

## **THE FORMATION OF A BLACK, QUEER, FEMALE IDENTITY IN ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME**

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### **Abstract:**

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name is auto-mythography penned by black lesbian poet Audre Lorde. Audre in her text, by relocating her social groups and homes, explores various notions of homes and identity. Lorde provides an insight into the juncture of race, gender and sexuality, yet vouch for the purity of lesbianism. The paper attempts at exploring the roles and functions of motherhood and social groups in formation of a strong black, queer, female identity. By incorporating the evidence of racism, and gender, the paper aims at bringing forth the role of a mother in developing the strong feminist ideas. Readings and research work have been assimilated in order for us to conclude women elevating women can bring out the change we seek for. Despite the fact that a lot of literature has been served in the field of Afro American Literature, but the question of queer identity still remains vague and unanswered.

**Key Words:** Queer Identity, Lesbianism, Black Female, Intersectional Feminism.

**Introduction:** In this atypical text, Lorde journalizes her way of living, developing her strong personality in a variety of modes like prose, biography, poetry, myth, memorial and factual; which coordinates together and construct a meaningful narrative for the audience. From Audre's intense childhood remembrance of racism and gender centric discrimination to her adulthood, her behavior is patterned. It especially highlights the interconnection of women who have embodied these characteristics into her and made her this strong queer identity. Audre doesn't tag her novel under "biography" rather coined a hybrid of genres as "biomythography", which indicates that the incidence we read in the text are not purely factual. This is not a purely historical account of her life. This is more about a sense of her, and about a sense of community she felt.

*"What is honesty? To declare dishonesty is perhaps the most honest thing Audre could have done. She had the honesty and generosity to tell you that; some of it may have happened and there might be little changes, but I felt it's important to tell you" - Maz Hedgehog*

**Discussion:** A little black girl born in 1930s Harlem, unaware of her destiny. She discovers her inability at speaking and hearing when her sisters often ignored her presence because they did not know how to connect with her and never even tried to. Apart from racism and gender centric discrimination outside the home, Audre

was also discriminated by her sisters at home. She wobbles through the youthful hardships like hunger, suicide, being alone and lonely on festive occasions, racial discrimination; until she rises into euphoria: friendships, affairs, social groups, discovering her sexuality. Lorde takes the audience on a ride through her childhood to her adulthood, exploring the true meaning of her name. The text portrays how she is not suitable for the white, misogynistic, heterosexual norms of the society.

The adjunct “New” in the title of the novel bring focus on the separation Lorde desires to imprint with what already has existence, the vigorous wish to be and act otherwise from her biological development and structure. This eagerness has been accounted for, early in the text. While, during her class work, Lorde unintentionally marks her freedom, a new identity by protesting to go along with her teacher’s orders, in the act of which the teacher points out: “I see we have a young lady who does not want to do as she is told.” When the teacher asked Lorde to write her name in a straight line, she does it differently and diagonally rather than copying her other classmates.

Nonetheless, Lorde’s juvenility speaks for her action, what is even more appealing to discuss here is her clear and obvious thirst for self-affirmation and freedom in a way that even though her teachers intimidate her in order to chastise her, she sticks by her independence and doesn’t go along with the cluster.

Lorde assembles several references to her ray of hope and power of being to these incredibly powerful women and the novel celebrates all of them who have in some or the other way altered her for the better. The majority of them look to be lovers from whom she gathers much but the one woman who empowers her to go against the societal norms for her race and gender is her mother, Linda. Though in the beginning of the text she opposes her mother, like any other daughter of a possessive mother who desires to create a happy place for her children despite the haunted world. Their relationship is at times stiff and unwieldy. Lorde as a child always felt like the left-out child treated sternly. Nevertheless, Lorde and Linda are certainly very akin and Lorde does honor her for passing on the inner strength and power. “There it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother’s blood.”

The novelist recounts her erotic intimacy with a male partner, Peter, which turns into one of the most haunting memory for her. She undergoes an abortion that leads to hopelessness and depression. Apart from Peter and Byron, Audre’s father, the only male figures portrayed in the novel are either sinister or abusive figures. Love, affection, tenderness, goodness, exactment and pleasure are reflected solely among the female characters.

While researching about Lorde’s *Zami*, I came to realize that a lot of work has been dedicated to *Zami*’s storyline, plot, emerging themes, connections, identity and the idea of home, but little has been done on the purpose of her styling and literary techniques which keeps varying. The amalgam of plurality in genres structures the novel, along with the deliberate use of “poetry and italics” at several instances, highlights crucial significance and great spiritually important documentary. The subject matter focuses on intersectional path for self-identification. Many scenes intensify the use of multiplicity of methods, particularly in writing and self-identification in the novel. This builds up the queer, intersectional essence of the text in a manner which upholds the text and heighten itself from other comparable narratives produced, that holds similar documentation but sabotaging the dominant modules of writing and self-identity but majorly lack in constructing such a boldly,

personally and especially an honest mythography as Audre Lorde beautifully does in *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*.

The novel's approach towards woman having sex with other women is remarked as them omitting self from the societal norm of sexual orientation to persons of the opposite sex. Starting from Harlem to Mexico, Lorde takes on with her relations with Bea, Eudora, Marie, Felicia, Ginger, Muriel, Rhea and Afrekete, where she portrays her denial to confining herself with the societal norms. By incorporating various same sex sexual companions, the novelist indicates her freedom to involve her self and her body and her desires as to her choice. Every partner satisfies her erotic lust and provides her a helping hand in overcoming the masculine domination and hold her identity as lesbian beyond the spurious society norms. They serve for the world she aspires for. Lorde upholds "Any world which did not have a place for me loving women was not a world in which I wanted to live, nor one which I could fight for." This is Lorde's tale of dissolving the societal and cultural norms. It is euphoric, tale of freedom, love, art, power, erotic intimacy and changes, filled with utmost poetry and boldness in her emotional strength.

**Conclusion:** Afro American women's autobiographies are authentic means for the gaining the knowledge about black women and in the way they have recognized themselves over the time. Every black woman holds a portrayal of herself not only as an individual being but also as a member of the Afro American community and of the societal influence in her attitude towards life's necessity and moreover towards herself. Their autobiographies depict an effort in spelling out their individual life experience through the summoning of their personal sensibility. In reach of this tradition, *Zami: A New spelling of my Name* reflects development in autobiographical genre for it places in proximity the historical, factual, fictional and mythical; composing a new self for the text. Lorde brings to light her life experience in her own narrative. Through the mythical atmosphere, the novelist offers a new identity for women who do not wishes to identify themselves with current ones.

*"The house of women becomes, then, the house of difference."*

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