaks" she says: "and if you would know me/look into the entrails of Uranus/where the restless oceans pound" (BU, 4). She seems to be identifying herself with "restless oceans" and the sea. Earlier in this poem she says she "will leave [her] shape behind" "when the sea turns back".

damaged body, heals it, transmutes it. Also Allen-Paisant sees sound as otherliness as “a way out of trauma”. Sound as “invisible and passing through barriers” has been, for enslaved people and their descendants, a way to handle their captive body (92). I will return to the concept of mimesis as a way of liberating the body in my discussion of Lorde’s embodied encounter with the goddess Afrekete.

7. ‘Embodied mythology’: a way out of history and trauma

In this chapter, I will focus on the final, pivotal moment in *Zami*, Lorde’s erotic encounter with the goddess Afrekete. Understood in light of Césaire’s and Allen-Paisant’s interpretations of mimesis and “spirit possession” and their notion of “myth as realness”, I am arguing that ‘embodied mythology’ as illustrated by Lorde, can be a way out of history, and a way out of trauma, towards liberation.

7.1. African myth/legend/religion as “*realness*”

> *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.*
>
> Their names, selves, faces feed me like corn before labor. I live each of them as a piece of me, and I choose these words with the same grave concern with which I choose to push speech into poetry, the mattering core, the forward visions of all our lives (Z, 303-304).

It becomes clear that for Lorde, the African mythological realm is a lived spiritual *reality*, both physical and metaphysical, immanent and transcendent. All throughout her poetry, essays and biomythography, she speaks of these Black goddesses and warrior women as part of herself; they are co-authoring figures that contribute to her story, her narrative identity. As mentioned in the interview with Rowell and as becomes explicit in the above quotation from *Zami*’s epilogue, they are her ancestors, just as real and present to her as her family, friends, and lovers. They exist outside of her, in the realms of the Sky Pantheon and Thunder Pantheon, the earth and seas,[39] but they also seem to materialize through her, feed her, become her. She invokes their presence in addressing the knowledgeable poet that resides in her body. She shares a history with them - as “women-bonded women have always been some part of the power of Black communities, from our unmarried aunts to the amazons of

[39] In Melville Herskovits’ book *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom,* Mawu-Lisa (male-female) is said to reside in the Sky Pantheon. Sky priests tell how the twins Mawu and Lisa had fourteen children, of which the first three, Sagbatá, Sogbó and Agbê, became founders of pantheons (1938, 105). In “A Glossary of African Names Used in the Poems” in *Black Unicorn,* Mawu-Lisa is said to be represented not only as “sky-goddess-god”, but also as “west-east, night-day, moon-sun”. More often, Mawu is regarded as the “Creator of the Universe” and Lisa is called her first son or twin brother. She is also called “the mother of all the other *Vodu*, and as such, is connected to the *Orisha* Yemanjá” (BU, 125). In Herskovits’ book, Afrekete is said to reside in the sea. She is not mentioned in the glossary of BU. However, Afrekete’s male equivalent Eshu is mentioned in the glossary of BU, since he is present in the poems. I will return to the divine figure of Afrekete in the next paragraph.

Dahomey" (SO, 115) - [40] whilst they also provide her with "forward visions" and hope for change. They contain past, present, future and all that is beyond.

On the basis of the findings so far, I think it apt to denote Lorde's understanding of mythology as "realness", which is the word used by Allen-Paisant to describe myth. Allen-Paisant says, and I quote the sentence in full, also because of the clarification it offers regarding the concept of myth as truth, spoken of by Césaire [41] in "Poetry and Knowledge": "Myth, in its primal sense, should not be understood as a narrative of origin or identificatory mechanism, as in widespread contemporary renderings, but as a mimetic interpretation of reality, operating as such beyond the spatio-temporal" (2024, 57). To translate in Wynter's terms: myth as "realness" leaves the grammar of master codes and operates in the "space" of a New Science of the Word, thus moving beyond conventional epistemologies and ontologies, offering a viewpoint of reality as it is outside the boundaries of our cultural symbolic system. For Wynter, a New Science of the Word is precisely not a science that includes myth, however for Césaire and Allen-Paisant it precisely is myth. This is because they dislodge the concept of myth from any sort of cultural framework and see it as a mode of consciousness, "*a way out of history*" (2024, 49)".[42] I think Lorde does the same when she acknowledges the presence of the Black mother (who is in the body, yet older than the body), the poet, and the idea of feelings as knowledge, in each human (SO, 92). She does so in her interview with Rich, but also in her letter to Daly.

In her letter to Daly, Lorde refers to "African myth/legend/religion" as the places where she found "the true nature of old female power" (SO, 58). She says this "old female power" comes from "Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa"; from the "warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan" (58). The important message in this letter, is that Lorde thinks the power of these Black warriors and goddesses is not limited to the Black community; they are the "Black foremothers (..) where european women learned to love" (SO, 59). Also here, she takes the Black foremothers out of the African/diasporic cultural context and considers them to be the source of all women's power and love. For Lorde, Black goddesses and warriors thus transcend culture and are part of all women's (and men's) being. Myth understood this way is an epistemology of humanness. I am reminded here of Wynter's reference to southwest Africa as the "human origin geography", the place where the human's origin as the co-evolution of bios/mythoi, the storytelling species, lies.

[40] In the glossary in BU, Amazons are said to be "highly-prized, well-trained, and ferocious women warriors who guarded, and fought under the direction of, the Panther Kings of Dahomey" (124).
[41] Césaire speaks of mythologies as true: ".. all the mythologies that the poet tumbles about, all the symbols he collects and regilds, are true. And poetry alone takes them seriously. Which goes to make poetry a serious business (Césaire 1990, liii).
[42] Allen-Paisant describes the idea of spirit possession as a mode of consciousness in his chapter "Possession as Paradigm of Consciousness", which I will return to in the next paragraph.

7.2. The erotic encounter with Afrekete: "spirit possession" and (physical) liberation

> Heard, seen, tasted, felt, and lived in the ethereal shadows of Man's world, however, a habeas viscus unearths the freedom that exists within the hieroglyphics of the flesh (Weheliye 2014, 138).

> Possession by the living world - for that is what the gods, the *Mystères*, the *lwas* symbolize for the enslaved African and her ancestors- emerges from a resistance to *modernity's possession*. In lending their body to the acting power of spirits, the possessed widens their time and their pace, enacts a known freedom, a known sovereignty of time. Spirit possession is resistance to the domination of time - which is another way of saying, to the domination of the body (Allen-Paisant 2024, 7).

> *And I remember Afrekete, who came out of a dream to me always being hard and real.*
> We were each of us both together (Z, 296-297).

Afrekete; "mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved" (Z, 303). It is in fact tricky to get a clear grasp of who Afrekete really is. She is hardly mentioned in sources on West African religion and mythology. It is the Yoruban deity Legba/Elegba/Elegbara/Eshu who is generally known to be the divine trickster or god of mischief (Herskovits 1938, 223). Herskovits does mention that Legba is of either sex, but almost never feminine (222). Interestingly enough, it is Eshu [43] and not Afrekete who appears in *The Black Unicorn*. This makes her unique and sudden life-changing appearance at the end of *Zami* all the more powerful. Here, Afrekete is the linguist, interpreter, transmitter, personifying mischief and unpredictability, all of which are usually associated with Eshu. In Herskovits' book *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom*, Afrekete is said to be the youngest daughter of Agbê (son of Mawu) and Naétê, who came down from the Thunder pantheon to establish themselves in the sea. Agbê stays in communication with Mawu up high, at the point where sea and sky meet, the horizon. This is why it is said that he and his children are both in the sea and in the sky as their home is where these meet (1939, 152). Afrekete as the youngest daughter is "cunning", the favorite, and she is known to play the role of the trickster. Herskovits explains that Afrekete is compared to Legba, but there are in fact differing opinions about her exact position. She is said to know all secrets, spread gossip and guard the riches of the sea. Also, she is known to occasionally possess creatures, who then "dance much like Legba". Afrekete is very loved by

[43] In BU Eshu is described as Yemanjá's (or as Mawulisa's) youngest and most intelligent son. He is "the mischievous messenger between all the other *Orisha-Vodu* and humans, he knows their different languages and is an accomplished linguist who transmits and interprets. (..) Eshu is a prankster, also, a personification of all the unpredictable elements in life. (..) Eshu-Elegba has no priests, and in many Dahomean religious rituals, his part his danced by a woman with an attached phallus" (BU, 124-125).

the Dahomeans, who say she is the most powerful of all her family (1938, 155-156). This powerful, cunning, trickster sea goddess is personified in Kitty, a woman Lorde meets at a party in New York (Z, 287).

The pivotal moment of love making between Audre and Kitty/Afrekete has been written about by various scholars, such as Keating, Morris and Ball, mentioned in paragraph 5.2. Their most important findings and interpretations of this moment concern emotional, physical and spiritual healing; the reclaiming of matrilineal heritage, African religion and (erotic) power; and finding self-knowledge and language (from the linguist, the trickster) to name herself, even becoming the Black goddess herself (briefly discussed in 5.3).[44] I will touch upon several of these insights, while I base my own interpretation of this moment on the concepts of mimesis and spirit possession as explained by Allen-Paisant (in turn based on Césaire's thoughts), placing it within the paradigm of "thinking with spirits". I present it as a way in which Lorde's body and self are liberated from damaging master codes and internalized racism.

Allen-Paisant detects a clear convergence between poetry and possession in Césaire's work. Césaire's understanding of spirit possession is based on the concept of "saisissement", [45] "seizure" (2022, 199). Césaire specifically refers to shamanic "seizure" as a new paradigm of being and thinking as it is a "participation" in the life force, in every living and non-living thing that is endowed with spirit (199).[46] The person possessed, according to Césaire, is 'seized by the world' and thus 'he begins to play the world, to *mime* the world'. The person is '*possessed.*...exactly as in Vodou...he is transformed into something else' (quoted in Allen-Paisant 2024, 52). Important is that, as explained earlier, mimesis is not to be understood as imitation, but as a state of being where the possessed person is both the other and himself. The person "participates" in the life force and the life force enters him; it is an "inter-energetic exchange" (2024, 67). As Césaire bases his philosophy of poetry (as knowledge) on the concept of spirit possession and the "realness" of myth, the poet is the one that, in Allen-Paisant's words "seeks to conjure or attract powers of Earth to himself, to be penetrated by the essence of life, while aligning himself with an African ancestral construal of the Real" (2024, 69). According to Césaire, connecting, thinking, being with African ancestry and myth is connecting, thinking, being with the essence of life. Through

[44] Morris describes this erotic meeting as a resolution to the emotional and material destructiveness of racism, evoking a sense of "spiritual protection" and "sacred life inherent in their blackness" (2002, 170). Keating considers this "revisionary mythmaking" as way for Lorde to reclaim her roots in the African religion and to find validation in Black women's power (1992, 28). Keating says that through her love making with Afrekete, the "language-maker", Lorde "renames herself and becomes the Black goddess" (29). Ball interprets this erotic meeting as a "theaphany" where Lorde "receives the gift of knowledge of herself and learns a way to live on the borders of her multiple identities" (2001, 61).

[45] Césaire borrowed this term from anthropologist Leo Frobenius, who inspired him in his thoughts about spirit possession. Frobenius questioned and challenged the rationalist divide between 'primitivity' and 'civilization' by thinking of civilization as a living organism that maintains its own 'organic' cycles, independent of humans. Central to his thinking was the idea of 'primal seizure'(*Ergriffenheit*); he believed that a people's 'feeling of life' (*Lebensgefühl*) is originally a powerful primal manifestation of the life force. The 'seizure' can appear involuntary as it is an intense emotional reaction to life within a community (Allen-Pasaint 2024, 52-53; quotes from Frobenius, *Le Destin des civilisations*).

[46] Allen-Paisant took the quoted words from Césaire's essay "L'Appel au magicien".

mimesis, the world as it is (the visible and invisible) can be entered by and known to the possessed (poet). Or as Allen-Paisant points out: “poetry thus involves rendering present to the senses that which is not, functioning at that juncture where spirit and matter meet” (2024, 62). This is why Césaire thinks of poetry as a new paradigm of thinking and being, of humanness, that completely opposes euro-western epistemologies and ontologies. As the body is always involved in this (poetic) “participation”, “seizure”, “mime”, the question whether or not mythology (as spirit, essence of life, ancestry) is embodied, becomes in fact redundant.

Based on Césaire’s understanding of spirit possession, I interpret the erotic exchange between Audre and Afrekete as an example of such a “seizure”. The words “we were each of us both together” (Z, 297) are key in the interpretation of their meeting as an “inter-energetic exchange”. Lorde in fact calls the erotic a “life force”, a “creative energy empowered”, “knowledge” (SO, 45). Not diverging from the idea that this explosive, sensual and passionate moment is bringing her back to her core, providing her with the ability to know, name and love herself and her body anew, it can simultaneously be understood as her partaking in an enormous life force that reaches beyond herself. She enters a new mode of consciousness, a new way of knowing and being, where she is “participating” in Afrekete’s energy and the world’s energy all at once. She is “seized” by Afrekete, her trickster appearance unexpected and intense. In this seizure, she mimes her. She becomes Afrekete, yet also remains herself. In this mutual participation they are enveloped by the natural world, the cosmos. The love making scene contains all kinds of imageries of fruits, flowers, landscapes, the moon, the ocean; “the silver hard sweetness of the full moon, reflected in the shiny mirrors of our sweat-slippery dark bodies, sacred as the ocean at high tide” (Z, 300), and“ slowly playing my tongue through your familiar forests (...) each surface touched by each other’s flame” (Z, 296). The motions and movements of their bodies are analogous to the motions and “rhythms” of nature, in particular the seas and skies; “the deep undulations and tidal motions of your strong body” and “we rode each other across the thundering space, dripped like light from the peak of each other’s tongue” (Z, 296-297).

Afrekete, the sea goddess who exists at the horizon, the liminal space between earth and skies, seduces, lures, leads her into a poetic, “oceanic” state. Even though I am diverging from Ball’s idea of Afrekete as an archetype (or at least this is not the approach I have chosen for), she makes similar references to the significance of the natural and oceanic imagery in this scene (2001, 70-71). I think that Ball’s interpretation of the effects of Lorde’s use of poetic language written in italic (“rising at times to incantation”) as opposed to the rest of the text hits home (70). Lorde alternates between italic and non-italic pieces of text in order to let the two landscapes of Audre’s world and Afrekete’s world merge; “the mythic world has appeared through the temporal world, and Audre has experienced the reality of both” (Ball 2001, 73). Afrekete “came out of a dream” yet is also “always hard and real”. Here, the idea of mythology as (physical) liberation comes to full circle: Audre’s meeting with Afrekete defies time as we know it. This trance-like embodied experience, which contains past, present, future and beyond all at once, is healing her as it ruptures the linearity of her narrative identity and provides a way for her to move beyond the spatio-temporal. Possessed by Afrekete, Lorde finds a “way out of history” and a way of out the “domination

of her body" (the grip of racist and homophobic narrative); she finds a "*way out* of trauma" (Allen -Paisant 2024, 49, 91-92), which opens up new visions and possibilities for the future.

The idea of embodied mythology understood in light of spirit possession questions the notion of narrative identity as linear and turns it into something circular, opening up spaces that previously seemed inaccessible. Allen-Paisant says: "by being born racialized, one is intrinsically born becoming a 'subject'. This is a theft of time, a theft of the connection we are meant to have with real life" (2024, 91-92). Lorde steals back her time and her body from racist, sexist and homophobic destruction by passing through myth. Her flesh is purged from damaging narratives, false master codes and from now on marked with a new story of liberation and power:

> "I never saw Afrekete again, but her print remains upon my life with the resonance and power of an emotional tattoo" (Z, 300).

8. Conclusion

The problems of "recognition deficiency" and "epistemic rigging" in relation to narrative identity in both individuals and groups cannot be addressed without revising the epistemology of humanness, and thereby Ricoeur's narrative identity theory. Fanon's concept of sociogeny and Wynter's sociogenetic principle form the building blocks of Wynter's theory of the hybrid human as bios/mythoi. This hybrid human, a storytelling species, is always already culturally programmed. Through the transmutation of social phenomena into ontogenic phenomena, cultural stories are alchemically made flesh. As Wynter's theory forms the foundation of my argument that narrative identity always interacts with the body, I am proposing a sociogenetic principle of narrative identity. The body as the site of damage caused by racist, sexist and homophobic stories, can also be the site of liberation.

Through my case study of Lorde's work, I demonstrated how "A New Science of the Word" or "poetic knowledge" can form a renewed intersection between body and story ('embodied mythology'), in a positive and liberating way. Poetry as knowledge, as mimesis and spirit possession, as portal to myth as realness, offers Lorde a way out of history and thus a way out of trauma: it is a chance for her to rewrite narrative identity infused with myth, opening doors to new visions, new ways of being, towards freedom. Poetic knowledge pushes us to think of the concepts of time and history anew. In light of this new vision of time and history, narrative identity can be understood as circular rather than linear. Or, as Allen-Paisant says: "human practice in the present is human action on the past (…) Nothing is over" (2024, 12). Ricoeur himself did not want to think of the past as closed off and complete as he urges us to see the concept of history as "taking the risk of resuscitating and reanimating the unkept promises of the past" (quoted in McCarthy 2007, 238), even though he did not specify how. Both Césaire and Allen-Paisant have presented us with a way in which to actually rupture the linearity of narrative identity.

Even though Lorde's work can be considered as one illustration of the healing, freeing and (re)defining of an individual's narrative identity, she always hoped and fought for the liberation of all women in similar situations. She dreamt of "the House of Difference", where difference does not divide people, but is celebrated and used as an empowering force, thus moving beyond any hierarchies or distorted power relations. It is why Fanon, Wynter, Césaire and Allen-Paisant argue for an alternative epistemology of humanness; one that abolishes Man and liberates all of humanity rather than specific groups.

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Appendix

ZAMI

And I remember Afrekete, who came out of a dream to me always being hard and real as the fire hairs along the underedge of my navel. (...). I held you, lay between your brown legs, slowly playing my tongue through your familiar forests, slowly licking and swallowing as the deep undulations and tidal motions of your strong body slowly mashed ripe banana into a beige cream that mixed with the juices of your electric flesh. Our bodies met again, each surface touched with each other's flame, from the tips of our curled toes to our tongues, and locked into our own wild rhythms, we rode each other across the thundering space, dripped like light from the peak of each other's tongue.

We were each of us both together (Z, 296-297).

DISCUSSED POEMS (from the Collections *The Black Unicorn* and *From a Land Where Other People Live*)

A Woman Speaks

Moon marked and touched by sun
my magic is unwritten
but when the sea turns back
it will leave my shape behind.
I seek no favor
untouched by blood
unrelenting as the curse of love
permanent as my errors
or my pride
I do not mix
love with pity
nor hate with scorn
and if you would know me
look into the entrails of Uranus
where the restless oceans pound.

I do not dwell
within my birth nor my divinities
who am ageless and half-grown
and still seeking
my sisters
witches in Dahomey
wear me inside their coiled cloths

as our mother did
mourning.

I have been woman
for a long time
beware my smile
I am treacherous with old magic
and the noon's new fury
with all your wide futures
promised
I am
woman
and not white.

(BU, 4-5)

From the House of Jemanjá

My mother had tow faces and a frying pot
where she cooked up her daughters
into girls
before she fixed our dinner.
My mother had two faces
and a broken pot
where she hid out a perfect daughter
who was not me
I am the sun and moon and forever hungry
for her eyes.

I bear two women upon my back
one dark and rich and hidden
in the ivory hungers of the other
mother
pale as a witch
yet steady and familiar
brings me bread and terror
in my sleep
her breasts are huge exciting anchors
in the midnight storm.

All this has been
before
in my mother's bed
time has no sense
I have no brothers
and my sisters are cruel.

Mother I need
mother I need
mother I need your blackness now
as the august earth needs rain.
I am

the sun and moon and forever hungry
the sharpened edge
where day and night shall meet
and not be
one.

(BU, 6-7)

The Winds of Orisha

I

This land will not always be foreign.
How many of its women ache to bear their stories
robust and screaming like the earth erupting grain
or thrash in padded chains mute as bottles
hands fluttering traces of resistance
on the backs of once lovers
half the truth
knocking in the brain like an angry steampipe
how many long to work or split open
so bodies venting into silence
can plan the next move?

Tiresias took 500 years they say
to progress into woman
growing smaller and darker and more powerful
until nut-like, she went to sleep in a bottle
Tiresias took 500 years to grow into woman
so do not despair of your sons.

II

Impatient legends speak through my flesh
changing this earth's formation
spreading
I become myself an incantation
dark raucous characters
leaping back and forth across bland pages

Mother Yemanja raises her breasts to begin my labor
near water
the beautiful Oshun and I lie down together
in the heat of her body's truth
my voice comes stronger
Shango will be my brother roaring out of the sea
earth shakes our darkness
swelling into each other
warning winds announce us living
as Oya, Oya my sister my daughter
destroys the crust of the tidy beaches
and Eshu's Black laughter
turns up the neat sleeping sand.

III

The heart of this country's tradition is its wheat men
dying for money
dying for water for markets for power
over all people's children
they sit in their chains on their dry earth
before nightfall
telling tales as they wait for completion
hoping the young ones can hear them
earthshaking fear wreathes their blank weary faces
most of them have spent their lives and their wives
in labor
most of them have never seen beaches
but as Oya my sister moves out of the mouths
of their sons and daughters against them
I swell up from the page of their daily heralds
leap out of the almanacs
instead of an answer to their search for rain
they will read me
the dark cloud
meaning something entire
and different.

When the winds of Orisha blow
even the roots of grass
quicken.

(FLWOPL, 37-38)

Outside

In the centre of a harsh and spectrumed city
all things natural are strange.
I grew up in a genuine confusion
between grass and weeds and flowers
and what “colored” meant
except for clothes you couldn’t bleach
and nobody called me nigger
until I was thirteen.
Nobody lynched my momma
but what she’d never been
had bleached her face of everything
but very private furies
and made the other children
call me yellow snot at school.

And how many times have I called myself back
through my bones confusion
black
like marrow meaning meat
for my soul’s hunger
and how many times have you cut me
and run in the streets
my own blood
who do you think me to be
that you are terrified of becoming
or what do you see in my face
you have not already discarded
in your own mirror
what face do you see in my eyes
that you will someday
come to
acknowledge your own.

Who shall I curse that I grew up
believing in my mother’s face
or that I lived in fear of the potent darkness
that wore my father’s shape
they have both marked me
with their blind and terrible love
and I am lustful now for my own name.

Between the canyons of my parents’ silences
mother bright and father brown
I seek my own shapes now
for they never spoke of me

except as theirs
and the pieces that I stumble and fall over
I still record as proof
that I am beautiful
twice
blessed with the images
of who they were
and who I thought them to be
of what I move toward
and through
and what I need
to leave behind me
for most of all I am
blessed within my selves
who are come
to make our shattered faces whole.

(BU, 63-64)