

Queering Masturbation in Lorde's Life and Writing

Eric Sipyinyu Njeng
University of Burundi

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Eric Sipyinyu Njeng,
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Abstract: In his article "Queering Masturbation in Lorde's Life and Writing" Eric Sipyinyu Njeng discusses masturbation in Audre Lorde's life and works to signal an important aspect of her oeuvre often neglected in scholarship. Lorde stands out among prominent queer queens by demonstrating theory corporeally thereby going beyond mere theory and positing her body as a space of complex sexual passions. When Judith Butler speaks of gender as performative rather than embodied, Lorde theorizes and foregrounds this in her works and self and celebrates a sexual matrix that ranges from heterosexuality to homosexuality to auto-sexuality. Lorde places masturbation between the binary hetero/homosexual options which privilege one form over the other suggesting that the hetero/homoerotic dichotomy is not transacted on a level field of emotional and analytical impartiality, but of homophobic pressure intent on devaluing other forms of sexuality. By forcing the third singularly corporeal option between the two, Lorde interpellates generalized homophobia and anti-masturbatory sentiment which remain pervasive in culture and society.

Eric Sipinyu NJENG

Queering Masturbation in Lorde's Life and Writing

Drawing on tenets of queer theory, in the study at hand I discuss on an essential yet neglected sexual alternative in Audre Lorde's oeuvre: masturbation. However, before I discuss Lorde's innovative thought about the practice of masturbation and its relevance for women and culture, as well as to herself in her life and in her writing, I present a brief introduction to the history of the masturbation and its understanding. Like homosexuality, masturbation has a history of erasure. Interestingly, in scholarship and in public discourse many situate masturbation as a subject of concern in public arenas of the eighteenth century, just as Michel Foucault situates homosexuality as arising in the nineteenth century. Curiously, one of the most important texts of Western culture, the Bible, is split on the penalty to be inflicted on the masturbator. One example is Onan who refuses to make children in his brother's name by choosing to spill his semen outside of the woman as a form of contraception: "Now in case a man has an emission of semen go out of him, he must then bathe all his flesh in water and be unclean until the evening. And any garment and any skin upon which the emission of semen gets to must be washed with water and be unclean until the evening" (Leviticus 15:16-17). However, whether the man has the ejaculation involuntarily or voluntarily is not specified. This suggests that the Old Testament acknowledges semen discharge as not necessarily resulting from a heterosexual liaison. That a cleansing ritual is proposed as a holy rite positions it as an option, albeit an unholy one. A man can ejaculate provided he purifies himself through a cleansing ritual. When contrasted with the former quote, masturbation begins to appear as wrong only when it is tied to the refusal to procreate. I should note briefly that with regard to non-Western cultures, various forms of masturbation existed among Buddhist monks in the fourth century BCE and the prevalence of masturbatory practices among monks in India was similar to Western culture whereby in both instances the practice was penalized (see, e.g., Derret). In English it was with the anonymous publication of *Onania, or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* in about 1710 and Samuel August Tissot's *Onanism; or a Treatise Upon the Disorder Produced by Masturbation* in 1776 that masturbation received public as well as pedagogical, legal, religious, etc., attention.

Allan Hunt situates masturbation as becoming an issue of concern in England especially among the middle and upper classes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as arising from parents' concern about their sons in boarding schools. Hunt suggests that anti-masturbation in the period can be explained by capitalist social relations and increasing urbanization which gave rise to a preoccupation with control. Foucault shows this relationship between masturbation and the negative perception of it connected to economics when he writes of the precocious onanist as one "in danger of compromising not so much his physical strength as his intellectual capacity, his moral fiber, and the obligation to preserve a healthy line of descent for his family and his social class" (121) and "Parents, families, educators, doctors, and eventually psychologists would have to take charge, in a continuous way, of this precious and perilous, dangerous and endangered sexual potential: this pedagogization was especially evident in the war against onanism, which in the West lasted nearly two centuries" (104). Masturbation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was believed to have pathological effects such as the deterioration of eyesight, disturbance of the nervous system, epilepsy, and other disorders. Further, in a review of Thomas W. Laqueur's *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, Claire Scrine comments on the radical shift in anti-masturbatory sentiment in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries: "In an era advocating self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-expression, solitary sex was embraced by many as a sign of liberation and a key to sexual happiness. This message seemed especially to resonate with the women's movement, and Laqueur explores feminist advocacy of masturbation as freeing women from the domination of a heterosexual model of sexuality and the feminist reaction against Freud's denigration of clitoral orgasm" (748).

Foucault highlights the false belief that non-procreative sex has negative effects: "it was one of the tenets of eighteenth and nineteenth century medicine that precocious sex would eventually result in sterility, impotence, frigidity, the inability to experience pleasure, or deadening of the senses" (153). In another passage Foucault captures the distaste for masturbation in Western culture and the association of the practice with pathological aberrations necessitating control and cure: "First there was

medicine, via the "nervous disorders"; next psychiatry, when it set out to discover the etiology of mental illness, focusing its gaze first on "excess", then onanism, then frustration, then 'frauds against procreation,' but especially when it annexed the whole of the sexual perversions as its own provinces; criminal justice, too, which had long been concerned with sexuality, particularly in the forms of "heinous" crimes and crimes against nature" (30). Foucault's suggestion is that any form of sexuality that could not support the economic and therefore the political, religious, and social imperative of the day was an aberration looked upon with foreboding. This helped to silence but not to erase the fact that eroticism must begin in the self; one is first aware of his/her own sexual desires before extending them outwards. And Simone de Beauvoir argues that "in our modern societies masturbation is popularly regarded as a danger and sin: many children and young people who are addicts practice it only with horrible fear and anguish. It is interference of society and particularly of parents that make a vice of solitary pleasure; but more than one young boy has been spontaneously frightened by his ejaculations: blood or semen, any flowing of his substance seems to him disquieting; it is his life, his manna that is escaping" (161).

D.H. Lawrence captures misconceptions of sex in his effort to free the word "fuck" from censorship by succumbing to censorship himself. Considered as one of the most sexually open writers of his age, Lawrence's conception of pornography and masturbation shed light on the extent to which sex was widely regarded as basically heterosexual. For Lawrence masturbation and pornography are interrelated: "In young and old, man or woman, boy or girl, modern pornography is a direct provocative of masturbation" (1962). He even goes further to make an argument for what may appear as rape over harmless masturbation: "But in masturbation there is nothing but loss. There is no reciprocity. There is merely the spending away of a certain force, and no return. The body remains, in a sense, a corpse, after the act of self-abuse. There is no change, only deadening ...Two people may destroy one another in sex. But they cannot produce the null effect of masturbation" (1963). "Two people destroying themselves" may be interpreted to suggest a violent encounter that may involve coercion or the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. That Lawrence should hold such a view underscores the prevalence of negative attitudes towards masturbation even among ostensibly progressive minds.

Commenting on the subject of female genital mutilation and its connection to the silencing of female auto-eroticism and masturbation, Mary Daly argues that in some communities women are circumcised in order to disable them from indulging in masturbatory practices. While masturbation is permitted for girls, it is not for women who had to enjoy only "interior" sensations thereby accentuating their subservience to men. It appears that most sexologists situate a woman's primary sexual excitation in the clitoris and thereby showing a link between women's sexuality and masturbation: "So far her erotic feeling has been clitoris. It is difficult to find out whether masturbation is less common in girls than in boys; she engages in this practice during her first two years, perhaps even from the first months of her life; it would seem that she gives it up at about two, to take it up later" (de Beauvoir 318). Thus the practice of clitoridectomy is a deplorable practice in place even today to prevent women from erotic and sexual pleasure. Patriarchy declared war against the clitoris especially because it threatened hegemonic structures which depend on reproduction and the exploitation of labor. Given that the clitoris stood apart as the only sexual organ whose primary role was pleasure engendered fear that women could become too independent. In turn, this suggests that women's pleasure is not necessarily bound to the penis making masturbation prior to other forms of sexual alternatives, a fact denied by patriarchy and its institutions evident for example in the practice of genital mutilation: "Only a mutilated woman is considered 100 percent feminine. By removal of her specifically female identified organ, which is not necessary for the male's pleasure or for reproductive servitude, she becomes a woman" (Daly 167).

An important view for my argumentation for masturbation as explored in Lorde's writing I find Kate Millet's take on women's corporeal autoeroticism particularly apt when she argues that the biology of women suggests an affinity toward masturbation: "The seat of response is the clitoris, which triggers other responses (the enlargement of the labia majora, the flow of transudation, vaginal spasms, etc.). Sexual arousal may have its source in the stimulation of body tissues, erogenous or otherwise, or in purely psychological excitation (thoughts, emotions, words, pictures, etc.). The clitoris, one might point out, is the only human organ which is specific to sexuality and to sexual pleasure: the penis has other functions" (166). As both queer theoretician and embodiment of queer desire

Lorde goes beyond mere theory by positing her body as a space of complex sexual passions and performances. When Judith Butler envisions gender and sexuality as "performative" rather than innate, Lorde theorises and foregrounds this concern in her works and self. Butler sums the dichotomy between anatomy and desire when she writes that "the construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender—indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another" (500). This suggests that standard conceptions of gender and sexuality have to be reconsidered by exposing the ideological forces and their privileging and prejudicial attitudes toward certain definitions of gender and sexual orientation. Lorde celebrates not just her lesbian dimension, but a sexual matrix that ranges from hetero-eroticism and homoeroticism to auto-eroticism thereby challenging the standard notion of gender and sexuality as standard definitions in human experience. Masturbation as the highest form of sexual autonomy is not a myth Lorde invents, but a clinically tested sexual option as seen in the findings by, for example, Masters and Johnson.

In *The Cancer Journals* and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* Lorde demonstrates her capacity to transcend identity ascriptions by first undermining identity and then signifying desire as situated corporeally. Gregory W. Bredbeck suggests the capacity for queer theory to transcend gay and lesbian theory thus: "Gay theory examines sexual difference as it is applicable to the male gender; lesbian theory examines sexual difference as it is applicable to the female gender; queer theory examines differences in order to undermine the very notion of identity" (449; see also Vasvári <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1290>>). Although Lorde defines herself as Black, woman, mother, lesbian, her works suggest that her multiple identities are not fixed concepts, but are meant to negate the very concept of identity in the sense that if identity is not stable but "performative," the whole concept of identity collapses in preposterousness. Masturbation as Lorde posits is neither homosexual nor heterosexual, but something that falls within and transcends the two. She uses her personal experience and the experience of mythological and legendary women to chart an alternative sexual paradigm in what she terms a "biomythography" (De Veaux 297). Arguing from the point of view that gender is not corporeal, but a construction of culture and power, autoerotic encounters become an option that unite all sexual possibilities and therefore undermining difference: desire and identity are neither conterminous nor congruous, desire seeks to unite while identity ascriptions are divisive. As a subject of multiple identities forced on her by variables of power, Lorde's work mirrors a search for healing. It is my opinion that masturbation is among the options that Lorde offers not only to the marginalized, but as a solution to negative difference.

Most critics and scholars engage with Lorde's Black lesbian identity with the risk of normalizing lesbianism as a fixed corporeal identity. Adrienne Rich, Barbara Christian, Ruth Ginzberg, Lynda Hall, Ann Louis Keating, Joan Martin, and others are concerned with Lorde's lesbian identity and her capacity to share private secret testimonies with others. While these authors do justice to her works in general, there is the need to extend her understanding of lesbianism as part of her sexual trajectory rather than as an ultimate end. Lorde's searching is evidenced in the multiple battle fronts which engaged her whole life and work beginning in her family and extending into the larger world and ultimately nesting in her body itself. Among the leading deconstructionist of popularized conceptions of sexual identity Lorde goes further by laying bare the most private arenas of her life: if sex is to be a liberating and empowering force, one must have power over its sources and one must be able to provide, guarantee, and safeguard his/her sexual satisfaction. Coming to the understanding that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are often disempowering because they create dependence on others, Lorde celebrates the ancient, closeted, despised, but arguably the most private and corporeal sexual practice: masturbation. There is no doubt that all humans masturbate to varying degrees and are forced by forces of culture to deny the act of masturbation. As one of the rare poets who affirm masturbation as an empowering sexual alternative, Lorde advocates for one of the safest and most economical of erotic alternatives. This is suggested through her engagement with the auto-erotic nature of the female body itself.

Lorde's sexuality is generated by an early realization that the sexuality of a woman is not dependent on that of a man, but in the womanly experience. By celebrating masturbation as an erotically charged and satisfying sexual alternative, Lorde stresses the ontological corollary between masturba-

tion and women's sexual independence and suggests that it is easier for a woman to satisfy her erotic impulses and that her many erogenous zones point to a corporeal auto-erotic nature. Luce Irigaray situates female sexuality as auto-erotic in the sense that a woman's sexual organs are always in contact: "Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other" (317). On this note, de Beauvoir charts the explication of women's sexual arousal by accentuating women's natural urge towards masturbation when she argues that "None the less it is beyond doubt that vaginal pleasure exists; and vaginal masturbation, for that matter – in adult women – seems more common than Kinsey indicates" (373). Irigaray and de Beauvoir suggest that the female body is biologically conditioned to be autoerotic and therefore cancelling out the primacy of heterosexual and/or homosexual relations.

Lorde's longing to be both male and female is evident in her writing about the interaction with her bifurcated self: making her both subject and object and freeing her from the horror of dependence as she writes that "I would like to enter a woman the way any man can, and to be entered—to leave and be left hot and hard and soft all at the same time in the cause of our loving" (*Zami*7). This suggests her tendency to be both male and female by accepting the primacy of androgyny and blurs anatomical and gender boundaries as both gender and anatomy merge and coalesce in a complex unity. She is female and male, masculine and feminine. Masturbating is empowering as it makes her both giver and receiver of the gifts of the human body. Cheryl Clarke analyses Lorde's thought by surveying sexual representations by comparing Lorde, Ntozake Shange, and Alexis de Veaux and charts the effort Black women writers exert in order to be liberated from the bounds of heterosexuality. Clarke argues that Lorde goes further than Shange and De Veaux by legitimizing what patriarchy considers illegitimate. Women are brought up ashamed of their biology thereby limiting their emotional and intellectual potentials. Daly sees this negative perception as emanating from patriarchal and socially constructed misconceptions about women and women's sexuality with regard to nature's gift to women, menstruation: "The menstruating woman is called filthy, sick, unbalanced, ritually impure. In patriarchy her bloodshed is made into a badge of shame, a sign of her radical ontological impurity" (248) and de Beauvoir posits that "since patriarchal times only evil powers have been attributed to the feminine flow. Pliny said that a menstruating woman ruins crops, destroys gardens, kills bees, and so on; and that if she touches wine, it becomes vinegar; milk is soured, and the like" (149). In a historical context, I refer here also to James George Frazer who captures prevalent bias of patriarchy about women's impurity during menstruation. Menstruating women are tabooed during which time they are quarantined and must not come in touch with men: "As soon as signs of that condition made themselves apparent in a young girl she was carefully segregated from all but female company, and had to live by herself in a small hut away from the gaze of the villagers or of the male members of the roving band. While in that awful state, she had to abstain from touching anything belonging to man, or the spoils of any venison or other animal, lest she would thereby pollute the same, and condemn the hunters to failure, owing to the anger of the game thus slighted" (190).

Further, Gloria Steinem questions the conception of menstruation as unclean by projecting it to men themselves. Such a possibility would reverse the negative cast that menstruation has on women and Steinem underscores the possibility of men turning their apparent weaknesses into strengths, for example making the testes (the most vulnerable part of the male) into a symbol of courage, while women are forced by patriarchy to accept their sexual organ as "weaknesses." By celebrating her first menstrual flow and uniting it with a masturbatory ecstatic feeling, Lorde makes menstruation an initiation into the ecstatic world of womanhood. Whereas most women's first menstrual experience arrives with a sense of foreboding, Lorde merges the imagery – the tactile, smell, and sight – with the sensation of erotic play and orgasm. The intimate sensation of the emission between her thighs and its fragrance thrust her into a world of self-sufficiency. Lorde merges cooking/menstruation/masturbation as womanly experiences which are interrelated and exalting. It is significant that her auto-erotic experience is not done in the privacy of her bedroom, but in the kitchen while cooking with her mother.

Celebrating her auto-erotic sexuality by stressing on its corporeal nature, Lorde corroborates the findings of William Masters and Virginia Johnson that masturbatory stimulation in women produces the most prolonged orgasms. In this context I refer to Susan Lydon's research who cites the findings of Masters and Johnson suggesting that women enjoy masturbatory stimulation more than penal pene-

tration: "1) the dichotomy of vaginal and clitoral orgasm is entirely false. Anatomically, all orgasms are centred in the clitoris, whether they result from the thrusting of the penis during intercourse, or generalized sexual stimulation of other erogenous zones like the breasts. 2) women's orgasm does not vary in kind; they vary in intensity. The most intense orgasms experienced by research subjects were masturbatory manual stimulation by the partner; the least intense orgasms were experienced by women during intercourse" (224). Masters and Johnson and Lydon suggest that the sexuality of woman is more complex than patriarchy acknowledges partly owing to the desire to domesticate women by making them asexual.

Lorde's lesbian relations were not always easy in the sense that she desired many women who could not reciprocate her love. This often led to feelings of frustration and suspicion. Her lust for Adrienne Rich was never reciprocated and this frustrated her need for emotional erotic satisfaction and her wish to build an intellectually and erotically charged connection across the racial divide. de Veaux comments on Lorde's erotic frustrations with some of the women she desired and respected thus: "Lorde tried to turn her attraction to Rich and Cliff into opportunities to bed them, separately. She once told Rich she could not, in principle, trust a white woman she had not slept with. Neither Rich nor Cliff was interested in Lorde sexually and both resisted her persistent attempts at seduction" (182). No doubt then that as she became older and more experienced, her early masturbatory experience resurfaced to inform her that auto-eroticism is a safe alternative. In much the same way as H  l  ne Cixous, Lorde views erotic illumination in women as central to their creativity and empowerment subsequently freeing them from the bounds of misogynistic discourse. The erotic in women is plural originating in the self and must be ignited from within before extending to others: "This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity ... something beautiful" (Cixous 257) and Lorde writes that erotic awareness "becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate these aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (*Sister Outsider* 57).

In *The Cancer Journals* Lorde mourns the loss of her breast while demonstrating her courage in the face of adversity. Losing a breast made her once more removed from the centre as she became "handicapped." As a Black, woman, and lesbian, she was already thrice removed from the centre of society. Being "handicapped" exacerbated her marginality and she felt almost helpless. Doubting if her partner will still find her desirable, her reminiscences as she lay in convalescence: "What will it be like making love to me? Will she still find my body delicious?" (*The Cancer* 43). The pathos couched in this utterance is attuned by resorting to reading and masturbation. In an entry dated 2 November 1978, written as she lay in convalescence after her mastectomy, she reports a conversation with her partner, Frances, in which she describes her anxiety about her lost breast: "How do you spend your time, she said. Reading, mostly, I said. I couldn't tell her that mostly, I sat staring at blank walls, or getting stoned into my heart, and then, one day when I found I could finally masturbate again, making love to myself for hours at a time. The flame was dim and flickering, but it was a welcome relief to the long coldness" (*The Cancer* 25). Masturbation is the solace that soothes away the cold distress of loss. Lorde is suggesting that her desirability was put to question in a way urging those who are thus "handicapped" to look inwards for erotic satisfaction. In this context, I refer to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson who puts into focus the problematic of being a "handicapped" person and suggests that most handicapped people turn to alternative forms of sexual fulfillment and to Zoe Moss who examines and questions the fact that aging women are excluded from the pleasures of life and sexuality.

As Lorde lay in hospital after the mastectomy, moments of loneliness are filled by reading and masturbation: activities which are self-reliant. Taking recourse to reading and masturbation suggests her view that the erotic drive is closely connected with creativity. Like writing, reading is just as private as autoeroticism in the sense that it involves an interaction with the self: "I spent the days mostly reading and wandering from room to room, or staring at blank walls, or lying outdoors in the sun staring at the insides of my eyelids. And finally, when at last I could, masturbating" (40). Sexologists show the analogy between reading and autoerotic indulgence in their intimately private nature. Here is an example: Laqueur quotes Tissot's association of reading and masturbation and writes that "The self-polluter, perpetually abandoned to his obscene meditations is, in this regard, something in the case of the man of letters, who fixes his attention on one point" ("Masturbation" 1). The point

Lorde may be making is that if masturbation is analogous to reading then it carries with it the benefits of decipherment. Reading and masturbation are liberating activities which involve engagements with the self and this is empowering especially when the need for others may be unattainable.

Lorde's meditations and autoerotic encounters are empowering evidenced in her refusal of a prosthetic implantation calling it a delusory attempt to deny her loss and accepting her scared breast as a sign of the challenges which must inform her personality as a woman. A prosthetic breast would alienate her from her scared body, denying her the insights she must garner from the experience, and making her dependent on cosmetics, an equally patriarchal and financially wasteful activity: "the emphasis upon wearing a prosthesis is a way of avoiding having women come to terms with their own pain and loss, and thereby, with their own strength" (*The Cancer* 49). The 1960s and 1970s saw unprecedented alliances of women fighting against the mass objectification of women's bodies in society. Several scholars have commented on the commercialization of women's bodies in capitalist economies by revealing the disabling effects on women. Commenting on the business of mastectomy and its attendant prosthesis as elements of patriarchy which help in fostering the beauty myth in women and thereby encouraging their dependence on gynaecologists, Daly reports that "This was first evident in cosmetic surgery. In the mid-seventies, mastectomies became popularised when not only First Lady Betty Ford but also 'Happy' Rockefeller had them. The prosthesis business has boomed" (286). Debra Connors emphasizes this tendency of profiteering medical practices and the corresponding victimization of women and the handicapped when she states that "If we are not willing to try every new experiment, no matter how slim the chance of cure or survival, we are blamed for wishing to remain impaired ... Grateful for services we suspect we do not fully deserve and cannot justifiably refuse, we are unwittingly led to participate in our abuse" (175). And Garland-Thomson accentuates this objectification of women's bodies and the underlying exploitation of women: "Cosmetic surgery's twin, reconstructive surgery, eliminates disability and reinforces the ideals of what might be thought of as the normalcy system" (580). Lorde demonstrates how stereotypes and prejudices against and of age, race, class, and sex, lead to exclusionary attitudes that limit self-expression (see "Age"). Lorde's early love affair with Eudora Garrett in Mexico, a one breasted lesbian initiated her into the warrior world of independent women and underscores her capacity to surpass limitations. From Garrett Lorde developed her warrior persona by linking her one breasted nature to the Amazon warriors. Memories of her love making with Garrett empower her as she thinks of her lost breast: "Eudora Garrett was the first woman with whom I shared body warmth and wildness, but she was the first woman who totally engaged me in our loving. I remember the hesitation and tenderness I felt as I touched the deeply scarred hollow under her right shoulder and across her chest, the night she finally shared her mastectomy with me in the clear heavy heat of our Mexican spring. I was 19 and she 47. Now I am 44 and she is dead" (*The Cancer* 35). Likening her experience to Garrett's and the Amazons empowers her to accept her mastectomy as another stage in her development as a visionary of change. Thus Lorde's sexual trajectory is multiple and complex permitting her to undermine acceptable notions of sex and sexually by proposing a new epistemology of sex: she foregrounds her body as the playground on which her theoretical elucidations are explicated and brought to bear on the lives of others.

Lorde interrogates the cultural standard of against masturbation by giving masturbation a central position in her work and making it corporeally ingrained in women's anatomy. Lorde celebrates and calls not only on women, but also men to take advantage of the gifts of the body and liberate themselves from the dictates of normative sexuality. The masturbator can dispose of a sexual partner at will and bend any tempting object to serve her or him without expending energy and resources. Current clinical observations on masturbation have completely overturned the distorted views propagated at first in calculated ignorance. Other benefits include the fact that it is safe, no one gets pregnant or contracts HIV/AIDS or other venereal diseases through masturbation. Moreover, it is cheaper and time saving. Heterosexual and homosexual liaisons imply economic and emotional dependency on others and such relations more often require negotiations and compromises which lead to emotional stress. Masturbation can free the individual from emotional and/or physical dependency: "in heterosexual intercourse for example, one's partner could always refuse. Not so with masturbation" (Laqueur, "Masturbation" 11). Further, masturbation can be particularly useful to the physically disabled, the "poor," and to people in a relationship who have to work far away from their partners. People with physical disabilities find it particularly difficult to find sexual partners thus making masturbation an option for

sexual enjoyment. By "poor people" I mean people who are not economically empowered enough to maintain a sexual relationship. There is no question that sexual relations are transacted along economic lines: a steady income, a home of one's own, etc. For example, married people who work in long distance such as miners, truck drivers, soldiers, etc., can enhance fidelity to each other by resorting to masturbation. Thus I posit that Lorde's engagement with autoeroticism is meant to propose an alternative sexual paradigm especially for the marginalized. How can one make masturbation a safe alternative, just as it is imperative to make homo/heterosexual encounters safe? The question that challenges us is whether we can make sexual satisfaction available to all just like there is an attempt to make food, water, shelter, and healthcare available to all? Is sexual satisfaction not equally an issue of human rights?

In conclusion, Lorde's work is written primarily on and about the woman's body because it is that body she knows best, but this does not mean that her treatment of the subject is limited to women. Deconstructing identity through her explication and exploration of a communal sphere where she is both member and outsider, she queers the boundaries which usurp difference. By suggesting to reconsider the epistemology of one's own erotic urges, she asks us to throw away notions of difference. If and when we masturbate our conceptions of sexual stereotypes can be interrogated with the result that the boundaries of difference may be shifted for a situation of general wellbeing. Lorde therefore places masturbation between the binary hetero/homosexual options which privilege one form over the other. Lorde suggests that the hetero/homoerotic dichotomy is not transacted on a level field of emotional and analytical impartiality, but of homophobic pressure intent on devaluing other forms of sexuality. By forcing the third singularly corporeal option between the two, Lorde interpellates generalized homophobia and anti-masturbatory sentiment pervasive in culture and society. Thus masturbation challenges patriarchal ideology.

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Author's profile: Eric Sipyinyu Njeng teaches US-American literature at the University of Burundi. His interests in scholarship include African literatures, feminism, cultural studies, and queer theory. Njeng's recent publications include "Archetypes of the Artist in Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* (2012) and "Achebe's Work, Postcoloniality, and Human Rights," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2013). E-mail: <njengeric@yahoo.fr>