

**Poetry as Knowledge: how epistemic sexism/racism can
be disrupted through the poetry of marginalised voices
and bodies**

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12/09/2023

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to demonstrate the importance of poetry as a form of knowledge, and how the voices of marginalised bodies can disrupt the instances of epistemic sexism/racism. By engaging with concepts such as phallogentrism, femininity and politics of location, a clear framing will be made to acknowledge the powerful knowledge that arises from poetry. The thesis uses important works in gender studies and philosophy which criticise Western logics, and through using marginalised bodies as an important lens to disrupt such ideas, it is shown the need to think and write through the body. By exploring the works of Luce Irigaray and Audre Lorde, which both engage with theoretical ideas in a creative mode, I use their poetics to interact with the concepts of feminine writing. Lived experience becomes of major importance to understanding poetry as knowledge, which is where Ellen van Neerven will be engaged with, finding parallels between fighting against epistemic sexism and racism, as well as the act of queer writing, as with Lorde's works. The idea of the erotic will be of significance in discussing the power of poetics and of having one's own body being centred in work, showing how differences elevate knowledge, and why the idea of knowledge needs to be reformed. I hope to demonstrate the necessity to open up the realm of knowledge to have a richer sense of understanding, and for poetry to be an important part of that.

DECLARATION

"I certify that this thesis:

- 1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and*
- 2. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text."*

Therese Jones

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the help given by my supervisor Dr Laura Roberts.

THESIS INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to demonstrate the importance of poetry and poetics as a form of knowledge, that when produced through the voices of marginalised subjectivities, can disrupt epistemic sexism and racism. This will be done using Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference and Audre Lorde's power of the erotic as theoretical frames. I use Ramon Grosfoguel's articulation of epistemic racism and sexism in Westernised universities as a frame to explore how different types of writing are understood and valued or indeed are excluded from what counts as knowledge, to then address knowledge that arises from poetry through feminine writing and lived experience. I engage with philosopher Luce Irigaray's critique of Western philosophy to illustrate the problem of privileging rational knowledge over embodied knowledge and the problem of valuing ideas of objectivity over socially located knowledge and language to bring marginalised voices and bodies out of the dark. Feminist philosophers and decolonial scholars have long made these arguments and my thesis aims to contribute to this conversation by bringing the work of Grosfoguel and Irigaray together here to read Audre Lorde's work as an example of writing that illustrates how poetry is a type of theorising and is producing crucial forms of knowledge that can challenge epistemic sexism and racism that dominates knowledge produced in Westernised universities. As Irigaray's philosophical project is also a creative one, I will also explore her creative methodology and writing style as another example of how creative writing can be understood to be theorising. As a female poet and creative writer, my motivation for this thesis comes from the frustration of having to exist within the university academic system which expects marginalised voices to conform to certain tropes of knowledge leading to the erasure of poetry and poetics as valid theorising.

This thesis will begin with an **Introduction** that surveys relevant work on gender and writing and begins to develop the theoretical framework for this thesis. The Introduction will outline what I mean when I refer to feminine writing and the basis for why poetry should be included as a valid form of knowledge for its important and insightful contributions. This will be done by first defining some key terms and concepts including a politics of location and phallogentrism, as well as engaging with

some central concepts found in Irigaray's works, and feminine writing which will ultimately drive the thesis. Finally, I engage with Helene Cixous' essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', to provide a starting point for thinking through poetic knowledge.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I offer a close reading of Grosfoguel's text to illustrate his decolonial critique of Western knowledge to offer further analysis of epistemic sexism/racism and to supplement Irigaray's critique of Western thought. I do this to provide further context and theoretical frame to my argument that is being addressed in my analysis of the poetry and poetics in Irigaray and Lorde's works. **Chapter Two** further develops my theoretical framing and explores key aspects of Irigaray's critique of Western logics through a discussion of her understanding of the symbolic and imaginary. This chapter aims to show how Irigaray's work aims to subvert the logics of Western philosophy through language and form, but also acknowledging the backlash from other academics and philosophers seeing her work as lesser due to the creative nature of Irigaray's writing. This chapter will unpack what I mean by feminine writing and discuss how both Irigaray and Lorde subvert the universalisation of rational disembodied knowledge in the embrace of becoming "other". **Chapter Three** explores poetry that theorises and engages lived experience of marginalised perspectives through reading the poetry of Lorde and Ellen van Neerven to show how these writers can use their poetics to disrupt epistemic sexism and racism, therefore demonstrating the importance of poetry as valid knowledge which protests against the universalisation of rational disembodied knowledge as the only credible form. I conclude the thesis by showing how if we appreciate the combination of feminine writing and lived experience, these thinkers and poets can demonstrate their rich knowledges, broadening the scope of understanding, and thus determining poetry as a way to both perform and challenge what counts as knowledge and fight against the constraints of epistemic sexism and racism by elevating their marginalised voices.

INTRODUCTION

DEFINING TERMS/THEORETICAL FRAMING

Before delving further into initial ideas and framing for the thesis, I begin with a discussion that attempts to define the concepts I explore in the thesis to provide clarity when discussed in depth throughout the paper. I will discuss the politics of location and phallocentrism, as well as review the importance of these terms for my thesis question.

In this thesis, I argue for the necessity of knowledge as emerging from lived experience and the subject's politics of location, which challenges the idea of a disembodied form of rational knowledge and challenges rationalist philosophy. I will say more about epistemic sexism/racism in Chapter One but for now, we can understand this to mean that knowledge "coming from human beings that are classified as non-Western" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.77) are considered inferior, including in this, women, both Western and non-western. Grosfoguel claims this is a common occurrence in academia and writing, but also acknowledges the absurdity of this for "if knowledge is produced in particular social relations, that is, inside a particular society then it cannot be argued that the human "I" can produce a knowledge equivalent to a God Eye view" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.76). This idea will be further discussed in Chapter Three when I consider the importance of knowledge coming from lived experience.

POLITICS OF LOCATION

The politics of location is a concept that emerges in the work of Adrienne Rich (1987) and refers to the idea that one's socially embodied and geographical location plays a part in determining knowledge, influencing the scope of what we know and how we know things. It is important to consider the notion of a politics of location for it challenges the universalisation of rational knowledge by understanding that since people are all different, the knowledge we produce can be too, without being lesser than in value or being classed in a hierarchy.

To frame why there is a need for feminine writing and this emphasis on privileging the voices of those with lived experience, Adrienne Rich's idea of the politics of location provides a context of where this importance comes from. Rich explores the richness of knowledge that arises from socially located identities, or as will be explored in depth in Chapter Three, lived experience is appreciated as being at the forefront of knowledge. This context opens up a new realm of understanding, demanding for us to begin "not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body. Here at least I know I exist, that living human individual (Rich 1987, p.212). Rich declares that "To say "my body" reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions" (Rich 1987, p.215), thus a politics of location forming rooted in embodied knowledge. As will be further unpacked with Grosfoguel, we must appreciate how certain forms of knowledge that are taken to be universal are always produced by subjects with their own politics of location, their own embodied and socially located subjectivity.

In producing knowledge, the idea of authority comes into play, and Rich argues that women can gain authority over their bodies and knowledges by "locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women. Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. To reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman" (Rich 1987, p.213). Rich emphasises the importance of the body and its social and geographical location, claiming that writing and knowledge must come from this place, opposing the claims of the disembodied "universal man's" knowledge and insistence on rationality.

The point Rich makes (1987) is that we all speak, write, and think from a particular body located in a particular social and geographical background. Taking my own politics of location into account, I am a woman, I am white, a feminist, and university educated, but I am also queer, a second-generation Australian from a refugee family, on stolen land, and I am gender-queer, and all of these elements have an influence on my knowledge, on my body and my existence.

I thus follow Rich's articulations of the politics of location in this thesis as she writes that we must define and recognise our politics of location, "having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted—there is a confusion between our claims to the white and Western eye and the woman-seeing

eye, fear of losing the centrality of the one even as we claim the other” (Rich 1987, p.219). And then, “To write “my body” plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me” (Rich 1987, p.215), because the centring of the body as my body ensures universal assertions that disregard the lived difference of embodied subjectivities are not to be made since there is a process of writing and thinking through the body happening here. The recognition of the entanglement of many social locations and what this brings to writing and academia then shows that “to locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has not let me go” (Rich 1987, p.215-216), thus the sexing and racing of the body can result in the sexing and racing of knowledge since that emerges from a socially located body. As we will see in a moment, Grosfoguel’s claims regarding epistemic sexism/racism can be understood concerning this. While the notion of a politics of location helps us to critically view disembodied rational knowledge, I turn now to explain the French Feminist critique of disembodied rational knowledge which views this as inherently masculine through the concept of phallogentrism.

PHALLOCENTRISM

Marks and Courtivron in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* discuss the capabilities of French feminisms in rejecting the logics of phallogentrism and finding new form and language as well as writing for and about feminine subjectivity and pleasure in a way of ensuring impassioned theory and thought.

Marks and Courtivron consider “Whether or not we can in fact escape from the structuring imposed by language is one of the major questions facing feminist and nonfeminist thinkers today” (1980, p.4). It is important to note that when Marks and Courtivron refer to the “structuring imposed by language” (1980, p.4) they are referring to the concept of phallogentrism, which is core to the French feminists’ work and their response of *écriture féminine* (translated to English as feminine writing). I will discuss this response of *écriture féminine* in more detail in a moment as well as the problem of essentialism. For now, however, we can understand the structuring

imposed by language regarding the notion of phallogentrism. Grosz, in unpacking the term phallogentrism, notes that this is more than the privilege of and lack of a phallus, but “a more general process of cultural and representational *assimilation*” (1989, p.105). This means to create and use “*one* model of subjectivity, the male” (Grosz 1989, p.105), which can be connected back to the argument of the thesis that epistemic sexism and racism are prevalent in the production of knowledge. In response to this diagnosis of phallogentrism, Luce Irigaray’s project is to recategorise “women and femininity so that they are now capable of being autonomously defined” (Grosz 1989, p.105). This need to undermine phallogentrism can be read alongside the notion of a politics of location and we can thus appreciate why there is an emphasis on feminine and embodied writing emerging from “my” body.

Feminine writing, this idea of writing from and through the body, with the integration of one’s politics of location, in response to phallogentrism, is needed because as Marks and Courtivron express in the text, when “women come together with the express purpose of criticizing and reshaping the official male language and, through it, male manners and male power” (1980, p.6), determination for change and to pull women’s writing (and knowledge) from subjugation is possible. Marks and Courtivron articulate the notion that this thesis will build on, that “the order of the universe is not a natural order; it is an order imposed by men” (1980, p.31), and that “there can be no revolution without the disruption of the symbolic order—bourgeois language, the language of the old humanisms with their belief in a coherent subject—and that only by dislocating syntax, playing with the signifier, punning outrageously and constantly can the old language and the old order be subverted” (Marks & Courtivron 1980, pp.32-33). It is this “symbolic order” understood as the order and realm of language that this thesis seeks to disrupt through an exploration of the poetry and ideas of specific thinkers. Thus, for the French and especially Luce Irigaray, the realm of language, as part of the symbolic order, is described as “the junction of body, psyche, and language, where the descriptive fields of psychoanalysis and linguistics (or semiotics) meet” (Whitford 1991, p.37), is a crucial battleground in feminist theory. This claim supports my thesis because of the insistence on the body and the language that arises from writing through one’s body. It is clear that “Irigaray’s project focuses on the question of sexual difference and is concerned with the

erasure of an autonomous female subject position in philosophy, in culture, in law, and various myth making discourses, as well as the silencing of female genealogies, histories and stories that go along with this. Irigaray's project is critical as well as creative" (Roberts 2022, p.154). I hope to show how "in imaginary and symbolic terms, language can be seen as a territory, a house or a home" (Whitford 1991, p.43), thus being brought back to a politics of location and embodied knowledge as a valid form. However, this thesis will not just focus on the French context and will thus explore how other feminist writers challenge the symbolic order of language, and how they do this further in the form of poetry.

An important aspect of challenging phallogentrism in *écriture féminine* is the focus on women's pleasure. In *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, they describe "one of the areas of greatest verbal concentration among French feminists is the description of woman's pleasure" (Marks & Courtivron 1980, p.37), because women need to write about their lived experiences in their own languages, in both style and syntax, to disconnect from the idea of universality. While not part of the French tradition I nevertheless see connections here with Audre Lorde's writing on the erotic and later in this thesis I present a close reading of Lorde's 'The Power of the Erotic' (2018), to understand how women writing using the erotic is a way to move away from and challenge the constraints of the phallogentric "universal" (male) world. Marks and Courtivron write the work of French feminists and philosophers offers "the few encouraging signs of an attempt to rethink, in depth, the human adventure and, whatever the despair, to move on toward what is yet to be" (1980, p.38) and following this idea this thesis offers an analysis of feminist poetry, the notion of poetry as knowledge and a way for marginalised voices to challenge epistemic sexism and racism.

Thinking then, of feminist poetry and the act of writing through the body, I turn to French philosopher Luce Irigaray whose work focuses on the question of sexual difference. The central themes in Irigaray's works are of importance to further the discussion of embodied subjectivities. Elizabeth Grosz in *Sexual Subversions*, specifically in 'Chapter 4: Luce Irigaray and sexual difference' (1989), explores Irigaray's language and works, the mother and daughter relation, patriarchy and universality of language and knowledge, and how all this together formed a poetics within Irigaray's philosophy. Grosz describes Irigaray's "writing, her 'styles', [to]

involve new forms of discourse, new ways of speaking, a 'poetry' which is necessarily innovative and evocative of new conceptions of women and femininity" (1989, p.101), building upon the idea that more needs to be given to theory than just that of the "universal" man and in his language, but also the lived experience of women through their own forms. The text celebrates Irigaray's writing, suggesting the power and passion possible if othered voices were elevated, as for too long "we [have] live[d] in a resolutely *homosexual* culture, a culture based on the primacy of the male, the *homme*, who can function only with others modelled on himself, others who are his mirror reflections. The problem with this libidinal structure of masculine desire is that it leaves no space for woman as such" (Grosz 1989, p.107). Thus, claiming the power that comes from elevating the voices of those marginalised for it provides a difference in subjectivity, rather than what phallocentrism has us believe as *the* model of judgement. Grosz focuses on sexual difference concerning Irigaray and philosophical writing in general, and how the female body is symbolised in Western culture as a castrated man, in a negative relation to man the HUMAN, woman as not man, and therefore there is the necessity for "reconceiving the female body as a positivity rather than a lack" (1989, p.110). This thesis will seek to praise and acknowledge whole-heartedly the nuances and notions of femininity through poetry, also showing the ability of poetry to be theoretical. The idea is to create "a space for women as woman" (Grosz 1989, p.119), and Grosz indicates the importance of feminine identity through the analysis of Irigaray's works.

However, before moving on further, it is important to note the thesis' focus on feminine writing as a response to phallocentrism and references to femininity is not subscribing to an essentialist position. I understand the uncomfortableness of gendered language, especially when engaging with van Neerven (a non-binary poet) in Chapter Three, but I hope to express the intentions I have and believe these thinkers to have when using such language. The critique that Irigaray's work is essentialist because "the reduction of morphology to biology occurs only on the crudest of misreadings and a *wilful* ignorance on the part of the critics" (Grosz 1989, p.113). Grosz argues that "*If* morphology is reduced to biology, the charge of *essentialism* seems well justified. *If* men's *biologically given* bodies are isomorphic with the structure of dominant discourses, this becomes simply a 'fact of nature' that must be accepted, not a political move that can be countered" (1989, p113). I argue

that Cixous, Lorde and Irigaray are not essentialising when they talk about women, but rather use such language symbolically in the opposition of the masculine. An emphasis then needs to be understood to describe a feminine essence instead of the idea of essentialism. Thinking of what Grosz discusses, body cannot be reduced to an essentialist framing, and it is clear in the demand by the thinkers this thesis explores, that body is seen to be more than a shell, but about lived experience much deeper than biology. Thus, in the pursuit to explore the importance of poetry as knowledge through feminine writing and lived experience, it is clear that essentialism is not the approach being taken, but rather critiqued, for the theory against phallogentrism would be weak, and when describing feminine writing and erotic power, this is used more symbolically and in search of uplifting marginalised bodies than it is biological.

CIXOUS AND FEMININITY

Helene Cixous, one of the so-called French Feminists (alongside Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva) in the essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' performs feminine writing while explaining what this is and why it is important, making the point about how women should write even though all forces are attempting to drive them away from this. Cixous is challenging the logics of phallogentrism and I use her work to frame this thesis because it brings to light the valuable contribution feminine writing has, how women must write, and not just about anything, but must write about themselves, their experiences, on woman, Cixous expresses that "I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man. So only an oblique consideration will be found here of man; it's up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at: this will concern us once men have opened their eyes and seen themselves clearly" (1976, p.877). The notion of gynocide and the knowledge lost by women from fear and patriarchal control of thought and writing is explored to present the need for women to contribute to theory in their own words and languages, instead of constantly perpetuating the sexist tendency of academia.

There is a complexity that Cixous writes about in the mention of feminine writing, because "It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed,

coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" (1976, p.883). Men for so long, that is the specific criteria of man to mean "universal", has dominated the realm of thought and academia, even on the topic of women or more broadly gender. Cixous demands for women to write for themselves, "and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies [...] Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (1976, p.875).

The necessity for feminine writing is "that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs" (Cixous 1976, p.876). With this, I think Cixous is expressing how the beginning act of women writing about women will strengthen others and present a space in which women don't have to be subjugated but celebrated and acknowledged for their worth in knowledge. Lived experience is important, and Cixous describes passionate and endless possibilities, whereby, "When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of men, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking" (1976, p.893). Cixous' insistence that women must write, for "Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (1976, p.876), shows the importance of women's writing being regarded at the same calibre as men's, but also with nuance in the difference, this essay is performing feminine writing which I will explore with the works of Irigaray and Lorde, how women are creating this feminine writing by their own means, and more specifically how this is apparent in poetry. The claim thus is that the act of writing IS thinking and is thus producing knowledge. The emphasis then is on feminine writing, showing that feminine thinking is acted upon and produces feminine knowledge to be engaged with.

CONCLUSION

The concepts I have discussed here, politics of location, phallogentrism, *écriture féminine* and that I go on to discuss next (epistemic sexism and racism) form the theoretical framework for my thesis and help to articulate my argument that poetry is a form of knowledge which resists the powers of epistemic sexism and racism. With a politics of location, French feminism and phallogentrism, and Cixous' claim of the necessity of women's writing, the significance of Irigaray and Lorde's works and theories will be elevated, too with the poetry of Rich and van Neerven, illustrating my argument in practice.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING EPISTEMIC SEXISM AND RACISM

While the context of the French feminist critique of the phallogocentric symbolic order and language, and their strategy of feminine writing, is central to this thesis, I am also concerned with the entanglement of the legacies of colonialism and racism with sexism. For this reason, I turn to explore questions of epistemology and delve into the question of whose knowledge is privileged and why, who gets to speak, and who is heard, to identify the issue of what Grosfoguel calls “epistemic sexism/racism” in the westernised university. This chapter aims to unpack this problem and then later in the thesis demonstrate how women’s (western and non-western) cultural production and writing offer resistance to this problem. The focus is on epistemic sexism and racism rather than decolonisation, for as Tuck and Yang explain, as we will explore later in this chapter, decolonisation cannot be used as a buzzword or so frivolously for this is an act of colonising in itself (2012)¹. The thesis thus focuses on epistemic sexism and racism in institutions intending to demonstrate how the use of poetics and poetry as a form of uplifting marginalised voices and knowledges, can challenge these epistemic knowledge structures. I begin with a close reading of the argument Ramon Grosfoguel puts forward in his article ‘The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century’ (2013) to explain what I mean by

¹ When we are engaging with decolonial critique it is important to appreciate Tuck and Yang’s argument in ‘Decolonization is not a metaphor’ (2012), they write that the act of decolonising should not be used to settle white guilt or for other metaphors because that in itself is an act of colonising the concept of decolonisation. They also propose that it is counterintuitive to leave Indigenous voices out of the discussion of decolonisation and that this cannot be done if decolonisation is the actual goal, which I attempt to address by privileging the voices of Black and Indigenous writers in Chapter Three. They further suggest that Westernised universities act so “Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts” (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.6), this idea will be directly explored in Chapter Three in the section about Political Bodies, with van Neerven, who is an Indigenous person of Mununjali heritage (in “so-called” Queensland), calling out western universities. Even at times when Tuck and Yang discuss the US context, this can easily be translated to an Australian context, which Chapter Three will explore in discussing Lorde and van Neerven together, combining the US and Australia through poets in conversation.

epistemic sexism/racism. These thinkers will provide the lens and theoretical framework for my project that will read Irigaray, Lorde and van Neerven's writing as an example of resistance to the structures of epistemic sexism/racism that Grosfoguel outlines.

The notion of Epistemic sexism/racism is unpacked by Grosfoguel to provide clarity as to how knowledge became convoluted with the issue of privileging and "who gets to speak and is heard". Grosfoguel presents the idea that "the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized university* is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)" (2013, p.74) and provides a historical narrative to illustrate instances where "other" forms of knowing and being was erased by colonisers through genocide and epistemicide. The idea of "universality", Grosfoguel claims, is built under the structure of "the social-historical experience of men of five countries" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.74) and anything other, such as "knowledge produced by women (Western or non-Western) are also regarded as inferior and outcast from the canon of thought" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.75), thus upholding knowledge structures that are fundamentally racist and sexist. With the influence of European Enlightenment thinking bringing about modernist, colonial "civilising" conquests that destroyed Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, rationalist thinking arising from the Enlightenment emerged as a world view that can be linked back to Cartesian logics. Epistemic privilege appears through the universalism of "I", but also through genocide and epistemicide. We might also say that the universal "I", which describes what the French feminists would call phallogocentric logics, is that "I" that Grosfoguel links to the producing of knowledge in Westernised universities, excluding others from gaining and contributing such knowledge. Grosfoguel criticises Cartesian rationalist Enlightenment philosophy, arguing that the "I" developed into "'I think" as the new foundation of knowledge in the modern/colonial world" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.77). However, within these colonising logics this "I think" is only associated with those who are associated with so-called rationalist knowledge (white upper-class men) and all excluded "others" (women, racialised and Indigenous people) are necessarily excluded from the "I think" and therefore from the notion of the HUMAN.

This becomes the criterion for the production and exchanging of knowledge, coming from “the entanglement between the religious Christian-centric global hierarchy and the racial/ethnic Western-Centric hierarchy of the “capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system”” (Grosfoguel 2013, p. 84). Such a criteria completely disregards the knowledge produced outside of these constraints, constraints that manifest into epistemic racism and sexism. A Westernised knowledge system must be critiqued due to the claim it makes of universal man being universal human, which is not true, and as we see feminine writing (and anti-colonial writing) seeks to explore the importance of difference and writing through one’s own body rather than the shell made for the Cartesian subject.

As Grosfoguel argues knowledge in Westernised universities comes from men from five countries and the epistemicides that took place in these European countries and colonised various parts of the world granted such possibilities to occur. The four epistemicides are the “Jewish and Muslim origin population in the conquest of Al-Andalus, against indigenous people in the conquest of the Americas, against Africans kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas and against women burned alive, accused of being witches in Europe” (Grosfoguel 2013, p.73). These events are described as epistemicides because religious and spiritual knowledge was destroyed by forced conversion and genocide. These epistemicides contributed to the privileging of certain forms of knowledge in the Westernised university, by the men Grosfoguel describes, inserting their knowledges as “universal” in the moves to colonise and destroy knowledges of these peoples and places.

Grosfoguel uses European witch hunts as an example that contributed to the contemporary state of epistemic sexism/racism and notes that “the conquest and genocide of women in European lands who transmitted Indo-European knowledge from generation to generation” (Grosfoguel 2013, p.85) were destroyed. Similarly, he explains the colonising subject’s fear which leads him to destroy “indigenous knowledge from ancient times [... who] were empowered by the possession of ancestral knowledge and their leading role inside the communities organized around commune-like forms of economic and political organization” (Grosfoguel 2013, p.85), but since this form of knowledge did not conform to or come from the hierarchy of knowledge discussed it was destroyed and considered inferior. From the knowledge

system arising from a Westernised realm of thinking, built upon epistemicide, it is unsurprising that epistemic sexism and racism result from this.

To speak specifically of the epistemicide of the European witch hunts, whereby most of the victims were women, the physical burning of these “witches” erased their knowledge as it took their lives as well as sending the message that the forms of knowledge these women held was dangerous and not to be listened to. However, as Silvia Federici writes “it should also have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade, the enactment of ‘bloody laws’ against vagabonds and beggars, and it climaxed in that interregnum between the end of feudalism and the capitalist ‘take off’” (2021, p.175). Further, it is in the fear of the power of the erotic and the power of women as a collective from the sustaining of a phallogocentric understanding of knowledge, that it is clear the witch-hunts were “a campaign of terror against women [...] teaching men to fear the power of women” (Federici 2021, p.176). From a “female revolt” arising from the anger of “women/witches” being killed for their knowledges and fear of the different, “as a means of social control” (Federici 2021, p.180), came existence as resistance, and further, I suggest, writing as resistance. Therefore, as not only being and existing as “other” or “woman” is defiance, so too is writing and integrating lived experience into the canon of thought.

Part of the witch hunts was about controlling “the erotic” power of women, which will be connected in further depth when discussing Lorde in a moment. I thus suggest the necessity to pair the ideas of “the erotic” and feminine writing for they are so deeply connected in their roots and in their instances of attempts to challenge the logics of epistemic sexism/racism. This is because the witch hunts presented the “tendency to blame the victims” (Federici 2021, p.175), for the displays of “feminine power” as different and “other”, thus it was feared by the phallogocentric and universal “male” world and so it was destroyed. Rich expresses how it is necessary to reclaim the body (1987, p.213), the suggestion of reclaiming meaning that it was previously belonging but taken away, as such the intention of the witch hunts, this reclaiming will too be explored in the discussion of Lorde about reclaiming one’s erotic power.

What becomes apparent is that “the four genocides/epistemicides are constitutive of the racist/sexist epistemic structures that produced epistemic privilege and authority to Western man’s knowledge production and inferiority for the rest” (Grosfoguel 2013, p. 86), which is where the issue arises, and as this thesis explores, we must understand various forms of marginalised writing as a challenge to epistemic sexism/racism, thus bringing feminine and “othered” writing and more specifically poetry to the canon of thought, bringing silenced voices out of the space of being “considered inferior [as they] do not think and are not worthy of existence because their humanity is in question”, to be taken out of the created “zone of non-being” (Grosfoguel 2013, pp.86-87), and into the space of being able to contribute at the same level within the university institution.

CHAPTER TWO: FEMININE WRITING

In this chapter, I hope to show how feminine writing emerges to demonstrate the importance of feminine writing to be created even with the restrictive opposing powers to unleash one's power, because feminine writing is feared, the power of the erotic, as Lorde expresses, is feared, and we should not allow the fear of the masculine "objective universal" stop the potential of other. I begin this chapter by engaging with the idea of marginalised bodies and voices, to explore what it means to write in the feminine through Irigaray and Lorde's works. Once again, we must appreciate feminine writing symbolically rather than in essentialist terms for, rather than advocating for a return to a feminine essence, these thinkers and writers are employing strategies to argue against the grain of the "universal" man, aiming to undermine phallocentrism. I will further discuss the valuable content and lived language that emerges from marginalised voices coming out of silence and sharing their embodied subjectivities, before exploring how feminine writing seeks to place the silenced feminine/othered self as Subject in writing. I argue that this move to situate a feminine /othered/marginalised self as Subject in feminine writing is an example of marginalised voices producing knowledge. This discussion will also demonstrate the connection between Lorde and Irigaray in their critique of phallogenic logics. Before concluding the chapter, I will explore feminine poetics and knowledge to bring us back to the thesis question of poetry as important knowledge being able to disrupt epistemic sexism/racism by writing through marginalised body and voice. Then, considers feminine writing with motherhood in mind, again speaking of epistemic sexism.

To begin our exploration of feminine writing let us listen to Helene Cixous when she writes: "Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don't like the true texts of women-female-sexed texts. That kind scares them." (Cixous 1976, p.877). Feminine writing is a phenomenon that arose in response to phallogenic in the French context but I suggest we understand it more broadly in

response to the legacies of epistemic sexism and racism, thus demonstrating the existence of the subjugation of women and colonised knowledges and the disruption to what is considered knowledge that these writers cause. Showing, then, marginalised poetic knowledge being produced in a space that does not allow it, hence being subversive/activist by default, I suggest that feminine writing that thinks through the body or writes the body is necessary. I will explore this notion by first delving into what it means to be “other” and writing a poetics of resistance, then to place the self as subject within feminine writing, I will show how Lorde and Irigaray’s writings work toward disrupting the epistemic sexism and racism with their use of the ‘I’. I explore feminine poetics and knowledge, and I will demonstrate instances of feminine writing and what this means to these two writers. Finally, I will analyse the representation of woman as mother, the complex relationships that phallogentric logics create, and how feminine writing is able to oppose these. This can be subverted to fight against inherent epistemic sexism and racism.

I begin by turning to Irigaray’s work as this helps to articulate what I mean by becoming other and how mother as subject is an important concept to consider when discussing feminine and marginalised writing. Lorde too discusses writing as other and writing as woman, and so I will in this next section, discuss the connections between the two to further demonstrate the important knowledge that emerges from bodies and the poetry of such bodies.

BECOMING “OTHER”: WRITING AS WOMAN

Thinking about the body and poetry as a feminine act, I ask what it means to write as a woman, to engage with the silenced/marginalised feminine to produce writing and how is this a subversion and division from writing from the “universal”? Starting with Irigaray, there is clear creative intent and method in her works, not only in the subject becoming but also in the way in which she engages with it, being written through the body of woman. Irigaray’s, strategy, therefore, is to target the logics of phallogentricism through what I call a poetics of resistance in response to being excluded from the realm of knowledge, thus being forced to disrupt the powers that silence marginalised voices.

Irigaray proposes that

to claim that the feminine can be expressed in the form of a concept is to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of “masculine” representations, in which women are trapped in a system of meaning which serves the auto-affectation of the (masculine) subject. If it is really a matter of calling “femininity” into question, there is still no need to elaborate another “concept”—unless a woman is renouncing her sex and wants to speak like men (1985, pp.122-123).

Irigaray is suggesting here that we must call into question the very concept of femininity because the feminine, for Irigaray, will always be in excess of any phallogocentric concept, in which the feminine will never have access to autonomous subjectivity. We must, according to Irigaray, reimagine the feminine as autonomous and work toward uncovering “the female imaginary and bringing it into language” (Whitford 1986, p.3). This is a crucial part of the challenge to phallogocentrism, to challenge the single masculine universal.

In her critique of Western thought Irigaray notes that woman “remains at the disposal of man” (1992, p.2) and due to the phallogocentric logics, lived experiences and parameters put in place to restrain women to a subjugated place, “woman is subjected to a loss of identity which turns love into a duty, a pathology, an alienation for her” (Irigaray 1992, p.2), stripping away identity. While this point can be seen as something concrete, it is also worth noting that for Irigaray it also takes place within the symbolic realm of language.

To counter this subjugation Irigaray thus attempts “to go back through the masculine imaginary, to interpret the way it has reduced us to silence, to muteness or mimicry . . . attempting, from that starting-point and at the same time, to (re)discover a possible space for the feminine imaginary” (Irigaray 1985, p.164). In the very language used, calling for a “(re)-discovery” of space for feminine writing shows the exclusion of marginalised bodies that were “othered” to a degree where one cannot “infiltrate” the existing space because it wasn’t designed for those very bodies. Thus, I suggest Irigaray’s work moves toward “becoming other” (in a positive autonomous way) because of the creative nature she writes to escape phallogocentric epistemic sexism which demonstrates a reimagined autonomous feminine writing as a form of thinking otherwise and producing alternative knowledges, which this thesis seeks to show. Lorde also discusses the need for this “(re)-discovery” of a space for

marginalised voices. Importantly, in line with her lived experience Lorde's writing also pays careful attention to racism. Lorde writes:

recognizing the enemy outside and the enemy within, and knowing that my work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death. And it means knowing that within this continuum, my life and my love and my work has particular power and meaning relative to others (Lorde 2020a, p.10).

Discussing then the fight against epistemic sexism and racism, it is clear that "the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak" (Lorde 2020a, p.14-15), suggesting the danger in feminine writing is not as fearful as the "universal" notion of knowledge would like us to think, for if the system is working to silence voices, what is the danger in resisting with women's own poetics? Leading on from this, Lorde expresses the necessity for feminine writing to oppose this subjugation, as "each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us" (Lorde 2020a, p.15). The call made then to reclaim what has been made to belittle the knowledge of the marginalised. She claims that "the fact that we are here and that I speak now these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" (Lorde 2020a, p.16). Lorde is expressing here, I think, the refusal to be hindered by epistemic sexism and racism and instead to celebrate differences—because without these differences, "my death is inside your own. We shall die together if you do not let me go outside your sameness" (Irigaray 1992, p.14).

Epistemic sexism and racism ensure that the existence of women and their knowledges remain silenced. As well as this, it works to define women in sameness, with the concept of motherhood and restricts their knowledges to this. The notion becomes that women are only something when they are mothers, showing that "I have no existence apart from you" (Rich 1993, p.10), but with poetic power and feminine writing, one can

Poem removed due to copyright restriction

This poem, 'Splittings', shows resistance to the notion that women's knowledge and poetics are lesser than, and instead claims the power women's language has, to express one's knowledge despite systems in place that subjugate.

This idea of "becoming other" that I take from Irigaray can be read alongside Lorde's writing on the erotic where she posits the erotic as knowledge. I argue that Lorde's writing is feminine, although this concept comes from the French, it is clear in Lorde's erotic and poetry that she too writes through the body. Lorde's projects may not explicitly talk about feminine writing, but I find her writing to connect concepts with Irigaray and the idea of feminine writing. This is another important concept driving much of this thesis which is described as the power of feeling fully and completely. Lorde describes how "the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough" (2018, p.7). In terms of disrupting epistemic sexism/racism, it is clear that "as women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge" (Lorde 2018, p.6), and so Lorde's erotic performs the same way as feminine writing, as being a form of embodied knowledge, the body being of deep importance. The power of the erotic is in finding potential, which can be done with poetic rioting and resistance from marginalised voices who have no choice, it may seem, but to have their poetics be in protest because their very existence is protest. Using this, I demonstrate how Lorde and van Neerven are resisting "universal" expectations of knowledge in their poetic accounts. The empowerment of poetics comes from these writers sharing "individual and collective memories, erotic and traumatic memories, and homeland memories as they relate to self-invention and self-narration" (Hua 2015, p.113), for as it has been described as "the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" (Lorde 2018, p.7), those feelings once expressed in an accessible form such as poetry, then being able to produce

important knowledge in this differing style of writing. I suggest, following this line of thought that poetry best expresses these ideas being discussed because the masculine logical language of order, rationality and universalism cannot capture what the poetic expresses, the same too with the feminine always in excess of these logics. It is within the constraints of such masculine logics where feminine writing and this erotic power is considered uncontainable. Considering erotic knowledge as a form of reimagined feminine writing, I suggest that poetry that arises from this power shows “the backbone of land // women’s space // for love // for beginning” (van Neerven 2020, p.93), and it is where “life appeal and fulfilment” (Lorde 2018, p.9) can be found, for the erotic after all, is “the personification of love in all its aspects” (Lorde 2018, p.9).

The language and poetic power of feminine writing is important to defy epistemic sexism and racism, because “in actuality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, are stultifying, oppressive and discouraging to all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male” (Nochlin 2021, p.30), thus the very constraints of the world are set to revoke any form of power women may have in producing knowledge through their own forms and experiences. Poetic power and power in general “are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare” (Lorde 2018, p.5), with the demand to “listen to her own inward scream” (Rich 1993, p.8), showing that “No one sleeps in this room without // the dream of a common language” (Rich 1993, p.8). Further, it can be said that the reasons “lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education” (Nochlin 2021, p.30), as was discussed in Chapter One about institutionalised knowledge and who and how this idea of knowledge was formulated.

To criticise phallocentrism and ultimately allow for differences to strengthen knowledge it is thus important to discuss what it means to write as a woman and think about women writing through the embodiment of knowledge, as I have done here. Once the constraint and classification of sameness are refused, an autonomous sense of self can come forward in both feminine writing and feminine knowledge. This all determines the importance of self in poetic knowledge, thus fighting against the systems of epistemic sexism and racism with the subjective self.

PLACING THE SELF AS SUBJECT IN FEMININE WRITING

Irigaray and Lorde both explore the 'I' when considering feminine writing and creating their philosophical poetics. I suggest that it is in this 'I' that poetics are profoundly rooted in the feminine, seeing "the most difficult thing for them is establishing a relation between *I* and *she*" (Irigaray 1992, p.3) since the "I" as thought through Westernised knowledges defines the Eurocentric man. Then, with "she", woman can speak from identity and body to show that "I feel, therefore I can be free" (Lorde 2018, p.4). Thus, it is in writing through the body rather than needing to conform to writing through phallogocentric and colonial logics is where the redefinition of "I" can begin to be brought forward, removing from the lies of universality. With the body as subject and placing oneself at the centre of their writing physically shows that their knowledge exists and that it came from within them. When writing, "she needs to be situated and valued, to be *she* in relation to her self" (Irigaray 1992, p.3), without this, epistemic sexism and racism can sustain themselves and ensure the continuation of the myth of the "universal". Instead there is "the artist's need for autonomous self-definition" (Montefiore 1987, p.29), when writing in the feminine it is clear that one needs to write through themselves and be able to write their own voice. Thus, it is in the self and the 'I' that "would enable us to define or at least to imagine the elusive but fascinating idea of specifically female identity and meaning" (Montefiore 1987, p.137). By writing with self-identity, "with the 'I' at its eternal core" (Lorde 2018, p.5), women are no longer reduced to the association with an object or assigned to motherhood, because there is an emphasis on the "I" thus demanding women be singular, autonomous beings, which can result in the previously silenced to exist within their own right. The presence of these poems and the resistance required to write them are, in my opinion, proof of the power of the poetic and show that this form is useful and significant in defiance and academia.

And so, in the rejection of male domination, the act of speaking and writing as a woman or as "other" becomes a fight against the "universal", and this act of resistance is important in the type of knowledge it produces. With feminine writing and poetics, "the question of sexuate difference is thus not only concerned with

symbolic social and political change; it is deeply concerned with [...] ways of knowing and, of course, in how we figure subjectivity” (Roberts 2022, p.158). The medium of feminine writing allows for new subjectivities which will be further explored in the following chapters about language and lived experience. It is in “the rejection, the exclusion of the female imaginary [that] certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily” (Irigaray 1985, p.30), and so to be able to envision the self as subject offers feminine subjectivity to be located as the Subject of discourse, not other, object or lack. Placing the self at the centre of one’s knowledge and discourse locates the personal within the universal, to express the need to expand the idea of what constitutes “universal”, so that “I see you in this way and you see me. At last I see myself when I see you in this difference which means that your existence can never be appropriated by me” (Irigaray 1992, p.28). In suggesting that appropriation of other could never happen due to the acknowledgment of differences, Irigaray explores the power of reclaiming autonomous feminine subjectivity. Irigaray expresses the importance of differences, for a way to oppose epistemic sexism and racism is to know that no two knowledges are the same, because of our politics of location, that an objective model of knowledge is impossible due to the variances in bodies and thinking.

Writing the self in the feminine can challenge phallogentrism. Recall phallogentrism “can be identified with a more general process of cultural and representational *assimilation*. Phallogentrism is the use of *one* model of subjectivity, the male, by which all others are positively or negatively defined” (Grosz 1989, p.105). It is in allowing woman to be seen as more than lacking, but in their own being, and in feminine writing, can express the absurdity of phallogentrism in its erasure of women’s subjectivity. I thus argue that epistemic sexism and racism are entangled with phallogentrism, with the assumption that, as Grosfoguel suggests, there are criteria for being “universal” and obtaining and sharing knowledge, and marginalised bodies and women are unable to achieve the criteria because “to undo the phallogentric constriction of women as men’s others and to create a means by which women’s specificity may figure in discourse in autonomous terms” (Grosz 1989, p.109). I see a connection here between Irigaray and Lorde about phallogentric logics in the way that this divide instead “requires reconceiving the female body as a positivity rather than a lack” (Grosz 1989, p.110), and to allow for the female body to

exist outside the constraints of physical criteria. To disrupt these ideas, one would need to not try and follow said criteria, but instead create their own knowledges, “it was so often her approach to the world; to change reality. If you can’t change reality, change your perceptions of it” (Lorde 2018, p.17). With, as Lorde says, the change in reality or at least perception, the capability to engage with knowledge becomes possible from this refusal to conform to what is set in place and believed to be “the way”. This is where the self becomes significant, I think, for it re-centres knowledge inside, rather than being a hypothetical “universal” which is out of reach of those who have been “othered”.

The current notion of rational disembodied ‘objective’ knowledge favoured in Westernised universities excludes the feminine, but “if an Imaginary mode of being could be discovered or glimpsed in women’s poems, this would enable us to define or at least to imagine the elusive but fascinating idea of specifically female identity and meaning” (Montefiore 1987, p.137). Thus, there is the ability to understand feminine writing as a way to subvert representations. As Lorde writes:

my silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences (Lorde 2020b, p.3).

This demand for refusing silence is a way in which marginalised voices can stand up against the “universal”, for if enough resist, this knowledge will be impossible to ignore. The power of feminine writing then is about re-centring our thinking and hearing, and this form of activism can involve fear, “because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (Lorde 2020b, p. 4), but that fear is not something to shy away from, because it is an indication of strong feeling. By opposing sameness and reclaiming difference, the constraints of writing through phallogentric and colonial logics are challenged to instead have women write and think through their own subjective body and allow for an embodied self as subject. Then, with this in mind, the concept of woman only in relation can be challenged, Irigaray and Lorde writing motherhood in a way that reimagines what this looks like and finds power in resisting epistemic sexism/racism to produce important knowledge.

CHALLENGING “WOMAN AS MOTHER”: REWRITING MOTHERHOOD

Both Irigaray and Lorde theorise a lot about associations of femininity and woman with motherhood, demanding that woman be seen as an autonomous being outside of the restraints of “mother”. Within phallogentric logics, women are defined in relation to motherhood, and as Jan Montefiore argues in *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women’s Writing* (1987), there is this sense that “outside of this alienating fantasy of herself as mother, woman’s ‘otherness’ is felt as a frightful abyss of nothingness that negates definition” (Montefiore 1987, p.142). I think this then says that motherhood becomes a cage that acts as epistemic sexism and racism to ensure this maintained subjugation. How “mother” here is described to be alienating shows the degree to which women are discarded into a singular definition, and as discussed in the section above, women are restricted to a sense of sameness, but power in difference both as woman and as woman as mother needs to be reclaimed.

For Irigaray, what thus becomes necessary is “a renegotiation of the mother-daughter relationship, for until the mother can be seen as a woman, the daughter does not have the basis for a feminine identity” (Grosz 1989, p.119). The power of this relationship is important to feminine writing. What I seek to demonstrate with different instances of feminine writing is to show that epistemic sexism and racism arise from the ideals of “maternity under patriarchy [which] curtails the mother’s ability to act as a woman. It also implies an ‘exile’ for the daughter, for she is cut off from access to the woman-mother; and thus from her own potential as a woman. She has no *woman* with whom to identify. She can take on the socially validated place as a mother herself only by replacing her mother, by symbolically ‘killing’ her” (Grosz 1989, pp.122-123). I argue that here, woman does not have to “kill” her mother to exist within her own right, as this notion validates epistemicide, by the destroying of one’s knowledge. Epistemic sexism is to be disrupted by the realisation that the mother-daughter relation does not need to be restrictive and instead allows for knowledge to emerge from experience and feminine writing. Thus, with the reimagining of the mother-daughter relation, Irigaray presents mother and daughter to exist within their own right.

Irigaray's poetic reimagining of the mother-daughter relation is performed in her text 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other' (1981). In this text "she does not write in the singular first person ('I'), nor address a second person ('you'), but speaks as an indistinguishable I/you: a 'we'. The 'we' here does not subsume or merge one identity with another but fuses them without residue or loss to either [...] This is a space of exchange without debt, without loss, without guilt, a space women can inhabit without giving up part of themselves" (Grosz 1989, pp.125-126). Irigaray can, I think, show the complexity of the mother-daughter relation, as in phallogocentric logics, the birth of a daughter creates competition for the role of mother. This logic demands the erasure of one's mother to obtain subjectivity, but Irigaray, in the text, expresses that "what I wanted from you, Mother was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" (1981, p.67), demanding for both to exist without giving in to the death of subjectivity. This demonstrates the challenge of "universal" to enable mother to write through their own body, and for daughter to write (and speak) through theirs, without one cancelling the other out. What then can become of this, is for mother to write as woman, daughter to write as woman, and woman to write as woman, thus to both write and be subject.

Irigaray in 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other' (1981) explores the idea of a collective, how the identity of woman is merged, forever reduced to the mother/daughter dichotomy. The paradox is that women exist only in the representation of motherhood, writing the complexity of the relation for when "you flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me" (Irigaray 1981, p.60). The idea of being paralysed rings true in an attempt to enter into the "universal" notion of knowledge, for this is out of reach for those "othered", being "held back by a weightiness that immobilizes me [...] I scream—I want out of this prison" (Irigaray 1981, p.60), seeing the connotation with being stuck in a space of subjugation from epistemic sexism and racism. This prison however, is "within myself, and it is I who am its captive. How to get out? And why am I thus detained?" (Irigaray 1981, p.60), this feeling of imprisonment being caused by the acceptance of existing within the motherhood representation, and I suggest, that to escape this prison, one needs to engage with their feminine writing and power, or as Lorde would put it, their erotic power. It is feminine writing which can help to bring about subjectivity, as it is an intervention into the male symbolic and imaginary. Feminine

writing offers a way to imagine the figure of the mother does not have to be paralyzing or all-consuming, but we can write both through the body and motherhood. The refusal to be boxed into this identity is resistance to the occurring epistemic sexism, the instance of epistemic sexism being the real prison.

I suggest that in the essay when Irigaray writes “something inside me begins to stir” (Irigaray 1981, p.60), this could be defined as the erotic, potential, and poetic power, as being “time to return to that repressed entity, the female imaginary” (Irigaray 1985, p.28). I see a connection here with Lorde’s writing and thus position the two writers in a form of conversation throughout the thesis. For Lorde, the erotic power means that “my survival lay in learning how to use the weapons she gave me, also, to fight against those things within myself, unnamed” (Lorde 2020b, p.26). The “she” Lorde refers to being her mother, thus further connecting with Irigaray’s mother-daughter relation by allowing the mother-daughter relation to strengthen rather than create competition to existence, and with this fight within, unleashing the erotic knowledge Lorde describes, that women have been told to repress and fear. Through engaging with one’s erotic power, women and the marginalised can fight against epistemic sexism/racism that diminishes the strength and visibility of their knowledges by the demand to be seen differently and as autonomous beings. Fighting then against the phallogocentric logics to see the knowledge that women produce as “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.” (Lorde 2018, p.5). Thinking of feminine writing as survival of their knowledges, it is clear that “survival is the greatest gift of love. Sometimes, for Black mothers, it is the only gift possible, and tenderness gets lost. My mother bore me into life as if etching an angry message into marble” (Lorde 2020b, p.26), for surviving means that epistemic sexism and racism is unable to sustain a hold on marginalised bodies. Survival in expressing they are still there and still writing their knowledges to be shared and heard.

Not only this but both Irigaray and Lorde comment on the ancient feminine genealogies. Irigaray writes,

A little light enters me. Something inside me begins to stir. Barely. Something new has moved me. As though I’d taken a first step inside myself. As if a breath of air had penetrated a completely petrified being, unsticking its mass. Waking me from a long sleep. From an

ancient dream. A dream which must not have been my own, but in which I was captive” (1981, p.60-61).

Lorde writes about being told, “stories about Carriacou, where she had been born, amid the heavy smell of limes [...] Once *home* was a far way off, a place I had never been to but knew well out of my mother’s mouth.” (Lorde 2018, p.11). I find this an interesting connection between the two because of the connection too with the feminine and ancient, being able to further indicate the power of the erotic and where it arises from, for it is something deeply feminine and as ancient suggests, has been existent for a long while, but epistemic sexism and racism has erased it. There is a connection too with Grosfoguel’s discussion of epistemicides, with the idea of the ancient erasure of knowledge that is considered out of the realm of Westernised knowledge. Lorde, in her autobiography, explores this imagining state, for “*Zami* is not simply an autobiography but a biomythography, in which myth and fiction function to frame past, present, and future selves” (Hua 2015, p.114), using this to be able to blend autobiography, poetry and prose to share the power of story and experience in having layers over truths, proving that lived experiences of others are important in shaping the world and memory. I see both thinkers’ engagement with myth as an intervention into the phallogocentric male imaginary of which Irigaray speaks. Knowledge is enriched by such processes:

Lorde explores erotic embodied memory, in particular, to empower herself and other women and young girls, as a resistant counternarrative to strategically deal with, heal, transform, surpass, and transcend the disheartening and detrimental conditions that are often faced by women and girls—racialization and racism, sexism, heteronormativity, class inequality, ageism, sexual violence and violation, silencing and cultural restrictions, and other exploitations that may occur in a market-driven capitalist society that prevents women and girls from self-possession and self-autonomy (Hua 2015, p. 132).

The embrace of imaginary and dreamlike memories of the ancient allows for “self-invention and subjectivity and to rewrite personal and cultural histories” (Hua 2015, p.114), thus directly being against the restraints of epistemic sexism and racism, as it exists in a realm that the “universal” notion of rational knowledge is unable to grasp due to its exclusion of “other”. Much of this dreaming and imagining comes from the idea that knowledge is passed down, and this divinely feminine power that is held within, comes from the notion of mothers and motherhood, the idea of mirroring for “*I am a reflection of my mother’s secret poetry as well as of her hidden angers*” (Lorde

2018, p.34). In the act of feminine writing, in which we have articulated the self as woman and dismantled the fusion of the mother-daughter under the realm of motherhood, we can articulate autonomous relations with motherhood. For Lorde there is an exploration that “*the strongest words for what I have to offer come out of me sounding like words I remember from my mother’s mouth, then I either have to reassess the meaning of everything I have to say now, or re-examine the worth of her old words*” (Lorde 2018, p.32). However, in resistance to the phallogentric logics of epistemic sexism and racism that ensure woman remains subjugated in the mirroring of mother/daughter, we find “this resistance of air being revealed, I felt something akin to the possibility of a different discovery of myself” (Irigaray 1992, p.105). Marginalised bodies can disrupt the notion of knowledge in the representation of themselves in their own voices and ways. As written in *Elemental Passions*,

Yet I was there, and remained there, like permanent things which are forgotten. And how could I make you remember my existence?

At one point, you seized me to take a step. Helping me over a fissure in the rock. You were holding me, I was in you. You were holding me close, experiencing my body. Touching me, and I could feel my form emerging once more.

And, from the depths of my memory, I was being reborn. I had a face once more. You could not hear me yet, but you already remembered. I walked by your side in silence.

In the deepest hidden depths, and beyond the horizon, you seek me still. Opening up the limits of what is possible. The scars of the beginning and the end of a story.

You gaze within me, and my past and my future are offered without reserve (Irigaray 1992, pp.96-97).

In this, I see feminine writing and poetics to offer up an act of resistance and power in finding identity to broaden the capabilities of knowledge and remove the restraints that exist in epistemic sexism and racism.

CONCLUSION

As expressed above, feminine writing is a way in which writers can rise from the constraints of epistemic sexism to write through becoming “other” in a positive assertive sense. Becoming other in an Irigarayan sexual difference is positive, thus

creating a poetics of resistance that fights phallogentric and colonial concepts. Also, centring the self on the subject of knowledge directly opposes the idea of “universal” to provide feminine poetics and knowledge, the distinction of such uncovering a female imaginary. Finally, with mother and daughter, the positive relationship between two autonomous feminine subjectivities rather than the patriarchal erasure of this relationship, the resistance and subversion of such representation demands a new imagining.

CHAPTER THREE: LIVED EXPERIENCE

In this chapter, Lorde's essay 'Uses of the Erotic' will be used as the framework to explore the erotic power of lived experience through the medium of poetry, and how this battles epistemic sexism and racism. Using the poetry of Audre Lorde and Ellen van Neerven, examples of the dismantling of epistemic racism and sexism will be shown, as well as the lived and important knowledge these poets provide. Lorde and van Neerven will also provide a queer perspective on knowledge and the lived experience that arises from this marginalisation. Van Neerven's work also provides an Indigenous Australian context to lived experience being an important aspect of poetry, in a form that can provide theory, and thus should also be considered important knowledge. First, I will begin the chapter by connecting back to Grosfoguel's argument alongside Indigenous Australian perspectives, to discuss van Neerven's poetry.

DECOLONIAL WRITING AND AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON EPISTEMICIDE

Before exploring van Neerven's poetry with Lorde, I am going to engage with the following thinkers to strengthen Grosfoguel's argument discussed in Chapter One by going to those who are affected by the instances of epistemicides and throughout history have experienced their knowledges being taken by western thinkers. Mary Ann Bin-Sallik, Sonia Smallcombe and Chelsea Watego are Indigenous academics of the Djaru people, Maramanindji people, and Munanjahli and South Sea Islander people respectively, and they provide rich theory and power in defying the restraints that westernised universities place on their knowledges and reach within academia.

Grosfoguel discusses epistemicides, one of the examples being the European witch hunts, and Mary Ann Bin-Sallik engages with this with Black women at the forefront, through the implication of involving Black bodies in the whitewashed idea of witch hunts, thus providing an Indigenous perspective on gynocide, exploring gender and race coined the Black witch hunts. This is important because of the erasure epistemicides had on Indigenous spiritual and cultural knowledges. Making the

connection of witch hunts with Indigeneity ensures we don't fall into the trap of making decolonisation a metaphor (Tuck & Yang 2012) and instead focus on the instances of epistemic racism/sexism. How history has confiscated and destroyed the knowledge of "other" makes it "clear that the focus is on a particular group which is seen to be jeopardising, as having the power to affect the status quo of, the state or nation state. In other words the power, patriarchy and conformity!" (Bin-Sallik 1996, p.202). The university system and academia specifically perpetuate this power and conformity in the privileging of certain voices and by creating criteria on what is considered academic and worthy to be read, even the idea of "peer-reviewed", which silences particular voices due to accessibility for certain bodies being more elevated and able to be read. The question then becomes raised, "does the absence of white recording mean that it never existed?" (Bin-Sallik 1996, p.207), the idea of white recording being the white Eurocentric account of events being what is considered fact and thus what is seen as the definitive truth, and the same can be asked if the absence of male recording mean that it never existed? These questions are the questions driving this thesis, for it targets the presence of epistemic sexism/racism, however as will be expressed, the absence of white recording or male recording does not mean it never existed, because as the thinkers and poets have demonstrated, there has always been the presence of marginalised recording, and as much as knowledge seeks to exclude them and destroy such knowledges, it will always rise to be heard.

It is necessary to note the emphasis on *Westernised universities*, to acknowledge that the realm of knowledge is arising from a specific geopolitical place. Thus, highlighting the existence of epistemic sexism and racism for the very notion of knowledge comes from men in the Western world who "After having conquered the world, European man achieve "God-like" qualities that gave them epistemic privilege" (Grosfoguel 2013, p.77). It is true and to be recognised that "until a few years ago the idea that Indigenous peoples 'owned' our own intellectual and cultural property did not exist as such property was seen to belong to anthropologists and museums who preserved and studies Indigenous groups 'to add to western knowledge'" (Smallcombe 2000, p.152), thus it has always been the decision of these institutions and those with power and patriarchy to determine knowledge and control the dispersion of such knowledge. The necessity of needing to rework knowledge from

its colonial experiences comes from the stealing of different forms and ideas of knowledge, as the witch hunts were done when “they felt that they could not control or penetrate the female psyche” (Bin-Sallik 1996, p.201), showing this fear of losing control and the upper-hand, for power, oppression and superiority are integral to maintaining institutions in their desired state. Smallcombe notes “the fact that Indigenous knowledge systems give power to women is incomprehensible to Anglo-Australian institutions because of the assumption that Aboriginal women’s knowledge holds little value in their own society, in the same way as women’s knowledge does within most western societies” (Smallcombe 2000, p.157), which provides a lived account from Smallcombe into the instance of epistemic racism/sexism in universities as Grosfoguel discusses. I think the idea of considering the strength, power and nuance in silenced voices would disrupt the framing of the system and demand a new understanding and dispersion of realisation and exploration.

The need for creating a new understanding and realm of knowledge comes from the idea that writing, knowledge, thought, and ideas all come from a certain location, that when people write, they “do write from a place. A place of power. Mind. I write this from a place in which I am meant to be powerless, literally” (Watego 2021, p.22). Lorde also discussed power and engaging with this, which I will unpack in this chapter, presenting the “erotic”. This space of existing within an institution that silences and discards the knowledge of “the other” and trying to engage within it when it works against creates a paradox wherein it is known that “the institution would never appreciate the impact of my work, and it wasn’t because it existed beyond their imagining or their reach, but because my word refused to be of service to it” (Watego 2021, p.30), which Lorde tackles in ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ (2018).

Going deeper than knowledge in academia but also the instance of feminine writing, it is clear that the same occurrences are there, for women (western and non-western) too have been made into “other”, and so the creation of a world that is no longer racist, feminine writing that is attuned to colonial logics of epistemic sexism and RACISM would be able to flourish for the current restraints would not be an issue. Thinking once again about politics of location, “the exiled location they insist we occupy is not the place of marginalisation they would have us believe, for this

land is ours, all of it. And it is in knowing our place in this place that we are offered freedom, freedom to move, to coordinate, to innovate, to agitate and demand more, because we know that as Black people we deserve more than what they have begrudgingly offered us” (Watego 2021, p.32). From this, it is clear that in the claim of place and space, people can reach out from the constraints that have been set for knowledge, to exist outside of this.

Watego raises the idea that “to stand in one’s power is not to ignore the violence visited upon us; it requires us to refuse their account of it, in which they deem it all of our making or imagining” (2021, p.24), and that “when an institution directs so much of its energy and resources towards breaking us, it speaks to their fear of our power, and not our powerlessness” (Watego 2021, pp.25-26). The power that comes from refusing to conform to the structures that tried to contain the voices of “the other” means the nuance that is born from the disregard of censorship and the idea of what is appropriate, all of which act as constraints to ensure the subjugation of certain voices is maintained. As epistemic sexism and racism are prevalent in knowledge and academia, the task of unpacking the power in feminine writing has a waterfall effect from the acknowledgement and inclusion of Indigenous and Black knowledges. Lived experience thus provides rich knowledge, which can disrupt epistemic sexism and racism, as shown in this section, through the engagement with Indigenous writers to practice privileging the voices of previously “othered”, which in turn is enabling erotic power to be used.

EROTIC AS FEMININE

The erotic, in its feminine definition, has been feared and Lorde argues that the patriarchy has oppressed women to turn the erotic “into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation” (2018, p.7), not only describing women as such but their works and knowledges too.

Following on from the argument I make in the feminine writing chapter exploring the disruption of the notion of knowledge, this also rings true in Lorde’s notion of the erotic that challenges epistemic sexism and racism. As van Neerven writes, the power gained from embracing the erotic shows how “when history becomes necessary // the sadness belongs to me // I am not aware of my power // you watch me build my

weapon” (van Neerven 2020, p.38), because it is clear that this power is within, but it is so repressed from the active workings of patriarchal restraints for knowledge. Yet, despite this, the power finds a way through, because lived experience cannot be ignored no matter how difficult the tools in place make it to be. This is shown in the way Lorde sees the erotic “as an assertion of the life force 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” (2018, p.9). Hence the erotic is a tool that those “othered” can reach within and use to express their knowledges. Thinking of the erotic this way, it “can be deeply connected to a woman’s writing, creativity, spirituality, and potentiality” (Hua 2015, p.113), because of the fulfilment and empowerment that refusing to conform to “the context of male models of power” (Lorde 2018, p.6). Rather, seeing this form of poetic power as “a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough” (Lorde 2018, p.7), because the oppression of marginalised bodies is sustained through the misinformation and fear of erotic power. Epistemic sexism and racism in the notion of knowledge can be shown to be a reason “why the erotic is so feared” (Lorde 2018, p.11), for it asks us to “demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of” (Lorde 2018, p.11). By marginalising voices and specific lived experiences, the notion of knowledge and the “universal” can sustain its higher position and continue to subjugate the forms, ideas and works of those deemed “below”. In the poem titled ‘Queens’, van Neerven asks “This is the time of night // where we can ask ourselves // how much would // we do without fear?” (2020, p.64), which can be seen to ask whether we would be capable of sharing such a deeply lived experience without this fear, but also, as Lorde suggests, that we should not fear our capabilities because:

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Here, van Neerven expresses the power of the erotic and suggests that although “it is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work” (Lorde 2018, p.7), when we do harness this power, “we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions” (Lorde 2018, p.12), thus being able to “rise up empowered” (Lorde 2018, p.8). Similarly engaging with pain and fear, the poem ‘For Each of You’ expresses to

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Both poets are seen to resist the restraints epistemic sexism and racism tries to hold over their knowledges, and with the use of their erotic and fully expressing their body as subject to share their lived experience, engaged with their politics of location and where their bodies are specifically located, they can use their poetry as academic activism. The erotic and using the power from this requires the rejection of the rules of the “universal”, to not fear “as we have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings” (Lorde 2018, p.12). This fear is the intention of “universal” knowledge and who gets to be heard, as “the fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women” (Lorde 2018, p.12). To be able to see this fear as a way epistemic sexism and racism is maintained and refuse to submit to such restraints so that “all kinds of loving still intrigue you // as you grow more and more // dark // rude and tender // and unafraid” (Lorde 1983, p.14), means, I suggest, that this feminine expression empowers the marginalised to be outspoken of the ideas they have to offer loudly.

POETRY AND POWER OF EROTIC AS ANTI-RACIST

For Lorde, “The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (2018 p.6). It is apparent that much writing and knowledges that arise from people not grouped in with “universal” man is from lived experience, oftentimes manifesting in the form of poetry, this is for “poetry [...] facilitated exploration of the self as well as larger, even universal, issues. Poetry was preferred by women especially women of colour because it was quick to produce and cheap to disseminate” (Strongman 2018, p.45). As a form that is constantly looked down upon, it is unsurprising that the knowledge shared as poetry experiences epistemic sexism and racism, yet “poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shift” (Lorde 2020, p.75), so as such an accessible form, it has the profound ability to be utilised as academic activism.

It is clear from the writing of these poets, that they can embrace their erotic power in an explicitly anti-racist way, and can empower themselves, for “I’m slowing recovering // my water // I’m slowly recovering // my power” (van Neerven 2020, p.41), showing here that there is an ability for “more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic’s electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange” (Lorde 2018, pp.14-15). In engaging with that quote though, it is important to note once again that van Neerven is non-binary, therefore the emphasis on women becomes an uncomfortable one, which I hope to express is used more in an umbrella term of those “othered” rather than of sex and gender. Thus, I argue that these writers are unpacking epistemic racism and sexism through the expression of their erotic power in their poetry and in the lived experiences they choose to share with others.

Lorde, in the poem ‘Black Mother Woman’, writes,

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Lorde discusses the “I Am”, the need to define oneself and to see beauty instead of hindrances in marginalising factors of a person. Seeing the erotic as anti-racist can mean that

energy can be directed away from establishing a correct (re)-reading or fixing of the intention of political texts – a source of so many divisions, exclusions and replication of hierarchical positions that have haunted, and continue to haunt, political movements for social justice. Rather, energy should be re-directed towards the situation and experience of instability as a site of political subversion (Nayak 2014, p.26).

Thus, I suggest that both the creation, sharing and reading of these poets is an act of subverting knowledge and how epistemic sexism and racism manifest within this.

POLITICAL BODIES

Thinking once again about a politics of location, as explained in the initial theoretical framing, both these poets search for their lived experiences and subject, significantly rooted in specific spaces and places in time. I suggest that through the expression of one’s erotic power in their poetry, subjectivity will become inherently political, thus speaking out against epistemic sexism and racism. When certain bodies are deemed political in existence because of gender expression and race, their voice too takes on this political nature. Feminine writing does not exist in a neutral space but rather is convoluted with differing layers of marginalisation, and “othering”, and often silenced by such factors. Arguably, the moment one who is “othered” within the sphere of knowledge contributes their own ideas, they are politicised and, as a result, are against the grain of what is considered to be accepted. If one uses the power of the erotic and chooses not to conform to this idea of “universal” knowledge, then

whether or not an active choice, it will be disrupting epistemic sexism and racism, purely by it too being “other”.

The idea of political bodies rings true in the experiences of the oppressed, as van Neerven writes in their poem ‘Cousins’, “this was the first time I realised that // others could see us differently” (2016, p.41). Van Neerven writes how those who live in political bodies don’t get a choice over the matter of how their bodies are perceived, and we are socialised to see this as “natural”. The poem is written through van Neerven’s body for they root their self into the subject as it is about their lived experience and how their body is political as existing and being seen as an Indigenous and queer person, in identities that have always been “othered”. Those in power fear difference and fear knowledges that could be powerful and exist in marginalised bodies, this fear is clear in the discussion Grosfoguel has on the epistemicides and the erasure of such knowledges. Another interesting point van Neerven makes is how both them and their cousin’s bodies are political, despite being in different locations and experiences, that they are seen as the same due to their skin and Indigenous heritage, writing “We are cousins // though we grew up on different sides of the axis // different sides of the moon // got to remember // same grandmother // same grandmother // We don’t share memories” (van Neerven 2016, p.41), expressing how they are seen as the same but as they are different people and do not share minds nor memories, it is nonsensical to group them as “same” when this is racially and politically motivated by how the world views people. This relates back to the we/our and my discussion with Rich at the beginning, whereby the meaning behind “we” cannot encapsulate each individual’s experience. This poem, in particular, demonstrates the differing politics of location of the cousins’ bodies, and how the demand to plummet into “my” and be rooted in lived experience is a powerful one.

Lived experience rings clearly in the feminine writing of poetry, showing that this contributes to the realm of knowledge, and that the knowledge that arises from something so deeply lived can show the importance of recognising the personal as political, thus opposing the powers of epistemic racism and sexism. The hesitation of connecting knowledge with the political is not one marginalised voices are privy to, as “the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge” (Lorde 2018, p.10). Especially in

such bodies where they are considered political, therefore it is unsurprising that their writing would take on that layer, resulting in deeply feminist philosophy, poetry and theory which decolonises and unpacks moves against epistemic sexism and racism. According to Garber, “Lorde took a firmly rooted, multiply located stand based on an identity forged through multiple differences—expressing an identity poetics” (2015, p.97), and since the emphasis is on identity, and those engaging with poetry whose bodies are considered political identities, it is clear that there is great “importance of defining one’s own identity in this hostile context” (Garber 2015, p.100). As explored in Chapter Two on feminine writing, the significance of identifying one’s self and finding power in the meaning of one’s name is a way to push back against the constraints of epistemic sexism and racism, engaging erotic power with the language of the oppressed to be able to express freely and truly.

The subjugation of women runs true in the poems, these writers sharing their lived experiences with such inequalities, as “women are still not being heard // our bodies ignored // crimes against us approved // sister spoke up // it took her life” (van Neerven 2020, p.47). The language of women and women’s voices, in general, are ignored, and epistemic sexism and racism within knowledge can be challenged by these poets using their form to expose these events. Van Neerven goes further, talking about Indigenous sovereignty as well, and going so far as to call out the university that published their poetry collection,

What of UQP’s claim? Does the fact that I have entered into an agreement with a non-Indigenous-owned press complicate this treaty? What about the non-Mununjali Yugambeh people employed in the production of this book? Does their involvement allow them a share? Who is the custodian of this book? How do we co-exist on this page? (2020, p.61).

Further, in the poem ‘Horror (plural)’ it is clear that the Westernised universities’ interpretation and production of knowledge completely removes and excludes the voices of the marginalised, the issue of decolonisation complicating it more, as it is demonstrated:

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This poem expresses the instances of epistemic racism and sexism, how colonialism for van Neerven has caused injustices and stolen many factors of their existence that should be self-determining and prevalent with a difference. They can demonstrate the areas that epistemic sexism and racism target, coming from a place of lived experience and ancestral experience, thus reclaiming their body for themselves as political rather than the colonial system's interpretation of their body as political.

The erotic is a power in which such differences can be reclaimed and used against epistemic sexism and racism. "Lorde's erotics enables individuals to meet as equals, share their experiences and ultimately overcome the barriers to understanding created by their differences" (Strongman 2018, p.48), and all of these poets can contribute to the realm of knowledge through their differences and with their own personal poetic voice. "As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different" (Lorde 2018, p.9), as Irigaray suggests when discussing sexual difference, suggesting the challenges that poetry and more specifically feminine poetry has to masculine academic prose in terms of substance and content. It is with the refusal to speak the language of the "universal" man, that empowering, enriching and recreating knowledge arises.

"[Lorde's] work is in conversation with feminist debates concerning sexism, racism and pornography that are ongoing while she is writing" (Strongman 2018, p.45), showing that poetry is active in theory and knowledge, being a way to respond to such issues in a different form than the typical "universal" language of academia. I suggest that the same is true for most poetry written by marginalised voices, as the subject and topics that poets such as Lorde and van Neerven convey are political just by being written by said voices. When existing in a body that is seen as political, it is clear that feeling and thinking and poetry are not luxuries but a necessary means of existence and recorded presence.

POETRY IS NOT A LUXURY: POETIC NECESSITY

Bodies that are continually “othered” and marginalised, in the pursuit to fight against epistemic sexism and racism, write with much more at stake than those whose knowledge is considered default. Lorde presents the idea that “For women then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence” (2018, p.2), and with this concept of survival and necessity, it becomes clear that poetry written by the “other” contributes much to knowledge because it is created under a means of need and resistance rather than, as discussed with Grosfoguel, the “universal” account that cisgendered white educated men have of their poetries and language.

Poetic power then becomes something with which resistance to epistemic racism and sexism can be tackled, and within this poetic power is woman’s power, found in this poetry which is oftentimes hidden and needs to be brought out of the dark, to show its form and name. There is a connection between poetic power and survival, as “For all of us // this instant and this triumph // We were never meant to survive”, and “So it is better to speak // remembering // we were never meant to survive” (Lorde 2019, pp.32,33), sharing then the insistence and desperation to life that women’s knowledge and the act of trying to have it heard implies. Epistemic sexism and racism are disrupted by “the transformation of silence into language and action” (Lorde 2020b, p.4), because there is no point to remain silent, for this only conforms to the systems in place, and bows down to the idea of the “universal”. Lorde writes that “My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you” (2020b, p.3), so that women and “other” may reach inside and find their voice in language, since “I would still have suffered, and I would still die” (Lorde 2020b, p.7).

The emphasis is placed that “poetry is not only a dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives” (Lorde 2018, p.3), thus the lack of luxury for women in this form is shown, as well as the full potential poetics holds to one’s livelihood. I suggest, that from this, it is clear that there is a necessity that comes with poetry and its potential as activism, for as Lorde wrote, it can comprise a person’s entire life.

CRACKS

With Lorde and van Neerven, their poetries speak to one another in their accounts of events in their lives and they focus on themselves as the lived subjects, both being Black and queer writers, who must reach into the cracks. This being, as Anzaldua theorises in 'Geographies of Selves—Reimagining Identities' (2020), for we are not either/or, but rather, “both subject and object, self and other, have and havenots, conqueror and conquered, oppressor and oppressed” (2020, p.79), and once we complicate identity, it becomes clear why knowledge too needs to be complicated and changed to involve all such identities. Identity is a fluid thing, and erotic power is a way to resist the binary of knowledge because once the traditional expectation of identity is rejected, the cracks become bigger and more light can shine through. Then “cracks in the discourses are like tender shoots of grass, plants pushing against the fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs” (Anzaldua 2020, p.73), thus being able to have perceptions of the world grow. Looking within oneself, “you might find // language is inside you // shiny and speckled // a rock” (van Neerven 2020, p.105), and seeking within these cracks, the possibility of discovery rings true. With the idea that identity is such a broad and complex thing, and thinking of questions such as “am I to be cursed forever with becoming // somebody else on the way to myself?” (Lorde 1983, p.27), the current restrictions of knowledge implementing a cemented idea of identity, those “othered” need to be “telling us who we are // not who we aren't // defying a fixed identity” (van Neerven 2020, p.24). The parameters set for knowledge and academia are set up to have the idea of the “universal” and the “other”, but by placing importance on the cracks in people's lives and experiences, there is an ability to eliminate such limiting thinking.

In the demand to reimagine ourselves, it is clear that “my body is sexed; I can't avoid that reality [...] My body is raced; I can't escape that reality, can't control how other people perceive me, can't de-race, e-race my body, or the reality of raced-ness” (Anzaldua 2020, p.65), and this reality for marginalised and oppressed bodies means that epistemic sexism and racism controls more than just the notion of knowledge. I suggest that this must be disrupted for knowledge to be true, complex and broad because in restricting some from accessing and producing, knowledge limits itself. Lived experience has a drastic impact on knowledge, because how can lived knowledge be refuted otherwise when “the places where I've lived have had an

impact on my psyche, left a mark on every cell in my body” (Anzaldua 2020, p.68), therefore influencing perceptions, thinking, language, expression, all of this is changed by location and what has been lived by individual people? Thinking then as people and their lived experiences as active agents, it can be shown that “we’re each composed of information, billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience” (Anzaldua 2020, p.69), the emphasis being on the knowledge this offers.

PATRIARCHAL RESTRAINTS

The poetics written with the engagement of the erotic by those deemed “other”, becomes “one of women’s greatest sources of power and, for that reason, has long been repressed by men” (Strongman 2018, p.48). Thus there is something within this resistance and lived experience that is missing from the notion of knowledge for the ones who decided what knowledge was, as Grosfoguel suggests, did not harness or consider such power. With both the “devaluation of poetry” (Strongman 2018, p.51) and the devaluation of women and the marginalised “other”, I suggest that there is power and significant value that is embodied within poetic writing. Epistemic sexism and racism come from a place of patriarchal restraint, and from this, women and those “othered” are

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From this, the demand of one’s self to be aware of such silencing, but not to allow the notion of “the way things are supposed to be” to make invisible the power of these knowledges. This, I suggest, is why poetry is so important as academic activism to refuse one’s voice to be only a whisper, for it is a form that so honestly

relies on lived experience and opens itself up for the varying languages of marginalised bodies to expose their truths.

Lorde writes that the erotic has been hidden and women have been warned of it, to ensure knowledge and power only to “exercise it in the service of men” (2018, p.7), epistemic sexism and racism arising from the demonisation of the erotic and the devaluation of women’s lived experiences, because “of course, women so empowered are dangerous” (Lorde 2018, p.8). With the allowance of oneself to use their power of the erotic, “I become less willing to accept powerlessness” (Lorde 2018, p.13), and instead it becomes a way to be in touch with one’s potential and the act of bravery to use such power, “not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society” (Lorde 2018, p.15). Thus, directly acting against the aims of an epistemicide.

COMMUNITY AND POWER IN COLLABORATION

“Lorde believes the erotic is a tool that can enable the reconciliation of the similarities and divergences in black and white women’s experiences and politics” (Strongman 2018, pp.42-43), thus with the differences in lived experiences, knowledge can be shared to create a more complex account of how and why things are. For “the erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge” (Lorde 2018, p.10), and when used, women can “form a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (Lorde 2018, p.10).

Collaboration is important in disrupting epistemic sexism and racism, because regardless of differing experiences, these instances are experienced by communities of people, and “as our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into, our identities” (Anzaldúa 2020, p.69). Thus, the gap between differences must be bridged “for my blood and bones are fused with yours” (van Neerven 2020, p.109) because “identity is relational [...] Identity is multilayered” (Anzaldúa 2020, p.69). Since identity has all these additional layers, it is sensible to include them in the sphere of knowledge and let there be multiplicities. The idea of

identity and layers needs to be unpacked when considering the ideas set around feminine bodies and what this means, “the desire to take clothes off // to take them off but also take // off another layer underneath // peel away those expectations // get closer to my truth” (van Neerven 2020, p.77), for there indeed is so much that comprises a person. Seeing people as existing in the cracks and being able to find identity, and this changes from being in a lived body that is experiencing different things, constantly moving and changing.

Lorde in her works is “challeng[ing] feminist discourses that minimised differences between women in the name of unity and proposes an alternative mode of sisterhood that reckons with difference” (Strongman 2018, p.42), to show that finding marginalised community can uplift all oppressed voices, and those with differing oppressing experiences can be supported. Community is where marginalised voices can find strength and volume, when

we come together now
clanswomen and women
from other nations to laugh
and to cry

my mother, my aunt, my niece,
my sister, you are mine, we're all
together now
through sorry time” (van Neerven 2020, p.90).

Suggesting that “the need for sharing deep feelings is a human need” (Lorde 2018, p.13), community must be found for lived experiences to be expressed, not sustaining the idea of the “universal”, but rather the idea that we are all human, and there is the innate need to share these as Lorde writes. Thinking then of the danger that epistemic sexism and racism have on knowledge, it is clear that “when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us” (Lorde 2018, p.13), emphasising the abusive and exploitative nature of “universal” knowledge.

CONCLUSION

From this chapter, I suggest that the different elements that comprise lived experience can be harnessed to challenge the restraints epistemic sexism and racism place on the notion of knowledge. Seeing, then, marginalised bodies as inherently political and understanding erotic power as a feminine and “othered” capability to be engaged with, this power, and poetry more specifically, are anti-racist. Lorde and van Neerven’s works can demonstrate this statement in the cracks they embark to uncover as they express their lived experience. By being aware of the patriarchal restraints, they can subvert these to produce and share knowledges.

THESIS CONCLUSION

Poetry is an important form that provides such rich knowledges and is a way in which marginalised voices and bodies can disrupt the constraints created by epistemic sexism/racism. In this thesis, I have demonstrated how the combination of both feminine writing and lived experience, within a form such as poetry, works to fight against the claims of universal rationalist knowledge. Through a discussion of a politics of location, it is apparent that knowledge cannot be disembodied because of how deeply rooted individuals are in their locations, these elements are substantial in people's production of writing and thinking through their bodies.

By beginning with a theoretical framing, I challenged what is considered knowledge within an academic scope through the discussion of terms such as knowledge, politics of location, phallocentrism, and initial insight into feminine writing with Cixous. Then, in Chapter One, I used the work of Grosfoguel to introduce epistemic sexism/racism which goes on to provide the groundwork for the remainder of the chapters. To respect Tuck and Yang's argument around decolonisation, I privileged the voices of Indigenous perspectives to not participate in the silencing of marginalised voices and allow them to speak to not speak over them. I concluded this chapter with a thought of creating a different language of the academic: out of the silence. Chapter Two went on to delve into feminine writing, with the important topics of becoming other, the self as subject, feminine poetics and knowledge, and woman as mother. In this chapter, I engaged with Irigaray and Lorde specifically to introduce how two thinkers who were/are both considered not in the realm of the "academic" or as serious as other thinkers, this being due to the creative nature of their projects. I then argued how their poetics are an act of resistance and must be regarded as contributing greatly to the realm of knowledge. Finally, in Chapter Three, I discussed the necessary act of writing lived experience. With Lorde's power of the erotic continually driving discussion in this thesis, I used the poetry of both Lorde and van Neerven to demonstrate their abilities to oppose and work against epistemic racism/sexism through their creative outputs. I discussed the importance of lived experience through political bodies and how those in marginalised bodies write poetry as a means of survival and to remain existing. I show the idea of the erotic as

feminine, and how it is a power that works against epistemic racism and sexism for it is by nature anti-racist. Further, I discussed Anzaldua's notion of existing within the cracks and the very system of patriarchal restraints being fought. Finally, I engage with power in collaboration and community to express how important poetic knowledge can disrupt epistemic sexism and racism when marginalised bodies come together.

Through the important work all these thinkers have done, and having them interact in conversation by this thesis, I hope to have shown the vitality and prosperity of poetry, and thus the need to expand the scope of what is in fact knowledge and whose knowledge it is.

THESIS WORD COUNT: 18075

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