



## The Phenomenon\* of Black Racial Identity in African-American Selected Poems

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### Article Information

#### Article History:

Received October 25, 2023  
Reviewer November 15, 2023  
Accepted November 20, 2023  
Available Online June 1, 2024

#### Keywords:

African-American,  
Blacks,  
Racial,  
Identity,  
Phenomenon

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### Abstract

This paper examines the issue of the Black Racial Identity as a phenomenon. It analyzes this phenomenon in selected poems of Lucile Clifton and Audre Lorde. It falls into two axes: the "Concept of Black Racial Identity" and "The Development of the Phenomenon of the Black Racial Identity". Black racial identity is established on the theory of nigrescence, (the process of becoming Black). It aims to change the Whites' conventional sense of the black race in general. It endeavors to give a positive sense of the racial identity of African-Americans and develop the image of Black community. On the other hand, scholars developed "The Phenomenon of the Black Racial Identity" through certain stages. The African-Americans have experienced this identity as individual in the Postcolonial period. Cross, an American scholar set a five-stage model of Black Racial Identity development for African-Americans. On the other hand, Jackson set a four-stage model of Black racial identity development. The African-American writers and literary figures are divided into two groups: one group supported the idea of utilizing the African-American language and dialect in their writings while the second group rejected the idea of using dialect. The study concludes that Lucile Clifton's and Audre Lorde's poetry represents and reflects a cultural feminist voice from a racial African-American vision, focusing on the construction of the black identity.

DOI: [10.33899/radab.2023.144110.2014](https://doi.org/10.33899/radab.2023.144110.2014), ©Authors, 2023, College of Arts, University of Mosul.

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## ظاهرة الهوية العرقية السوداء في قصائد أفريقية-أمريكية مختارة

فادي بطرس كرومي حبش\*\*

المستخلص:

تدور هذه الدراسة حول ظاهرة الهوية العرقية للسود. وتنقسم إلى محورين: الأول مفهوم الهوية العرقية للسود والثاني تطور هذه الهوية كظاهرة. وقد بنيت هذه الظاهرة على النظرية المعروفة "السواد" أو عملية التحول نحو الهوية السوداء. تهدف الدراسة إلى تغيير مفاهيم البيض ومشاعرهم تجاه العرق الأسود بشكل عام. فتحاول إعطاء إحساس إيجابي للهوية العرقية للسود الأمريكيين وتطوير صورة المجتمع الأسود. ومن ناحية أخرى، فلقد طور المفكرون الهوية العرقية للسود كظاهرة من خلال مراحل. فالإفارقة-الأمريكيون قد خبروا هذه

\* Why is it a phenomenon?? It is considered phenomenon for it has attracted the scholars' attention. It explicitly perceived and it has its influential presence in the American cultural and intellectual scene. It presented its ideas directly. It did not employ emblems or esoteric or hidden symbols.

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الظاهرة كموضوع من مواضيع ما بعد الاستعمارية. ووضع كروز, المفكر الاكاديمي الأمريكي نموذجاً مؤلفاً من خمس مراحل لتطور الهوية العرقية السوداء للمجتمع الافريقي-الأمريكي. وكذلك وضع جاكسون نموذجاً مكوناً من أربع مراحل لتطورها. فالكتاب والمفكرون والادباء الافارقة-الأمريكين يقسمون الى مجموعتين: الأولى اكدت على أهمية استخدام اللغة واللهجة الافريقية –الأمريكية في كتاباتهم بينما عارضت المجموعة الثانية هذه الفكرة تماماً. في الخاتمة, يمثل ويعكس شعر لوسيل كليفتون واودير لورد الصوت الثقافي النسوي من خلال رؤية العرقية للافارقة-الأمريكيين.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الافارقة-الأمريكيون, السود, العرقية, الهوية, ظاهرة

## I- Introduction:

The previous studies of African-American poetry rarely concentrated on the racial side without delineating its relationship with identity. Henceforth, the importance of this study lies in its focus on the identity issue with reference to the racial side. The study is confined to two African-American poets, Lucile Clifton (1936-2010) and Audre Lorde (1934-1992). Its scope consists of ten poems. It approaches the phenomenon of black racial identity through applying William E. Cross's, Baily W. Jackson's, and Marvel Elizabeth Harrison's theories of race, gender, identity and ethnicity. It is restrictive to their theories of African-American and nigrescence. It is a postmodernist approach to Clifton's and Lorde's selected poems.

In fact, human beings usually tend to seek a random racial classification in order to envisage their independent identity which differs from others' identities. The process of distinction aims to organize an individual personality that reflects that certain group along with its various merits and benefits for developing and improving their exigent role in the integrity of humanity. The integrity creates a kind of equality among all the races and people living on this globe.

The Blacks, like some other ethnic groups, endeavour to formulate an independent identity and personality. They strive to present themselves as an active group along with its benefits to humanity and civilization, throughout expressing their various scopes whether they are social, political, or scientific. So, it is possible to manipulate the idea of "race" in order to refer "to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant" (Little: 2013, 326-7). The main fundamental features of "The Phenomenon of Black Racial Identity" fall into two axes: "Concept of Black Racial Identity" and "The Development of the Phenomenon of the Black Racial Identity". The first axis presents a short sketch of the Concept of Black Racial Identity.

Black racial identity is the redefinition of the racial identity of African Americans community by the African American individual. It is founded on a theory known as nigrescence, meaning in French "the process of becoming Black" (Cross:1991, x). It is a process of changing the Whites' conventional sense of the black race in general. It endeavors to give a positive sense of the racial identity of African Americans

and develop the image of Black community. This process emerged as a reaction to the White traditional image of the African- American individual; it (this image) perceives the African American as uncivilized, uncultured, and inferior. The realization of the Black racial identity was contextualized in the African American society and art.

On the Intellectual level, The New Negro (1895) was the first African American movement that sought racial pride, self-reliance and rights for the Blacks. Its members strove to reach the cultural level of the White middle class; whereas, on the artistic level, there have come stream of African-American artistic movements since the early 20<sup>th</sup> C. They include The African-American Modernism (1910-1950), The New Negro Movement (1919-1925), Harlem Renaissance (1920-1930), The Black Aesthetic (1965-1976) and others. They sustained a new conscious awareness of the self on the part of the African-American himself/ herself. The African-American individual started to recognize himself as a Black individual belonging to a different cultural identity. His self-recognition has been developed into a Black racial identity. The phenomenon has crystalized the notion of a diversity of the ethnic and racial groups in America.

As for the second axis, it traces "The Development of the Phenomenon of the Black Racial Identity". According to scholars, the Phenomenon of the Black Racial Identity developed through stages. Cross, an American scholar set a five-stage model of Black Racial Identity development for African Americans. It involves five separate stages: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion- Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment.

The first stage involves the African-American absorbing the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture. In the second stage, the African-American individual acknowledges the influence of racism on his/her life. In the third stage, he/she tends to denigrate White people and glorify Black ones simultaneously. In the fourth stage, the individual starts to realize his/her social group in relation to the White group and comprehends his/her minority. In the last stage, the African American individual activates the personal sense of blackness and translates it into the consensus of Blacks as a group. This model of the development of Black racial identity helps understand the development of the African American identity (Cross:1971, 15-23).

On the other hand, Baily W. Jackson set a four-stage model of Black racial identity development: passive-acceptance, active-resistance, redirection, and Internalization. The first stage deals with the Blacks who totally undergo from the Whites' cultural, social, institutional standards, norms and values in their daily dealings. The second stage is epitomized through the rejection of the Whites' standards and values through having an anger feeling to the Whites' community. In the third stage, the Black comes to

establish their own unique values, standards, and tradition in addition to diminishing anger at the Whites, reducing their social isolation from the Whites and begin to feel proud of their identity and culture as well. In the last stage, the Blacks reach the acceptance of the American society with healthy aspects besides being committed to overcome poisonous elements in the American culture (Harrison:1994,19-21). Jackson classifies these four stages under the Interpersonal and Societal Approaches. The Interpersonal tackles the oppositions and contradictions in the two stages. Stage one confirms self-disability to suppress hostility, threatening and hatred. The second stage admits this approach as an irrelevant one due its involvement of Blacks' warmly contact with the Whites. The third and fourth stages find this approach as unimportant with little essentiality, while the Societal Approach is more preferred by the Blacks because it signifies Blacks' personal needs determined by the society itself or the needs which are concentrating on comprehending the society power bases and finally to coin new conceptions related to the Blackness of the Blacks with its race implications (Jackson: 1976, 72-3). Thus the African-American writers and literary figures are divided into two groups: those who supported the idea of using the African language and dialect in their writings such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Claude Mackay and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. And those who refused and rejected that idea were represented by Ameri Baraka (Leroi James), Don L. Lee (Haki Mahubuti), Countee Cullen, and James Weldon Johnson (Beach: 2003, 118-128).

Generally, literary genres are introduced as an open field of searching identity that is ironically collides with the norms of both the society and its nature which prevents humans to know himself. Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952) presented a protagonist's suffering from hatred, humiliation and discrimination and came to feel alienation. These feelings of frustration motivate one either to discover his /her true self or at least to "invent" him /herself due avoiding the blackness of skin. This situation puts the protagonist in front of two positions: the first one is related to the Whites ignoring the Blacks' individuality and their entire refusal of the Blacks' humanity. The Whites introduced the Blacks with certain stereotypes, which encouraged their exploitation and discarded their (Blacks) rights which therefore came to be seen as invisible. While the second matter appears in protagonist, as White oriented and feels inferior as well as ashamed from his/her dark skin. Because of that, the protagonist submits to the Whites' rules and customs. The Invisible Man arranged his life according to other people's models through imitation and refusing creation an independent choices and preferences (Miniotaité: 2017, 31-32).

The transformation from the idea of being Negro into being a member of Black race required using various tactics such as music, literary genres of blacks involving certain linguistic norms, etc. The writer presented his protagonist to be a universal character not only African American one because he is melted

and even assimilated in a consumer society which eradicates and obliterates all individuality of a person (Miniotaité:2017, 32).

The African Americans hardly worked to achieve an independent race, which differentiates them and portrays their entity and existence. Therefore, they relied heavily on literature to delineate the black race along with its weight in the American community as one of its main and major constituents. The African Americans educated themselves and established various literary canons in order to distinguish their Racial Black Identity that is parallel to the Whites' Racial Identity. The comprehension of one role and position is determined through creating this individuality and privacy of race. The blacks suffer from discrimination and even consider them as inferior or uncivilized creatures. All such frustrations motivated blacks to prove their existence through introducing as useful race in the community that are part of it. They refused the stereotype images, which regard them as savage, criminal and riot makers.

This study sheds light on selected poems of African American poets, which tries to prove the reality of drawing an authentic Black Racial Identity. These poets in spite of their hard working but they have been divided into two groups; one group attempts to present a black independent race while the second group works to be similar or like the Whites Middle Class equally. This matter is incarnated in the form of phenomenon due to its complexity and exigency for shaping a positive fruitful pivotal Black Race that participates actively in constructing and adding to the heritage of American community new things. This phenomenon asserts that the Black as part of the wide American community are able to enrich its different fields of knowledge and scopes of sciences and even improve its culture. The phenomenal involvement causes a radical exchange in the social wrong concepts and then leads to develop and modernize a moderate judgment and treatment toward others who are different in colour, sex, ethnicity, belief and faith, etc. Therefore, the selected African American poets for the study are **Lucile Clifton and Audre Lorde** who clearly show in their poetical works the phenomenon of Black Racial Identity obviously. In addition, they represent the two African American major points of view towards the Phenomenon of Black Racial Identity (Beach: 2003, 118-128).

## **II- Black Racial Identity in Lucile Clifton and Audre Lorde's Selected Poems:**

It is noticed that the Black Racial community is divided into three distinguishable parts. The first group employs the African myth and even borrows from Asian traditions and myths in order to create an independent racial identity. The second group imitates White communities and bears White names within the Black community. The third group intends to remain as slaves guided and directed by the White majority.

The manipulation of myth to pinpoint the Blacks' identity is widely invested in the African-American poets. The works of **Lucile Clifton** and **Audre Lorde** are enriched with presenting a new image of Black woman, her needs, defies, struggles, problems and suffering in the American society (Whites and Blacks). Therefore, Lucile Clifton and Audre Lorde intermingled the African myths in formulating their independent identity.

**Lucile Clifton** used poetry to demonstrate the state of loss and split between American women (Black and White). She discovers her blackness spiritually and feels proud of it. Thus, " Clifton apologizes for her "whiteful ways" and joyfully accepts her black identity" (Page:2007, 95). Clifton's poems clearly draw the dilemma of the black woman as part of the black community in indicating an independent identity since the Blacks own an independent race. So, this leads to have specific traditions, habits, beliefs and even way of thinking. William L. Andrews, and others (2001) shed light on the quality, subjects and Clifton's poetical themes saying:

**The themes of these exceptional poems reflect both Clifton's ethnic pride and her womanist principles, and integrate her race and gender consciousness. Casting her persona as at once plain and extraordinary, Clifton challenges pejorative Western myths that define women and people of color as predatory and malevolent or vulnerable and impotent. Her poems attest to her political sagacity and her lyrical mysticism. Poem sequences throughout her works espouse Clifton's belief in divine grace by revising the characterization of such biblical figures as the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, and in *An Ordinary Woman* she shows herself in conflict and consort with Kali, the Hindu goddess of war and creativity. (76)**

**Audre Lorde** utilized "African matriarchal myths" (Page: 2007, 372) to enhance her purpose of creating an independent identity. William L. Andrews and others (2001) argue that the main topics and themes of Lorde's poetry deal with love, betrayal, childbirth, and the complexities of raising children. They also confirm the poetess; insisting on the "thematic scope and vision of worldwide injustice and oppression (261). Lorde examines in her poetry feminism and she finds that:

**... struggled against the limitations of the label, insisting that feminism is important to all factions of African American life. As a perceived outsider on many fronts, Lorde believed that bringing together divergent groups can only strengthen and heal a torn society: "When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness,**

**and therefore my struggles on both these fronts are inseparable." (Andrews and others:2001, 261-262)**

Hence, the selected poems epitomize those subjects and themes, which are related to the Blacks search for their race and coining an independent identity to differentiate themselves from their surroundings. The chosen poems from Lucile Clifton are classified into religious and mythical thematic ones such as "**Sodom and Gomorrah**", "**Armageddon**", "**Prodigal**", "**Calming Kali**", in addition to poems that tackle captivity and serfdom which reveals in "**Mataoka**" and "**Slaveships**".

**Lucile Clifton** utilized the Biblical tales in "**Sodom and Gomorrah**", "**Armageddon**" , and "**Prodigal**" in order to combine reality with unreality through employing imaginary issues and adding to it a type of religious spirituality. She attempts to add a kind of sacredness and truthfulness to difficulties and inhuman dealings with the Blacks. The poet put human and spiritual dimensions to the issue she is fighting about through these tales.

In "**Sodom and Gomorrah**", the poet deals with a religious theme in order to disclose the suffering and unbearable life and impossible living circumstances of the black community. Clifton employed this Biblical symbolic tale to magnify the amount of black marginalization and subalternity. This tale is full of punishment, symbolic references, and it is used by the poet to convey the kind of unjust treatment practiced on the people of black complexion. The poet used satire to reveal the blacks' unchangeable situations by referring to the past with the phrase "what was", the Blacks present conditions are summarized by "what is" and their future is shortened by "what waits":

**1. what was**

**mirror-images:**

**twin cities like two bodies**

**blasted in a single furnace**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser, P. 705)**

In these lines, Clifton makes a comparison between the terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah due to their sins and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. In fact, the American Whites committed this terrible crime and its victims were the innocent people in Japan. Satirically, the poet tries to say that killing is a kind of hobby for the Whites in America. Ironically, the destiny of humanity is between the dominating Whites, and the two cities have the same destiny for being

set into fire, burning and destruction. The Whites God delineated this fate under His wrath and punishment. The Whites draw to themselves the good powers while the others are classified under evil powers.

**3. what waits**

**house of the rope**

**house of the razor**

**temple of bullets and pills:**

**the bright doors line up**

**and the knowing stars**

**ride out the whole incendiary night.**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 705)**

These instruments are tools of punishment and torturing of Blacks through a melodramatic method. The poet connected the image or prison depicted in the shape of "house of the rope / .... razor" to the type of worship in which such tantalization and torturing acts took the way of holy rituals and sacrifice by means of the use of "bullets and pills". The bullet's aim is killing the body while pills are used for abortion or even destroying the Blacks' progeny and offspring. The other dimension is mingling the savage and ancient rituals of sacrifice in order to delight and glamor the gods, which are the Whites in this context. The speaker assured the sacrifices admitted in the eternal fire for the sake of the stars. These stars could be the innocent Blacks who were victims of the Whites.

**"Prodigal"** describes the Afro-American as a man who decided to leave his father's house but after a long time from loss and foolish wasting of his fortune decided to return to his father's house. On the other side, his father was waiting for his lost son to return and at the time of his son's return, the father celebrated it because he considered that his son was lost and found. This Biblical story compared the Africans who were taken slaves and were lost in a strange land away from their culture, traditions and land. If they decide to go back to their original land, they will be welcomed at least if this journey of return is a spiritual one. The conflict between light and darkness was incarnated in the story of the prodigal son and his younger brother who was angry and embittered by the way their father received his brother with celebration. This biblical story refers to the envy, hatred and selfishness but father's mercy



and kindness remain alive even if the sons leave and spent their lives foolishly. This hints to God's patriarchal mercy and forgiving the sinners. Rachel Elizabeth Harding (2014) argues that:

**..., Lucifer's recollections are not those of the "devil", rather they are reminiscent of a prodigal son or younger brother of the creator God. ..., Clifton pulls back the accustomed Christian layers to reveal other ways of knowing underneath. ... Lucifer suggests that after all that has happened (in and to the world) in the relationship between himself and God, there is still a universe of "mercy and grace" in which the forces of independence, temptation, and sensual pleasure must ultimately find a place in the being of God, as all other divine energies do. (52)**

This evil appears in the type of form of relationship of the American community. The Blacks are portrayed as devils while Whites' religion is described as pure and righteous. The following lines sum up this meaning:

**illusion is**

**your prettiest trick.**

**free will, you said.**

**but all the roads**

**that seemed to lead away**

**have circled back again to you,**

**old father, old necessity.**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012. 706)**

The image of circle symbolizes the beginning, and the end of all things as employed in these lines. The beautiful mottos, slogans and the announcement machine for the Whites' domination deceived the blacks. Despite the religious theme of the story but the blacks suspect its justice and reality of the unequal treatment and discrimination practiced on the basis of colour and race variation. The speaker notices the unified essence of the human race is one in spite of the marginalization act. All humanity belongs to the same origin that is the "old father". This shows the equality among humanity as it is written in small letters "old father" to embrace different races and colours under its title without distinction. The biblical parable of the prodigal truly signifies the real human goodwill, brotherhood equality, justice, sacrifice,

mercy, love and forgiveness. Michael-John DePalma and Jeffrey M. Ringer (2015) claim that Clifton uses "themes of fathers and children" in order to coin the nature of "relationship of parts to whole and form to meaning, recognize the narrative's complexity in unity, and appreciate the paradoxes and ironies."(89)

On the other hand, "**Armageddon**" depicts the last battle between goodness and evil, the powers of righteousness and powers of darkness.

**i am all that will be**

**left to them in that day.**

**men will come here, full armed,**

**to make their last war.**

**their bodies will**

**litter this valley floor.**

**they will lie here together then,**

**intimate and quiet as lovers,**

**their ruby hearts still bleeding through in places.**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 709)**

The poem opens with a small letter "i" which belittles the value of the Blacks. Also, Clifton demonstrated the biblical reference to the last battle between the two opponent forces from the time of creation until the end and demolishing of the life. She protests the valueless and inferior people by the wicked Whites who regard themselves as dominating superior people. This battle is going to occur till the last breath from the side of the Blacks because it symbolizes the Blacks real existence as humans deserving to live and be respected. Otherwise, death could be a kind of consolation to them. Clifton refers to all the sacrifices afforded by the blacks through the American history and their participation in the rising of the sublimity of the America as a nation for all its people whatever their color or race is.

In her "**Slavships**" the nature of identity conflict is divided into two types. The first type is the conflict with the other represented by the Whites and the second type is the conflict between the same race (within Blacks themselves). The Asian mythology is brought to confirm the livelihood of the Black race since black colour in the Indian culture stands for death and destruction, but the African American

employed it as a sign of their colour, which distinguishes them from their surrounding and symbolizes their power, strength and continuity.

**loaded like spoons**

**into the belly of Jesus**

**where we lay for weeks for months**

**in the sweat and stink**

**of our own breathing**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 503)**

Lucille Clifton manipulated the name of "Jesus" instead of full stop to her protest toward religion and Jesus as a protector who did not do as well as to reveal her shift from one idea into another. The Blacks share Jesus in the similarity of the bloody images since Christ was crucified by Jews, who are Whites. The common colour of the shedding of Jesus and Blacks is red. Since Jesus was the redeemer, the poet blames him for not protecting and saving them from killing and serfdom. The Blacks have been shipped like animals and treated savagely to die in the sea without having a respectful burial. Clifton shows this idea in these lines:

**Jesus**

**why do you not protect us**

**chained to the heart of the Angel**

**where the prayers we never tell**

**and hot and red**

**as our bloody ankles**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser. p. 503)**

Clifton's feelings of sorrow and bitterness reflect her inner agony for adopting the Whites' traditions and reinforce her pride in her black identity as a daughter of the courageous and innocent who were brought to America by means of force and against their will. She tells about their suffering and comes to describe it in the state of "vomit". The ship has been turned from an inmate into a lively creature. The ship

started to throw the Blacks' corpses during the savage voyage under the iron fetters. Ironically, the Christian values are connected with paganism due to the fact that Christianity refuses serfdom and discards ill-treatment toward powerless and weak people.

**Jesus**

**Angel**

**can these be men**

**who vomit us out from ships**

**called Jesus Angel Grace Of God**

**onto a heathen country**

**Jesus (Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser. p. 503)**

The poet's obituary for those enslaved blacks victims is involved in bitterness and remorse. Their memory will not be more than barren bones because their flesh is stolen, and their souls have been kidnapped by the criminality of the Whites. The American critic Jean Anaportte-Easton states: "“the distinctive quality of Clifton's voice comes from her ability to ground her art in an imagery of the body and physical reality.”" qtd.in (Page: 2007, 97)

**Angel**

**ever again**

**can this tongue speak**

**can these bones walk**

**Grace of God**

**can this sin live (Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 503)**

Then, "**Calming Kali**" formulates the Hindu mythical goddess Kali who is the destroyer of the evil forces. Kali is a four-armed black female having the traits of creation and destruction at the same time. (Page, p.95) Rachel Elizabeth Harding shows that Lucile employed Kali to serve her mystical purposes in writing her poetry. The poet opens this short poem by calming the furious woman. She determines that the Black woman who improves her existence turns into endless and undistinguished fires of hell. It

seems that there are specific mixed rituals of ancient origins that demand introducing blood and bones to make the woman or goddess be calm and finish its anger as it is shown in these lines:

**be quiet awful woman,**

**lonely as hell,**

**and i will comfort you**

**when i can**

**and give you my bones**

**and my blood to feed on.**

**gently gently now**

**awful woman,**

**i know i am your sister.**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 164)**

According to Rachel Elizabeth Harding (2014), Lucille Clifton deliberately intermingles the Biblical stories with the pagan and Hindu goddesses' stories in order to present "Kali edge into others about the female body, its blood, scars, and breaking, as if to suggest the holiness in the wounds." (50) In fact, Kali is introduced as " the Hindu goddess of destruction, renewal, and eternal energy, Kali; the West African goddess of the ocean and divine mothering Ye Ma Jah; and with southern African American mystic traditions of attention to signs, dreams ,and the insistently intimate embrace of the holy." (Harding:2014, 39). Two mutual features are inseparable in "Kali": which represents every African American woman or Black woman that are destruction and holiness. This fury is owed to marginalization of the Black woman in America from having her rights. This protest is clearly expressed in the poet's use of small "i" instead of using the capital letter for this pronoun. She refuses these kinds of discrimination practiced to the Afro-American woman either from the White side and even from her own Black community. She tries to convince them that the Black woman is heaven and hell at the same time. It is heaven for those who respect her and protect her rights and hell for those who deny all those rights.

Clifton adds to this diversity of the American community the American Natives (Indian) through the poem "**Mataoka**" who saved the life of Captain John Smith. Moreover, she insists on the possibility of strengthening the Whites and Blacks or Natives by means of marriage. Nations and people are created to

meet, and knowing each other and not to fight and destroy one another. Lucille Clifton introduces the story of Mataoka or Pocahontas in order to show the similarities of this woman voyage into England and her death due to the diseases along the Afro-Americans who are brought from Africa to die through the voyage by various diseases. The common criminal in these two cases is the White man as the poet refers to him as "dream":

**in the dream was white men**

**walking up from the river**

**in the dream was our land**

**stolen away and our horses**

**and our names**

**in the dream was my father**

**fighting to save us in the dream**

**the pipe was broken**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 647)**

Then, in the previous lines, she portrays her father as fighter holding a broken weapon (pipe) because as a black man with a confiscated well is unable to change the reality of being slaves. She utilizes the "dream" as an illusionary defense not only to create a sheltered zone for her fears but to establish within her inaccessible dream. She delineated through such escaping and unrealistic dream imagery an independent Black racial identity of a well-confiscated father and children with a good-will to identify themselves as people who totally refuse the idea of revenge as this idea sheds light on it through the father's broken pipe:

**and i was leaning my body**

**across the whimpering**

**white man**

**if our father loves revenge**

**more than he loves his children**

**spoke the dream**

**we need to know it now**

**(Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser:2012, 647)**

Mataoka demonstrates the goodness of the blacks as merciful and compassionate people. The blacks tend to help and save others even rescuing those who attack them. The poem symbolizes the entire humanity of the black people since they have senses, emotions, kindness, passions and love. The aboriginal and black slogan "the pipe" has been broken or destroyed by the invaders who are the Whites while the land owners were unaware of the Whites' plans but in spite of the speaker's father's plans for revenge, their descendants refuse having avenge from the Whites. Instead, the shocking reply and revenge were by getting marriage from the Whites to transmit the great humanity and forgiveness to all the committed crimes against the aboriginal people and the blacks too.

While **Audre Lorde** selected poems revolve around injustice, oppression, racism, gender and identity. Yolinda Williams Page (2007) confirms that "Lorde created a mystic identity for herself" (157) as she is portrait as a strong warrior who fought "depression, racism, sexism, and later cancer" (158). She appears to be a woman of contradictions by her love and hatred to whites, for her love of men and hatred them, etc. (Page:2007, 158) Audre Lorde poetic works indicate various social and political tendencies; especially in "**Equinox**" from the collection entitled *Cables to Rage* (1970), "**Who Said It Was Simple**" from the collection *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973). While in her poem "**Coal**"; from the collection *The First Cities* (1968), shows her celebrity of her black identity and in her book *The Black Unicorn* (1978) especially in the poem called "**From the House of Yemanjá**" manipulates the mythology in introducing the image of serfdom ugliness. In these works, the African mythology enhances the themes of racial pride, identity, women, spirituality and motherhood, etc. Lorde used visual images and symbols to reinforce the topics exposed in her poetry.

"**Coal**"; from the volume called *The First Cities* (1968), is regarded as an opposition to the injustice, inequality and dehumanization practiced to the Blacks. The coal and the blacks have the same colour significance as they are portrayed by the Whites an evil, dangerous and criminal people. Such labeling is an absolute kind of dehumanization practiced to an ethnic group or race. Therefore, these practices encouraged the Blacks to innovate as a special and distinguished social, educational, cultural and even religious identity.

**I**

**Is the total black, being spoken From the earth's inside.**

**There are many kinds of open.**

**How a diamond comes into a knot of flame How a sound**

**comes into a word, coloured By who pays what for speaking. (Roxane Gay:1976. *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*. np)**

Lorde brilliantly reflected her inner feelings, emotions and self through a prose poem. She intermingled poem and text as one unity in order to incorporate the insuperable unity between body and soul. Through this unique relationship, Audre Lorde was able to transmit the suffering of the blacks beside their sacrifice after death of "Gennie". This memorial poem expresses the poet's life at a "particular moment in time" which is known as "technique of metissage" through the combination of "autobiography, poetry, and myth into a biomythography and thus into a multi-faceted mirror for herself and her dead friend". (Birkle:1996, 221) The identity is basically the core issue for Lorde as she begins her poem with "I" and through using the mirror image; Lorde declares that she is proud of being black and rooted deeply in the earth. (Ibid:1996, 236)

**Some words are open**

**Like a diamond on glass windows Singing out within the**

**crash of passing sun Then there are words like stapled**

**wagers In a perforated book—buy and sign and tear apart**

**—And come whatever wills all chances The stub remains**

**An ill-pulled tooth with a ragged edge. (Roxane Gay:1976. *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*. np)**

In these lines, Lorde defends her black skin with the racial oppression and apartheid policies practices by the Whites to connect it with the source of the diamond which is coal. Since diamond resource is coal that is characterized by the blackness of its color which is the same color of the African-Americans but it is too worthy and valuable. This means the Africans value is also important, otherwise it is discrimination and obvious bias. The Africans who produces diamonds from the mines are able to produce and innovate or create their outstanding literature and being distinguished by the language they use since she mentioned "books" (Beach:2003, 134)



**Some words live in my throat Breeding like adders. Others**

**know sun Seeking like gypsies over my tongue To explode**

**through my lips**

**Like young sparrows bursting from shell.**

**Some words**

**Bedevil me.**

**(Roxane Gay:1976. *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*. np)**

Lorde accuses the Whites of deviling their Blacks due to the complexion. This mirrors the White hatred and psychological complex against the blacks. The metaphor of the Blacks mirror image is connected with the visual images in the poem. The originality of her blackness is not only incarnated in her complexion but in earth and language as well (Birkle:1996, 236)

**Love is a word another kind of open— As a diamond comes**

**into a knot of flame I am black because I come from the**

**earth's inside Take my word for jewel in your open light.**

**(Roxane Gay:1996. *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*. np)**

The justification of her Blackness is introduced from being the origin of the land. The blacks are sprung from the deep essence of the earth. They represent the core of the land as their roots are deeply indulged in it. The poet arrives at the reality of being proud of her dark colour. The darkness signifies originality and the deep sense of human being represented by the earth. Those uncontrolled senses are shining like diamonds as they indicate man's liberty and emancipation from the fetters of serfdom. Carmen Birkle (1996) claims that:

**"Coal" is a poem about the various processes of coming to speech, of writing, of communicating, but it is also the metaphorical definition of a black self, a black poet and thus of Lorde herself. The words are organic and always come out of somewhere deep inside a human being, and the writer or speaker is not in control of these words. In that sense, the poem "Coal" is a mirror for the poet Audre Lorde, for the "total black." (237)**

In the collection of poems entitled *Cables to Rage* and especially in the poem “Equinox”, the poet begins this poem by mixing secularity with religious images to concentrate on the Blacks suffering. In fact, Lorde introduced amazing and powerful images along with having contradictory symbolic meaning as in the following lines:

**My daughter marks the day that spring begins.**

**I cannot celebrate spring without remembering**

**how the bodies of unborn children**

**bake in their mothers flesh like ovens**

**consecrated to the flame that eats them**

**floating like small monuments**

**in                      an                      ocean                      of                      oil.**

<https://ineedtoreadmorepoetry.tumblr.com/post/180940180024/equinox-by-audre-lorde>. np)

She introduced spring as a season of cruelty not as a beautiful nature and soothes. Lorde laments “the bodies of unborn children” as if spring is the season of mourning and sadness instead of being the season of happiness and life renewal. It is turned upside down to signify a season of torture, loss and crying. Then, the poet moves to intermingle the religious issues of offering sacraments to the ancient gods since introducing the two words “bake” and “consecrated”. In fact, in the ancient rituals practices are fulfilled. They imply the holy fires eating the flesh in order to produce perfumes that please the pagan gods and at the same time, they refer to the White Western Civilization. According to Lorde, this civilization enslaved Blacks to entertain and enjoy the Blacks baked flesh and burned to turn to the oils which delight the Whites who turned to be the pagan gods.

In addition to that, Lorde explores the various kinds of death of the activists who defended the rights of the Blacks rights. Ironically, the methods used to get rid of them reflect the cold blood of the criminals who appeared as if they were catching rats or animals as she talks about the death of DuBois and the Birmingham’s Black Children:

**The year my daughter was born**

**DuBois died in Accra while I**

**marched into Washington**  
**to a death knell of dreaming**  
**which 250,000 others mistook for a hope**  
**believing only Birmingham's black children**  
**were being pounded into mortar in churches**  
**that year**  
**some of us still thought**  
**Vietnam was a suburb of Korea.**  
(<https://ineedtoreadmorepoetry.tumblr.com/post/180940180024/equinox-by-audre-lorde>. np)

These lines intend to focus on the Blacks' dilemma of being chased to fall dead in various parts of the world. They have been deprived of serfdom. The most ugliest and horrible image is brought to emphasize the Blacks' undergoing is the image of smashing the "Blacks children" in churches which are supposed to be holy and sacred places and not places of criminality and discrimination practiced to innocent and faultless children. The strengthened Whites savageness is portrayed in the Vietnam and Korean wars because in these two countries people have complexion and skin different from the Whites. The mentioning of the great black figure DuBois in the previous lines is not randomly since Lorde intensifies the value and tax of struggle till obtaining all the rights whether for blacks or others. Therefore, DuBois symbolizes the embalm of struggle toward liberty and equality. So, DuBois believed in the power of intellect and academic knowledge implemented for the social change of both Whites and Blacks that he expressed in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In spite of the death of his son, he continued his battle till obtaining blacks rights (Griffin. W.E.B.Du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk*, np.)

In the poem entitled "**Who Said It Was Simple**" from the collection *From a Land Where Other People Live*, the poet reveals the utmost ugliness of slavery as she deals with the issue of Whiteness and Blackness colours, discrimination and the method the Whites abuse the Black girls' sexually including rape and so on:

**There are so many roots to the tree of anger**  
**that sometimes the branches shatter**

**before they bear.**

**Sitting in Nedicks**

**the women rally before they march**

**discussing the problematic girls**

**they hire to make them free.**

**An almost white counterman passes**

**a waiting brother to serve them first**

**and the ladies neither notice nor reject**

**the slighter pleasures of their slavery.**

**(Audre Lorde:2012. *Classic Poetry Series*. P.40)**

Lorde attempts to maintain a new perspective to African-Americans women through declaring rights of the Blacks' lesbians in the American community beside their sexual rights too. She tries to defend her choice for being lesbian and having her independent decision concerning sexist or carnal or the physical practices to women. She discloses the painful fact that due to her sexual tendencies, she turned to be fought by her community who refuses such matters. Despite those negative reactions towards her, she regained her rights through poetry as a rejection to those nullified accusations, hatred and belittling look to herself. She totally refused the idea of being isolated from her society and struggled to liberate herself from such injustice and personal and psychological prison in order to live her life as she wants and not according to the black and the white communities wish.

**But I who am bound by my mirror**

**as well as my bed**

**see causes in colour**

**as well as sex**

**and sit here wondering**

**which me will survive**

**all these liberations. (Audre Lorde:2012. *Classic Poetry Series*. P.40)**

Audre Lorde depicted the inhuman conditions of exposing the Black girls and women in a kind of auction to sell them. The most humiliating thing is making them in a kind of display as if they are goods or they stand for a kind of food that is eaten in fast food restaurants such as “Nedicks” chains. The poet aims to liberate the black women who are dually enslaved by their Blacks community and the Whites as well. She concentrates on the individuality of person as major right. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) draws a clear map of the Black women intellectuals “self-definition” and “self-determination” as a basic element to create a “heterogeneity of Black womanhood”. This action is faced with everyday barriers but facing it with courage leads to “Blacks women survival” (36). Audre Lorde concentrates on the importance of the individual voice within collective context of Black women’s communities in order to create self-affirmation. Being silent is the most dangerous thing for the Black women writers and members of Blacks’ community as well. They realized the danger of being Black and woman too (Collins: 2000,104).

Lorde deals with mythology to create an independent Black identity and character since she was from Caribbean-American origins. She employs the White myth to enhance her noble task as it appears in the first poem entitled "**From the House of Yemanjá**" from her collection of poems *The Black Unicorn*. Carmen Birkle (1996) argues:

**Mother of the other Orisha, Yemanja is also the goddess of oceans. Rivers are said to flow from her breasts. One legend has it that a son tried to rape her. She fled until she collapsed, and from her breasts, the rivers flowed. Another legend says that a husband insulted Yemanja's long breasts, and when she fled with her pots he knocked her down. From her breasts flowed the rivers, and from her body then sprang forth all the other Orisha. River-smooth stones are Yemanja's symbol , and the sea is sacred to her followers. Those who please her are blessed with many children (197)**

Again, she depicted two contradictory images of “two women” in one body which are the mother and the witch in order to inject stream of life and warmth to the poem’s atmosphere. It is an action of empowering the weak and well confiscated women especially the Black ones. Audre Lorde says:

**My mother had two faces and a frying pot**

**where she cooked up her daughters**

**into girls**

**before she fixed our dinner.**

**My mother had two faces  
and a broken pot  
where she hid out a perfect daughter  
who was not me  
I am the sun and moon and forever hungry  
for her eyes. in the midnight storm.**

**(Audre Lorde:2012. *Classic Poetry Series*. 17)**

The poet is clutched by the dual image in her poem in order to shed light on the concept of identity since she unearthed this inner personal split in her identity. She begins this with two faces of her mother to shift to employ the two concentrations “sun and moon” that enhances her ideas concerning the issue of identity because the varieties between these two planets. There is a kind of duality image in the two mothers which is demonstrated in realistic mother. The poet utilized contradictory images in order to create such typical stereotype picture of mother as she is dark and pale, rich (ivory), hungry (bread) and terrified, etc. In fact, the daughter acquired her mother’s double personality and identity. Moreover, she considered mother’s breasts as “anchors” to reinforce steadfastness in addition to nutrition, passions and originality (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>). But unfortunately in spite of that the daughter is always hungry maybe because of starvation and lacks of food are caused by serfdom to the Afro-Americans or Blacks in general. However, the two faces of the mother could be an indication to America as nation with two races Whites and Blacks. The poet attempts to convince herself and her readers to accept this reality of duality and diversity of multi-ethnic existence.

**I bear two women upon my back  
one dark and rich and hidden  
in the ivory hungers of the other  
mother  
pale as a witch  
yet steady and familiar  
brings me bread and terror**

**in my sleep**

**her breasts are huge exciting anchors**

**in the midnight storm.**

**(Audre Lorde:2012. *Classic Poetry Series*. 17)**

Yolanda Williams Pages (2007) uncovers the secret behind Lorde's utilization of the matriarchal myths as a bridge of the blacks cultural and traditions habits besides exposing "the misrepresentation of Africa and its people" (372) as it is reflected clearly in her collection entitled "The Black Unicorn". Therefore, it is not strange of the Blacks to use the African mythological fables to reshape their lost or confiscated identity among the Whites community. In fact, this duality indicates manipulating the two faces of new Blacks identity which are their original roots of Africa and new identity affected by the Whites one. In adopting these two culturally identities, African-Americans are going to melt and re-establish an updated Black racial identity who are proud of their past and origin and at the same time are able to cope with the new modern life within the whites majority. The Black racial identity is an independent one and it accepts all without bias to any one and at the same time it is capable of evolvement and development.

Besides, there arose Black female group of poets and writers whose poetry investigated the social injustice, silence and freedom. This group was known as "womanist". Yvette Hutchinson (2002) claims that such type of poetry is used in order to increase the intimacy among the black people. The Black women wrote this poetry as a kind of inner revolution among the black community for achieving normal and healthy relationships beside finding respect among the blacks community. The black woman poetry was classified into two kinds: "hypermasculine" and "hyperfeminine". (179-180) This norm falls within "womanist essentialism" which entails the pivotal and major role of the black women's writing as an essential agent of change through its specific revolutionary intends (Ibid,183).

### **III- Conclusion:**

To conclude the African American or Black poets Lucile Clifton and Audre Lorde employed the ancient African and Asian myths and mythological conceptions in demonstrating a pure Black Racial Identity as parallel to the White one. Moreover, the success in adopting some of Whites heritage in their demand of crystallization of the black racial identity since they are incapable of getting rid of the slavery impact on them. This is widely revealed in adopting the Whites' names, titles and even surnames. The historical inheritance of serfdom continues streaming in their blood. Altogether, these three factors

worked together to introduce a comprehensive black racial identity in spite of the negative and positive sides. Yet, African-Americans had hopes in living within western whites communities as minorities distinguished by their special different identity from their surrounding ones. They are proud of their past and African ethnic group by means of using myth. They remember their destiny as slaved community (serfdom and their bringing to America as slaves), beside their anxiety from future. This anxiety is represented in liberation and consequently in manipulating the Whites' names as a source of integration or disappearance among the Western community and civilization (white civilization). It is represented in converting from African traditional religions into Christianity (the religion of the Whites) in order to escape from the black colour stigma. In short, the two African-American poets', Clifton and Lorde endeavor to configure as special racial identity of the African-Americans' through their poetry. Their poetry represents and reflects a cultural feminist voice from a racial African-American vision.

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