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FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN IN AUDRE LORDE'S *ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME*, SANDRA CISNEROS' *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET* AND TONI CADE BAMBARA'S *THE LESSON*

MASTER THESIS

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KABUL VE ONAY SAYFASI

Haliz Abdulkareem Yousif ALSALEEM tarafından hazırlanan “ FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN IN AUDRE LORDE’S ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME, SANDRA CISNEROS’ THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET AND TONI CADE BAMBARA’S THE LESSON ” adlı tez çalışması aşağıdaki jüri tarafından OY BİRLİĞİ / OY ÇOKLUĞU ile Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalında YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ olarak Kabul edilmiştir.	
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AUDRE LORDE’UN *ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME*, SANDRA CISNEROS’UN *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET* VE TONI CADE BAMBARA’NIN *THE LESSON* ESERLERİNDE FEMİNİST BILDUNGSROMAN

ÖZET

Edebiyat, insan deneyimlerinin ifade edilmesi için bir araç olarak kullanılan etkili kültürel ve tarihi bir belgedir. Bu, özellikle kendilerini korumaları ve ifade etmeleri için edebiyatın önemli bir vasıta haline geldiği, Amerika içinde büyüyüp gelişen başta Afrikalı ve Meksikalı gibi etnik topluluklar için eşsiz bir durumdur. Amerikan toplumunda beyaz olmayan kadınlara yoksulluk, cinsiyet ve ırk açısından ayrımcılık yapılmaktadır. Bu yüzden, farklı etnik kökenlere sahip romancılar, sınıfları ve ırkları nedeniyle göz ardı edilen beyaz olmayan kadınların tarihlerini okumalarına ve seslerinin duyulmalarına ortam hazırladılar. Afrikan Amerikan edebiyatı öteden beri varlığını sürdürürken Meksika Amerikan edebiyatı, Meksika'nın 1940'ların sonlarında Meksika Savaşı'nın ardından Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin kuzey bölgesini Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne kaptırmasıyla kendini hissettirmeye başladı. Bu iki ırka mensup insanlar ya Amerikan vatandaşı oldular ya da Amerika dışında başka yerlere gittiler. Bu göçmen topluluklar unutulmaya başlandı ve Afrikalı veya Meksikalı kültürleri ihmal edildi. Ayrıca ayrımcılık, kimlik ve özgürlük kaybı, ırkçılık ve cinsiyetçilik yaşadılar. Bazı kadın yazarlar eserlerinde bu tür kavramlarla ilgili konulara değindiler. Audre Lord, Sandra Cisneros and Toni Cade Bambara are among the best examples of writers of mixed ethno-cultural backgrounds to demonstrate the hardships of their lives in their novels. Farklı etnik kültürel geçmişe sahip olan Audre Lord, Sandra Cisneros ve Toni Cade Bambara romanlarında hayatlarının zorluklarını yansıtabilen en iyi yazarlar arasındadır. Tezimize konu olan Audre Lorde'un *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Sandra Cisneros'un *The*

House on Mango Street ve Toni Cade Bambara'nın *The Lesson* romanları feminizmin bildungsroman ile bütünleştigi bir ortamı gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: African-Amerikan, Mexican-Amerikan Edebiyatı, Audre Lord, Sandra Cisneros, Toni Cade Bambara.

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ABSTRACT

Literature is an effective cultural and historical document employed as a means for the expression of human experiences. This fact has been uniquely the case of the ethnic communities largely growing within the American society including African and Mexican communities for whom literature becomes a major tool for self-preservation as well as self-expression. Women of colour in American society are discriminated against in terms of poverty, gender and race. Therefore, novelists of different ethnic backgrounds have allowed women of colour, who are disregarded for their class and race, to have their histories read and their voices heard. African American literature kept its survival for long periods while Mexican American literature began to realize itself when Mexico lost the northern territory to the United States of America following the Mexican War in the late 1940s. Both communities either became American citizens or went to some other places outside the USA. These immigrants remained disremembered and their African or Chicano culture had been neglected. Additionally, they experienced discrimination, loss of identity and freedom, racism as well as sexism. In their writings, some woman writers illustrated issues related to such concepts. Audre Lord, Sandra Cisneros and Toni Cade Bambara are among the best examples of writers of mixed ethno-cultural backgrounds to demonstrate the hardships of their lives in their novels. Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Lesson* offer the chance to discover indeterminacy in Feminism where it converges with Bildungsroman, which is the focal point of this thesis.

Keywords: African-American, Mexican-American Literature, Audre Lord,
Sandra Cisneros, Toni Cade Bambara.

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SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

Descriptions

FB

Feminist Bildungsroman.

AMAL

African and Mexican American Literature

AAL

African American Literature

MAL

Mexican American Literature

WOC

Women of Color

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INTRODUCTION

This world is full of different ethnicities, races and people with distinct unique cultures, societies and backgrounds. These differences have produced different cultures, thoughts, beliefs and ideas that affect literature. For Sevanen the concept of ethnicity used to be studied heavily before the 1990s to refer to a group of people descending from the same ancestors or belonging to the same tribe. He also states that "there is in the United States a large number of ethnic communities" in which together they form the nation; the unity of these groups, the feeling of 'togetherness' and common traditions may function as a basis of a national identity (2004: 34-5).

This section sheds light on information about aims and objectives, original value, topic scope, summary, material and method of the thesis. Additionally, it focuses on feminist bildungsroman, African and Mexican American literature. Moreover, it sheds light upon the definition of feminist bildungsroman, the characteristics of female bildungsroman, as well as how it was in the past and how its status today.

It is important to mention that there is a close relationship among black women's writings, literary criticism and the African American feminist theories. It is, in fact, this subtle relationship that has paved the way and helped the black women to write, recover and reconstruct what has been lost from their rights, identity and existence under the influence of inferiority within the American society. Thus, black woman has established a substantial feminist literary theory that reflects their changing needs and desires and calls for their superiority and independence as well as a recovery of their voice which was silenced for ages under the hegemonic white society. Furthermore, the history of black women's writing enabled them to resist their marginalization and reconstruct their historical narratives. So the tendency of their writing is focused on these writings as forms that have resistance glosses (Patterson, 2009: 13).

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name portrays geographical, historical, and political experiences related to the life and experience of black women in the American society. In her portrayal of the difficult life of Audre (the protagonist), Lorde combines elements

of history, autobiography, and mythology to construct a new form she calls, *Bio-mythography*.

In an interview with Claudia Tate (1988) Lorde describes *Zami* as a bio-mythography, Which is truly fiction . It has biographical elements and mythological history. In other words, it is fiction constructed from many sources. Lorde returns to this definition in more than one place, for example, in an interview with Joseph F. Beams (2004), she calls *Zami* a “bio-mythography because it’s made up of myth, history, and biography, all the ways in which we perceive the world around us” (Beam, 2004: 128) Despite Lorde’s ‘neologism’ and despite the fluidity of its form and its generic instability, *Zami* has been read largely as “either autobiography or– a category that overlaps the first but that has generic expectations of its own coming-out story” (Wilson, 2001: 99). Much of the criticism dealing with the formal properties of *Zami*, however, have focused on Lorde’s controlling autobiographical voice as a way to construct a black female identity that was, in Lorde’s own words, ‘invisible’ in the white American society of the fifties.

In their exploration of Lorde’s style, (Kaplan and Glover, 2000: 76) indicate that Lorde attempts to “explores the highs and lows of growing up and coming out in New York City, and includes both lyrical evocations of love affairs, and a Sharpe critique of the racism within lesbian subcultures of the period.” *Zami* describes the process of growing up and coming to voice of a subjugated female in New York during a time when racist attitudes were still highly prevalent .Reflecting on her difficult life in the mid-twentieth century America, Lorde writes: “it was hard enough to be Black, to be Black and female, to be Black, female and gay, to be Black, female, gay and out of the closet in a white environment” (Lorde, 1982: 224).

With an emphasis on the exploration of the hardships of growing up in this atmosphere in the novel, this thesis focuses on the study of feminist bildungsroman in *Zami* and locates the themes of development of the identity-reconstruction, as well as social, political realities and historical difficulties that are considered a part of the African American life and literature.

The reconfiguration of feminist bildungsroman in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* starts with an introduction to the text with a special focus on its critical reception with modern feminist literary thought. The chapter, then, moves to explore the way Cisneros re/de-construct feminist bildungsroman to depict the process of coming to voice of her female characters increasing forces of racial, gender and class discrimination.

Sandra Cisneros is almost the first writer from Hispanic America to write about Chicana (Mexican-American) women's lives and experiences. Cisneros tracks the growth of Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*, who wants to have a room of her own and a house that she can be proud to show the progress of the protagonist Esperanza from her childhood to adulthood. The novel follows the life of Esperanza, a Chicana (Mexican-American girl) about twelve years old when the novel begins. Esperanza thinks the house is a massive improvement from the older family apartment, and it's the first house that her parents actually owned. She's not happy with the house, however, because it's too small and it's not the dream house she's been longing for. The house is in the center of Chicago's Latino neighborhood, a city where individuals suffer from many forms of racial segregation (Shobia & Aruna, 2016: 4).

Cisneros' novel deeply depends on the elements of liberal feminism in its portrayal of the subordinate position of women, which reduces the understanding of gender-based violence to the personal relationships between men and women and to the viewpoints of women and men. *The House on Mango Street* is a novel about the formation and maturation of females focused on the difficulties of growing up in American society, specifically in a house in Chicago whose Mexican-American inhabitants are built as the ethnic or racialized others of America. This consideration deepens their systemic exploitation by broadening the cycles of subjugation, marginalization and exclusion from society. The novel focuses primarily on gender oppression and the experiences of young women and their mothers, aunts and neighbors, with a focus on the problem of poverty.

In Cisneros's treatment of the feminist Bildungsroman, Esperanza's developmental process becomes a representation of the life paths of the remaining female characters, who are homebound and individualized. The novel presents a number of female characters confined in their houses and who then exchange the prison of their father's house for that of their

husband's, where their hopes in the face of domestic work and child care and other duties of self-abnegation. In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros portrays the innocent young girl, Esperanza as facing all these problems directly and gradually gains experience only to become, at the end, an experienced woman with a subtle distinct identity of her own (Shobia & Aruna, 2016: 4).

The employment of feminist Bildungsroman in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Lesson* is tackled later beginning with an introduction of Bambara's novel and details the work and its critical reception. Then, the chapter moves to discuss Bambara's aim behind reconfiguring the genre of feminist Bildungsroman in her novel to illustrate the growing up of her female characters amid an atmosphere in which ideologies of racism and sexism prevail.

The title of the short story—"The Lesson"—in a sense, describes its genre. It is a coming-of-age story, focusing on the maturation of its protagonist, Sylvia. Even though her narration indicates her unlikeness of Miss Moore, Sylvia's attitude continue to change. Her sentiments of anger focus more at the inequities of her society rather than at Miss Moore. (Hargove, 1984: 5).

Told from Sylvia's first person point of view, "The Lesson" explores the 1960s economic injustice in America through the life and experiences of a young girl. Bambara portrays Sylvia as a proud and sensitive young girl who is too intelligent not to see the realities of her society (Hargove, 1984: 6). Bambara also depicts a number of characters who, for Sylvia, represent all the problems and difficulties that face poor minority groups in America. Sylvia lives in a poor neighborhood where her family, similar to many African American families in the twentieth century, has moved to from the South looking for a better opportunity. Sylvia becomes aware of all the inequities of the social and economic system that is very common in the 1960s United States.

Set in Harlem, the author's native city, the story is primarily a portrayal of financial inequality, centred of the discovery made out of childhood perception. Describing the author's own childhood experiences, the story describes a small journey to the shopping mall that Miss Moore arranges for the neighboring children. Miss Moore and children make a trip to FAO Schwarz Toy Store in Manhattan. The store sells very

expensive toys for white people. Surprised at the very expensive prices of the toys in the store, in the journey, the eyes of the children are opened to the reality of their society, as they finally become aware that there is another life for another group of people; a life completely different from the life of the black community (Hargrove, 1984: 5).



CHAPTER I

1. FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN

1.1. Feminist Bildungsroman: An Introduction

Bildungsroman is a combination of two German words: *Bildung*, which means "education," and *Roman*, which means "novel." Bildungsroman is a novel that deals with the formative years of the main character - in particular, his psychological development and moral education. With the hero's foolish mistakes and painful disappointments over and over and a life of usefulness ahead, the bildungsroman usually ends on a positive note. The classic example of this type of novel is often cited as Goethe's late 18th-century work *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*). While the word is predominantly applied to novels, in recent years, some English speakers have started to extend the term to films that deal with the coming-of-age of a youthful character. (Merriam Webster 2020: 1)

When it comes to feminist Bildungsroman, it is an essential genre in literature since some writers prefer to differentiate the masculine factor from the feminine one. Barr (1990) confirms that there is a war between masculine and feminine elements in literature and that literary gender war is not new. She adds that the authors of science fiction configure this war to explore the problems that relate to world's gender-related cultural problems. For Barr the role of men is useful in feminist science fiction "the genre's female and male feminists both posit alternatives to patriarchy-the end of masculinity (Barr, 1990: 154).

There are various elements related to modern societies such as feminism, politics, computers and technology which have special importance in the postmodernism period which is known as the period that let people deal with new concepts and trends. This treatment has extended to literature and specifically fiction which is considered as one of the most revolutionary and untraditional genres to construct new subjects to connect with the global interests of data circulation (Bukatman, 1993: 127).

Contemporary American women writers have created new visions in their literary works. This fact also applies to women writers who live in America coming from different origins and have chosen to recall and form their original identities. Shehabat (2011) analyzes three different books, two of which are Arab- American and the third is a memoir of an Iranian-French author in a way to follow the pattern developed on shaping the concept of identity and home although they belong to different religions, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. The author claims that these female writers were somehow misrepresented and estranged and that reflected their perspectives and attitudes as women coming from other ethnical origin rather than American.

There are different characteristics of female bildungsroman as a variation of the genre of Bildungsroman such as education, career, attitude and other characteristics. Fuderer (1990) stated that the female becomes aware of her identity and existence in the female bildungsroman. The writer also stated a number of characteristics of female bildungsroman which are female protagonist, self-realization, roles, and women's attitudes especially towards marriage, sex, education, religious crisis and career (Shehabat, 2011: 43).

The material or the subject of the bildungsroman genre is focusing on different subjects such as the gap between different generations. Lazzaro-Weis (1993) states that the women writers of female bildungsroman deal with the generational gap between the mothers and their daughters and describe the female's experience in relation to loss, home and community, nostalgia. He also defines feminist bildungsroman as a text that describes the "[C]oming-of-age story process involving female protagonists." These feminist critics analyzed the portrayal of young women as they matured by female novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The female bildungsroman of these times depicted the "suppression and defeat of female autonomy, creativity, and maturity by patriarchal gender norms" (Weis, 1993: 17).

As mentioned by Maier (2007), feminist bildungsroman is seen as an extension of the traditional coming-of-age genre and the development of the female protagonist, a matter that continued through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and contemporary until the present time with such works as *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*.

In the black community, feminism is considered as a divisive force and the Black women writers are calling for feminist literature to convey their problems and make their voices heard within the white societies. In her discussion of bildungsroman, Carlson (2014) mentions that there is another name for bildungsroman and it is frauenroman, “The existence of the female bildungsroman genre -- sometimes called the frauenroman -- has been debated amongst scholars and feminists alike with a blurred resolution” (Carlson, 2014: 26).

Relatedly, Ricky states that for women writers, feminist bildungsroman remains an important genre and they use all the opportunities to challenge conventions that the entire favorite does. Ricky further adds that.

A common ending for the bildungsroman female, particularly for the deliberate heroine who refuses to conform, was death, either as punishment or protest; yet some began marriage rather than ending, rightly acknowledging that many women of the 19th century married before, not after, they had reached maturity, and that the search for themselves did not always end on the wedding day. (Ricky, 2020: 6).

Boes defines *Bildungsroman* as “the spiritual and intellectual maturation of its protagonist” (2012:3). This definition is related to the explanation given in *Formative Fictions: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and the Bildungsroman*: “The reconstructions of genre can be made by the writers and the genre is reconstructed or rebuilt after it is being hit with an extremely criticism. Then, the genre can be built and can be reconstructed according to the situation that is existed in and causing new shape or product from a certain genre” (Wiki, 2020: 112).

Interestingly, Bildungsroman had an allegorical nature as what the prominent literary and political theorist Fredric Jameson describes as a national allegory in relation to literary discourses of the third world writers. In his seminal article, *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi- National Capitalism* Jameson asserts that “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical...they are to be read as what I will call national allegories...particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (Jameson, 1986: 69).

In any definition of the feminist Bildungsroman, it is important to mention that one of its major and frequently adopted themes is sex roles, which, in many cases, is used to distinguish it from the male variant. Moreover, this aspect in the feminist Bildungsroman may be considered as a problem that is rarely perceived a counterpart to the male form. But the classical Bildungsroman and the slave narratives that are examples of the African American narratives in the literature describe the relation between the classical model of the narratives and the African American female as the African American writers use central characters who are the female protagonists as central characters. The narrative voices are considered an important element in the African American female narrative of “bildung”. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the rearrangement and reconfiguration of the genre that the women writers respond to in their interest in the depiction of the changing and need to make the writings better and more acceptable in the recent time (Kester, 1997: 57).

1.2. African and Mexican American Literature

Literature is affected by ethnics and it can give a certain picture of an individual or a group’s thoughts, habits, way of thinking and different aspects of life. African and Mexican American literature are considered two variations of literature affected by the African and Mexican communities, their cultures, beliefs and their thoughts.

The history of African American people shows the immense discrimination practiced against them and the way they have suffered various violations of human rights within the American society: oppression, slavery, racism and the feeling of being unworthy and inferior. So many people from the African origin who are known as black men or black women, negros or by other names are chosen for them by the hegemonic powers, these people have historically attempted to fight subordination and resist marginalization and one way they have done so has been through literature. Most of the writers of the African origin have suffered both on the individual as well as the collective level and have depicted their pains and horrors through their writings (Warren, 2011: 23). So this part of the thesis sheds light on two powerfully established ethnic literatures within

the American literary discourses as well as society: African American and Mexican American literatures.

1.2.1. African American Literature

The Black writers who live in the United States produce African American literature and reflect the roots of the Black communities in the South. Also, it is produced to respond to the disfranchisement of black community in the south of the United States (Warren, 2010: 43).

In the history of the United States, African American Literature (AAL) has deep roots. Phillis Wheatly confirms that AAL gives a very informative background on the history of the African American people and their existence in the USA starting from the late 18th century:

Before the high point of slave narratives, African- American literature was dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives. In the 19th century, the genre known as slave narratives were accounts of people who had generally escaped slavery, their journeys to liberty, and the ways they claimed their lives. A great period of flowering in literature and arts was the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, influenced both by writers who came north in the Great Migration and those who were immigrants from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. The top awards, including the Nobel Prize given to Toni Morrison in 1993, were recognized by African-American authors. The role of African Americans in the wider American society, African-American culture, racism, slavery, and social equality are among the themes and issues explored in this literature. African-American writing tended to incorporate oral forms such as spiritual, sermon, gospel, blues, or rap. (Wikipedia, 2020: 21).

Literature produced by African American women has traditionally been described as being highly effective in terms of its educational and didactical quality about the life and experience of African American women. Additionally, it has become a means by which African-American women speak out and express their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, social issues, and their writings include equality, racism, classism and sexism.

Interestingly, African American literature is considered an inseparable part of the American literature where it expresses the struggle for freedom, and thoughts and issues related to black people living in the United States. However, there are some studies show that African American literature has not always given a positive picture of the black people (Eric and Jennie, 2007: 53).

African American authors have traditionally described themselves as Negroes or colored people, and their writings have reflected different social and political changes and thoughts. Also, the recognition of AAL depends on the society's achievements of racial equality. Warren (2011) describes the black or African American writers stating.

Writers of African descent would have certainly merged and written novels, plays and poems that merited critical attention, put the imperative to introduce and to consider their literature as a corporate enterprise would not have obtained. The achievement of black writers lay in their artistic response to the imperatives emanating from the creation of a social order on the basis of perceived black inferiority, and not in any transcendence of these imperatives. (Warren, 2011: 17).

African American literature as any other genre of literature has its special slang, syntax, grammar, idiom and pronunciation. Additionally, the oral tradition and techniques have a role in resolving problems in identity, tension in the writings. Recently, African American writers are trying to change classical shape of their literature. They are using their own distinctive oral and aural forms and modifying their writings. They use models that are related to European American and European traditions. The contemporary writers of African American literature are, moreover, turned to the oral procedures to produce stylistic and linguistic procedures and modernize the literature (Jones, 1991: 96).

Accordingly, the African writers reflected their own distinct culture and world in their literature and they shaped their historical and cultural identity through a combination between the western literature and African American literature with an amazing portrayal that reflected both cultures, thoughts, beliefs and societies' issues. It also included secular arts and literature with socio-religious realities (Soyinka, 2000: 134).

The women writers started using literature as a means by which to convey their feelings, attitudes and to resist anything they do not want in their life, society and nation. Therefore, the feminist element sometimes uses religious beliefs. However, the significance and the special shape of African American literature does not mean that it is far from the American and the European literary discourses. There are various interrelations between African literature and American literature; therefore, it is related even in the name it is combined together as African American literature with a mix of the characteristics to help them resist the racist and discriminatory objectification (Abrums, 2004: 48).

Nowadays, the Black writers are still focusing on identifying the situation. While, the predicaments that faced African Americans put an abundant impact on their cultural, social and personal lives. Moreover, there is consciousness or double-consciousness described as “two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Cleveland, 2004:183). Then, African American people are trying to improve their situations and improve the negative stereotypical images attached to them throughout their existence in the USA.

Although the African American women writers selected in this thesis have not suffered directly from racism, depression or slavery, they have very realistically conveyed what the previous generations told them about the past years of slavery in the American society. However, critics and scholars have agreed that Black communities especially Black women suffered a lot from the trauma of racism and slavery, more specifically, the psychological trauma of the children who grew up in the African community and listened to the stories of slaves and ex-slaves from the previous generations and that affected their well- beings. This means that some critics consider slavery as a cultural and national trauma that existed within the African American society and literature and it is related to the Black and African American identity (Eyerman, 2001 and Pearson, 2007: 32).

Interestingly, trauma is known as a status that occurs when an individual from the society having feelings towards horrendous events that left fixed marks in the communities or nation that they lived in or sharing them the same origin. In addition, the

person had consciousness and made that bad memories as a mark that can change the future and effect on them and considered as fundamental and irrevocable way (Stavropoulos, 2018: 12).

1.2.2. Mexican American Literature

Recently, there have been many changes in human thinking and way of life. These changes have included not only the ways of thinking but also of living, dealing with social issues, studying, and contacting with others and playing different roles in daily life. This shift can be attributed to the modernity of life or the modernity of technology. Modern life has many new different aspects that did not exist in the past, and the moving of life from one place to another can change the life style and the way of thinking.

These changes have evidently included aspects related to literature, cultures and society of such communities as the Mexican American literature (MAL), which is considered a result of an interaction between Mexican and American literatures that are written by people of Mexican origin or people who love Mexican or live with them and know the bases of their lives and social mores and values. Accordingly, it can be safely claimed that Mexican American literature deals with the culture, feeling, attitude, that are engendered by the destruction of highly civilized culture and the writer's attitudes towards the native habits and inhabitant's development. The Mexican culture, additionally, influences on the literature that emanate from the southwestern United States (Cecil, 1963:64).

The exchange and interaction between two cultures, languages, nations, racism, ethnics or origins can introduce a special kind or genre of literature. This is what existed in Mexican American literature when the Mexican writers put their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, problems, social issues or any features or principles of the Mexican literature within the American context or genre of literature (Tatum, 1975: 102).

Interestingly, when there are writers or people who live within a certain society, they may suffer from racist attitudes, inferiority or slavery. This is what has happened with the people with black skin who are not of white colour. So, the writers depict black

characters and write about the life that they lived and write about the political and cultural motifs that are mostly related to racism. Jarrett (2007) stated that the texts that were written by Black writers are deemed authentic when their authors known as Black writers or when they revealed their identity (Jarrett, 2007: 14).

There is an argument regarding whether white writers who wrote about the problems of the black people are considering their works as part of the black literature. Some theorists and scholars state that white writers lack real experience to write about what the black people suffer from. On the other hand, there are others who support the notion that any piece of literature about the experience of the black is considered as black literature since the writers depict the problems of the black communities. (Greve, 2011; Vinyard, 2007: 41).

The Mexican American writers are trying to connect the local with the global. This means that they write about their local culture and they added the global American culture with it. This combination or mixture can give a new and special result that has critique and focus on the problems of the nature of the individual, history, culture and the existence of different subjects (Lopez, 2011: 22). Also, the writers of the Mexican American literature are trying to balance between the Mexican context as well as the American context. Therefore, the results of their work are described as intermediate literature, with its general and known name Mexican American Literature. In addition, their work is described as “meditating the internal contradictions of their own burgeoning nationalisms while grappling with increasing U.S. hemispheric dominance” (Lopez, 2011: 15).

Over the past half century, the Mexican American literature (MAL) consisted of different kinds of genre such as poems, plays, adventure stories, songs and legends. Also, the writers express their attitudes, feelings and some of them express their experience of Chicano (Paredes and Paredes, 1972: 41). Mexican American has a rich and lengthy culture and a great literary heritage, and the Mexican American writers express themselves at the middle of the American society that they are considered as part of it but from different origin and try to ensure their self-identity. In addition, women writers of the MAL are substantially concerned with self-identity and this is rooted in their self-

awareness as they are considered a marginalized group within the hegemonic white American society. Furthermore, the Mexican American writers wrote about the Mexican American civil-rights protests to have their place in the political and cultural society. There are also writers that cared for Chicano literary and political forms, that Chicano emerged in the protest decade and it is supported and developed by the Chicano movements and writings. Now, the people from Mexican regions are growing more than the in the past days and they are approximately 66 percent of the total Hispanic population (Jacobs, 2006: 17-18).



CHAPTER II

2. AUDRE LORDE AND FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN

2.1. Audre Lorde: Life and Career

An influential poet and novelist Audre Lorde was born in 1934, in New York City as the youngest of three sisters to immigrant parents from Grenada. She attended a Catholic school in Manhattan and started writing poetry while still in high school when her first poem appeared in a magazine called *Seventeen*. Receiving her BA from Hunter College and an MLS from Columbia University, she soon started working as a librarian on a public school in New York. Lorde married Edward Rollins in 1962 and had two children, Elizabeth and Jonathon, before divorcing in 1970.

Lorde's official literary career started with the appearance of her first volume of poetry, *The First Cities*, which was published in 1968, the same year when she went to Tougaloo College in Mississippi as a writer-in-residence where she also developed a passion for teaching. In Tougaloo, Audre met with Frances Clayton who became Audre's long-term partner. *The First Cities* was quickly followed with *Cables to Rage* (1970) and the nominated for a National Book Award *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973). (Alexis, 2004: 4).

Her well-known collection *Coal* appeared in W. W. Norton in 1976 and followed by *The Black Unicorn* in the same year. These were followed by her other volumes include *Chosen Poems Old and New* (1982) and *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986). Shortly after, Lorde was diagnosed with cancer, an experience that she chronicled in *The Cancer Journal*, her first prose collection that won her the Gay Caucus Book of the Year award in 1981. Her other prose volumes include *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), and *A Burst of Light* (1988), which won a National Book Award. (Gay, 1996: 19).

Lorde cofounded the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press with her fellow writer Barbara Smith in the 1980s and became a founding member of Sisters in Support of sisters in South Africa which is an organization that helped in the awareness raising of women facing the process of apartheid. Lorde died of breast cancer in 1992. The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde was published in 1997. (Alexis, 2004: 6).

2.2. Feminist Bildungsroman in Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

Zami, a New Spelling of My Name starts during Lorde's childhood in Harlem, New York. She is the third daughter child of a black family from the West Indies. She receives her education in a Catholic School and is exposed to various forms of racism as a child, along with being legally blind. Despite her initial troubles with speaking properly, she soon displays strong verbal talents, especially in writing, from an early age and this talent is more polished as grows up. Growing up proves to be especially difficult for Audre who constantly feels alienated from her family, school and society.

College life proves even more difficult for Audre who leaves home and moves to Connecticut to find work and where she meets her next love, Ginger. Following her father's death, she returns to New York and starts a relationship with a woman called Bea. With Bea's departure for no clear reason, Audre decides to move to Mexico after saving some money. Arriving in Mexico, Audre develops a very sensual *relationship* with a middle-aged woman named Eudora who becomes an intimate mentor and lover to Audre.

Returning to New York, Audre meets and falls in love with a woman called Muriel, who is schizophrenic and highly troubled. Shortly after moving in with Muriel, Muriel cheats on Audre and their relationship ends. After recovering from this shock, Audre meets her final lover in the novel, Afrekete, who subsequently leaves her to look for fun in Atlanta. The story ends with Audre pondering and meditating on all the incidents and the women in her life, especially her mother who has taught Audre how to speculate and share her deep passion for the feminine vision.

As it becomes clear from this short summary of the novel, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* is Lorde's autobiography. However, it is not a straightforward autobiography, as the novel starts a new genre which Lorde calls biomythography: a combination of history, biography, and myth. Stating that Zami is a Carriacou name for all the women in her life, Lorde shows that she owes all her power and passion to the women in her life to whose contributions the entire boon is devoted. Despite being rejected by her society on the grounds of her race, gender and sexuality, the novel traces the way Audre stands up against racial, sexual and class discrimination through a genre known as female Bildungsroman.

While Lorde faces the intersecting oppressions of being black and woman, she also criticizes the lesbian circles she mingles with. In lesbian circles, her Blackness is erased. Her white girlfriend is confident that being gay is the same as being Black: they're both outsiders. Lorde can't find the words or strength to fight her on this. Hence, in *Zami*, the writer criticizes the story of lesbians by presenting how idealized the lesbian girls or women are suffering from the racism and how the black women or girls are neglected and do not have the right to be beloved as white girls. So if the Black girl love white girl she may neglect her, and the white men neglect her too, as well as, the Black men love the white girls and neglect the Black ones. This can put the Black women in a place for searching of love and care from any sources with any person or gender (Giuliana, 1995: 52).

In Bildungsroman, the writers often use the first-person pronoun 'I' during their narration of the stories, and employ personal struggles to draw different characters. Therefore, those characters present different categories of people and what they have faced and suffered in their lives and how they overcame the hard past years and achieved their goals (Salmon, 2004: 29).

Also important, there is a clear intersection between trauma narrative and Bildungsroman based on the topics that are written about trauma, death, poverty, injustice, racism and illness. All these issues are intermingled in the various forms of writing such as diaries, mother-daughter-plots, immigrant stories, as well as graphical texts, lesbians' novels of development, memoirs and Bildungsromans. So, the difference

between topics tackled in the Bildungsroman and the other topics can build borders between different forms of literature, which are related with such issues as development, making changes in the life, and between the literature that narrates different actions that happen in different situations and can convey various themes, especially the theme of writing about the lives of women and the feminist Bildungsroman, which is focused on the women after focusing on the issues of men at first (Bennett, 2014: 22).

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name adopts and reconfigures both classical Bildungsroman and the classical African American narrative in the depiction of the female character. The female protagonist is perceived as a marginalized outsider. The treatment of her surroundings makes her “close to crazy with believing that there was some secret thing wrong with the personality that she has. Lorde, however, believes that through female determination and solidarity, a concept she prefers to call ‘sisterhood,’ women are capable of achieving self-recognition and identity. To show her deep attachment to her counter-part black women, Lorde dedicates her novel to all the women who have helped in shaping her:

To whom do I owe the power behind my voice?

To whom do I owe the symbol of my survival?

To whom do I owe the woman I have become?

To the journeywoman pieces of myself Becoming. (Lorde, 1982: 5).

The term journeywomen, as used in Lorde’s dedication, is an equivalent to the male term of journeyman, and is defined as “the process of giving someone full education in craft or trade” Wiktionary (2020). In the novel, the term is used to describe the process of coming to voice and growing up of Audre from a voiceless victim of racism and social prejudices to a fully grown and educated woman who is strong enough to depend on herself as a strong independent woman.

In her exploration of the different categories of the feminist Bildungsroman, Rita Felski (1989), a modern literary and feminist theorist proposes two main forms: these are self-discovery and confession novels. Other sub-categories include feminist

Bildungsroman and the awakening novel. Felski also makes a generation in the category of self-discovery and designed texts that are related to women writers. Then, modification of the categories can happen according to the variation and differences that exist in the genre.

As a novel written by a woman, *Zami* is based on implicit autobiographical elements and it is about a female protagonist and is received within the context of feminist literature. This gave importance to the text and its power is laid on the autobiographical voice, as well as, on the description that is used in the text and specifically on the interaction and tension between the categories of the personal and political. Thus, female maturation has special importance in the texts that deal with the political ideology of feminism. The feminist writings that exist in the narrative are related to the feminist Bildungsroman and emancipation has social significance. This social importance is clarified by Felski:

On the one hand, it is autobiographical, exploring woman's changing perception of self; on the other, this examination of subjectivity acquires a representative significance through the superimposition of trans-subjective pattern of meaning, a narrative of emancipation derived from the political ideology of feminism. (Felski, 1989: 83).

Therefore, the genre upon which *Zami* is constructed is a complex form that deals with certain issues that are real and not merely fiction. For example, the lesbian world within the Black community is a historical fact that has substantially existed within the American community. In this regard, Wilson (2001) demonstrates that *Zami* is more authentic than fiction as reflected in a real situation of the life in the black lesbian community, and describes their habits and lives in a way that seems fictional by mixing the reality with the fictional ways of writing. Wilson also adds that the black women community has different and special habits that are related to the ideology of black women too. Additionally, Wilson illustrates that she is aware of the approaches of the black lesbians and the authenticity and verisimilitude that are existence with the black community as well as the writings of the black women writers. Accordingly, Wilson describes *Zami* as a realistic text that is describing the realities of black women and the author's life: "This actual autobiography– Audre/Lorde would become a mother: *Zami*

ends in a transcendental evocation of Black lesbian sexuality and community that makes no gesture towards such heterosexual or hetero-social possibility” (2001: 102).

According to Tate (1988) *Zami* is considered a bio-mythography that is fiction and describes real things that exist in the black women's community. She adds that *Zami* is not only an autobiography and the fictional elements are taken from history, myth and biography. The controlling of the autobiographical voice of women in *Zami* is obvious throughout the novel. Audre is described as being feeble in the past but the restriction of her stereotypical image makes her strong and have a voice that is steady and clear for the reader and for the people who can deal with the novel and what to know about the African American society and the black women within that community. This notion is confirmed by Bolaki (2011) who focuses on how Lorde controls the autobiographical voice. Then, the identity of black women is drawn by Lorde’s own words and she describes the reality of the Black women community.

In addition to the political and social difficulties that surround her, Audre is described as suffering from strong physical (sight and speaking) disabilities. Moreover, Audre’s relationship with her mother and two sisters is not a good one as she feels detached and estranged within her own family. Instead of identifying with Audre and managing her troubles, her mother always attempts to discipline her for what they perceive as rude and disrespectful behavior.

Zami describes the differences between the white and black women confirming that white women live a rich and comfortable life with many luxuries, but the Black women are living a hard losing a lot of things that they need or dream of. As Lorde writes in *Zami* “people who were very different from us. They were blond and white and lived in houses with trees and had dogs named Spot.” (1982:18) The difference between the white and Black women is described as a very obvious one where unlike white women, Black women cannot even have houses, trees and dogs.

Even though Audre is not described as pother children as in the novel, the teacher treats her in a prejudiced and racist manner and eventually, the class in which she studies is divided into two groups, one for the white and the black, which Lorde describes as very intensive for the pupils who hardly perceives of the reality around them: “In this day of

heightened sensitivity to racism and color-usage, I don't have to tell you which were the good students and which were the baddies" (Lorde, 1989: 28). Despite the difficulties she faces, little Audre is determined to go on in her studies realizing the importance of education for a marginalized group in the wider American society. This is manifested by Bolaki in her study of the importance of schooling in the works of ethnic writers such as African American: "The school, as in early immigrant narratives and ethnic Bildungsroman, provides an early platform to excel in upward mobility skills." (Bolaki, 2011: 13) Besides, Bolaki (2011) stated that the schools were forcing uniformity and discipline, and the slave or black narratives consider this as an important stage that they are based on. Moreover, in bildungsroman and the ethnic American variant or postcolonial, the formal education collides with the native culture and is used to form a colonial or an assimilated subject.

The experience of Audre's childhood is described in *Zami* as one of the most painful racism-charged experiences: "unadorned, unexcused, and particularly painful because I wasn't prepared for it" (Lorde, 1982: 59). Moreover, when Audre complained about the unfair treatment, the teacher at her school replies with the painful words that she stinks: "my Christian duty to tell you that Colored people did smell different from white people." (Lorde, 1982: 60).

Not only at school, but also in the surrounding environment, among the people and within society, racist prejudices between Black and white people were clear and the Black people were treated as inferior to the white who traditionally control the public spheres while the Black are not allowed to have a good position or establish remarkable careers.

Audre tells of a very sad and hard situation she and her family encountered on vacation when the family planned their first trip to Washington DC. The waiter in a restaurant tells her father to eat in another place as they do not receive Black people in their restaurant (Lorde, 1982: 70). In the novel, Lorde describes the incident as a very painful and shocking experience for the whole family:

The waitress was white, and the counter was white, and the ice cream I never ate in Washington D. C. that summer I left childhood was white, and the white heat and the

white pavement and the white stone monuments of my first Washington summer made me sick to my stomach for the whole rest of that trip and it wasn't much of a graduation present after all. (Lorde, 1982: 71).

It is crucial to contextualize a feminist text such as *Zami*, which is both polemic and fictional, in the context of an ongoing backlash against radical feminist cultural work. One instance of this backlash is the critique of instrumental feminist texts by Anna Wilson, *Persuasive Fictions*, which includes *Zami*'s analysis. Wilson downplays the role of feminist literature as "cultural fiction rather than history" in historical feminist movements and social changes. (Wilson, 2001: 129).

The reduction in the transformative power of feminist literary texts by Wilson has the effect of de-legitimizing them and silencing them. This represents a strand of liberal feminist critical theory that decontextualizes and/or eradicates the political and social potential and context of women's radical (black/lesbian) literature. This kind of criticism also tends to project on these texts a form of paternal individualism that further culturally negates the collective resistance and power that has often been reflected, inspired or created by radical literature. The rich, diverse and playful language of *Zami* indicates it as an experimental narrative whose structures reflect various black/lesbian philosophies, theories and semiotic transiomatic philosophies. Too often, a heteronormative analysis of themes and motifs in literature is complemented by the dialogical nature of black/lesbian feminist work, further marginalizing the 'other' space within critical studies.

Barbara Christian, on the other hand, argues that black/lesbian texts positioned as 'others' may not refer to or draw on 'theory,' but are, in fact, theoretical representations as active engagement. This position undermines Roland Barthes' post-modern vision of the 'death of the author', hierarchical binary oppositions, and the significance of the 'critic' (T.S. Eliot), often considered to be an authoritative white male heterosexual with authority. By defining this "Eurocentric masculinist worldview," Patricia Hill Collins echoes Christian's views, which she also argues "fosters the subordination of black women" (Hill Collins, 1990: 221). She also highlights how communal texts have been too long removed from their political and historical contexts, those that refer to and represent collective understandings and social movements.

2.3. Black Lesbianism & Originary Myth

In a deliberate attempt to rewrite black/lesbian novels, the Lord chronicles Audrey's female ancestors in the contemporary world. Lord links the psychological life of female intimacy with her childhood relationships: "The emotional aspects of lesbianism have to do with my mother, although the life and death struggle I felt towards my father was also a factor" (Lord, 2004: 23). Lord, in opening Braxton and McLaughlin's pioneering group on critical thought of black women in literature, asserts that blacks / lesbians are not a new phenomenon: "It is not that we have not always been here since we have been here" (1990, p. Xi)). But Lord also interrupted the concept of lesbianism as a purely physical act, stressing the need to recognize the idea of the persistence of homosexuality by Adrienne Rich. With a collection of female traditions that guide its writing and support it. Lord writes and works, just like generations of women before her: "They constructed their women's homes and harvested watersheds. They wove their lives and the lives of their children together. The women who easily escaped the absence of their marine men. Because they came to love each other after the men returned (Hall, 2004: 24).

As for the ancestor codes of Lourdes, they are living processes with a physical history. By redefining the existential understanding of both gender and sexuality, Lord transforms the axis of the metaphysical world and the material world - by refocusing on experience within an African central worldview: the African tradition treats life as an experience we must live ... we see ourselves as part of the life force. We are connected, for example, with air, to the Earth. We are part of the entire process of life (Lord: 2006: 98). As the closing narration in *Zami* makes clear, Audrey's encounter with Afrikit combines Lorde's objective and subjective myth of black / lesbian life.

2.4. Lesbianism and Sexuality: Audre's Adulthood Experiences

For Audre, adulthood experiences, unfortunately, were not better than her childhood. Audre states that she had very few friends who were white. After her graduation, she starts to work and decides to leave the house where her family lives to live in a flat where she meets with several strong independent women who are mostly lesbians. She soon develops an intimate relationship with a woman called Eudora.

The fact that she grows up to be a black female lesbian in a society that neither tolerates her skin colour nor her gender and sexual tendencies make life almost unbearable for Audre who faces rejection from her family and society alike. At more than one point in the text, Audre explains the difficulties of feeling an outsider in one's own community: "Moving through the bunches of women cruising each other in the front room, or doing a slow fish on the dancing floor in the back...being an outsider had [nothing] to do with being lesbian" (Lorde, 1982: 220).

The life of lesbian African women literature and fiction in the 1980s was autobiographical work and it is associated with well-crafted friction. Wilson (2001) described the situation of lesbian African women in the 1980s, "because it is the one extended prose work of which [she is] aware that approaches black lesbian experience with both verisimilitude and authenticity" (Wilson, 2001: 10). This means that black lesbians were aware of what they are choosing and doing and they had verisimilitude and authenticity.

American 1980s society not only suffered from socio-racial discriminations, but also from political injustice especially in the case of (lesbian) black women who were treated unfairly on the grounds of their race, gender and sexual tendencies. In the novel, Lorde describes the political atmosphere in American society including such incidents as the call to free Rosenbergs and Lorde's effective participation in the movement and the acts of picketing, envelopes, stuffing and demonstrations. Also, she stated that she was treated cruelly and unfairly and cried a lot from the hard situation and said "for myself -- wondering whether there was any place in the world that was different from here" (Lorde, 1982: 149).

Occasionally, Lorde tried to motivate the black women and she encouraged the teamwork from the black women to change the situation and to have their voices heard within the American white society and to stop to be inferior by sending a message within her novel to the black women who are African American that are living in the American society by saying.

When black women in this country come together to examine our sources of strength and support, and to recognize our common social, cultural, emotional, and political interests, it is a development which can only contribute to the power of the black community as a whole. Surely that can never diminish it. For it is through the coming together of self-actualized people, female and male, that it is possible to make any real advances. The old relationships of sexual power based on a dominant/subordinate model of inequality have not served us as people or as individuals. (Lorde, 1982: 46).

In this regard, Lorde emphasizes the situation of black women within the American society, and she mentions and clarifies numerous instances that Audre has experienced and she reflects on the needs and desires of the African American or black women for oppositional institutions as she states: “We tried to build a community of sorts where we could, at the very least, survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile to us; we talked endlessly about how best to create that mutual support which twenty years later was being discussed in women’s movement as brand-new concept” (Lorde, 1982: 170).

Different critics have given different critical interpretations of the socio-political functions of the novel. For example, Wilson (2001) describes it as a marginal text that is significant within the feminist criticism as it addresses and persuasively argues for the situation of the black women. Also, the cultural aspects are addressed and mentioned clearly in the novel. Also, the black narrative or slave narrative reflected the political, economic and social conditions of the black women and black people and Lorde conveys that and talks about the 1980s. So, the voices of slaves are grown and raised by black women writers or the writers of black literature to the world. Then, black writers moved from the stage of silence and accepting the situation to the stage of developing themselves and rejecting all the injustice around them (Gqola, 2012: 121).

In an attempt to find a better opportunity to live a freer life and enjoy her racial and sexual identity without all the restrictions that exist within American society, Lorde decides to travel to Mexico. Formalistically, this travel coincides with the journey of a craftsman in their developmental journey. While, the journeywomen ship means becoming, and it describes Audre's journey from the stage of her childhood to the stage of maturation overcoming the hard years. Also, the term journey-women describes Audre's completed stage of apprenticeship and the awareness of her community's values, ideological and cultural perceptions.

Taking the effective portrayal of Audre's developmental trajectories and her self-awareness early in life into consideration, it is significant to examine *Zami* within the boundaries of feminist Bildungsroman. In the novel, Lorde highlights the processes of self-discovery and self-awareness that is black women experience during their lives. Lorde uses their special tools and they use evidence from the real world to express what they felt and what they suffered from the surrounding white people: "in this day of heightened sensitivity to racism and color-usage, I don't have to tell you which were the good students and which were the baddies" (Lorde, 1982: 27). Therefore, the narratives expressed the black women's miseries and suffering, and the trade of slaves is stopped and literature is considered as one impact that put the end to the slave trade, and colonial slavery in America (Lahure, 2013: 13).

The novel ends by describing the strength of black women and this becomes the main theme that is directly related to the power of women affiliation and solidarity. And she concludes by saying that "every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me" (Lorde, 1982: 255). In her interpretation of the novel's title, Lorde indicates that: "Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers" (Lorde, 1982: 255). Lorde also mentions that the source of her power is the very women that she encounters every day in her life. This is the reason why she honours and acknowledges these women and especially her mother who has given her strength and power all the time and from whom she has learned too much.

To conclude, Lorde attempts to draw a picture and convey a message related to the understanding of the collective public life of the black women within American white

society. Thus, the novel has different dimensions including the political and motivational for the black women. Moreover, Lorde identifies the feminist bildungsroman and the reconstruction of the genre in literature in her novel. The feminist Bildungsroman, accordingly, focuses on the movement or transition from one level to another while making reconstruction, as a transition from childhood, to girlhood or adulthood to womanhood. So, it is more about changing, reconstructing, and having new things different from the past or opposite to it and growing.

Following the formal and thematic properties of the feminist Bildungsroman, *Zami* explores the abilities of a woman to improve her life and move forward. The novel depicts numerous situations where oppressed women manage to overcome the hard circumstances and challenge conventions. Thus, one of the most important elements of the feminist Bildungsroman is that the written material is grown from the individual or own experience of the author (Felski, 1989: 34). Therefore, expresses her own feeling, experience and the struggle that she faced during her life within the white American society as Black African American women.

To sum up, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* has a clear and strong tendency with the genre of feminist bildungsroman, and it is considered one of the African American effective genres of the present day. It reveals that white people doubt the educational abilities of black women and treat them as inferior individuals in the community. Also, some white people have the idea that black people cannot write and read as white people. Yet black people and especially black women can write great writings and they did that in many literary works. Also, they use the literature to convey their suffering and they improve themselves globally and make the world conscious of this dilemma and hard experience with racism. Additionally, black women writers improve themselves within the local and international literary discourses. As a result, *Zami* is considered a part of the cultural revisionism that expresses the feeling of the African American women within the white society (Schur, 2018: 54).

CHAPTER III

3. SANDRA CISNEROS AND FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN

3.1. Sandra Cisneros: Life and Career

Born in Chicago in 1954, Cisneros is the only daughter in her family. She has traveled between Chicago and Mexico to visit her relatives, and has spent most of her childhood in Humboldt Park neighborhood. The writer retreated to books and started expressing herself in poetry as she grew up in a home where library cards were obligatory. Cisneros initially discovered a passage and found approval for her creativity when she was in high school at Chicago, and she was highly encouraged by her educators.

So, she studied English at Loyola University of Chicago, and she had a master degree of fine arts creative writing in 1978 and later received her M.F.A. from the well-known writers' Workshop at University of Iowa. Then, she came back to Chicago and worked as a teacher at a high school, and in her leisure, she wrote poems and submitted them to several literary magazines. Gradually, Sandra earned a reputation locally by reading her poems at coffee shops and clubs (Barrett, 2014: 83).

Throughout her literary career, Cisneros has produced different literary forms, writing several collections of poetry such as her well-received *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987). In a series of vignettes in the 1991 *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, she has managed to build an impressionistic picture of life on the border between the United States and Mexico.

Cisneros has received numerous awards for her substantial work, including the 1995 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and the 2003 Texas Medal of the Arts Award. She lives in the Texas town of San Antonio. The most prominent award, however, includes the National Medal of Arts presented to her by President Barack Obama in 2016 confirming that she was being "for enriching the American narrative. Through her novels, short stories, and poetry, she explores issues of race, class, and gender through the lives

of ordinary people straddling multiple cultures. As an educator, she has deepened our understanding of American identity" (Jackson, 2014: 1).

3.2. Feminist Bildungsroman in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

The House on Mango Street depicts one difficult year in the life of the young Chicana girl, Esperanza Cordero, who lives with her parents and three siblings in a poor neighborhood in Chicago. The story begins with Esperanza, both main character and narrator, describing her family's first arrival on Mango Street explaining that they used to move very frequently before settling in their new house which is a small and run-down building with crumbling red bricks.

After wondering from one place to another in the hope of finding a house of their own, Esperanza's family finally manage to find a house on Mango Street, although the region does not seem to be the one they have been dreaming to live in and hence, her parents try to explain that the house might only be temporary until they find the promised house. Despite being better than most of the houses in which her family have so far lived, Esperanza does not like it stating that it is not like the houses she has seen on TV.

Esperanza who dreams of a big white wooden house with a spacious garden, feels suffocated in their house on Mango Street and always expresses a desire to escape. Growing up, Esperanza learns to express her feelings through poetry which is one reason she gives very vivid descriptions of peoples' behaviour and the characteristics of her family and neighbours. Her descriptions give an image of the neighborhood and give examples of the many important people around her, providing important moments in her life and the lives of those in her community. Mostly, she focuses on moments that show the difficulties they face, such as when Louie's cousin was arrested for stealing a car or when Aunt Lupe of Esperanza died. (Marrero, 2012: 1).

As the novel progresses in the form in vignettes, it portrays Esperanza's maturation process and development as well as her perception of the world around her. As she eventually enters puberty, Esperanza's develops sexually, physically, and emotionally. Although her father, being a religiously committed but physically abusive

man, prevents her from going out very often, Esperanza soon develops a friendship with Sally who ditches Esperanza for a boy at a carnival and Esperanza is sexually assaulted by a group of men.

These traumatic experiences together with the observations she has of the women in her neighbourhood which are highly shaped by the control of the men in their lives, further her desire to escape Mango Street. It is only when Esperanza meets Rachel and Lucy's aunts, the Three Sisters, and they tell her fortune, that she realizes that her experiences on Mango Street have shaped her identity and that it will always be with her, even if she leaves. As the novel ends, Esperanza vows that after she leaves, she will return to help the people she has left behind (Marrero, 2012: 1).

Related to the above summary of the novel, Cisneros has confirmed that she has “experiments, creating a text that is as succinct and flexible as poetry, snapping sentences into fragments so that the reader pauses, making each sentence serve her and not the other way round, abandoning quotation marks to streamline the typography and make the page as simple and readable as possible” (Montagne, 2009: 17). She explains in her new introduction to the book written in 2009 that, in utilizing this unique style, she wants it to be “a book that can be opened at any page and will still make sense to the reader who doesn't know what came before or comes after” (Cisneros, 2009: 6).

Describing life on her time at the barrio of Chicago, the writer, Esperanza Cordero gives a lively picture of female's idealization at home in 1984, and the novel has achieved an international approval. Moreover, the novel has become obligatory textbook used at schools. Similarly, Herrero (2017) describes the text saying:

This novel by the important Chicana author Sandra Cisneros begins through the voice of Esperanza, who will guide the reader through her experiences on Mango Street, her new neighborhood where she does not feel comfortable and, thus, aims to escape. She explains how her family has just moved in a new house on Mango Street, a segregated community where Chicanos are placed inside a larger city in the United States. *The House on Mango Street* is a very gradual depiction of Esperanza's process of development. Each chapter hints to a new maturational stage within, and it is not until the last chapters that

Esperanza is able to define her future and her role as a woman, writer and Chicana (Herrero: 2017: 6-7).

In novel, the writer describes the way the conflict that she experienced has impacted her and shaped the quality of her maturational process. She reflects on the feelings of alienation from her family and social communities (Roszak, 2016; Eysturoy: 1996: 33). In other words, female protagonists need to learn to curb their expectations and stifle their voices in order to become and remain little women. (Armstrong 1992: 453). Young women are taught socially acceptable forms of behavior, self-perception, aspirations and occupational choices when tracing the development of a prepubescent girl through the literary trials and tribulations that teach her to become a little woman. (Chew 2008: 22) . They need to perceive their destiny as dependent on a man and their identity as a derivative of his identity.

Thus, the traditional bildungsroman worked as a training manual that socialized girls to accept the role of a domestic nurturer without their own desires or aspirations, and therefore as a “shadow, a negative, an object” (qtd. in Oliver-Rotger, 2003: 153). The fulfillment and advancement of someone else. Any deviation from this standard is strictly sanctioned and any attempt is nipped in the bud to break out of this prescribed pattern of growth and formation. Traditional women played a direct role in promoting and promoting the women's housekeeping cult and the image of women as home owners. (Golden, 2003: 16). Therefore, it is no accident that, in the second half of the 19th century, the traditional bildungsroman style as a literary genre took root in the West., marked by the spread of industrial capitalism and the unification of "capitalist patriarchy" (Eisenstein, 1999: 127).

Tracking the maturation process of the female protagonist from childhood through adolescence into adulthood in an attempt to reach authentic self-realization and identity, the genre features a major conflict between the main character and their society. Cisneros' text portrays the life of Esperanza who faces various problems and gain experience to become, at the end of the novel, an experienced adulthood with her identity of her own house-female bildungsroman. In depicting the various forms and layers of struggles that the protagonist faces as well as the alienation and degradation she feels from her society and community.

Being a female Bildungsroman, *The House on Mango Street* portrays the struggle for self-definition and self-realization as a central theme in the process of coming-of-age of the female protagonist, in this case Esperanza. Esperanza's struggle to assert herself both as a woman and as an artist, is manifested through her attempts to change her name so that she can define herself on her own terms and not simply accepting a name that merely expresses her family heritage. (Shobia & Aruna, 2016: 4).

Hoping to create an independent state and a life of her own choice over which she has full control, Esperanza constantly endeavors to separate herself from her parents and younger sister. Becoming more sexually aware, Esperanza wishes to be beautiful but strong and cruel so that the men in her life will not be able to hurt her. After being assaulted, she finally accepts her place in her community and decides that the most important way she can define herself is as a writer. At the end, Esperanza succeeds in reaching maturation and arrives at an understanding of important matters including family, friendship, love, oppression, racial segregation, self-identity and matters related to culture, gender, and society (Ibid: 2012: 5).

3.3. The Struggle for Self-Definition in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

The main character of the novel, Esperanza, grows up imaginatively, sexually and emotionally during the whole year and has Chicano friends, Rachel and Lucy, who share the same ethnic origin with her. In the first part of the novel, her friends go through many adventures such as getting knowledge from an older girl called Marin and exploring through a Labyrinthine junk store. Esperanza experiences the injustice of racism while getting fond of music, attractiveness of poetry and disgraces poverty as she explores the world (Moretti, 2000: 56).

The vignettes of the novel briefly describe Esperanza's neighbors, besides describing her chronological development. Some vignettes contain females who are trapped somehow while others include memorable or eccentric males including Meme, Ortiz, Geraldo, and Earl. Also, there is another character, Alicia, who has to study all the night to be able to graduate and have a job one day despite her hard life that her father

was waking her up early in order to do the chores and make tortillas. Additionally, there is another character who is confined through the unbearable duty to take care of her several unruly kids. Minerva, who, similar to Esperanza, is fond of poems, has been previously married with two kids, and she was regularly beaten by her husband (Moretti, 2000: 79).

Esperanza grows up in a strictly codified environment where she feels women are not treated fairly and not respected, what is more, they are not given the rights in an environment where men have the power and superiority. So, she desires to escape the men-dominated society when she recognizes that most of her women neighbors are violated and abused by the men in their lives, i.e., their husbands and fathers. Then, Esperanza has to cope with her own sexuality and, thus, chooses to be cruel and beautiful similar to the women in the movies, who are attractive to the male but powerful. Therefore, Esperanza grows up as a powerful, dominant and defendant individual, and she is still at the house of mango at the end of the novel. In the novel, Esperanza escapes from *The House on Mango Street* physically through financial dependence and education. Therefore, the novel is told from the perspective of the Mexican-American first-generation women who lived the hard life and did not take their chances in their lives. So, Esperanza is concerning with the female maturation and development. The novel centers on the struggles of growing up in modern society in the United States of America, especially in a ghetto in Chicago in which Mexican American inhabitants tend to be established as the ethnic others in America (Cisneros, 1991: 6).

Esperanza's maturation narrative acts like a remedy to the rest of the main female character's life trajectories who stay connected to home and entangled throughout domestic drudgery and individual around the clock childcare. The implication produced is that the women's development and maturation in Cisneros' tale fails to start on a reconciliatory note characteristic of traditional feminist bildungsroman and its modern versions. The novel's formulation allows the leading figure in the novel to embrace the incorporation into the current socio-economic patriarchal structure of late capitalism. A system that relies on reconciliation with its rigid gender norms and the established hierarchy grounded upon the (modernized) paradigm of breadwinning. As an alternative, the novel appears to request the creation of a

subjectivity which is defiant and not housebound, which is to be emulated and pursued by others (Moretti, 2000: 123).

It is no wonder that this novel is particularly highly praised by its tale of female emancipations. It is also effectively addressing the idea of the key character fleeing the ghetto and entering America mainstream. Nevertheless, this story eventually treated struggles of sex constraints. Which were merely a phenomenon restricted to the ethnic Mexican-American culture. It is in reality the broader systematic hegemony. The issue of oppression and domestication of female in the novel is, thus, presented as the single naturalized symbol of racial distinction instead of as a structural issue impregnating or describing the American culture as a whole. Cisneros' effort to write a feminist bildungsroman in which the focus is on the emancipation of female that automatically leads to a mainstream America resulted in socially essentialist and problematic depth (Moretti, 2014: 28).

Sandra Cisneros reconstructs the picture of women in her time and she builds another picture as she imagined or as she aims that the life and situation of women will be. The life of the Mexican-American women has been hard and they have been suffering of ethnic discrimination in the American society and she has suffered from male-authority. Therefore, the writer reconstructed the traditional picture of the Mexican women calling for women empowerment and educational development (Sampler, 2019: 23).

As a young women living in a racist patriarchal society that oppresses her on the grounds of her colour and gender, Esperanza, conveys the image of the Mexican woman born in a restricted Mexican community that force women to feel that they are reinforced to have the feeling of claustrophobia, loss of achieving goals, inferiority and weakness. The description of the Mexican households and the way they are different can be noticed when Esperanza was talking with her sister: "Look at that house ... I said, it looks like Mexico... Yes, that's Mexico all right" (1984: 18). In this regard, Esperanza fails to find her identity in her Mexican society, Chicana in the *Mango Street*, in the American society and even within her family as she describes the society as: "the outer Anglo society" (1984: 105). Furthermore, she confirms the gap between her family, society and Mexican-

American and within the Chicana community in Mango Street and with her neighborhood: “I don’t belong here” and “I don’t ever want to come here” (1984: 107).

However, the feeling of not belonging is not limited to Esperanza’s family, culture, environment but also to the whole Anglo atmosphere. She wants to live a life outside of the borders that the society has built and put her under the impact of certain ideas, thoughts, and control and she describes it by saying that in the vignette entitled *Four Skinny Trees*: “Four raggedy excuses planted by the city” (Cisneros, 1984: 74). In this statement, the city is believed to be using “empty gestures to excuse itself from taking any more substantive responsibility for battling ethnic segregation and socioeconomic inequality” (Roszak, 2016: 66).

The reader can see the awareness and maturation of the narrator of the story “Esperanza” had, and how she forms her self-identity as she decides to leave the place that she has lived in as she stated in the first vignette of the novel: “I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. But this isn’t” (1984: 5). Additionally, the writer describes her life in the house in which she lives as well as the house she has been dreaming to have. So, she reconstructs the house imaginatively: “Small and red with tight steps in front and, windows are so small” (1984: 4). In this example, Cisneros describes life in her real house which is a small house with small windows like a prison. So, the writer tries to reflect the image of the women in the house as they are unhappy and live in an uncomfortable place: “A real house that would be ours for always. . . . White with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence” (1984: 4). Cisneros describes the house that she was dreaming in and she rebuilds and reconstructs the image of her life or of the women’s lives. The adulthood is described by the writer as a very sad phase, as she wishes to die because she feels sexually assaulted in the society. “I wanted to be dead . . . And the garden that had been such a good place to play didn’t seem mine either” (1984: 97-98). Furthermore, Cisneros talks about her grandmother as a strong woman and the restrictive atmosphere in her house and how they dream to share other happy women’s lives outside the house by acquiring their rights to learn, work, go and do what they want and not stay at the house all the time and work inside it as seen in the following example from the novel, “A wild horse of a woman”, “Out the window her whole life, the way many women sit their sadness on an elbow” (1984: 11).

The leitmotif empowers Esperanza in the novel and gives her encouragement and awareness. Her awareness is clear: “But I know how these things go” (1984: 5) Also,

Esperanza, who is the main character that the writer Cisneros uses to convey what she herself has been feeling is aware of the relation between the Mexican women and American women and she states that the Mexican women as the Chinese women do not like their strong women (1984: 10).

Interestingly, Cisneros describes the difference between the life of boys and the life of girls in her society, and how boys do not talk to girls. This is mentioned in the following statement from her novel, “The boys and girls live in separate worlds ... got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the home. But outside they can’t be seen talking to girls” (Cisneros, 1984:8). The girls are afraid of going outside the house and they think that is only for boys, and the society will look at them and the people will think about them. This is one of the problems that the girls suffer from and the society considering the place of girls only in the houses from their young age and later when they get married. This is shown in the example of Sally who “sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission” (1984: 102).

Cisneros also uses the metaphor and builds physical expression of the characters as when she describes her grandmother as a wild horse, and that sign for the power, braveness and strength. But that is a unique description for the women in her culture and environment, because the women ought to be weak and confined to the house. The description of her grandmother as mentioned in the vignette with the title *My Name* is as follow: “A wild horse of a woman” (Cisneros, 1984: 11).

Interestingly, Esperanza's grandmother's marriage again in an old age makes Esperanza feel disappointed as how the strong and brave woman cannot live without a man and chooses to marry to live and to avoid the society and the people around her as they are seeing her as the only woman without man and this may be considered shame in her society and the best thing for the women is marriage living under the men's control and security. The description for her grandmother's marriage is described as follows: “Fancy chandelier” who “looks out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness in their elbow” (Cisneros, 1984: 12). After the marriage of her grandmother, Esperanza couldn’t find a role model to follow or to stay within her family as she feels the shame of for mother and sister and does not like her father and his authority on her. Then, she gets alienated within her society and her family too.

Accordingly, the way that Cisneros's restricted society has been forcing women into marriage and to stop them from learning is depicted in detail. This is one of the problems that she has written about in her novel as she has written about the way Rafaela's marriage is an unhappy one because she was forced to marry and to live with her husband in the house and do the house work and stop her dreams outside the house: "Because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (1984: 79). However, Esperanza suffers from violence when she tries to escape from her society and the physical and emotional violence as well as the overwhelming feelings of pity that she has always felt for herself under the dominance of the men in her society. (Cisneros, 1984: 79). Furthermore, Esperanza conveys the feelings of sexual isolation and the way she wants to be a normal woman that the men dream of and want to love and be with her. So, she suffers from isolation and she dreams of being strong and beautiful by saying that the idol woman as she describes her as beautiful and cruel at the same time, "Beautiful & Cruel" (1984: 88).

Cisneros describes the house that she lives in and this could be applied to most of the houses of her society in her time. Their house is not having a yard and she thinks that to prevent women from sitting in the yard because their places are hidden inside the house. Also, they do not own cars and even if there is a place for the car in the house and this can be a sign that women in her society were not driving cars in her time too, "No front yard... The car we don't own yet" (1984:4). Cisneros demonstrates the ethnic ideology of the American society and how the shape of the Mexican houses are and how they are hidden and built in bad or not good areas, and she described the houses as they are not having closest, "where sunlight never came" (Cisneros, 1984: 60).

Also, she describes the way the American people think about the Mexican people as follows, "They think we're [the people in Mango Street] dangerous. They think we will attack them..." (Cisneros, 1984: 28). From this example, it can be understood that the houses are built in places that are hidden in the city. The writer wants to illustrate that the houses are full of injustice and she tries to describe them as houses with no sunlight. The writer also tries to mention the ideologies of ethnic and racist discrimination that is employed towards Mexican American people in the American society and how the

freedom, equality and not even sunlight can reach their houses. Additionally, the houses can be considered as the identity of the Mexican people in the American society and how they live and their identity and rights were hidden or not having a value within the American society in that time.

Furthermore, in a vignette entitled *A Rice Sandwich*, the writer describes the humiliation and embarrassment that resemble disassociation rather than uneasiness that raised as Cisneros reflects on her situation compared to the image of Esperanza and her awareness of the racism that surrounds her and that place that she lives in is not her house and she should leave it as soon as possible and search for the place that can make her feel that it is her house. From the novel, it can be understood that Cisneros may hate to live at *Mango Street* because of the restricted life, feelings of racism and ethnicity that the writer faces with her family. Additionally, she seems to asks for help from the other people to change the situation of life in Mango Street to make life better and normal as the other society lives without racism, ethnicity or inferiority for the women: “Somebody makes it better” (1984: 107).

In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza, acquires the awareness that she will always be under the restrictive roles in her society and family. So, she decides to leave and to live the life, the life that she dreams of and wants to have the education, work and style of life that she wants. But she promises to come back to make a change and to help the other women who suffer from that kind of life that make them lose themselves to live under the authority of the men in their houses and to live as alienated individuals in their society and environment as she describes the life that the women have been yearning of it outside their houses and what they see from behind the windows of their houses: “Look out the window (their) whole life” (1984: 11). Also, Esperanza describes her determination as she confirms that she wants to live in the Mango Street by saying: “One day I will say goodbye to Mango” (Cisneros, 1984: 110). Furthermore, she does not want to be selfish and to live as she wants and leave the other women who suffer in her society without help. She describes her feeling by saying: “Such a selfish wish” (Cisneros, 1984: 105).

The feelings of abandonment and helpless and the feelings of pain of rape that surround Esperanza, because she is aware of the problems and of suffering and find the solution by escaping and leaving *The Mango Street* and live in peace outside that society. But, she cannot help the other women and that make her feel abandonment as explained in the novel: “Why didn’t you hear me when I called? Why didn’t you tell them to leave me alone?” (Cisneros, 1984: 100).

At the end of the novel in the vignette entitled *The Family of Little Feet*, the writer reconstructs the image of the women and she completely rebuilds the image of her life. The girl becomes aware of her sexuality and become Cinderella and the men dream to love her and be with her. In addition, the writer describes the male oppression and how that is based on constrictions of the gender.

The Mango Street is considered as a clear example of autobiography and feminist Bildungsroman. The writer conveys the situation of her life in the past and describes the hard years, the dreams of the future and the reconstruction of the image in the future by achieving what the writer or the main character in the novel is dreaming of. Thus, the life of the writer is an image for all the women in her society at the time of the novel.

CHAPTER IV

4. TONI CADE BAMBARA THE FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN

4.1. Toni Cade Bambara: Life and Career

Born in 1939, in the neighborhood of Harlem, in New York City, Toni Cade Bambara was constantly encouraged to be proud of her race and focus on her creativity. Bambara left Harlem with her family at ten and spent most of her youth in such cities as Brooklyn and Queens as well as in New Jersey. Studying English and Theater Arts at Queen's College, Bambara graduated in 1959 and pursued a master's degree in American studies at City College in New York and as a program director at Colony Settlement House, an organization that provided social services to immigrants (Yoo, 2019: 1).

Bambara's first influential literary contribution came with her editing of *The Black Woman* which was a successful anthology by a number of emerging African-American women writers of fiction, poems and essays including such prominent writers Alice Walker and Nikki Giovanni. Bambara published her first collection of short fiction, *Gorilla, My Love*, in 1972 followed, over the next decade, by a second collection of short stories and a novel. Bambara's constant travels in Europe, Vietnam, and Cuba, among other places both inspired and influenced her writing through which she extensively depicted the lives and experiences of different groups of people against racial and ethnic oppression.

In 1986, she narrated the award-winning documentary *The Bombing of Osage Avenue* which chronicles the bombing by the police of the headquarters of MOVE, a Philadelphia black organization. In 1993, Bambara was diagnosed with colon cancer but continued to write despite her illness from she died in 1995 while collaborating on a documentary about W. E. B. DuBois. One novel, *These Bones Are Not My Child*, was published posthumously. (Ibid).

4.2. Feminist Bildungsroman in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Lesson*

The Lesson is one of the important short stories in Bambara's influential short-story collection, *Gorilla, My Love*. The short story acclaims the African American culture and community juxtaposing it with the white ones through making the characters to reconsider the established set of social values and mores.

Written in the first person point of view, *The Lesson* is told by Sylvia, a young black girl who grows up in Harlem in an unspecified time period known only as "Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only ones just right" (Bambara, 1992: 9). However, considering the prices of the goods at the markets to which the children are taken, one can assume that it is some point in the early seventies. The story is about a trip initiated by Miss Moore, a well-educated woman who has taken it upon herself to introduce the neighborhood's unappreciative children to the world outside of their marginalized culture. The destination is the Schwarz Toy Store of the FAO in Manhattan, where the kids are surprised at the costly prices.

The well-intended Miss Moore uses the trip to show how unfair the economic and social systems are in America which causes unfair access to money and resources for black Americans. The story ends with Sylvia seeking to rethink the events of the day emphasizing that individuals who are segregated to certain environments should not be condescended to, as Miss Moore, the educated outsider, creates resistance with her patronizing (Friedman, 2011: 1).

In the discussion of Bambara's employment of feminist bildungsroman, it is important to turn to Eysturoy's 1996 definition of bildungsroman as "traditionally been defined as the somewhat autobiographical novel of formation" (1996: 8). Herrero (2017) describes the situation of bildungsroman in the 19th century in a long statement by saying that:

Published in 1972, Bambara's *The Lesson* depicts a young black lady to convey the situation of life and the difficulties she faces while growing up. A black girl, Sylvia, is the main character who grows up in Harlem, New York. The novel also introduces a well-educated woman named Miss Moore who helps black children by showing them the importance of going outside the oppressed community. Miss Moore refuses racism, injustice, social and economic systems that have been traditionally unfair to black American people and how the Black

children cannot buy expensive toys from the white markets. Miss Moore starts to educate the children and show them the importance of asking for their rights and encourages them too. The actions of the story end with making plans to change the situation of black American people, and Sylvia seeks solitude to contemplate the events of the day. So, at the end of the story, the two main characters choose two different paths that Miss Moore shows the children that there is another life rather than their poverty and injustice life (Wikipedia, 2020: 32).

4.3. Race and Community in *The Lesson*

The Lesson is considered one of the important African-American texts that is narrated using the vernacular English of African American. Bambara uses her original local dialect that was used during the 1940s and 1950s. One of the main characters is Sylvia, who is a young black woman living in New York. She is a strong girl with a strong feminist attitude towards the actions and things that happen around her. Bambara uses humour and realism at the same time to narrate Sylvia's story. Similarly, the dialect that she uses shows the pride of her ethnic and original dialect. The story is about life outside the ghetto which has unequal, injustice and unfair life towards African people. So, the children from the African society live within the white economic power, racism, ethnicity and bourgeois culture (Heller, 2003: 49).

Then, Bambara uses Sylvia to convey the feelings that she does not accept the injustice and the inferior situation that the Black African children and especially girls are living within the white American society. Also, Sylvia conveys the self-confidence and strong character and wants to show the way the African girls are strong and confident (Heller, 2003:54). The writer tells the story by describing the life of people in her time, and she describes them as old and stupid: "Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and I and Sugar were the only ones just right, this lady moved on our block with nappy hair and proper speech and no makeup." (Bambara, 1972: 1). Miss Moore is described as she is so black woman that like to make plans for the girls in her society, and asking them to do things to full their time. But, the narrator, Sugar, seems

as if she did not like her way or what she serves for them and that can be seen in the short story:

“Miss Moore was her name. The only woman on the block with no first name. And she was black as hell, kept for her feet, which were fish-white and spooky. And she was always planning these boring-ass things for us to do, as being my cousin, mostly, who lived on the block cause we all moved North the same time and to the same apartment then spread out-gradual to breathe. And our parents would yank our heads into some kind a shape and crisp up our clothes so we’d be presentable for travel with Miss Moore, who always looked like she was going to church, though she never did” (1972: 1).

The character of the narrator, Sylvia, is different from the other adults who are known as children, and her character seems strange within her neighborhood. Also, she seems rebellious and she is resistant at the lesson. As highlighted by Wesleyan University (2020), *The Lesson* focuses on the socioeconomic differences in the society and states that Sylvia is not like Miss Moore because she is different; she is not an educated woman, do not go to the church and she always exposes the children to the socioeconomic differences and what their parents are unable to do. Furthermore, the culture and the interests are different from Miss Moore and her students especially Sylvia who are not concerned about the future and a free-spirited child. Miss Moore is a meticulous adult. So, Sylvia always tries to ruin the lesson and stop the teacher from completing it, but Miss Moore is a successful person who can make her message passing even if Sylvia is confused. That can be shown from the story in the following narration:

“So, we heading down the street and she’s boring us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money ain’t divided up right in this country. And then she gets to the part about us all poor and live in the slums which I don’t feature. And I’m ready to speak on that, but she steps out in the street and hails two cabs just like that. Then she hustles half the crew in with her and hands me a five-dollar bill and tells me to calculate 10 percent tip for the driver. And we’re off. Me and Sugar and Junebug and Flyboy hanging out the window and hollering to everybody, putting lipstick on each other cause Flyboy a faggot anyway, and making farts with our sweaty armpits. But I’m mostly trying to figure how to spend this money. But they are

fascinated with the meter ticking and Junebug starts laying bets as to how much it'll read when Flyboy can't hold his breath no more. Then Sugar lays bets as to how much it'll be when we get there" (1972: 2).

Miss Moore focuses on the socioeconomic differences and she wants the girls to notice that when she asked: "Then Miss Moore ask what it cost. So, we all jam into the window smudging it up and the price tag say \$300." (1972: 3). Furthermore, Sylvia has a strong character as she is planning and has self-confidence and she wants to be a leader for her friends:

So, I'm stuck. Don't anybody want to go for my plan, which is to jump out at the next light and run off to the first bar-b-que we can find. So, then she asks how long take for Big Butt and June bug to save up their allowances. "Too long," I say. "Yeh," adds Sugar, "outgrown it by that time." And Miss Moore say no, you never outgrow learning instruments. "Why, even medical students and interns and," blah, blah, blah. And we ready to choke Big Butt for bringing it up in the first damn place (1972: 3).

Also, the narrator describes the actions of Miss Moore as follow, "So this one-day Miss Moore rounds us all up at the mailbox and its puree hot and she's knocking herself up about arithmetic. And school supposed to let up in summer I heard, but she doesn't ever let up" (1972, 1). The plans and descriptions of Miss Moore are really strange: "Miss Moore say, presenting it to us in the voice she uses at the museum. "Let's look in the windows before we go in. I beg your pardon," say Miss Moore, and we fall out. So, she leads us around the windows of the toy store and me and Sugar screaming, "This is mine, that's mine, I gotta have that, that was made for me, I was born for that," till Big Butt drowns us out" (1972: 2).

Sylvia is a poor girl and she always tries to seem careless, self-confident and do not care of the actions around her or the high prices or the things that Miss Moore showed them, and seen to the high-class people in her society. Even though Sylvia dreams to have a rich life and the rights that the white people have, she seems strong and careless. Therefore, the poverty of the black African American students is clear in the text as seen in this example from *The Lesson*, "I don't even have a desk," says Junebug. "No. And I don't get no homework neither," says Big Butt. On the other hand, the richness of white American

students is clear as in the following example: “I do,” says Mercedes. “I have a box of stationery on my desk and a picture of my cat. My god” (Bambara, 1972: 3). Sylvia plans to leave the place and to go to another place to be rich and to live a peaceful life that nobody can beat her as shown in the following example: “We start down the block and she gets ahead which is O.K. by me cause I’m going to the West End and then over to the Drive to think this day through. She can run if she wants to and even run faster. But ain’t nobody gonna beat me at nuthin” (Bambara, 1972: 7).

Interestingly, Sylvia feels nervous about seeing expensive things and she cannot own them because she is a poor girl. But she also feels nervous in a way that she hides the weakness that she is feeling towards poverty: “Then Sugar run a finger over the whole boat. And I’m jealous and want to hit her. Maybe not her, but I sure want to punch somebody in the mouth.” (Bambara, 1972: 5) Moreover, the pride that Sylvia pretends in the situation of seeing expensive things or when she feels that she is a poor girl:

Watcha bring us here for, Miss Moore?” “You sound angry, Sylvia. Are you mad about something?” Givin me one of them grins like she tellin a grown-up joke that never turns out to be funny. And she’s lookin very closely at me like maybe she plannin to do my portrait from memory. I’m mad, but I won’t give her that satisfaction. So, I slouch around the store bein very bored and say, “Let’s go”. (1972: 5).

Sylvia and Sugar have a dialogue while they are looking at the prices of the toys and accounting what the prices of one of that toys can do for them and their families:

Me and Sugar at the back of the train watchin the tracks whizzin by large then small then gettin gobbled up in the dark. I’m thinkin about this tricky toy I saw in the store. A clown that somersaults on a bar then does chin-ups just cause you yank lightly at his leg. Cost \$35. I could see me askin my mother for a \$35 birthday clown. “You wanna who that costs what?” she’d say, cocking her head to the side to get a better view of the hole in my head. Thirty-five dollars could buy new bunk beds for Junior and Gretchen’s boy. Thirty-five dollars and the whole household could go visit Grand-daddy Nelson in the country. Thirty-five dollars would pay for the rent and the piano bill too. Who are these people that spend that much for performing clowns and \$1000 for toy sailboats?

What kinda work they do and how they live and how come we ain't in on it? (Bambara, 1972: 6).

At the same time, despite the pride that Miss Moore has towards the life of rich people, and the hope that they will be rich one day, as she shows the girl the expensive things outside their poverty and poor life. She asks herself a question that highlights that she is trying to make herself strong in front of the richness and the prices that the people can pay to have something: "Where we are is who we are, Miss Moore always pointin out" (Bambara, 1972: 6).

Sylvia describes the lecture of Miss Moore as a boring lecture that she and her friends do not like and is waiting for it to finish every time. This description of the feeling that the women has towards learning and culture because they are living in a poor society that has lost many things that they need, and the things that Miss Moore is talking with them about not being there for them at the current time, but she is trying to encourage them and make them aware of what the world has outside the borders that has been built in their limited and isolated society that suffer from racism, ethnicity and poverty:

Miss Moore lines us up in front of the mailbox where we started from, seem like years ago, and I got a headache for thinkin so hard. And we lean all over each other so we can hold up under the draggy ass lecture she always finishes us off with at the end before we thank her for borin us to tears. But she just looks at us like she readin tea leaves. Finally, she says, "Well, what did you think of F.A.O. Schwarz?" (Bambara, 1972: 6).

It is important to mention that the African American women are described in the story as having feeling of hatred to the culture and life-style of the white people as white people similarly hate their culture and life-style. So, they want to live in a rich life in the same manner as the white people but they do not like them or they do not dream to be like them and having their folk. That can be seen in the following statement from the novel: "Rosie Giraffe mumbles, "White folks crazy" (Ibid). So, the poor girls are feeling strange about people buying expensive possessions and if they can have that amount of money in the future. In contrast, the writer shows what the rich student says about going back to the expensive place and buys the things that she wants with the money that she will receive in her birthday, "Imagine for a minute what kind of society it is in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family

of six or seven. What do you think?”, “I’d like to go there again when I get my birthday money” (Ibid).

The sense of jealousy is too clear between the rich students and the poor ones. Especially, when the rich students say that their families can buy for them what they want and the poor ones know that their poor families cannot do that for them. That is clear in the following example: “That much money it should last forever,” I figure. “My father’d buy it for me if I wanted it.” “Your father, my ass,” say Rosie Giraffe getting a chance to finally push Mercedes. “Must be rich people shop here,” say Q.T. (Bambara, 1972: 4).

Miss Moore encourages the girls to establish solid careers and have money to change their situations from poverty to richness or even to have what they want to have without feeling that they cannot have. The following sentence highlights what Miss Moore tells her students: “It’s important to have a work area all your own so that . . .” (Ibid). The pride of the African girl Sylvia is not the same with her friends. So, her friend Sugar thinks of stealing expensive things:

Can we steal?” Sugar asks very serious like she’s getting the ground rules squared away before she plays. “I beg your pardon,” say Miss Moore, and we fall out. So, she leads us around the windows of the toy store and me and Sugar screamin, “This is mine, that’s mine, I gotta have that, that was made for me, I was born for that,” till Big Butt drowns us out. “Hey, I’m goin to buy that there” (Ibid: 2).

Furthermore, the limited culture of the African girls is illustrated in the text as they do unsuitable things in unsuitable places. Also, they want to put makeup and live in a way that can be described in a messy way. That can be seen in the following statement from the story: “Me and Sugar and Junebug and Flyboy hanging out the window and hollering to everybody, putting lipstick on each other cause Flyboy a faggot anyway, and making farts with our sweaty armpits” (Bambara, 1972: 2).

In the same manner, Gates (1983) confirms that *The Lesson* is one of the texts that draws the picture of the African American women, life and culture through the utilization of African American vernacular that the writers use in writing their works. Also, the language that is used has a sense of humor, silence and ignorance all of that is considered as a part of the African culture. Furthermore, Sylvia is the character who seems conscious about her situation

as a black girl that is living in a white American society. So, she stated by being silent because she is resisting the English language of imperialism. In addition, some of the African American writers think that English language cannot be effective as their vernacular do, and that seems normal because the person can convey his/her feeling by their own language or the language that they accustomed to use.

The theme of the story is to focus on education, and how discomfort learning can lead to the positive change in the future. Miss Moore empowers her students, educating them and giving them an image about the real life. Also, she dreams together with her students of a future free from ideologies of ethnicity and racism and she constantly tries to give them hope. It seems clear that the characters in the story are clearly aware of their self-identity and they are conscious of the situation that they live in the American white community that has different culture, dialect, habits and even different economic status.

To sum up, *The Lesson* is a call of pride, hope, dream, conscious, awareness, having a look to the world around us, to be proud of oneself and do not lose hope even if the situation is not good. In addition, the reconstruction of the characters and the planning for new, rich and happy life is started even if it is not happened before the end, Furthermore, the feminist Bildungsroman is employed in a substantial style to build an image for the characters and change it or enable them to have what they dreamt of for the future.

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon recent feminist literary theory and criticism, this thesis has investigated the de-/re- construction of the genre of feminist bildungsroman in three selected novels including Audre Lord's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Lesson*. Close formal and thematic discussions of the novels have shown that all of these novels are clear examples of feminist bildungsroman due to their emphasis on the representation of the maturation processes of female characters and their transformation from voiceless victims of ideologies of racism, ethnicity, sexism and class distinctions to strong independent women who are fully aware of their identity and self-actualization. The content of the above novels has conveyed the hard life that the main characters have lived through the different stages of their lives, especially at the first stages.

In accordance with recent male, female, and African American Bildungsroman and feminist theoretical frameworks, this study has offered close textual analyses of African American and Mexican American women's novels of selfhood portraying various forms of self-development to illustrate the struggles that African American and Mexican American women are exposed to in their journey toward self-identity. This thesis has highlighted the importance of employing the elements and definitions of the feminist Bildungsroman as part of the analysis when evaluating the fictional works by women writers of the African and Mexican origins. Since the genre has become a direct reflection of the society and its various struggles, it has been argued through the selected texts that feminist Bildungsroman can rightfully be described as a manifestation of women's various agonies as well as aspirations.

Through the re-evaluation of life-writing narratives and the involvement of persona experiences, the selected texts have offered an increasingly reflective model of female development and of female maturation. It has been argued that the three writers in question, namely, Lorde, Cisneros and Bambara have established coming out stories of female protagonists who learn from the tragedies in their lives and the various layers of

racial, sexual and class oppression and achieve some form of self-identity by the end of the books. In the process, these writers reveal how the maturation process of Black adolescents has been complicated by "race," gender, and class as they exist in a racist society. In the end, this literary study reveals how young Black girls, as portrayed in novels, strive to establish healthy cultural and individual identities amid the prevalence of racism and sexism in their lives.

The paper has traced the complicated personal development and maturation of Audre, Esperanza, and Sylvia as black women attempting to challenge inferiority and stand against the various forms and layers of abuse and subjugation practiced against them in their racist and sexist communities. In confirmation with the increasing adherence within feminist literary and cultural studies on women's literary discourses and the revival of its social function to bring about a critical analysis of contemporary feminist novels, this thesis has explored the attempt of women writers of ethnic origins, namely African American and Mexican, to re-formulate established fictional genres to initiate reacting genres that better manifest the heterogeneity of women's experiences.

As asserted in the study, the novels have also depicted such aspects as strength, freedom, dignity, education, working and ambition which have a substantial impact on the daily life of the characters. The thesis has focused on the characteristics of the feminist bildungsroman determining that it is a valid literary genre employed specifically by ethnic writers given its suitability for the representation of troubled and unsmooth processes of growing up. This has been done by exploring what is a bildungsroman and what are the differences between male and female bildungsroman. The goal has been to show that the female bildungsroman is a legitimate novelistic form and that the selected novels are perfect examples.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Name : Haliz Abdulkareem Yousif ALSALEEM
Gender : Female
Marital Status :
Date of birth :
Place of birth :
Recent address : -----
Phone # :
Email : _____

Educational Background: -

Bachelor of English language dept. at University of Duhok.
Master Degree of English Language and Literature (M.E.L.L.) at University of (Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi).

Languages spoken: -

Kurdish (Mother Tongue).	Fluently
Arabic in reading and writing.	Fluently
English in reading and writing.	Fluently
Turkish in reading and writing	Fair

Employment history:-

- Worked as receptionist at World Health Organization (WHO)
/2003
- Worked for Civil Rights Organization as International Relations Officer
/2004-2006
- Worked as English teacher for Duhok High school for girls
/2005
(Evening classes)
- Worked as English teacher in Classical school of the Meds
/2006
- Currently I work for University of Duhok/College of Basic Education
/since 2007

Special Skills:-

- 1- Use of Computer, Photocopier, Camera and different type of printers
- 2- Good experienced in Microsoft Office (Windows, Word, Excel and PowerPoint)

VAN YÜZÜNCÜYIL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
LİSANSÜSTÜ TEZ ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

Tez Başlığı/Konu:

29/01/2020

FEMINIST BILDUNGSROMAN IN AUDRE LORDE'S ZAMI: A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME, SANDRA CISNEROS' THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET AND TONI CADE BAMBARA'S THE LESSON

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu belirlenen tez çalışmamın Kapak sayfası, Giriş, Ana bölümler ve Sonuç bölümlerinden oluşan toplam (59) sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 29/01/2020 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından, Türitin intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtreleme uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinalite raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı %19 (Dokuz) dur.

Uygulanan Filtreler Aşağıda Verilmiştir:

- Kabul ve onay sayfası hariç,
- Teşekkür hariç,
- içindekiler hariç,
- Simgeler ve kısaltmalar hariç,
- Gereç ve yöntemler hariç,
- Kaynakça hariç,
- Alıntılar hariç,
- Tezden çıkan yayınlar hariç,
- kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 7 words)

Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Tez Orijinalite Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılmasına ilişkin Yönergeyi inceledim ve bu yönergede belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içmediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim. Gereğini bilgilerinize arz ederim.

08/02/ 2021

Haliz Abdulkareem Yousif ALSALEEM

Adı Soyadı : Haliz Abdulkareem Yousif ALSALEEM

Öğrenci No : 179216016

Anabilimdalı : English Language and Literature

Programı : Master Thesis

Statüsü : Yüksek Lisans ☒ Doktora ☐

DANIŞMAN

ENSTİTÜ ONAYI

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aydın GÖRMEZ
08 /02/2021

UYGUNDUR

/02/2021

Prof. Dr. Bekir KOÇLAR
Director of Institute