

Mythoform and the Misovire Consciousness: A Gender Conceptual Renewal Strategy in Werewere Liking's *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral*¹

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This paper underscores the need for new plausible myths that redefine gender relations in an attempt to revalue female assertion, ethical values, and human development. This creative process presents a different perspective from the views of some feminist theorists who have seen myth as a regressive and oppressive structure. The focus, in this paper, is to illustrate how in her chant-novel *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* Liking appropriates the productive force of myths through the misovire consciousness and ritual structure for her gender politics and for promoting ethical values and the culture of human development. In this regard, she decodes existing negative myths and reconstructs new gender myths that redefine gender relations, celebrate what she calls women's "cosmic force" and through ritual cleansing, reinvents a new language of beauty and a new race of Jasper and Coral. Thus, guided by the tenets of deconstruction and the gender relations frameworks, this paper defends the thesis that Liking's chant-novel through myth invention and revision combines and fuses traditional and modern aesthetics, thematic and structural elements that she uses to deconstruct social and gender relations. The contention is that in negotiating plausible gender relations for men and women in Africa, Liking's story and structure incorporate the cleansing, cathartic effect of Bassa ritual performance into the narrative.

Keywords: mythoform, misovire consciousness, feminist revision, gender conceptual renewal, human development

Introduction

Myth has impacted tremendously on the consciousness of the Western and African worlds, but mythic imagination structures human thought and actions and shapes lives and values more profoundly in Africa. Myth therefore stands as a basic source of socialization, identity construction, role sharing, and self-perception in Africa. African literature has also drawn upon myth to imply authority, resonance, importance, character, tone, quality, reverberation, and significance. In this respect, myth can be seen as a tool for enforcing certain epistemological values. As a consequence, it is easy to graft gender fallacies into many areas of life and entrench gender bias, moral codes and behaviour in order to normalize men's visibility on the power platform. That is why some feminist theorists (de Beauvoir, 1970; Kristeva, 1980; Jasper, 2006; Lavine, 2010) have seen

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¹ Translated from *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail: Journal d'une Misovire* (chant-roman, 1983) by Marjolijn de Jager (2000).

myth and mythology as regressive and oppressive, an inhospitable terrain for women writers. They explain that the archetypes in myths have helped to oppress women in their personal and social lives and have forced them to accept identities which actually are not theirs. According to this school of thought, it is thanks to myth that women believe that woman must be either angel or monster. In this regard, Mugambi has observed that African myths of origin subvert women's positive roles and have become explanations for patriarchal domination (1994, p. 51). In the same light, Kolawole foregrounds the many ways mythoform impacts on African women's space in a very pragmatic manner and how myth provides the *raison d'être* for male domination of the power structure (1997, p. 54). According to these African critics, the African patriarchal structure has largely manipulated myths to vindicate women's disempowerment in vital public spheres and women themselves have internalized myths that ingrain negative self-image and foster self-negation as opposed to self-realization. But other feminist writers, theorists, and critics like Rich, 1975; Ostriker, 1982; Cixous, 1991; Atwood, 2006; Chandran, 2013, break away from the male-oriented myths and interpretations so as to rewrite female experience via rewriting and re-visioning of myths. Werewere Liking's chant-novel, *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* projects a peculiar politics of the gender myth conceptual renewal and her position in the literary discourse on mythic consciousness and feminist revisions is the motivating factor behind this paper.

With this motivation, this paper aims to demonstrate that Werewere Liking in *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* has chosen to challenge well established myth structures. She appropriates the productive force of myth for other purposes and invents new plausible gender myth structures with the aim to (re)create reality in her own terms and provide alternative visions for the future. This act of appropriation and invention, mediated by the creative process, does not reproduce the original mythic structures, but nevertheless does produce through the narrative process kinds of new mythoforms, with the power to expose, modify, and even to subvert pre-existing myths and the reality they project.

This paper therefore seeks to grapple with the following questions: How self-conscious and successful is Werewere Liking in incorporating myth structures in the chant-novel? What creative process does Liking adopt in order to recreate plausible gender myths that can enhance the current quest for positive female assertion, ethical values and human development? How does Liking's tapping from the recesses of mythic consciousness reveal in powerful fashion what Pieterse (1998, p. 75) has termed a moment of conceptual renewal and momentum of newness? To answer these questions, this paper projects a main objective which is to analyze Liking's narrative in order to see how she appropriates the productive force of myth through the misovire consciousness and ritual structure for structural and thematic purposes. Given this objective the paper defends the thesis that Liking in *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral*, through myth and ritual structures, combines and fuses traditional and modern aesthetics, thematic and structural elements that she uses to deconstruct social and gender relations, to unfold the past, explicate the present and chart new directions for the future of gender relations and human development. The contention is that in (re)negotiating plausible gender relations for men and women in Africa, Liking's story and structure incorporates the cleansing, cathartic effect of Bassa ritual² performance into the narrative. The result is that she demonstrates how ritual is necessary for cleansing and restoration, not only of gender balance through new gender myths, but of cleansing and restoring contemporary

² Werewere Liking and Marie-José Hourantier conceived of ritual theatre as an experimental theatre based on the principles of African aesthetics as they exist in ancestral ritual.

Africa, the way ritual (re)asserted the spiritual sense of community in the African past, hence the culture of human development.

This paper is guided by the tenets of deconstruction and the gender relations frameworks. According to Culler (1997, p. 127):

To deconstruct an opposition is to show that it is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourse that rely on it, and to show that it is a construction in a work of deconstruction that seeks to dismantle it—that is, not destroy it but give it a different structure and functioning.

Deconstruction helps to demonstrate how through the misovire consciousness—Liking's type of African feminist consciousness—she appropriates myth and ritual and uses them to deconstruct mythic structures that project gender hierarchies and binaries. Then through the creative process, she reconstructs relations of gender that are complimentary in a co-harmonious and accommodating existence. The theory of gender relations looks at the social relationships between men as a sex and women as a sex. Gender relations, according to March are simultaneously relations of cooperation, connection, and mutual support, and of conflict, separation, and competition, of difference and inequality (1999, p. 18). The gender theory helps demonstrate how the Misovire Consciousness appropriates mythic structures and elements to propel a narrative process and language structures that conceptualise and revalue new gender relations of complementarity, connection, networking, corporation, mutual support, co-harmonious existence, negotiation, and renegotiation. At the same time, Liking's creative process deconstructs relations of hierarchy, antagonism, gaze, disconnection, rape, penetration, exploitation, oppression, and suppression. To understand deconstruction or feminist revisionist tendencies and mythic consciousness that help to lay bare the manner in which Liking's creative process begets new myths that celebrate female identity and gender complementary roles and responsibilities, it is important to conceptualize mythic consciousness and feminist revisionist tendencies.

Conceptualizing Mythic Consciousness and Feminist Revisions

In feminist studies, myth is a concept that spurs ambiguities as the indicators of women's empowerment and disempowerment have been heavily mediated by it. This means that myth has a functional structure as critics of mythic discourse rightly delineate. Although many Greek and European critics emphasize myth as non-truths, pure fiction, fables, or unrealistic and illusory tales, others like Jung (1968) foreground the ritual basis of myth. He relates myth to the collective unconscious, explaining the similarity in the myths of different people. Yet, others like Levis-Strauss (1969), Frye (1976), and Barthes (1972) explain myth in terms of structures of culture and their view is of interest to this paper. Frye (1976) particularly relates myths to culture and defines it as a broad cultural concept that relates to social values. He states that, "A mythology is ... a cultural model, expressing the way in which man wants to shape and reshape the civilization that he himself has made" (1976, p. 21). In this statement the productive force of myth can be discerned. In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1972) uses the term myth as indicative of any made up, illusory thing, the false representations and invalid beliefs prevalent in the society which we accept as natural. According to Barthes (1972), the role of the mythologist is to prove that what appears to be natural is in fact artificial constructs which support existing power structures and construct a world for us and decide our place in it. What Barthes (1972) terms as myth is in fact the manner in which a culture signifies and grants meaning to the world around it. Barthes (1972) suggests that myths

not only reflect and explain perceived reality but also convey powerful messages about how this reality should be and how people should behave. In this respect myth can be seen as a functional structure that serves many functions in a given society. That is why Asante has observed that for African and African American societies, myth constitutes “a productive force ... myth becomes an explanation for the human condition and an answer to the problem of psychological existence in a recent society” (1987, p. 98). It is this productive force of myth that patriarchy has largely drawn from as the most powerful tools to subordinate women in the use of language and in social relations. Feminists have observed that myths have always been a source of collective male fantasy that attributes to women a gender identity built on the binary logic and a sexual identity submerged within the phallic system. Many contemporary women writers have chosen to challenge well-established myth structures, by engaging in what Rich has termed re-vision (1975). Myth is a complex form of language and women writers must become what Ostriker has termed, “the thieves of language” in which they are humiliated before they can refashion it to tell their story (1982). Re-vision of the myths therefore is a re-appropriation of male space for female ends.

As a feminist strategy of subverting patriarchal values, revision can be (re)interpretations of the androcentric myths as writers and critics redefine women and mythic structures that define them from the feminist perspective. They review the image of women which patriarchy has popularized, asserting that myths are originally ideological narratives of patriarchy that are utilized to justify and perpetuate the gender roles established by this ideology. In the light of the real experiences of women, feminists challenge the patriarchal construction of female identity. Revision is therefore a fertile ground for (re)interpretation. It is an attempt to retrieve female identity from the oppressive phallogocentric language. Re-visioning, in Ostriker’s view, is like filling an old vessel with a new wine (1982). According to her, myth is a free form capable of alternate possibilities at the beginning, end and at every pause. This means that the art of re-vision has multiple purposes. Ostriker has remarked in “The Thieves of Language” that old stories are changed utterly by female knowledge of female experience and so they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy (1982). They become corrections and representations of retrieved images of what woman have collectively and historically suffered and in some cases they are instructions for survival. It is in this regard that Rich observes that revision which is the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes; of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history (1975, p. 90). It is an act of survival. These writers place themselves in the world, remembering through an elaboration of mythic constructs which privilege female agency. Sankovitch cogently elucidates the transgressive implications and the generative function of the feminist revisionary mythopoetic enterprise (1988, p. 146). He maintains that, “The mythopoeic process is [...] a process of recovery and re-formation, as the ‘old’ myths are spirited away from their dead, oppressive contexts, and rejuvenated by reinterpretation, rereading, rewriting, all performed in newly found female contexts”. Werewere Liking’s narrative, *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* demonstrates and foregrounds the misovire consciousness which stands as the mythopoeic process that transforms, transgresses, and reforms gender relations and ethical values for human development. I intend to see how Liking deconstructs myth structures that project gender binaries, and how she revalues and reconstructs, through the misovire consciousness, new gender myths that redefine gender relations, celebrate what she calls women’s “cosmic force” and how through ritual cleansing, she reinvents a new language of beauty and a new race of Jasper and Coral.

The Misovire and Plausible Gender Myth Structures

Liking's plausible gender conceptual renewal myth structures in *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* arise from a creative process that assumes three dimensions. The first facet is the invention of the language structure through the concept of the misovire and the consciousness that surrounds her use of the term. The second element demonstrates that the misovire as a concept has a double function, a social construct, and a device. Then, the third is the revision of the myth of origin to tell her own story, one that suites her terms.

I see in Liking's invention of the misovire concept the specific definition she accords that concept and the gender complementary consciousness raised through it. When Liking names her narrative a chant-novel and gives it a subtitle "Journal of a Misovire," she creatively scripts the text as a gender relations centred narrative. As a chant-novel and a journal of a misovire, Liking demonstrates her inventiveness and these revisionist and transformative tendencies and practices that she promotes in her imaginative works and are also observed in her praxis³. The invention of the misovire concept demonstrates Liking's act of what Ostriker has termed "stealing the language" in which women are humiliated (1986). Liking is able to refashion this language to tell her story in arrestingly significant ways.

Liking's re-appropriation of male space for her ends through the invention of the misovire concept transgresses the patriarchal ideology of myth. It should be noted that the patriarchal ideology of myth is hardly visible due to its defamiliarizing capacity. Patriarchal African myths have come down from history with fixed co-ordinates and already defined and accepted meaning. As socializing phenomena, the strong influence of patriarchal mythoforms or myth structures validate and authenticate certain ideas about women and gender. African literature, philosophy, religion, and arts incorporate myths of gender that have tremendous influence on women's self-esteem. As stated above it is easy to graft gender fallacies into many areas of life and entrench gender bias, moral codes and behavior in order to normalize men's visibility on the power platform. Then, myths of gender and femininity combine to shape gender roles, attitudes, identities, and responsibilities through imbibing of certain concepts. But when Liking creates the misovire—a mythic figure who is at the same time a character, narrator, creator, critic, author, diarist and observer in the world of the chant-novel—she mediates a female perspective that has the force to unravel the phallogocentric nature of myths and challenge their androcentric structure.

As a writer cum critic, Liking coined the term misovire—literally translated as manhater—to better capture and foreground the issues she wants debated and played out in her chant-novel. Her ingenuity as a creator is seen in this concept, a much more complex term that moves beyond the literal definition manhater. The concept is grounded in Liking's specific understanding of what gender relations between men and women have been in her postcolonial philistine society in opposition to what they ought to be. Liking does not create this word because she wants women to hate men, but out of her dissatisfaction with so many men and women in Lunäi (symbolic representation of postcolonial Africa) who cannot complement each other. The diarist/character/narrator comments that the man of Lunäi "lacks even the discernment of his five most

³ Liking runs the artists village called the Ki-Yi Mbock Village located in Abidjan. Ki-Yi Mbock means "Ultimate Knowledge" in Bassa, Liking's native tongue and signifies the philosophical basis of the venture. The village now includes the following structures; the Ki-Yi Mbock Theatre, the Ki-Yi Arts Productions, the Eyo Ki-Yi Editions, the Ki-Yi management, the Neck-Neck Ki-Yi, the Ki-Yi Gallery, the Ki-Yi lines and Museum Ki-Yi.

common senses. Even his dreams his imagination his survival instincts are reduced. ...Do you see. ...The Tsetse flies. ...The Contamination..." (Ellipses and emphasis in the original, Liking, 2000, p. 32). Indeed, the misovire is filled with pity because of the inadequacies she observes in relations between men and women in Lunaï. Therefore, through the concept, she advocates for men and women to confront that which makes them contemptible beings and then reinvent themselves. In this regard, Cixous remarks that it is by writing, from and toward and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus that women will confirm women in a place other than silence (1991, p. 875).

I see in the very act of invention itself a primal importance as Liking engenders a new language, more adept at describing her reality, more attuned to her sensitivity for conceiving new gender myths and creating a new race and more consonant with her ideological stance. Her invention is the genesis of a language fashioned by women to bring into being that which does not exist or a new reality. I observe that Liking's invention deconstructs the structures that have had the power of naming stolen from women. This type of creative process, I may add, makes her exist humanly; for to exist humanly is to name the self, the world, God, and words which, materially speaking, are identical with the old becoming new in a semantic context that arises from qualitatively new experience. The misovire stands as a role-reversing and inverting discourse that contrives at once to deflate centuries of male aesthetic pretentiousness and to assert the identity of female sexuality and female creativity. Liking's identification and creation of an active, aggressive woman with truth, as she does the misovire, is to defy a very long tradition that identifies strong females with deception and virtuous females, including muses, with gentle inactivity.

The invention of the term misovire also functions to fill a void. A major theme in feminist theory, on both sides of the Atlantic, for the past decade has been the demand that women writers be, in Herrmann's (1979) phrase, *voleuses de langue*, thieves of language, female Prometheuses. Liking wrests language from the existing structure that Ostriker describes as "the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasures where our meanings for male and female are themselves preserved" (1986, p. 211). These treasures and sanctuaries are largely constructed through attributing to women a gender identity built on the binary logic and a sexual identity submerged within the phallic system. Mythoform in Liking's narrative is seen in the light of this complex form of language use. The language we speak and write has been an encoding of male privilege, what Rich calls an oppressor's language inadequate to describe or express women's experience (1975). Liking has it in her power to seize speech, to wring the encoded language from its treasures and sanctuaries, and to make it redefine experience. The French language includes the words *misanthrope*—denoting a person who does not like human beings in general and *mysogyne*, designating a person who does not like women; but no word exists to refer to a person who does not like men. Werewere Liking's invention is critical in that it shows how gender ideology pervades all spheres of human endeavour, including linguistic constructions. The arrogance of the dominant discourse is obvious here. Starting with language, with terminology, it extends to behavior. Liking stresses this arrogance in the following excerpt:

Did you ever see a man think himself unworthy of what's fit for the King? The ugliest the most vulgar the most untalented the most inane man doesn't give it a second thought to make advances to the finest of women to the goddess herself and never asks himself what he might contribute to the dialogue. Undoubtedly because men seem to think that their phallus alone is enough to compensate for everything else: inner and outer poverty pettiness of vision and action ugliness and bad manners... (2000, p. 109)

It is precisely to counter these forms of dominant patriarchal ideologies—the sexual identity submerged within the phallic system—that Liking who is adept at mixing categories, combines Greek and Latin components to invent the mythic figure *misovire*. Liking's invention is all the more important as the creation of the word also creates the function, and the possibility of another reality. Yet, disregarding the literal etymological meaning of *misovire* as “man-hater”, Liking offers a very different definition for her neologism in “A la rencontre de”: “une femme qui n'arrive pas à trouver un homme admirable” (A woman who cannot find an admirable man) (1985, p. 21). Liking's definition is refreshingly ambiguous. First, it deconstructs mainstream separatist feminism whose opinion would necessarily be that there is no point looking for an admirable man. Then, the phrase could variously be interpreted as “I cannot believe an admirable man exists” or “an admirable man does exist, but I have not yet found him” or “a woman who has not yet found an admirable man”. Despite the ambiguous nature of her definition, what remains clear is that Liking does not advocate gender relations of disconnection, separation, and antagonism between the sexes. What distinguishes Liking's creative ability, I suppose, is not the shared, exclusive *langage des femmes* desired by Irigaray, but her vigorous and transgressive invasion of sanctuaries and treasuries of existing meaning and language.

Indeed, Liking's stance does not limit itself to an anti-male rhetoric, but stresses instead a balance between demand and persuasion. So Liking exerts that force by the act of inventing the term *misovire*, yet moderates that force with a certain subtlety through the special definition she gives the word. This is the balancing act that remains at the heart of how women negotiate their demands, indeed their positions, within African societies. With the redefinition of woman as *misovire*, Liking emphasizes men's shortcomings in contemporary society, reminding them of a lack of dignity, of a lost sense of values that cause women to move away from them as she insists in her article “A la rencontre de”:

Elle (la femme) se sent entourée par des “larves” uniquement préoccupées par leurs bas penes et leurs bas-ventres et incapables d'une aspiration plus haute que leur tête, incapable de lui inspirer des grands sentiments qui agrandissent, alors, elle deviant misovire [She (the woman) feels that she is surrounded by “larvae” solely preoccupied with their bellies and their loins and unable to aspire to something that reaches higher than their heads, unable to inspire her with feelings that can uplift her, so, she becomes a misovire]. (1985, p. 21)

Liking's remarks are not intended to alienate men from women, but to make them think about gender relationships and reinvent themselves. It is therefore important to restate that the invention of *misovire* does not constitute a gratuitous act. It is done for a redressive purpose for besides filling the linguistic void, the word aims at destabilizing the status quo. It shows the extent to which social reality and literary expression are inextricably intertwined. From this perspective Liking dreams of a new race that will be “of jasper and coral” and can only be born when:

Every man on any continent will search within for his existence without being forced to “play the black man” or to serve as “front man” and without having to feed the thought-shape of the colonizer.

When man no longer acts the pig

When woman no longer is a bitch in heat

When I am no longer a misovire and there are no more misogynists

When there are only Beings in search of a better becoming and a better Existence. (Quotations and emphasis in the original, 2000, p. 112)

Liking's stance is both appealing and inspiring, for I interpret her definition of misovire as a willingness to make a decisive departure from conventional meaning. In this context, Liking's position reveals an interest not so much in feminism as in a new form of humanism—not a humanism that was distorted by the West at a certain point in history and served as a tool to exclude the “other”, but a humanism that tolerates no exclusion, a humanism that is capable of transforming society as a whole. That is why the title of the text, *It shall Be of Jasper and Coral* demonstrates an emphasis on a new race that must be born if Africans are to escape their precarious socio-economic and political conditions. In fact, in her persistent use of the term race, Liking deconstructs the conventional conception of the term that is surrounded by the binary white/black divide, a simplification that discredits and degrades human beings in their gender relations. It is indeed not by chance that Liking asserts that the new race of Jasper and Coral will be sapphire-blue and jade-green, made from a multitude of bright colours with celestial and ethereal beauty (2000, p. 20).

Liking's act of rethinking, recasting, reconceptualizing, and redefining lead to a reformulation of the concept of misovire with a double function, as a social construct and as a device used to construct poetics. As a social function she constructs a functional poetics that begets a new race through the force of the “power word” (2000, p. 4). The misovire critiques the people of Lunaï who have, upon colonial contact, turned their back on the positive aspects of traditional knowledge and wisdom and are vegetating in their own vomit. Liking through the misovire articulates the weaknesses and ugliness of the Lunaïans as follows:

the word no longer has any meaning. Looks, pleasures, friendship are congealed in ambivalence. Original desires have become perverted. Intellectuals are hollow and muddle-headed. Men have no balls and women are real shitfaces. Old people are decayed, children contaminated, and an educational system capable of stabilizing the standards no longer exists or has not yet been found... (2000, p. 3)

The Lunaïans of all walks of life, ages and sexes, have adopted corrupt, individualistic and materialist attitudes that have destroyed their society and have disconnected their contact with the cosmic force. To save this society from total decay, the misovire insists, the Lunaïains need to rethink themselves and fall back to purification rituals, those positive aspects of tradition that they have forgotten.

It is through the urge to revalue that the misovire as a concept is seen as device. As a device she incorporates the cleansing, cathartic effect of Bassa ritual in the narrative process. This style is executed through the diarist who is herself reclaiming the cosmic force through her narrative. Her style of writing is poetic, theatrical, transgressive, exalting, cathartic, because it is infused with initiation into many participatory and collective cleansing rituals. Right from the beginning the misovire as a diarist cum narrator invites everyone to think along with her, to ponder the issues at stake, and together find solutions, as they would, in any ritual performance or what Liking and Hourantier have termed an operational theatre.

Liking herself submits that *It shall Be of Jasper and Coral* is a mixture of poetry, drama, in short, a “text-game” (2000, p. 4). Women and men, as characters and as readers are seen as spectators and participants in this same “text-game” whose ritual experience becomes paramount to the rejuvenation process proposed in the chant-novel. Women can play an especially important role in this ritual process as the mythic figure/author/misovire/diarist/narrator/observer/ who acts as a *meneur de rite*, props the readers to take part in this ritual cleansing process, along with the people of Lunaï. Thus the reader is guided by the critical observations, the “power word” of the woman/misovire in her quest for a new race of jasper and coral. This

new race, I might add, will not come into being out of a neofascist ideology that fosters racial or ethnic cleansing. It will be made up of people who have looked into the depths of their own fractured souls and questioned the disconnections and decadence defining their gender relations and their lives. The text demonstrates and with emphasis the ritual process that the man of the next race will take to attend defragmentation. Through the metaphor of the heart of the trunk, which would be joined with the heart of the body, to be joined to the roots, the misovire captures the gender relation defragmenters that could convey strong relations of connection and negotiation between the genders. This ritual process will further enable the construction of a sturdy bridge between the spoken and the unspoken, between the solid and the intangible and it will clear the path toward wider horizons. Once this ritual process is accomplished, "tribe race will no longer mean region skin but community of Vision and of Aspiration. And man of the next Race will appear in a stronger healthy body that lives in greater harmony with richer more solid and more refined Emotions" (Emphasis and ellipsis on the original, Liking, 2000, p. 14).

The positive energies acquired from this ritual experience are constructive, creative energies as Liking further concurs, "His thinking will be more rigorous and more creative his will stronger and better directed his consciousness more open..." (Ellipsis on the original, Liking, 2000, p. 14). Women and men with stronger creative energies and a new reconnection with the cosmic force will cease to redefine themselves in the patriarchal binary ways of thinking that are represented in the text by the characters Grozi and Babou. The text reconstructs a new race of misogynists and misovires that will exist only to complement each other, "There shall be born a New Race of men/From human breath and divine fire/And the *misovire* I am now shall encounter a misogynist" (Liking, 2000, p. 5). I think that this new direction of re-inscribing women's voices and experience in the creative process, as proposed by Liking, is a way of introducing what Lincoln (2000) has described as new directions and mythemes of resistance and cultural recuperation that can innovatively and radically change postcolonial discourse on gender.

To further give voice to women who have been oppressed by the male-defined myths for centuries, Liking has executed a revision of the creation myth. This rethinking is in line with Asante's contention that "certain myths refuse to die long after the needs which created them have passed away" (1987, p. 95). Liking recreates the myth of origin that redefines African gender relations and provokes human development in multiple ways. According to Liking's myth, the gods had, many times in the past, given mankind knowledge, but each time, man abused it, degraded it and used it as a destabilizing force. Horrified at man's choice to always glide back into the idle animal world of slumber and short-lived pleasure where there exists no accountability, the gods unanimously condemned them to vegetate in the animal world, ruminating on their fate. But *Um*, one of the gods' civilizing masks who had fallen in love with man, stole a bit of knowledge and tried to make contacts with men. *Um* was unsuccessful because no man was interested in or would have thought to go to the heart of the earth in search of anything, let alone knowledge. So, a woman who went to the river to fish for love, came into contact, not only with love, but with knowledge, wisdom and the most powerful forces of the universe, which *Um* begged her to bear and regenerate. But she got so scared of mothering such enormous knowledge and power alone, and invited men who later usurped and totally dispossessed her of the powers.

This exploration of myth is particularly seen in Liking's simultaneous deconstruction of the prior myth of origin and reconstruction of a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself as woman. The conceptual

renewal in Liking's narrative process maintains that in spite of men's selfishness woman remains the only being who masters this force:

But Soo was able to keep the feeling of the warmth of this first contact between the fires of the gods and of men, as well as the memory of this voice of Love and Knowledge which she was the first one to have heard and which she would never forget.

And from that day onward women have had the power to recognize strength beauty and honesty at a first encounter by the mere inflection of a voice. (Liking, 2000, p. 57)

The gender conceptual renewal through myth-making here is purposefully and consciously mediated to convey the message that women were originally either the power bearers or just as powerful as men, until men, in their greed and refusal to share power, usurped what was rightfully women's. I contend that Liking is not making a case for matriarchy here, but that she uses myth as a discursive strategy that functions as a radical consciousness raising tool. Women are through this creative process reminded that they had/have a role to play in negotiating gender relations of connection, cooperation and negotiation, but they have also had a role in the their loss of this power. Liking revalues this source of positive energy through the initiation rite between Soo and *Um*, through which Soo emerges empowered. Her contact with the ultimate cosmic force, *Um*, leaves Soo and women—who never totally gave up that original contact—with the strength to recognize and define power, sexuality and gender in complex, non-linear ways to which men have to access. Rich insists that until women and men can understand the assumptions in which they are drenched they cannot know themselves (1975). And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. Liking's narrative process provokes women into taking responsibility, into reclaiming the full complexity of their womanhood and creating a new world. The woman diarist pronounces the "power word", "I am the Matrix Mother in which Ideas and Forms and Breath of life are in gestation so that all may be because I am. ...I am woman of men and of women who come from woman. I Walk ahead and I am" (Liking, 2000, p. 67). Women must reclaim this word force, the power and knowledge that the mask *Um* offers and represents. They must reclaim the spiritual, supernatural embodiment of the powerful forces of divinities that inspire and guide the collective consciousness of a community towards connection, networking, empowerment, cooperation, negotiation, and goodness.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have tried to demonstrate that Liking's *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* invents and revises *mythemes* and *mythoi*, wresting language from its sanctuaries and treasuries of meaning, to recreate new meanings that suite her convictions as a misovire. Therefore, her chant-novel is a radical critique of conventional meanings of gender and African feminism in its impulse. The invention and revision of the mythoform strategy employed by Liking is wrought in the chant-novel first of all as a clue to how women live, how women have been living, how women have been led to imagine themselves, how women's language has trapped as well as liberated women; and how they can begin to see and therefore live-afresh. The result is that a change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if women are not going to see the old political order re-assert itself in every new revolution. I have demonstrated in this paper that through myth-making as invention and revision in *It shall Be of Jasper and Coral*, there is need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known

it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over gender roles and identity. It is in this respect that literature can be seen as a tool that can be used for the promotion of the culture of human development. Liking's chant-novel therefore calls attention to the need for new plausible myths that redefine gender relations, revalue female assertion, ethical values, and human development. As I have demonstrated, through Liking's creative process a feminist perspective that views myth only as a regressive and oppressive structure is resolved. I have illustrated that Liking in *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral* appropriates the productive force of myths through the misovire consciousness and ritual structure for her gender relations' politics. I have shown that she appropriates the productive force by decoding existing negative myths and reconstructing new gender myths that redefine gender relations, celebrate what she calls women's "cosmic force". I have revealed that through ritual cleansing, Liking reinvents a new language of beauty and a new race of Jasper and Coral.

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