



# The Intersections of Sexual Orientation and Gender in Queer Literature

Adelokun Adetunji Oluwapelumi

Skyline University Nigeria.

## Abstract

*The representation of homosexuality and the challenges faced by queer women in the works of Audre Lorde and Chinelo Okparanta is explored, with a specific focus on the gender aspect. These authors utilize queer literature, exemplified by Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, to provide a platform for narrating the experiences of queer women. Through their works, they shed light on the intersecting issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation, offering insightful accounts of the oppression experienced by queer women in society. The paper primarily delves into Lorde's experiences as a Black lesbian woman, emphasizing the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination in society. Similarly, Okparanta's novel highlights the impact of gender and sexual orientation on the protagonist's life in Nigeria, illustrating the challenging environment faced by women of color. The paper also examines how Lorde and Okparanta employ literary devices to capture the complexity of intersectional existence, while also critiquing the socio-cultural realities depicted in the narratives. The information presented in this paper underscores the significance of addressing the intersections of sexual orientation and gender to foster sensitivity and understanding among individuals.*

**Keywords:** *Queer Literature, Intersectionality, LGBTQ+ Identity, Gender and Sexual Orientation, Audre Lorde, Chinelo Okparanta*

## INTRODUCTION

Queer literature offers a theoretical framework through which people of the LGBTQ + community live complex experiences (Kazyak, 2011). In this field, one can pinpoint the connections between sexual orientation and gender as discerningly essential, since they portray the multiple facets of the queer person's existence. These intersections are worsened by cultures in societies where discrimination against people with LGBTQ+ harbored lives is the order of the day leaving women with the ordeal of having to fight both gender discrimination as well as hetero-normative domination (Burn, Kadlec & Rexer, 2005). This paper aims to determine how lesbians faced by Audre Lorde and Chinelo Okparanta in their literature are challenged due to their sexual orientation.

LGBTQ + experience remain's documented in queer literature as a tool for voicing the journey, victories, and complexity of queer existence (Miller, et al. , n. d. ). It is thus for this reason that authors such as Audre Lorde and Chinelo Okparanta use their stories to give the reader insights into the experiences and the processes involved in the understanding of race, gender and sexual orientation (Powell, 2021). Lorde's "*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* Written by Bell hooks and *Under the Udala Trees* by Okparanta are other excellent examples of works, which tell complex and layered stories of queer women oppressed by the society (Piazza, 2021). These texts do not just represent the individual's discovery and acceptance of oneself that is an important goal in postmodern existence

but these texts also show the ways in which one can and cannot achieve this goal while elucidating the contexts in which such a quest is performed.

Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* is an innovative novel that draws on the genres of autobiography and mythology to depict the struggles of people of color, women, and homosexuals. Thus, the black lesbian woman, Lorde showcased how European-Americans erased her identity and how her identity was defined in full by the dominant culture in contestation. Thus, *Zami* provides Lorde's biography starting from her childhood in Harlem up to her early adulthood, General Analysis illustrating the complexity of her subjectivation processes (Poonia, 2021). Lorde speaks out the voices which are oppressed in the society and she uses powerful words to denounce the systems of the society.

Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* presents gripping story whose background is formed by the Nigerian Civil War. The novel tells the story of a young Nigerian girl, Ijeoma, who falls in love with another girl with considering the issues of gender, and sexual orientation, and or culture (Briggs, 2023). Living in a society that does not accept people of the LGBTQ+ community, Ijeoma has to face a lot of hurdles and live dangerously. Highlighting Okparanta's narrative, the audience is presented with the dominating system of oppression through restrictive societal norms and the persistence of queer persons in their struggle against it. The historical and cultural dimension that surrounds the

novel superimposes another facet illustrating the societal influence on self-conflicts (Cruz-Gutierrez, 2023). *Zami* can be regarded as one of the most influential novels that provide significant perspectives on the existence of queer females, as well as *Under the Udala Trees*. Therefore, this work's purpose is to identify the shared experiences and differences among people depending on their orientation and gender through an analysis of the specified works. In the analysis, the strategies in which the authors express the multiple facets of intersectional subjects and the significance of these stories will also be examined.

As this paper aims to discuss sexual orientation and gender in queer literature, it suggests the necessity of such analysis to increase people's tolerance and compassion. Those women especially those who belong to minority groups, are rarely given voice and or are misunderstood and gay and lesbian literature gives them voice. The works of Audre Lorde and Chinelo Okparanta open the field and invite the readers to explore the many layers of identity and fight for acceptance and integration. This paper aims at enhancing this discourse by presenting the findings of the challenges and achievements presented in the above pioneer texts.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersectionality is a concept emerging from Black Women's studies by Kimberle Crenshaw it was formulated to the interconnectivity of forms of oppression like race, gender, class, colour and sexual orientation that form joint system(s) of disadvantage (Carbado, et al. , 2013). Concerning queer literature, intersection actually offers the theoretical conception of how all these aspects of individuals in the queer community distinctly contribute to their experiences (Daftary, 2018). The social construction of queer characters is richly portrayed in queer literature with special emphasis given to the factors that contribute to the queer characters' oppression and survival (Rossi, 2022). For instance, works like Audre Lorde's "Zami: Intersectionality in "A New Spelling of My Name" and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* shows how the characters' experiences are characterized by race, gender, and sexual orientation as all these aspects of identity intertwine to create a complex web of oppression. For instance, Lorde's story focuses on the experience of a black lesbian woman in society to bring out the multiple levels of oppression that are faced in a world that r Gay and lesbian people, people of color, disabled people, and women, in particular, are among the most oppressed groups. Likewise, the chosen novel of Okparanta reveals the issues of gender, sexual orientation, and cultural imperative in Nigeria to express the main character experience of the conflicts.

Feminist and queer theories are critical in understanding gender and sexual orientation in literature as they are both socially constructed and exist in a continuum. Specifically, the feminist theory, which examines the issue of gender and the need to abolish the dominance of the male over the female in society, will help to understand how gender roles and gender

stereotypes are represented in the work. It challenges the social relations that define women's existence especially as far as their sexual orientation is concerned. Whereas queer theory seeks to challenge the categorization of gender and sexual orientation in the form of a dualistic system by urging the acceptance of a range of possibilities (McGuire, 2022). It challenges the assumptions that regulate sexuality and gender as hetero and cis, providing a different way for reading literature. Collectively, these theories establish that in theorizing character one needs to understand how they live their character within these structures of oppression. In the novel "Zami" Lorde can be viewed as a black lesbian woman who is involved in both feminism and queer politics since she is not willing to accept traditional roles and tries to find her own identity. Similarly, Okparanta employs the theories to depict the main female character struggling against cultural norms and searching for her identity in *Under the Udala Trees*.

Intersectionality, feminism, and queer theories' connection to queer literature is that the mentioned theories help dissect relations of identity and domination (Chan, et al. , 2019). Through the application of these theories, the readers and other scholars are in a position to understand the struggles of characters within queer literature with regards to their identities in situations of oppression. These theories depict the systematic oppression of queer people, while at the same time also depicting their power. As for the analysis of *Zami* and "*Under the Udala Trees*," intersectionality is as effective in depicting the intricate interdependence of the heroes' experiences within such oppressive categories as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Additionally, this analysis is enriched by the employment of the feminism and queer theories which problematize the norms and categories of identity. Overall, these frameworks contribute to the complete picture on the shades of queer literature thus helping gain a more profound understanding of the authors and concerns which queer literature voices.

### Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

Audre Lorde who is uniformly renowned as one of the prominent writers in the mid-twentieth-century America was born and raised in New York City in 1934 to Caribbean immigrant parents (Gupta 6). She considered herself a Black lesbian feminist and it became her life's mission to work on the oppression based on race, sexuality, gender, and class. Lorde as a poet, essayist, and autobiographer published extensively ad her major themes include identity, oppression as well as resistance (Koolish, 2001). Her most famous works include *The Black Unicorn*, published in 1978 where she lays emphasis on both her African past and her sexist philosophy and *Sister Outsider* a book of essays on racism sexuality and gender published in 1984. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* published in 1982 is a unique work of Lorde that contains both the true and mythical elements that portray different phases of the author's life starting with childhood to the womanhood (Lewis, 2016). In this way, she describes her

life as the Black lesbian woman and opens an extraordinary perspective to understanding the peculiarities of one's society's perspectives touching upon race and gender identity as well as the paths to self-acceptance and joyful living. Contemporary audience still reads Lorde's work and finds it still relevant to their lives and thus the writer remains a crucial figure in literature and social justice.

### Exploration of Identity through Lorde's Biomythographic *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* is a brilliant mix of the biography and the legend that provides the reader with a multifaceted picture of the world. Lorde has called this type of writing 'biomythography,' because history and myth are interwoven in personal narrative here, not to mention Murray's identity as a woman of color (Napikoski 2018). Thus, the memoir component of the book contains extensive descriptions of Lorde's life experiences and emotions reflecting upon her early years in Harlem and growing up. Thus, this personal history reflects racism, sexism, and homophobia that a Black lesbian woman might face throughout her life.

At the same time in the narration, there are mythic aspects to the story which Lorde portrays based on the African and Caribbean cultures as well as the author's inventions of the reality. This is where the concept of myth creates a veneer of timelessness and fixture the protagonists' trouble in the fabric of the universal archetypal heroism. For instance, the portrayal of her mother as goddess like symbolizes the impact of enforced family and culture on one's molding. Thus, the novel is neither a plain autobiography, nor a myth, but the combination of both combines a personal story with archetypal patterns. This flexible structure enables her to express the diversity and the relativity of the subject and the subjectivity prioritizing the real life and discursive stories. *Zami* not only transforms into narration of Lorde's biography but also becomes an analysis of individual and collective subjectivity which speaks to readers about the complex and layered experience of search for one's self in the conditions of social oppression.

### Complexities of Intersectional Identities

*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, is rich in the topic of race, gender and sexual orientation, offering a deep and informative outlook on this paradigm of her identity. Lorde, being a Black lesbian woman, therefore has to deal with racism, sexism, and homophobia in society; all forms of discriminations that stem from being a black lesbian woman. It highlights how such intersections present several difficulties and the interactions that are considered distinct in their totality, affecting her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Lorde's race does feature significantly here because she is a writer of color and she continuously deals with racism on both a micro and macro level, including issues within white feminism and Queer communities. She continues to demonstrate the kind of life a black woman would lead in Harlem in the 1940s and

1950s, and how confined the society made the lives of the black people. The experiences of the racism she receives does not exclude her gender or orientation; instead, it overlays them giving her even more points of oppression.

Gender and sexuality therefore have significant influences on Charlotte's personality and life opportunities. Speaking of the main character, Lorde, the narrator of the story, one should mention that the latter is a brilliant representative of the female sex who has to struggle with the feeling of sexual superiority which dominates the society. She is also a lesbian which brings another dimension of the prejudice both in the external society and the black community. Interactions with other women, be they sexual or just friendships, are at the core of Lorde's constructions of self, as they are the only publicly and safely acceptable places of resistance, sisterhood, and affection in the hostile worlds she inhabits. In the text, there isn't an implication that Lorde has one kind of intersectional ordeal; rather, it is exhibited as a palimpsest of various, interacting means of oppression. Her story is a clear example of how these intersections affect her identity and ways in which she can fight or cope with oppression. For example, the feminist thematic also involves her interaction with other oppressed groups – queer women and people of color whereas they turn into the sources of her power. These connections emphasize that there is strength in unity, and that it is necessary to fight different types of oppressions simultaneously.

These experiences are well captured within Lorde's work which underlines the need to understand the needs of people who belong to more than one social identifier. This way by narrating her experience she lays light on the structural barriers affecting not only her, but many women of color worldwide. *Zami* is thus a notable documentation of the trials of the Barcelonan women and others like them in a world that in one way or the other seeks to classify them and lock them into a certain corner. Lorde masterfully weaves her stereotypical experiences of racial, gender and sexuality to explain how the lives of Black lesbian women are constructed.

### Struggle for Self-Definition and Acceptance

In this text, Audre Lorde has succeeded in recounting the story of her determination in claiming the identity of the Black lesbian woman she is while integrating all the aspects of her person. Thus, the identity of the work as a memoir-myth can be seen in how Lorde's need to discover herself is preconditioned by racism, sexism, and homophobia; and how she confronts the circumstances to forge her freedom. Racism and social norms of the mid-1900 s America are introduced to a young girl Lorde who must face them and adapt to the oppressive rules of the society. These pressures lead to a feeling of alienation and loneliness because society's expectations impose specific roles that are contrary to what is expected from a young black woman. It is here, in the spirited neighborhood of Harlem, that Langston's voice is

first stifled by the tenderness of her people and then choked by the harshness of prejudice. This journey is while being lesbian which even isolates her more from the normative society and sometimes even from the community.

her journey towards defining self for Lorde is a very central way in which she has interacted with people especially other women, who are in a similar position as her from as a result of their struggles. In her romantic, as well as the platonic, relationships, the spaces of the self are constructed for self-definition and recognition. Thus, through these relationships, Lorde learns about the existence of love and togetherness in the fight against internalized oppression and social exclusion. The interactions mentioned in the narrative show that relationships with these characters are the key for feeling wanted and accepted, which has a big impact on her self-identification. That is why the relationships with women who are similar and dissimilar to Lorde in some way allow her to notice the existence of the plurality of her identity. Zami too has to struggle to come to terms with the issue of acceptancy; acceptants; acceptances; acceptability. Her story follows her achievements in racially homogeneous academic facilities and feminist organizations where she discovers yet another layer of oppression and erasure. Such experiences compel her to analyse and discard the rigid and oppressive categorisations projected onto her. She carves out her own unique path for personal growth and ultimate acceptance of herself and her individuality within the context of black womanhood, rather than simply succumbing to the struggles defined by society's attempts to box her into one limited, stereotypical vision. It is also relevant to note that emphasis on acceptance is also discerned in Lorde's portrayal of her family especially her mother. Her mother, whose overly cautious actions are often coupled with a more threatening attitude, represents the dichotomy of obedience against individuality. Indeed, as it will be seen, the rejection Lorde suffers in her family is an extension of the other type of rejection she endures in the larger society. Such a conflict and tension epitomize the struggle to find an identity when the world and the society are oppressive and dictate on how one should be. Still, there is the message in the text of victory of the individual over the collective sense of propriety. Lorde underlines how self-definition is not a process which forms a single Beginning, middle and end but rather it is a continual struggle of reclamation. By doing so Lorde writes an autobiography that is not boxed in, and which reflects the contingency and complexity of her experience. This approach enables her to take her story back and assert an 命 is more complex form of herself against the relegation into simple dualisms. As with most such narratives of self-making, the themes of self-creation and acceptance are at once universal and deeply moving, demonstrating the need for strength and inventiveness that is emblematic of anyone who dares to carve out an existence that expresses who they genuinely are. Lorde's experience mirrors the experiences of many Black queer folks and other Minority people in that they are disadvantaged by each form of discrimination hence

serves to demonstrate the need for support from like-minded people and love and acceptance from oneself in order to fight for the true realization of the self. Stating a true fact, I can say that Lorde, telling about personal experience and describing the world in passionate and poetic words, reveals both the personal search for identity and the timeless drama of being human.

### Identity and Resilience amidst Nigeria's Tumultuous Past in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

Chinelo Okparanta, the Nigerian American writer, was born in Port Harcourt Nigeria in 1981. She later moved to the United States for her college education where she attained her bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University and masters and a masters of fine arts from Rutgers University and the acclaimed Iowa Writers' Workshop respectively. Okparanta's literary work has been described by scholars as rich in themes including; gendered-sexual politics, and intricate cultural politics of identity (Murray, 2021). Some of the issues portrayed in her writing are the experience of growing up in Nigeria and her experiences in the diaspora. Happiness, Like Water, the first volume of short stories from Okparanta, was published in 2013 and was well received by the critics as well as winning several prizes among which were the O. Henry Prize as well as the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction. This theme is further pursued in her first novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) which tells a powerful story of a girl who struggles with her newfound sexual orientation in a country that does not accept homosexuality.

Okparanta, is noted for beautifully crafted narrative, rich emotions, and the treatment of taboo subject matters. *Under the Udala Trees* was written based on historical events and is set during the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970 (Cruz-Gutierrez, 2023). This was due to the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria, as the Republic of Biafra. The war was characterized by extreme hunger, massive population shedding, and appalling human suffering that remained imprinted in the memories and the hearts of Nigerians for quite a long time (Lockwood, 2022). From the start, the heroine Ijeoma is a little girl whose life is disrupted by the war experience. Her father dies in the war, and she is taken to another town for protection; this is a portrayal of the impact of the war on the people personally and within their families. The war serves as both a literal and metaphorical backdrop for Ijeoma's coming-of-age story, highlighting the themes of loss, displacement, and the search for identity amidst chaos (Raj, 2021).

On the question of culture, the novel portrays the rigid culture of Nigeria with regard to issues of gender and lesbianism. In a war affected context there is a greater perceived bond loyalty to traditional gender roles and social security and a rejection of conducts considered to be disruptive to this security. The process of developing the consciousness of her homosexuality happens in such cultural conditions of the society as strict-patrolled gender roles expectancy and

highly years of severe homophobia, stimulated by religious stigmatization of same-sex relationships (Amodu, 2023). This context is very significant to the plot of the text as it defines the experiences of the protagonist and the various difficulties of the representatives of the queer community of Nigeria. Okparanta employs this background as a way of showing that identity together with love can grow in the most unfavourable and hostile environments (Offei & Oppong-Adjei, 2021). This makes the novel a powerfully moving statement on diaspora politics and especially a powerful portrayal of Ijeoma's confusion and determination to find a place for herself in a culture that has rejected her, and that she in turn rejects – a very intense drama of survival in the face of conflict and oppression.

### Intersection of Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Cultural Expectations

*Under the Udala Trees*, is a text that portrays titles of gender, sexual orientation, and culture through the life of Ijeoma, a girl from Nigeria who develops queer affection toward other women in an environment that frowns at and punishes queer individuals. For Ijeoma, sexual politics remain suffused with Nigeria's conservative traditions that confine women to controllable and unassertive roles. In particular, as a woman, she is expected to embrace romantic and marital relationships and motherhood as norms that are essential for maintaining the stability of society as well as her happiness. Ijeoma first embarks on a journey of self-identification at the core of the Nigerian Civil War – a time that intensifies social phobias and overemphasizes such culturally prescribed parameters of femininity. This kind of relationship transcends the cultural and religion, societal expectations and beliefs when Ijeoma falls in love with Amina, another girl. The perception of homosexuality is greatly influenced by the dominance of Christian doctrines in Nigeria and thus it heavily frowns at the vice as being a sin and an anathema to nature. This cultural setting puts Ijeoma in fear and doubles her efforts to protect her true identity to avoid being discriminated against. This stereotype becomes a major force in Ijeoma's life experiences the pressure to fit into the heteronormative mold. As indicated by her mother's compulsion towards sending her to a convent school and securing her marriage to a man, women are expected to conform to the prescribed gender roles. The inner-conflict nature of the story is brought out through Ijeoma, and the tragic pressures put in her by society amps up the magnitude of cultural influence on one's identity. Struggles faced by lesbian women in societies that are hostile and oppressive This novel by Okparanta, *Under the Udala Trees*, presents a compelling depiction of the ordeal that homosexual women undergo in such societies as witnessed by Ijeoma. It is a complex set of problems that affect the individual both in terms of personal and family relationships and personal struggle within the human subject. Another common challenge and one that is maybe the most prevalent is the fact that one has to lead a life in the shadows.

Ijeoma and Amina's relationship has to be a secret and that means that their life is characterised by fear and anxiety. The violence remains a sensitive issue, and the ostracization of homosexual behavior persists in Nigeria due to their strict normalization of heterosexuality. The novel also gives an illustration of the effect of such suppression on the mental well-being of the affected persons. In the book, Ijeoma's forced marriage to a man she does not love is a sign of the physical and psychological torture of possessing an identity that is not true to one's self. This conformity to societal norms results in internal struggle and personal dissatisfaction as Ijeoma rebels against her oppressive role and dissonance between her reality and that of the expected Nigerian woman. In the case of minority individuals such as women and people of color, this internalized oppression can be observed as feelings of self-doubt as they try to embrace their diverse identity and belong to the community. Further, the novel portrays the limited social acceptance of queer existences in these societies and the absence of supportive networks. Looking at Ijeoma's experience of loneliness, one can understand the necessity of unity and comprehend the consequences that loneliness brings. Interactions with other queer characters bring some hope to the main character in circumstances that make it obvious that queer people have little protection from outside hatred, so unity and acceptance are essential.

The text also discusses the issues of gender and sexual orientation in conjunction with socioeconomic disparities. The war and its consequences decrease many families and individuals' economic status, so Ijeoma has to remain financially dependent and has limited freedom to express her full personality. Her inability to do economic transactions is a clear indication of how she depends on her husband and family hence no freedom for her proving that socioeconomic factors make the lives of queer women hard. In harvesting Ijeoma's character the reader is invited to witness first hand the suffering of queer women in oppressive cultures and societies, therefore leading the readers to understand that homophobia as well as sexism is rife in our societies. In addition to presenting the readers with Rather, it also raises concern regarding practices that have led and continue to facilitate the marginalization and oppression of specific people in society. In doing so, *Under the Udala Trees* becomes a powerful testament to the resilience of queer individuals and the enduring struggle for self-acceptance and liberation in the face of overwhelming adversity.

*A New Spelling of My Name* and *Under the Udala Trees* addressed the fundamental matter of search for acceptance in a world that is often hostile to queer subjects. In her autobiography, *Zami*, Lorde shows her struggle to gain acceptance of her sexual orientation and color in a world that does not accept her. Her memoir demystifies the oppression and marginalization she has to endure in order to gain acceptance within her cultures. Likewise, in *Under the Udala Trees*, one of the main issues revolves around the main character Ijeoma's search for the approval of her society.

Liking another girl during the Nigerian civil war situates her in conflict with the traditional African and religious beliefs that frown on homosexuality. Lacking the approval of her mother and society, Ijeoma can also be shown to go through a similar struggle as Lorde, showing that this is the struggle of queers in general.

Another topic that is explored in both pieces is the ways in which queer subjectivity is permeated and shaped by social expectations. Lorde and Okparanta analyze how cultural norms and societal norms control and often oppress queers and queer experiences. Similarly in *Zami*, Lorde has to survive in a world where race, sex and gender roles complicatedly intersect in a manner that brings about injustices. Her story raises awareness of how such norms influence her subjectivity and her conduct, making her constantly negotiate and establish herself anew. Similarly, the novel, *Under the Udala Trees* focuses on how the Nigerian culture and religion uphold strict gender roles and frown on homosexuality. Ijeoma's hardships stem from the cultural expectations of a society that refuses to accept her identity, making homosexuality a psychologically and emotionally traumatizing experience. While both works address these oppressive norms they seek to change how people understand and construct identity.

Identity politics is another major concern that is evident in both works since identity is a product of various aspects such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. What is more, Lorde's novel explores Black lesbian woman identity and the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality is a central narrative focus of "*Zami*". Such issue is important in order to show the role of these two identities in her life and in her experiences of discrimination and survival. Likewise, in Okparanta's story "*Under the Udala Trees*," readers are introduced to Ijeoma, who is presented as resistant and whose identity is linked to her gender, sexual preference, and cultural origins. I have identified several aspects of her identity that are central to the novel, and how each of these aspects impacts her and the circumstances she encounters. Rather than offering simple themes such as: black and lesbian, Lorde and Okparanta bring the matter of identity as well as of their narratives, as a question of layers and complexity, not black and / or lesbian which refers to the pluri-dimensionality of the human experiences. In the novel *Zami* and *Under the Udala Trees*, two main topics which are evident are; Resilience; resistance to adversity. Lorde's narrative, overall, is about her strength and she constantly subverts the constraints of social roles and enforces the self. It is a story of rebellion against the complete oppression that is infused on her in all the facets of life and a person full of defiance. Like most of the protagonists of contemporary African lesbian themed fiction, Ijeoma of *Under the Udala Trees* is a resilient fighter growing up and asserting herself against a society that seeks to ensure she conforms to their norms and give in to the pressure of their policed heteronormative culture.

Although the context within which she lives and operates seeks to deny her individual agency and subjectivity, Ijeoma is always trying to stake a claim and put in place measures that approve the possibility of love. Though both works depict the struggles that queers face, both works also express how strong queers are and how capable they are of fighting oppression or how they are capable of finding a way towards happiness and fulfillment. The issue of commonality and togetherness holds much significance in both the stories. Basing on "*Zami*," Lorde discovers other women that she feels close to, and even forms a community with them to sympathize, comfort and support her. In constructing her road to self-affirmation and agency, these linkages are significant. Likewise, *Under the Udala Trees* reveals that, as much as the society denies Ijeoma its support, she still needs people's companionship. The few interactions with other queer people and friendly, non-contaminated by prejudice, people serve as a source of comfort and appreciation of one's existence, which highlights the message of standing together if society cast away. Besides these themes, both novels contain a lot of recommendation for the queer under one roof, tolerance, the horror of lesbianism in traditional societies, sexuality, the ability to endure through all the difficulties and the need for unity. Nevertheless, to read these narratives is not to learn the specific stories of people simply but to get the insight about the general questions of identity and humans' existence.

*Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* are two novels that provide a subversive context with distinct cultural and historical experiences, which the characters in both books have to face in accepting their identities. The settings of mid 20th century America and Nigeria's Biafran War place the book under discussion within the context of the period and allow for deeper understanding of queer experience and possibilities of its non-pathological existence in distinct societies.

In *Zami*, the context where the story is based is mid-20th century America, an era defined by intense social change, especially on matters of race, gender and sexuality and the beginning of what can be considered as the gay liberation movement. Coming from a poor black neighborhood in New York known as Harlem, the black lesbian poet's oppression is seen in terms of her race, gender and sexuality. The matters of racial segregation and discrimination remain severe in the American society; thus, she is aware of how they affect her as a Black female subject and her sensed place in the nation. Also, the movement that developed during this period empowering the LGBTQ+ community is also a chance and new type of exclusion since even within the queer movements, Black women were also erased. Lorde's journey is deeply intertwined with her activism, as she becomes a vocal advocate for intersectional feminism and queer rights, using her personal experiences to challenge and critique broader societal norms.

On the other hand, *Under the Udala Trees* is situated in postcolonial Nigeria at the time of and after the Biafran War (1967-1970). It is a period that could be described as a battle ground and a period of ethnic dimension and search for national identity after Nigeria's independence from British colonial masters. The losses and severe food shortages during and following the war deepen the climate of instability and terror that amplifies the Pressure to conform to culturally defined roles and expectations. In this regard Ijeoma's experiences of a lesbian subjectivity are circumscribed by the rigid societal and religious norms that prevail in Nigeria. Homosexuality is thus strictly prohibited and considered as a Western form of civilization and against Nigerian cultures and beliefs. This environment characterized by strict and oppressive conservatism and fear greatly limits Ijeoma's freedom to be herself and leads to the latter's life of closetedness and internal turmoil. Although Lorde and Ijeoma experience oppression through various intersections, the experience they undergo is not the same due to the cultural and historical background they come from. Lorde's experiences in America include appreciating and existing while simultaneously coping with race, sex, and sexual orientation oppression although the country is reforming to embrace civil rights while being oppressive to people of color and gay people. They are a part of the progressive human rights activism and literary expression that allows her to raise a voice on social struggle and transformation. Ijeoma on the other hand has to deal with a society that not only discourages homosexuality but also legalizes the oppression of gay people, while religious and cultural traditions strictly enshrine heterosexuality. The post-war period reinforces these conservative views as a way of maintaining a united and steady nation after the Biafran War. Ijeoma's resistance is 'silent' and 'individual', which entails acts of defiance and searching for love and acceptance in what can be referred to as proactively oppressive circumstances.

There are few similarities between the two framings when it comes to the support systems and community. Still, Lorde discovers that there are allies within the feminist and lesbian communities despite their failings in *Zami*. These communities offer her safety and opposition and are vital for her transformation into a self-accepting activist. Other women become her romantic partners and/or friends who provide her with necessary social and psychological contacts. In contrast to the situations described in "Americanah," Ijeoma in *Under the Udala Trees* is limited in her available choices, and no one is there to support her at the end of the day. The homophobia that exists in Nigeria limits her fortress of acceptance because she is isolated and has very limited power in this regard to change this aspect of Nigerian society. The threat of aggression and social exclusion is always present, and therefore the formation of effective support networks is very difficult. Connections with other queer people are treacherous but are the only sources of sustenance for Ijeoma's experience of self and survival.

Audre Lorde uses the elements of memoir and myth to express the issues of intersectionality. This results in a construction of the fact that this hybrid form enables her to blend personal history with the cultural mythology in a way that mirrors the complex self-identity of the Black lesbian woman. It all works to strengthen the raw emotion of the narrative, all crafted by the poetic attach present in Lorde's writing. Through the inclusion of poems to narrate her story, she is able to symbolise the interdependency of the strategies of memory and history as well as presenting the flexibility of memory. This technique forms the basis of the concept that identity is a dynamic entity made up of the interaction of race, gender, sexuality, and culture among persons.

Lorde's narrative structure also plays a crucial role in highlighting intersectionality. The non-linear chronology of *Zami* mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and the process of piecing together one's identity from disparate experiences. This narrative choice allows Lorde to juxtapose different periods of her life, illustrating how past experiences inform present understandings of self. Furthermore, her incorporation of dialogue and detailed character interactions brings to life the social dynamics that shape her identity. Through conversations with family, lovers, and friends, Lorde reveals the external pressures and internal conflicts that arise from navigating multiple marginalized identities. This dialogic approach not only personalizes her experiences but also situates them within broader social and historical contexts.

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta utilizes a more traditional narrative structure, yet she employs several literary techniques to effectively convey the complexities of intersectional identities. Okparanta's use of symbolism is particularly powerful in exploring the themes of identity and resistance. The udala tree, which recurs throughout the novel, symbolizes both shelter and vulnerability, reflecting Ijeoma's struggles and growth. The tree serves as a silent witness to her secret love affair with Amina and later becomes a metaphor for her resilience in the face of societal oppression. This symbolic imagery enriches the narrative, adding layers of meaning that resonate with the reader on both an emotional and intellectual level.

Okparanta also uses strong and vivid language and represent cultural and emotive aspects of the characters. Amos Tutuola is best in describing scenes and making characters come alive, a fact that can be vividly seen in her descriptions of postcolonial Nigeria as a place teeming with life and strife. This serves to build up more of a realistic representation of Ijeoma as a character to understand her reactions and to see how cultural, religious and historical contexts influence her character. This is because third person limited's point of view makes audience track the internal struggles and transformation of Ijeoma throughout the book and feel more sympathetic towards her. Both authors also employ dialogue as a tool to interrogate the societal relations and structures that shape the personalities of the characters. *Under the*

*Udala Trees*, Ijeoma painfully examines the experiences of a woman with the traditional expectations of what she should be and what she aspires for through her interactions with other characters, her mother, and the homophobia of the community, as well as a brief moment of support from others. Okparanta also takes time to develop language as a plot tool where the film's dialogue not only serves to move the story forward but also shows how religious and cultural backgrounds dictate character actions. Lorde and Okparanta use literary strategies to express severally the experiences of multiple oppressed statuses. In this case, both Ratso and Oven have succeeded in coming up with exemplary narratives and richly detailed narratives as they compose their biomythic tales, full of poetic language, symbolism and especially memoirs. Through their writings and publications, the authors extend an invitation to consider the self and society from intersectoral, intersectional, and interconnected points of view, providing a rich analysis of the human experience.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of Audre Lorde's "Zami: The collection of short stories in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*" reveals the differences and similarities of African queer lives depending on cultural factors, while Chinelo Okparanta's historical novel *Under the Udala Trees* narrates the effects of a Nigerian Biafran war on a lesbian character. Both authors show the multi-faceted approach towards intersectional existence through the primary literary devices. Memoir intersected with myth; non-linearity; language: The resulting complexities contribute to a layered, textured and multi-faceted work that carefully weaves together themes of race, gender and sexual orientation. As with Okparanta, the application of symbolism and beautiful language, with special attention to elaborate character relations, also throws light on the everyday struggles of queer identified people within the oppressive cultural and religious context of postcolonial Nigeria. All these works establish the thereby crucial role played by societal norms, as well as historical contexts, in the development of queer existence and self-representation. The discussion of a Gay Studies locus of queer literature raises certain broader questions, pertaining to the field in general. Analyzing how identity is constructed in a multiplicity of axes such as race, gender and sexuality, the analysis highlights how whites, men and upper-classes benefit from the oppression of queers. It emphasises the urgency of eradicating an over-simplification of queer existence by acknowledging the multiple and multifaceted oppressions faced in this intersecting world. Slant not only enhances formalistic interpretation but also expands the understanding of queer literature as a diverse creative field. It challenges scholars to understand how queer becomes constructed in various cultures, history and socially to expand the literature of queer literary criticism

Understanding the intersections of sexual orientation and gender in literature is crucial for several reasons. It offers a deeper insight into the lived experiences of marginalized individuals, fostering empathy and awareness. It challenges

simplistic and reductive narratives about identity, promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive view of human diversity. In society, this understanding can inform more equitable and inclusive policies and practices, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and social services. It also supports the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights by highlighting the specific needs and challenges of individuals at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. In literature, this understanding enriches the analysis and appreciation of texts, allowing readers and scholars to engage more deeply with the stories being told.

The analysis of Lorde's and Okparanta's works underscores the importance of intersectionality in both literature and society. By exploring the unique and complex ways in which race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect, these narratives offer powerful insights into the human condition. They remind us of the need to embrace diversity and complexity in our understanding of identity and to recognize the profound impact of cultural and historical contexts on individual experiences. As we continue to study and celebrate queer literature, it is essential to consider these intersections, both to honor the full richness of the narratives and to advance the broader goals of social justice and inclusion.

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**Citation:** Adelokun Adetunji Oluwapelumi, "The Intersections of Sexual Orientation and Gender in Queer Literature", *Universal Library of Arts and Humanities*, 2024; 1(3): 07-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70315/uloap.ulahu.2024.0103002>.

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