

Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*: Lorde's Mastectomy as an Identity

Ali Mohammad Alshhre

Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, King Khalid University, Mohayil City, Saudi Arabia

Email address:

ama101034@windowslive.com

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Abstract: Mark Sherry, in "(Post) colonizing Disability," defines disability differently and reconsiders it as an identity like race, religion, and gender: "it is an identity, with both social and personal dimensions, which may be associated with feelings of community, solidarity, and pride, or conversely, with feelings of difference, exclusion, and shame. It could be an identity that is based on identifying as someone who navigates the world in atypical ways," [15] such as encountering some physical and attitudinal obstacles. This paper argues that feminist disability theory provides many ways to think about women's disability and how their disability is considered as an identity and pride rather than something shameful or embarrassing in Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*. For example, After Lorde's breast cancer surgery, she refuses having a breast prosthesis because she considers it as something against her identity and her body. She reflects, after mastectomy, how disability is in itself identity that is associated with her body. Moreover, her novel can be read to gain the experience that rather than accepting the breast prosthesis that makes people change their views in a society towards her and to avoid looking at her strangely, her disability as an identity and pride that makes her accept her temporary situation without having the breast prosthesis. Consequently, Lorde's refusal for the breast prosthesis and to remain as she is signifies how important is it to keep her real identity in a society even if she faces negative attitudes or negative barriers.

Keywords: Colonialism, Medical Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Disability, Mastectomy, Prosthesis, Feminist Disability, Self-Power, Disability Pride

1. Introduction

The term "disability" has many various definitions in different books, magazines, and articles. Some of its definitions are medical, political, social, religious, cultural, and personal. Mark Sherry in "(Post) colonizing Disability," defines disability differently and reconsiders it as an identity like race, religion, and gender: "it is an identity, with both social and personal dimensions, which may be associated with feelings of community, solidarity, and pride, or conversely, with feelings of difference, exclusion, and shame. It could be an identity that is based on identifying as someone who navigates the world in atypical ways," such as encountering some physical and attitudinal obstacles. [15] In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde suffers a lot because of breast cancer, and she does not agree on having the breast prosthesis to hide its mastectomy from people in her society due to her consideration for her disability as an identity. Mark Sherry

considers disability as an identity, but the society is using the term to colonize the identities, and it is an effect of colonialism in epoch of postcolonialism. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde illustrates many ways to think about women's disability, and their disability experience as an "identity," [15] self-power, and pride rather than a "form of postcolonialism" [15] that is shameful and embarrassing in their communities. Therefore, I argue that, through Lorde's consideration of her mastectomy as an identity, self-power, and pride, she encounters and sees wearing the prosthesis as a form of colonialism which colonizes her body's freedom and her identity.

2. Lorde's Mastectomy (Disability) as an Identity

Susan Wendell argues that disability is a "social practice" symbolizing inequality, discrimination, and oppression

against other people who are labeled as disabled in any society: “. defining disability and identifying individuals as disabled are also social practices that involve the unequal exercise of power and have major economic, social, psychological consequences in some people's lives.” [17] She adds that “It is important to keep in mind that some people who consider themselves disabled are not identified as disabled by everyone else.” [17] Wendell claims that some people who are labeled or see themselves as disabled should rethink and reportray themselves bravely and decisively. Wendell asks people in the society to not accept the term “disabled or disability” because the society has no right to classify them as disabled. For Wendell and Sherry, disability is not a term associated with descriptions or depictions of people's bodies, but rather it is something related to society's thinking, feelings, decision, and identity.

Sherry's definition for “disability” is different from other definitions. He sees it as an identity which is based on identification like one who travels around the world in atypical way, encountering many physical barriers and negative attitudes. [15] One of the “attitudinal barriers” that is encountered by Lorde to represent her disability as an “identity” occurs when she refused to have the prosthetic device while talking with the nurse:

You are not wearing a prosthesis, she said, a little anxiously, and not at all like a question. ‘No,’ I said, thrown off the guard for a minute. ‘It really doesn't feel right,’ referring to the lambswool puff given to me by the Reach for Recovery volunteer in the hospital. Usually supportive and understanding, the nurse now looked at me urgently and disapprovingly as she told me that even if it didn't look exactly right it was ‘better than nothing,’ and that as soon as my stitches were out I could be fitted for ‘a real form.’ ‘You will feel so much better with it on,’ she said. ‘And besides, we really like you to wear something, at least when you come in. Otherwise it's bad for the morale of the office.’ [12]

This dialogue between Lorde and the nurse signifies that the nurse is shocked when she knows that Lorde is planning to not wear the prosthesis. Lorde wants to remain as she is. But, when Lorde hears the nurse's attitude regarding that, she becomes angry because she considers the nurse's words as an assault on her body, her emotions, and her right. Unlike other women with disabilities, Lorde does not see her mastectomy as a disability and does not label herself as a disabled woman; but rather, Lorde considers herself and other women with breast cancer as warriors in a great war: “women with breast cancer are warriors. [And] I have been to war and still am.” [12] Wendell says, “not everyone who is identified by other people as disabled (either for purposes of entitlement, purposes of discrimination, or others) considers herself or himself disabled.” [17] Lorde sees the nurse's reaction towards her refusal of the prosthesis as an attack on her privacy. In other words, the nurse sees Lorde as a disabled woman after the mastectomy, but Lorde does not agree to see herself as a woman with disability. The attitude of the nurse towards lorde's refusal for the prosthetic device supports what Wendell says about disability and how it is socially constructed.

Lorde sees her mastectomy as something she is proud of rather than a stigma she must hide from the society. The nurse's reaction to Lorde, when Lorde refused to have the prosthesis, does not influence her; therefore, Lorde's mastectomy is seen by the nurse as something stigmatized, and Lorde must hide it by the prosthesis. In Myron G. Eisenberg's, Cynthia Griggins's and Richard J. Duval's *Disabled People as Second – Class Citizens*, they say, “Once the disabled person becomes aware of his stigmatized label, his self- perceptions are affected. Even if he rejects the label, his awareness of the reactions of others will contribute to changing the social interactions of which he is a part.” [4] Lorde neither sees her mastectomy as a stigmatized label nor it influences her self- depiction. She does not see it a stigma, but rather she sees it as part of her valuable body that represents and evaluates her valuable identity. Consequently, Lorde's rejection of the nurse's and the doctor's attitude towards the prosthesis gives her a power to increase her perception to call other women with breast cancer to change the negative societal attitudes towards them:

If we are to translate the silence surrounding breast cancer into language and action against this scourge, then the first step is that women with mastectomies must become visible to each other. For silence and invisibility go hand in hand with powerlessness. By accepting the mask of prosthesis one-breasted women proclaim ourselves as insufficient dependent upon pretense. We reinforce our own isolation and invisibility from each other as well as the false complacency of a society which would rather not face the results of its own insanities. In addition, we withhold that visibility and support from one another which is such as an aid to perspective and self- acceptance. [12]

Lorde's struggle for changing the attitudes of the society is something heroic. Instead of putting the prosthetic device on her breast to be more accepted in her society, the society must change its views towards women with breast cancer because the society can change its views but not our identities. Lorde's visibility in the society without having the prosthesis would create many supports for post-mastectomy women. She sees that if women with mastectomy keep silent and give up to remain invisible would increase the chances of their isolation, and they might feel as if they are strangers or aliens. She does not give up or let the society's negative opinions alienate her, but rather she reinforces herself to remain strong and brave to face all the negative attitudes, especially after her refusal for the prosthesis.

Simi Linton in *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* argues that her experience of disability or as “a disabled subject”, and [her] alliance with the community are a source of identity, motivation, and information.” [11] Much like Sherry' reconsideration of disability as an identity, Linton sees the term “disability” as “a marker of identity” as well. [11] Concentrations of Linton and Sherry to define the term “disability” as an identity are signs for greater changes in their societies. They disregard the medical definitions of disability because Linton and Sherry think that, “the medical definitions of disability are dominant, [and] it is logical to

separate people according to biomedical condition through the use of diagnostic categories and to forefront medical perspectives on human variation.” [11] Concerning the redefinition of the term “disability,” Linton and Sherry illustrate how medical opinions and definitions of disability influence, affect, and oppress many people in societies. Lorde is not influenced by the medical opinions regarding the prosthesis. When she rejected the notion of the prosthesis, she outraged after hearing the nurse response and reaction, “it is bad for the morale of the office.” [12] Therefore, Lorde’s disagreement with the nurse regarding the prosthesis signifies how she is seen as “a threat to the ‘morale’ of a breast surgeon’s office.” [12] Lorde is shocked and “realized that the attitude towards prosthesis after breast cancer is an index of this society’s attitudes towards women in general as decoration and externally defined sex object.” [12] After Lorde’s attitude with the nurse, she thinks to “. reexamine the quality and texture of” [12] her whole life to face this society’s negative attitudes towards women with breast cancer experience. Lorde’s presence and call for women with breast cancer to be visible in the society is considered a “source of identity and motivation.” [11] Moreover, Lorde’s presence and visibility among her society and her friends is a sign of power, bravery, and heroism to her society’s negative attitudes towards women with a mastectomy. Lorde says: “I am not alone. Yet once I face death as a life process, what is there possibly left for me to fear? Who can every really have power over me again?” [12] Lorde challenges her society to make changes regarding views towards women with mastectomies because they have right to live as other people in their society.

3. Lorde’s Mastectomy as a Source of Self-Power and Pride

Lorde knows herself very well when she decides to not wear the prosthesis. Knowing the self gives one more confidence and courage to decide wisely and rightly. Kenneth J. Gergen in “The Self: Colonization in Psychology and Society,” explicates the importance of self-knowledge and its consequences: “While the Greek exhortation to ‘know thyself’ has resounded compellingly across the centuries, the object of knowledge in this case has been in a state of continuous transformation, [and]. the self was virtually equivalent to the human soul.” [7] Even Lorde, after the mastectomy, insists on self- knowledge without paying attention to the other doctor’s words and speech regarding the prosthetic device. She mentions that, “Self-scrutiny and an evaluation of our lives, while painful, can be rewarding and strengthening journeys towards a deeper self.” [12] Furthermore, the breast cancer surgery led her to know herself better and wisely after her disapproval of the prosthesis. She wants to appear as she is in her society without giving any attention to the other people in the moment of seeing her without the prosthesis. This signifies that she values herself after mastectomy even after her

decision to not wear the prosthesis. After her mastectomy, she does not see her breast cancer surgery as a disability that should be hidden from other people by wearing the prosthetic device, but rather she accepts staying without it to represent her true beauty.

Knowing the self gives power, resistance, and durability. Lorde was very strong, before and after the surgery, to accept her appearance and beauty without the prosthesis. She says: “It was very important for me, after the mastectomy to develop and encourage my own internal sense of power. I needed to rally my energies in such a way as to image myself as a fighter resisting rather than as a passive victim suffering”. As a result, after the mastectomy, Lorde with a feminist disability always looks to the bright side of her life and to be loving again:

It is physically important for me to be loving my life rather than to be mourning my breast. I believe it is this love of my life and myself, and the careful tending of that love which was done by women who love and support me, which has been largely responsible for my strong and healthy recovery from the effects of my mastectomy. [12]

Lorde looks at her good things in her life. She does not care for what others say. She does anything that makes her happy and bright. Moreover, her ambition leads her to look at the bright side of her life to feel better. Due to her power and resistance, she does not feel or describe her life after the mastectomy as shame or disgrace.

Breaking silence and using it to make the whole world understand one’s sufferings and feelings is another form of power that results from seeing disability experience in *The Cancer Journals*. Lorde’s experience with breast cancer surgery and her refusal of the prosthesis leads her to be powerful. Without considering it as a shame or disgrace, she shares her knowledge and experience of the breast cancer surgery with the people in her community. As Diane Price Herndl mentions in her article “Reconstructing the Posthuman Feminist Body Twenty Years after Audre Lorde’s Cancer Journals,” “Lorde begins the work of giving voice to women and to women issues that had remained hidden, shameful, unspoken.” [9] She not only encourages herself to speak in public about her breast cancer, but also encourages other women who had breast cancer to avoid silence and start sharing their feelings to the people in their societies. She says to “. every woman. having one breast did not mean her life was over, nor that she was less a woman, nor that she was condemned to the use of a placebo in order to feel good about herself and the way she looked. Well women with breast cancer are warriors.” [12] As a result, her speech encourages the visibility of women with breast cancer in their society, and her attempts to convince women with breast cancer are good steps towards changing the society’s perceptions. Moreover, her refusal to have her scars invisible and hidden “behind lambswool or silicone gel” [12] is another example of her consideration of her disability as something she is proud of; consequently “scars become not only evidence of wounding, but also a new surface on which to form community and intimacy.” [8] She learns from her

mastectomy to support and call other women with mastectomy to be visible and brave to change some societal negative ideas pertaining them.

Self-esteem has a strong association with identity. Rosalyn Benjamin Darling offers in her book, *Disability and Identity: Negotiating Self in a Changing Society*, some studies about the lowering percentage of self-esteem in women with disabilities: "women with disabilities tend to have lower self-esteem and lower perceived quality of life scores than other women. [And] self-esteem is comparatively low among women in general and especially low among women with disabilities." [2] Although Darling's speech about the lowering rate of self-esteem among women with disabilities, Lorde represents and appreciates her self-esteem and respect her body after the breast cancer. She represents her self-esteem and power through her novel when she decides to avoid silence, and starts sharing and telling her society about her experience with breast cancer: "And, of course, I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger." [12] The significance of breaking silence to express a person's internal feelings to the world is signifying to the appreciation and respect of self. Moreover, women with a disability do not feel convinced about their life, and they are not satisfied with it. [2] The reduction of self-respect is escalating among them due to their disabilities. But, Lorde is different from other women with breast cancer. After her mastectomy, she develops and improves her self-esteem by sharing her experience of cancer to the society. She becomes enthusiastic and satisfied with her life with her friend Frances who helps her and stands beside her in her difficult times. Consequently, she finds her life with Frances uninfluenced largely after her breast cancer surgery.

Rather than having a "deficient self," Lorde's speech about her breast cancer experience illustrates her strong and perfect self. Whereas in Gergen Kenneth's "The Deficient Self: Colonization and Conflict," he describes how science affects "the surrounding culture" [6] and creates many experimental methods towards people in the society. Additionally, Sherry describes that the creation of scientific methods to be applied on other people is a form of oppression that may lead science to be classified as "a form of postcolonialism." [15] Therefore, Lorde's refusal for having the prosthesis represents her strong self, and how her powerful self led her to be decisive and wise: "Every woman has a right to define her own desires, make her own choices." [12]

4. The Prosthesis as a New Form of Colonialism

There are many arguments about the correlation between disability and postcolonialism. Loomba argues:

Postcolonialism is not a term that signifies the end of colonialism, but rather signifies new forms of contesting colonial domination and legacies of colonialism. In this

sense, postcolonial criticism is understood as examining the relations of domination between and within nations, races, or cultures, recognizing the historical roots of such practices within colonialism." [15]

After independence of some societies in the epoch of postcolonialism, there are many remaining signs of it. For example, in Tom Shakespeare's "The Social Model of Disability," he mentions that the term "disability" is created by a society: ". it is society which disables physical impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society." [14] The society's classification of people as disabled is considered as a form of colonialism because under which circumstances or rights the society should take action on behalf of its people. For example, *The Cancer Journals* explains how in some situations a society may take decisions over bodies of women with mastectomies without thinking of their feelings and opinions. Lorde criticizes her society's mistreatment regarding the women with mastectomies, and also criticizes her society's attitude towards them: "We are told that our feelings are not important, our appearance is all, the sum total of self." [12] What is understood from Lorde's words is the complete ignorance of her society to their feelings and emotions. Their society only cares for their nice, beautiful, bright, and attractive appearance by telling women with a mastectomy to wear the prosthesis. Thus, the prosthesis is used as a metaphor for colonizing their bodies, especially Lorde's body, but she refuses it to reclaim her body's freedom and status.

The dominance of colonialism over many places in the eighteenth and nineteenth century led to creation of the normalcy concept. According to Lennard J. Davis' "Introduction: Normality, Power, and Culture," he explains that the concept of normalcy creates the problem of disability. He argues that ". the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled" [3] in these century. During these two centuries, the colonialism was dominant in many places on Earth, especially in North America. Davis mentions that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, many notions appeared like "nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation," [3] and became dominant in Europe and North America. What is understood from Davis' article is that disability is just a term originated by some eugenicists to differentiate between people and to classify them according to some specific criteria. Then Sherry describes disability as a form of colonialism that is used in some postcolonialist societies to oppress and control bodies of people with disabilities. For instance, though Lorde considers her mastectomy as an identity, the nurse sees her mastectomy as a disability and feels it necessary Lorde should have the prosthesis to conceal it from the public. Consequently, Lorde's society, including the nurse, depicts her mastectomy as a disability but she sees it as an identity and a precious part of her body.

Loomba's argument about the presence of new forms of colonialism in some societies may include the disability paradigms, the medical, moral, supercrip, and charity models. These models are designed to oppress the bodies by locating some problems in those bodies and defining them as wrong. [1] These models represent the social injustice, and their aim is to "marginalize people, including disabled people. [1] When Lorde outraged because of the nurse's harsh response regarding the prosthesis, she considers it as an attack on her body and a source of oppression: "I could hardly believe my ears! I was outraged to speak then, but this was to be only the first such assault on my right to define and to claim my own body." [12] Lorde's reaction is wise. She considers it as an insult on her privacy, but she doesn't become a scapegoat of the breast surgeon's office. Though the nurse's words are oppressive, Lorde is not affected, but rather she increases her attitude towards the medical center and the society. Her attitude is that all women with breast cancer should appear and fight for their right in their oppressive society and its medical centers.

5. Lorde's Mastectomy (Disability) vs. "Medical Colonialism"

Iona McCleery says: "Medicine can be used as a lens to view colonialism in action and as a way to critique colonialism," and She gives many other names for medicine, such as the "imperial medicine" and "tropical medicine." [13] The definition of "colonial medicine" was dominant in many empires through history. McCleery defines it as a "a tool of empire enabling settlement in the colonies. [13] It was dominant in the British, Portuguese, and Spanish Empires from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century. McCleery adds that, "the history of colonial medicine shows no signs of decline and its sibling the history of postcolonial medicine [that were] flourishing." [13] During the colonization era, the use of the medicine was a way for mistreating some colonized people in some regions around the world. For example, the British empire during the nineteenth century used the medicine for specific aims. According to McCleery, medicine was not only used as a tool of "enabling settlement," but also "medicine in the colonies slowly began to be seen in a more critical light as a method of subjugating indigenous people with disruptive and often unhealthy consequences; imperial expansion began to be the cause of disease." [13] Medicine is illustrated and seen as a colonizing domain over the patients and people with disabilities. For instance, Lorde is the best example for one who should fight for her body's reclaiming and freedom. As a consequence, many historians of the areas of (post) colonial medicine concluded that this kind of mistreatment of the indigenous inhabitants in the colonies led for appearance of many themes like oppression and racial tension; these themes extended and caused inequality in healthcare. [13]

Pertaining this colonial medicine in a postcolonialist society, *The Cancer Journals* deconstructs and illustrates

how some people with disabilities face unequal and racial attitudes while they are at some medical centers. Her presence in the medical center made her feel isolated and separated. She felt some kind of mistreatment but she struggles and fights for her right and her body without abiding by the laws of her society as a post-mastectomy woman. In some medical centers, the idea of prosthesis for women with breast cancer experience is just to make them silent and invisible without ever thinking to talk about their sufferings from the breast cancer. For Lorde, it is a kind of oppression and inequality that is considered as a consequence of colonialism in postcolonialist societies:

There is a commonality of isolation and painful reassessment which is shared by all women with breast cancer, whether this commonality is recognized or not. It is not my intention to judge the woman who has chosen the path of the prosthesis, of silence and invisibility, the woman who wishes to be 'the same as before.' She has survived on another kind of courage, and she is not alone. Each of us struggles daily with pressures of conformity and loneliness of difference from which those choices seem to offer escape. I only know that those choices do not work for me, nor for other women who, not without fear, have survived cancer by scrutinizing its meaning within our lives, and by attempting to integrate into useful strengths for change. [12]

Though her feelings of sadness and depression are due to silence and invisibility of women with breast cancer, she is still a courageous fighter attempting to change the negative attitudes of her society regarding them. Therefore, through Lorde's visibility in her society after the mastectomy, she fights the terrible looks of people in the streets where she considers herself as an "outsider": "I Don't feel like being strong, but do I have a choice? It hurts when even my sisters look at me in the street with cold and silent eyes. I am defined as other in every group I am a part of." [12] Lorde does not pay attention to or care for their looks and even for the people she meets during her stay in the hospital. In this way, she faces this kind of oppression and always encourages herself to change her society's attitudes towards the negative thinking about visibility of women who refuse to have the prosthesis in their society.

Sherry describes many relations between disability and postcolonialism. He says that Franz Frank describes the relation between doctors and their patients as "medical colonialism." [15] In Wendell's "The Cognitive and Social Authority of Medicine," she argues that, the societal authority of some doctors with their patients may have some negative consequences: "In. society and many others where it holds sway, scientific, western medicine has both the cognitive and social authority to describe our bodies to ourselves and to others. 'Cognitive authority' is a term. means the authority to have one's descriptions of the world taken seriously, believed, or accepted generally as the truth." [17] Moreover, Irving Kenneth Zola warns off that "medicine is becoming a major institution of social control, nudging aside. It is becoming the new repository of truth, the place where absolute and often final judgement are made by

supposedly morally neutral and objective experts.” [17] This why Franz Fanon describes this cognitive authority and other medical places as places where doctors and nurses colonize and empower their patients by making decisions on behalf of them. Lorde's refusal of the prosthesis signifies her strictness, which is not influenced or controlled by her doctor and the nurse's speech when they recommended her to have the prosthetic tool, and she reclaimed her body. In other words, in spite of Lorde's mastectomy, she refuses the suggestions of the nurse about the prosthetic device because she considers the nurse's suggestion as an attack on her personality and identity. She considers her mastectomy as something essential to her body that forms her beauty and identity.

Another important issue that results from the doctors' relation with other patients in hospitals is the body alienation of the patients. In other words, the doctors' relation with other patients may make the patients feel as if they are strangers and dehumanized. Wendell's argument that the scientific medicine authority like hospitals and clinics “describes our bodies [and] contributes to our alienation from our bodies and our bodily experience, an alienation that is already fostered by other aspects of commercial cultures of North America, including the objectification and commodification of women's bodies.” [12] Moreover, “The cognitive and social authority of medicine to describe our bodies affects how we experience and validates/invalidates them. The authority of medicine tends to delegitimize our experiences of our bodies as sources of knowledge about them.” [17] This kind of medical authority may cause alienation and destruction of post-mastectomy women's feelings, appearance, and visibility in their societies. For example, when Lorde was told, after the mastectomy, that her feelings are not significant because her appearance is more important than her feelings in the society. She considers her appearance with the prosthesis, if she agrees to have, to be as a “physical pretense” that have two negative points:

It encourages women to dwell in the past rather than a future. This prevents a woman from assessing herself in the present, and from coming to terms with the changed planes of her own body. Since these then remain alien to her, buried under prosthetic devices, she must mourn loss of her breast in a secret, as if it were the result of some crime of which she was guilty.

It encourages a woman to focus her energies upon the mastectomy as a cosmetic occurrence, to the exclusion of other factors in a constellation that could include her own death. It removes her from what that constellation means in terms of her living, and from developing priorities of usage for whatever time she has before. It encourages her to ignore the necessity for nutritional vigilance and psychic armament that can help prevent recurrence. [12]

For Lorde, the prosthesis is something like a ghost that haunts women's feelings after mastectomy. It influences their mind and their way of thinking; every time they look at the prosthesis, they would remember their breast surgery and its trauma. Her speech about the effects of the prosthesis lead to have negative results on our bodies. She attempts to convince

other women with mastectomy not to have or give up some medical centers' recommendations regarding the prosthesis. Her aim from her speech is that, the way some medical centers “imagine disability and disabled people must shift in order for real social justice to occur.” [5] Her insistence on not having the prosthesis portrays her strong reimagination of her mastectomy as something part of her identity and body rather than a disability she should hide by the prosthesis to please and be more attractive in her society.

Michelle Jarman' “Resisting ‘Good Imperialism’: Reading Disability as Radical Vulnerability” gives many explications about the relationship between postcolonialism and disability: “postcolonial theory has offered a perspective from which to theorize the marginalized position of disability in contemporary Euro- American cultures. Arthur Frank, explains illness and disability as ‘medical colonization’ in that modern medicine lays claim to the patient body as territory.” [10] Frank's and Jarman's depictions pertaining to disability are very crucial to represent how some doctors and nurses mistreat some patients harshly in some hospitals and clinics without giving or respecting the patients' feelings and appearance. The doctors and the nurses, as colonizers, disrespect other patients, as colonized, and this creates a great opportunity to classify this kind of relation as a new form of colonialism in postcolonialist societies. For instance, the attitude between Lorde and the nurse signifies how the nurse attempted to depersonalize her, but she does not allow her to do so. As a consequence, Lorde reclaims her identity, and never allows the nurse to exceed her limits.

Tom Shakespeare is familiar with many works about (post) colonialism like works of Edward Said and Franz Fanon. For him, postcolonialism and disability are similar:

I suggest that ‘care’ can operate as a kind of imperialism. In the early twentieth century, residential institutions were often called ‘colonies’. Still today, people who receives welfare or medical help may be taken over, their homes or bodies invaded. In return for help, they have to give up control over their lives. The colonialism incipient in the caring relationship can mean that the power to define the problem, let alone the way that the problem should be solved, is removed from the person and monopolized by the helper. The help receiver may be regarded as incapable incompetent, sometimes even morally inferior- just like attitudes to ‘natives’ in the former colonies. [14]

The above quotation refers that medicine and care are forms of colonialism in the twentieth century. Patients are mistreated, and they should give up their lives for the colonizers to control the colonized people's bodies. The relation and “interactions between patients and doctors have been characterized as a form of colonialism.” [15] Like Sherry and Fanon, Clare Barker focuses more the relations between doctors and their patients as “relations of domination and subordination.” [15] Lorde's disapproval for the prosthesis marks for her refusal to be subordinated by the nurse's or doctor's speech and instructions. Lorde's self, feelings, emotions, and personality are powerful and dominant. Her dominant feelings over her body leads Lorde

to shape her decolonized identity during her disagreement for the prosthesis. Though Lorde is ignored sometimes by the nurse, she does not care about this ignorance: "Yet every attempt I made to examine or question the possibility of a real integration of this experience into the totality of my life and my loving and my work was ignored by this woman [the nurse]. I felt outraged and insulted, and weak as I was." [12] Lorde remains strong and does not allow for the nurse to control or mistreat her. This harsh relationship between her and the nurse emphasizes that this relation is another new form of colonialism and its remaining legacies according to Loomba.

Further proof that disability is considered as a form of colonialism is its relation with the "symbol of evils of colonialism" [Sherry 14], and it is considered as a cause of medical apartheid. Though Lorde's consideration of her mastectomy is part of her identity, she was medically segregated by the nurse. While Lorde's presence in the clinic for the mastectomy, the relation between Lorde and the nurse represents a kind of medical apartheid. According to Harriet A. Washington's *Medical Apartheid*, the term "sickly freedom" describes blacks as those people who "lacked the mature judgement of whites." [16] She finds it hard to deal with the nurse in the clinic before and after the mastectomy. The nurse's actions against her represent a kind of inequality, racism, and discrimination. For example, she finds it hard to relax during her presence in the clinic with the nurse:

It is such an effort to find decent food in this place, not to just give up and eat the old poison. But I must tend my body with at least as much care as I tend the compost, particularly now when it seems so beside the point. Is this pain and despair that surround me a result of cancer, or has it just been released by cancer? I feel so unequal to what I always handled before, the abominations outside that echo the pain within. [12]

The pain which Lorde feels during her presence in the clinic results from the inequality of her care. In spite of her feelings of apartheid, racism, segregation, and exile, she does not give up to the medical center to control her body. Moreover, she does not allow for the center to treat her body as a "corpse." Wendell points out that, "the body as a corpse, not the body as lived experience, is the heart of western medicine. This can leave them [the patients] not only isolated with their experience but feelings obliged to discount or ignore it, alienating them further from their bodies." [17] Consequently, Lorde's bravery does not allow anyone in the clinic to control or dominate her body because medicine nowadays "tries to colonize bodies." [15] She knows if she allows medicine to colonize or control her body, she will lose herself, and her body will be treated as a dead body, but she learns from her mastectomy a lot of lessons: ". I had begun training to change my life, with a teacher who is very shadowy. I was not attending classes, but I was going to learn how to change my whole life, live differently, do everything in a new and different way. I did not really understand, but I trusted this shadowy teacher." [12] One of the lessons which she learns from her mastectomy is to call and ask post- mastectomy women to be visible in their societies. Her mastectomy

experience makes her very strong woman. She fights her society's negative attitudes towards disability, and she doesn't allow anyone to judge or make decision over her body.

The term "disability" has many definitions and meanings. Some people define or see it as an illness. Others define people with disabilities as inferior, unfit or different from other normal people. But, in Sherry's "Postcolonising Disability," he views disability as an identity like race and religion. Sherry's notion about disability as an identity is illustrated in Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*. Therefore, there are many ways to think and see disability as an identity, and it is part of the self. For example, Lorde sees her mastectomy as an identity and an essential part of her body. She signifies how women with mastectomy should unite to change the society's views regarding them. As a consequence, her sufferings of cancer make her understand many useful things regarding her society and her body. For example, when she is at the clinic, she does not allow for anyone to take decision on behalf of her. She does not allow the nurse to judge or take decision over her body; consequently, Lorde reclaims her body. Her body after the mastectomy leads her to learn and understand many things around her and her society. She tries to convince post-mastectomy women to be visible rather than remaining invisible in their communities and considering their mastectomy as a shameful or disgraceful thing.

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