

A Study of Audre Lorde's
Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (1982)
Dispersion of Magical Fruit and Unfathomable Distances

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Introduction

“Bridges,” asserts Gloria Anzaldúa, “are thresholds to other realities [...] passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders and changing perspectives” (*This Bridge* 1). Thirty-three years before that remark, in her first collection of poems, Audre Lorde describes the act of bridging as follows:

We are each of us both shorelines [...]
Joined our bodies have passage into one
Without a merging [...]
We search each other's shore for some crossing home.
("Bridge through My Windows" 7, 11-12, 15)

Throughout her life, Lorde not only emphasized the importance of her differences and multiple positionalities but tried to connect myriad differences between her selves and others due to her belief that divergence is “a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” and “a springboard for creative change within our lives” (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 111, 115-6). For Lorde, traversing differences is a source of her artistry, her exquisite vision, which this article seeks to elucidate by discussing her autobiographical fiction, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Lorde remarked that what she craved to do in *Zami* was to “underline the connection between Africa, the African Caribbean, and Africans in America” (J. Hall 125). In order to explore this linkage, I believe that it was necessary for her to cross borders of different times and spaces and imagine and embrace unfathomable distances. Indeed, in the last chapter in *Zami*, a luminous sea-green fruit which has traversed different times and spaces liquefies and flows on the surface of gendered and racialized subalterns' bodies: the bodies that have been incessantly displaced and deeply injured by an amalgam of racism, sexism, and homophobia throughout history.¹ That viridescent object eventually indicates other actualities altering our perceptions.

Audre Lorde defines her “selves” as African-Caribbean-American, woman, non-heterosexual poet. Those multiple selves, however, are not fixed, everlasting identities in the essentialist sense. They rather indicate intricate multifocal selves that are constructed through their ceaseless interaction with others within and outside her selves. For Lorde, incessant reciprocal action is to listen with attention to the voices of both internal and external others and respond to them through her representation.

This article explores Lorde's representation created through an unremitting

endeavor to listen attentively to the voices of others and reply to them. She zealously addresses the non-existent whose voices have been oppressed and deprived, and I believe that her addressing voice disturbs existing norms and institutions and carves out a path through existing categories. By exploring Lorde's literary achievements that evoke the accretion of repressed voices, this article will examine the relation between the situation wherein human beings are deprived of expression and Lorde's representation, contemplating the possibility of opening up a space in which experimental discourse can be performed.

Audre Lorde's autobiographical fiction, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, has been viewed in terms of her autobiography by previous researchers. They mainly focused on Lorde's political positionality: her African-American, woman, non-heterosexual identities and how they were represented in the text.² In actuality, *Zami* sees Lorde describing her memories of childhood and adolescence and the social context of racist, sexist, homophobic America from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Lorde states, however, that *Zami* is a "fiction built from many sources. This is one way of expanding our vision," insisting on its aesthetic aspect (J. Hall 99).³ Art and the protest against social pressure are indivisible for her because what is beautiful has to change the lives of the oppressed (J. Hall 92). She also designates herself as "the mischievous linguist, trickster" who causes linguistic trouble (*Zami* 255). In fact, besides the chronicle of her life, Lorde, or rather the tropical fruit, delineates another trajectory of time and space. This fruit, the magical transferring object, depicts the intricate lines in the text and finally, in the last scene, deliquesces on the surface of Lorde's and other women's bodies.

This article first focuses on the hybridity of the text, in which various disparate times and spaces and multilayered voices and visions arise from Lorde's convoluted positionality, her multifocal selves. Lorde depicts a desperate struggle of women of color in their everyday life which is intersected with a complex of oppressions such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and patriarchy. Collins states that "single-focus lenses on social inequality left little space to address the complex social problems," (3) which is intersecting power relations that African American women face in their everyday life. I think that *Zami* sheds light on the blind spots where subalterns are silenced and deprived of their voices, criticizing and challenging existing social inequalities, and trying to create possibilities for epistemic and social change. Lorde's description of their everyday experiences makes it possible for us to discern that those dominant systems force their way into the lives of subalterns from every direction and try to menace and rule their lives. Those disparate and manifold factors, however, are not merely juxtaposed but interact with one another. To inquire into this intersection, the article then pursues the trajectory of the magical fruit because it seems to cross the boundaries of divergent times, spaces, and other factors, providing connections among them. In my opinion, it is presumable that Lorde tries to limn a network of

multiple oppressions by employing essentialist category of gender, race, and sexuality while also undoing the very category itself by limning the excess of subalterns' bodies, a sort of excessive life force which cannot be irreducible to fixed categories and completely regulated by dominant power.⁴ To put it another way, Lorde simultaneously depicts harsh realities of disenfranchised people while counter-depicting non-essentialist phase of the self which is always already under constant negotiation and transience. The point that I would like to focus on, however, is what the sensibility or perception that is peculiar to Lorde precisely and accurately seizes and indicates. In the course of her narrative, the magical transferring thing is ultimately hybridized with gendered and racialized subalterns' bodies, and I will attempt to articulate what is occurring on the surface of the uncannily depicted bodies by utilizing the critical theory on racialized, genderized, and sexualized episteme by Butler. In a sense, it is an exquisite vision that Lorde conjures into existence, and a precious gift to anyone who suffers from the monolithic system that draws a distinction between the viable and the nonviable and struggles to break through the restriction of a dichotomic and hierarchical pattern of thought.⁵

***Zami* in literary and sociopolitical contexts**

This section considers the sociopolitical and literary conditions before and around the time of the publication of *Zami* in 1982 in order to explain the circumstances that led Lorde to write the text.

“What did it mean to be a Black Lesbian/Poet in America at the beginning of the twentieth century?” asks Akasha Gloria Hull in “‘Under the days’: The Buried Life and Poetry of Angelina Weld Grimké” (74). After close examination of Grimké’s life and works, Hull concludes that her literary output was very small because “she was triply disfranchised, Black, woman, Lesbian, there was no space in which she could move” (79).

After the liberation movements of African Americans, women, gays, and lesbians in the United States from the late 1950s to the 1970s, those who had been suffering from manifold invisibility and discrimination were finally able to raise their voices and began to create spaces in which they could exist. One of the earliest of these voices is “The Combahee River Collective Statement” written in 1977.⁶ It asserts strongly as follows:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppressions are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (264)

It continues that to forge an alliance with other feminists of color who live in solitude across the nation, “writing, printing, and publishing” is absolutely constructive (272).

Barbara Smith, one of the founders of The Combahee River Collective, established Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1981 with Audre Lorde. It was founded to exclusively publicize books by colored women of all ethnic backgrounds, social strata, and sexual orientations. Before the establishment of Kitchen Table, the voices of women of color were scarcely brought out by established or Caucasian feminist publishing companies, which were entirely governed by Euro-American interests and standpoints. In 1983, Kitchen Table published the long-sought and pioneering miscellanies *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color and Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Andrews 423). In these books, colored women of divergent cultural ethnic circumstances, sexualities, and classes, whose voices had been underrepresented and disregarded, at long last began struggling to find their voices and articulate their thoughts and visions precisely.

Compilers of *This Bridge*, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, consistently gave support and courage to the contributors, observing that “from the moment of its conception, it was already long overdue [...] we knew it was a book that should already have been in our hands” (xxv). They noted that in creating this assemblage, which reflected differing viewpoints, lingual styles, and vernaculars, their basic attitude was to maintain its multiplicity as well as each author’s particular voice and manner (xxiv).

Like *This Bridge*, *Home Girls* is a miscellany that assembles various voices of colored feminists because it is fitted to expose a multitude of problems concerning women of color and also to forge a collaborative relationship among them (B. Smith xlv-v, li). In the long, enthusiastic introduction of *Home Girls*, Barbara Smith claims that although their efforts remain unrecounted, since 1973, the movement of feminists of color has been dealing with and challenging “sexual, racial, economic and heterosexist oppression” along with “imperialism, anti-Semitism, the oppressions visited upon the physically disabled, the old and the young, [...] militarism and imminent nuclear destruction” (xxx-i-iii). The conception of the synchronicity of oppressions that colored women had to suffer in everyday life served to elucidate their sociopolitical reality. This “multi-issued approach to politics [...] altered the women’s movement,” and they realized the necessity of a multifaceted strategy and coalition building to protest against their monstrously complicated political situation (xxxiv-v).

I believe that the originality that appears in such anthologies and statements resides in the fact that they realize that women of color are subjected to systematic oppressions and, especially, that they perceive the synchronicity of those persecutions. Moreover, they are distinctive in that they promote unity in diversity. They try to unite their efforts to challenge synchronized and structured suppressions while maintaining the rich diversity of their voices.

With regard to American letters, “there has been almost nothing written by or

about” non-white, non-heterosexual, lower-class women owing to the fact that they are “non-entity in imagination as well as in reality,” being positioned as such within “the labyrinthine systems of male-dominated, patriarchal, racist, heterosexist societies” (Shockley 83; Hull and Smith xviii).

For example, a black lesbian feminist, Barbara Smith stressed in the late 1970s that “centuries of concerted suppression and invisibility” and “accumulated generations of psychic damage” had been serious impediments to black women’s artistic creation (Hull and Smith xxvii, xxx). She articulates this point with passion, stating as follows:

I want most of all for Black women and Black lesbians somehow not to be so alone. This last will require the most expansive of revolutions as well as many new words to tell us how to make this revolution real. I finally want to express how much easier both my waking and my sleeping hours would be if there were one book in existence that would tell me something specific about my life. One book based in Black feminist and Black lesbian experience, fiction or nonfiction. Just one work to reflect the reality that I and the Black women whom I love are trying to create. When such a book exists then each of us will not only know better how to live, but how to dream (“Toward” 183-4).

Although posterior to the 1950s political campaigns that culminated in an emergence of writings by African American women, literary texts that gave particular prominence to non-white, non-heterosexual subject matter and personae were not published without difficulty. A few pieces by African American non-heterosexual writers started to come out in the 1970s such as Pat Parker’s and Audre Lorde’s poems, which presented non-heterosexual themes candidly. Their endeavors were crucial to the development of non-white, non-heterosexual literature that would burgeon subsequently (Andrews 432; B. Smith, “Toward” 182). A thin scattering of voices accumulated gradually following such efforts until it formed a space of “diasporic excess” (Butler, *Prearious* 126) filled with multifarious visions and voices.

Multilayered voices and visions

The preceding section referred to *Home Girls* and *This Bridge Called My Back*: two diverse collections made up of varied women’s articulations and perspectives that were previously unrepresented. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* is one of those invaluable works that expand and enrich our vision. This section discusses the miscellaneousness of *Zami*, focusing on Lorde’s multiple visions and the myriad voices that are observable in *Zami* and her poems.

“To whom do I owe the power behind my voice, what strength I have become, yeasting up like sudden blood from the bruised skin’s blister?” questions Lorde in the opening lines, stating that she was constantly “trying to figure out something [...] secret that some women carried like a swollen threat” (*Zami* 3). I insist that throughout the text, Lorde tries to fathom something abstruse that women hold deep

in their hearts, and her narrative voice is sustained by an accretion of various images of women and their secret voices. She describes all manner of women she has met in her life. For instance, she recalls a black woman, DeLois, whom she “never spoke to” but adored “because she moved like she felt she was somebody special, like she was somebody,” with the young Audre wanting to understand this woman someday (4). She also depicts white women who suffer domestic violence and refuse Audre’s helping hand because of their racial prejudice (5).

Another example is that Lorde recounts her childhood in the first half of the text, including the voice of her mother, Linda. Lorde’s parents immigrated to New York City from Grenada in 1924. Grenada is the country of Audre’s “forebearing mothers,” whose powers are still swinging “though the rain-warm streets with an arrogant gentleness” (9). Linda worked all day without rest in the country she knew so little about (9-10). Lorde, however, minutely describes what Linda knew about, with one example being her beautiful prayers to “Virgin Mary [...] mother of the word incarnate” (10). Lorde enumerates what Linda misses in her hometown. She longs for the music and songs that always filled the air in Grenada. She also misses “Ma-Mariah, her root-woman grand-mother,” who taught her many things “under the trees on Noel’s Hill in Grenville Grenada, overlooking” the Caribbean Sea and “(a)unt Anni and Ma-Liz, Linda’s mother,” who shared the same knowledge (12). Linda told her three girls “wonderful stories about Noel’s Hill” surrounded by the sea and “Carriacou, where she had been born, amid the heavy smell of limes” (13). Although young Audre had never visited those islands, she knew women of Grenada and Carriacou and how they “move their lives [...] together” and “came to love each other” from their mouth (13-4). It is clear from these examples that innumerable images and voices of women appear from behind Lorde’s narrative voice in the book’s opening pages.

As a further example of the excessiveness of Lorde’s plural voices, let us consider the following extract from her poem “Call” in *Our Dead Behind Us*.

Holy Ghost woman
stolen out of your name
Rainbow Serpent⁷
whose faces have been forgotten
Mother loosen my tongue or adorn me
with a lighter burden
Aido Hwedo is coming.
[...]
We are learning by heart
what has never been taught
you are my given fire-tongued
Oya Seboulista Mawu Afrekete⁸
and now we are mourning our sisters

lost to the false hush of sorrow
[...]
and we are shouting
Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer
Assata Shakur and Yaa Asantewa
my mother and Winnie Mandela⁹ are singing
in my throat
the holy ghosts' linguist
one iron silence broken
Aido Hwedo is calling
calling
your daughters are named
and conceiving
Mother loosen my tongue
or adorn me
with a lighter burden (1-7, 63-83)

In this poem, I assume that Lorde seems to be suffering from thick-layered silences of nameless women who are “lost to the false hush of sorrow,” and she addresses herself to the ancient goddess, saying “loosen my tongue” to lighten the load of wordlessness. She gradually realizes “the spiral of power” in her voice and recognizes that her black women sisters are chorusing in her throat (*The Collected* 417-9). The refrain “Aido Hwedo,” which sounds like “being” (“I” “we”), is itself at the same time “doing” (“do”). I believe that Lorde perceives such existence surging forward and hears something dynamistic addressing her. It is also notable that the verbs such as “call,” “shout,” and “sing” lack of their direct object. It is unclear what is called, shouted, or sung and it is presumably correct to say that Lorde does not intend to place emphasis on the meanings of what are uttered but the voiced sound itself, its physicality or materiality that has been negated and underrepresented. She also shows us that the collective voice uttered from her sisters tries to rearticulate monolithic reality by which they have been repressed and persecuted throughout history.

Another illustration of the multiplicity in Lorde's voice is her early poem “Martha,” which is included in *Cables to Rage* (1970). Dedicated to her loved one, Martha, this is a text “in which Lorde poetically confirms her homosexuality: ‘we shall love each other here if ever at all’” (Andrews 461-2). Lorde zealously addresses Martha, who is seriously injured in a traffic accident and hovers between life and death (DeVeaux, *Warrior* 101). In this long piece, however, not only Lorde's voice but also Martha's “mangled words” (*The Collected* 39) can be heard, and Lorde attempts to fathom Martha's incomprehensible delirious utterances. In this “double-voiced poem” (DeVeaux 102) of love, Martha's mysterious utterances written in italics frequently interrupt Lorde's narrative voice. Lorde notes down Martha's chaotic voice uttered

from a boundary between life and death, and finally, with her exceptional sensibility, starts to converse with her. Initially, Lorde seems to be overwhelmed by harsh reality, confronted with her loved one hovering between life and death. Lorde, however, starts contemplating this overpowering reality with her poetic language, in a sense, objectively and composedly considering cruel reality from a different point of view as a poet. Furthermore, she tries to bridge the gap between the delirious utterance of her loved one and the language of poetical contemplation, making them converse and interact with one another, which shows another example of Lorde's compound perspectives that enable her to see things from different viewpoints in order to alter seemingly monolithic reality.

Such divided voices are also discernible in *Zami*. According to Raynaud, "Lorde often resorts to italics to break the rhythm of realistic writing, to modulate it, to blur the possible identification by the reader of the source of writing, of the voice" (230). She further suggests that "(i) talics help to create polyphony and are uttered by other voices than that of the traditional autobiographical narrator" (230).¹⁰ In *Zami*, it is observable that the narrator's voice itself is occasionally split into divergent poetic utterances. These multiplex voices are indicated in italics and surface at the moments when Lorde depicts her dream (199), poetic voice (103, 160), and different times and spaces (13-4, 249-52).

The text is also filled with a great variety of songs. For example, popular songs in the 1940s and 50s can be heard with considerable frequency such as the songs of Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Doris Day, and numerous other vocalists (90, 98, 129, 130, 191, 220, 228, 240, 245). However, another singing voice comes from Ella, who is a stepmother of Audre's first love, Gennie, and a victim of domestic violence at the hands of Gennie's father, Phillip. Gennie was also abused viciously by her father and finally committed suicide by taking poison (94, 97). Although Ella was "too beaten down and anesthetized by Phillip's brutality for her to believe in her own mouth," she was always "singing her non-stop tuneless little song over and over and over" (251). In the last chapter, Lorde finally perceives something sacred speaking through Ella's discordant singing voice, and to that something she owes her survival (251). What she discerns here seems to be a response to her own question in the opening paragraph: "To whom do I owe the power behind my voice [...]?" (3).

Lorde's auditory hallucination in chapter 30 affords another example of her capacity to appreciate divergent voices inside of her "selves."¹¹ When Lorde boards a bus at Second Avenue, Negro spiritual of hope quite abruptly surges up within her head, and she feels that "the angelic orchestration" is "a new way through or beyond pain" (238-9).

With regard to her multiple visions, the following provide apt illustrations. Take the visual hallucination in chapter 4 for example. At the age of four, Lorde saw a young

girl whose image lasted for several minutes in front of her house in Harlem. I insist that Lorde, however, hallucinates differently because her illusion is as real and concrete as reality. She describes what she saw minutely:

Here she stood before me now, smiling and pretty in an unbelievable wine-red velvet coat with a wide, wide skirt that flared out over dainty little lisle-stockinged legs. Her feet were clad in a pair of totally impractical, black patent-leather maryjane shoes, whose silver buckles glinted merrily in the drab noon light. (37)

Furthermore, Lorde exchanges words with that little girl, and her mother Linda witnesses her in extraordinary old-fashioned attire.

Two of the women Lorde has loved taught her that the word carves out a new dimension in reality. One of them is her mother Linda, who “had a special and secret relationship with words,” with her remarks giving a vivid description of “surreal scenes” (31-32). Her lover Muriel is a poet whose words “held a precious unfolding of her humorous and prismatic vision” (189). Lorde states as follows:

I came to marvel and delight in the new view she afforded me of simple and unexpected things. Re-seeing the world through her unique scrutinies was like re-seeing the world through my first pair of glasses when I was a child. Endless and wonderful re-discoveries of the ordinary. (189-90)

These women disclosed her alternative points of view “to change reality,” that is, to alter the perception of a reality that had appeared immutable (18).

What we can perceive in her text is that Lorde has an ability to discern others' existence through numerous voices or something dynamic. The point to which should be directed is that the existence that Lorde perceives has equivocal, spectral characteristics. Although the verbs, “shout,” “sing,” or “call,” are repeated in her text, it does not seem clear as to what are shouted, sung, or called as the verbs lack their objects; or rather, Lorde does not intend to perceive those shouts, songs, or calls as something which has meanings in the first place. At any rate, it is presumably correct to say that for Lorde listening to the voices of others does not mean to understand the meaning of the words that are uttered. Rather, it is more likely to listen to the voiced sound itself. In other words, (Lorde not only refers to the auditory hearing sense but also “throat” which produces vocal sounds) it could be said that it is through her physical, not rational or practical, sense, that she perceives the existence of others, especially obscure one, which shows a perceptive ability peculiar to Lorde. On the basis of the argument above, in the next chapter I would like to discuss the relation between her physical perception and amorphous existence which her distinctive ability perceives. Her auditory and visual hallucinations seem to appear as imaginary or surreal images. Furthermore, in her text those images seem to intermingle with each other although they are not completely dissolved into one another as we can recognize each vague existence and voice severally.

The first part of this study examined the sociopolitical and literary contexts before and around the time when *Zami* was published and reaffirmed the surge of previously unrepresented women's voices in this period. It can be said that *Zami* accurately reflects the characteristic of its time because it is an assemblage of various women's images and voices that were almost unheard of in that period. Lorde not only carefully listens to what is uttered by subalterns, including murmurings in delirium such as Martha's chaotic words and Ella's discordant singing voice, but also inscribes what is unutterable in the text such as the poems Muriel burned before she was hospitalized with a mental disease and a blank sheet of paper she left bearing the single word "NOTHING!" (219, 240). I believe that myriad voices and visions that are observable in *Zami* and Lorde's poems also indicate that language plays a crucial role in transforming a seemingly monolithic and unalterable reality. Compound realities in *Zami* that contain different times and spaces will be discussed in the next chapter.

Green Things Are Precious: Dispersion of Magical Fruit

For further perusal of Lorde's representation, this chapter discusses compound realities in *Zami*, which contains different times and spaces.

In my view, *Zami* delineates two distinct temporalities. On the one hand, it portrays Lorde's memoirs of childhood and adolescence along with the sociopolitical context of that time, such as the Great Depression, World War II, red-baiting, and gay culture in the 1950s. On the other hand, it depicts another temporality that has been woven around the legendary Caribbean island, "Carriacou," in which Lorde's foremothers dwelled together in peace and friendship with other female islanders.¹²

In my opinion, these seemingly distinct temporalities, however, intermingle with each other. For example, in the last chapter, Lorde's girlfriend Kitty's factual story and imaginary woman Afrekete's tale, which is represented in italics, commingle dynamically through a tropical fruit that is both from the storefront in New York City and Carriacou at the same time (Takemura, *Possibilities* 432). This approach can be seen in the following quotation:

And I remember Afrekete, who came out of a dream to me always being hard and real as the fire hairs along the underedge of my navel. She brought me live things from the bush, and from her farm set out in cocoyams and cassava - those magical fruit which Kitty bought in the West Indian markets along Lenox Avenue. (Zami, 249)

The above extract also indicates that Afrekete and Kitty seem to be the same person. Actually, Kitty gives her name as Afrekete, and Lorde refers to Kitty as Afrekete without hesitation. The important point to note is the synchronicity of different times and spaces. They coexist in the same line, which strings out linearly in the text as sentences. As a matter of fact, Lorde mentions that it is desirable to have two or more plans in a single text as follows: "I have often wondered why the farthest-

out position always feels right to me; why extremes, although difficult and sometimes painful to maintain, are always more comfortable than one plan running straight down a line in the unruffled middle” (15). Furthermore, Lorde insists that the matrilineal passage of time does not merely proceed in the same direction diachronically: “I have felt the age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the “I” at its eternal core, elongate and flatten out into the elegantly strong triad of grandmother mother daughter, with the “I” moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions as needed” (7). This excerpt designates that “I,” which is enclosed in quotation marks, goes to-and-fro among women, insisting on their synchronical linkage.

There is one further point to note. It was observed in the preceding section that various visions and voices are intertwined in the fabric of the text. It is also clear that *Zami* is a text that contains interwoven strands of compound temporalities. In my opinion, that dynamic intermingling is indicated by transferring fruits that transcend different times and spaces. At the beginning of the text, Lorde’s mother Linda is searching for a tropical fruit from her homeland in New York City. The text then gives a vivid description of Grenada and Carriacou surrounded by the beautiful sea and full of tropical fruits and the smell of aromatic spices. Those fruits continue to traverse unfathomable distances in the text and subsequently become the magical fruit in the last chapter. For instance, the magical fruit emerges at the storefront in New York City (206-7), in her dream (199), as engraved figures on the exterior surface of mortar (71), as goods on a hawker’s truck (73), and so forth. It follows from what has been said that several divergent times and spaces are discernible in *Zami* and that they are represented synchronically.

Next, I will concentrate on the correlation between the synchronicity perceptible in *Zami* and Lorde’s multifarious positionality. The “I” mentioned previously expresses Lorde’s convoluted locality as woman, mother, daughter, non-heterosexual, African-Caribbean diaspora who sojourns in the United States. It is worthwhile examining what is occurring in *Zami* when that plural state of “I” traverses divergent temporalities and encounters innumerable women who are both mythical and actual.

In regard to the correlation between the synchronicity in the text and Lorde’s complex selves, it can be said that Lorde’s tangled positionality itself is synchronic because her selves refuse to be settled down to a fixed identity. Moreover, her black, lesbian, women selves are the targets for racism, homophobia, and patriarchy. They are coerced to be tongue-tied multiply. In the situation of being compelled to be a subaltern who is deprived of expressions and does not even know how to dream, I insist that the act of groping for words is a quest for the vision that reconstructs the body harmed by sexual, heterosexual, and racial prejudices; further, it is a quest to expand the boundaries of the space of her artistic representation.

At the outset of *Zami*, Lorde states that the source of the power behind her voice is the strength of all the women she has met in her life. She also perceives her own

body plurally: “My body, a living representation of other life older longer wiser” (7). Furthermore, Lorde recognizes her selves, which have their voice and body sustained by other women, as “the journeywomen pieces of myself” (5). As she states, “(i)mages of women flaming like torches adorn and define the borders of my journey, stand like dykes between me and chaos. It is the images of women, kind and cruel, that lead me home” (3). I believe that the encounter with other women is thus a driving force of her journey and her writing. In other words, *Zami* depicts the process whereby Lorde becomes “*Zami*,” the “bridge and field of women” (255), and also “*Afrekete*,” who is “the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become” (5, 255) by discovering the multilayeredness of her selves.

What sort of resonances, colorings, and bodies can be found in *Zami* when her multilayered selves journey through the text into which divergent spaces and times are woven? I believe that deviational magical fruits that transcend space and time indicate the path to that vision.

Thus, it is my understanding that the point to observe is the trajectory of the mystical objects. They emerge in chapters 1, 11, 25, 26, and 31. Chapter 1 describes how Lorde’s mother, Linda, who longs for her home of Grenada, is searching for tropic fruits in New York City: “In October 1929, the first baby came and the stockmarket fell, and my parents’ dream of going home receded into the background. Little secret sparks of it were kept alive for years by my mother’s search for tropical fruits “under the bridge” (10). The chapter then depicts Linda as being perplexed by life in an unfamiliar environment as a newcomer to the big city. Meanwhile, it enumerates in detail the knowledge that Linda’s mother and grandmother conveyed to her in Grenada. Among the things she learned are that “green things” are invaluable and that the green color in water eases one’s mind: “Linda knew green things were precious, and the peaceful, healing qualities of water” (12). Linda takes her three daughters to the Harlem River, and sometimes they take a train to go to the sea. In places near the water, Linda tells her girls about Grenada, which is surrounded by the emerald green sea. She then traces back to the past and speaks about “Carriacou,” her foremother’s homeland. “Carriacou” is the island that is thickly covered with lime trees (13); moreover, another “home,” which is an italicized “*Carriacou*” located in another space and time, emerges in the text (14). It is a “magic place” whose location cannot be found on a map (14). This “*home*” = “*Carriacou*” is a place Lorde came to know from the words of her mother. “Once home was a far way off, a place I had never been to but knew well out of my mother’s mouth” (13). The “*home*” = “*Carriacou*” reconstructed by Lorde’s imagination is pictured with colorful fruits as follows:

Carriacou, a magic name like cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, the delectable little squares of guava jelly [...] the long sticks of dried vanilla and the sweet-smelling tonka bean, chalky brown nuggets of pressed chocolate for cocoa-tea (14)

[...] home was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind up between the pages of a schoolbook. It was our own, my truly private paradise of blugoe and breadfruit hanging from the trees, of nutmeg and lime and sapodilla, of tonka beans and red and yellow Paradise Plums. (14)

As described above, through Linda's search for the tropical fruit, the intricate unfolding of several distinct spatiotemporal expanses can be observed. Those manifold ramifications consist of at least five spatiotemporalities: New York City, Grenada, Carriacou, imaginative "*Carriacou*," and Lorde's dream. Subsequently, the brightly colored tropical fruits metamorphose into engravings on mortar such as "rounded plums and oval indeterminate fruit, some long and fluted like a banana, others ovular and end-swollen like a ripe alligator pear" (71). Furthermore, they transform themselves into a watermelon on the back of a hawk's truck in chapter 11. The fruit then crosses the border into another temporality and reemerges in Lorde's dream (199).

In my view, the tropical fruit continues to travel and in chapter 26 reemerges at a storefront in New York City in the guise of "the ripest golden green melon" (207), whose color corresponds to the color of the Caribbean Sea and limes in Carriacou. In cooperation with her lover Muriel, Lorde snatches that green thing from a street stall and runs through the streets in New York City, holding it in her arms (206-7). This traversing green object finally reappears in the last chapter as a "magical fruit" (249), and a mythical figure, *Afrekete*, hands it to Lorde. The interplay of different times and spaces occurs again when the object passes into Kitty's hands, and she says "'I got this under the bridge'" (249) to Lorde. Undoubtedly, this is the "tropical fruits 'under the bridge'" (10) that Linda was seeking in chapter 1. This mystical fruit, which transcends various times and spaces and reemerges time and again in the hands of women who are lovers, is portrayed in the following vision:

I took a ripe avocado and rolled it between my hands until the skin became a green case for the soft mashed fruit inside, hard pit at the core. *I rose from a kiss in your mouth to nibble a hole in the fruit skin near the navel stalk, squeezed the pale yellow-green fruit juice in thin ritual lines back and forth over and around your coconut-brown belly. The oil and sweat from our bodies kept the fruit liquid, and I massaged it over your thighs and between your breasts until your brownness shone like a light through a veil of the palest green avocado, a mantle of goddess pear that I slowly licked from your skin.* (251)

A green object held in the palm of Lorde's hands liquefies and flows on the surface of the skin of her hands. Her hands, rounded like "a green case," seem to have become a green fruit. The green liquid then flows on the surface of women's bodies that lie one above another. Furthermore, it disperses radially and expands its viridescent area

with “the deep undulations and tidal motions” (249) of their bodies. The wave motions of bodies and liquidized color reverberate through the text in which divergent spatiotemporalities cross one another and conjure up the vision with a dazzling brightness of color and light. Shortly afterward, Lorde says as follows:

Afrekete Afrekete ride me to the crossroads where we shall sleep, coated in the woman’s power. The sound of our bodies meeting is the prayer of all strangers and sisters. (252)

We had come together like elements erupting into an electric storm, exchanging energy, sharing charge, brief and drenching. Then we parted, passed, reformed, reshaping ourselves the better for the exchange. (253)

It is my understanding that the tropical fruit that Linda was searching for migrates unfathomable distances, crossing the boundaries of divergent spatiotemporalities in the text. It eventually liquefies and flows into the areas where myriad spaces and times intersect. At that intersection, multilayered bodies of women that lie one upon another interchange energies and re-create their bodies. At the same time, they demolish the ingrained bigotry toward different colored skin and women’s bodies and sexualities, and infinitely deconstruct persecuted selves that have been confined within preexisting categories. As previously mentioned, Lorde is keenly perceptive about ambiguous beings which appear in the text assuming surrealistic and amorphous images intermingled with one another. Supposedly, what those bodily images indicate is, as it were, collective disidentification which has the potential to subvert cultural and social regulatory norms regarding race, gender, and sexuality. According to Butler, “bodies only appear [...] only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas” (*Bodies* 127). They continue as follows:

(S)uch constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies [...] excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility [...] its constitutive outside (131).

However, those constraints need reiteration because “bodies never quite comply with the norms” and it is this reiteration of the norms that, paradoxically, cause “rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law” (167). In my view, surrealistic and amorphous images which appear in Lorde’s text indicate the very potentiality to alter the normative power because those images render inconceivable domain of bodies trying to rework and rearticulate constitutive norms critically. Butler also states that “(t)he visual field is not neutral to the question of race,” on which white paranoia is projected, and it is a “racialized episteme” (“Endangered” 17). Her theory can also be applicable to biased and partial views of gender and sexuality, which produces sexist and heterosexist state of mind that stigmatizes certain groups of people as anomalous, suspicious, and unnatural.

“home” as a discursive space

This section reexamines the concept of home, which Lorde represents as another “authentic” reality that once existed in her female ancestor’s island in the Caribbean Sea.

In order to address this issue, it might be illuminating to discuss another representation of a Caribbean island. Jamaica Kincaid grew up in Antigua: an island that was dominated by England from 1623 until it gained independence in 1981. In contrast to Lorde, it is impossible for Kincaid to represent her homeland as an ideal paradise because it is fettered by imperialist culture and tradition. For instance, in order to break away from the yoke of a white-dominated society, her “homeland,” and unlearn the master’s pattern of thought, Lucy, the protagonist in one of Kincaid’s novels, has to begin rewriting by herself on a blank notebook that white Mariah gave to her (*Lucy* 162-4). She also attempts to dismantle her master’s tongue, English, by perceiving differences in respective tongues that speak the oppressor’s language (43-4, 83). What Kincaid is able to do is continue rewriting in her master’s language, revealing fissures in itself.

Lorde’s text, however, also depicts her escape from home (*Zami* 103, 199). There are several previous studies commenting on Lorde’s representation of home.¹³ According to Kley, *Zami* does not “enact a nostalgic return back to an innocent and idyllic female community supposedly untouched by ideological deformation” (129). She points out that home contains two antithetical conceptions as follows:

Throughout the text, the emotional mixture of longing for security, protection and recognition on the one hand and the experience of rejection and repression within relatively narrow circles on the other remains constitutive of Audre’s conception of ‘home.’ (132)

In *Zami*, home emerges as a “discursive site for a complex negotiation of such concepts as identity, community, and sexuality” (129) and is not a “‘refuge or place of origin,’ but the possibility of a temporary recess, without which the negotiation necessary for social change cannot be borne for any length of time” (136). From these remarks, I conclude that Lorde considers home a locus of discourse in which alternative interconnections between herself and others (including others in herself) are ceaselessly reconstructed.

Given that Lorde no longer regards Carriacou, her foremother’s island, as home (*Zami* 256), it is crucial to discover its “latitudes” (256). According to Walk, Lorde “finds her home-place in the erotic body and in language” (820). Morris also points out that Lorde “perceives her body as a text and is conscious of her texts as emerging from her body” (168). In the last chapter of the text, Lorde realizes “new definitions of our women’s bodies” (250) and expresses that vision in words. As we have observed, in that scene, the green object that traversed various spaces and times and underwent kaleidoscopic changes through the text encounters multilayered bodies and facilitates

their hybridization and their drive for continual alterations.

Since Lorde's home is a discursive terrain that emerges from multilayered sensual bodies, her transformed italicized "*home*" (256) appears at "the crossroads" (252) where their corpora intersect, "exchanging energy" and "sharing charge" for their reshaping (253). At this locus, I insist, the fictionality of preexisting monolithic categories such as "black" and "lesbian" is revealed. Moreover, the reconstruction of bodies at this intersection indicates its unpredictable but enormous potentialities:

Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me - so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins. Another meeting. (255)

The passage cited above makes clear that what seems to be a part of herself is "apart" from her; in other words, what is indispensable and close to her bears an imprint of others who are utterly different from her and located far in the distance. Lorde's method of measurement of the unfathomable distance between herself and others is best expressed by a poem in her posthumous work *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, published in 1993:

Rushing headlong
into new silence
your face
dips on my horizon
the name
of a cherished dream
riding my anchor
one sweet season
to cast off
on another voyage
No reckoning allowed
save the marvelous arithmetics
of distance. (*The Collected* 423)

Her multilayered body, which incorporates a limitless number of others, always embraces what has not yet been represented, or rather, because of its excessiveness, her body itself is something that is unrepresentable like an expanse of water in the quoted poem, which has an amorphous contour and is likely to undulate and transmute in various encounters with others, never focusing into an ultimate image. Paradoxically speaking, it always exists "somewhere else" (*Zami* 14), that is, the here and now, which differentiates itself minute by minute as Lorde conveys in the following statement: "This now, here, was a space, some temporary abode, never to be considered forever nor totally binding nor defining" (13).

Her body is invariably disturbed by a series of displacements and always exposes

itself to the possibility of encountering myriad unknown pieces of her selves. Judging from the above, it seems reasonable to suppose that this momentary quasi-positionality, which entails continual displacement and mutability, is what Lorde calls “the very house of difference” in which she cannot “afford to settle for one easy definition, one narrow individuation of self” (226).

This chapter discussed the compound realities in *Zami*, which contains different spatiotemporal expanses. Firstly, the chapter focused on several temporalities depicted in *Zami* and how their synchronicities were represented in the text. It is not to be denied that those seemingly distinct spaces and times intermingle through the medium of tropical fruits that disperse throughout the text. The chapter then inquired into the vision that Lorde conjured into existence by scrutinizing the correlation between the synchronicity of various spaces and times, Lorde’s convoluted oppressed positionalities, and the dissemination of the tropical objects. In my view, in that scene, multilayered bodies of women who have suffered from the amalgamation of racism, sexism, and homophobia cross one another, interchange vital powers, and recreate themselves. It is also observed that Lorde detects her homeland in her body and language, and as a discursive space, it becomes an entirely new field of possibilities that generate unpredictable linkages between herself and others.

Conclusion

This article attempted to explore Lorde’s representation constructed through her persistent endeavor toward listening intently to the voices of others and responding to them. Lorde desperately addressed the non-existent, whose voices had been oppressed and deprived in the social context of racist, sexist, homophobic America from the 1920s to the 1950s, and her addressing voice disturbed and undid existing norms and institutions and carved out a way through existing categories in her text.

This article first examined the sociopolitical and literary contexts before and around the time of the publication of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and reaffirmed the surge of previously underrepresented women’s voices in that period. It can be said that *Zami* and her poetic writings accurately reflect the characteristic of that time because they are an assemblage of various women’s images and voices that were almost non-existent during that period. It then pursued myriad voices and visions observable in her texts, which seemed to indicate that language played a crucial role in transforming a seemingly monolithic and unalterable reality.

To further consider Lorde’s representation, the article discussed compound realities in *Zami*, which contains different times and spaces. First, it focused on several temporalities and their synchronicity represented in the text. It then inquired further into the vision that Lorde conjures into existence by scrutinizing the relation between the synchronicity of different times and spaces, Lorde’s convoluted multifocal selves, and the dispersion of magical objects. According to Butler, “materialization of the

norm in bodily formation produce a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation [...] failing to qualify as the fully human” (*Bodies* 457). In my view, what Lorde describes in her text is this very realm of “abjected bodies;” some are dead, some are deeply bruised, some have specter-like figures whose contour vacillates and blurs, some emit delirious utterances shouting, calling, crying, singing tunelessly, and screaming, and some are deprived of their voice. Lorde minutely depicts those figures, and converses and interacts with them, ultimately trying to spark off and perform, so to speak, collective disidentification which is an attempt to radically rearticulate what qualifies as to be lives that are worth living. It also pondered the concept of “home,” which Lorde seems to represent as an ideal paradise that once existed in her female ancestor’s island in the Caribbean Sea. It was observed that Lorde had ambivalent feelings about home. She left an odd sentence in which two conflicting ideas coexist: “There is no place/that cannot be home/nor is” (*The Collected* 276). On the one hand, she craved to return home, but on the other, she wished to leave there, and those conflicting emotions tore at her. It should be stressed that Lorde attempts to solve the insoluble problem by performing the incompatible acts of returning and leaving home simultaneously. That is why she finds her quasi-location in the elusive spatiotemporality, the here and now, which differentiates itself minute by minute, accelerating her drive for ceaseless alterations.

A foreseeable extension of this study would involve a more detailed consideration of the multitude of Lorde’s poems (she left behind more than 300 poems), interviews, speeches, essays, and journals, including an unpublished diary in which she was working on her second fiction (De Veaux, *Warrior* 340). Comparisons with her literary contemporaries who inspect the intersection of class, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality are also needed for a more complete understanding of her writings.

Notes

- 1 Lorde’s perception of her own body is plural. Besides her multiple identities, she perceives her corporality as “a living representation of other life older longer wiser” (*Zami* 7).
- 2 See, for example, Carlston 226-36; Keating 145-179; Morrison 2-3; Thomson 240-66; Walk 815-34.
- 3 In “Possibilities of Lesbian Studies,” Takemura emphasizes the significance of Lorde’s representation, pointing out that two different milieus intersect each other through the tropical fruit in *Zami*. This remark is highly instructive to my argument.
- 4 As to negative effects of multiculturalism whose stereotypes applied to subjects who have been neglected and negated in society, see *Novel Subjects* by Milne.
- 5 For critical responses to *Zami*, see Mountain 241-3.

- 6 The Combahee River Collective is “a Black feminist group in Boston.” Its name is connected with Harriet Tubman, who fought for the liberation of slaves in 1863. She raised the rebellion and liberated over 750 slaves (Combahee 264).
- 7 Rainbow Serpent: Aido Hwedo is “a representation of all ancient divinities [...] whose names and faces have been lost in time” (Lorde *The Collected* 419).
- 8 “Oya”: a call of rejoicing or prayer. “Sebouliisa”: “the goddess of Abomey [the capital of the ancient African kingdom of Dahomey].” “Mawu”: Prime mover of the cosmos in African mythos. “Afrekete”: an appellation frequently employed by Lorde, signifies “the female spirit of Africa” (Baym 2755).
- 9 Rosa Parks, who refused to surrender her seat to a white person, provoked “the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955,” which led to the liberation movement of African Americans. Fannie Lou Hamer founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement. Assata Shakur is a progressive “black nationalist.” Yaa Asantewaa is the Empress of Edweso in Africa who assembled her populace against the British aggression in 1900. Winnie Mandela with her husband Nelson Mandela strived for the liberty of Africans in South Africa (Baym 2756).
- 10 Miller–Purrenhage also points out that the trauma of “African–Americans who are forever the other in both African countries and the United States” leads to an “‘othering’ of the self” and causes a schizophrenic voicing that can be observed in the work of Audre Lorde (10–11).
- 11 This scene of her auditory hallucination along with her optical illusion is also the moment when another reality disturbs and enters seemingly authentic reality. The interplay of different realities will be discussed in the next chapter.
- 12 Several anthropological studies have proved that this “legend” is a fact. See DiBernard’s research for further details.
- 13 See, for example, Calle, Gillan, Kader, Kley, Lindenmeyer, and Walk.

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