"We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves": A Dialogically Produced Audience and Black Feminist Publishing 1979 to the "Present"

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Abstract:
In 1979, black lesbian feminist writers and scholars Barbara and Beverly Smith wrote, "There is…no guarantee that we or our movement will survive long enough to become safely historical. We must document ourselves now." In order to make themselves "present" black feminists (especially lesbian and bisexual feminists) operating in literary collectives from 1979 to 1990 stole the key term "motherhood" out of its heteronormativized function and instead used it to create a shared space and time of co-production. In 1983, when Audre Lorde suggested "[w]e can mother ourselves," she was explicitly suggesting the possibility of a co-productive relationship between black women of the same generation, countering the presumption that a black woman could only expect unconditional love from her mother. In addition, Lorde's statement implicitly requires a complete transformation of the mode through which black female subjectivity is produced, invoking a politics of presence which both frames the political practice of black feminist publishing and scholarship in the 1980's and provides a framework for how black feminist scholars, writers and publishers today can engage a legacy that will still be in the making.

The Problem

Black mothers are dangerous.

1 In 2005 former U.S. Secretary of Education and officer of Drug Policy William Bennett publicly stated that aborting every black baby would decrease crime.[1] This neo-eugenicist statement about US race relations corresponds with globalized "family planning" agendas that have historically forced women in the Caribbean, Latin America, South Asia and Africa to undergo sterilization in order to work for multinational corporations. In 1977 World Bank official Richard Rosenthal went so far as to suggest that three fourths of the women in developing nations should be sterilized to prevent economically disruptive revolutions.[2]

2 Policy makers justify these disproportionate and selective barriers against the birth of people of color through a narrative about the deviance of black and "third world mothers." The moral of the story is that racist inequities and extreme poverty in "developed" nations is reproduced, not by the economic actions of the state, not by divestment from social institutions in communities of color, not from increased policing in the same communities, but by the cultural persistence of poverty perpetuated by the black mother who either passes "poverty" on through her genes, or at the very least nurtures it through her deviant mothering practices. Likewise, in this story, the global problems of pollution and global warming are not

[1] September 28 broadcast of Salem Radio Network's Bill Bennett's Morning in America.
[2] Luz Rodriguez, "Population Control in Puerto Rico", Conference Presentation at Let's Talk About Sex the SisterSong 10th Anniversary Conference, May 2006.

results of the environmentally detrimental practices of multinational corporations, but by "overpopulation" caused by women of color who defy the economically necessary worthlessness of their lives by daring to give birth. Which is to say that "population control" is exactly what it sounds like. Which is also to say, the attack on the reproductive subjectivity of black woman and other women of color is actually a pre-emptive attack on what women of color and young people were (are) positioned to create: a new world. I offer a revised reading of black feminist publication that takes into consideration the problematic discursive function of black women as producers.

3 In the face of this genocidal attack, black feminists from the 1970s to the 1990s appropriated motherhood as a challenge and a refusal to the violence that these discourses of stabilization and welfare would naturalize. While the U.S. state enacted domestic and foreign policies that required, allowed and endorsed violence against the bodies of black woman and early death for black children, black feminists audaciously centered an entire literary movement around the invocation of this criminal act of black maternity, demanding not only the rights of black women to reproductive autonomy in the biological sense, but also the imperative to create narratives, theories, contexts, collectives, publications, political ideology and more. I read the black feminist literary production that occurred between 1970 and 1990 as the experimental creation of a rival economy and temporality in which black women and children would be generators of an alternative destiny. A black feminist position became articulable and necessary not only because of the lived experiences of capitalism and empire that black women resisted, but also because of the successes and failures of the black cultural nationalist movement and the white radical lesbian/feminist movement. Critical of a racist, nationalist and patriarchal set of limits and amputations, this movement was necessarily as internationalist as the developing neo-liberal tactics of empire it resisted. If a growing neo-liberal world order endorsed the literal and social deaths of black women and children, then this literary movement, at its most radical, imagined the death of the dominant capitalist relation, a halt to the reproduction of the state and the counter-production of a livable community against the chronopolitics of development.[3] And this is a queer thing.

4 To answer death with utopian futurity, to rival the social reproduction of capital on a global scale with a forward dreaming diasporic accountability is a queer thing to do. A strange thing to do. A thing that changes "the family" and "the future forever." To name oneself mother in a moment where representatives of the state conscripted "black" and "mother" into vile epithets is a queer thing. To insist on an black motherhood despite black cultural

[3] Elizabeth Freeman. "Time Binds or Erotohistoriography." *Social Text* 84-85, Vol. 23, Nos 3-4, Fall -Winter 2005. Discussed in more detail later.

nationalist claims to own black women's wombs and white feminist attempts to use the maternal labor of black women as domestic servants to buy their own freedom (and to implicitly support the use of black women as guinea pigs in their fight to perfect the privilege of sterilization) is an almost illegible thing, an outlawed practice, a queer thing.

5 During the period between 1970 and 1990 the pathologization of black women's bodies occurred directly alongside a post-Civil Rights project of disciplinary inclusion in which both the black power movement and the mainstream white feminist movement were complicit. The Black Nationalist effort to construct a black patriarchy and the white feminist effort to tokenistically incorporate the labor of women of color led to an environment in which black women's writing was increasingly marketable. By 1990 Henry Louis Gates was able to explain that black women's writing was valuable because of its unprecedented marketability, combining the black interest and women's interest readerships that had developed in the post-civil rights era. With this statement Gates proclaims the fulfillment of a prophecy made almost one hundred years earlier by black industrialist Booker T. Washington who said (without literature in mind), "In proportion as the black woman is able to produce something that the white or other races want, in this same proportion does prejudice disappear." (87 cited in Ferguson) Roderick Ferguson cites this suggestion from Washington along with other statements about keeping young black women employed and off the streets in his article "Of Our Normative Strivings" in order to demonstrate his argument that the project of black uplift was complicit in the process through which normative sexual behavior became a prerequisite for acceptable racial difference in the construction of 'productive citizenship' in the post-slavery era. I read Henry Louis Gates Jr. alongside Booker T. Washington to point out a practice in the post-civil rights era through which the literary practices of black women we reincorporated into a capitalist and imperialist framework where black women's lives were "new subject matter" to be consumed and "new territory" to be discovered by an expanded market, which is similar to the way black bodies were prepared for resale in the post-reconstruction moment. (Gates 4) The reconstitution of the black family as a consumer unit and the reconfiguration of black women as marketable tokens were parts of the same process. The same capitalist narrative that had created black lack of family to reproduce enslavability, also created the post civil-rights black family as a circuit through which to perpetuate itself.

6 For this reason it is crucial for me to distinguish between the much examined topic of "black women's writing" between in 1970 and 1990 and the *black feminist literary production* during the same period which will be my focus in this article. Black feminist literary

production was not necessarily a distinct movement from the black women's literary renaissance of the time period, because its practitioners were deeply involved in this renaissance, but rather than tracing the *development* of a black women's literary tradition, this project seeks to reveal and participate in a rival temporality, a queer intergenerational focus on words that were not meant to survive. This article theorizes poetry as a productive act, examines the ways in which the poetics through which black feminists responded to and transformed the publishing possibilities of the time period, and proposes a shared refocusing of the impact of black women's literary work in the late 20th century. What I am calling *black feminist literary production* has a *queer* relationship to "black women's writing" such that the former exceeds and critiques the coherence of the later. The "queer" in this project, by denaturalizing and illuminating social reproduction, allows an examination of the politics and possibilities of production subsumed in racialized narrative of capitalism. In this instance queer outsidership and the place of the invisibly laboring, criminalized black mother merge. This queer relationship manifests in what I am calling a poetics of black queer maternity.

7 The black feminist literary practitioners that inspire this project were at once included in, excluded from and amputated by black cultural nationalist and white feminist movements because their deviant sexual positionality was not useful for a black nation or a multi-cultural liberal sisterhood, because of their inability or refusal to reproduce properly. Because of their inability or refusal to reproduce property, these black feminist literary engaged in a critical revision of family, a radical anti-imperialism and a socialist experimentalism. As Cathy Cohen has argued, the position of the pathologized black mother must be seen as a queer postionality.(Cohen 1997) I want to add that this position, in critical tension with capitalist ideas of family, is also a position out of time with the clock of development that uses the same progress narrative deploy welfare reform domestically and structural adjustment policies internationally. For all of these reasons these black feminist literary producers inhabited the queer threat of the pathologized black mother. She who refuses to reproduce the status quo threatens to produce a radically different world. The black feminist literary figures that led and epitomized this practice were lesbian and bisexual radicals such as Audre Lorde and June Jordan who are now historicized as queer ancestors.[4] Cherrie Moraga, for example, recently proclaimed that black lesbian feminists such as Lorde, Pat Parker and June Jordan, gave lesbians like her, "a body, a queer body in the original dangerous, unambivalent sense of the

[4] See, for example, the Audre Lorde Project, a center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit people of color organizing in New York City (www.alp.org) or Zami an organization of "lesbians of African descent" in Atlanta or National Black Justice Coalition (an organization committed to the legal rights of black non-heterosexual people) feature of June Jordan on Day 1 of their black history campaign.

word, a dyke body that could not be domesticized by middle class American aspirations."[5] I am proposing that the invocation of black maternity as an alternative to genocide in the period between 1970-1990 required the production of a queer time and space within which black women and young people could operate as co-producers in a future radically different from their present.[6]

An Approach

8 It may remain unclear to some readers why "mothering" of all things holds the queer transformative potential in my analysis. Does not the term mother retain an inescapable essentialism? Is it even possible to delink motherhood and the reproduction of racial difference? Michelle Wright's *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* provides a helpful critical precedent for the work of understanding mothering as the marker of a queer discursive strategy in black feminist publishing in the late 20th century. Wright argues that the figure of the black mother, as deployed by poets such as Carolyn Rodgers and Audre Lorde, interrupts the production of blackness in opposition to whiteness. Wright explains that whereas the masculinist knowledge production that has passed responsibility for the production of an ontology of blackness from man to man to man over time in a dialectical struggle with the white patriarchal knowledge project that seeks to reproduce white humanity through black abjection, the figure of the *mother* allows for a dialogic paradigm shift. The figure of the *mother* calls reproduction into question, reminding us that the production of racialized subjectivity occurs across difference, in dialog, not passing from one to one, but rather created as the tense reconstitution of race despite the dynamic coupling of different, but not opposite bodies. So while the erasure or subsumption of the subjectivity of mothers under the authority of patriarchy has facilitated essentialist reproductions of racialized dehumanization, the rival authority of the black mother has the potential to reveal racial difference as a social narrative, the terms of which are contingent and do not have to be reproduced.

9 To be sure, the use of motherhood in black women's literature is not *necessarily* queer. The most cited uses of narratives of motherhood in black women's literary criticism and literature in the late 20th century sought to argue against the pathologization of the black family, through representations of motherhood that were in conversation with cultural

[5] Cherrie Moraga at "Sister Comrade" a celebration of Audre Lorde and Pat Parker at the First Congregational Church in Oakland, California on November 3rd. 2007.

[6] See Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press, 2005. And Jose Munoz *Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism* (forthcoming).

nationalists towards the reproduction of a black race. In this paper I seek to distinguish between *representations* of black motherhood and black feminist *revisions* of the significance of mothering. The latter, I will argue, uses the pathologization of black maternity to create a queer revision, revealing the socially produced predicaments of black mothers and offering rival structures of nurturing and futurity. In order to make this distinction as clear as possible I will take some space here to clarify my uses of the terms "queer," "black" and "maternity" in this statement.

Queer

10 I use queer not as an identity marker, but rather in the way that Roderick Ferguson interprets Barbara Smith's use of the term "lesbian" in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." (1977).[7] In that text, written during a period in which Barbara Smith was communicating with Lorde as a participant in the Combahee River Collective retreats and June Jordan as the moderator of the on the Feminism and Black Women's Writing Panel at Howard University, Barbara Smith defined lesbian as what Ferguson calls a "negation," as anything that fundamentally challenged heteronormativity. Therefore, Ferguson argues, lesbian was not an identifier but rather an alarm, pointing to the violence of existing identity frameworks and calling for a critical difference. I align with Ferguson's assertion that one genealogy for the contemporary use of term "queer" in queer theory is Smith's non-identarian use of "lesbian."

11 Another generative site for "queer" is June Jordan's 1992 essay "A New Politics of Sexuality" in which she uses bisexuality as an intervention into predictive sexuality to create a space for freedom. This critical use of bisexuality prefigures the use of the word "queer" to describe a politics of sexuality that is not based on a specific sexual practice, but rather a critical relationship to existing sexual and social norms. Jordan uses a proclamation of her own bisexuality as a hinge to articulate her own contradictory multiplicity: "I am Black and I am female and I am a mother and I am bisexual and I am a nationalist and I am an antinationalist." (132) Here bisexuality, not as an identity but as an intervention , a refusal of a particular choice, connects Jordan's anti-imperialist politics which cause her to fight for the national sovereignty of Nicaragua while challenging the norms of nationalism itself with her identification with the impossible subjectivity of black motherhood in the United States. Through her articulation of bisexuality, Jordan answers both the queer dystopians and the gay and lesbian assimilationists writing 15 years after the publication of her essay. For Jordan, bisexuality requires a particular definition of survival: "But a struggle to survive cannot lead

[7] Roderick Ferguson. *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 127.

to suicide: suicide is the opposite of survival. And so we must not conceal/assimilate/integrate into the would-be dominant culture and political system that despises us. Our survival requires that we alter our environment so we can live..." (135) Jordan's definition of a sexual politics of survival seeks to generate a future that does not reproduce the present. Accordingly I will use the term queer (here) to signal a similar call for critical difference that disrupts narratives of heteropatriarchal family and capitalist development and as a modifier that causes the terms that follow to exceed what they have named. For example, a "queer black maternity" would not only invoke the additive complexity of multiple interpolation, it would also place the procreative inheritance of blackness and patriarchally defined motherhood under investigation.

Black

12 Black feminism in the seventies and eighties emerged within and co-produced a broader "third world women's movement." Often this complicated mix of subject positions was called forth at once, for example, when "black and other third world women" would create "special issues" of otherwise white feminist periodicals. This overlap between "black" and "third world" women's production was complicated by at least two historical dynamics. First, non-white feminists in the United States were in almost constant communication with "Black feminists" in Britain who were using the term "Black" to claim solidarity between women of Asian and African descent who had shared experiences of colonialism at "home" and racism in England. "Black feminists" in Britain and the US reviewed each other's special issues and anthologies and wrote letters of support to each other's editorial collectives. Even still, "black" and "third world" were never commensurate terms on either side of the Atlantic. Indeed "blackness" itself was incommensurable even in the Americas, signifying differently in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean, but the term was used to facilitate translation of different black experiences across national contexts. "Third World" a term used to describe women who would most likely be called "women of color" from today's vantage point was an intentional term used by non-white women in the United States in order to enable solidarity between groups experiencing different manifestations of racism AND to link US liberation movements to a wider set of decolonization struggles in which women were responding to the encroachment of economic empire. In "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other," a special issue of the New York based feminist art journal *Heresies*, a special editorial collective of self-identified U.S. based Third World Women explains the salience of the term "Third World" as it's an invocation of an "other" way to be created by those "other" than the

dominant white male ruling class.[8] While many contemporary transnational feminist activists argue that the term "Third World" erases women who are actually living in developing countries when it is claimed by U.S. women of color, Chandra Mohanty insists that to invoke "third world" as a particular way of being feminist is to remember the spirit of the Bandung conference of non-aligned countries which insisted that another world could be created.[9] The specific iteration of "black feminism" that we are concerned with here could only have emerged within and alongside this discourse of "third world" feminism which was both anti-capitalist and internationalist.

13 However, while the production I will characterize here is firmly grounded in what was called the 'Third World Women's Movement" in the United States (conversely called the "First World Women's Movement" in English-speaking Canada), I will be focusing on the work of feminists who explicitly identified as "black." While attacks on the bodies of women of color and their potential to create are widespread, the narratives applied by colonialist, racist, orientalist enactors of sexual violence and reproductive injustices have been historically specific and deserve in-depth attention. My focus on the term "black" here signals my emphasis on the queer feminist possibility of transforming the maternal trace of slavery into a mode of co-production that responds to the persistent commodification of flesh. I am not arguing that the narratives of pathologization to be intervened in here are specific to "people of African descent," nor am I seeking to reserve the term black for the descendents of enslaved people to the exclusion of black people in Africa and other parts of the non-Atlantic world. Rather I am interested in a narrative through which blackness has come to stand in for expendability and non-humanity and the modes of poetic practice through which radical black feminist literary practice threatened this perceived truth.

Mothering

14 In her groundbreaking text "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: A New American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers emphasizes the difference between "motherhood" which is reproduced as the role of white women through the violent exclusion of the bodies of black women from the definition of the human and the reproduction of "mothering" which is the labor that black women have still been compelled to perform despite their exclusion from the domain of proper "motherhood." This was a crucial intervention for Spillers to make in 1987

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[8] "The Politics of Being Other: Third World Women." *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. Vol. 2 No. 4, 1979, 1.

[9] Chandra Mohanty, Conference Presentation "Transnational Feminisms" at Mellon-Mays Summer Conference, June 14th 2006.

when both black nationalist invocations of black motherhood as a subservient role for the reproduction of a patriarchal black nation and white feminist reifications of domestic labor made black women's sexuality and subjectivity unspeakable. In her 1989 essay "But What Do We Think We're Doing: The State of Black Feminist Criticism(s) or My Version of a Little Bit of History," Barbara Christian describes the resistance she encountered when she attempted to publish her monograph *Black Women Novelists* thusly:

> "[...] practically all academic presses as well as trade presses commented that my subject was not important-that people were not interested in black women writers. Couldn't I write a book on the social problems of black women? Affected by the rhetoric a la Moynihan, most of these presses could hardly believe black women were artists."

Christian's dilemma points to the discursive moment during which black feminist criticism struggled to emerge. The intersection of narrow social movement priorities and a dominant rhetoric of black maternal pathologies made it difficult to argue that black women were capable of literary production or creative expression; the name 'black woman' had become synonymous with 'social problems', in state policy, academic discourses, and progressive social movements. In order to produce subjectivities in which black women could be imagined to create, black feminist critics generated a critical use of maternity that they distinguished from patriarchal and capitalist definitions of motherhood and appropriations of "mothering."

15 Spillers explains that both the state of motherhood and the labor of mothering are reproduced through ideological and legal acts of naming that dehumanize black women and transform their bodies into flesh and their offspring into slaves. Fred Moten builds on Spiller's analysis by emphasizing the shared root *mater* in the words "maternity" and "materiality" explaining that the trace through which we understand black people as material objects is a maternal trace. In a 2006 discussion of "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe," Spillers elaborates that her intention in the essay was to create a new vocabulary wherein the history of black subjection in the United States could seriously destabilize functions of gender and family. This creation of a new vocabulary, and indeed a new grammar, required the radical reassessment of the terms mother and mothering. I will invoke the term "mothering" modified by queer and black to describe the material intervention through what I understand to be a queer appropriation of the production of difference wherein difference, instead of becoming a dehumanizing mark, enables the co-production of a radically different future.

16 My use of the term "mothering" uses the modifiers queer and black in order to disrupt the normative incorporation of maternity into a narrative of patriarchal family. It is clear from

the political discourse on black maternity in the United States that "black maternity" is seen as disruptive to the patriarchal order of family and to the model of "democracy" that the patriarchal family functions to reproduce. By keeping the terms "black" and "mothering" together I hope to retain this threat born in the moment Spillers invokes. Black maternity has always been about production (in this American Grammar Book), or more explicitly the reproduction of abjection, instead of family, but as Spillers elaborates in a later essay the law that the child would follow the condition of the mother "did nothing to establish the maternal prerogative for the African female." By adding the term queer, I am suggesting that a focus on the black queer maternal enables the production of an intersubjective future that does not reproduce ownership of or through bodies but rather reimagines connection, accountability and the production of a livable world.

"To Mother Ourselves"

17 In 1983, Audre Lorde published an article in *Essence Magazine* entitled "Black Women and Anger," later republished in her 1984 volume of essays *Sister Outsider* as "Eye to Eye: Black Women Hatred, and Anger." Lorde's 'Eye to Eye' appeared alongside an article entitled 'Sister Love' in which Alexis De Veaux outlined a politics of loving other black women that included but also exceeded romantic love. The explicitly diasporic tone of De Veaux's companion piece brings Lorde's diasporic vision into context. De Veaux opens her piece with a quintessentially diasporic statement: "I am a Daughter of Africa." In order to include her sexuality, class and gender within this primary identification with Africa, De Veaux explains that she must "dress myself in my own words." Similarly Lorde, writing a piece that approaches the issue from another angle, the internalized hatred and anger that makes sisterhood between black women difficult, agrees with De Veaux that the articulation of love and partnership between black women is a radical and poetic act of translation.

18 The main argument of Lorde's article is that as black women "we can learn to mother ourselves." This statement comes after a section in which Lorde explains that black daughters often believe that no other person will be able to provide them with the love and understanding that they have learned to expect from their mothers. Lorde wants to counter the belief that only black women socialized into a mother/daughter relationship with each other can provide the mothering that healing and community building requires. But it is significant that Lorde does not say "we can learn to mother each other." She says instead "we can learn to mother ourselves" which relies on an intersubjective production of a rival maternity, that does not reproduce familial relations, but rather disperses the labor of mothering. Lorde argues that

black women "eye to eye" reflect the defense and hatred that we feel for ourselves onto each other such that answering the hatred that we have learned to metabolize after being forced to consume routine ideological, physical and sexual violence is a coproductive process that requires women "who will not turn away" from each other.

19 My argument is that this combination of a queer vision of the future and an anti-capitalist relation in the present is a key concept for reading the literary productivity of black feminists during the late 20th century which is marked by discursive interventions into the potential of mothering. How else do we understand why a figure as publicly resistant to domestic models of normalcy as June Jordan entitled her collection of anti-imperialist love poems, *Living Room*? Why would a collective of black lesbian feminists founding a publishing company for third world women decide to call it "Kitchen Table Press"? Black feminist literary producers during the late 20th century were actively engaged in appropriating and transforming discourses of home, reimagining nurturing to create space for a radically different future.

20 The structures, practices and ideas expressed by these publishing collectives in the 1980's enacted the co-productive pedagogy of "learn(ing) to mother ourselves" at the levels of labor, content and form. The individual articulations of writers such as Jordan and Lorde were not only sustained by their continued communication with each other during this period (during which they also decided both decided to end their editorial participation at the mostly white publication Chrysalis due to racism),[10] but was also indicative of a larger scene in which the transformations they imagined were validated. In the late 1970's June Jordan participated in a collective called "The Sisterhood" which also included Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Toni Morrison, Veve Clark, Renita Weems and others who intended to create something called Kizzy Enterprises, which they envisioned as a periodical, publishing initiative and clearing house to be stationed at Shange's home and funded on a not-for-profit basis to reach a mass of working black and third world people and to keep important black texts in print. This collective was in communication with possible chapters in Atlanta and in the Bay Area, met monthly in the homes of writers scholars and publishers and envisioned a transformed literary impact generated by their relationships to each other. Though it seems that Kizzy Enterprises never officially emerged, in November 1980, the women who had participated over the years in the Black Feminist Retreats hosted by the Combahee River Collective gathered in response to a phone conversation between Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde to create Kitchen Table Press. The gathering, which consisted almost exclusively of

[10] "Correspondence with Chrysalis." Box 85, Folder 1. Radcliffe Library: Harvard University.

women of African American and Afro-Caribbean identification, agreed in that first meeting that the press would be for all third world women and women of color, not just black women and not just lesbians, though the Press did intend to combat the under-representation of lesbians of color on the literary landscape. At that first meeting the group also decided on the name "Kitchen Table Press" which they chose because it referred to alternative modes of invalidated production that women of color had depended on for their self-expression and survival. The press itself ran as a community-supported initiative, which at a significant financial burden kept all of its titles in print for its entire lifetime, regardless of sales.[11] Women who had participated in the Combahee River Collective and the Salsa Soul Sisters, a lesbian of color organization based in New York City, also formed the Azalea Collective, which hosted the first 3rd World Lesbian Writers conference and which produced a literary and visual arts publication with a rare editorial process of including all submissions from lesbians of color and rotating editorial responsibilities so that no one's labor became specialized, or taken for granted.[12] The publishing apparatus developed by these black feminists sought to create rival spaces of nurturing in the anthologies they produced. Most explicitly, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* attempts to serve as a surrogate home for black feminists and lesbians who are rejected from black communities because of their refusal to reproduce a gendered status quo. In the introduction Barbara Smith explains her intentions to respond to the phenomena that "so many Black people who are threatened by feminism have argued that by being a Black feminist (especially if you are also a lesbian) you have left the race, are no longer a part of the black community, in short, no longer have a home." Smith explicitly reveals the mission of *Home Girls* as the creation of collective nurturing by and for black feminists who have rejected other models of home due to their commitment to a transformed future. Home in *Home Girls* becomes a process of alternative nurturing, responding to the patriarchal forms of home that text like Amiri Baraka's collection of essays entitled *Home* enforced. Learning to "mother ourselves," in the sense in which Lorde will express in *Essence* around the same time, is a call for the production of a rival sustainability, providing a system to produce a livable world.

"that dark rich land we wanted to wander through..."

21 While much of this essay has focused on a look at the activist and literary discourse of mothering generated by black feminists in the Northeastern United States, it is important to

[11] Barbara Smith. "Memorial Address for Audre Lorde." Box 101, Folder 4. June Jordan Archives. Radcliffe Library: Harvard University.
[12] "Note" in Azalea, front matter. Vol.1 No. 2.

remember that the black feminists in this region were intentionally in communication not only with black feminists and writers in other regions of the United States but with self-identified black feminist all over the world. The black feminist literary scene was transnational in the late 20th century, but this was not a novelty of the avowed anti-imperialism of black feminists in this era. At the cusp of the previous century, black women writer and publisher Ida B. Wells founded the first international anti-lynching organizations during her travel to England, tracing a path that abolitionist and formerly enslaved woman had traveled before her. Black women from the Caribbean and the United States attended the graduation of Anna Julia Cooper from the Sorbonne in Paris. While researching and writing about these precedents, black feminist literary producers also nurtured a collective movement generated between the differences of their national contexts by reviewing each other's individual books and anthologies periodicals and writing letters of support and subscription to the wide variety of black feminist publications that emerged in the United States, Canada and Great Britain during the late 20th century. The pathologization of black maternity through political rhetoric and social policies in the United Kingdom and Canada led black feminists in these sites to critically engage social production and the language of mothering as well. As we contextualize a movement of black feminist publishing it is important to note the alternative modes of generation that black feminist collectives modeled. Elsewhere I catalog a number of the models to counter the dominant influence of capitalist markets on our historiography of black women's writing. The preponderance of anti-capitalist autonomous literary institutions created and sustained by black women writing in predominantly white national literary markets presents a trajectory through which to reread the contours of black feminist literary practice. My intention in this essay is to point out the queered genealogies of black mothering and to suggest that the figure of the mother in the ignored histories of black feminist anti-capitalist publishing in neocolonialist sites of power such as Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States could play the role that Michelle Wright suggests this figure plays in the theorization of diaspora. Production becomes visible, as does the violent reproduction of a status quo.

22 A black feminist transnational genealogy for the production of queer sociality and critique clarifies the intersections between reproductive rights, state sponsored narratives of pathology and the queered subjectivities of black women writers within hostile publishing markets and academic institutions. The articulation of queer contexts for mothering enables a theorization of queer intergenerationality, disrupting the oppositional positioning of queer critique and futurity, while maintaining a critique of heteropatriarchal reproduction.

Meanwhile a look at the complicity between reproductive coherence and the brief publishing boon of "black women writers" encourages us to look at the dangerous, unmarketable publishing practices that black feminists (many of whom were at the same time working for capitalist publishing institutions) sustained across space and age. While the flows publishing capital sought to reproduce the presence of a few black women writer superstars across the English speaking first world (Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and to a lesser extent Audre Lorde and June Jordan), and to ignore indigenous black feminists movements with specific demands against the state structures of the United Kingdom, Canada and the third world feminist movement in the U.S, attention to the anti-capitalist publishing alternatives that black women nurtured in these sites reveals another geography of articulation and translation. The critique of reproductive futurity that a position centering black motherhood and queer subjectivity requires, illuminates the contours of a body of black feminist literary production that very reproductive force of a market economy as made invisible. But the exclusion of these important text need not be reproduced. Audre Lorde did not simply say "We can mother ourselves." She wrote, "We can *learn* to mother ourselves." This is one effort to enact that pedagogical process, such that a the reproduction of oppression loses its inevitability, such that the body of work that we call "black women writers" is deepened by our criticism of capitalist market limitations, such that we can present ourselves with alternate futures, and revised histories, and *not turn away*.

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