IN SEARCH OF A BLACK FEMALE SELF: A STUDY OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND SELECT WORKS OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON AND MAYA ANGELOU

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Submitted by

Praseedha G.

Research Guide

Dr. W.S. Kottiswari

Lecturer (Sel. Gr.) in English

Mercy College, Palakkad.

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES

MERCY COLLEGE, PALAKKAD.

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Declaration

I, Praseedha G., part-time Research scholar at the Research Centre for Comparative Studies, Mercy College, Palakkad, affiliated to the University of Calicut hereby declare, that the thesis entitled, "In Search of a Black Female Self: A Study of the Autobiographies and Select Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou," which is submitted to the University of Calicut, for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a bona fide record of research done by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title or recognition.

Praseedha G.

Praseedha G.

Research Centre for Comparative Studies
Mercy College
Palakkad

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, "In Search of a Black Female Self: A Study of the Autobiographies and Select Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou," submitted to the University of Calicut, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bona fide research carried out by Praseedha G., under my supervision and guidance. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

Dr. W.S. Kottiswari
Lecturer (Sel. Gr.) in English
Mercy College, Palakkad

Place: PALAKKAD
Date: 12/4/2010

DEDICATION

To my parents, Sri. K. Gopinath Kumar and Smt. V. Radha Gopinath, for being my strength and guiding light.

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Abbreviation of titles in Thesis

The following books have been referred to in this thesis as:

Dust Tracks on a Road	- *Dust Tracks*
Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica	- *Tell My Horse*
The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou	- *Collected Autobiographies*
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	- *Caged Bird*
Gather Together in My Name	- *Gather Together*
Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas	- *Singin' and Swingin'*
The Heart of a Woman	- *The Heart*
All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes	- *All God's Children*
A Song Flung Up To Heaven	- *A Song*
The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou	- *Collected Poems*

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PREFACE

The genre of autobiography and "autobiographics," the methodology of reading and writing autobiography has not been granted due recognition, although there is a huge wealth of life-narratives by people from all walks of life. The world of autobiography was first introduced to me by Dr. H. Kalpana, Reader, University of Pondicherry (former Research Guide for my M. Phil thesis), when I was trying to locate an area of study. What began as a cursory attempt at understanding "lives narrated" within works, slowly assumed a myriad of other inter-related and sometimes complicated issues through which I realised that the life writer communicated through their life-narratives.

On my visits to the I.A.C.I.S., Hyderabad, to decide upon an area for research, I had in mind a basic framework of choosing works that dealt the intrigues of lives. My search for a suitable autobiographical work was greatly assisted by my research guide Dr. W.S. Kottiswari, who suggested that I take up works of writers of literary repute by positioning the self in life- writing as a referent within their non-autobiographical works. Situated at the core of my analysis are Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou whom I regard as emblematic of a 'radical Black Female subjectivity.' In choosing these writers, I looked across generation and temporal differences to sift through and identify the women autobiographers who have made significant impact within the literary sphere and beyond to inspire the general lot.

While conducting a preliminary check on the canon of African American women autobiographers, I happened to read Maya Angelou's *Caged Bird.* The evocation of the self despite being caught within the flux of race and gender in addition to the urge to free themselves from these cages enchanted me. It was again by chance that I came across Hurston's *Dust Tracks* and since her *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was familiar to me, I considered my search over.

A general reading of these texts made me realise the complex ways in which they tried to project themselves within and outside the dictums of life-writing. These life-narratives can hardly be seen as amateur autobiography, because of the professional touch added to it. Alternatively, with the wealth and skill earned as a writer, they cleverly manipulate their marginalised selves and attempt to project an autobiographical subject – that is far from being just 'African American' and 'woman' life-narratives. Their work also presents how women can come to understand themselves as 'speaking subjects' located within historically specific, discursive social structures, to question those structures aloud, and to seek and advocate a means to change them.

The terms 'autobiography,' 'life-writing,' 'self -life -writing' and 'life-narrative' have all been used as synonyms within this thesis. There is an attempt to chalk the different positioning of the autobiographical subject within and outside the realms of stereotypical self- life-writing. The first

chapter of the thesis titled, "Positioning 'Black' 'Female' Autobiography" consists of two parts. The first part presents the backdrop that lead to the rise and development of autobiography as a genre, while highlighting the circumstances within which the African American men and women functioned. Along with the relevance of Maya Angelou and Zora Neale Hurston within the canon, a brief synopsis of the works considered for analysis within this thesis has also been added. The second part of the first chapter attempts to highlight the methods and theoretical perspectives used to expose the strategies adopted by the autobiographers in their life narration.

The second chapter titled, "Zora Neale Hurston- Re-Positioning the 'Black' and 'Female,'" makes an analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks.* The chapter attempts an analysis of the themes of 'black' and 'female' within her autobiography. The circumstances that made her negotiate her position as an Insider and Outsider and its impact on the narrated self are all taken up for analysis within this thesis.

The third chapter titled, "Maya Angelou- Centring the 'Black' and 'Female'" focuses on the serialised autobiographies of Maya Angelou. Here, attempts have been made to identify the various I's at work in crafting the life- narratives, apart from unravelling the ideology she projects in presenting the individual as part of "the collective." Angelou, while

representing the general conditions of the African Americans as the core element, also questions the dominant practices of America.

The fourth chapter entitled, "Hurston and Angelou: Reconstructing Life's Philosophy in Other Creative Forms" analyses how both these autobiographers, also creative writers, make use of common and uncommon "safe spaces" to voice the ideology that they have tried to project in their life-writing. Their non-autobiographical works such as- Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* and Maya Angelou's *The Complete Collected Poems* explores how the philosophy that they expound in their life writing is also articulated within select non autobiographical works. The fifth chapter titled "Conclusion" summarises the observations regarding how both the eminent autobiographers, using their own unique methods, craft a selfhood for themselves within the life-writing and managed to extend the same to their other artistic endeavours.

Chapter – I

Positioning 'Black' 'Female' Autobiography

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past (Marx).

The term 'autobiography' according to the *Oxford Reference Dictionary*, was coined as late as 1809 by Robert Southey who used the term while commenting on the life of a Portuguese painter, Francisco Vieura in the *Quarterly Review.* Etymologically the word "autobiography" is a compound of the Greek terms 'autos' (self), 'bios' (life), and 'graphe' (writing) (55). At its simplest, then, autobiography can be defined as "self-life-writing." There is a little of the 'self' in many other forms of art, but the self in autobiography is clearly more pronounced and distinct. A diary, memoir, journal / reminiscences and letters all deal with the same self, but from different standpoints. While a diary chalks out the day-to-day accounts of one's life they are not generally meant for publication, a memoir is developed by recording the public events with very minimal stress on the 'self.' Roy Pascal adds, " The diarist notes down what, at that moment, seems of importance to him; its ultimate, long-range significance cannot be assessed" (*Truth and Design in Autobiography* 3). In her essay, "Autobiography: A Literary Genre," Sarojini observes that a journal, on the other hand, "is written to a plan" (*Women's Writings : Text and*

Context 201), adding that it adheres to specific objectives and records only certain types of occurrences.

Autobiography is not merely a retrospective account of the autobiographer's life; it involves the shaping of the past and imposing a coherent pattern to one's life-story. There have been varied arguments regarding the segregation of autobiography as a separate genre. Yet the act of writing one's life, which may find its traces in fiction, also presents a credible claim as a distinct category. The early American Republic witnessed vast outpouring of personal narratives, mainly by citizens of the new nation and others by visitors from overseas. Benjamin Franklin's account of his early life in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1793) is the most famous precursor in autobiography that led to the rise of Romanticism as a pre-condition for authentic autobiographical writing. Rousseau's *Confessions* marks the beginning of the modern Romantic autobiography. Stephen Carl Arch in his book *After Franklin: The Emergence of Autobiography in Post-Revolutionary America 1780-1830,* sees a "paradigm shift" taking place from "classic to romantic," a transition he identifies with a shift from "traditional to modern" and from "patriarchal to democratic values" (13).

Traditionally, autobiography has been viewed as a narrative of reputed men of distinction and credit. It has been seen as an outcome of an attempt to correct his public image in the form of apology, to sustain the image he has in

society, to gain public recognition or notoriety, as a means of earning one's living. This established view is largely based on readings and critical analyses of seminal texts by St. Augustine, Goethe, Jean- Jacques Rousseau, Henry Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. James Olney, an eminent critic on autobiography states that, "In the works of three authors one can trace the central line of life-writing in the western world. St. Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Samuel Beckett: each of them is crucial; no others are necessary" (*Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* 11). Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, a spiritual autobiography mirrors "his" era with "his" viewpoint, "his" ideology, "his" idea of representing the community and "his" sense of universality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions* and Samuel Beckett's *Company* romanticizes St. Augustine's subject by making it more secular and universal. The traditional development of the male autobiographical self begins in relationships, but develops into an understanding of his separateness from others.

While these are the wide-ranging rules governing the writing of the male autobiographical canon, the rules stand adapted when it focuses on the African American life narration, for, his attempt mainly focuses on 'telling a free story,' claims William L. Andrews in his, *To Tell a Free Story: : The First Century of Afro- American Autobiography, 1760-1865.* Andrews adds in his *African American Autobiography* that the nineteenth century abolitionists sponsored the publication of the narratives of escaped slaves in the belief that

the first-person account would mobilise white readers more than any other kind of antislavery discourse. The twentieth century African-American autobiography was also written with the potential to liberate the white reader from racial prejudice, ignorance and fear (*African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* 1).

The African American Slave Tradition was highly constraining and hence they developed a distinct tradition of their own. Slave narratives, document slave life primarily in the American South from an invaluable perspective of first-hand experience, as a historical source. Increasingly in the 1840s and 1850s they reveal the struggles of people of colour in the North, as fugitives from the South recorded the disparities between America's ideal of freedom and the reality of racism in the so-called "free states." The genre of autobiography also serves a means through which the mystified image of a Negro being 'savages, brutes and illiterates' is decentred. Some of the famous African Americans who heralded the male autobiographical tradition were Henry Bibb through his *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1850), Solomon Northup's *Twelve years a Slave* (1863), *Narrative of the Rev. Noah Davis* (1859) by Rev. Noah Davis, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860) by William and Ellen Craft, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892) by Fredrick Douglass were some of the fore runners of the Slave Narrative Tradition.

Booker T, Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folks* (1903), James Weldon Johnson's *Along This Way* (1933), *Black Boy* (1937) by Richard Wright, Claude McKay's *A Long Way from Home* (1937), Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (1940) are all capture the feeling of namelessness and insecurity that haunted the African American ethos. The autobiographical subject in this tradition does not attempt to valorise life like its western counterpart. Instead, individual rebellion, alienation, and success against all odds form recurrent themes in this tradition. James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), Langston Hughes' *I Wonder as I Wander* (1964), Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), Leslie Alexander Lacy's *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro* (1970), all signify the growth of new radicalism. It reawakened a sense of new political commitment to their cause by openly criticising the dealings of capitalistic societies.

The universalizing agenda of the western male autobiographical subject and "the sense of individual rebellion of the African American tradition," as Couser calls it in his *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography,* leaves little room for the kind of multiple, contradicted subjectivities that might be encountered in women's self-life-writing. The women's autobiographical tradition began initially by appendaging their life-story to their husband's work, for it was considered that women's autobiography was just a minor, homelier tradition, just a part of the greater

and more valuable tradition, that of the male. Thus, the all – important western male tradition was considered the touchstone whereby all other heterogeneous subjects became marginalized. Mary A. Mason in her essay, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," identifies Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe* (qtd. in *Life / Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* 30) as the "first full autobiography in English by anyone, male or female." Here she draws on a number of literary conventions of the time, namely, voyage and pilgrimage literature, lives of saints, fables intermingled with dramatized episodes that resembles the picaresque novel. Margaret Cavendish's question, "Why hath this lady writ her own life?" (qtd. in *Life / Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* 19) evokes questions regarding the space specified for women to voice their concerns in life-writing. Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle's "The True Relation of My Birth and Breeding" in *The Life of William Cavendish (Duke of Newcastle),* was first published as an appendix to her husband's republished autobiography *The Life of William Cavendish (Duke of Newcastle).*

Estelle Jelinek lists three prominent types of women autobiographers in the late nineteenth century: writers, pioneers who traveled West, and feminists and reformers (*The Traditions of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* 5). While the basic doctrine within a Western male autobiographical subject is his ability to celebrate his self through individualism, a female autobiographical subject is supposed to represent her

'self' in terms of her relations to others. The re-presented feminine self within autobiography would be seen as a by-product of intersection of the various layers, such as the self in terms of class, race, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities, for, as, Chodorow in her *Reproduction of Mothering,* observes that "The basic feminine sense is a sense connected to the world, while the basic masculine sense is 'to separate,' and any deviation from the prescribed ideology was seen as a narcissistic endeavour" (54). Therefore, conventional male autobiography 'tells' the reader who the subject is. It states the identity of a man, which is understood as fixed and solid. On the other hand, women's autobiography constantly 'questions' who the writer is. It leads to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a fixed or stable identity. Rather, women's autobiography asserts that women are fluid, simultaneously employing various identities. Elizabeth W. Bruss in her *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of A Literary Genre* observes that, "Revisions to the form of conventional autobiography take shape through metaphor, myth as seen in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and metaphor in Lauren Slater's *Lying,* vignettes, communal stories, poetry, and photographs as in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*" (131).

The African American women's autobiographical tradition like other traditions is plagued by the classic statement of Sojourner Truth, who expressed the predicament of the African American slave women at the Women's Rights Convention in 1853,

> . . . Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into the barns, and no man could head me . . . and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear the lash as well . . . and ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen women and seen them most of all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard . . . and ain't I a woman? (*The Narrative and Book of Life* 120-21)

The predicament highlighted by Sojourner Truth is greatly relevant within the genre of African American autobiography, for, all these testimonies portray the role of the African American women or rather the lack of it during and after the slavery period thereby serving as important historical source. The impulse to write historical autobiography remains very strong in this particular ethnic group because, as Albert Stone puts it, "It has been the fate of numerous black Americans to have been systematically prevented from creating history" (*The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* 176). The earliest autobiographical narratives were generally pseudo-narratives of female slaves penned by whites. The African American autobiographer assumes the role of a social and political commentator by placing their selves as a bridge between the races, whether as mistress, as maid, a nurse or as humanist. Nellie Y. McKay, in "The Narrative of Self: Race, Politics, and Culture in Black American Women's Autobiography,"

suggested a different perspective of reading autobiographies of African American women. They must be read in their specific and historical context of gender and race, because the self of African American women is different from the self of African American men, but also from the self of middle–class, white women (qtd. in *Women, Autobiography, Theory – A Reader* 96).

Some of the few outstanding life-writing narratives by female African Americans are Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828* (1850), Harriet Jacobs' *The Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861), Harriet Tubman's *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869). These narratives echo the pain and helplessness on living as a slave. Annie L. Burton's *Memories of Childhood Slavery Days* (1919), Ida B. Wells' *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (1928), Mary Church Terrell's *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940) present the life story of women who try to define themselves in the early twentieth century. Angela Davis' *With My Mind on Freedom: An Autobiography* (1974), Lorraine Hansberry's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969), Gwendolyn Brooks' *Report from Part One: The Autobiography of Gwendolyn Brooks* (1972), Bell Hooks, *Bone Black: Memories of Childhood* (1996), Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (1988), Bebe Moore Campbell's *Sweet Summer: Growing Up with and without My Dad* (2000) presents the life narratives in the later half of the twentieth century.

The usual theme within the African American female autobiographical tradition is the attempt to create an identity of a mother and fierce protectoress. Helen M. Buss, in her "Reading for the Doubled Discourse of American Women's Autobiography" points out that, "A major part of the energy was directed towards debunking the racist, gender ideology of the white culture" (*A/B: Auto/ Biography Studies* 95). Therefore they find other space through which they can articulate themselves more freely using the networks such as the church, bonding with elder women of the community etc.

The presentation of the self in all autobiographies, no matter how progressive or radical, are always produced in retrospect. Hence writing one's autobiography will always necessitate selection and introspection before charting out special moments and turning points that justify and make possible the telling of a life story. The typical important moments captured within any autobiography are: first childhood memories, going to school, first love, first time you became conscious of your gender, your race, your class, or your sexuality, your first experience of death, your first job, the first time you questioned a cherished belief or thought about something in a new way, and so on. Likewise, Paul Paul Eakin maintains that autobiography is a process "in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness" (*Fictions in Autobiography* 5). When an autobiographer retroactively thinks of his/her life in terms of important turning points, they do so because they want to show

how they have changed, how they got to the place they are now at, and to frame what would otherwise be a continuous and undifferentiated outpouring of our life experiences. But the moments they choose to foreground are not innately more important than any others. They are constructed to be important.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks* and Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies are the self-life- writing works examined in this thesis, for, they offer a context for discovering personal identity by giving them space and voice to portray their own culture through deliberate selection of events. Their works were chosen due to the multiplicity in treatment of self by centering and de-centering dominant ideology mainly with regard to racial and sexual categorizations.

Hurston was a novelist, anthropologist, playwright, essayist, and key figure in what is now termed the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic and political movement of the African Americans centered on Harlem, New York in the 1920-30s. Born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, her family soon moved to Eatonville, Florida, the first all-black incorporated town in the United States. Hurston's novels, including, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Mules and Men*, provide an example of a creative writer's journey into the realm of the African American experience, through which the reader is made aware of the relationship between social forces and the construction of identity. Some of her other works include, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching*

God, Tell My Horse, Moses, Man of the Mountain, Seraph on the Suwanee, "Spunk", "Color Struck: A Play," "Sweat," "The Gilded Six-Bits," "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience," How it Feels to be a Colored Me, Hoodoo in America, Mule Bone, Mules and Men, Mrs. Doctor among other collections of plays and short stories.

Dust Tracks was written through 1941 and the early 1942. In its early chapters she recounts her childhood at Eatonville, Florida, the only incorporated, all-black township in America. Her father, John Hurston had been the town's alderman and three times its Mayor. He had written many of the laws in the late 1800s, which are still observed to the present day, and was also the moderator of the South Floridian Baptist Association. Her mother, Lucy Ann Potts had fallen in love with an "over- the- creek nigger," John Hurston and had eloped with him much against her parents' wish. She describes her infancy as a delightful period that she cherishes throughout her life due to its secure and carefree air. Her mother who had been instrumental in building her spirit urged her "to jump at de sun." Her father she recalls as a person who is pivotal in bringing about the change in Eatonville. When Zora was nine year old, her mother's death and father's remarriage lead the outspoken Hurston to leave home. Life changes drastically and young Zora, her brothers and sisters drift apart. Her brothers and sisters go back to school while young Zora although underaged is sent to the school at Jacksonville. Her father ask the school to adopt her, for, young Zora is not liked by the new

Mrs. Hurston. The school authorities refuse to take her in, and she is sent away with little money. She tries to get a job as a maid in some households and finally becomes a maid to a prominent performer. When the performer quits, Zora finds herself out of job and tries a hand as a waitress, and finally gets admittance at the Night High School at Baltimore. She is also offered a seat later at Howard University, which is considered the capstone of Negro education in the African American world. While at the University she worked part-time in a barber's shop. The final part of her book is devoted to some of the important issues such as friendship with Fanny Hurst and Ethel Waters, her love life and marriage, the contradictions within race and religion etc. *Dust Tracks* follows Zora Neale Hurston from childhood to adulthood, from storyteller to writer, from student to teacher, and from a woman of values from the community to a woman of her own independent values that reflect back to the community.

Mules and Men, the other work chosen in this thesis is a treasury of African American folklore as collected by Hurston, a famous storyteller and anthropologist who grew up hearing the songs and sermons, sayings and tall tales that have formed an oral history of the South since the time of slavery. Returning to her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, to gather from within the social context of African American life, the stories, "big old lies," songs, Voodoo customs, and superstitions recorded in these pages capture the imagination of the readers. It also contains many sayings, fragments of songs, rhymes and legends etc. *Mules and Men* is seen as a lasting monument to the

African American people. Her work, *Tell My Horse* is the second non - autobiographical work taken for consideration in this thesis, it documents the anthropological research in folklore, Hoodoo and the like in the Caribbean- focusing mainly on Haiti and British West Indies. The Voodoo rituals and the secret behind the zombies provide insights into the politics, sociology, and anthropology of Haiti and Jamaica.

Maya Angelou (original name Marguerite Johnson), was born to Vivian Baxter and Bailey Johnson at St. Louis, Missouri on April 4, 1928. She is an acclaimed poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director. In 1993, Angelou became the second poet and first African American in U.S. history to write and recite original work at a Presidential Inauguration. She has received the Mother Teresa Award - 2006 for her service to humanity; and has several honors and degrees to her credit. Her important works include a multi-volume collection of autobiographies, entitled the *Collected Autobiographies*, include *Caged Bird,* 1970; *Gather Together*, 1974; *Singin' and Swingin'*, 1976; *The Heart*, 1981; *God's Children*, 1986, *A Song,* 2002. A few of her non-fiction works include short story collections namely, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, 1993; *Lessons in Living*, 1993; *Even the Stars Look Lonesome*, 1997.

Her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* remains till date one of her best loved works. Marguerite Johnson and her brother Bailey

are sent to Arkansas by their parents when she is three to live with their father's mother, Mrs. Henderson / Momma who is strictly religious, and owns a general store where the children are expected to work. Then their father arrives suddenly, and takes them to St. Louis to stay with their mother. Unfortunately her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman begins to molest, and finally rapes young Maya. Soon after he is discovered, and mysteriously killed, probably by her mother's family, young Maya believes it is all her fault, and stops talking for a long time. She and her brother are sent back to Stamps, where she meets Mrs. Flowers, who teaches her that speech and writing are beautiful and important. Momma decides that Maya and Bailey have to go to California to be with their parents. She doesn't know why, but she thinks it's because Bailey has seen, up close, a dead black man and a white man who is happy to see the man dead. She reads some lesbian literature and, not understanding her developing body and mind thinks she is a lesbian. She approaches a popular boy and asks him to have sex with her, and three weeks later finds she is pregnant. She has the baby, and is afraid of hurting it for a while, but soon realizes that as long as she has good intentions, her instinct will help her care for it.

Following her highly acclaimed first autobiography Maya Angelou writes her second volume *Gather Together* which is set at the time of World War II. Angelou, still known as Marguerite / Rita, has just given birth to her son, Guy, and is living with her mother and stepfather in San Francisco. The book follows Marguerite from the ages of 17 to 19, through a series of

relationships, occupations- as an "absentee manager" for two lesbian prostitutes, a failed attempt to enlist in the Army, with descriptions of cities visited as she attempts to raise her son and find a place for herself in the world. It continues exploring the themes of her isolation and loneliness, and ways she devises to overcome racism, sexism, and her continued victimization.

Singin' and Swingin,' the third volume of her life narration, shows Maya, at 22, with a five year old Clyde, working as a salesgirl in a music store Melrose Record Store after Louise Cox (a white woman) the part owner of the store offers her a job. Her suspicious nature regarding the whites takes a back seat as she befriends Louise Cox and later courts and marries a Greek ex-navy man Tosh Angelos. The marriage ends when Tosh admits that he was "tired of being married." The separation from Tosh leaves both Clyde and Maya broken hearted. She gets hospitalised later for an appendectomy and wishes to move to her grandmother's to heal in body and spirit. But she is horrified to learn of her death. She gets a job as a dancer in a night club. Later she joins *Purple Onion*, a dance troupe. Here, she christens herself as 'Maya Angelou' and becomes a popular dancer at the club. She details all her experiences at various places such as Italy, France, Yugoslavia, Belgrade etc. She is forced to cut short her visit when she learns of Clyde's bad health. Later she receives an offer as a dancer in Hawaii which she gladly accepts. She then takes Guy alongwith her to the island.

The Heart, the fourth of her multi-volume autobiography, speaks of her acquaintance with Billie Holiday, a one time famous singer and dancer. Through her friend Abbey Lincoln she meets John Killens, a script writer, who encourages her to move to New York City to try a hand at writing. Here she joins the Harlem Writers' Guild, and later the Apollo Theater and sings calypso songs. She also helps to raise money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and decides to help the cause by staging a play. The performance gets noticed but life does not change. Maya Angelou later becomes the co-ordinator at SCLC. But she quits her job marries Vus Make, a revolutionary African freedom fighter and attends the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage, CAWAH meetings regularly. On hearing the news of Patrice Lumumba, a Congolese diplomat's assassination, African americans decide to show their solidarity by staging a protest at the UN General Assembly. Maya is offered the role of a black queen in Genet's play, *The Blacks*. The show is a success and is enjoyed even by the whites. Her relation with Vus begins to strain due to his indiscretions and she decides to end her marriage. Guy graduates from high school and seeks admission at the Ghanaian University for further studies. Unfortunately, he meets with an accident and is hospitalised for a long period. The book ends with his health improving and his admittance at the Ghanaian University after passing an entrance examination.

God's Children is the fifth of her multi-volume autobiography that begins at Ghana. Here she gets a job as a secretary at the University while Guy

joins the college and begins his studies. She also becomes a part-timer at the *Ghanaian Times* office. The African Americans are under the scanner due to the attempt on the life of Kwame Nkrumah. This makes her predicament in Ghana worse. When Maya comes to know of the march proposed by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in support of the African Americans struggle for freedom, she and her friends decide to organize a parallel march in Ghana in tandem with King's march at the US. An incident that makes her aware of the love-hate relationship for her homeland is when she sees the American flag being hoisted amidst booing and jeering from the Ghanaian crowd. This experience drains Maya emotionally and physically. She has a meeting with Malcolm X at Ghana. She decides to accept the offer of Malcolm X as the co-ordinator of Organisation of African American Unity in the United States. Before she leaves, she feels that she has inadvertently stumbled and found her roots when she meets a native woman, who tells her that she resembles a friend who was shipped off to America as a slave.

The last volume of her autobiography *A Song,* begins with Angelou's decision to join the radical revolutionary movement of Malcolm X., the Organisation of African American Unity. While on a visit to San Francisco she learns about the assassination of Malcolm X and is greatly disturbed to see that the majority of the African Americans unconcerned over his death. Terror strikes once again with the murder of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. She designs a TV series called "Blacks, Blues, Blacks," to present proudly upstanding free blacks. Robert Loomis of Random House proposes that she write her

autobiography. Initially she refuses, only to give in to his challenge to write autobiography. Later, she accepts the challenge and begins to write the first lines of the *Caged Bird.*

Apart from her life narratives, her collection of poems entitled, *Complete Collected Poems* has been taken up for analysis within this thesis to find the common tropes that Angelou uses in her life narrative and poems to celebrate her African American female self.

MULTIPLE CODINGS OF "I"

Writing one's life seems an apparently simple task, for, the autobiographer "is writing about what he knows best- his life" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 1). But autobiography as a genre is very difficult to define. This is because it is an exploration of one's life experience, although, "the 'self' is said to be elusive, 'identity' changeable, and 'life' incomprehensible," (*Female Journeys* 1*).* Women's self- life - writing / life narrative finds its roots in the effort to find a voice and re-define one's self to the world at large.

The positioning of the autobiographical subject plays a significant role in the formulation of all autobiography, for, "the major epistemological issues of our time are raised in connection with the nature of 'selves' - on how to understand and how to study them, under what kind of intellectual conditions *Reproduction of Mothering Feminist Auto/Biography* 5). Autobiography in

general, as a genre, can be a site for pondering two types of questions, namely, theoretical issues dealing with the self or the subject, and empirical issues regarding race, gender, class and working life. This thesis attempts to combine the two approaches- the theoretical and the empirical in an attempt to find the reason underlying their strategies of self-representation. This would, "allows us to recognize that the *I* is multiply coded in a range of discourses: it is the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of 'identity,' multiple figurations of agency" (*Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* 184). The acceptance and recognition of multiple subjects- as a result of race, gender, education, culture etc, implies that there is not a unique concept of subjectivity such as the –Western, white and middle class– but that there are alternatives to this model. These alternatives make possible a shift from an uncritical understanding and acceptance of a single model of autobiographical self to the recognition of diversity.

Formerly, the autobiographical contract affirmed "the 'identity' between the names of the author, narrator and protagonist" (*On Autobiography* 27). This idea of a stable, unitary, transparent self of the Pre-Renaissance period has been deconstructed in the Post-Structurally inspired discussions about the self. Complexity marks the act of writing by the autobiographical I as, the writer becomes split into "both as the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader.* 1). To put this in perspective, telling one's life story involves, "A narrator here and now telling about a protagonist of the same name, there and then" (*The*

Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self Representation 39). The texts are found to mediate between two beings (writer and reader) spatially and temporally (then and now).

In analysing the positioning of the autobiographical I within Zora Neale Hurston's and Maya Angelou's life narratives, from the theoretical perspective, Smith and Watson's argument, suggesting that, "We need to think more critically about the producer of the life narrative, and proposes to go beyond the I-then and the I-now, and to look into the multiple I's, to find the ideology spoken through the I, by the flesh-and-blood-author" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 58–59). This theoretical premise has been made use of, in this thesis. Thus, within the framework of writing autobiography Smith and Watson locate four layers of the autobiographical I. Foremost, is the 'real' or *Historical I*. This is the authorial I that is assumed from the signature on the title page of the autobiography. The 'real' I is the historical person, the one producing the autobiographical I's – but it has to be remembered that this person's life is far more diverse and dispersed than the story that is being told. It is possible, to verify this I's existence, but this I is still "unknown and unknowable by readers and is not the I that we gain access to in an autobiographical narrative" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 59).

While this *Historical I*, or, in this context, Hurston / Angelou, the autobiographer, is the self in flesh and blood, the next I's are purely textual categories. The second, the *Narrating I* is the one available to readers. This is the Narrator, the 'I' who dominates the autobiographical narrative. The

Narrating I, is "neither unified not stable" but "split, fragmented, provisional, multiple, a subject always in the process of coming together and of dispersing" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 60). The third category of the autobiographical I is the *Narrated I* or the *Object I.* This category is distinguished from the *Narrating I* in such a way that, "the *Object I* is the subject of history whereas the *Narrating I* is the agent of discourse" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 60). The *Narrated I* is "the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the *Narrating I* chooses to constitute through recollection for the reader" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 61).

The fourth category, the *Ideological I*, reaches again out from the textual level and refers to broader societal, intellectual and cultural contexts. It is "the concept of personhood, culturally available to the narrator when she/he tells her/his story" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 61). Every autobiographical *Narrating I* is historically and culturally situated and each is a product of her or his particular time and experiences, hence, the autobiographical works focus around this. Smith and Watson remind us that "at any historical moment, there are heterogeneous identities culturally available to the narrator" and that "the ground of the *Ideological I* is only apparently stable and the possibilities for tension, adjustment, refixing, and unfixing are ever present" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 62). These four layers of autobiographical I are put to use within the life narratives of the two life-

narrators-cum- professional writers, Hurston and Angelou, with special emphasis on their *Ideological I.*

The African American autobiographical form is closely related to the rise and development of the slave narratives, a unique genre in American literature, which was used to tell their formerly unheard stories. This makes the genre of the life narratives of the African Americans grounded basically within the realm of the empirical. The slave narratives served as a political tool enabling individuals and groups to rewrite history into histories. Here the *Historical I, Narrating I, Narrated I* and the *Ideological I,* amongst other things, shared the pervasive longing for freedom, dignity, and self-respect. Analysing the role of the subject/ object within these works involves not only examining the cultural construction of personal identity, but also analysing the construction of one's social and cultural fabric. In many ways the retrospective accounts of Hurston and Angelou were not simply supposed to be their own individual story alone, but similar to other life narratives, thereby "representing the collective group" (*Black Autobiography in America* 14). Rosenblatt, while discussing African- American autobiography in his essay "Black Autobiography: Life as the Death Weapon," emphasizes on the same, when he states that African American autobiography actually exists as a separate genre, "Because there are discernible patterns within black autobiographies that tie them together and because the outer world apprehended by black autobiography is consistent and unique" (516). He also claims that there are two elements in African American autobiography that are constant, they are -

the expressed desire to live as one would choose as far as possible, and criticism of the external national conditions that make one's freedom of choice limited or simply non-existent" (516). Eventually, it is noticed that the life narrator has his life chalked out for him/ her even before she embarks on the job of narration.

An African American female autobiographer has to decide whether she needs to define the autobiographical I's in terms of "African- American-ness" and/ or "female-ness" or use other ideological tools, thereby making these paradigms the operational pre-requisites of the *Ideological I.* Therefore, the subject-in process is, as Elizabeth Fox- Genovese puts it, "torn between demonstrating their virtuous womanhood and their individualism" (*Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* 223). The *Narrating I,* the voice within the story in turn develops the *Object I* using the *Ideological I.* This conscious *Historical I* or the author in –flesh-and-blood could manipulate the position of the various textual I's to suit her purposes.

Liz Stanley describes the act of writing autobiography as "Ideological accounts of 'lives,' which in turn feed back into everyday understandings of how 'common lives' and 'extraordinary lives' can be recognised" (*The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* 3). She observes that the *Historical I* essentially tells the reader the story that she wants them to have and writes with that purpose, and not from the perspective of simply revealing her story to the world. The autobiographer may also resort

to chronological or achronological ordering of events inorder to bring out the desired effect in the construction of the autobiographical I. Thus, by selecting and ordering their events to the last detail the autobiographer attempts to create a well-crafted narrated self within the autobiography.

No two experiences of African American, or for that matter, any two individuals can be identical. Consequently, all members of marginalized communities quite differently recognise and re-order their narrated I's and their autobiographical subjects also demonstrates signs of the same. In analysing the use of the 'Ideological' within the life narratives, different theorists have been used depending on the backdrop in which the narratives have been penned. Hurston, being an ethnographer blurs the margins between 'ethnography' and 'autobiography,' making her self-life- writing an 'autoethnography.' In analysing her work in this light, the autoethnographic theory of Fetterman, Ellis and Brochner have been of great use.

Maya Angelou's work incorporates spiritual resistance against empirical issues. Her life-writing is therefore analysed based on the most important figure of African American Church- the African American preacher. The theory presented by Bruce A Rosenberg, is used in analyzing Maya Angelou's life narratives. The empirical issues such as racial and sexist ideology of the society that dictate power (or the lack of it) are analysed using the postulates of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Teresa de Lauretis. The *Historical I* is thereby analysed by interconnecting the empirical and the theoretical issues to

understand the presentation of the autobiographical I's that assist in the course of personal narration.

Patricia Hill Collins' suggestion that the African American female, the *Historical I* in life narratives, is plagued by,

> The prevailing images of mammy, matriarch, welfare mother and Jezebel provide the ideological justification for racial oppression, gender subordination and economic exploitation . . . Matriarchs were considered overly aggressive, emasculating, strong, independent, unfeminine women . . . The welfare mother was the woman as a breeder image . . . the Jezebel image was that of a sexually aggressive woman. (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* 31)

The life narrator has to contend with these widely prevalent 'myths' and try to represent themselves against this pre-determined ideology. The role of the reader plays an important part in determining the strategy adopted by the *Historical I*. The *Ideological I* in the life narrative also makes efforts to expose the strategies of subjugation by the American male who construct a stereotype of the African American female. The African American life writer may position her life narration deliberately outside the 'white gaze,' yet, they may be framed by the 'male gaze.' In analysing the gender postulations within these life narratives, Teresa de Lauretis' four ideological propositions such as, "Gender is (a) representation," "Gender is a construction," "Gender is

constructed by the 'State apparati' " and that "Gender is a construction and a deconstruction" (3), are of great use. An astute *Historical I* would cleverly manipulate and bring out the levels of constructions of the self in terms of gender. When they do so,

> There have always been women who cross the line between private and public utterance, unmasking their desire for the empowering self- interpretation of autobiography as they unmasked in their life the desire for publicity. Such women approach the autobiographical territory from their position as speakers at the margins of discourse. In so doing, they find themselves implicated in a complex posture toward the engendering of autobiographical narrative. (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 303)

Here, Smith quotes the dilemma of the erudite *Historical I* who understands the multiple coding of the self with regard to ideological perspectives that Collins pointed out with an inner urge to craft their *Narrated I, Narrating I,* and *Ideological I* as per their own terms. Their textual *self* becomes a "Bad Subject," to borrow Althusser's term, for they do not adhere to the dictates of dominant ideology, and are "punished" through mainstream societal ridicule, obsequy, or ostracism" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 303). Smith sees the female autobiographer as caught in a double bind: if she elects to say nothing or little, she is silenced; but when she tries speaking,

to recount her life, she goes up against all the patriarchal assumptions about what an individual self is and how its story should be told. But, as both authors use their autobiographical narratives for "expressing self-revelation" there is a shift in the way each author reveals how they reach a point of maturity (*Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* 29). These are some of the issues to be considered in the life- narratives of Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou.

Teresa de Lauretis' and Collins' systematic scientific understanding into the gendered construction and its impact on the historical narrator reveal the African American predicament as a "construction." Powerful social institutions such as religion, patriarchy, marriage, educational systems, and the like reproduce ideology in an ever-changing dynamic process. Almost all the female autobiographers underscore this biased Eurocentric ideology exposing their norms on the matters of race and gender as being predisposed and biased. An African American female autobiographer who has witnessed the patterns of hierarchy, suppression and domination based on race, class, gender and sexual orientation find ways and means through her cautious use of the textual I's to expose these myths. While doing so, they may situate themselves within the 'walls' constructed by race, class, gender, and sexual oppression follow to expose its flaws, or they may devise certain strategies that dismantle these 'walls' that inhibit their freedom.

The need to challenge and reinvent the images and thereby the identity of African American people and other people of colour, and particularly women

of colour, has led to the establishment of autobiography as a significant and principal technique of creating new images. The redefinition of the textual I's , from different ideological perspectives, through the writing of autobiography, is supposed to place power into the hands of the writer, to define who she is and to share her self-identity with the readers.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese also notes that, "The tension at the heart of black female autobiography derives in large part from the chasm between an autobiographer's intuitive sense of herself and her attitude toward her probable reader" (*Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* 74). A majority of the writers of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century were under the patronage of generous and benevolent white Master / Mistress. Their readers were by and large whites with/ without liberal views, male intellectuals, but very rarely were there African American women who read autobiographies. The politics of power alters / displaces the textual self, for, the text is a by-product of a constrained condition. Thus the presentation of the *Narrated I* and the *Ideological I* in the text are doubly distorted creating 'strained, muted, constrained or even silenced voices' (*Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* 76). Thus the clash between the ideologies of two groups decentres the real story of the *Historical I.* Here the autobiographer's work is subjected to the 'wider public gaze' and hence she compromises on her several positionings. Apart from the subject- object relationship within the construct of autobiography the third important angle remains the assumed imaginary relation to its readers.

Patricia Hill Collins identifies three spaces, "social spaces where Black women speak freely... resisting objectification of the other" (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* 95). The first is black women's relationships with one another, the second being cultural connections such as the black women's blues tradition and finally the voices of African American women authors. In order to gain a deeper understanding into the philosophy of life of Hurston and Angelou it is essential to locate the standpoint within their life-writing to 'their public safe spaces'- their non autobiographical works. This is because, these African American life narrators, also professional writers, naturally choose this domain to voice their ideology. Liz Stanley's observation regarding "inter-textuality of the genre of fiction and autobiography" is highly relevant in the case of all autobiographers especially African American women autobiographers. Hurston's novels speak more unreservedly as regards to racist and sexist ideology. Her two semi-autobiographical accounts, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* have been considered in this thesis along with her autobiography *Dust Tracks.* Maya Angelou's select poems, chosen from *Collected Poems,* have also been taken up for analysis along with her collected autobiographies. Her capacity to transcend the genre allows for deeper engagement with the politics that she cherishes in her life.

The thesis attempts to analyse how the autobiographer / writer while recounting their past, simultaneously re-construct their selves by using a

particular ideology. The thesis attempts to explore the double bind –theoretical and empirical behind the positioning of the autobiographical subject. It also tries to locate whether these I's fall within or outside the realm of conventional female African American autobiographical identity. Apart from this, the difference in the use of rhetorical devices and narrative strategies by the life narrators as they dissemble racist and sexist stereotypes in (re)constructing 'black,' 'female' subjectivity through an image of active resistance, outright protest, subtle resistance etc. are also analysed. The standpoint that they take up as a protagonist, as a victim or as an observer along with the relationship that they try to establish with their audience, all form a part of the circle between the narrator and the reader. The safe space of fiction which also allows these black women life narrators to escape and resist "objectification as the Other" (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* 101) to serve as a means of self empowerment are also focused on in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

Zora Neale Hurston- Re-Positioning the 'Black' and 'Female'

By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life. (Ellis & Bochner)

Alice Walker in her essay, "In Search of Her Mothers' Gardens," observes that Zora Neale Hurston was the "freest of all black women writers" (2376), and names her "the genius of the South" (2376). Nonetheless, she did not enjoy the literary reputation she deserved. It was Walker, who rediscovered Hurston and looks upon her as a literary foremother. However, Walker claims that her *Dust Tracks* is an "oddly, false-sounding autobiography" (*Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston* 18), while Robert Hemenway, the biographer of Zora Neale Hurston calls *Dust Tracks* as "one of the peculiar autobiographies in Afro-American literary history" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 278). The 'peculiarity' and 'oddness' that Walker and Hemenway allude to is due to the complex positioning of the textual I's that has limited grounding in the experience and literary tradition of slave narratives.

Although it announces itself as an autobiography, it also calls into question our very concept of what an autobiography is. This paradox raises questions with regard to the standard pattern to be followed in writing an African American autobiography, in general, and in writing a female African

American autobiography, in particular. This chapter attempts to capture the sense of 'oddness' that has been haunting her autobiography by placing her not as a regular autobiographer, chalking the stages of her life from nothingness to fame. Instead, her life-writing *Dust Tracks,* is seen as an attempt to place her life as an ethnographic research report that gives us an insight into the African American culture and its people, while including the Americans also within the purview.

Prior to the publication of her *Dust Tracks* she had published famous novels such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine* 1934, *Mules and Men* 1936, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1938, *Tell My Horse* 1939, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* 1941, apart from writing short stories, drama and non-fictional publications. She had worked as an anthropologist, a playwright, a high school and college drama professor, a director, a librarian, a producer, and in her latter and more impoverished years as a maid. The first African American to chronicle African American folklore and voodoo, Hurston, studied anthropology at Barnard in the 1920s under Franz Boas, who encouraged her interests in African American ethnography, a branch of anthropology. It is interesting to note the significance this had on her all her work including her life narrative.

Hurston, was therefore an established literary figure in intellectual circles even before the publication of her *Dust Tracks*. Celebrated primarily for her creative literary endeavours and vibrant personality as one of the central figures of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston's work as an

anthropologist tends to overshadow her work as a novelist, journalist and playwright, in crafting the self in her autobiography. She was wholly dedicated to the preservation of the southern African American aesthetic, travelling to some of the most remote places of the southern United States, as an ethnographer, during the early part of the twentieth century to collect and interpret the songs, stories and folklore of rural Blacks—work that was absolutely unheard of, at the time by any woman, especially a woman of colour.

It is important to understand the backdrop in which Zora Neale Hurston lived and operated to get a fair idea of the construction of the self in her *Dust Tracks*. Hurston came to New York when the Harlem Renaissance was in full bloom. This cultural movement of the 1920s integrated renowned writers such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Arna Bontemps. They, like Hurston, celebrated black culture. Historian Darwin Turner agrees that "although Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Wallace Thurman had mimicked the black of Harlem, they had been censured by sensitive African Americans who feared that ridicule would hamper their efforts to be accepted in the dominant culture" (*In a Minor Chord* 110). These 'sensitive' Harlem Renaissance figures, also saw themselves, as Pinckney puts it, in his essay "In Sorrow's Kitchen," the "guiding elite" for other African Americans (55). During this period several intellectuals, amid serious disagreements advocated different approaches to the presentation of the true essence of African American identity in their works. W.E.B. Du Bois' article *Criteria of Negro Art* brought up a

debate regarding the path to be followed by an African American artist in crafting his work. At this juncture he identified two essential criterions for the presentation of black art. He proposed that, through art, African Americans can continue and contribute to the ongoing fight 'pushing onward' against white oppression. Most importantly he advocated the principle that "all art is propaganda" and "through art they (artists) can compel recognition" (754). He strongly felt that art should be used as a platform to voice concerns regarding racial equality. Du Bois also felt that a black writer's chief concern should be on how African Americans were being portrayed to the white reader.

The intention of these detractors may have been to represent the African American experience, but, as Martin Favor correctly discriminates, "Can there ever be such a thing as the African American experience?" (*Authentic Blackness* 3). Several other eminent writers such as Alain Locke believed that the urban North African American presented the uniqueness of their identity through their ever changing phase, whereas Houston A. Baker observes that the African American's identity is defined by the Blues and the folk identity of the South. Ann duCille, criticises Baker, arguing that this exclusionary literary practice denigrates other cultural forms (*The Coupling Convention* 69). If the Harlem Renaissance was a movement set to re-define the image of the African American, it becomes important to question the portrayal of black life in the literature. Meanwhile, Zora Neale and Langston Hughes believed that the "Negro farthest down" (*Dust Tracks* 145) was the truest representative of the African experience. Hence, the sense of a single accepted ideology was still in

the offing, but the consensus among all these detractors except Hurston was that they should reflect the pathetic plight of the African American in America. While many of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance considered it their responsibility to write about the 'race problem,' Zora Neale Hurston felt that her main duty was 'to write' of the African American 'farthest down' and not to send any political messages. Indeed, Fox-Genovese in her "My Statue, My Self, " has asserted that, "Black women's autobiographies [in particular Hurston's *Dust Tracks*] suggest a tension in black women's relations to various dominant discourses" (198).

Carla Kaplan asserts that it was this counter-culture association that attributed to her quickly descending status among her contemporaries, and what set off the campaign by political strongarms to relegate her to the perimeters of the collective voice of the movement:

> This was a risky move esthetically and it was a risky move politically because it ran a foul of the main aesthetic and political tenet of the Harlem Renaissance. Most of her contemporaries, which is to say also most of her dear friends in the Harlem Renaissance, were absolutely dedicated to the notion that the literary arts were the single most important way that blacks could achieve civil rights and they would do so by showing white America that blacks were really no different. Which meant that the theater and the fiction that was considered most important in

> the Harlem Renaissance were those cultural representations that showed blacks looking like mainstream ideas of white culture, which is to say Northern, urban, middle class, professional blacks. Hurston wanted to do something altogether different. She wanted to show white and indeed black culture, a group of black Americans they had probably never heard of. So she wanted to go down into the deep south, into the sub-working class and document the lives of what she called the 'Negro farthest down.'" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* 22)

"What makes Hurston's life narration so emblematic is the capacity for self-invention . . . at a time when the terms 'black,' 'woman,' and 'artist' were never complementary" (*Women of the Harlem Renaissance* 201). This is because, her experience in ethnographic field work helped greatly in modifying her viewpoint. Ethnography, the art and science of describing a group or culture, writes about the routine, daily lives of people with an ability to keep an open mind about the group or the culture they are studying. The ethnographer must be a keen surveyor and interpreter of culture from the 'emic,' or the insider's view of reality, he must also occupy an 'etic,' or the outsider's perspective, which is also fundamental to ethnographic research. David Fetterman, an ethnographer, defines "an 'etic' perspective as the external, social scientific perspective on reality" (*Ethnography: Step by Step* 32). As an ethnographer, Hurston places empirical issues such as gender and race, as peripheral concerns with regard to the African American ethos. Instead, to her,

tradition and culture matters the most. Hence, while focusing on her life narrative as an autobiographical piece written using the tenets of ethnography; she tends to present the cultural conditions of African Americans in an American ethos.

In literature, it was the autobiography that allowed us to see ourselves differently by reading another person's experiences. By so doing, especially in the Post Modern period, autobiographies became an important genre in literature. Furthermore, Reed-Danahay names such new ethnographies as an "auto-ethnography" and says that, "Autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text as in the case of ethnography" (*Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* 9). That is, when ethnography transcends its role as a medium to describe non-western culture and society and when it gains a new role as a medium to see both ourselves and others, it begins to appear somewhere between ethnography and autobiography and makes a hybrid space in literature. Duncan M. in his essay, " Autoethnography: A Critical Appreciation of an Emerging Art" observes that, "Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point when the autobiographer understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes" (*International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* p.5). In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses be they-ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and /or class based. The subject "in history" is rendered destabilized and incoherent, a site of discursive pressures and

articulations. Autoethnography is a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity. It is a method and a text, a "form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (*Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* 9). Neumann notes the following about autoethnography:

> ... this joining of *auto* and *ethno,* of self and culture, can critique the conditions of the culture in which the self is located. In this sense, autoethnography is more than a telling of one's experience; it is a critical looking outward at power relations in a cultural space that constrains the meanings available for understanding the writer's (i.e. one's own) life and text. (*Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* 176)

Hurston's *Dust Tracks* presents the self within the African American cultural ethos from both the 'emic' and 'etic' perspective. An 'emic' (native-oriented) approach investigates how natives think, categorize the world, express thoughts, and interpret stimuli. 'Emic' on the other hand shows the "native viewpoint." Whereas an 'etic' (science-oriented) approach emphasizes the categories, interpretations, and features that the anthropologist considers important.

Neumann explains that autoethnography allows the author to critique the conditions of the culture in which the self is located. This positioning, in fact lends tension to her life-writing work, *Dust Tracks*. The self thus takes on a

political meaning, based on the dominating matrix of politics of power- thereby focusing on the culture of Americans and African Americans. A trained anthropologer, Hurston delves into various facets of the study of humanity; namely physical anthropology, ethnology, and anthropological linguistics. Thereby she tries to make her 'auto-ethno-graphy' a highly personalised account to extend understanding of a particular culture.

When analysed as a true autoethnographic work of the early twentieth century, the *Dust Tracks* ought to have been an expression of the self as an 'emic' mainly focusing on the restrictions and subjugations culturally. This is because, almost all African American autobiographers, since the seventeenth century grounded their identity focusing narrowly on racial discrimination and gender issues among African Americans. Contrary to this expectation there are very little details regarding racial tension and gender inequality in the America of 1940's and earlier. Instead, as Crispin Sartwell astutely observes, the *Dust Tracks,* "Stands as a monument of resistance to all impositions of specific forms of visibility" (*Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography and White Identity* 123). Thereby, the *Historical I*, or the author in flesh and blood, formulates "resistances to all impositions" by re-creating her life narrative in terms of autoethnography. When she was urged to write her own autobiography she made it an 'autoethnography'- an ethnographic description written by a member of the African American culture.

In assessing the rhetorical strategies behind her 'ethno-personal' writing, a highly relevant argument by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson regarding the act of life-narration by the life narrator needs to be considered. They feel that the autobiographer or the autoethnographer, as in this case, becomes split into "both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 1). As a trained anthropologer, Hurston's Barnard education plays a key role in deciding the course of the *Narrating I* in her life-writing exercise. Hurston draws upon keen insights and observations gained from her anthropological research in crafting her autoethnography which combines autobiography, the story of one's own life, with ethnography, and the study of a particular social group.

The four categories that make her view clear are spelt out by Smith and Watson who suggest that there are four layers to deciphering the self within autobiography. The first one is Hurston the author sitting down to pen her autobiography at the behest of her editor, J. Bertram Lippincot. This, according to Smith and Watson is–the *Historical I.* The second is the *Narrator I*- the omnipresent representative of Hurston within the text. The third- the *Object I* / the *Narrated I* forms the protagonist of *Dust Tracks*. The final, Ideological *I* decides the main course of the discourse. This *Ideological I* in turn embodies the ideology that the *Historical I* / the author-in –flesh- and-blood holds as true. The self narrated as a triangulation of the Historical- the Narrating- and the Ideological guide the *Object I* / the *Narrated I.* Hence, this thesis tries to chalk out the self that emerges as an intersection of these three levels of I's.

The *Historical I* confronts a tension when the autoethnographic *Narrating I* who speaks to the dominant American group while grounding her narrative within African American culture. The 'emic' / 'etic' duality plagues the treatment of the *Narrating I*. This is because, the *Historical I* as an 'etic' is aware of the systems of race, class and gender that 'constructs' the African American as inferior, while being intuitively aware of the cultural strength and resourcefulness of the race as an 'emic.' The *Historical I* thereby seats her *Narrating I*, as frequently moving between the boundaries as an 'emic' and 'etic.' The *Historical I* refuses to place her life narrative as a voice that identifies only with the degrading and inhuman conditions of enslavement. Instead, as Denzin argues the "important characteristic of autoethnography is that the writer does not adopt the 'objective outsider' convention of writing common to traditional ethnography. . . [instead] he entails the incorporation of elements of one's own life experience when writing through biography or ethnography" (*Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* 6).

Under the guidance of Franz Boas, the *Historical I* had learnt that the West Africans who had come to the United States did not come from one culture or one single ethnic group; they had come from many different societies and nations. Each ethnic group had its own identifiable language, beliefs, customs, rituals, and ceremonies. Despite the cruelty placed on American slaves without family and kinship systems, they were still able to develop,

create, and assemble a rich and unique culture in the United States (*The Birth of African-American Culture* 5). The *Historical I* makes her life-writing a manifesto of the methods adopted by these diverse African Americans in assimilating and adapting to their circumstances in America.

In her essay, "Zora Neale Hurston: Author and Folklorist," Margaret Wilson writes, "To be African American is to experience a complex, even disjointed, subjectivity. Black self-consciousness is a hybrid of self-knowledge and social knowledge, influenced by personal perception as well as communal beliefs about race ... Black subjectivity is shaped by social forces and institutions" (*Negro History Bulletin* 109). The *Historical I* uses the art of scientific observation to persuade readers to change their attitudes or beliefs towards those marginalized by race, gender, or class-based ideology. In doing this, the *Historical I* utilises the anthropologists' artifacts, such as research, and investigations, to present the adaptive skills, survival skills, creative skills, and life-ways of her ancestors, thereby, giving different perspective about their culture, and their self-worth. In order to fulfil this goal, the *Historical I* chooses only those incidents that help in highlighting the adaptive skills both as an individual and as a group.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Object I*, moves both within and against the dominant political ideologies. The *Object I* performs the role of a protagonist in the ethnographic endeavour, while, the *Narrating I* becomes the 'emic' and 'etic' autoethnographer alternatively. The *Historical I* weaves the *Object I*

through a series of social attributes namely, her early relationship with family, the lack of a proper family structure leading to her wanderings, the role of education, research, and the struggle against empirical restrictive codes of the society etc. Beneath all these descriptions is her determination to present her life narration as per her own dictums. James Olney, an early critic on autobiography, observes that autobiographers may sometimes project " an aggressive, creative expression of the self, a defence of individual integrity in the face of an otherwise multiple, confusing, swarming and inimical universe" (*Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* 15). Imposing her research skills as an anthropologer, she gives expressions to the various textual I's that turn the events in her life into a research material in understanding the cultural context in particular and the world at large.

As a veteran ethnographer, the *Historical I* is also deeply aware of the readers of this ethnographic project- the predominant American audience. Consequently, a part of authenticity is pre-determined for those readers. Denzin, a theorist on autoethnography writes, "Experience with autoethnography reveals that it is in fact the opposite of self-absorbed – while the inquisitive gaze is placed on the self of the researcher, the text is produced with the reader in mind, as autoethnography focuses on being dialogic and conversational with the reader and not solely focused on the reporting of a researcher's data" (*Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices in the 21st Century* 14). However, the *Narrating I* as the autoethnographer is able to counter expectations by navigating a strategy to manipulate identity through

rhetoric leading on to changes in the level of representation. It can be noticed that Hurston did not let expectations imposed by white patronage dictate her presentation. On the contrary, R. A. Croft observes that, "She chooses to participate in the social, political and religious discourses of the times and uses strategies that will lead readers to evaluate and synthesize ideas regarding cultural constructs that identify with her scientific point of view" (*Zora Neale Hurston Companion* 11).

The *Historical I* assigns Chapters 1-6 to early childhood days at Eatonville, but soon after, the *Narrating I* veers away from being chronological thereby disrupting time, place and logicality. Chapters 7-16 demonstrate a lack of progression from one to another but are theme-based focusing on particular segments such as religion, love, friendship, research etc. The *Narrating I* devises a strategy of framing a beginning, middle and end, making these chapters seem 'units' unto themselves, making them look more as essays. The *Narrating I* begins the first chapter titled "My Birthplace" with the words:

> Like the dead – seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say. So *you* will have to know something about the time and place I came from, inorder that *you* may interpret the incidents and directions of my life. I was born in a Negro town. *I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town.* Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure

> Negro town-charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America." (emphasis added, *Dust Tracks* 4)

The *Narrating I* as the ethnographer is more an insider / an 'emic' drawing attention to the significance of the temporal and spatial, in the growth of individual identity. In presenting the foundation of the narrative, the *Historical I* instantaneously shifts to the *Narrating I* - the omnipresent narrator within the text. The use of both the 'now' and 'then' tense markers, 'is'and 'was' strengthens Smith and Watson's claim regarding the juxtaposition of the I-then's and the I-now's in life-writing. The use of first person 'I' and the second person 'You' signifies the *Historical I* setting the stage for the probable reader- the white audience.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century which the *Historical I* speaks of, was a time when the segregationist stance was at its pinnacle, the African Americans were looked down as 'low dogs.' They were stereotyped as more violent, less intelligent, lazy and irresponsible. Americans also felt that the African Americans blamed everyone else especially the white Americans for their problems, and were resentful troublemakers. Through her 'emic' description of African Americans holding different positions (then and now) the *Narrating I* dispels the myth regarding the need of Americans to help the

community. The *Narrating I* draws attention to the fact that there were African American societies in the early twentieth century that thrived on their own inspite of severe discrimination. The *Narrating I*, as the ethnographer, is at the same time affirming the worth of the community both in the past and the present. By highlighting this, she debunks the stereotypical image of the enslaved African America community of the 1800s as dependant on the mercy of the whites.

The *Narrating I* positions the "you" (mainly white readers) as interpreters of her life- narratives. As a social scientist the *Historical I* dispels misconceptions that are bound to creep into the minds of ignorant readers regarding an average black town. Therefore, the *Narrating I* stresses that Eatonville is far from being a 'black back-side of an average town. In doing this, the autoethnographer Hurston repossesses the South as her home, she embraces the folk culture; its "kindness, anger, hate, love, envy and its kinfolks" (*Dust Tracks* 46). It must be noted that she does not merely place importance on physical existence in the South. By embodying the whole of black culture in the South, she encompasses the whole African American experience as a true insider/ 'emic.'

Through the initial description, the *Narrating I* simultaneously re-aligns the readers and their expectations regarding her own roots. The significance that she assigns to Eatonville is purposeful, for, the *Narrating I* / ethnographer believes that the locale has a great role to play in her life. Deborah Plant in her

Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston has observed that Eatonville, for Hurston, was a model of black ingenuity, and she was proud of that history of her hometown (35). Concurrently, the *Narrating I*'s belief in the rich political legacy of her Southern community communicates through these lines. Annette Trefzer in her essay, "Let Us All Be Kissing Friends" adds that Hurston's "formation of the individual was linked to time and place" (*Journal of American Studies* 71).

The *Narrating I* as the autoethnographer expands on another basic premise from ethnography- the use of bicultural identity of African Americans and Americans as highlighted in their specific contexts. The *Narrating I* here becomes an outsider / 'etic' when she claims, "White Maitland and Negro Eatonville, have lived side by side for fifty-five years without a single instance of enmity" (*Dust Tracks* 6). By deliberately placing the African American and the white American as living alongside peacefully the autoethnographer / *Narrating I*, rewrites the conventional classification of African Americans as the enslaved, by deliberately projecting the theme of how white Americans could live content in "separate – but - equal" colonies.

In the chapter describing her birth titled, "My Birthplace," the *Narrating I* speaks of how an old white man "of many acres and things" "decided to drive the five miles and bring a half of a shoat, sweet potatoes" (*Dust Tracks* 20). On arrival, he helped assist her mother who was unattended after labor by "cutting the navel cord" (21). In keeping with her presentation of the "separate-but-

equal" status, the *Historical I* picks out this incident claiming, "This is all hear-say" (19). Thus the *Narrating I* attempts to put forth a view that the Eatonville-ites considered white Americans as normal people like themselves in keeping with the "separate-yet-equal" status. The *Narrating I* as an 'etic' simultaneously debunks the image of whites in America as slave drivers, uncharitable to African American women, instead, it is replaced by those assisting an African American woman in labor. Thus she draws up a canvas in which the culture of the African Americans and the white Americans in Maitland were intertwined into a friendly, helpful and thoughtful group. In yet another description, two white gracious women come on inspection to the African American school in Eatonville. The autoethnographer/ *Narrating I* recounts the earnestness with which they had helped African American children and even recalls them giving her candies, clothes and books for her excellent oral reading in class. These descriptions go against the basic dictum of portrayal of the whites by African American autobiographers. Her biographer, Robert Hemenway observes, "She overemphasizes the few whites who were around so that her all-black upbringing will not appear segregated" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 284). Yet, given the historical context, she does not present her life and times objectively, instead the resisting *Object I* depicts a certain tension on taking on the role of an 'autobiographer' and 'ethnographer.' Therefore the *Narrating I* as the ethnographer carefully chooses anecdotes to establish that there were whites who did help rather than hinder the growth of African Americans.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, a noted critic on women's autobiography, rightly points out that, "The tension at the heart of black female autobiography derives in large part from the chasm between an autobiographer's intuitive sense of herself and her attitude toward her probable reader" (*Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* 74). This condition is highly relevant in the analysis of *Dust Tracks* whose probable audience in the 1940s were mainly whites.The awareness of the white audience and their direct impact on the construction of her identity, makes her autoethnographic work 'conversational.' In parts of this narrative the *Narrating I* as the trained ethnographer, speaks out directly to her white audience, as in the description of her father stating, "A little of my sugar used to sweeten his coffee right now. That is a Negro way of saying his patience was short with me" (*Dust Tracks* 19). A little later, the *Narrating I* as an insider adds, "we held two lying contests, story-telling contests to you" (*Dust Tracks* 19).The act of interpreting the African American linguistic discourse to the probable non-African American audience indicates the *Historical I*'s intuitive awareness of the 'audience' as a necessary member within her work. All her research was deeply rooted in a Diaspora paradigm, which stressed an examination of the cultural continuities and differences that emerged when African Americans were scattered across the Americas and Europe as a consequence of slavery. By translating the folk tongue of her father and consequently her own society, the *Narrating I* as the autoethnographer linguist assumes the role of an interlocutor/ translator by analysing and preserving her own folk culture.

In the second chapter titled "My Folks," the *Narrating I* presents her family within the dominating matrix of power. She was born as the fifth of eight children, to John Hurston, a carpenter and Baptist preacher and Lucy Potts Hurston, a former school teacher. The *Narrating I* takes great care in describing her mother as one who played a major role in infusing a strong sense of self-worth and deep love for knowledge. The love for her race and the fierce pride she exuded as an African American was instilled in her by her mother. The *Narrating I* also shows how her mother always advised the *Object I*, "to jump at de sun" and voiced a strong sense of disapproval at turning into a "mealy mouthed rag doll" (*Dust Tracks* 13). The warmth and satisfaction she enjoyed in the relationship with her mother is clear when the *Narrating I* claims, "Mama never tried to break me" (*Dust Tracks* 13). She remembers confiding all her imaginary tales to her mother and getting approval for it while her grandmother, father and others called her tales, the work of the Devil. Here the ethnographer as the *Narrating I* highlights an important cultural facet of bonding between the mother and daughter.

The *Historical I* presents John Hurston, as a pragmatist when he warns her mother Lucy Potts as regards the high spirit of young Zora. He constantly reminds the mother- daughter duo that, "It did not do for Negroes to have too much of spirit" and that, "White folks would not stand for it" (*Dust Tracks* 13). He even feared that Lucy Potts "was going to suck sorrow for not beating my temper out of me before it was too late" (*Dust Tracks* 13). John Hurston is described as one who represents the harsh reality of the African American

society at large- outside the town of Eatonville. However her mother who shielded her often does not fall within the dictates of a typical African American mother. Instead she declared that she did not want to "squinch" young Zora's spirit and turn her child into a "mealy mouthed rag doll" (*Dust Tracks* 13). Her mother is presented as the motivator of her individual potential unaffected by the prominent ideology of the times. The *Narrating I* as the ethnographer as an 'emic' intuitively points to how her father externalises the reference point for identity as being not only race, but also gender, while her mother is shown as deviating from these dictums.

The *Object I* in *Dust Tracks* is found discovering the powerlessness of her race and gender from the dictates of her father and the world on the whole. The *Narrating I* presents the awareness of the difference 'in essence' from the girls her age. Her lack of enjoyment in girlish games with girl playmates, make her begin playing with boys. Her father would have none of it and did everything to remind her that, "it was not lady-like for girls to play with boys" (*Dust Tracks* 30).Here, the autoethnographer highlighting the ideological assumption behind being 'lady-like' and 'unlady-like' realises her variance from girls her age when she innocently asked her father for a "fine black riding horse with white leather saddle and bridles," as a Christmas gift, to travel to the horizon. On hearing of her choice her father explodes;

> A saddle horse! It's a sin and a shame! Lemme tell you right now, my young lady; you ain't white* Riding horse! Always

> trying to wear the big hat! I don't know how you got into this family no how. You ain't like none of the rest of de young' uns" P.S. * That is a Negro way of saying that means, "Don't be too ambitious. You are a Negro and they are not meant to have so much." (*Dust Tracks* 29)

While performing the role of a translator to the white audience through her 'Post Script,' the *Narrating I* realises that her father did not enjoy her spirit and adds, "Since Papa would not buy me a saddle horse I made me one up. No one around me knew how often I rode my prancing horse, nor the things I saw in far off places" (30). Her father's prophecy of predicting "...dire things [for her]... The White folks were not going to stand for it. I was going to be hung before I had grown" (*Dust Tracks*13). The autoethnographer presents a childhood in which the *Object I* failed to conform to the dictates of both the 'African American' and 'female' dictums.

In chalking out the character of her father in the *Dust Tracks* the autoethnographer exposes the racist and sexist ideology that dominated the African American culture. The sexist ideology gets more pronounced when the *Narrating I* speaks of the conditions surrounding her birth. On hearing the news of her birth as the second girl child in the family, her father threatened to cut his throat when he got the news. "Plenty more sons, but no more girl babies to wear out shoes and bring in nothing. I don't think he ever got over the trick he felt that I played on him by getting born a girl . . . " (*Dust Tracks* 21). Her

father's reaction to her birth and his earlier reaction to her request for a horse are consonant to the fact of what he envisaged her future would be like. As a trained anthropologer, the *Narrating I* exposes the common thought shared by majority of parents of the time, who, out of concern for their child's safety tried to indoctrinate and modify modes of behaviour to suit the racial and gendered taste of the times. When she realised the problem of voicing her fantasy to her father the *Object I* devises other methods such as "riding her fine horse" to strange places far and wide through her imagination. The autoethnographer as an 'etic' hereby foregrounds how, for the young Zora "home" stands as a place which indoctrinates the " constructs" with regard to empirical issues such as gender and race, as de Lauretis foregrounds in her *Technologies of Gender.*

Traumatic phases in life, like the death of her mother leads to devastating, and dramatic turning points in Huston's life narration. Joanne Braxton states: "When her mother dies, these ties are cut, and Hurston's link with place and tradition is broken; the magical inner world of Eatonville is destroyed" (*Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition* 147). In fact the incident also brings to the fore the integration into family life of cultural practices adapted from West Africa. This is clear when the *Narrating I* speaks of her mother in her death bed. "That day, September 18th, she had called me and given me cerain instructions. I was not to let them take the pillow from under her head until she was dead. The clock was not to be covered nor the looking- glass" (*Dust Tracks* 63). The *Narrating I* then

reveals a conversation between Death and his maker she had heard about as a child:

> But Death had no home and he knew it at once.
>
> "And where shall I dwell in my dwelling?" Old Death asked, for he was already old when he was made.
>
> "You shall build you a place close to the living, yet far out of the sight of eyes.
>
> Wherever there is a building, there you have your platform that comprehends the four roads of the winds. For your hunger, I give you the first and last taste of all things."
>
> We had been born, so Death had had his first taste of us. We had built things, so he had his platform in our yard.
>
> And now, Death stirred from his platform in his secret place in our yard, and came inside the house. (*Dust Tracks* 63)

This conversation exposes a larger Truth, the dependency of life and death on each other" (*Dust Tracks* 86). Here the autoethnographer / an 'emic,' foregrounds the African folk custom followed by African Americans- the custom of veiling the mirror, so that the dead may rest in peace and not trouble the living. Her mother's appeal "not to veil the looking glass" is to leave their imprint on the memory of the living so that we may live in peace with history and thus be able to "think back through our mothers" as Virginia Woolf believed, it was important for women to do (*A Room of One's Own* 22). Here

the autoethnographer as an 'etic' reveals the relationship of the African Americans to culture and their own ancient history. Hazel Carby, in her " The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," observes, "The cultural myth of paying homage to the dead and departed foreplays the place assigned to one's ancestors in both African and African American tradition" (*History and Memory in African-American Culture 142)* .

It is important for autoethnography to pull the reader in and take them along for the experience that is being detailed in the writing. The reader should experience the writer's feelings, sensations, fears – whatever is happening In fact, Lucy Potts' death becomes a metaphoric death for young Zora. Her father's remarriage, her resultant schooling and estrangement from her father makes the *Narrating I* confess how the innocence and freedom of childhood gets replaced by a sense of responsibility. In the turbulent years that followed the *Narrating I* places the *Object I* within her *Dust Tracks* as floating between locations, roles and identities in search of a 'home.' The autoethnographer echoes bell hooks' theory on the very meaning of "home" changing with the experience in her *Black Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* , "Home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference (19).

Usually all autoethnographic works are tied in with producing an evocative text, an autoethnographer does better by *showing* more than *telling.*

The feelings of insecurity, helplessness and listlessness echo through the above lines and are in many ways a precursor to the reader about the things that are in store within her autoethnography. This means that the *Narrating I*, after being properly self-reflexive, must tell her story in such a way as to make the reader feel the emotions they experienced. Instead of telling the reader that they were upset by something, the writer must bring the experience to life in vivid, lively detail, showing, not just telling how they felt when they were upset. This communicates the emotionality of the experience, and fulfills the criteria of autoethnographies to highlight emotional experiences. As an objective 'emic,' the autoethnographer describes the impact of change from Eatonville to Jacksonville:

> Jacksonville made me know that I was a little colored girl. Things were all about the town to point this out to me. Street cars and stores and then talk I heard around the school. I was no longer among the white people whose homes I could barge into with a sure sense of welcome. These white people had funny ways…I didn't get a piece of candy or a bag of crackers just for going into a store in Jacksonville as I did when I went in to Galloway's or Hill's at Maitland or Joe Clarke's at Eatonville. (*Dust Tracks* 70)

As an ''etic',' her *Narrating I* exposes how several institutional sites such as people, street cars, stores etc. operated against the empowerment of the African Americans women. Patricia Hill Collins observes that, "Domination is

also experienced and resisted on the level of social institutions controlled by the dominant group: namely, schools, churches, media, and other formal organisations" (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* 228-29). As a trained anthropologer Hurston's *Narrating I* which is exposed to these facts realises the difference between the rules of the two societies and struggles to come to terms with them. By positing the experiences at Jacksonville to that of Maitland and Eatonville the *Narrating I* exposes how she felt an 'outsider' in Jacksonville town while Eatonville and Maitland made her feel more an 'insider.'

The *Narrating I* confesses, "I have been a Negro three times - a Negro baby, a Negro girl and a Negro woman" (*Dust Tracks* 143), clearly showing as an 'emic' how a change of circumstances led to a change in her identity. This situation highlights the constructs of the society in matters concerning colour. Further, in her essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," she remembers it as "the very day that I became colored" (215). The *Narrating I*, it must be noted does not mention the 'colored' feeling anywhere within the autoethnography but navigates the *Ideological I* towards matters of ethnographic concerns. Zora Neale Hurston's own reflection of the fragmented identity is seen when she speaks of how the thirteen year old girl, Zora from the Eatonville disappeared and 'a little colored girl' took up her own place instead. Here we find the forces of society to have played a great role in decentering the idea of her individual self. It is her anthropological self that rekindles the sense of pride on being born an African American. Thus the *Narrating I* foregrounds the important role

played by 'race' as a parameter that decides the nature of the self. The cultural variation is clearly delineated to present both types of Americans, the one's who fall within and also fall outside the gamut of racial distinction.

Dust Tracks does not clothe its ideas and incidents surrounding the race-based cultural identity: Instead, the *Historical I* occupies a position of fundamental transition —being at once a participant in and an observer of her culture. Incidents such as this that highlight segregation and its impact on her psyche are totally ignored and an 'etic' position overrides the narration. While at Barnard College in 1925-27, under Dr. Franz Boas, Hurston decided that race is an artificial category, a construct developed by society. In the essay, "The Instability of Human Types," delivered at an academic conference on race in 1911, Boas boldly argued against assumptions of innate racial inferiority; insisting that culture, not nature, explained differences among the people of the world (101). This viewpoint was the major interpellating force that prepared her to reframe her ideology regarding 'race' and 'sex.' She seems to have resolved to deconstruct this ideological thought through the placement of the textual I's in her *Dust Tracks*. This resolve makes her develop different strategies, mainly rooted in its cultural inscription. Zora Neale Hurston's work indicates that identity at that time was not shaped by a single factor such as race alone but by a series of conflicting social forces. She positions her Narrating, Narrated and Ideological subject in such a way that it is free from the racial prejudice that plagues all other African American autobiography.

Malinowski, a noted anthropologer proclaimed that "[w]ithin the boundaries of the tribe the writ of the same culture runs from end to end" (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific* 11). If one believes that one common culture lies across every inch of a people's land like an evenly applied coat of paint, then it seems to follow that every "insider" enjoys equal access to the shared mentality of the culture, a mentality underlying or overriding all internal differences, and that every member, to the extent that he or she can set aside the limiting and qualifying aspects of such "secondary" identifications as gender or class, is capable of enunciating this common mentality. Encouraged by Boas and a $1,400 fellowship from the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, the *Historical I* decides to collect some of this African-American lore, to record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, and games. But when she arrives at Eatonville, her hometown, she notices that the theory of Malinowski is at once destabilized, for,

> When I went about asking, in carefully-accented Barnardese, `Pardon me, do you know any folktales or folk-songs?' The men and women who had whole treasuries of material seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads. No, they had never heard of anything like that around here. Maybe it was over in the next county. Why didn't I try over there? I did and got the self-same answer. (*Dust Tracks* 144)

The *Narrating I*'s recapitulation of the antagonism that the *Object I* had to face from her own 'tribe' when she tried to collect folklore using her Barnard educated self. The objectivity that would help her evaluate her group made her an outsider in many ways, therefore the *Narrating I* writes;

> I needed my Barnard education to help me see my people as they really are. But I found that *it did not do to be too detached* as I stepped aside to study them. I had to go back, dress as they did, talk as they did, live their life, so that I could get into my stories the world I knew as a child. (*Dust Tracks* 196)

Here, the *Narrating I* highlights the paradox concerning the examination of the self as "a native," / an 'emic,' while also interpreting her own culture as a "non native"/ an 'etic'," for a "non native" audience. The focus on collecting folklore provoked the *Object I* to revert to the old self as an 'emic'- recreating the Zora of Eatonville. This helped blend with her 'native culture' easily. Hurston, the *Historical I* is clearly able to decipher the "double bind" (*The Souls of Black Folks* 45) that DuBois speaks of and she is also able to resolve this dilemma by separating the internal and external self. She uses her educated self to focus on the job at hand, i.e., collecting folklore. The incident also reveals a deep reality to the *Historical I*, who understands that to integrate with the commoners she would not need her educated self, on the other hand, to pacify her audience (white) she would have to use her educated / 'etic' self. It is this experience that she foregrounds in situating the textual I's in her *Dust*

Tracks—to develop a sense of detachment regarding limiting issues such as race, gender, class etc.

One of the primary locales where the culture was transmitted within the African American community in Eatonville, was the store porch in front of Joe Clarke's General Store. It served as a place rich in oral traditions preserved from the period of slavery to the twentieth century. Robert Hemenway adds, "The men and women on the Store porch were not a function of time, history, population changes or even Joe Clarke's dying and the Store's going to Lee Glenn, their lying sessions were constant verbal rituals contributing order, beauty, and poetry to the community's life" (*Zora Neale Hurston: Modern Critical Views* 12). The porch played a very important role in many of Zora Neale Hurston's fictional works. The autoethnographer terms it as the "heart and spring of the town," the place where people sat around on boxes, benches and nail kegs and "passed this world and the next one through their mouths" (*Dust Tracks* 69). The *Historical I* thus situates the African American community as rich in oral folklore using a native's point of view.

As an 'etic,' the *Narrating I* situates storytelling as an important event in the African and African American communities. Through storytelling, questions were answered, history was conveyed, and lifelong lessons were taught and learned away from the distorted renderings of power. The *Narrating I*, re-creates Joe Clarke's porch in Eatonville, as a place where stories of creation were recreated to explain several important realities of day-to-day life,

Stories of God, Devil, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis. Cat, Brer Bear etc., "walked and talked like natural men" (*Dust Tracks* 69). Tales of slavery were also narrated and these tales were passed on verbally through many generations. The most common form of storytelling among these enslaved people was the folktale. Most African folktales involve animals as the principal characters. In Africa, the stories may have been told about the hyena, lion, elephant, monkey, and trickster Anansi, the spider. Even though the tales retained their basic story lines, the characters changed to match the animal life of this new land. Tales about the lion, elephant, and hyena now featured the rabbit, fox, and bear—the stories we know as the Brer Rabbit tales. These stories entertained the plantation owner, so he saw little problem with allowing this form of activity. The porch in addition served as a platform where words of the Blues reverberated with the work song of the labourers. The *Historical I* felt that the porch served as a stage where the life and culture of the African Americans was enacted to the maximum. This facet of African American culture forms an integral part of her fiction such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine, Their Eyes were Watching God, Mules and Men* etc. Traditional tales were interspersed with contemporary anecdotes and imaginative fiction was improvised. When she depicts the porch as a platform where the verbal rituals are enacted with all its grandeur the 'etic' stance is replaced by the 'emic' stance. The autoethnographer here recognises the importance of folk tradition as a means to survive all odds with strength and dignity.

Zora Neale Hurston had begun collecting folklore in the 1920s and this helped to liberate the rural Black folk from, as Hemenway puts it from, "the prison of racial stereotypes" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 112) and granted them dignity as participants of a great culture. American pathologists and psychologists of the time were working under an assumption regarding African American behaviour and deviants in African American mental health. Her folklore collection helped in recognizing the flaws of these sociologists and in understanding the distinctiveness in traditional African American culture.

The *Historical I*, due to the education that it had gained does the act of re-positioning the African American identity through its folklore- music, tales, beliefs, aesthetic' content, sermons, courtship rituals, Hoodoo, lying sessions, oral traditions etc. She inverts the 'etic' stance and re-conceptualises it to bring out the strength of the collective tradition. In this sense she attempts to make her *Dust Tracks* 'a voice of the collective.' Her aim is also cultural interpretation which according to Fetterman involves, "the ability to describe what the researcher has heard and seen within the framework of the social group's view of reality" (*Ethnography: Step by Step* 28).

Even as the reality of the cultural interpretation as an 'emic' is seen when the *Narrating I* concentrates on folklore and tradition, this interpretation gets marginalised and consequently an 'etic' stance is taken up when the idea centers around race matters. Having noticed the depth and beauty of the

African American folklore, the *Narrating I* blatantly rejects classification based on skin colour, ridiculing the idea behind skins as a measure of what were inside people. Keeping this viewpoint in mind the *Ideological I* also exposes the constructs regarding terms such as "Race Pride, Race Prejudice, Race Man, Race Solidarity, Race Consciousness, Race" (*Dust Tracks* 179), which recur as themes in many African American's work of her times. The *Narrating I* becomes an outsider from her lot when she observes, ". . . no Negro in America is apt to forget his race. . . People made whole careers of being "Race" men and women. They were champions of the race (*Dust Tracks* 179). Here the *Narrating I* acknowledges the impact of 'race' as an 'emic' in the life and arts of the African Americans, while the *Ideological I* that sees race as a construct and thereby pokes fun at the artists who were supposed to exhibit their creativity were caught up in the trap of "race" matters. This cynicism regarding displacing race matters as the core point in her works lead to harsh criticism among her contemporaries.

In an essay entitled, "Seeing the World as It Is," Hurston says, "instead of Race Pride being a virtue, it is a sapping vice" (249), and she observes wryly, "What the world is crying and dying for at this moment is less race consciousness. The human race would blot itself out entirely if it had any more" (250). And, for consistency's sake, she adds "I cannot, with logic cry against it in others and wallow in it myself" (250). The *Narrating I* vehemently voices her disapproval at those who act as saviours of the race.

When her textual subject re-positions itself she also re-positions the idea of 'connecting with the community.' Thereby she attempts to re-write history in her own ethnographic terms. Smith and Watson argue that, "When life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making "history" in a sense" (*Reading Autobiography: A Guide For Interpreting Life Narratives* 10). From Smith and Watson's argument it is clear that Hurston's textual I's resist conventional classification and experiments with the limits of the genre. What *Dust Tracks on a Road* indicates, is, in fact, a deeper philosophy concerning the impact of her own race and on her identity as an individual. Hurston declared that, "Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was, and am, thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or woman do such and so, regardless of his color" (*Dust Tracks* 171). While colour did not matter to the *Ideological I* the culture and its impact on her identity form the base for the *Narrating I.*

As an autoethnographer the *Historical I* is supposed to present the life lived in its cultural context with an 'open and objective mind.' One of the basic tensions that the text has been plagued with, is her ability to stage subjectivity not always as an objective anthropologer, but as an interpretative one. The *Narrating I* constructs the African American identity as collective and united through an episode that occurred at her hometown Eatonville, when she was young. Here, the *Narrating I* is objective when she projects how 'race matters' that brought the 'skin folks' together was a "business" that was carried out by

the whites in order to "keep a Negro in his place" (*Dust Tracks* 185). The *Narrating I* portrays Zora's father, John Hurston and a group of men marching into the forest with shot guns on suspicion that one of their neighbours, Jim Watson, was being lynched by the Klu Klux Klan. But to their amusement they realised that Old Man Bonner, a low class white man, was being lynched instead. On returning home after the trip to the forest, the *Narrating I* observes their reaction to the incident - the mocking of the unfortunate Bonner's cries, the laughter and relief of the crowd is palpable as:

> They had gone to rescue a neighbour or die in the attempt, and they were back with their families. So they let loose their insides and laughed. They resurrected a joke or two and worried it like a bone and laughed some more. Then they just laughed. The men who spoke of members of their race as monkeys had gone out to die for one. The men who were always saying, "My Skin-folks, but not my Kin- folks, My Skin race but not my taste" had rushed forth to die for one of these same contemptible. (*Dust Tracks* 188)

This incident highlights the strong kinship bond that unites the African American culture when they felt threatened by the White American community. Paradoxically, the incident undercuts the *Narrating I*'s 'separate but equal status' maintained by the whites and the blacks in Eatonville. The shrewd ethnographer at the same time understands and communicates the

significance of seeing race, and class as interlocking systems of oppression. The *Narrating I* is found to be performing several rhetorical acts simultaneously. As an observer and interpreter of cultures, the incident reveals an unpleasant dimension of the white American culture. She discloses the close ties that the African American people harbour for each other; she also conveys the cultural matrix within the American society. The relief and happiness on learning that lynching was not carried on their own lot but only on a low class American exposes the cruel institution of the white Americans in maintaining not only racial but also class segregation.

Yet, later in her autobiography, the *Historical I* deliberately chooses, "An incident that made me realise how theories [on race] go by the board when a person's livelihood is threatened" (*Dust Tracks* 134). This incident goes against the very grain of "skin folks being kinfolks." The incident shows how an African American man came up to an all-white barber shop where the *Object I* was working and demanded a haircut. After a scuffle the man was thrown out on the street by both the Blacks and Whites in the shop. Later that night in bed the *Narrating I* recollects analysing the whole thing and realizing;

> . . . that I was giving sanction to Jim Crow, which theoretically, I was supposed to resist. But there were ten Negro barbers, three porters and two manicurists all stirred up at the threat of living through loss of patronage. Nobody thought it out at the moment. It was an instinctive thing. That was the first time it was called to

> my attention that self- interest rides over all sorts of lives. *I have seen the same thing happens hundred of times since, and now I understand it, one sees it breaking over racial, national, religious and class lines.* (emphasis added, *Dust Tracks* 135)

"The instinctive thing" that the *Narrating I* alludes to, decentres the sense of "collectiveness" that the African Americans of the saloon were supposed to feel towards the person belonging to their own race. On the contrary, the sense of self interest is found to over-ride the sense of fellow feeling. The incident reverses two sets of beliefs, namely, that the African Americans were supposed to stick together with their folks through thick and thin, and that an African American was supposed to project an image of how they bailed out each other when they were in need. The *Narrating I*'s claim that "self interest" would over ride all other aspects of life, places the self as estranged from both her own skin folks and from the white folks. By presenting instances of Jim Crow and Lynching as a part of the American culture, the *Historical I* shows the methods of adaptability adopted at the community and individual level to fight and establish a foothold in the suppressing American ethos.

The *Narrating I* speaks of concepts concerning race which she refers to as "Race Solidarity" which looked like something solid in her childhood, but she realised that it was only a mirage that faded out when she came close enough to look. She writes:

> As soon as I could think I saw that there is no such thing as Race Solidarity in America with any group. It is freely admitted that it does not exist among Negroes. Our so called Race Leaders cry over it. Others accept it as a natural thing that Negroes should not remain in unmelting knot in the body politic. Our interests are too varied. Personal benefits run counter to race lines too often for it to hold. If it did we could never fit into the national pattern since the race line has never held any other group in America, why expect it to be effective with us? The upper class Negroes admit it in their own phrases. The lower class Negroes say it with a tale." (*Dust Tracks* 179)

The 'real' and the 'mirage' once again lay emphasis on not only solidarity or the lack of it at the level of African Americans alone, instead, the *Narrating I* widens the gamut to cover all ethnic groups in America. While positioning the racial, the classist thoughts are also brought to the fore, exposing the tension between the individual and the stereotype, between what she thinks of herself and what the white and African American society expects of her. These contradictions, according to Robert Hemenway, "grant a special energy to the autobiographical prose" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 293).

She also reverses another established myth regarding skin 'folks as kinfolks' at a meeting with Cudjo Lewis at Mobile, Alabama, for a research

journal, *Journal of Negro History.* Cudjo Lewis whose African name was Kossola-O-Lo-Loo-Ay, had arrived on the last load of slaves to the United States and was the only Negro alive that came over on a Slave ship in 1859. He was in his late nineties at the time of their meeting and he narrated in detail of the circumstances in Africa that brought about his slavery here. How the powerful kingdom of Dahomy, finding the slave trade so profitable had abandoned farming, hunting and all else:

> ... to capture slaves to stock the barraccoons on the beach at Dmydah to sell to the slavers who came from across the ocean... the able-bodied who were captured were marched to Abomey, the capital city of Dahomy, and displayed to the King, then put into barraccoons to await a buyer. The too old, the too young, the injured in battle were instantly beheaded and their head smoked and carried back to the King. He paid off on heads dead or alive. (*Dust Tracks* 164-65)

The interview and three months of association with Cudjo Lewis made her change her perspective as whites alone being the enemy to the blacks.

> They had bought us, it is true and exploited us but the inescapable fact that stuck in my craw was ... my people had *sold* me in and the White people had bought me. That did away with the folklore I had been brought upon- that the white people had gone to Africa waved a red handkerchief at the Africans and lured them

> abroad the ship and sailed away. I know the civilized money stirred up Africa greed... my own people had butchered and killed, exterminated whole nations and torn families apart, for a profit before the strangers got their chance at a cut... It impressed upon me the universal nature of greed and glory. Lack of power and opportunity passes off too often for virtue. (*Dust Tracks* 165-66)

Here the *Narrating I* is interpretive when she decentres the belief that the Whites were solely to be blamed for the history of exploitation and slavery. She places the blame on the native Africans who, stirred by greed and lack of bonding due to the culture and blood had sold away the members of their own race. The autoethnographer thereby places her ancestors as shameful co-conspirators in slave trade.

The *Narrating I* while exposing the age old dark secret regarding the initial stages of slavery and slave trade highlights the various ways in which African Americans are divided amongst themselves. In her chapter titled 'My People! My People!,' the autoethnographer claims that this refrain stems from the Negro's lips due to "pity, scorn and hopeless resignation" (*Dust Tracks* 178). Here the *Narrating I* takes on the role of both an insider and outsider to bring out the difference within the African Americans as a group. She singles out a situation at 50th Street railway station. The *Narrating I* first focuses on two groups of African Americans based on class- the 'brown' young woman,

fresh from the classic halls of Barnard College escorted by a 'black' boy from Yale; and the "scabby –looking Negro…bloody, smelly and too loud." The *Narrating I* exposes the paradoxes inherent in the African American community who claim "race solidarity" and "race pride," when the low class African American began detailing the way one of the men beat up his woman. He is quite loud when he talks of "how he fixed *his* woman up when she tried that same on *him*." Meanwhile,

> Barnard and Yale sit there and dwindle and dwindle. They do not look around the coach to see what is in the faces of the white passengers… Some are grinning from the heel up, and some are stonily quiet. But both kinds are thinking "That's just like a Negro." Not just like some Negroes, mind you, no, like all. Only difference is some Negroes are better dressed. Feeling all this like rock –salt under the skin, Yale and Barnard shake their heads and moan, "My People, My People!" (233)

The well- bred African American is conscious of the fact that the community needs more respect if he expects to get any acceptance at all. Therefore after straining every nerve to get an education, maintaining an attractive home, dressing decently, and otherwise conforming to all dictums, he is dismayed at the sight of others tearing down what he is trying to build up. Even as they try to distance themselves from the 'lowly Negroes' their activities make the well bred men shrink in themselves, for they know that the

whites would club them all as just alike. In the chapter entitled 'My People! My People!' the autoethnographer manipulates and mocks at the stereotypes who try aping, passing and imitating the ways of the Americans to try establish their identity. Other than the class segregation within the blacks the African Americans enjoyed imitating the Whites and voices the jokes of some of the African Americans, "Nigger see de White man do something, he jump in and tried to do like de White man, and make a great big old mess" (*Dust Tracks* 181). As an 'etic,' the *Narrating I* exposes the feelings of insecurity that the refined African American feels when he is amongst Americans.

The chapter titled, 'My People, My People!' ends with the *Narrating I* amusingly recounting how she learnt about the "why and how of races" from a woman named Gold, a native of Eatonville, who was also good at folklore. The *Narrating I* described God as the Creator who:

> . . . had some spare moments so he rolled it [the clay] out, and cut out the human shapes and stood them all up against His long gold fence to dry, while he did some important creating . . . and when He found time He blowed the breath of life in them . . . God planned to give colour to all his creations and asked them to assemble at seven o' clock *sharp*. For all those who turned up at the appointed time he gave away the yellow, red and white color. When a group of people that arrived late began creating "a racket of all sorts" God said, "Git Back! Git Back! . . . they

misunderstood Him and thought He said, "Git Black!" So they just got black." (*Dust Tracks* 51)

The *Narrating I* presents a folk tale to show the American audience of the relevance of race and group consciousness, ending with the observation, "So according to that, we are no race. We are just a collection of people who overslept our time and got caught in the draft" (*Dust Tracks* 306). Even as she breaks the theory of race the African American self foregrounds her richness in her culture and tradition paradoxically placing her as both an 'etic' and 'emic.' The *Narrating I* uses a folk tale where a Negro Brother Isham was asked to lead the congregation in prayer. "Lawd, Brother Isham began, "I really want to ask you something but I just know you can't do it"... Well then Lawd I ask you to get these Negroes together, but I know you can't do it" (*Dust Tracks* 180), thus echoing the inability of even the Supreme Power to bind all the Blacks together to speak in a single voice.

In her chapter titled, 'Religion' she begins with, "You wouldn't think that a person who was born with God in the household would ever have any questions to ask about it" (266). By directly addressing the audience and the problem regarding 'faith,' the autoethnographer lays down the foundation of what is to follow in the chapter. She recounts how she was greatly influenced by the Black Southern Baptist religious tradition. Her primary influence being her parents - her father was a travelling Baptist minister, while her mother was the superintendent of the Sunday school. Her own early experience in the

religious tradition is described in the following words, "I had been pitched head- foremost into the Baptist church when I was born. I had heard the singing, the preaching and the prayers. They were part of me" (*Dust Tracks* 266). As the *Narrating I* claims to have enjoyed participating in the religious ceremonies, particularly the 'revival meetings' the 'emic' role gets more pronounced. The voice of the preacher, the tenor and the treble of the church choir, the high drama, the high music, ecstatic chants and the emotional outbursts of the converts are the main highlights of the tradition. But the *Narrating I* distances itself and the 'etic' stance takes over when she looks at the concept of religion from an objective angle and therefore adds as an autoethnographer,

> The unreachable and therefore the unknowable always seem divine-hence, religion. People need religion because the great masses fear life and its consequences. Its responsibilities weigh heavy. Feeling a weakness in the face of great forces, men seek alliance with omnipotence to bolster up their feeling of weakness, even though the omnipotence they rely upon is a creature of their own minds. It gives them a feeling of security. Strong, self-determined men are notorious for their lack of reverence. (*Dust Tracks* 268)

Thus she brings about a triangulation between 'man' irrespective of their race, his traditional belief in religious concepts and their inner self. While

commenting on the traditional beliefs of the African Americans the *Narrating I* writes about voodoo ceremonies in Haiti observing, "...I hold that any religion that satisfies the individual urge is valid for that person. It (voodoo) does satisfy millions, so it is true for its believers" (*Dust Tracks* 169). As an ethnographer Hurston views religion objectively without passively taking in the explanations passed down for centuries. Her own rational and objective mind rises above the different types of faith- the Baptist, the Voodoo etc. and makes her claim;

> I do not pretend to read God's mind. He has a plan for the universe worked out to the smallest detail; it would be folly for me to presume to get down on my knees and attempt to revise it. That, to me seems the highest form of sacrilege. So I do not pray. I accept the means at my disposal for working out my destiny. It seems to me that I have been given a mind and will- power for that very purpose. I do not expect God to single me out and grant me advantage over my fellowmen. Prayer is for those who need it. Prayer seems to me a cry of weakness and an attempt to avoid, by trickery, the rules of the game as laid down. I do not choose to admit weakness. I accept the challenge of responsibility. Life as it is does not frighten me since I have made peace with the universe as I found it and bow to its laws. (*Dust Tracks* 225-26)

The autoethnographer thereby does away with the traditional concept that the Black Episcopal Baptist Church had a controlling effect on the African Americans. As an ethnographer the *Historical I* had observed how the African American church had also been marginalised and silenced by the American church. The idea that they could help bring power within the African American psyche is replaced by an intuitive sense of understanding that the individual and his plight can be changed only by claiming responsibility for his own deeds. The impact of the individual over the collective places the force of collective to be relegated to the margins.

The chapter titled, "Backstage and the Railroad" helps reveal the tensions undercurrent in her life as an African American female. The autoethnographer / *Narrating I* presents a situation in the Moncrief household where she was working as a maid. Mrs. Moncrief has been sick since the birth of her young child. Within a few days, the *Object I* claims, Mr. Moncrief, began "waylaying her down the street and walking with her" suggesting that, "He would take me to Canada with him" (*Dust Tracks* 94). Finally, the *Object I* decides to inform his wife about it. The reaction to this disclosure exposes the helplessness of the bed-ridden white woman who is caught defenceless and powerless claiming:

> You have nothing to cry about Zora. You haven't been lying here for three years for somebody hoping to find you dead every morning. You don't know what it means for every girl who

> comes within hailing distance to be mixed up in your life. You don't know what it means to give birth to a child for your husband and find that your health is gone the day the baby is born and for him not to care what becomes of the baby or you either. God! Why couldn't he leave *you* alone? (*Dust Tracks* 95)

Despite the *Object I*'s attempts at rebuffing Mr. Moncrief he comes over to her place the next day saying that he had never wanted to get married in the first place adding, "All I need is a young, full-of- feeling girl to sleep with and enjoy life. I always did keep me a colored girl. Last one moved off to Chicago and sort of left me without. I want a colored girl and I'm giving you the preference. (*Dust Tracks* 96). The nightmares of her ancestors are revisited upon the *Object I* when she realises the position he assigns to the black woman in his life. The anthropologer / *Narrating I* also exposes the tension of the African American women working as maids apart from foregrounding the fear and animosity harboured against them by their white mistresses on sexual grounds. bell hooks in her book, *Ain't I a Woman* observes, "White colonizers encourage black women who are economically oppressed and victimised by sexism and racism, to believe that they are matriarchs, that they exercise some social and political control over their lives" (81).

The conventional image of a young, unattached African American girl who would submit to the racist and the sexist impulses of the male white gaze was very important, for the colonizer who wanted to keep the black women

under their decree. bell hooks observes that "Sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim"(*Ain't I a Woman* 85). Instead of presenting herself as a passive victim who adheres to the sexist and racist ideology of the times, the *Object I* chalks out a plan to outwit him. She feigns affection towards Mr. Moncrief, and fixes a date to move to Chicago with him. In the meanwhile, she decides to quit her job and leave the place instead of becoming a victim to the matrix of racism and sexism. The *Narrating I* is found clearly negotiating between the white male and female race and class oppression and white male and Black female sexism.

The *Historical I* devotes a chapter to the theme of "Love." Here, the Narrating voice claims, "Don't look for me to call a string of names and point out chapter and verse. Ladies do not kiss and tell any more than gentlemen do" (*Dust Tracks* 203). The autoethnographer makes clear a point that people, irrespective of their gender, any autobiographer would never want to reveal their intimate experiences adding elsewhere, "I am supposed to have some private business to myself" (*Dust Tracks* 211). She does reveal that she had married and divorced when she was at college and had planned to start on research. Later she speaks of "P.M.P.", of whom she claims, "His intellect got me first for I am the kind of woman that likes to move on mentally from point to point, and I like of my men to be there way ahead of me" (*Dust Tracks* 205). The criterion of intellect and not emotion as being the point of reference in 'the man' in her life makes her in many ways different from the women of her times. The *Narrating I* describes how P.M.P. illustrated about the qualities he

looked for in his 'future wife,' claiming, "You know, Zora, you've got a real man on your hands. You've got somebody to do for you. I'm tired of seeing you work so hard. I wouldn't want *my* wife to do anything but look after me." (*Dust Tracks* 207).But she claims her career, literary parties and impromptu meeting with litterateurs made him jealous and in the end the *Narrating I* adds, "I could not see that my work should make any difference in marriage...He felt that he did not matter to me enough. He was the master kind. All, or nothing, for him" (*Dust Tracks* 208). So she decides to give up hopes of living with him and opts to take up the Guggenheim fellowship for research and leaves for Jamaica. While P.M.P fits into the stereotypical role of a husband (irrespective of racial barriers) who expects his wife to give up all and look after his affairs, the decision of the *Historical I* speaks volumes regarding the character of Hurston, for, women of the 1930's and 1940's were usually confined to the domestic sphere of life, looking for suitable husbands and happy homes. Her decision to build her career also shows the dogged ambition within her to "jump at de sun" as her mother had always wanted her to do.

While on the subject of Love, the *Narrating I* takes on an 'etic'/ observer role and humorously categorises three types of men she had observed, the first kind was more interested in treating his woman as an object of sex, the second kind is the man who turns an enemy if his woman grows tired of the relationship, the third kind is the man who would never relent to a 'no' from his woman. While putting forth these categories the *Narrating I* takes care to present these men as dominators who follow the dictates of the dominant

ideology. Nevertheless the *Object I* is presented as 'calling the shots' without falling in line with their expectations. Leigh Gilmore in her book *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Self- Representation* observes, "... in specific places and at specific times debates over "what a woman is and should be" and "what a man is and should be" chart their own course through autobiography..." (xi). Whereas in her *Dust Tracks* she debunks the idea regarding all stereotypical ideas regarding what an African American woman 'is' and about what she 'should be'.

The autoethnographer, through careful choice of events and deliberateness in positioning the self in narration avoids delving into the depressing and painful moments that might have dehumanised her as a person. The racial climate during the first half of the twentieth century was clearly a divisive one. Lorraine Bethel in her essay, "The Infinity of Conscious Pain Zora Neale Hurston and the Black Female Literary Tradition," writes, "Despite or perhaps because of these achievements, Hurston like many African Ammerican women writers, has suffered "intellectual lynching" at the hands of white and black men and white women (*All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of us Are Brave, Black Women's Studies* 177). Hurston's visit to Margorie Kinnan Rawlings' household, on invitation, where she was extended warm hospitality throughout the day. Yet, when it came to sharing sleeping accommodations she was not treated as a fellow author but as a black woman out of place in a white's house. Idella Parker, the house maid of Rawlings enumerates,

> Imagine this now! Here was a Black author who had come to visit Mrs. Rawlings and had been treated like equal all day long, talking, laughing and drinking together on the porch for all the world to see. But when it came to spending the nights, Zora would be sent out to sleep with the servants. This was not for lack of bedrooms mind you. Mrs. Rawlings had two empty bedrooms in the house. (*Idella Parker: Margorie Rawlings' "Perfect" Maid* 86-87)

There is hardly any mention of segregations of any kind in her autobiography. By placing herself as an interpreter, she continuously plays between being an objective ethnographer and a selective subjective life writer. Martin D.L. in his 'Introduction' to the Dust tracks feels, " To describe the discrimination she encountered might suggest that such self-reliance was a defensive reaction to white oppression; it might imply that racial discrimination worked, that it created compensatory black behavior" (xv). As a professional ethnographer she strives to resolve the binary oppositions that hold the power structures aloft. Hurston posits, in her self-authored life-writing, a purposeful and willful *Narrating I* through the act of resistance, as she is determined to recreate her life in her own terms and not according to the earlier autobiographical conventions. Her *Dust Tracks* won her the Anisfield-Wolf Award for its contribution to race relations. Deborah Plant clearly articulates the dilemma that Zora the writer encounters in the following manner, "An

outsider inside her home, an outsider in the larger society, Hurston was gradually assailed by negative images and ideologies of her Black female self. Yet she was not tragically colored, tragically poor or tragically female" (*Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* 181).

As an ethnographer, her duty was to observe, examine, and reproduce the deep understanding of complexity of human life. Alice Walker in her 'Foreword,' to Robert Hemenway suggests that Hurston's work "comes from the essence of black folk life, in her confidence that being black was not wrong" (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 183). Thus she moved the African American people to the centre of enquiry, establishing them as subjects, in a place that was reserved for the whites in the dominant euro-centric sphere. Despite Hurston's attempts at redefining her own autobiographical identity in individualistic terms it can be noticed that, "isolate individualism is an illusion" and the autobiographical subject is highly entangled with her own community and its nuances even while it attempts to reject any effort to classification under racist and sexist terms. Her deep insight into the black folklore helps sharpen her pride and dignity, and widen her intellect towards her ancestral culture. This in turn makes her present her self in terms of the place that she believed epitomised this culture - Eatonville naming it as "the greatest cultural wealth of the continent" (*Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* 64). The discovery thus sharpened and renewed her sense of black national dignity and

pride. Hence the writer self shaped all her self narration in part and fictional works wholly based on African American folklore and mythology. However, juggling objective anthropology and subjective creativity caused an internal rift, making her dual identity as an academic folklorist and creative artist difficult to reconcile.

As a young African American woman of the 1930-40s, her capacity of self- sustenance from the age of fourteen, besides her capability to continue her education independently needs to be seen as a remarkable accomplishment. In her presentation of the *Object I* in her life narration and as in her real life, Hurston challenges the patriarchal assumption, decentres the conventional Black Female identity of the 1930-40's. She writes in her autobiography, "Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me" (*Dust Tracks* 95). These questions echo the love and pride that Hurston nurses towards her own individuality while at the same time decentring the concept of the collective. By displacing family, mothering, children, sisterhood etc., from being the epicentre of African American women's autobiography the *Historical I* distances itself from the conventional mode. Her *Dust Tracks* poignantly captures the dilemmas that seemed to confront Black Women writers- or intellectuals- of her generation" (*The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical writings* 78).

The *Narrating I* lays to rest the bone of contention between the two races by the rhetorical positioning of the final part of her life narrative that exudes the lessons learnt through her life,

> I have no race prejudice of any kid. My kinfolks, and my "skinfolks" are dearly loved. My own circumference of everyday life is there. But I see their same virtues and vices everywhere I look. So I give you all my right hand of fellowship and love, and hope for the same from you. In my eyesight, you lose nothing by not looking just like me. I will remember you all in my good thoughts, and I ask you kindly to do the same for me. Not only just me. You who play the zig-zag lightning of power over the world, with the grumbling thunder in your wake, think kindly of those who walk in the dust. And you who walk in the humble places think kindly too, of others. There has been no proof in the world so far that you would be less arrogant if you held the lever of power in your hands. Let us all be kissing friends. (*Dust Tracks* 232)

As an ethnographer, the *Narrating I* looks for trends and patterns that occur across the various groups or within individuals. The struggle between negotiating and being negotiated is clearly played out in the *Dust Tracks* by Hurston who tries to accommodate a variety of readers while at the same time challenging boundaries that restrict her, which lead her to make striking

rhetorical choices. By presenting her life narrative as one untouched by the white subjugation the autoethnographer thereby disputes the accounts of others, and conveys cultural information. She also suggests that racial identity can become obsessive and racialist and looks for new paradigms to re-create her life. Her focus was mainly on what the African American's were doing for themselves, rather than the effect the whites had on them. Carla Kaplan, in her *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters,* points out that to Hurston, "the black identity should not be defined against racist oppression, the African American was not a victim" (25). By deliberately presenting her life narrative from this standpoint she concluded her autoethnographic work with a plea to her readers, "to look at the world as it is" (*Dust Tracks* 232) devoid of a race, gender or religious bias and to remain "kissing friends," using the yardstick of individual strength and intellectual capability. She confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, those marginalized at the borders. An examination of a selection of works that Hurston wrote, provides insight into the way in which she communicated with wider society and how she used them as a medium to present a life lived, not imagined, by African Americans.

Susan Bennett outlines various useful points to define the strategies of an autoethnographer. According to her, an autoethnography is primarily, an analytical / objective personal account about the self / writer as part of a group or culture, thereby stressing on her 'emic' role. Secondly, there is often a description of different cultures – exposing the significance of the bicultural.

Thirdly, there is also an analysis on being different or an outsider- as an 'etic.' Fourthly, it is usually written to an audience not a part of the group. Fifthly, it is an attempt to see the self as others might. Sixthly, it is also an opportunity to explain differences from the inside. Finally, there is always an attempt to explain one element of self to other, i.e. an explanation of how one is "othered" (*On Autoethnography* p. 8). In short, Hurston follows all the dictums prescribed by Bennet to present an identity that is devoid of the dominant practices.

Autoethnography can also be a form of what James Clifford calls "self-fashioning," in which the ethnographer comes to represent himself as a fiction, inscribing a doubleness within the ethnographic text: "Though it [ethnography] portrays other selves as culturally constituted, it also fashions an identity authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe – but always with some irony – the truths of discrepant worlds" (*Cultural Studies* 8). Hurston's willingness to go against the grain and to experiment with new ethnographic styles and methods positions her far away from her lot. Her strategies of survival and resistance are something that mark her as unique from the rest of the women who belong to the same canon. By blurring the controlling images based on black / white, male / female, subject / object, superior / inferior etc., she invents desirable futures among others. As a forerunner in presenting the self in terms of ethnography, in the midst of stifling circumstances, her *Dust Tracks* will forever remain a life narrative that voices her concepts of life in a manner that any African American male or female had ever done earlier.

Despite all the contradictions and criticism the trajectory of dust tracks will forever remain as tracks that will lead towards rather than away from the African American community.

CHAPTER-III

Maya Angelou- Centring the 'Black' and 'Female'

If growing up is painful, for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult. (Maya Angelou)

Maya Angelou, uses religion, resistance, and recreation to overcome multiple memories of the most cruel institutions of America - the slave trade and its degrading effects on the community, in her life narratives. Here, the African-American race as a whole, is envisaged as a 'caged bird' which longs for freedom from oppression, in the form of women ambushed and raped, young boys whipped and maimed, men castrated etc. This image of cagedness is chronicled through a series of six autobiographical volumes that moves on to images of togetherness, song, music and ends with a supplication to God the Savior. These multi-volume autobiographies beginning with the *Caged Bird* published in 1970, highlight the social and political tension of the period. This is followed by subsequent self-life- narratives, namely *Gather Together* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin'* (1976), *Heart* (1981), *God's Children* (1986), and *Song Flung* (2002).

Her self- life- narration adopts a unique cyclic form, fulfilling Olney's notion of, "describing the entire life of the individual up to the time of writing." (*Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* 19). Angelou's life narratives are a well- crafted cyclic re-presentation of the life making it distinct in such a way that the last lines of the final volume *Song Flung* matches the first lines of

her first volume *Caged Bird.* The title of the first volume of her autobiography, *Caged Bird* is taken from the poem "Sympathy" by African American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. While, the title for her second life narrative, *Gather Together* is taken from a New Testament injunction which refers to all travailing souls to pray and commune while waiting patiently for deliverance. This idea also finds precedence in all the folk sermons where the preacher exhorts his congregation the theory of forbearance. Her third volume, *Singin' and Swingin'* follows the black vernacular pattern paralleling a folk preacher's oral discourse with verbs changed in the title to suit the forms of poetic chants signifying how people would "sing and swing and get merry like Christmas". The fifth volume, *God's Children* is a book about going back to their native homeland, while the last volume titled *Song Flung* appreciates 'the inside truth' on being an 'African American' and 'female.' *Collected Autobiographies* which is a collection of all her self-life-narratives begins with a dedication, "This collection gratefully acknowledges the gifts of all my ancestors. It is dedicated to my great-grand children..." (i). Her life-narratives thus become a testimony to the people and the times she lived in.

In Angelou's life narration the African American history has a significant role to play in deciding the course of the textual I's. Her narratives cloaked with the burden of slavery heightens the sense of insecurity, leading towards the support system that helped the African American community in their sustenance- their spiritual conviction. Even as slaves, the African Americans had recognized God as their salvation on earth and beyond.

Religion thus became a therapy designed by the enslaved to aid them in their physical and mental survival from slavery. Spirituality and spiritual conviction became a part of their life. In the early days of slavery, the number of Blacks who were permitted to attend to Christian preaching was relatively limited. One of the most influential positions within the African American religious conviction is one that is occupied by the Black folk preacher. Angelou, in her life narratives, makes her *Narrating I* adapt the tone and form of a folk preacher, revealing the spirit of resurgence within the African American psyche.

bell hooks in her *Talking Back* claims, "... the liberatory voice [of the folk preacher]... is no longer determined by one's status as object – as oppressed being. That way of speaking is characterised by opposition, by resistance" (15). Maya Angelou / the *Historical I* makes use of this liberatory voice as a Black folk preacher, borrowing images such as - freedom from bondage, one of resurrection, etc. from the Bible, to suggest the power and energy of African Americans. In using the voice of a black preacher, the *Historical I*, places her life narratives as an embodiment of the African American oral tradition. The ideas analysed within her life narratives fall within the precincts of African American women's self-stories viz, to consider the methods African American women have used in constructing a woman-centered, community-based, theological model.

Maya Angelou, the *Historical I*, is inherently dependant on 'call and response,' an important feature within all African American sermons. This feature is characterized by the use of Biblical language paralleling the text of a sermon. The "call" to write these life narratives came in the late 1960s when Robert Loomis, editor, Random House, proposed that she write her autobiography. Maya Angelou flatly turned down the offer. Several months later, Loomis enticed her to write an autobiography, but this time he posed a challenge by stating, "You may be right not to attempt an autobiography, because it is nearly impossible to write autobiography as literature. Almost impossible" (*Conversations with Maya Angelou* 65). Not being the type of person who would refuse a challenge, Angelou took the offer and wrote the *Caged Bird.* The *Narrating I*, within the life narratives, adapts the sermonising technique to situate the core of her autobiographical I's as positioned within the interpellation of institutionalised empirical categories, such as, racism and sexism.

Throughout her multi-volume autobiography the *Narrating I* charts the *Object I*'s journey from displacement to self-knowledge. The bonding with the spiritual and the sermonising technique finds its root in the feelings fostered by her grandmother that the only means for redemption was through God. Religious conviction to the *Object I* did not simply mean Sunday classes and attending the church alone, it meant habituation of the self and the tongue. Rigid laws governed every aspect of the young *Object I*, who is made conscious of the verbal virtuosity apart from learning the laws about

cleanliness and obedience, and about performance in the school and church. Even a phrase such as "by the way" was prohibited, since it meant using God's name for trivial purposes. The spoken word is thus presented by her grandmother Henderson as directly controlled by religion and any slight in this regard would invite damnation from the Almighty.

Apart from the church-related evangelical activities, annual meetings also witnessed all members of the community as participants in the victuals that followed. In this context the *Narrating I* observes how the Missionary ladies of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church helped Momma prepare the pork for sausage. In addition the *Narrating I* presents pictures of how the men chopped off the larger pieces of meat and laid them in the smoke house to begin the smoking process (*Collected Autobiographies* 23). As a folk preacher, her descriptions underscore the solidarity of the entire community while celebrating the richness and warmth of the Southern African American life in the face of oppression and poverty. Years later, the *Narrating I* presents an individual occurrence while at San Diego as a seventeen year old, single, with a two- month old baby boy attending Sunday 'go-to-meetings'. "*I understood them all. I was part of that crowd. The fact of my Southern upbringing, the fact of my born Blackness meant that I was for the rest of my life a member of that righteous band, and would be whether or not I went to Church again*" (emphasis added, *Collected Autobiographies* 259-260).

Placing religion at the core of the communal life, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher uses conversational oratory to show how the Southern African American community nurtures its members to survive antagonistic environments. The *Historical I* weaves together the changing seasons which also provide opportunities for church related activities that promoted fellowship and festivity. In winter, after the first frost, hog killings are spirited events that demonstrate community linkages and strength. The annual revival meetings stress the importance of faith, hope, and charity and "They were assured that they were going to be the only inhabitants of that land of milk and honey all the Negroes had to do generally, and those at the revival especially had to bear up this life of toil and cares because a blessed home awaited them in the far off bye and bye" (*Collected Autobiographies* 101). There are numerous examples elucidated by the *Narrating I* to show how different individuals of the community help bail out one another. During the perilous times of Depression, her grandmother Henderson employs a system of barter to help save her neighbours and her own Store. When her brother Bailey comes home late the whole community, comprising of both the men and womenfolk share Grandmother Henderson's concern.

Yet the certainty of being a part of the "righteous band" is disrupted when, in her third autobiographical work, *Singin' and Swingin'* the *Object I* finds her son raising doubts regarding her main support system -religion. This happens when the *Object I* and her son go out on an evening walk. Here they witness a group of people gathered around a man praying out aloud at the street

corner. Clyde, Maya Angelou's son urges her to leave immediately claiming, "That man is crazy." When the *Object I* tries to reason out, "That is one of the ways people praise God. Some praise in Church, some in the streets and some in their hearts" (*Collected Autobiographies* 207). Clyde asked her, "But mom, is there really God? And what does he do all the time?"(207). The *Object I* is stunned. Having grown up in a Christian Methodist Episcopal Church where her Uncle had been the Superintendent of Sunday School, and her grandmother, the Mother of the Church, each Sunday having spent a minimum of six hours in Church all came rushing back to her when the *Object I* heard her son ask whether there was really God. The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher wraps up this unsettling question of her son with, "To whom had I been praying all my life?" *(Collected Autobiographies* 402-03).

The innocent question of a five year old, who is yet to get 'interpellated' into the religious system leaves her speechless, for, the greater part of her life revolved around the Church. In order to get him "interpellated" into the "righteous band" she writes, "That night I taught him Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" (*Collected Autobiographies* 403). The Battle of Jericho or the Siege of Jericho is taken from the Book of Joshua, in the *Old Testament*. The *Narrating I* equates the circumstance of Joshua, a poor slave, (who rises to become the military commander and eventually the leader of Israel), with the plight of African Americans. With faith and God on his side Joshua was able to win the battle of Jericho (Joshua 5:13-6:27). Her choice of the story from *Old Testament* adds to the similarity with the folk preacher, for, this text contains

elements essential for a successful folk sermon. In her short story collection titled, *Even the Stars Look Lonesome*, Angelou points out how the " stories [in the Bible] also offer a sense of hope and inspire them to continue struggle" (23). The themes of resistance and empowerment are characteristic features within the stories that help the preachers to a great extent.

According to Louise Althusser, a French philosopher, all ideology, does the function of constituting individuals as subjects (*Critical Theory since 1965* 241). There are specific belief systems that get people (subjects) to believe in them. The meetings and the voice of the preacher become a vehicle that helps create a collective spiritual rebirth while inciting resistance to European cultural hegemony as "inferior subjects." Religion thus forms one such belief system that tries to infuse a specific sense of ideology among the African American community. The power of the spoken word and the intimate knowledge and understanding of the sermonic tradition vibrate through the above words. Through the visionary words of the folk preacher and the response of the congregation, African Americans created a world wherein they were at the centre where they found comfort and consolation. The amount of influence the folk preacher exerted on the congregation is what the *Historical I* attempts to produce in her readers through her life narratives. Therefore the *Narrating I* as the speaking subject evokes the rhetoric of the folk sermon form to articulate her own struggles and individual standpoints.

Bruce A. Rosenberg, an analyst on the structure and nuances of the folk sermon form, in his *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* claims that they may follow one of the two definite patterns. In the first pattern, the Biblical text of the sermon is read first and is followed by the context, a prosaic explanation of the text. After that the message the preacher derives from that text is preached or chanted. On the other hand the preacher abandons the text and is taken over by the spirit. The sermon at this point is chanted and becomes poetic. In the latter form, the sermon is basically orally presented prose and is characterized by conversational oratory and conversational non-chanted speech (9). The six volumes of her life narratives reveal a strong Narrating voice as the folk preacher presents the most significant events in her life through conversational oratory. The *Narrating I* follows the latter form when she sets the stage, introduces characters, and portrays conflicts and tensions among those characters as they interact with one another and deal with their own internal conflicts and challenges.

In his, "The Message of the American Folk Sermon," Rosenberg points out that one of the most complex, and the oldest mode of arrangement of a folk sermon is, in the parallel organization of events in which themes are introduced one at a time, developed individually, and then combined with other clusters either to be developed further or to be included in a conclusion. This structural type encourages subtle and extended development of the individual elements of an argument; however, to be effective, the audience must recall all these developments prior to the conclusion, when all components are joined into an

organic and logical entity. With this type of structure, major themes will have similar distribution patterns: that is, the parallel structure should be reflected in themes that have important concentrations in non-overlapping portions of a sermon before coinciding at the very end (701).

The *Historical I* takes care to weave together a wide range of socio-political groups viz, rich/poor, white/black, male/female, old/young, free/enslaved, America/ Africa and Northern/Southern. The *Historical I* is also conscious of the form adopted in her life narration when she claims, "... I have tried to make the selections [of events] graduate so that each episode is a level, whether of narration or drama, well, always dramatic, but a level of comprehension like a staircase" (*Order Out of Chaos* 140). Besides this, the I-now, while contemplating on putting her life in words, states regarding the composition of her life narratives in the following words, "I thought about black women and wondered how we got to be the way we were" (*Collected Autobiographies* 1166). In crafting the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher, the *Historical I* is careful in building a resilient image of the self, observing:

> Image-making [process] is ...especially important for African American women in that we are, by being black, a minority in the United States of America, and by being female the less powerful of the genders, so we have two areas we must address. If we look out of our eyes at the immediate world around us, we see whites

> and males in dominant roles. We need to see our mothers, aunts, our sisters and grandmothers. (*Black Women Writers at Work* 2)

The *Historical I*, presents the first stage of hurt, humiliation and helplessness when she presents her childhood days of segregation at Stamps, Arkansas. The *Historical I* expresses the insecurity on being born a black girl through Marguerite Johnson (her original name). The image of the 'caged bird' is found pervasive in all the life narratives and it is found accentuated in the first volume *Caged Bird,* set in 1930s. It begins with the lines,

> "What you looking at me for?
> I din't come to stay . . . ." (*Collected Autobiographies* 7).

Here, the *Historical I*, intentionally singles out a situation at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Stamps, Arkansas, where Marguerite Johnson (Maya Angelou) climbs up to the pulpit to wish everyone on Easter Day. The preceding night the *Narrating I* claims she had dreamt that, "I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (*Collected Autobiographies* 8) " like a movie star"(7). Instead, when the *Object I* gets on to the pulpit she is aware of the painful gap between her dream and reality, for she is wearing a dress that is "a plain ugly cut-down from a white woman's once-was-purple throwaway" (8). She realises that her "skinny legs" and looks that were "dirty like mud" (8) as being the focus of everyone's gaze. Not surprisingly she loses her confidence, forgets her lines amidst "wiggling and giggling" (8). It takes a bad

psychological impact making her feel an urgent need to urinate. The young Marguerite later runs back home "peeing and crying" (9). The image of an unwilling child who wishes to metamorphose into a movie star or white girl echoes the psychological uneasiness on being born into a Black segregated community. Here the *Historical I* presents Marguerite Johnson, young Maya, as the quintessence of all African American children. The unconscious desire of young Marguerite, as a dislocated *Object I*, stems from the gulf between the sordid reality of her blackness and her dream to turn white. Such a feeling, according to Fanon is part of the socialising process of all African American children (*Black Skin, White Masks* 143).

Barely after the *Narrating I* presents the unfortunate Easter episode comes the second level of introduction to another dimension of individual plight. The *Narrating I* situates the young *Object I* and her brother Bailey as sent away "wearing tags on our wrists which instructed- "To Whom It may concern"- that we were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson Jr., from Long Beach, California, en route to Stamps, Arkansas, c/o Mrs. Annie Henderson (*Collected Autobiographies*) by their estranged parents. Even while speaking of an individual painful experience, the *Narrating I* adds, "Years later I discovered that the United States had been crossed thousands of times by frightened Black children travelling alone to their newly affluent parents in Northern cities, or back to grandmothers in Southern towns when the urban North reneged on its economic promises" (*Collected Autobiographies* 10). Here the *Narrating I*, as the preacher takes care in making the personal appear as part of a broader

spectrum of the collective, pointing to the role of economy in deciding the family structure in African American children. Jens Brockmeier underlines the same fact in the essay, "Autobiographical Time," when he observes that the life narrator, "Does not just describe or represent a self in time, but it evaluates this self in time, in the light of moral assumptions and ethical convictions" (59). The *Narrating I* presents a double layered sense of displacement- from home and parents and within the larger African American society that is segregated due to racial subordination.

In developing the theme of racist segregation, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher, presents a narrative and dramatic example from her experiences as a small child, Marguerite Johnson, at segregated Stamps. The folk preacher presents a scene of familial warmth, cleanliness and togetherness in the act of raking the garden; this sense of positive energy is contrasted with the 'powhitetrash' kids who are presented as dirty, unkempt and rude. Young Marguerite, from behind the screen of the Store relates to how the kids walked up to her grandmother Anne Henderson's Store, pretended to be serious and begin aping her grandmother, calling her names, making faces and taunting her, while her grandmother continued singing hymns one after another. The rude behaviour of the powhitetrash is highlighted when they get ready to leave; they call out "Bye Anne" to which Mrs. Anne Henderson replies politely, "Bye Miz Helen," "Bye Miz Ruth," "Bye Miz Eloise" (*Collected Autobiographies* 29). The young *Object I* behind the screen door reacts angrily to the incident,

> I burst. A fire cracker July-the-Fourth burst. How could Momma call them Miz? The mean nasty things. Why couldn't she have come inside the sweet cool Store when we saw them breasting the hill? What did she prove? And then, if they were dirty, mean and impudent why did Momma have to call them Miz? (*Collected Autobiographies* 29)

The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher, through this incident re-creates the image of the 'caged-ness' caused by white illogical prejudice on empirical grounds such as, race and class. The incident on the one hand reflects the powerlessness of the 'powhitetrash,' on classist terms, while underscoring young Marguerite's rage at the African American's tragic predicament. Within the white society these 'powhitetrash' kids were made to feel substandard and degraded even by the untidy and unkempt class of whites. The feeling of hurt, anger and humiliation seeps through every pore on observing these children trying to exercise control over an old African American woman who held a commanding position in her society. The folk preacher exposes the ethical system of the Southern rural African Americans, "Values among Southern rural blacks are not quite the same as those existing elsewhere. Age has more worth than wealth, and religious piety more value than beauty" (*Collected Autobiographies* 283). While subverting the Eurocentric notions the *Narrating I*/ folk preacher places the ideological core of Stamps as being defined by a far superior framework than that of the white society namely, age and religious piety- the qualities that her grandmother epitomised. The *Narrating I* / folk

preacher presents the Grandmother figure as passing through a state of epiphany as a result of which her face acquires an added glow of calm.

The *Object I* is aware of the fact that her grandmother had won an emphatic victory which the *Historical I* cloaks in poetic imagery. The use of hymns to gain strength over the stifling external circumstances helps the young *Object I* find peace and calm. Immediately after this encounter Momma and young Marguerite go back to the job of raking the garden. Pierre Walker in his essay entitled, "Racial Protest, Identity, Words," while commenting on the presentation of this scene observes, "The presentation of the raking scene immediately before and after the incident serves to accentuate the image of a beautiful, clean, strong and pious " (101). This contrasts with the image of the dirty, sordid and lewd 'powhitetrash' kids. Although she and her grandmother never discussed the incident later the *Narrating I* knew that her grandmother had remained stoic and resolute and hence won a psychological victory over the 'powhitetrash' children. The power of religion- to generate a sense of achievement and harmony from within creates a discrepancy from the shameful outside, making religion an apparatus that heals when it hurts. Grandmother's strategy of using hymns to deal with an adverse external force can be seen as one of subtle resistance turning the deeds of the whites back on to them in what Dolly McPherson calls, "the dignified course of silent endurance" (*Order out of Chaos* 33). The *Historical I* throws light on an important technique adopted by African American women in the face of adverse situations which in turn helps

in strengthening the maternal archetype- the use of religion as a vehicle of subtle resistance leading to moments of triumph.

On another occasion, late one evening, the *Narrating I* recounts how the used-to-be Sheriff came over to warn her Uncle Willy to lay low that night, for, a "crazy nigger" had "messed with a White lady" and that the "boys were coming over that night" (*Collected Autobiographies* 18). The hurt and anger that the *Narrating I* feels is evident from the description of these "boys" as men who "were covered with graves of dust and age without beauty or learning" *(Collected Autobiographies* 18). These 'boys' were members of the Klu Klux Klan and took on the charge of lynching and killing 'wayward' black men. Inherent also is an expose of the cruel intent of the Klu Kux Klan, for, her Uncle Willie was lame. The *Narrating I* throws light on how the Klu Kux Klan behaved as a tool in reinforcing the politics of power. Further, Uncle Willie's incapacity is not seen as a defence when juxtaposed with the contention of race. The *Narrating I* despises the ex-Sheriff for coming up with the news and observes, "His confidence that my Uncle and every other Black man who heard of the Klan's coming ride would scurry under their houses to hide in the kitchen droppings was too humiliating to hear" (*Collected Autobiographies* 19). By using the analogy of rodents to African Americans the *Historical I* re-creates dramatic and narrative effect on how African Americans were regarded through the eyes of white Americans in the 1920s. This incident, as with the earlier one regarding the 'powhitetrash' highlights the fact that the threat to the

community emanated from the outside world and not from within the community.

Despite the humiliation the *Narrating I* recounts how her grandmother persuaded Uncle Willie to hide in the bin in which they stored onions and potatoes in keeping with the "safe path" tradition. The *Narrating I* shows how with a tedious and fearful slowness Uncle Willie bent down to get into the now enlarged empty bin that had held potatoes and onions earlier. He was made to lay low when they covered him with potatoes and onions, layer upon layer, "like a casserole" (*Collected Autobiographies* 19). The *Narrating I* adds, Grandma knelt down praying in the darkened Store. Fortunately, the "boys" did not turn up. However the fear of death that held the African Americans at ransom, and Uncle Willie's "caged-ness," stands as a prototype for all African American men. The incident serves to accentuate the sense of 'white illogical hate' and the idea of the "white" as an adversary to the African Americans. A parallel theme of prayer and redemption through religion recurs as a firm support system for the dispossessed and marginalized African Americans. The *Narrating I*'s role as an all powerful black preacher has at its center a Biblical hermeneutic that views God as a powerful sovereign acting mightily on behalf of the suppressed. The *Narrating I* thematically portrays the *Object I* as gradually moving from the stages of hurt, humiliation and helplessness to subtle resistance to feelings of rage.

In presenting her life 'as a staircase' another incident at a white dentist's clinic underscores the African American predicament. This incident helps expose the humaneness of her grandmother with the harshness of white Americans. The *Object I* is taken to a white dentist with a painful abscessed tooth, but, the white dentist tells her grandmother in no uncertain terms that he'd rather stick his hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's. On hearing this, Momma asks the young *Object I* to wait outside when she reminds him of the money she had lent him during Depression. Her supplication for help is countered with the money that the dentist owed her, before she is shown the door. Here the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher, takes care in crafting the image of her grandmother as a provider and a fair minded person, conversely drawing upon the image of the white American dentist as an opportunist. Racism at its worst is faced by Momma, but she refuses to be cowed down by such incidents. She deviates from the long travelled "safe path" by asserting herself. The *Narrating I* takes care to heighten the 'caged' image of the African Americans as the power structure refuses to yield to the dictates of Mrs. Annie Henderson.

Meanwhile the *Object I*, young Marguerite conjures up a situation when she waits outside Dr. Lincoln's office. She imagines Momma imposing her will upon Dr. Lincoln who ends up pleading for mercy. But, when she learns of the truth the *Narrating I* claims, "I preferred, much preferred my version" *(Collected Autobiographies* 164). In her imagination the *Object I* assigns her grandmother a role of power wielder who would stop at nothing short of asserting herself. The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher marks a sense of

disappointment in following the first two stages of resistances, viz., feeling helpless, or resorting to subtle forms of resistances and gradually begins to place her protest at another stage. Black preachers use their power to inspire the enslaved to resistance and revolt. Once again, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher makes use of this incident to demonstrate her graduation to the next level, from subtle resistance to a sense of outright protest.

Mrs. Annie Henderson's role as a resistor and later a questioner does not graduate to the level of outright rebellion, instead she reverts to the 'safe paths' by relapsing into bouts of silences and resignation thereby presenting conflicting images at certain phases of Angelou's life narration. This is obvious from an incident that makes the *Object I* feel "rootless, nameless, [and] pastless" (*Collected Autobiographies* 293). On returning to Stamps after a long stay at California an adolescent *Object I* visits the Merchandise Store, in the predominantly white area. A tall white saleswoman orders her about coldly, assaulting her ego. The *Narrating I* recounts how she gives her a piece of her mind and walks home congratulating herself only to be hit by her grandmother for "showing out" on the Whites. Here the *Object I* is found to transgress from "the safe path" dictated by her grandmother, "... that white folks could be talked to at all without risking one's life. And certainly they couldn't be spoken to insolently. In fact, even in their absence they could not be spoken to harshly unless we used the sobriquet "They" (46). The result was not what she had envisaged. The 'principle' behind the incident was more important to the *Narrating I* whereas Grandma Henderson whose upbringing had been as quiet

resistor did not encourage speaking up outright at the Whites [except on rare occasions]. Greatly anxious for Maya Angelou's safety in Stamps, Arkansas, Grandma Henderson packs her to Louisville.

Here grandmother takes on the tone of a folk preacher summing up the fear factor that governs the African American race, viz., the fear of being killed for talking back, the fear of being whipped for forgetting the dominant norms, the fear of being physically violated to remind her of her place in the society...etc. Nevertheless the beacon of hope lies in the anticipation that God Almighty would protect them. The sense of urban humanism that she had learnt at California does not help in the rural South, but the incident brings to the fore the changing sense of identity within the young *Object I*. Her early years at Stamps, Arkansas had made her feel meek and humble, but through the greater degree of exposure at California she realizes that there is much more to life beyond colour segregation. Lynn Bloom sums up her change in the following way, "Living in South of Arkansas, in Stamps Angelou learned what it was like to be a black girl in a world whose boundaries were set by whites." She further adds: " But she learned, also, that blacks would not only endure, but prevail" (*Afro-American Writers After 1955: Dramatics and Prose Writers 9).* From being a quiet resistor the *Object I* becomes a talking-back rebel. Strains of this rebellion stem from her Grandmother's temperament as highlighted in the dentist's scene when she had dared to question the white dentist. The graduation to this stage forms the dramatic gradation to the next level in the "staircase"

from being a fearful and insecure young Marguerite/ *Object I* to someone who dares to question the power structure.

Her brief stint at Mrs. Cullinan's kitchen becomes her "finishing school" (*Collected Autobiographies* 83), where she learns valuable lessons of life making her an active protestor. The white employer Mrs. Cullinan demeans her in the beginning when she insists on calling her "Margaret" instead of, "Marguerite." In the presence of her friends Mrs. Cullinan however, calls her "Mary" for the sake of convenience. The *Narrating I* feels enraged on "being called out of her name" (*Collected Autobiographies* 86). The *Narrating I* / folk preacher recollects the collective past tradition of the African Americans insulted by being called, "niggers, jigs, dingles, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks" (*Collected Autobiographies* 86). The use of allusions and negative imagery such as these helps accentuate the feelings of enslavement and objectification while justifying the graduation to the level of outright protestor.

The *Narrating I* attributes the change from a meek girl to an active protestor to her brother Bailey who helps resolve her conflict with Mrs. Cullinan by advising her to choose some of Mrs. Cullinan's favourite dishes to smash up before quitting her job. While doing so, the *Narrating I* recollects Mrs. Cullinan exclaiming to her friends, "Her name is Margaret, goddamn it, her name's Margaret". The *Narrating I* ends this narration with, "Mrs. Cullinan was right about one thing. My name wasn't Mary" (*Collected Autobiographies* 87). Besides encapsulating 'Naming' as an important trope within the African

American life narration, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher provides hope and solace that reconciliation need not be the only alternative amid injustice and despair. The *Narrating I* / folk preacher thereby highlights the transformation of the young *Object I* from being a meek and humble girl to one who voices her protest lucratively.

In establishing the self as assertive, the *Narrating I* / folk preacher reveals an attempt to chalk a different path for her group when she plans to join the San Francisco Street Cars as a conductor. This was a time when white women were replacing men at the job. However, as expected, her request at the Market Street Railway Company is treated with suspicion and coldness. The secretary plays her part to perfection claiming that the Personnel Manager is out and that she is unsure of his presence the next day. The *Narrating I* recounts that the incident seemed a recurring dream, concocted years before, which eternally haunted all African Americans. The *Narrating I*, equates the secretary to Hamlet while the *Object I* becomes Laertes who were bound to duel. The *Narrating I* feels that both of them were "fellow victims of the same puppeteer" (*Collected Autobiographies* 205). The folk preacher/ *Narrating I* evokes literary imagery from the well known Shakespearean tragedy *Hamlet* making all the people involved – both Americans and African Americans -actors, guided by a puppeteer. The mature *Narrating I* recognises these pre-determined dictums as a "recurring dream," which is in many ways similar to the dentist scene where she had yearned for a similar self asserting grandmother to make the white dentist attend on her. Breaking away from her grandmother's "safe path" the *Narrating*

I asserts herself, protests against this discrimination and finally gets hired as the first Negro conductorette of the San Francisco Street cars. The *Narrating I*, in using the folk sermon form, binds together an extraordinary experience that has, among other results, forged a unique way of understanding the African American socio-cultural experience in America. The folk preacher slowly graduates the *Object I* from being meek and submissive. In many ways echoing the siege and fall of Jericho the *Object I* attempts to break free from the shackles that objectified her ancestors thereby uses themes such as industry, individual achievement and empowerment.

The feeling of outright protest is slowly replaced by an added level of intuitive understanding, regarding the problem of 'race as a construct' that needs to be transcended. From this stage on, the *Object I* assumes a different name and ideological construct, from 'Marguerite Johnson' she transforms into 'Maya Angelou.' While Marguerite stood for shame and helplessness, Maya Angelou was synonymous with accomplishment, empowerment and greater sense of worth. This change of identity came when she became a stage performer with *Porgy and Bess.* Here, the *Object I* could travel to different parts of Europe where she discovers varied reactions to the African American race. As a performing artist she is judged and respected for doing her job well. It is then she realises that although there were white co-performers the crowd was not prejudiced on the basis of race as the Americans.

The *Narrating I* / preacher brings out a discovery that reassures her greatly, "Europeans made a clean distinction between Black and White Americans... Blacks were liked, whereas White Americans were not" (*Collected Autobiographies* 529).This statement, while reinforcing the view of the merit of the group, conversely draws attention to the fact that white Americans are not a widely respected community throughout Europe. From segregated Stamps, were the helplessness and dislocation is a constant reminder, the *Ideological I* slowly elevates and transforms the *Object I* away from the empirical notion of race - into a confident worldly- wise individual who realises her individual competence.

The folk preacher's dream of a world of righteousness is manifested once again in the way the *Object I* is presented in an enactment of the play, *The Blacks, by* Genet. The *Narrating I* claims that the play was "delicious to our taste," for, they were African American actors in 1960 s staging the real-life confrontations on the streets of America. Maya Angelou played the role of the White Queen Heart (which Genet himself prescribes as to be acted by a black woman). The depth to which the superior/ inferior dictum plagues the African American psychology is evident as she demonstrates how her senses faithfully represented the white Americans with ease. Nevertheless, Genet's prophecy of "the oppressed would take over the position of their former masters" (*Collected Autobiographies* 784), envisaging a reversal of the roles of the African American and the whites in future, and that "They would be no better, no more courageous and no more merciful," Genet's play thus exemplifies the politics of

power based on racism. In *The Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon echoes the same sentiments when he notes that "decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution" (35), thus he prophesizes that the superior/inferior paradigm would be swapped but not ended forever. Du Bois in his *Souls of Black Folks* claims that the "The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a "boss," an intriguer, an idealist..." (65). As a folk preacher the Narrative I strongly disagrees with this prophecy observing that African Americans, "... were different more respectful, more merciful, more spiritual" (786). The folk preacher as the *Narrating I,* thus embodies the strife for another just world, with the dream of righteousness, which they impart to their fellowmen.

In synchronising with this feeling of righteousness, the *Narrating I* adopts an affable stance with regard to white Americans in her life narrative, *Singin' and Swingin'.* Here the *Narrating I* portrays Louise Cox, a pleasant white woman who is said to have "smiled openly with the Negro customers" (*Collected Autobiographies* 392). Cox, the part - owner of a music store loans the *Object I* a record one day. This act of kindness from a white American, leaves her puzzled for "there was no ready explanation for her gestures of trust" (*Collected Autobiographies* 393). This narrative stands in direct contrast to her depiction of the whites in Stamps, Arkansas as generally dirty, illogical, untrustworthy and hated by the African Americans. The *Narrating I* is careful in

dealing with this change in attitude, by not turning over a new leaf impromptu. The *Narrating I* on the other hand reminds the readers that the *Object I* is weighed down by centuries of segregation, distrust, hate and anger. This incites her to rush home, squeeze enough money from her emergency fund to repay Louise's loan immediately. She is taken aback when she hears Louise tell her that she did not have to hurry, "Because I like you because my heart tells me and I trust my heart" (*Collected Autobiographies* 394).The *Object I* continues to feel suspicious of the friendship offered, mistaking it for pity, when unexpectedly she is offered a job at the same music store by Louise Cox.

Here, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher takes care to rupture the myth that all whites were enemies of the blacks. The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher places the *Object I* within the intersection of culture, politics, history and the individual to shape a unique conception of identity of the self throughout these narratives. Batsell Barret Baxter, in *The Heart of the Yale Lectures,* identifies amongst other qualities, a sermon needs to have a definite purpose that is determined by the needs of the congregation; ... the preacher needs to understand the congregation; "... the preacher will appeal to reason and emotions using indirect appeals rather than direct appeals, being audience centered rather than subject matter centered, being positive rather than negative, appealing to basic motives" (34). Having an intimate relationship with problems of segregation and hostility, the folk preacher takes great care in blending both character and craft together with a style rooted in personality. The narratives conform to the theory of the 'call' and 'response' making her sermons the call

that helps enervate the disillusioned African American psyche. As a folk preacher she interprets "the Word" serving as tellers-of-tales, relating ancient narratives to contemporary contexts. Louise helps change her perspective regarding whites as adversaries to a great extent. The *Narrating I* / folk preacher who has hitherto been focussing on "the Word" regarding the "whites as racists" dogma, yet, the *Narrating I* breaks away from this dogma to show how Americans could also be friends. While elaborating on this change of heart, the *Narrating I* elucidates how she takes the job, but kept Louise under constant surveillance, for, she had heard tales about white women pull off their drawers lay down first and then scream rape. The deeply ingrained suspicion against the White folks makes her watch Louise "like a hawk", but could find "no thread of prejudice against her" (*Collected Autobiographies* 397). The *Narrating I* slowly widens the gamut of her life narratives to include, among other things, a healthy interaction and a successful friendship between two hearts sans racial discrimination.

Concurrent to the delineation of the empirical element 'race,' an additional significant unified theme that finds prominence in her life-narration is the impact of gender in the portrayal of the image of the self. Angelou, the *Historical I* takes great care in introducing and building up strong female figures who have played a decisive role in shaping her life narratives. Her autobiographical series focuses on the theme of resilience through a network of relationships viz, mothers, aunts, sisters and grandmothers. The *Narrating I* consciously presents stories of only strong, successful mothers and

grandmothers based on the true stories of sacrifice of black mothers performed for their children. Angelou in her interview with Claudia Tate gives a vivid description regarding the plight of the African American women,

> Black people are nurturers of children in our community... Black women have not historically stood in the pulpit, but that does not undermine the fact that they built the churches and maintained the pulpit. The people who have historically been heads of institutions in black communities have never said to Black women .... We don't need you in our institutions. (*Black Women Writer's at Work* 3)

The American society, as part of the Eurocentric construct, assigns roles to women of the African American society. The women of this "group" fall within multiple categories such as, mothers, other mothers, cheap labourers, domestic workers in white family, the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, the Jezebel, wet nurses, cooks and maids. Alice Walker enumerates this re-presentations in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" observing how Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the mule of the world," because they have been handed the burden that everyone else refused to carry. Their desperate pleas for understanding, for simple care, have been ignored thoroughly. Teresa de Lauretis re-conceptualises this theory of Walker and puts forth a proposition regarding Gender as a "Representation", "a socio-cultural construct and a

semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy etc.) to individuals within society" (*Technologies of Gender* 5).

The socially constructed determiners of women, as objects of sex, primary nurturants etc. have been systematically reproduced through various political apparatuses. The image finds credence in her first life narrative, *Caged Bird*, where the *Narrating I* presents the *Object I* as an young girl in a displaced society, to an anguished child coping with rape, to the role as a single mother, a writer, a wife, concluding with an emancipated African American female self who breaks free from all the cages that bind her. Inherent within all these is the strength that she generates using the religious indoctrinations from her grandmother at Stamps.

The *Narrating I* in *Caged Bird* focuses on how the *Object I*, an innocent young female is susceptible to violence and violation. She is cruelly reminded of being a female, when, at the age of seven and half years she is brutally raped by Mr. Freeman, her mother's live-in jaded boyfriend. The incident exposes the internal dimension of African American life, for, Mr. Freeman, an African American, portrayed as a weak man, is unable to prevail over her mother, Vivian Baxter, and therefore takes advantage of young Marguerite. Having longed for the companionship of her parents young Marguerite mistakes Mr. Freeman's intimacy for paternal affection only to be deeply scarred by the relation throughout her life. Her trust is betrayed and she also suffers from

excruciating pain physically. The mental scars and the battle that she wages to redeem herself brings to the foreground several determining apparatuses and their role in a young black girl's life.

The *Narrating I* throws light on how the legal system works in objectifying an young African American girl. The court room scene is also representative of how the dramatic and narrative methods of the folk preacher works together to intensify the feeling of distress. The *Narrating I* shows how she is subjected to another type of 'rape', at the court room, with the defendant's lawyer trying to hold her, a seven and half year old, responsible for the incident. The bitter struggle that the young *Object I* goes through to prove that she had indeed longed for his contact as a father and not as a rapist accentuates her problem. The folk preacher here highlights on how the legal system could twist the manacles of justice to entrap an innocent young child. Her religion had taught her that to lie was evil, yet the *Object I* is forced to lie in the end that she did not yearn for his contact for the sake of survival. The lie earns Mr. Freeman a year's punishment but the *Object I*'s own personal ordeal begins. Young Marguerite traumatized by the memory of the lie "used silence as a retreat" (*Collected Autobiographies* 70). When her maternal grandmother Mrs. Baxter and her uncle use their influence and kill Mr. Freeman she feels that she is indeed evil. Young Marguerite is bewildered and benumbed at all the oppressive systems, namely, patriarchal, social and religious discourses that control her life." Lillian K. Arensberg, in her essay, "Death as Metaphor of Self in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," observes, "Speech, sexuality and

violence are interconnected" (278), consequently, the *Object I* resolves to remain silent. She goes through a "perfect personal silence" (*Collected Autobiographies* 70) phase which continues unabated for nearly seven years until her meeting with Mrs. Bertha Flowers.

Mrs. Flowers, a neighbour and friend at Stamps throws her the first 'life- line' helping her overcome her silence from the external psychological pressures. The *Narrating I* takes care in projecting the image of Mrs. Flowers. The *Object I*'s perception that illiteracy meant "mother wit and the collective wisdom of generations" (*Collected Autobiographies* 83) is replaced by a learned African American who instils in her a feeling of being "proud to be a Negro, just by being herself" (*Collected Autobiographies* 79). The *Object I* as the folk preacher feels that Mrs. Bertha Flowers was the first person to introduce her to the beauty and rhythm of the English sounds. Initiated into the sensual joy of literature being pronounced and uttered-helps her overcome her "perfect personal silence." While at Stamps, Arkansas young Marguerite falls in love with William Shakespeare, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Dubois. This life line "reading" leads her towards the solid anchorage of her later years, her romance with sounds especially with the Bible,

> I read the Bible to myself; I'll take any translation, any edition and read it aloud just to hear the language, hear the rhythm, and remind myself how beautiful English is. Though I do manage to mumble around in about seven to eight languages English

remains the most beautiful of languages. It will do anything.

(*Contemporary Literary Criticism* Vol. 77: 15)

The initiation into sounds and the beauty of the language can be in every way attributed to the *Historical I*'s use of the folk preacher's technique. Oral techniques such as storytelling have always been important among African-Americans. Mrs. Flowers thus serves as a via-media for her to return to the speaking community of the society.

As in the treatment of the image of Mrs. Bertha Flowers, the *Historical I* takes great care in presenting strong African American women characters, while their male counterpart are relegated to the background. Among the various strong female characters presented are Mrs. Henderson, her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Baxter, her maternal grandmother, and her mother, Vivian Baxter. In *Heart of a Woman, Mind of a Writer, and Soul of a Poet*, Lyman B. Hagen provides a possible reason behind this feature as being, "Since it is generally accepted that children of her era developed stronger bonds with their mother than their father, it is not surprising to find Angelou emphasizing the importance of mother and grandmothers" (69).

The *Narrating I* projects a positive theme of gender and gender roles by re- presenting two powerful women characters such as her paternal and maternal grandmothers. It must be noted that the *Narrating I* devotes only passing references to her grandfathers while her maternal Grandmother Baxter and her paternal Grandmother Annie Henderson gain precedence. The *Object*

I's upbringing in the Stamps, Arkansas, re-conceptualises the Afro-centric notions of the family. As the 'other mother' for Marguerite and her brother, 'Momma' becomes a vital role model. Her place of authority in Stamps, as the female owner of the only store in the area, her role as the Mother in the Church, her capacity to lend money (even to white males) to people when they are in need, her culinary skills, her power to gain strength from her own self plays a great role in shaping the *Object I*. The sense of power that she derives from within is due to her strong foothold in her religion. This strength she tries to infuse in her grandchildren. Through the disciplining of religion, grandmother feels that she could find solace and re-affirm her self from the powerlessness of the external world. To the *Object I*, grandmother Henderson plays a very important role of, "Interpreting the society and equipping her with pertinent skills and attitudes that would allow her to survive ...She [grandmother Henderson] may not have always been able to protect her home from outside white forces but she surely surrounded the household, her family, with a tough kind of strength and love" (*Order Out of Chaos* 159). Mildred A. Hill in her essay on grandmothers in Africa and America notes that Annie Henderson has been a significant force in the stability and continuity of the black family and the community" (qtd. in "Singing the Black Mother: Maya Angelou and Autobiographical Continuity" 257). The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher, thereby takes care to develop her grandmother as a self-made woman, with a sense of righteousness and strength, a traditional preserver of

the family, a source of folk wisdom and an instiller of values within the black community.

The *Narrating I* describes her as a good cook, who later built a store in the heart of the Negro area. Grandma Henderson or Momma is a robust, independent person, who takes care of her crippled son and grandchildren. Apart from being a protectoress to her family and provider to her family and community she is also presented as a person who helps bail out white people through Depression. Her impervious spirit and shrewd nature keeps them safe in times of crisis. Through the presentation of her grandmother the *Narrating I* / folk preacher uses visionary words to draw attention to the fact of how the female members of the African American community developed survival strategies to confront the existing Eurocentric ideology, breaking free from them to establish a different set of norm for themselves.

The folk preacher / *Narrating I*'s portrayal of Grandmother Henderson uses the theme of 'image making' to the fullest extent. Despite being an independent woman, she is projected as cautious, for, she chooses certain paths in life, that are looked upon by Marguerite / the *Narrating I* as "safe paths", because they were tried and tested formulas handed down from generation to generation. The *Narrating I* observes, "Momma intended to teach Bailey and me to use the paths in life that she and her generation and all the Negroes before had found, and found to be the safe ones" (46).These "safe paths" help make

her existence at Stamps easier, thereby the folk preacher throws light on the paths that were tread by the ancestors as reliable.

The *Object I*'s majestic octoroon maternal grandmother, Mrs. Baxter represents another facet of the unknown Southern Black woman. Like Momma she is self-reliant and owns a ghetto borough in Prohibition–era St. Louis. She has leverage with the lowest crook and the highest officer in the police department. The *Narrating I* portrays her as playing a crucial role in the development of the area, by being "almost a man." As a young black female the *Narrating I* discovers that the dominant, race-based, black victim status discourse can be undermined to grant the black female any agency or claimant group status. Yet the *Narrating I* takes care in re-presenting her Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Baxter as digressing from these social 'constructs' While they share the platform as crucial members of their society, the former is portrayed as a subtle resistor whereas the latter is crafted as an outright protestor. The folk preacher in presenting these strong female characters highlights, affirms, and glorifies their contributions to the African American community in general. The segregation of work for the African American woman was not restricted to housekeeping alone. Thereby, the *Historical I* makes her life narratives a political discourse in the battle to improve the image of all African American women in the eyes of whites.

Nancy Chodorow in her *The Reproduction of Mothering* enumerates how institutions like schools, media, and families perpetuate ideologies and

contribute to social reproduction. These ideologies help create expectations in people about what is normal and appropriate and how they should act" (35). A primary ideology perpetuated among societies was that the mother was seen as the primary caretaker of the family and children. When this ideology was seen in light of the Baxter's they would turn out to be "outsiders" from "normal," "appropriate" behaviour. Patricia Hill Collins draws attention to the fact that African American communities have also recognised that vesting one person with the full responsibility of mothering may not be wise or possible. As a result 'Other mothers' - women who assist blood mothers by sharing responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood (47). The *Narrating I* uses this concept wherein Mrs. Annie Henderson becomes the 'Other mother' who nurtures the *Object I*, young Marguerite, while also performing the duty of social community activism, as has been a part of the African American tradition.

Her mother Vivan Baxter is found to exude a good deal of Mrs. Baxter's qualities, highlighting de Lauertis' claim that gender and the roles associated to it are a representation reversing all the stereotypes prescribed for women and mothers. The *Narrating I* presents the *Object I*, young Marguerite, as longing and pining for her mother, Vivian Baxter. When both her parents abandon young Marguerite and her brother Bailey, the *Narrating I* voices the anguish felt at the absence of her mother as, "I could not believe that our mother would laugh and eat oranges in the sunshine without her children" (*Collected Autobiographies* 43). Her father's role, on the other hand, has very limited

mention (except for an incident or two) in all her life narratives, reaffirming the ideological notion regarding the role of the mother as the primary provider of the family. Nancy Chodorow observes that young children may feel invulnerable and all powerful because it has introjected, or taken as an object, a nourishing and protecting maternal image, whether or not its mother is actually there. Alternately, it may feel rejected and alone whether or not its mother is actually there because it has taken as an internal object an image of her as rejecting and denying gratification" (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 43).

The reason behind an insecure, displaced self as seen in the first scene of the *Caged Bird* where the *Object I* struggles to wish people during Easter, hoping to transform into a white girl is because of the introjections of the lack of a primary caretaker-the mother. This "internal object" gains vitality when it comes in contact with her mother who is seen taking initiatives and affirming her spirit as a "light skinned, straight hair, talented dancing and her snappy fingered, head tossing elegance" (*Collected Autobiographies* 455).

The *Narrating I* replays the scene when young Marguerite first meets her mother with the words, "I was struck dumb. I knew immediately why she had sent me away. She was too beautiful to have children. I had never seen a woman as pretty as she, who was called "Mother"" (*Collected Autobiographies* 50). The unconventional scene where a child is introduced to her mother serves to intensify her displacement. It also serves to concretise de Lauertis' and Chodorow's claim on gender and mothering roles. 'Motherhood'

and 'Mothering' as seen from Vivian's viewpoint are roles assigned that tend to limit the female alone. She therefore resorts to a 'safe passage' to her children under the care of her ex-husband's mother Annie Henderson.

The Narratorial voice of Young Marguerite attempts to justify the reason behind her indifference, by attributing it to her physical attractiveness and youth that had no room for conventional representations, especially, children. The *Narrating I* takes care in crafting the image of Vivian by presenting her as 'nearly white' due to her light skin, yet she is portrayed as a person who chose to remain as part of the African American community. The *Narrating I* uses poetic imagery to highlight the distinctiveness of Vivian, "To describe [her] would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow" (*Collected Autobiographies* 49). Her reaction to the meeting brings to the foreground the fears that clouded her mind. The fear that her brother would no longer remain her dear friend due to the Oedipal attraction that he cherishes for their mother along with the sense of insecurity that her brother and mother matched each other in their looks.

Yet this loss of identification physically with her mother at the tender age, gives way to a sense of mature adult admiration. Her mother's self-reliance, approach to life, methods of handling people and fear, advice regarding life helps the *Object I* overcome fears that plagued her from her childhood. It is this contact with Vivian that helps her mature making her graduate from the level of anger, rage and subtle resistance to a more secure self.

In spite of the positive effects of the mother over the *Object I*, young Marguerite, George E. Kent observes that Vivian stands for, "The Blues Street," signifying the fast life (*Kansas Quarterly* 75). He also claims that her behaviour seems "puzzling and unsettling" (183). Stephanie Demetrkopoulos, a critic, notes that Vivian's deviant behaviour is "shockingly callous" and "insensitive" (*Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* 201) at the time she sends young Marguerite back to Stamps depressed after the rape. This is because the stereotypical idea of a "good mother" as the teacher, protector, provider, and nurturer that Chodorow points to as a "construct" is vouched by Vivian Baxter, for, she becomes an Outsider subverting dominant ideologies regarding mothering, motherhood, living life etc.

While speaking of the mother- daughter bond that holds its sway over the Historical I, a critic, Maureen T. Reddy in her essay, "Maternal Reading: Lazarre and Walker," warns that a "barrier to learning to think maternally may arise from a woman's experience as a daughter, from witnessing her own mother's shortcomings" (*Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* 228). Hence the *Historical I*'s relationship with Vivian Baxter can be seen as a doubly pronged love-hate relationship. Her mother had tended to her only after the age of thirteen. This serves a constant reminder in the later years after her son is born. The Narrating I overcomes her own bias and anger against Vivian and begins to communicate using a more mature approach after the birth of her son, thereby re-affirming Reddy's claim that daughter's tend to,

"recognize and to reject destructive ways of thinking, then [find] constructive ways of thinking that allow the correct identification of virtues" (*Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* 229).

Ironically though, when she delivers a son, at the age of sixteen, it is her mother who brings to the *Object I*'s bed the three- week -old son, re- assuring her that if you are for the right thing then you do it without thinking" (*Collected Autobiographies* 222). The *Narrating I* claims to have been terror stricken, for, she "was sure to roll over and crush out his life or break those fragile bones" (221). Contrary to this claim, when she wakes up, she finds herself bending her arm and making a tent for the baby with the blanket. Stephen Butterfield in his *Black Autobiography in America* feels that, "The book ends with a symbol .... Continuity is achieved by contact of mother and child the sense of life begetting life that happens automatically in spite of all the confusion- perhaps also because of it" (213).

Francoise Lionnet in her *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*, captures the essence of influence of Vivian on the *Object I* in the following manner, "To be sure, one can see Vivian Baxter as a non-nurturing, highly competitive, and goal oriented mother. Yet she is the one who teaches Maya to trust her body, to follow her maternal instincts when her son Guy is born" (135). Paradoxically, despite all the contrariness, the *Narrating I* clearly posits the view that the independence and pride Angelou nurtures as a mother and an adult emanate from her mother Vivian Baxter. Being a political activist

she exercises considerable influence on the Black and white community at St. Louise. The sense of self confidence is instilled in the *Object I*, when the mom-daughter duo make plans to meet at a predominantly "White's Only" hotel at Fresno. On arrival the *Object I* feels "the piercing glare in the lobby" (*Collected Autobiographies* 647) leaving her nervous. Noticing this, her mother Vivian Baxter, teaches her the first lessons of handling fear in matters concerning race observing, that animals can sense fear and that human beings were animals too. She advises the *Object I* never to let a person know that she is frightened adding that fear brings out the worst in everybody.

Through Vivian Baxter, the *Ideological I* spells out the secret of the Eurocentric norm that creates fear among African Americans, leading to "a fear-admiration- contempt for the White "things"- White folks cars, and White glistening houses and their children and their women" (*Collected Autobiographies* 40). Inorder to pull oneself away from these representations Vivian Baxter spells out a new dictum, "Ask for what you want and be prepared to pay for what you get" (*Collected Autobiographies* 647). The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher hereby brings to the foreground the "cage" that binds African Americans, urging them to break free from the fetters that bind them. One of the significant components of all black sermons is its practicality and relevance to a broad spectrum of African American existence. Annie Henderson and her 'safe paths' were of great help while at Arkansas, yet, the *Object I* resorts to follow Vivian Baxter's advice when she grows up in keeping with a broader spectrum of experience.

Maya Angelou clearly shows how the African American women of America could "call their shots" by becoming a natural leader even in the 1940s and 50s. The *Narrating I* also explodes the myth regarding lack of participation of the African American women in the political arena. The Baxters' are deliberately presented as strong African American women who parallel Mrs. Anderson in being powerful in their own unique way. In fact Angelou, observes Lynn Z. Bloom, in her " Heritages: Dimensions of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiographies," observes that, " Through the rituals and techniques of her mother Vivian Baxter, and her grandmother Mrs. Baxter, the folk preacher presents the practices of mothering that seek to challenge and change the norms of patriarchal motherhood that are limiting and oppressive to women" (*The Lost Tradition* 295).

Mothering and motherhood in her life narratives, become a political and public enterprise, wherein the *Narrating I* / folk preacher emerges as a social commentator and political theorist who radically, through her maternal philosophy, reworks, rethinks and reconfigures the concerns and strategies of African American, and in particular black women's emancipation in America. Bearing a child out of wedlock is the primary step in this regard, the *Narrating I* claims that initiation into motherhood changed the way people at Stamps dealt with the *Object I.* The *Narrating I* observes, "I was a mother and that placed me nearer to the people" (*Collected Autobiographies* 283).

In fact, her mother Vivian, is seen as a principal disruptor of the transmission of sexist and patriarchical values from generation to generation. Besides this, Vivian is a successful individual who creates a new meaning for 'black womanhood.' Consequent to the acceptance of her mother's value system, the *Object I*, follows Vivian's footsteps. This makes her an antithesis to the strong black mother image as the primary protector and nurturant, when she opts to tour Europe with *Porgy and Bess*. The *Object I* leaves her son under her mother's care but cuts her tour short to return home on hearing of her son afflicted with severe rashes physically, and an insecure mental wreck, all due to her long absence. It is here that the *Narrating I* is haunted by the romanticized stereotype of the strong motherhood image,

> I had ruined my beautiful boy by neglect, and neither of us would ever forgive me. It is time to commit suicide, to put an end to accusations and guilt .... If my temporary absence in Europe caused such devastation to his mind and body, what would become of him if I was gone for ever? I brought him into this world and I was responsible for his life ... .(*Collected Autobiographies* 609).

From now on, the *Narrator I* exposes how the *Object I* juggles to balance both profession and mothering. The *Narrating I* here decides to re-negotiate her responsibility as a single parent, deciding not to compromise on her son's welfare. The sense of loneliness and rejection seen in the young *Object I* is

palpable in her son Clyde, for, they did not have a nourishing and protecting mother. Nevertheless this insecurity in the young *Object I* is replaced by Grandmother Henderson, while in the case of Clyde, the *Object I* returns to fill in the gap. Thus we see her decision never to leave her son Clyde, even when she goes for her jobs, becomes a part of what Carol Boyce Davies observes regarding black feminist politics as being transformational. Besides seeking to challenge social conditions and processes it gives value to existences often rendered silent or invisible in current patterns of social ordering" (*Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* 27).

Her effort at making things transformational, the *Narrating I* as the folk preacher voices is not always a smooth ride, for, she is always beleaguered by multiple fear that haunt all African American parents when they raise adolescent boys, she voices this concern in the following way:

> While they are young, you pray you can feed them and keep them in school. They get up some size and you pray some crazy white woman don't scream rape around them and get them lynched. They come of age and white men call them up to go fight, and you pray they don't get killed over there fighting some white folks' war. (*Collected Autobiographies* 694)

While trying to cope with the pressures of single parenting, an additional patriarchal notion that entraps the *Narrating I* is the image of a 'happy family' with a husband, wife and child. The *Object I* meets a Greek white man, Tosh

Angelos, who befriends and finally proposes to her. The romantic notions she harbours while entering into a relationship and the myths associated with it are all delineated within specific contexts. Her narration of Tosh Angelos is particularly significant, because of his racial distinction. Her mother's reminder voices the collective tone of all African Americans who have suffered due to centuries of slavery, she says, "Remember that White people have taken advantage of Black people for centuries" (*Collected Autobiographies* 412), Anger and guilt had been the critical factors that decided "that Black was Black and White was White and although the two might share sex they must never exchange love" (*Collected Autobiographies* 412). The *Narrating I* thus concretises Louise Althusser's claim that we are always "already made subjects before our births" (*Lenin and Philosophy* 166). The folk preacher here evokes memories of the advice passed down centuries. But the rigid wall of animosity that she had been indoctrinated with from her young days at Stamps is torn apart when she befriends and marries Tosh, who shows genuine appreciation for black jazz and Blues. The *Narrating I*, by placing him as an admirer of Black art, tries to persuade and shed light on the motivation behind the choice. The decision to break free from the determining ideology of the days of slavery, physical abuse and ugliness of the white prejudice is done with the conviction that,

> Tosh was Greek not White American., therefore I need not feel I had betrayed my race by marrying one of the enemy, nor could White Americans that I had so forgiven them the past that I was

> ready to love a member of their tribe .... I stared back hard at the whites in the streets trying to scrape the look of effrontery off their cruel faces. But I dropped my eyes when we met Negroes. I could not explain to all of them that my husband had not been a part of my degradation ...." (*Collected Autobiographies* 419)

The idealistic notions that the *Object I* harbours regarding family hierarchy, makes her an 'insider' in the patriarchal sense. Yet, it paradoxically places her 'outside' the gamut of the conformist, making her drop her eyes when she meets Negroes on the streets. This is because, the *Object I* strays from the dictates of her own community when she marries Tosh Angelos, a Greek, white man. Despite this deviation from the prescribed norms of the society, the *Object I* feels content, for, "I had a son, a father for him, a husband and a good home for us to live in. My life began to resemble a *Good Housekeeping* advertisement" (*Collected Autobiographies* 416). This break away from the community dictates can be analogised with the 'prodigal child' who strays away from the flock, only to return with greater conviction and hope.

A year later, the folk preacher/ *Narrating I* observes that she saw the evidence of a "reptilian presence in my garden. Tosh told Clyde the there was no God. When I contradicted him he asked me to prove this presence. I knew I was a child of a God who existed but also the wife of a husband who was angered by my belief. I surrendered" (*Collected Autobiographies* 417). The

clash of ideologies of individuals from different socio-political backgrounds is obvious in this case, yet, the compulsion of the *Object I* as his 'wife' makes her surrender to his wish.

The anguish over the loss of her cherished religious tradition lay within her and the *Object I* begins to scout neighbourhoods to become a member of churches and on Sundays prepares a good breakfast, lies to her family, hurries to a friend's home to change clothes and hastily rushes to the church. The *Object I* even takes care to visit different churches on different Sundays feeling, "I changed my sites each month, afraid that too many repeated visits would familiarize my face and that on promenade with Tosh I would be stopped by a church member and possibly asked about last week's sermon" (*Collected Autobiographies* 417).

These secret visits were a method of appeasing the *Object I*'s inner self, the way the enslaved Negroes of the past did. They had failed to pray in public for fear of being lashed. This was because the whites had considered religion as a subversive instrument and hence prevented the African Americans from visiting churches. The enslaved great-grandmothers and the people of those times took to secret meetings in the woods. Maya resorts to attend secret meetings in churches, for, she explains, that these meetings,

> ... drove into my body, to my fingers, toes, neck and thighs. My extremities shook under my emotional possession .... I was elated that I could wallow in the ceremonies and never forsake control

> ... on the street I felt cleansed, purged and new. Then I would hurry to Ivonne's change clothes and go back to my own clean house and pretty though *ungodly* family. (emphasis added, *Collected Autobiographies* 418)

When the clash between ideologies begins, the *Object I* and Tosh's relationship takes on the mythic dimension symbolising pre-abolition days-like that of the master-slave. They begin to drift apart making them an "ungodly family." She enrols herself at the Evening Star Baptist Church and gives them her real name, address and telephone number. One day the Mother Bishop calls up home, (it was unfortunately attended by Tosh Angelos) asking her to pay twelve dollars for her Baptism next Sunday. Tosh informs her that he had replied to Mother Bishop that " No one who lived here was going to be baptized anywhere at anytime" (*Collected Autobiographies* 423). After that incident, she claims, although things appeared normal she feels that, "The form was there [in their marriage] but the spirit had disappeared" (*Collected Autobiographies* 423).

When the *Narrating I* / folk preacher describes her life as the wife of a Greek man, Tosh, and later as the wife of an African radical leader, Vus Make, she brings out the male – female domination matrix that amalgamates diasporas. Her major routine after marriage to Tosh was to cook well balanced meals and clean up the house. With Vus Make, her second husband, the *Narrating I* describes her routine as,

> It seemed to me that I washed, scrubbed, mopped, dusted and waxed thoroughly every other day. Vus was particular. He checked on my progress. Sometimes he would pull the sofa away from the wall to see if possibly I had missed a layer of dust. If he found his suspicions confirmed his response could wither me. He would drop his head, his face saddened with disappointment. I wiped down the walls, because dirty fingers could spoil his day and ironed his starched shirts. (*Collected Autobiographies* 754)

The *Narrating I* notes that Tosh and Make shared similarities in certain ways in that they made all the choices for her, including choosing her friend's circle, "Only two [of her] former Navy friends … were allowed to visit our domestic paradise. He [Tosh] explained that the people I liked or had known or thought I liked were all stupid and beneath me" (*Collected Autobiographies* 416). When the *Object I* gets an offer to act in Genet's play *The Blacks* he refuses to let her do it saying, "They [Americans] do not know or care that there is a world beyond their world where tradition dictates action. No wife of an African leader can go on the stage" (*Collected Autobiographies* 785). Discourses that govern the constitution of identities and relationships within a particular social context are always susceptible to being overturned and replaced by another discourse, producing new subjectivities and /or a new relational order between subjectivities in the process. The *Object I* thereby is seen to relegate herself into a relational subjectivity, where her own life and interests are marginalised for the sake of familial harmony. The patriarchical

assumptions of the culture of male domination in African societies is voiced by Angelou's African friend Abbey in the following manner,

> A man's supposed to be in charge. That is the order of nature .... The worst injury of slavery was that the white man took away the Black man's chance to be in charge of himself, his wife and his family. Vus is teaching you that you are not a man, no matter how strong you are. He is going to make you into an African woman just watch it." (*Collected Autobiographies* 755)

Here Abbey equates man to strength, thereby a privileged group while women are shown as subordinated and thereby distinctly disadvantaged. For the African male the rein of power totally rests on himself. When she realises his inability to provide for the family she accepts the job of associate editor with *Arab Observer*. Vus Make's response to this was, "You took a job without consulting me? Are you a man? " establishing the realm of domestic space that the *Object I* had transgressed.

When the *Object I* suspects and confronts him on his fidelity, he replies, "... do not question me again. You are my wife. That's all you need to know." (*Collected Autobiographies* 798) adding,

> I am a man. An African man. I am neither primitive nor cruel. A man requires a certain amount of sexual gratification. Much more than a woman needs, wants or understands ... to an African man

> the act of sex is only important as long as it lasts. It is not the factor which holds the family together. It pleases and relieves tension, so that one can get about the business of living." (*Collected Autobiographies* 854)

Vus too re-affirms the fact that the African patriarchal claim that they required excess sexual gratification and the society had nothing against it. Maya realizes that Vus' values were different from her own. She writes regarding values in marriage in an African American society, "Among the people I knew my family and friends; promiscuity was the ultimate blow in a marriage. It struck down the pillars of trust which held the relationship aloft" (*Collected Autobiographies* 855).

The *Historical I* uses varied rhetorical strategies to expose the range of female subjugation as the wife of an African. When she decides to leave Vus Make, his friends arrange for a public debate, a "palaver", as she names it, where she is questioned regarding her decision to separate from him

> "Have you kept yourself clean?"
>
> "Do you refuse your husband his marital rights?"
>
> "You are an American., how well can you cook African food?"
>
> "Do you curse and act unbecoming?"
>
> "Do you try to dominate the man?"
>
> "Do you press him to have sex when he is tired?"

"Do you obey him? Listen to him carefully?" (*Collected Autobiographies* 860)

All these questions establish the limits set for 'gender as representations' as de Lauretis claims, determining that a woman as a wife is meant to keep things clean, to permit him his marital rights, to cook native food, never dominate and to listen and obey his orders carefully. These ideologies are perceived by the *Historical I* as 'constructs' and the *Object I* decides to break away from them. The folk preacher as the *Narrating I* demonstrates the self as a representative of the silenced, deprived and unprivileged, conversely draws attention to the inner strength, beauty, creative gifts while highlighting her imaginative and intellectual abilities and truths. By enumerating the questions, the *Narrating I* exposes the discursive social structures, questions those structures aloud, and seeks to change them. By walking out of the marriage she makes herself a 'speaking' and 'active' subject re-centering her own goals.

Apart from the discrimination felt on various levels, *Gather Together,* written during World War II, captures the exploitation of the African American community. Many African Americans were in turn promised freedom and economic progress with the dream of a new racial equation in mind the young and old African Americans sacrificed themselves. When the war came to an end the dominant ideology of the past took hold of the society once again. The *Narrating I* captures the pathetic' plight of the war heroes, "Military heroes of

a few months earlier who were discharged from the army in the city ... began to be seen hanging on the ghetto corners like forgotten laundry left on a backyard fence" (*Collected Autobiographies* 228). The use of simile such as "forgotten laundry left on a backyard fence" serves to accentuate the disillusionment of the African American's dream for a better life and fresh beginning. The bleakness in believing things would change and that they would be treated with dignity is a ploy adopted by the whites in order to work together to gain maximum labour during the war. The *Narrating I* adds, "... if war did not include killing I would like to see one every year. Something like a festival" (*Collected Autobiographies* 228). The *Narrating I* / folk preacher draws the image of Americans as exploiters- an unreliable group who are bent on taking advantage of the marginalised.

Search for one's roots is another theme that most of the African American autobiographies harbour as its theme. In the fifth volume of her personal chronicle, *God's Children* she takes the reader to Ghana, in West Africa during the early 1960s. This journey is a means by which she connects with her past. As an African American expatriate she tries to forge a link with her homeland. The lines strongly echo the Biblical story of the prodigal child.

> So I had finally come home. The prodigal child having strayed, been stolen or sold from the land of her fathers, having squandered her mother's gifts and having laid down in cruel gutters, had at last arisen and directed herself back to the

> welcoming arms of the family where she would be bathed, clothed with fine raiment, and seated at the welcoming table. (*Collected Autobiographies* 893)

The link could be seen as something that she fails to achieve in her "adopted" country, America. Dolly McPherson observes that the late 1950s was a time when many African Americans on first opportunity, tried, "To identify in a positive way with their ancestral home" (*Order out of Chaos* 104). Africa thus became a territory of consolation, a place where the feelings of indifference, rejection and shame were replaced with feelings of interest, acceptance and pride. Ghana's independence and its governance under its celebrated leader Kwame Nkrumah, the first new African leader reversed another dominant ideology of the times that whites could occupy positions of leadership and command attention and respect. These new awakenings in Africa dispelled the misconceptions that the African was inferior to govern his country. Ghana, unlike Liberia (which was founded by former African slave) was the centre for African cultural Renaissance. It was a period when old values and tradition of the continent was looked up with pride. The newly earned freedom brought about a time of promise and hope.

In Maya Angelou's fifth volume *God's Children* the *Historical I* presents an important incident at the Senior Common Room reserved for professors, lecturers at the Institute of African Studies. The *Narrating I* recounts how she chanced to overhear an Englishman, and Yugoslav woman

speak about Africans and African Americans. The Englishman comes up with a remark, "Democracy was never created for *lower classes*. Everyone knows that. Just like at Ghana." (emphasis added, *Collected Autobiographies* 926). A Ghanaian Professor of English and a Steward who were present there refused to comment on their remark. The *Object I* is shown in a fit of rage, lashing out at them. The Steward mollifies her rage saying, "This is not their [the foreigners] place. In time they will pass. Ghana was here when they came. When they go Ghana will be here. They are like mice on an elephants back. They will pass" (*Collected Autobiographies* 928). The confidence and maturity that the poor and the uneducated Steward of Africa showed was lacking in the *Object I*. The *Narrating I* observes, "No Black American I had ever known knew that kind of security" (928). The insecurity and the lack of the sense of self worth in the *Object I* is a by-product of the Eurocentric system, whereas, the poor African who lives in his own land, one with his own culture did not let these words ruffle him. The *Historical I* learns that outright protest is only a result of the lack of confidence in one's own worth. Before leaving the Steward adds, "... but your people ... they from this place and if this place claims you or if it does not claim you, here you belong" (*Collected Autobiographies* 928), thereby reminding her that Africa was her motherland although the *Historical I* claims to be an African American. The safety and security, the *Historical I* realizes, is firmly rooted within the culture of the continent. On the other hand, the folk preacher points to the sense of alienation and insecurity amongst African Americans, that stems from centuries of mistrust leading to feelings of

rootlessness and anchorlessness in American soil. The *Historical I* presents the *Object I* as transcending above the 'slings and bows' that kept hurting her from her childhood realising that such hurtful words and deeds need to be ignored to become a mature individual. The transition in portrayal of 'life as a staircase' is complete when she realises that the answer lies within her. Thus the Narratorial self as the folk preacher places the *Object I* as passing from- helpless rage, to anger, hurt and humiliation, to subtle protest, graduating to outright anger to the final phase of transcendence above all odds.

In response to what the Steward had alluded to regarding Africa being her home country the *Narrating I* captures the love / hate relationship she nurtures for America. This is clear when the *Narrating I* claims that although they could physically return to Africa, find jobs, learn languages, even marry and remain on African soil all our lives, "...we were born in the United States and it was the United States which had rejected, enslaved, exploited, then denied us. It was the United States that held the graves of our grandmothers and grandfathers. It was in the United States ... that those same ancestors had worked and dreamed of, "a better day by and by" " (*Collected Autobiographies* 987). Perceiving her identity as a member of the oppressed group and furthermore, acknowledging the socio-political and historical context in the American ethos helps her construct her own rituals of transcendence.

Yet, the *Historical I*, while presenting a worldview of a particular people highlights how the African Americans effectively prepared methods of

safeguarding themselves for the purpose of ensuring their survival. Besides the menu of acceptable foods, a collection of proper hairstyles and attire, a way to greet people, ways to sing music and tell stories, and ways to build homes and rear children, is a way to view the world. And the *Historical I* presents just that. By using the technique of a Black preacher the *Historical I* presents an intimate, first hand narration on the peripheral as well as the psychological reaction to being born an African American in the American soil.

The *Historical I* reinforces the Afro-centric feminist stance by positioning her *Ideological I* around the creative power used for good of the community. The life narratives begin with the sense of hopelessness and insecurity, moving away to focus on the strengths that hold the community together. The ideology behind this writing in other words echoes Patricia Hill Collins' view that the African American community is conceptualized as one's family, church community or the next generation of the community's children. (*Black Feminist Thought* 223-24).

The *Ideological I* throws light on how the external national conditions make one's freedom of choice limited or simply non-existent Besides this, the *Ideological I* also reveals all the repressive apparatuses that constantly remind African Americans of their colour and their past, to reinforce the superior / inferior dogma. It also throws light on how the Eurocentric patriarchy subverted the ideological apparatuses to help serve their end by providing numerous examples of the same. The *Historical I* in these life-narrations has

crafted the *Object I* in such a way that it renders an image of resurgence using the voice of a folk preacher.

In addition to this, the *Historical I* infuses a practice, within her life narrative, that is common among the people of Africa – the ritual of "Naming." Assuming a new designation or name on the occasion of some striking occurrence in one's life was a generally accepted practice in African history. Names might change, too, when a person passed through one of the rites marking a new stage in his or her development. In African-American naming practices, every child receives a given name at birth and a nickname that generally follows the individual throughout life. "Marguerite Johnson" becomes "Maya" her nickname that changes variously to "Rita" and later to "Maya Angelou." Maya Angelou adopts the African custom of giving names to her son as "Guy" in the second volume of her autobiography, which suddenly changes to "Clyde" without any serious explanation other than, "Clyde, he says, is an o.k. name for a river, but my name is Guy" (*Collected Autobiographies* 522). Marguerite Johnson, re-Christians herself as, "Maya Angelou," when she plans to join the tour to Europe. Thus the act of 'naming' and 'renaming' oneself is an attempt at connecting with her ancestral tradition. The change of name also corresponds to the gradation from a particular stage to another. When she changes her name she removes most of the cautious wisdom of reality instilled in her at Stamps and begins to get more practical according to the need of the hour. When her son, Guy (nee Clyde) renames himself he also attempts to assert his own independent will as a nine- year old.

In presenting her life 'like a staircase' the *Historical I* using the style of the folk preacher arranges several episodes that appear more like short stories. Keeping in mind the requirements of the target assemblage the *Historical I* makes her life narratives an important political tool. Through the interaction of the personal and the public the *Historical I* seeks to reflect on the stages of the evolution of the self, keeping in mind her audience- black girls, black boys and white girls and boys, as she attempts to portray, the condition of the Black female. Instead of basing her life on chronology she bases it on the theme of image – making and theme- making. Each volume becomes "literary," "inventive," and "innovative" through a touch of storytelling and dramatic rendition in sermonic form, keeping in mind the needs of the audience, thus creating an incremental sense of movement using Angelou's idea of "a level of comprehension like a staircase" (*Order Out of Chaos* 140). She therefore "redefines the nature and possibilities of the self" (*The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self Representation* 49). Although all of these volumes are distinct in style and narration the common images and themes that abound her works are the images of a 'Black,' 'Female' passing through various phases of life from childhood to adulthood- as a daughter, single parent, and wife. The life narratives stretch over time and place, from Arkansas to Africa, from confused child as a caged bird to an accomplished adult- an unrelenting self.

Chapter IV

Hurston and Angelou: Reconstructing Life's Philosophy in Other Creative Forms

One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art. (James Baldwin)

This chapter aims at extending the ideological stratagem identified within the life narration of Hurston and Angelou to a selection of their non-autobiographical works. While Hurston's projection of the self in her life narrative through ethnography is extended to her fictional works such as *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, Maya Angelou's folk preacher's style of self representation is extended to select poems from her *The Complete Collected Poems* of Maya Angelou.

Ann duCille in her essay, "The Mark of Zora: Reading between the Lines of Legend and Legacy" observes:

> No maternal ancestor fit this new black feminist ideal quite as neatly as Hurston, whose prose brimmed with the authentic black female language and traditional black female activities—rootworking, herbal medicine, conjure, midwifery—that Smith cited in her essay as emblems of a black feminist literary continuum (p.16)

Hurston struggled to achieve a personal voice against prevailing attitudes about race, and in her writing there is a clear connection between voice and self-empowerment. Her voice was constrained in part by the expectation of white readers, that she would confirm their sense of the black person's naturally primitive essence. As a student of anthropology, Hurston employed the rhetoric of anthropological authority in her ethnographic writing along the lines established by Franz Boas for the professional folklorist. Both Hurston's *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, focus on this anthropological research carried out in America and the Caribbean. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* was published in 1938.

Mules and Men, published in 1935, is a work that embodies Hurston's anthropological perspectives, by combining folk tales and Hoodoo practices from her visits to West Indies. This book is a result of research conducted between 1927 and 1932. It has two parts, namely, "Folk Tales" and "Hoodoo." The folk tales help the readers gain insights into the oral transmission of highly subversive folk tales and songs collected from Florida and Louisiana. The second part details the occult rituals and folk medicine practices of the conjure artists of New Orleans. It becomes an anthropological treatise, for, the text has an introduction by Franz Boas, a glossary and footnotes which explain such exotic words such as "chitterlings" and "doodley," "squat" etc. and an appendix containing Negro Songs with music formulae, a registry of Hoodoo doctors, a listing of paraphernalia of conjure and prescription by root doctors. In fact, the

connection between orality and literacy is especially served by studying *Mules and Men.*

In his 1928 work, *Anthropology and Modern Life*, Boas reiterated that the social sciences must be based solely on the study of "observed phenomena," and he went on to articulate that, " the scientific study of generalized social forms requires therefore, that the investigator free himself from all valuations based on [his] culture. An objective, strictly scientific inquiry can be made only if we succeed in entering into each culture on its own basis" (201). Similarly, Fetterman in his book *Ethnography: Step-by-Step* reiterates this thought when he claims that,

> The an ethnographer must keep an open mind of the culture or group they are studying, ... he also begins with biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think and is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the 'emic,' or insider's, perspective as both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native's point of view, the better the story and the better the science. (15)

Through her *Mules and Men*, Hurston interprets her own African American 'culture' both as a storyteller, and a scientist. She is a part of the African American culture and hence - an 'emic,' yet as an objective anthropologist / scientist she thinks objectively making her presentations as an

'etic.' Amongst all the connections that bind the people together Hurston chooses the African American folk tales and ritualistic practices alone to show how they form an integral part of their culture. When placed alongside her autobiography, *Dust Tracks*, it must be noticed that unlike her objective stance on race in the life narrative, Hurston does voice the brutal oppression of the African Americans in the South through her folktales. Yet, the focus does not remain the social and economic deprivation, but it concentrates mainly on the pride that she nurtures towards her culture.

Carl G. Herndl points out that the standard trope in ethnography is "the arrival story," i.e., the poetic description of the ethnographer entering the native scene. This trope establishes the fieldworker's presence, authorises her account, and then allows her to recede from "the description that follows, subsequently suppressing the writer's genuine participation throughout the remainder of the text in order to establish the "scientific" authority of the "observation" (325). Hurston revels in her own "arrival stories," without however, subsequently fading into the background. At the very opening of *Mules and Men*, the townspeople introduce and name her to the reader, thereby making "Zora Hurston" the subject of the work. As she rolls into Eatonville in her Chevrolet, "They looked up from the game and for a moment it looked as if they had forgotten me. Then B. Moseley said, "Well, if it ain't Zora Hurston!" Then everybody crowded around the car to help greet me" (23). They eagerly ask her how long she plans to stay among them and with whom she plans to stay. The incident highlights the change that she perceives in her after her Barnard

education, while identifying with the stiffness of the community. This insider/ outsider dilemma make her construct several versions of the 'I' in the *Mules and Men*, sometimes as an observer/ an 'etic', sometimes as a participant/ an 'emic' and sometimes as a combination of both – as a participant observer, 'etic'- 'emic.' Her biographical personae and textual personae are thus irresolute, for, the latter functions within this community, while the former isolates her from it.

Her trip to Eatonville was not an immense success as she points out in her life narration, *Dust Tracks*:

> My first six months were disappointing. I found out later that it was not because I had no talents for research, but because I did not have the right approach. The glamour of Barnard College was still upon me. I dwelt in marble halls. I knew where the material was all right. But I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnadese, "Pardon me, but do you know any folk-tales or folk-songs?" The men and women who had whole treasures of material just seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads. No, they had never heard of anything like that around there. . . . (176)

Failure to accomplish all she hoped for from the attempt at gathering material forced Hurston to critically evaluate the methodology she had learned from academic study. Rather than maintaining the distance between herself and

her own townspeople, from whom she hoped to glean information, Hurston worked to establish intimate ties with them. She followed a pattern of participant- observation that would 'inform all' to help in her anthropological work. Although she suggests in her introduction to *Mules and Men* that college training was necessary, for, it enabled her to "see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garments" (3), her approach to field work changed. Instead, Hurston's introduction suggests that she always behaved as if she was one of the community returning home, an 'emic,' rather than a visiting- scholar trying to exploit the resources of the community to further her own academic ends.

In describing the routine adopted in collecting her tales from the native Eatonville townspeople, she narrates on how she is actively sought out by her informants, the storytellers, instead of the reverse, which is the norm in anthropological field study. A character in her home town of Eatonville, Florida, remarks that Hurston looks as if she's bored by what she is hearing and he urges the rest of the group to tell better stories, or "lies" as they are called, in order to hold her interest: "Zora's gittin' restless. She think she ain't gointer hear no more" (*Mules and Men* 43). At the opening of the second chapter, Eatonville storytellers such as George Thomas and Charlie Jones appeal to her to come and listen:

> "Zora," George Thomas informed me, "you come to de right place if lies is what you want. Ah'm gointer lie up a nation."

> Charlie Jones said, "Yeah man Me an my sworn buddy Gene Brazzle is here. Big Moose done come down from de mountain" "Now, you gointer hear lies above suspicion," Gene added. (37)

Implicit in this approach is the deconstruction of the subject/object relationship that characterized the anthropological work she studies. After successfully gathering material, Hurston could write of her research: "I enjoyed collecting the folk-tales and I believe the people from whom I collected them enjoyed the telling of them, just as much as I did the hearing." (3). This reciprocal relationship of telling and hearing is communicated in *Mules and Men*. Throughout the work Hurston conveys her pleasure and the pleasure of her comrades, who find power and beauty in the act of being an insider and an outsider-participant, thereby blurring the boundaries as an 'emic' and 'etic.'

It is almost as if her presence is required for this rich oral culture to come into being. Hurston writes in her *Mules and Men*, "Here in Eatonville I knew everybody was going to help me" collect the folktales which form the basis of her study (19). Yet, her "arrival story in the lumber camps in Ploughman, Polk County was not as easy as it had been in her own hometown Eatonville, Here:

> That night the place was full of men - come to look over the new addition to the quarters. Very little was said directly to me and when I tried to be friendly there was a noticeable disposition to fend me off. This worried me because I saw at once that this

> group of several hundred Negroes from all over the South was rich field for folk-lore, but here I was figuratively starving to death in the midst of plenty. (*Mules and Men* 85-86).

She intuitively realises that the African American community was suspicious of all outsiders and she had to become a participant / an 'emic' that makes them shed their resistance and open up to her. From her interaction with the folk community at Eatonville and parts of Florida such as Polk County etc, she realizes that story telling is a strategy of resistance by the African American community. The tales written were simple, varied underscoring the joy of storytelling with Hurston as the narrator / participant in the whole scheme of things. The stories range from traditional Brer Rabbit stories, that are greatly popular in the South to the black folk hero, John. The 'John' in the African American folklore is carefully distinguished from the 'John Henry' of white American story tellers. Hurston clarifies:

> Jack or John (not Henry John) is the great human culture hero in Negro folklore. He is like Daniel in Jewish folklore, the wish fulfillment hero of the race. The one who, nevertheless, or in spite of laughter, usually defeats Ole Massa, God and Devil. Even when Massa seems to have him in a hopeless dilemma, he wins out by a trick. Brer Rabbit, Jack (or John) and the Devil are continuations of the same thing. (*Mules and Men* 305)

John is thus portrayed as a great folk hero although he does not outwit God in any of the tales in *Mules and Men*, yet, he is confident in his ability to outwit white men and even the Devil. The harsh conditions in which the African Americans live in seldom let them triumph over all odds, but through their tales they invariably succeeded over the white Americans. The Brer Rabbit appears in few tales, but Hurston shows how the native Floridians used the story of the 'Gropher' as equivalent to the 'Rabbit.' Her visits to places other than Eatonville help establish patterns while discerning variations as well.

These tales usually alluded to as 'lying sessions' are similar to the ones at Joe Clarke's Store porch. This has one story teller trying to outdo the other:

> Many of the tales have distinct characteristics which suggest a kind of formula for story telling. They often begin and end with lines of native poetry which themselves are rarely, if ever, related to the tales they preface of conclude. Rather, they seem to function as convenient vehicles for getting in and out of the tales- much like, "Once upon a time" and "They lived happily ever after" do in popular fairy tales. (*Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 151)

One story teller for instance introduces his tales, "Man and the Catfish" with the words, "Once there was a man and he was very wicked. He useter rob and steal and was always killin' up people" (*Mules and Men* 102). While the endings were typically, "And that's how come no body don't ever see no

mocking bird on Friday" (103), "And dat's how come a 'gator is black today cause de rabbit took advantage of him lak dat" (116). While most of the tales conclude with a link from the past to the present times, all tales serve a common purpose- they indirectly criticise injustice in America by suggesting mythic reasons for the burdens imposed on them. The stories are more than a mere ritual of insult or a specific verbal game. Henry Louis Gates feels that they are, "a mode of language use, synonymous with figuration. Elsewhere he defines signifying as "a strategy of black figurative language use" (*The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* 85). The tales thereby also highlight the imaginative character of the African Americans.

Franz Boas, in his 'Foreword' to the book explains the value of her folklore collection in following terms,

> To the student of cultural history the material presented is valuable not only by giving the Nergoes reaction to everyday events, to his emotional life, his humor and passions, but it throws into relief also the particular amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life, the importance of which is in diminishing distance from the South. (*Mules and Men* x)

Yet beneath all the story telling and humour, Hurston, through the printed codification of the cultural messages, makes it, a longer, more enduring means of preservation of the heritage of the African Americans.

Hemenway, in his 'Introduction' to the *Mules and Men* presents the text as inherently political and subversive. It is political in this that the tales passed down the generations by African American community affirm their humanity while fostering a sense of self pride. The tales also bring out the strategies of survival, adaptation and resistance, of the African American community, which also form a part of these folk tales. As an objective 'etic,' she realises that the slave John is a 'wish fulfillment hero' of the race. The construction the tales of *Mules and Men* can be read as signifying both "a uniqueness of race spirit because they were a code of communication –intra racial propaganda- that would protect the race from the psychological encroachments of racism and the physical oppression of society" and "proof of the psychic health" of Southern blacks in the face of this oppression (*Zora Neale Hurston* 51). Hurston casts herself in many roles as she endeavors to find more of her culture by returning home to Eatonville, plunging deep into the culture of 'lies' that as a child she had failed to appreciate. Although *Mules and Men* is not an autobiography Hurston employs devices inherent to the genre of life narration in order to tell tales and sing songs of "the Negro farthest down" (*Dust Tracks* 145).

In *Mules and Men*, Zora Neale Hurston captures the Southern Negro's reactions to everyday events such as -their emotional life, their humor and their

passions. While documenting her culture, the anthropologer uses these tale tellers and to expose the African American identity. As an 'etic' Hurston observes,

> They [the story tellers] are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence is particularly evasive... The Negro offers a feather bed resistance ... the theory behind our tactic: the white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All night, I will set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I will put this play toy in his hand and he will seize it and go away. Then I 'll say my say and sing my song." (*Mules and Men* 4-5)

The best source of folklore- the under -privileged are the shyest, for, they are reluctant to reveal "that which the soul lives by" (4). The feather bed resistance that Hurston speaks of is about how the African Americans use laughter as disguise: "His laugh has a hundred meanings. It may mean amusement, anger, grief, bewilderment, chagrin, curiosity, simple pleasure or any other of the non or undefined emotions" (67). Laughter, for the African Americans is seen as an essential means of self preservation. Laughter was assigned the purgative power and the cultural hero, "High John de Conqueror" was a famous prototype of the same. He became, "A whisper, a will to hope, a

wish to find something worthy of laughter and song" (*Mules and Men* 69). Apart from High John de Conqueror, trickster figures such as John and Jack exhibited the spirit to negotiate hostile circumstances. John the slick slave makes fool of his "Ole Massa," while John is shrewd, Jack is depicted as the "over noble hero." All these figures stand for courage and negotiation of paths crucial for survival. Lowe writes of High John, Zora Neale Hurston's trickster character, "John, however, frequently gets tricked himself, as were his predecessors - the Signifying Monkey, Anancy, and Brer Rabbit" (*Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy* 9). It becomes more productive to recognise that, the construction of identity is not monolithic in nature, and is ever changing in its conception. Jirousek in "That Commonality of Feeling," writes, "Hurston, through her presentation of folktales that are 'bound by no rules,' presents a culture constantly in flux and ever changing, rather than fixed" (245).

The stories range from racial superiority to interracial conflict to human nature to cultural expressions and their adaptations. Jack was the greatest cultural hero of the South, for he could outsmart the mortals and immortals alike including God and the Devil. The folktales Hurston collected featured folk heroes from the time of slavery, dramatising the slaves' uncanny ability to get the upper hand through verbal banter in exchanges with white masters. The white master, unable to detect the duplicity of slaves' language, became its victim. The power of language to be aggressively subversive, and to give voice to those at the margins thereby challenging their oppressors are all brought

clearly through these stories. Hurston adapted these strategies in her own writing to channel aggression indirectly through verbal play. Deborah Plant notes that the "patterns of behavior recognizable in Hurston's life and work- silence, shamming, tomming, signifying, masking, and posturing- are all patterns of behavior exhibited in archetypal African American trickster figures like John, High John de Conquer, and Jack" (*Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* 45).

Some of the 'lies' are centered on the exploits of a folk hero, John. John is a slave figure who appears in a variety of situations which allow him to display the wit and cunning that enable him to overcome his enemies. John's master underestimates his cunning. His seeming humility and obedience allow him to pit himself successfully against stronger opponents. If circumstances warrant, John is not above using trickery. As in the previous folktale, many tales in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* have moral lessons in which virtue is rewarded.

While dealing with the collection of folklore, Hurston realised that the African American language was also a powerful resistant tool against oppression. Deborah Plant observes, "She [Hurston] was able to approach her study of language and culture of the folk through comparative analyses that acknowledge the inter-dependence of cultures while allowing for an evaluation of folk expression on its own terms" (*Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* 44). There are stories in

Mules and Men that highlight the fact that language is an instrument of domination. In one of the folk tales, John finds himself alluded to as a 'Nigger' throughout by his Massa (Master). Instead of arguing with his Massa or try to fight his way out, John, "Consumed on wid his bag," (*Mules and Men* 97-98) to walk towards Canada for freedom. After rescuing the Massa's children from the lake when John was granted his freedom, the Ole Massa keeps reminding him, " But 'member, John youse a nigger" (98). Each time he reminds him of his place in the society, John responds with, "Yassuh" (98).

The interlocking foreplay of power, politics and language are highlighted here when Ole Massa seeks affirmation from John. This places him in a superior position, one that guarantees him security while reminding John of his worthlessness. Similarly, several stories highlighting the African American's yearning for freedom from slavery is a recurring theme within the folk tales. Deborah G. Plant observes, "Such stories communicate to the teller and listener who unlike 'Ole Massa' can extract a meaning from the multiplicity of meanings or the ambiguity inherent in the language used ... posturing as the servile, self debased slave and knowing what to say and when to say it are "school lessons" embedded in the tales (*Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom* 46).

Hurston adopts the Boasian theoretical framework that an ethnographer must look beyond artifacts and rituals to the hard-to-see nuances of culture in order to document and account for the "mental life of man" (*African American*

Review 418). Hurston deepens this perspective by taking part in the activities along with hers study participants, therefore blurring the lines between participant and observer. Hurston trained in Boas' methods of objectivity and accuracy, and was then able to present her findings in a way that allowed her voice to be heard, along with the informants in her study. For example, in *Mules and Men*, Hurston processes and responds to her findings, acting as a catalyst for the text by establishing herself as a 'character' and all the while making the work more accessible to a non-academic audience (*African American Review* 419). Another technique that helps accomplish this is her use of her southern dialect in the writing of *Mules and Men*. Here she becomes an anthropological linguist exposing the several phonological deviations of speech through the characters in her folktales- The deviations are mainly, substitutions of "d" sound for "th" sound, "k" sound for "c" (kin), the double negative ("Ah know you can't make none"), the inflection of strong verbs as if they were weak ("throwed"), over inflection ("All turtles loves water"), variant use of pronouns ("and scratched he head") etc.

The tendency to repetition of key words and sounds (alliteration), vivid imagery, concrete catchy phrasing, figurative and metaphoric language, symbolism, and experiential oral style may be transferred to written style. Narrative sequencing to elaborate abstract concepts that may include details, characterizations, plot, and related digressions are certainly there. Deliberate manipulation of grammatical structure and meter can be transferred.

Exaggerated language and proverbial statements may transfer, along with formulaic structure. Indirection, suggestion, and innuendo can be retained.

Apart from her linguistic accounts and experiences with voodoo practitioners *Mules and Men* documents folk songs collected from Negro folklore. The collection also details the method it has to be sung with music. The songs are categorized as 'Work Song Series,' 'Social Song series,' 'Convict Song,' 'Spiking Rhythm,' and 'Songs for Children.' By basing her text mainly on the forces that shape and hold the African American community aloft, Hurston enforces humor, religious and ethnic identity. Her attempt at 'showing' rather than 'telling' is evident in all African American folklore and Hoodoo rituals. Hurston also becomes the guide and translator, throughout the text with men and women of Eatonville, New Orleans as participants gathered around her to translate the folklore to new listeners. While she takes on the role of a participant and observer in this folklore collection, she does the same with the Hoodoo rituals and folk song collections. When her friend Alan Lomax once questioned her about the source of her songs, she replied:

> I just get in the crowd with the people and if they sing it I listen as best as I can and then I start to joinin' in with a phrase or two and then finally, I get so I can sing a verse. And then I keep on until I learn all the verses and then I sing 'em back to the people until they tell me that I can sing 'em just like them. And then I take part and try it out on different people who already know the song until

> they are quite satisfied that I know it. Then I carry it in my memory. I learn the song myself and I can take it with me wherever I go. (qtd. in *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* 168)

Hurston reveals several sides of her personality through this quote- her fastidiousness, her spirit at getting deep into the thick of things, her love for folk culture, and the persistence at getting things right. She also demonstrates the skill to " have mouth " to observe , collect , preserve , and perpetuate oral tradition and verbal art through her writings and her life .

Hurston took much criticism for "ignoring" the atrocities that took place in the Jim Crow years of oppression. Scholars now support her work, saying that her discourse expanded the margins of the African Americans at that time. Instead of orienting them in relation to their White oppressors, she "sought first and foremost to study Black people on their own terms" (*Zora Neale Hurston and A History of Southern Life* 7). Hurston chose to document and to celebrate their music, the beauty and cadence of their language, and their rich storytelling techniques, all of which was seen as 'primitive' at the time. This is all recorded in her *Mules and Men* (1935) that establishes her in the field of ethnography. Hurston was even bold enough to document the voodoo and 'peasant cosmology' that was ignored by the African American Northern middle class and intellectual elites as it was seen as an embarrassing or 'primitive' practice (*Zora Neale Hurston and A History of Southern Life* 11).

When Hurston introduces the readers to Hoodoo practices in New Orleans she takes care to present its origins, along with the rituals associated with it, adding the first hand treatment practiced by various Hoodoo doctors. She writes:

> Hoodoo or Voodoo as pronounced by the whites is burning with a flame in America, with all the intensity of a suppressed religion. It has its thousands of secrets at its adherents. It adapts itself like Christianity to its locales reclaiming some of its borrowed characteristics to itself. Such as fire worship as signified in the Christian church by the altar and the candles. And the belief in the power of water to sanctify as in baptism. (*Mules and Men* 193)

In addition to her work in New Orleans, Hurston's fascination with the feminine allure of Voodoo is reflected in her anthropological research in the Caribbean- in Haiti and British West Indies. Like the *Mules and Men* this is documented in her *Tell My Horse* which reports of folklore practices that differ substantially from those practised in the United States. Here, the ethnographer as the 'etic' describes Brother Hanansi, the Spider, a culture hero who is represented in Haiti by Ti Malice and in the United States by Brer Rabbit. While the cultural variations or the inherent parallels of the African American folklore and Caribbean folklore form a part of the work, the text is divided into three sections, the first consists of five essays on Jamaica, centering on problems of colour and race and the second focuses on the chaotic political and

social climate of Haiti. The third section studies Haitian Voodoo. The first chapter includes a list of Jamaican proverbs that Hurston characterizes as "rich in philosophy, irony and humor" (*Tell My Horse* 9). As an 'etic' she places the list of proverbs and translations which serves as an example of the sophisticated wit of folk culture of Jamaica. A proverb works by indirection, its surface meaning encoding a latent meaning. For example, Hurston translates "Rockatone at ribber bottom no know sun hot," as, "The person in easy circumstances cannot appreciate the sufferings of the poor" (*Tell My Horse* 9). The translations help the outsider/ reader decode the latent meaning to bridge the known to the unknown.

Besides the cultural portrayal of the proverbs and folk tales, she highlights the inferior social position of women in the Caribbean. She makes a bold statement on the pivotal role male-female relations can have in a culture. Hurston's fieldwork observations, and personal experiences being raised in the rural south, lead her to conclude that; "male-female relations, rather than race, were central in the social interactions of black folk" (*African American Pioneers in Anthropology* 61). This theme is seen in the feminine prototypes she describes in *Mules and Men*, all strong and assertive, and bearing their societal position, and holding families, homes, communities and their culture together. Conversely, she also discusses how these Caribbean women attained powerful positions in the community as priestesses. Hurston documents Jamaican burial rituals characterized by a "strong flavor of matriarchal rule" (*Tell My Horse* 41). In *Tell My Horse* she describes a dance ritual: "a woman

breaks through the dancers with a leap like a lioness emerging from cover. Just like that. She sings with gestures as she challenges the drummers, a lioness defying the tribesmen" (53). In this ritual, the stereotypical male attributes of strength and power are ascribed to the female dancer. A symbolic queen without a king, she commands reverence from the tribesmen. Further, Hurston examines the "Nanas" as local priestesses. Through the lioness dancer and the Nanas, she presents two African female centric prototypes: the defiant woman who challenges the male power structure and the revered matriarch esteemed throughout the community.

In Haiti, as in Jamaica, Hurston focuses on the role of women and describes Haiti as "the black daughter of France" (93). In Haiti, Erzulie Freida, the goddess of love, possesses even higher cultural status than the lioness dancer and Nanas in Jamaica. Like the historical figure Marie Laveau who would rather "dance and make love" (*Mules and Men* 201), Erzulie is sexually charged and unfettered. Hurston explains that unlike her Greek and Roman counterparts, Erzulie "has no children and her husband is all the men of Haiti. That is, anyone of them that she chooses for herself . . . . As the perfect woman she must be loved and obeyed" (*Tell My Horse* 121). As an objective 'etic,' Hurston establishes a dichotomy between European and African goddesses, casting the former in a restricted role, confined to traditional European realms of womanhood. While the European goddess is bound to serve others as mother

and wife, in contrast, the African goddess is unbound, liberated, and autonomous.

The deification of the goddess figure as well as the prominent role of the priestess in West African religion help shape the African female centric dimensions of. Voodoo rituals, for example, feature "the priestess as the central figure—the person who is the oracle to the spirit of Voodoo" (*Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* 80). The strikingly womanist power of this African practice is captured in the opening anecdote of the Voodoo section of *Tell My Horse*. Hurston reports:

> "What is truth?" Dr. Arthur Holly asked me, and knowing that I could not answer him he answered himself through a voodoo ceremony in which the Mambo, that is the priestess, richly dressed, is asked this question ritualistically. She replies by throwing back her veil and revealing her sex organs. The ceremony means that this is the infinite, the ultimate truth. There is no mystery beyond the mysterious sources of life. (*Tell My Horse* 113)

This sacred ceremony not only personifies ultimate truth as feminine, but it also highlights feminine deification intrinsic to West African culture.

As a travel narrative, *Tell My Horse* details the natural beauty of Haiti's landscape and the sacred zones where African gods dwell, the good Rada and

the bad Petros. Hurston gives a comprehensive description of the main gods, including their desires and their powers (113-31). She identifies the arts of music (mainly drumming) and dance as intricate elements in Haitian religious rituals. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston extends her discussion beyond supernatural issues and examines Haitian politics, observing that "the people of Haiti needed a spirit which could burlesque the society that crushed them" (200).

In Haiti different forms of worship often collided at the intersection of race, culture, and ethnicity, and this passage demonstrates the French Catholic attempt to dominate and regulate religious practices in Haiti. Highlighting the inevitability of such conflict, Hurston asserts, "gods always behave like the people who make them" (219). As an 'etic' she underscores, how religion represents a culture's attempt to explain the source of human existence and life as the members of that culture experience it. Documenting Hurston's personal religious practices, Hemenway, her biographer, believes that she refused to divulge all the mysteries of Voodoo she discovered in her research. He cites her practice of Voodoo as a source of conflict between her responsibilities as a researcher / writer and her vows of secrecy as a Voodoo practitioner.

In both anthropological texts, Hurston presents Voodoo as potent and mysterious, yet its mysteries are never, to any significant degree, crystallized in either text. Hurston's explication of Voodoo, then, like the explication of any religion, is cloaked in mystery. In her attempt at presenting the Voodoo as a legitimate sophisticated religion, she claims: "It is old, old mysticism of the

world in African terms. Voodoo is a religion of creation and life. It is the worship of the sun, the water and other natural forces, but the symbolism is no better understood than that of other religions" (Tell *My Horse* 37). By stressing on its religious nature, the 'etic' ethnographer, dignifies voodoo worship, removing all the sensational associations related to it.

As an ethnographer, Hurston often critiqued the submission of the race to white authority, making this a theme that runs through *Tell My Horse*. In the first chapter on Jamaica, she laments that , " it takes many generations for the slave derivatives to get over their awe for the master-kind" (6) and suggests facetiously that Jamaica is a "rooster's nest" (9):

> When a Jamaican is born of a black woman and some English or Scotsman, the black mother is literally and figuratively kept out of sight as far as possible, but no one is allowed to forget that white father, however questionable the circumstances of birth . . . Black skin is so utterly condemned that the black mother is not going to be mentioned nor exhibited. You get the impression that these virile Englishmen do not require women to reproduce. They just come out to Jamaica, scratch out a nest and lay eggs that hatch out into "pink" Jamaicans. (*Tell My Horse* 8-9)

As literary collages, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* are amalgamations of sociology, topography, history, religion, politics, and poetics. Many of the passages in these texts are filled with beautiful lyricism, not the

"stuff of standard speech" or "formal [academic] standards" (*Frontiers* 145). Instead, these texts communicate playful, colorful, yet profoundly meaningful expression. Ishmael Reed in his 'Introduction' to *Tell My Horse*, characterizes:

> The content and style of *Tell My Horse* as postmodern with its mixtures of techniques and genres, this book, originally published in 1938, is bound to be the postmodern book of the nineties. But her greatest accomplishment is in revealing the profound beauty and appeal of a faith older than Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, a faith that has survived in spite of its horrendously bad reputation and the persecution of its followers. (xv)

In addition to Hurston's distinctive form and style, because of her legacy variations in the treatment of Conjure are widespread in African American literature. A pre-eminent sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, used racist statistical surveys in his field research to describe African-American communities as "disorganized and culturally non-adaptive" (qtd. in *Reinventing Hymes* 159). In a study entitled "Traditions and Patterns of Negro Family Life in the United States," published the year before *Mules and Men*, Frazier concluded:

> To be sure, when one undertakes the study of the Negro he discovers a great poverty of traditions and patterns of behavior that exercise any real influence on the formation of the Negro's personality and conduct. If . . . the most striking thing about the Chinese is their deep culture, the most conspicuous thing about

the Negro is his lack of a culture. (qtd. in *Reinventing Hymes* 159)

As Szwed points out, the established consensus of American social scientists between the wars, and well into the 1960s, was that African-Americans were part of "a deficit culture, a kind of negative culture existing in the absence of a real one" (*Reinventing Hymes* 160). Positioning itself in the interstices of this institutional edifice, Hurston's *Mules and Men* is the first full-length work that refutes the lie to present a "scientific" ethnographic base of argument on the persistence, strength and continuity of a distinctive African-American culture and tradition. Through her *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, Hurston treats the African American in his tradition. Her work on African religious practices detailed in *Tell My Horse* provides insight into the politics, sociology, and anthropology of Haiti and Jamaica and also (along with *Mules and Men* and her work with the Florida Writers' Project) serves as important source material for her works of fiction.

Hurston the anthropologer adds that Jack, like his blood brother, the rabbit and other culture heroes such as the bear, the lion, the buzzard and the fox is, " the trickster hero of West Africa [who] has been transplanted to America" (*Tell My Horse* 56-57). Holloway points out that, Hurston's research in Jamaica and Haiti had confirmed her belief in African roots of African Diasporan cultures in the United States and Caribbean, "Through her investigations of the primal black communities of the Americas those whose

links to the motherland were least culturally diffused by the slaves [and Hurston] was assured that the source of the culture she celebrated was truly African" (qtd. in *Every Tub Must Sit on its Own Bottom* 44). Thus by revealing all that 'the soul lives by,' she also attempts at moving beyond the traumatic context of enslavement to show how through oral literary techniques and ritualistic patterns they get transformed into legacies of empowerment. Hurston centers the African Americans and other migrants from Africa in their own African tradition- to show how the inventive, joyous, courageous people loved drama, appreciated wit and, most of all, relished the pleasure of each other's company.

> *Poetry is music written for the human voice. It must be read aloud. Poetry, I want it spoken. I want it almost sung. (Maya Angelou)*

Maya Angelou in her 'Foreword' to H. Beecher Hicks' book, *My Soul's Been Anchored,* observes, "The African-American preacher is a poet because he has had to be a poet . . . African-Americans have survived an unspeakable history of horror with the passion and purpose of good preachers and committed ministers" (i). Maya Angelou realises the invincible link between religion and poetry, a bond of words that can work as a method of resistance, of freedom. This is the reason she adopts sermonic tone in her poetry, as she realizes that the African American people considered religion sacred since it pervades values, beliefs, and sociopolitical life.

In this section select poems from Maya Angelou's collection have been chosen taking into account the levels of transformation- from utter humiliation and despair to subtle protest to outright protest to transcendence above all odds. Apart from this, the use of the folk preacher's sermonic tone in her poetry is another aspect that is dealt with, in this section. For Angelou, who wrote honestly about the world into which she was born, it was impossible to turn away from the subject of race, which permeated every aspect of his life, writing, public reception and reputation. That said, her subject matter was extraordinarily varied and rich: her poems are about music, politics, America, love, the blues, and dreams. No list could be inclusive enough. Angelou wrote poems about ordinary people leading ordinary lives, and about a world that few could rightly call beautiful, but that was worth loving and changing.

A brief glance at the poetry of the major black women writers reveals that the major themes they deal with are the rejection of negative images of black women, the relationship between black men and black women, importance of female sexuality and its relation to the process of creation and writing, relationship of black women to other women and their literary tradition, desire for liberation, socio-psychological inferiority, anger against marginalisational forms, etc. The poetry written by African American women such as Angelou proved that Black poetry could be both didactic and political, and art as well. Maya Angelou incorporates all these elements to make her poems a part of this tradition. Her verse is free and conversational, resembling the folk spirituals. Maya Angelou as a poet and black preacher incorporates several personal

testimonies, both as an individual and as a member of a doubly marginalised group. The volume *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* includes individual collections of poems namely, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Dii, Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well, And Still I Rise, Why Don't You Sing?, I Shall Not Be Moved,* and *On the Pulse of Morning.*

All the poems weave together real life testimonies, references from the Bible, and jokes in keeping with the sermonizing tone of the African American preacher. At the thematic level she explores the social, psychological and cultural structure of the African American society. Her *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Dii* was first published in 1971, and it acts as a social mirror that holds up the progression of Civil Rights in America. Besides adopting the style of a folk preacher the main theme of her poem remains "Female" and "Black," saturated with the feelings of love, loss of love, rejection, social acceptance, racial differences, resistance and national consciousness. Angelou, in fact discusses life and its experiences by drawing on the experiences born out of the intersection of oppression from race, class, and gender. Throughout her poems the self is found in the context of self and others.

One generalised assumption that supports this very different treatment of themes in poetry by men and women, is the idea that women whose poetry asserts significant commitments to religious traditions are restricted in imaginative or intellectual scope, and that any woman who engaged with

religious traditions must have been accepting her inferiority to men. In short, women poets who write on explicitly religious themes have most often been seen as passively reiterating "male" religious traditions which have often been categorized as repressive to women. This is consistent with Black women's experiences of Jesus filling a void in their lives, which is defined by the action of Jesus in their lives, not his gender. For example, we could use terms like 'Creator,' 'Redeemer,' 'Sustainer,' 'Savior,' or 'Healer,' there is a myriad of options. Indeed, the alternative language is more descriptive and invites listeners to experience God in a different reality - an "action-oriented" perspective.

Clarence Major cites the more recent poetry of African American women poets as being good example of how it is possible to reconcile both the political, the didactic, and art.

> Among recent African-American poets, Audre Lorde, I think, proved that it can. Sonia Sanchez, with her haiku-like style, in her exploration of self in exchange and conflict with community, in her probing of the personal self's relation to the public self, in her search for the higher public self, in her search for the higher public good in that public self, in her constant redefining of those selves, especially as female body and spirit, proves that it is possible . . . Joyne Cortez, with her improvisational free form, in her struggle to define the black female in the context of family, class, body, spirit, and moral self, proves that it's possible to focus

> on these social issues - as well as drug addiction, persecution, rape, war, sexism, racism - and create poems that stand on their own as works of solid art. (*The Garden Thrives: Twentieth-Century African-American Poetry* xxviii-xxix)

African American women since the 1970s, such as Maya Angelou, have proved that black poets can write works of art with pure creative energy. While describing this "life in process," that creates poetry she states, "We are a tongued folk. A race of singers. Our lips shape words and rhythms which elevate our spirits and quicken our blood . . . I have spent over fifty years listening to my people" (*Black Women Writers* 3). Maya Angelou as the folk preacher continually sows two types of narrative seeds in order to keep her poetic edge impenetrable. First, there are personal narratives; second, Biblical stories. In the first type, the stories are fashioned by the African American preacher from his own life. In many ways these stories are a variant of their testimonies that members of his congregation give during the prayer service. She parses "the Word" in order to contextualize universal truths, that they might address highly specific locales and incidences. In the volume titled *Collected Poems,* she communicates the common African American female's feeling of helplessness and despair, leading on to feelings of subtle resistance, to feelings of outright protest and subsequently to find ways to transcend above all odds.

"Remembering," one of her better known poems mirror the first phase within her life narrative - the mood of helplessness and humiliation, by

illustrating how African Americans react to the white society's overbearing oppression that is tormenting their souls. The poem begins as "Soft grey ghosts" (*Collected Poems* 13) that threaten the black race. The African Americans response is to "deny their threats/and answer them with lies" (*Collected Poems* 3-4). Here the folk preacher makes use of an allusion; the universal human fear of ghosts is made to symbolize the blacks' fear of white oppression. This is illustrative of Angelou's ability as a folk preacher to communicate with her readers through common emotions. "Remembering" continues with the theme of despair, for, the blacks now "lie in stolid hopelessness / [as] they lay [their souls] in strips" (*Collected Poems* 13). "Lying" within the African American context signifies 'story telling.' It is here, in the conclusion, that Angelou as the folk preacher confronts her readers with the notion that the white's oppression cannot be merely shrugged off with lies and denial. Furthermore, if blacks continue to lie, the whites will eventually overpower them and lay their souls in strips. Capturing the history of slavery and interweaving images of pain under the whips of tyranny makes it one of her finest works of social issue poetry.

A common theme that runs through most of her poems is her pride in ancestors. This thought figures in, "Song for the Old Ones," which is a celebration of those who kept her race alive. She speaks of her ancestors:

My fathers speak in voices

that shed my fact and sound

they say "Its our submission

that makes the world go round."

They've laughed to shield their crying

then shuffled through their dreams

and stepped 'n' fetched a country

to write the blues with screams (*Collected Poems* 108).

The poem in brief describes how the blues were born and how the ancestors used it as a means of resistance against the power structure that subjugated them. Houston A. Baker, in his *Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* echoes the same thought when he chalks out the evolution of the blues "as a means of resistance" (22). A similar implication finds shape in "Old Folks Laugh" (1990) wherein she writes that old folks' laughter frees the world. The poem ends with the observation that, 'When old folks laugh, they consider the promise/ of dear painless death, and generously/ forgive life for happening/ to them (*Collected Poems* 227).

Whenever appropriate, Angelou voices approval of all those men and women who endured indignities to feed, shelter, clothe, and educate the family. Her 1990 volume of poetry, *I Shall Not Be Moved*, has as its title the chorus to the poem, "Our Grandmothers." The same idea is recurrent in "Our Grandmothers," where she captures the essence of the grandmother who had to endure enslavement and names, "swirling ribbons in the winds of history:/ nigger, nigger bitch, heifer,/ mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon,/ whore, hot tail, thing, it " (*Collected Poems* 254). The poem captures the abortions,

the pitiful handouts from welfare lines and all other depressing faces of enslavement that the "lemon-yellow, plum-purple/ honey-brown" have experienced, yet the refrain, "I shall not be moved" keeps echoing throughout the poem to show the feeling of resilience and courage that they derived from these experiences. The use of a positive refrain helps heighten and instil the feeling of hope and faith among the readers.

Her sense of pride in these old ones and her sense of kinship with them is evident in her words. To those who hurled ribbons of invective into the wind of history, she said,

> But my description cannot
>
> fit your tongue, for
>
> I have a certain way of being in this world
>
> and I shall not,
>
> I shall not be moved. (*Collected Poems* 254)

The freedom that the grandmothers offer their children in "Our Grandmothers" is the freedom to be fully human:

> They tell them, "When you learn, teach.
>
> When you get, give."
>
> "I laugh until I start to crying,

"When great souls die," she says in the final stanza,

> Our senses, restored, never

to be the same, whisper to us.

They existed. They existed.

We can be. Be and be better.

For they existed. (*Collected Poems* 254)

As a folk preacher, Maya Angelou picks on a common day occurrence this time focusing on a sixty year old African American woman, in her "When I Think About Myself," who feels helpless being bound to the system of enslavement. Along with this, the poet as a folk preacher throws light on how the African American community on the whole uses laughter as a protective shield in the face of nothingness and despair:

When I think about myself,

I almost laugh myself to death,

My life has been one great big joke,

A dance that's walked,

a song that spoke,

I laugh so hard that I almost choke,

When I think of myself...

Sixty years in these folks' world,

The child I works for calls me girl

I say "Yes Ma'am" for working's sake.

Too proud to bend,

Too poor to break,

I laugh until my stomach ache,

When I think about myself." (*Collected Poems* 29- 30)

Angelou comes to the defence of Uncle Toms, people censured by black activists because they do not overtly resist unfair treatment Angelou explains why a black woman responds with a simple "Yes, Ma'am" for the sake of a job, even to a young white who insults her with the offensive word "girl." This poem echoes a recurring theme highlighted within her life narrative, namely, the horror of being called out of one's name, the use of race, and not age, as the deciding factor within the American society. The African American woman does not pity herself and knows she is keeping her race alive. By being servile for an entire lifetime, she has provided sustenance for another generation who may find better conditions. The poem also suggests the subtle resistance that the African American woman follows to continue living, by turning the detestable experiences into a joke.

Maya Angelou's "Caged Bird," written in 1983 also adopts the African American preacher's tone. Here, however, the sermon doesn't lead from despair to the oppression of the black soul, as in "Remembering," instead it leads a step further to a demise and death of dreams. The poem opens with a vivid image of a bird, free in nature, who "leaps/on the back of the wind / . . . and dips his wing /in the orange sun rays/and dares to claim the sky" (194). This is followed by an unsettling image of a caged bird who "can seldom see

through /his bars of rage" because "his wings are clipped and/his feet are tied" (10-13). Angelou is thus referring to the inequalities between a white man (the free bird) and a black man (the caged bird). The white man can dare to "claim the sky" and is not hindered by any social or racial barriers. But a black man can only watch "through his bars of rage" because his "wings are clipped" by racial prejudice and social barriers. The poem continues with this stark contrast as "the free bird thinks of another breeze/ . . . and he names the sky his own" (194). But we see that the "caged bird stands on the grave of dreams/his shadow shouts a nightmare scream/his wings are clipped and his feet are tied" (195). The caged bird's "lament for a freedom never known" (195) is really a lament for a multitude of freedoms. The black society is in effect searching for economic freedom, the freedom to excel, and freedom from social and racial oppression. Yet, because of the social, economic, and racial barriers, Angelou sees the African-American as "stand[ing] on the grave of dreams" (195). This vivid image allows the reader to connect directly to the idea that oppression kills dreams, and that until the caged bird is set free from social and economic barriers, the dreams of African-Americans will continue to perish. The poem has Angelou questioning the dominance, power and hegemonic control of the Americans and black's peripheral treatment Mary Cosgrave in *Horn Book Magazine*, stated that "Caged Bird" was "a lyrical outpouring of seasoned feelings from the heart and mind" (336). She goes on to say that "Angelou is musical, rhythmical, and enchanting" (336). There is a display of an impulse towards transcendence from an imprisoning environment. We see that the

black women have been creative in singing songs and celebrating with an ever present spirit inspite of being caged and suffocated. Angelou says, "The poetry of the black women gives an insight into the burden of feminine sensibilities suffocated by masculine responsibilities" (*Black Women Writers* 6).

Similar to much of Black preaching in general, the overall structure of the preacher's sermon, which includes persuasion and emotion, builds to a point where her conclusion invites the congregation to participate in an explosively cathartic celebration of her central theme. In addition to this sermonic crescendo, she uses call and response, repetition, alliteration, and African-American colloquialisms throughout the delivery of her religious discourse. She emphasizes the importance of diversity and equality as an affirmation of the Divine within the human.

As a folk preacher, the poet Angelou displays a keen ear for dialogue and dialect, and also evidences a keen psychological understanding of an adolescent girl's romantic concerns and possessiveness. The speaker in, "No Loser, No Weeper" expresses in the vernacular a universal sentiment. In using the vernacular the preacher connects with the listener immediately. Again Angelou carefully structures her poem. In each stanza, the speaker notes how her reaction to losing something, beginning with feminine childish items and advancing to that of major worth: in the first stanza, a dime; then a doll; then a watch; but especially in the last stanza what she truly hates to lose: her boy

friend. Yet as the title indicates, this personal loss will not make her flounder, nor will she keep crying.

In any community, the folk represents a very large majority. As a preacher Angelou evokes the sense of protest evident among the common folk, by exposing the horrors of existence experienced by the poor. She also takes care in presenting the strengths and humanity of an unappreciated class of people as a type of protest. Angelou uses every opportunity to build African-American pride and in "Ain't That Bad?" she praises black culture, customs, and leaders. Its short lines, its repetition of imperatives, and its repetition of the title help constitute a chant, similar to the ones in churches. The preacher brings in famous African Americans of the times- Arthur Ashe, Mohammed Ali, Andre Watts and Andrew Young, to highlight how Blackness need not imply negativeness. The poet brings to the foreground a different ideological approach to 'black' signifying 'bad' terming "black" as "the hour of the night / when your love turns and wriggles close to your side / Black as the earth which has given birth / To nations, and when all else is gone will abide" (166). Next, the preacher focuses on 'Bad' as being, " the storm that leaps raging from the heavens / Bringing the welcome rain/ Bad as the sun burning orange hot at midday / Lifting the waters again (161). And the invectives that wind up the poem stress on the 'black' and 'bad' while ending with the question "An' ain't we fine?" (161). Therefore, 'bad' is used extensively in this poem not as a critical connotation; instead it means not just 'good' but 'very good, extremely good.' This meaning has been incorporated into everyday black vernacular and

therefore is commonly understood. The voice of the preacher becomes a vehicle that helps create a collective spiritual rebirth while inciting resistance to European cultural hegemony as "inferior subjects."

But it must be observed that all of Angelou's works do not centre on despair and violence; several of her best known pieces on racial equality include a distinct flavoring of hope. In "America," Angelou explores the idea of racial equality through the hope that we as a nation will "discover this country" with all of her flaws and all of her treasures. "America" is significant, in that it is a direct dialog between Angelou and the reader. In many of her works, Angelou either uses a third person narrator, or becomes an actual character in the piece; but, "America" is a direct communication between author and reader. The folk preacher / poet, in "America" begins by mixing America's virtues with her current flaws. This mixing of flaws and virtues has led many readers to view Angelou's work as anti- American (*Conversations with Maya Angelou* 11). Angelou tells us that America's "borders of justice" are not "clearly defined," and that "Her crops of abundance/ the fruit and the grain/ Have not fed the hungry nor eased that deep pain" (3-8). Angelou continues, "Her proud declarations/ are leaves on the wind / Her Southern exposure/ Black Death did befriend" (9-12).

Yet, after presenting these negative observations, Angelou implores the reader to "Discover this Country" (13). Through the poem, the folk preacher also discusses with the reader what needs to be done: "Erect noble

tablets/where none can decry/"She kills her bright future/and rapes for a soul /Then entraps her children/with legends untrue." / I beg you / Discover this country" (15-22). "Discover this country" is a direct appeal to Americans, to come together, research their past, explore their current position, and work together to provide for a better future. It is this contrast between an America gone awry, so caught up in her own progress that she destroys her own future. The poet is thereby bent on exposing discursive social structures, questioning those structures aloud, and seeking to change them. She also presents a plea to the society to prevent future generations from suffering such terrible fate. As a black preacher Maya Angelou affirms their self worth, brings in happiness and instills pride with thoughtful remarks that also include well crafted jokes. This verbal thicket is the first line of cultural defence against the racial and human problems of life for many African Americans.

In "To a Husband," she praises the black slaves who helped build America, and the black man who proudly reflects his African roots, while contributing to the physical growth of this country. Angelou also idealises black men and enhances their pride in her love poems. Two poems in particular in the first section of *Just Give Me* present admirable images of black men - their colour: Black Golden Amber; and their behaviour--gentle and grave. In "A Zorro Man" love is found to be exciting; the speaker is delighted that her man is courageous and thrilled with her. "To a Man" admires a man's special qualities: his Southern upbringing and gentle manners. Interestingly, Paulo

Freire (1970) views the race issue from a different perspective. Freire expresses,

> The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on *having more* as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves. They cannot see that, in the egoistic pursuit of having as a possessing class, they suffocate in their own possessions and no longer *are*; they merely *have*. For them, *having more* is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own "effort, with their "courage to take risks." If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the "generous gestures" of the dominant class. Precisely because they are "ungrateful" and "envious," the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched. (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 59)

In her poetry she likes to talk about courage, perseverance and the acceptance of oneself. Sometimes Angelou uses contrasting pairs in her poetry. For example, in "Phenomenal Woman," she asserts using the folk preacher's style, the special qualities of women. She putsforth images that empower women and create an ethic of resistance. The woman described is found to be "not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size," yet she describes, how men "swarm around me, a hive of honey bees." The reason she deduces to be in "the arch of my back,/ the sun of my smile,/ The ride of my breasts,/ the grace

of my style" (131), the strong and compelling presence according to Angelou allows her the freedom of not needing to bow her head, or shout or jump to make herself visible, for, through the, "The bend of my hair,/ the palm of my hand,/ The need for my care" (131) defines her as a Phenomenal Woman. Here, the poet marginalises outward beauty that always befits the attribute of 'woman of beauty' and replaces it with her personal merit that draws people towards her for what she is. Angelou seeks not only in reifying female marginalization but also brings into the limelight her beauty. Here we see the poetics of 'subversion' which Angelou uses in order to quash the Western construct that 'Black is ugly.' The poem is also reminiscent of the celebratory punch line of the Negritude movement that 'Black is Beautiful.'

A poem for her mother, Vivian Baxter, titled 'Avec Merci, Mother,' the word 'Avec' in French means 'with' intimates the ambivalent ways in which children respond to their mother. The poem begins with an explanation of her mother's aura, which her children held in such high regard. The comment in the second stanza that refers to genuflection shows Maya's mother's gracious acceptance and expectation of the worshipful attitude. This is comparable to passages that occur in the autobiographies whenever Maya talks about the role her mother played in her childhood. When Vivian is mentioned it is with a sense of awe. Instead of being turned off by her mother's aloof, superior attitude, young Maya and her brother, Bailey, quickly begin to believe that their mother deserves to be held in the high esteem she demands. The fourth stanza of the poem captures her essence- of both emotional as well

as physical strength. The title 'Avec Merci, Mother' seems to be Maya's method of thanking her mother for the strong role model she provided.

Biblical stories form the second type of narrative style used by African American preachers. In doing this, the black preacher should master the Bible from cover to cover or "from Genesis to Revelation," as his congregation would say. The more familiar they become with the word, the better they are at improvising, weaving a Biblical character, familiar verse, and or story into their sermons. Maya Angelou is adept at this skill when we notice the skill with which she weaves the personal and the Biblical to make the poem appealing to the readers. She uses references from the Bible to enhance the sermonic tone in her poem, "Just Like Job." Here the poem begins with the refrain, "My Lord, my lord" with the Almighty addressed variously as "O Lord," "Father," "My God" etc. The poet equates the condition of Job with herself and opines, "When my blanket was nothing but dew, / Rags and bones/ Were all I owned,/ I chanted your name/ Just like Job." (*Collected Poems* 172). She claims to be "leaning", "trusting" and "calling" the names of the Lord despite all the trials of life. In her other poem "Thank You, Lord," Maya Angelou she describes the joy of being born an African American, because, "Sunday services become sweeter when You're Black," for she becomes one among the community. The use of rhythm and refrain helps create the atmosphere of sermons when the Lord is thanked and followers feel gratified of their existence as a blessed group.

"The Mothering Blackness," another poem that evokes the sermonic mode, has several Biblical allusions and refrains. The poem deals with the theme of African American mothers forgiving their prodigal children. On another plane, the reference is also to Africa, her motherland, when the poet feels that as a prodigal child she felt that "She came home blameless." By not condemning her children, the mother has "her black arms waiting, "warm heart waiting" with nothing but unconditional love.

Peggy McIntosh (1989) addresses a topic of white privilege when she states, "To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tools here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo" (*Peace and Freedom* 12). While speaking of the African American preacher's role, Hicks calls for a "rethinking of roles, goals, and priorities . . . [as] a part of the making of perspectives of the new Black preacher." (9) Angelou's favourite theme, "Still I Rise," is the same title as that of a play she wrote in 1976. The title, Angelou says, refers "to the indomitable spirit of the black people." (*Massachusetts Review* 8). She often quotes this poem in interviews and includes it in public readings. In spite of adversity, of dire conditions; in spite of racial epithets, scorn, and hostility, Angelou expresses unshakable faith that one will overcome; "one will triumph; one will Rise!" (*Massachusetts Review* 289). The lines remind us of the black spiritual "Rise and Shine" as well as other religious hymns that express hope: "Oh, rise

and shine, and give God the glory, glory! / Rise and shine, and give God the glory, glory!" Like Hughes, Angelou uses the technique of anaphora, or repetition, as a rhetorical device that unifies the disparate elements of the poem. The beginning and end of *And Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou reflect such struggles for social justice described by Freire. Yet towards the end rethinks on her roles and priorities and addresses the white reader and the black reader at the same time when she sends out the message of remaining hopeful, amidst intersections of oppression. She writes:

> You may write me down in history
>
> With your bitter, twisted lies,
>
> You may trod me in the very dirt
>
> But still, like the dust, I'll rise.
>
> .....
>
> Out of the huts of history's shame
>
> I rise.
>
> Up form a past that's rooted in pain
>
> I rise.
>
> I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
>
> Welling and swelling I bear the tide.
>
> Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
>
> I rise.

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise.

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave.

I am the dream and the hope of the slave,

I rise.

I rise.

I rise (*Collected Poems* 163-64).

At the intersection of oppression, Freire observes, "... people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 83). Angelou does this when she perceives her life in terms of the oppositional binaries such as the complex web of issues raised in the literary works into oppositional binaries, such as, male / female, agent / victim, day/ night, ascend /descend etc. highlighting using elements from nature to show how the African American psyche tries to break out from its shackles.

In "Our Grandmothers" Angelou voices a similar sentiment contained in another dearly loved spiritual: "Like a tree, down by the riverside, I shall not be moved." As a black preacher Maya Angelou takes care in trying to make the personal appear as part of a broader spectrum of the collective The "I" in 'Still I Rise' is designated female by Angelou herself as she numbers this poem as one of the four about women in "Phenomenal Woman." As a folk preacher she speaks not only for herself but also for her gender and race. This extension of

self occurs in Angelou's autobiographies and protest poetry. It is in keeping with a traditional practice of black writers to personalize their common racial experiences.

Angelou's poetry belongs in the category of "light" verse. Her poems are entertainments derived from personal experiences and fall into one of two broad subject areas. First, she writes about everyday considerations--the telephone, aging, insomnia--topics that are totally neutral. Second, she writes with deep feeling about a variety of racial themes and female concerns. Another general reflection is seen in her poem, "On Reaching Forty." Angelou regrets the passage of time and expresses tongue-in-cheek admiration for those departing this world early and by this bestows upon the poem an unexpected conclusion. She is saddened by the passing of youthful milestones. The years forward will weigh even more heavily. Inasmuch as Angelou is an accomplished cook, it is not surprising to find that she addresses the appreciation of traditional foods. In "The Health-Food Diner" exotic health food items are rejected in favour of standard range of food, such as red meat. In alternating tetrameter and trimeter quatrains, Angelou concludes each stanza with a food preference. Her reader finds life must be sustained by solid values, not notional influences.

Amidst the individual and personal Angelou brings out the universal, thereby making her poetry a part of a broader tradition. By using African American vernacular speech as a language system operative in a continuum of language practices available to the African American poet as a base of

vocabulary, metaphor and style. Vernacular culture provides the African American poet with a tradition of performativity in the sacred and secular spheres. The sacred traditions of prayer, testimony and sermon and the secular ones of signifying, playing the dozens, boasting and toasting are sites of African American vernacular performance which privilege the personal speaking voice. This voice provides African American poetry with much of its dramatic quality. Whether the poet presents a scenario in which a persona directly preaches/ teaches or stages a scene in which the reader hears a character speak, the poetry is imbued with a written orality. In the words of Braxton: "Readers of her poetry appreciate its rhythm, lyric imagery, and realism." Moreover, she appends that "the people who read Angelou's work include both critics and lay readers, and she has achieved a measure of true sainthood in their eyes by transcending brutal racism, sexual abuse, and poverty to become one of America's most celebrated contemporary writers" (*Modern American Women Writers* 7).

Kelly Holland Cecil her summarises her poems observing, "Angelou's poetry covers a wide spectrum of topics" ("Maya Angelou 1928- ." lines.3-4). Maya Angelou, the poet as a black preacher who could defy all odds, transcend barriers, and voice experiences eloquently as a sermon, with the whose primary aim at inspiring the congregation. Her poems are distinguished by a quest for a better world where people are able to learn from the painful experiences of the past. Thus it taps into several high intensity veins: social, cultural, intellectual, religious, racial, and so forth. The black preacher inspires

his congregation to challenge the racial prejudice that they encounter everyday with a series of dramatically retold situations. Through her various poems she admonishes and cajoles, warns and promises. She also reminds the readers, through many of her poems and life narratives, that the healing thought that we live with is in the imagination of God. The use of alliteration, allusion, figurative language, simile, metaphor, helps accentuate the identity crisis that she and her community faces. Almost all her poems are replete with patterns that are predictive, able to be replicated, cycles, motifs, repetitive, made up in details, person-made and natural designs, and recurring elements. These patterns in fact heighten her sense of dislocation as an African American in an American set-up.

My reading of Angelou's poems suggests that the relationship between literature and preaching is, in fact, a reflexive one. Poets as preachers are vernacular critics who also exemplify the speakerly mode of literary creation as the first artists, the ones intelligible to the masses. Angelou's emancipatory praxis often includes a denouncement of oppression and injustice, and she frequently calls on the community to live out its faith in the world. The preacher does not often expound on what constitutes justice work, at least not in detail within her sermons. She is talking about personal and social community organizing and political action. She does this by attempting to bring forth a strong interaction between herself and her readers, as a preacher does to his congregation. In attempting this, she points towards broader social and political implications both within a given community and the community's

relationship to the wider culture in which it participates. The preacher is also charged with the task of bringing Biblical text, church tradition, and congregational context together into one proclamation of local theology and folk art that is integrative and capable of capturing the imaginations of its hearers. Preachers' regular addresses are spoken with a rhetoric that serves to orient the broader rhetorical strategies of African-American culture as well. In all these ways, the implications of preaching as a method of literary inquiry may in fact extend beyond the provinces of African American vernacular literature. Although, she becomes a mouthpiece typical to African American downtrodden women, she also retains the specific position as universal writers of human beings above from the national, racial, gender, lingual, geographical levels.

Conclusion

Ideologies can be held by a person or a group or a culture. No doubt a personal ideology is a result of life experiences and education. But even though personal ideologies grow out of experience, they are not entirely private; experiences and our memories of them, are influenced by prevailing cultural attitudes about ethnicity, gender, class, appearance, ability, and occupation, among other things. (Sharon Crowley, Debra Hawhee)

The genre of autobiography has undergone numerous modifications from its original form. In this thesis the focus has been on whether the 'self' represented through their autobiography, strictly follows empirical issues in terms of 'race' and 'gender,' as has been noticed in African American female autobiographies in general. The theme of 'quest,' that forms a part of this thesis, attempts to find how African American women resist the conventional form created by Western "values" and "ideals." Zora Neale Hurston, and Maya Angelou's autobiographical and non- autobiographical works which were taken up for analysis within this thesis focuses primarily in bring out the ideological standpoint in crafting the self in their life narratives. This standpoint is later extended to a selection of their non-autobiographical works to locate how they devise strategies to subvert the dominant ways of presentation of the self.

The two autobiographers works encompass a wider canvas than merely recounting individual experiences. In recounting a life of success rooted in the public world, both these autobiographers differentiate themselves to form distinct individual identities through their self- life-writing. Through their

penetrating autobiographies, the two writers have managed to produce narratives of resistance, that also display their historical and social context. They underscore the enormous odds posed against them by their respective milieu making their work 'political.'As Selwyn Cudjoe astutely notes: "When resistance is the chief preoccupation of a country (or a race), the aesthetic must become political" (58).

In charting their quest for the self, two major epistemological issues, pertaining to the theoretical and empirical category have been taken into account. To address the theoretical part within self -life - writing, the theory putforth by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have been used. The self -in - writing and the self written are clearly divided by these theorists into four different categories namely, *Historical I, Narrating I,* Narrated I / *Object I* and *Ideological I.* These divisions help in separating the strands of the self that is represented to throw light on the self that represents it. African American existence has been plagued by the empirical issues such as race, gender and class, therefore, their life narratives are pre-supposed to reflect these issues. In bringing out the Ideological base for the presentation of the 'self' in their life-writing, the idea of the *Historical I* to either, align the self towards, or away from the usual empirical themes, play a crucial role in deciding the direction of the *Ideological I.* While analyzing the presentation of the self through and away from the empirical issues, it is interesting to note the way in which they have attempted to infuse the same within a selection of their non-autobiographical works.

In using the theory propounded by Smith and Watson, the *Narrating I* or the omnipresent narrator takes on the role of the mouth-piece of the *Historical I*, the autobiographer. Therefore the method of projection of this *Narrating I* has significance in the analysis of the autobiographies. It is fascinating to note that the mode of experimentation adopted by both the self-life- writers which mark them as unique and authentic from the rest of the canon. The *Ideological I* that is presented to the society at large through their autobiography, indirectly focuses on the self developed through social recognition – in other words – how they view themselves both as a person and in relation to other people.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Narrating I* expresses the experiences of life as an autoethnographer, using the "spy glass of anthropology" (*Dust Tracks* 44). Being a professional ethnographer, the life writer applies the theory of study and presentation of culture to her life-writing making it distinct from others of the same canon. Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies, on the other hand, presents her life story using folk discourse by borrowing the style of the African American folk preacher. Religion has been a strong compelling force within her life and it is scarcely surprising that Angelou's *Narrating I* adopts the voice of the central pivotal member of the church- the folk preacher.

The life and times of Hurston was dictated heavily by the empirical issues of colour and gender. All the intellectuals of her time and the Harlem Renaisssance period of which she was a part of, used this as the central theme of their works. Yet, her *Dust Tracks* has sparing mention of the pain and

humiliation, of the segregation, and of the racial hatred in the early twentieth century America, let alone the pain she had to undergo as a woman who had to face double marginalisation. Hurston's *Ideological I* is firmly rooted in her anthropological, scientific truth- the truth that questions empirical issues. Her work is therefore based on purely objective reasoning concentrating on the strengths of her individual self and her community.

Inorder to achieve this goal she presents her life-writing as autoethnography. Hurston had watched the atrocities heaped on her people by the white Americans, yet, unlike her predecessors she refused to represent her *Ideological* in relation to the whites. Instead, she suggests that racial identity can become obsessive and racist and her training as an ethnographer makes her turn her life narrative into a study of the self in culture. It is of significance to note that all autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on 'auto'- the self, 'ethno'- the socio-cultural connection and 'graphy,' – the application of the research process. (*Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social 9*). Hurston's self-life-story focuses largely on the 'ethnography' part while inviting personal connection into issues of personal importance within and outside the realm of explicitly acknowledged social context.

In some cases her contribution revolves around the intimate knowledge of the subject matter (her own culture), and the text's complex articulation of it and its innovativeness. In other cases the theoretical and the empirical perspectives or voices are presented, sometimes separately, and sometimes in an

intertwined way, where they are in dialogue throughout the text, and where this dialogue is what weaves the fabric of the text. Her life narrative is replete with fractures, silences, secrets and elisions, yet the description marginalises tested empirical features. Her *Object I* thereby becomes a model for the non-representative, dispersed, displaced subjectivity.

Her life narration presents the African American culture and its people from both an 'etic' (outsider), and 'emic' (native) perspective. By making striking rhetorical choices the *Narrating I* becomes an 'etic' and an 'emic' alternately. Hurston, re-positions all existing ideas of 'interdependence' through the examination, and reproduction of a deep understanding of human complexity. As an objective ethnographer, her work shows that one's identity need not have to be bound by an "either / or" proposition- of being an American / African American, or man / woman. She questions the basis for this segregation - that the white American is supposed to represent; good, beauty, purity, normality, sophistication, and power, while the black man embodies the opposing values; evil, ugliness, sin, abnormality, primitivism, and weakness. She raises herself above this constraint and simultaneously becomes an 'etic,'when she asks, "Why should I be proud to be a Negro? Why should anybody be proud to be white? Or yellow? Or red?' (*Dust Tracks* 264). What becomes important is the way in which Hurston, by removing the racial barrier, moves her community from the margins to the centre of enquiry, establishing them as subjects, in a place that was reserved for the whites in the dominant euro- centric sphere.

Apart from opposing the concept of segregation on racial differences, Hurston also vehemently opposes 'race leaders' and their attempt at uplifting the 'race,' for she feels that they were trying to further their own prospects and not thinking of the good of the community. Therefore she feels the need to connect with the African American 'further down,' to help understand the cultural essence of her community. By marginalising social stereotypes, Hurston centers the common folk and re-presents them in their own terms. In exploding the power politics based on racial superiority, Hurston the ethnographer, traces the history behind the enslavement of African Americans as a race both from the mythic and historical perspective to emphasise on the irrationality of the blame game - she places both the greedy Kings of Dahomy, Africa and white Americans on nearly same indistinguishable levels thereby exposing the truth regarding their enslavement.

Apart from the exposure of artificiality of 'race' as a construct, the *Narrating I* deconstructs another common view regarding 'collective consciousness' by exposing several naked truths regarding 'skin folks being kinfolks.' The ethnographer also takes on an 'etic' role and mocks her 'skin folks' who try to imitate, mock and ape the Americans. By exposing their duplicity the ethnographer also throws light on how these individuals seek recognition by turning their backs on their own culture.

The roles performed by a person are a result of the external norms of the society; they are roles attached to a person of a specific gender, race, or sexual

categorization. Usually a female autobiographer focuses on how she performes roles as a mother, daughter, caretaker, worker, and wife. Interestingly, Hurston's life-writing detaches itself from the 'cocoon' of 'womanliness,' and extends the tenets and parameters of 'womanliness' to unchartered territory. By removing herself from the framing male gaze she situates the self written as a political tool. Apart from the endearing childhood before her mother's death the ethnographer is an objective observer – an 'etic,' presenting herself as individualistic, refusing to follow the dictates of the society when she decides to focus on her career rather than settling down after marriage.

By turning down the stereotypical role of the African American women, and opting for her career as an anthropologer, Hurston decentres the identity of the African American women as intellectually marginalised. Instead she presents her own life as an example for how the African American women could defy all odds and live their life according to their own terms. By deliberately circumventing the rules of the genre, the Hurston also challenges the limits of autobiographical discourse.

The premise within self - life - writing as ethnography is extended to her non-autobiographical works such as, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* - which are ethnographic works regarding her research in America and the Caribbean. These books have been chosen because of the marked similarity in the treatment of *Ideological I* within all works. In the presentation of the African American folklore and its oral tradition, Hurston presents the 'emic' perspective in all

these works, bringing out the rich tradition that is carried on by the different tribes that were forcibly settled together in America. The 'lying sessions' or the 'story telling sessions' form an important part of both her autoethnography and other creative works. The Joe Clarke's store porch, which forms the stage for these sessions, encapsulates the social, cultural, economic and spiritual fabric of the African American ethos. Her use of folktales and folk lore emphasise on the basic premise, which is the initial premise of all anthropological research- basic racial equality.

Hurston shows that being 'black' and 'female' does not automatically lead to a racial and gendered identity. Therefore Hurston's autoethnography places her *Dust Tracks* as part of this larger social and cultural enquiry- the realisation that the lives of African Americans "are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different" that they can not be bound under one standardization of identity (*Dust Tracks* 192). Therefore, she fashions her ideology away from her African American contemporaries, to present a 'metaphor of the self' similar to the folktales she collected. From her expedition to the South she came to realise that African American culture, found in the Spirituals and folklore, was vibrant because it was 'bound by no rules.' She recognised the art of improvisation used not only in folklore but in everyday African American life and harnessed this very same strategy to control the part of her identity to reveal externally, both in her life and in her work. The recreation has always been a method followed by African Americans in terms of religion, music, dancing, proverbs, and storytelling. It was through their

storytelling, known as folktales that the slaves would entertain and educate their children. In the African American folktales, there was always an animal who was a trickster. Hurston uses this motif to make her life narrative similar to that of Brer Rabbit tales.

One of the methods in which discourses are established as dominant perceptions, is through repetition, where, representations turn into identities. African-American women have come this far by reiterating down the generations their faith and spirituality, that enabled them to sing their song of hope with great conviction and spirit. Maya Angelou, the second African American autobiographer chosen in this thesis decides to follow the dominant discourse of the times, one that throw light on the life that is 'caged' on racial and gender lines. Her *Narrating I* borrows the voice of a folk preacher, as one who leads the congregation with love and encouragement towards transcendence and hope. In using the sermonic mode throughout her multi-volume autobiography Maya Angelou, uses the incidents in her life as anecdotes that show how an African American woman could be made to feel hurt, traumatized, victimized and suppressed.

The outward pressures of a prejudiced society have their effects and the *Object I* suffers much damage when the society around reflects a demeaning picture of the young Maya. When this image gets repeated many times the misrecognised *Object I* ends up imprisoned, distorted and a reduced being, because, with repetition she ends up internalising this picture of herself. Using

the folk preacher's style there is a slow thematic change in empirical issues such as- race and gender, when the *Object I* internalises the inferiority initially, naturalises it, and later graduates to the level of freeing herself from her 'cage.' Her gradation from an insecure, voiceless young child to the stage of helpless rage, and hurt to the stage of subtle protest, to outright protest to the final stage of transcendence, to a newly found space for articulation, form the crux of her life-writing works. Her non-autobiographical works, mainly her poetry in the *Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*, the themes expressed in her self-life- writing are repeated to show how the same theme forms the basis for her life as well as her non autobiographical writings.

In embodying the African American oral tradition, Maya Angelou, the *Historical I*, borrows the voice of the folk preacher. By selecting events from her life interweaved with the method followed by a folk preacher, she places the *Object I* as graduating through different phases of life. The *Historical I* adopts the black preacher's creative use of language and storytelling, using allusions that serve to heighten the sense of displacement, shame and dislocation. As a person who had travelled far and wide and seen different cultures and traditions, the *Historical I* makes her life narrative more like a *bildungsroman.* Her life narratives are haunted by empirical notions forming a vicious triangle to engulf her- these pertain to masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black powerlessness. Her spirituality serves to heal, and gives her the strong will to survive the destructive social and political forces that threaten her life daily thereby helping to discover her inner self.

The *Narrating I* as the folk preacher foregrounds another important principle behind their capacity to overcome and emerge formidable, this is linked directly to the support and bonding with other women within the community. The African American women as mothers, sisters, friends etc affirm one another's humanity and the right to exist. Maya Angelou's sense of her individual worth came up first from her grandmothers and later from her mother Vivian Baxter. Her poems further reiterate the fact that any person could see themselves as valuable and worthy of being allowed to live their life according to their own terms.

Angelou's autobiographical series has what has discernible patterns as seen within most of the African American autobiographies that tie them together because the outer world apprehended by black autobiography is consistent and unique. The themes of racial prejudice, love for the ancestors, love for the aged and pride in one's own individual strength that are a part of her life narratives are also seen within her *Collected Poems.* She owes the art of transposing feelings into language – both prose and poetic with equal eloquence. Both her poems and life writing works shoe her skill at integrating the feelings and thought, passion and reality, abstract and concrete, and to transcend and triumph over all odds. The use of native proverbs, slang and colloquial language lends it a color of its own and helps to shape her conception of identity, self and acknowledgments.

Her poetry and life narratives have at its centre, African American female characters such as: her mother, her paternal grandmother and Mrs. Flowers who helped in crafting her life from humiliation to transcendence. The strength that she gained from the church makes her borrow the style of a folk preacher, who uses anecdotes to explain and lead his congregation to the path of righteousness. Angelou does the same when she strings together anecdotes that mark her transformation from being a non entity to an accomplished writer and poet.

Hurston and Angelou share a common unique agenda in respect to the presentation of their culture, whether in their self- representational work or fiction; they attempt to dispel the myths imposed on them in an alien ethos. As a fourth and fifth generation African American they try to re-interpret and negotiate identities imposed on them. Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou also embark on a journey to unravel the 'African American' and 'Female.' Both autobiographies deal with the issue of freedom and the determination to stand up to the social and political oppression that beleaguer their human existence. Being writers from the South, they celebrate the strength, vitality and bonding of the Southern African American community when they describe about their life in the South. The struggles, fears, happiness and closeness of the community echo through their portrayal.

While Maya Angelou realistically situates the race problem as the crux of the African American existence. She borrows the folk preacher's voice, uses

formal devices such as rhetoric, anaphora, and rhyme to make her poems so memorable, for, they come from a cultural tradition that had never had a voice in poetry. In that sense, Angelou's use of forms was itself political, not just the content of her poems. Her use of the language of image, narrative, and melody makes her poetry a suitable vehicle for bringing the concerns of gospel, tradition, and local cultural experience together into a creative synthesis that is authentic to each. Hurston, on the other hand, prefers to take up the folk tales, folk lore and the customs and rituals within the community as the connecting force that integrates the society. By blending folklore into her personal account she narrates not only about her community but also dispels several myths regarding her race.

Smith and Watson remind us that "at any historical moment, there are heterogenous identities culturally available to the narrator" and that "the ground of the *Ideological I* only apparently stable and the possibilities for tension, adjustment, refixing, and unfixing are ever present" (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 62). Amidst all these elements of fixing and unfixing, both these life writers try to present their feed back into everyday understandings of how 'common lives' and 'extraordinary lives' can be recognised" (*The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* 3).

Reading these women's personal and lyrical acts using a multi-layered theoretical framework, elucidates the scholarship of using both poetry, folk

preacher's disourse and folklore as protest, as a tool for fostering community building and as a site for engaging in subversive Black rhetorical practices. The rhetorical power of these texts by women autobiographers is the employment of literary space to negotiate male-dominated scientific and social discourse for the purpose of shaping cultural, economic, or social ideas and reform. The autobiographers use tangled threads of discourse in unique ways to force the reader to question scientific, religious, and social beliefs and doubts for the purpose of reconstructing personal values that give the readers a model of feminist negotiation of public discourse. But the ground of the ideological 'I' only appears stable. There are several possibilities for adjustment, refixing, and unfixing. In making self-identity and the life that informs it a continual project of resistance, one can claim one's identity as a site of freedom. In this way, critical self-analysis becomes a political form of self-representation, one with great potential for social change. Moreover, Hurston and Angelou imply that the African American race will not just endure, but will triumph with a will of collective consciousness that Western experience cannot extinguish.

In life, people often have to make choices in difficult, ambiguous, and uncertain circumstances. At these times, we feel the tug of obligation and responsibility. That's what they end up writing about. Both these writers use a rite of passage into a less restricting and oppressive existence, a transition into the mythic dimension, where as an autoethnographer and folk preacher they are able to create a world that they envision. The study of life narratives in terms of their culture and its nuances helps provide further critical insights into issues of

race, gender, and religion at the intersection of art and politics in American culture. Through their life narratives, they show how people are in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean. Besides this, they also propose new models for women who do not identify with the existing ones.

The *Ideological I* within these life-writings not only dispels myths regarding the African Americans in general and African American women in particular, but also reconciles the relationship between one's skin colour, one's gender and one's internal self. Maya Angelou begins her life narration by charting her growth from 'cagedness' to freedom and finally ends with a feeling of transcendence. Hurston however, conversely begins her narrative from this very concept of transcendence (of Angelou), and ends in a note of stronger sense of empowerment, although she lived a generation before Maya Angelou. Hurston departs from the usual road taken by autobiographers to present the 'self' down a road that is hardly traversed by others, yet one that is intimately and truly connected to the free uninhibited life of Eatonville. Hurston ignores the cages that bind her, to voice the self through other empowering ideas- such as connecting to her own roots, making her in many ways a precursor to Maya Angelou in terms of the ideological rather than the temporal and spatial. Hurston's willingness to go against the grain and to experiment with new ethnographic styles and methods positions her as the foremother of what is today called interpretive anthropology, or the new ethnography.

The inter-textuality between Hurston's and Angelou's autobiography and their other texts has been used here to show the importance of this kind of relational analysis. Although I have clearly given autobiography priority in this study, it is the autobiography's relationship to their other texts and to the other kinds of signifying systems mentioned in them, that gives the autobiography itself an added dimension. The purpose of this thesis is to show how Hurston and Angelou pushed the boundaries of the dominant script in order to create spaces whereby people would see African-Americans as idiosyncratic individuals. Attempt has been made to show how these accomplished writers showed the world that they could form their own terms, live and die for it, as Hurston did. In doing so they also speak to the future like many other African American women writers who consciously reshape the 'African American' 'female' roles. These women espouse objective, adaptable, and also courageous techniques in constructing their self identity using a two-pronged approach. They were providing public intellectuals with social, cultural and public education. The education that they sought to teach was based on life experiences. The very base of empirical notions is questioned and they seek to invent better images of the self through their life narratives and select non-autobiographic works. Despite the fluid, complex and changing nature of individual life narratives, consistency lies perhaps in the continuation of one's own culture which forms a vital link by itself. As such, these women are iconic radical 'Black' 'Female' subjects and folk poets committed to breaking silences and transforming their community and the world. Through their narratives, they

try to lead to a positive change trying to make the world a better place. Their life narratives and other non- autobiographical works strive to leave the communities, participants, and their own selves better off at the end of the narratives than they were at the beginning. This is why it is imperative for research to go beyond the search for the empirical issues to examine the dynamics between individual life narrators and their similar culture to make 'history' in a sense.

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