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SCRATCHING WHERE IT ITCHES IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF HARRIET JACOBS' INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL AND BHANU KAPIL'S SCHIZOPHRENE

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2017

ABSTRACT

‘i am accused of tending the past
As if I made it,
as if I sculpted it with my own hands.
I did not.
this past was waiting for me
when I came,
a monstrous unnamed baby,
and I with my mother’s itch
took it to breast
and named it
History’

(Clifton, 7)

Set within a revisionist and feminist context, this thesis seeks to draw parallels in the autobiographical texts of Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) written by an African American ex-enslaved and Schizophrene (2011) penned by Bhanu Kapil, a British born Asian American, a descendant of a generation that live (d) through/with ‘what happened in a particular country on a particular day in August 14th 1947’ (Quaid). These literary representations will constitute the corpus of this research paper as it attempts to examine how these autobiographies draw attention to and break the notion of prevailing dominant geographies of oppression. In both texts, the authors juxtapose appropriation and hegemony with an alternative literary geographic narrative that seeks to recuperate the liminal (black) body and psyche. This research paper will seek to explore the multiple and interrelated ways in which both authors employ certain strategic mechanisms to re-appropriate tools of social power, thus exposing the frailties of their respective oppressive histories by disrupting their continued, albeit imagined stronghold on them. In employing their autobiographies as anthropological arsenals, these authors seem to demonstrate the manner in which history has attempted through its numerous sites of oppression not only to construct black victims and mere black bodies but also

to un-write and evacuate its untidiness. These autobiographies will be employed to reconstruct and re-imagine the authors but symbolically the collective black body as more than objects but rather as humans with subjectivities and self-assertion. The paper further seeks to understand how these autobiographies tend to a vicious past of slavery and partition and how they translate these memories, remembering the depth of their experiences whilst also being haunted by their contemporary echoes. An accent will be given to the ambivalence, perversions and anxieties of these autobiographies.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master in the Arts at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

.....

Linda Thokozile Thango

------- Day of ---------- 2017

Dedication

To my son, Xilombe:

‘I saw you and became empty.
This emptiness, more beautiful than existence,
it obliterates existence, and yet when it comes
existence thrives and creates more existence’

Buoyancy by Rumi

Benediction

‘I said: What about my eyes?
God said: Keep them on the road.
I said: What about my passion?
God said: Keep it burning.
I said: What about my heart?
God said: Tell me what you hold inside it.
I said: Pain and sorrow.
God said: Stay with it.
The wound is the place where the Light enters you’

Rumi

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Merle Govind: Thank you for sharing your fan with me when I needed to cool down. As the pressure and my 'not so private' summers mounted so did my need☺. You laughed with us when we were foolishly scrambling to meet deadlines and became our greatest cheerleader for each line we crossed. You gave me a sense of belonging in the Department and I am grateful.

Prof Bheki Peterson: Those initial seminars needed a bottle of something! Besides, our eyes were already glazed over! Lost in translation! You took me on an amazing and intense literary journey, laid the foundation for what lay ahead, fed me love for words and all things dark and beautifully unsettling. Thank you Prof.

Prof Dan Ojwang: You came into the seminar room and taught. I remember being excited at having finally followed a seminar fully for the first time! Your reputation of being a disciplined bookworm preceded you and I was determined not only to look as though I understood what was being taught but to truly understand. Thank you for trying to instill discipline in us. As you surely realize, it is still work in progress….

Dr Danai Mupotsa: By the time we encountered you, I had already become a professional in looking as though I understood what was being presented (with all the right nods and the appropriate smiles punctuated at the right places) whilst my mind wondered to far off places! We walked out of that first seminar confused and excited. Thank you for making literature so relevant.

Prof Isabelle Hofmeyer: I wondered privately how a nice gentle Professor could present a seminar of such graphic violence as Partition with such poise. I was so unsettled but hooked. I knew then that I wanted to explore it further. You made us examine Partition through poetry and it was lyricism laced with such darkness, it screamed to be explored. Thank you for a subject matter that I still find intriguing.

Prof Pumla Gqola: You understood me and my need to just be. The contradictions, shades and contrasts. This. Thank you for giving me the creative license not only to explore but also to push academic boundaries in order to stay true to my literary voice. For making me touch, feel and see. Your excitement in my work was infectious – it strengthened my confidence in the spaces I chose to occupy and explore. Thank you for this immense literary freedom.

Greezy (aka mom): I have finally answered your lingering question 'why don't you do your Masters? Thank you for loving me.

Abiye: We had so much fun during this journey. Thank you for a friendship and support whilst we juggled parenthood, friendships, jobs and the demands of keeping sane. To be repeated then?

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CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE TONE

'But I want to say more than this'

(Hartman, 2)

1.1 AIM & RATIONALE

The selection of these two autobiographies from disparate historical moments somehow complicates a tidy textual contextualization. In order to stabilize the reading of these texts and unburden this project somewhat, it is important, not only to locate the authors' respective historical realities but also to ensure that their personal (his) stories precede their literary narratives. To that end, this research paper's approach leans towards Henry Louis Jnr's suggestion that in analyzing Black literature, it is important to do so as a comparativist (Gates, 'Signifying', xxiv). For the purposes of this paper, the African/Black/Asian American race term dialectic will be conflated, shifting it away from essentialising race and defining it oppositionally to elevating it to an imaginable and brazen literary harmony amongst women of colour. Rather than being blind-sighted by these women's racial constructs, this project is keen to flirt with Valerie Smith's significance of 'naming oneself and shaping one's story, whether orally or in writing in a culture where the discourse and ideology are controlled by the 'Other' (Smith, 153).

It has been a challenge to grow this paper whilst employing texts from within and across disparate geo-political landscapes. Despite the spatial, temporal, historical and chronological differences in both texts, this project draws from an analytical and comparative intersection,

where Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Schizophrene converge and thread a rich literary tapestry that bonds these autobiographies. After-all,

> for twentieth-century black women identity is grounded in models of nineteen century black women who passed on to their generations the most vital lesson of their experience: black womanhood was not a static or a single ideal. The selves in the stories of the early foremothers reveal black female identity as a process of ongoing invention of self under the pressures of race, class and gender oppression (Smith and Watson, 100).

In addition to the links suggested by Smith above, identity is however also characterized by moments of textual divergence, those sites of contradiction and struggle that allow these texts to enter into a discourse of difference with each other. Furthermore, the paucity of literary testimony by and about women of colour has meant that men have remained unabated in their self-appointed roles as the transcribers and the transcribed in narrating the black woman's story. This paper breaks that mold as it looks to recuperate the voice and testimonies of these authors within their respective historical contexts which, in addition to attempting to deny them both 'have given (women of colour) more myth than history' (White, 8). In other words, I am interested here in how Jacobs and Kapil mitigate the socio-political-historical hostility that seeks to erase their memories and consciousness. This research project first introspects on how the contemporary voice examines the past in order to understand women's current positions, reflects on how these nineteenth century and contemporary narratives deconstruct and reconfigure the woman of her time; second, how both authors frame that which is real around that which is not there and cannot be represented and third, how these autobiographies inscribe and partake in a discourse that often mis-tells and distorts their stories. Furthermore, this project explores Morton's 'multiple worlds' (Morton, 11), the inter-textual dynamic between these autobiographies, their continuities and discontinuities in laying claim to their subjectivities, how both texts organize their narrative strategies, shape and structure,

use literary devices to contest dominant discourse and challenge historical memory and finally, how both use the autobiography not only to locate the author and self but also to subvert the control of the prevailing hegemony.

1.2 JACOBS IN CONTEXT

Harriet Jacobs' nineteenth century literary gravitas and indeed the African American women's autobiography emanates from personal narratives that were penned against the backdrop of that all American whore factory: the slave plantation. Harriet Jacobs begins authoring her text in 1853, at the dawn of the Civil War and at a time after she had been living as a fugitive, enslaved in the north for ten years. Her composition reflects the socio and political dynamic of the nineteenth century with all its contradictions, burdens and anxieties. She writes at a time when slavery exists as an all pervasive and institutionalized feature of southern life, of the American narrative. The story of slavery and indeed the tale of the American economic and political capital does not begin in the south but rather finds its roots in those libidinous trans-Atlantic vessels that buoyed the African into/across that vast and unsilenced Atlantic graveyard unto the bosom of slavery. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the backbone of the American raison d'etre, its domestic and emotional politics seems to be dominated by the expediency of slavery. And although slavery gradually wanes in the industrialised north, the economic importance of cotton in the south weathers the tenuous anti-slavery winds that were beginning to blow in from the north. The juncture from 1774 to 1804 sees the abolishment of slavery in the northern states, yet the north remains paradoxically complicit to slavery as this region's economic growth also rests on slave trade and investments in southern plantations. As the north explicitly loosens the yoke, the south tightens its hold on slavery, buoyed by tacit economics between the seemingly feuding cousins. This complexity is further fuelled by the inherent moral ambivalence of the time. In 1820, Thomas

Jefferson remarked that 'we have the wolf by the ear and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale and self-preservation in the other' (Jefferson, 69). It is against this background that Jacobs roots her narrative and renders an autobiographical account that intelligently delves into the politics of slavery and its associated intricacies (master/slave paradox, strategy, subversion, etc.). The text not only narrates the brutality of slavery but it also re-choreographs the dominant discourse/memory and coyly implicates the oppressor and the oppressed in the most awkward and dysfunctional embrace. The author recounts not just her experience as a slave but the general black slave experience as well. She not only renders an affective account of black lives, identity and memory, but she also accurately locates and weaves her story within particular historical moments in the black slave history. Patricia Morton supports the assertion that Jacobs writes at a time when 'in its images, the black woman's history has both figured and been profoundly disfigured' (Morton, xi). She counters the master's mirror as it constructs and reflects slave women and indeed the black race as curiously linear, invisible, pedestrian, hyper-visible and base. Carrie Mae Weems seems to have captured the prevalent discourse in Jacobs' Victorian era in the caption of her artwork in 1986:

'Mirror mirror on the wall
Who is the finest of them all?
Snow White you black bitch
And don't ever forget it'

(Weems, 1)

These constructions of slave women evoked in the extract above were also constructed relationally to religion and to gendered whiteness as embodies by both white men and women as clarified in my discussion below. This is a period when race trumps religion in its quest to define (who) what it means to be human, when 'whiteness, like new snow wants to disavow its birth in (black) blood and dirt and present itself as a clean slate on which history as progress can be written' (Black, 1) and when hierarchies of power and exclusion render slaves powerless through politically and

socially propped up power relations that thrive in a nineteenth century ideology hungry for fatalistic black servitude both on the plantation and in the master liar. Reviled by both the political and social timbre, the slave woman of Jacobs' era is confronted with a double bind of sexual and gender distortions. The master's ambivalent feelings of desire and loathing towards the female slave are deeply seated in superiority and power wielded over the 'Other'. Sibley (1995) maintains that the 'Other" is what psycho analysts refer to as the tension between an attraction/repulsion of the seen racial 'Other" and the invisible blackness. This anxiety and distress translates to an uncivilized era of brutality upon the black body (rape, whippings, familial dislocations, psychological trauma, etc.). To add to this complex milieu are intricate dynamics between black women and white men, white men and women and between white and black women (virgin/whore dichotomy) all promulgated by that staid and troubled Victorian cult of true womanhood that beatifies white women whilst demonizing enslaved women. This Victorian cult of true womanhood itself needs to be further framed within the context of that ungodly God of the South, who in Debow's Review in the 1843 is said to have '…..completely silenced all opposition to slavery by His Holy Word' (160). Robert E. Lee remarked that the incendiary abolitionists were attempting to obliterate the American Church whilst in an effort to fiercely defend slavery on religious grounds, Pastor Ross' southern text; Slavery is Ordained of God (1857) became a 'best seller'. This is the backdrop of Jacobs' autobiography as it transports her back to a traumatic memory of a world that enslaved her. Braxton submits that 'the autobiography of the black American woman is an attempt to define a life work retrospectively and a form of symbolic memory that evokes the black woman's deepest consciousness' (Braxton, 9-10). This deep consciousness allows Jacobs to travel back to a distressed autobiographical place, where she disconcertingly births a text that not only swallows her, but is beholden to it, its limitations and anxieties. In penning this autobiography, she restages and reproduces an ambiguous (non) fiction that is trapped by what it is (not).

1.3 KAPIL IN CONTEXT

'The advantage of the written word is that
I can tell you here near the beginning
What was only revealed to me near the end.
I write these words to name myself,
To name each of us
Worthy of going home
Of having our longing met...

(Dreamer, 1)

In 1853, when Jacobs authored her autobiography, she could not have imagined that her literary pioneering spirit would have paved the way for Schizophrene, a transcendent text penned by Bhanu Kapil in 2011. Although Kapil maps a narrative of post-colonial and displaced migrant identity, she casts her dye from a story, from generational memories of a rapturous historical moment in India, in 1947. She locates her autobiography in the here and now of the aftermath of the 1947 Partition but incestuously also in the then and here of a violent account of the separation of a subcontinent and the nascent of independent states of India and Pakistan.

Significantly, Kapil surfaces in her narrative how this violence constituted the subject then and how it reconstitutes the subject still. Kapil's textual lexicon is framed around a time in August 1947, where a singularly vicious civil unrest saw hundreds of thousand people mowed down, untold number of women raped and forcibly converted, neighbour pitted against neighbour, emasculation of traditional men and millions dislocated to refugees. There were seven years between the first pronouncement for a separate Muslim state and the founding of Pakistan and after only two days of independence, the new borders were officially announced – in timeframes that undeniably left the nation unnerved. The ensuing character of violence, from arson to rapes and killing was unparalleled, motivating right-wing

scripts and official denials to suggest that this brutality goes against Indian fundamental values. Kapil predicates her autobiographical memory on a historical moment of fear, loss, confusion, contempt, self-loathing, humiliation, subjugation and pain. She thus grounds her story in the experiences of families, individuals, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all defined and redefined by the period before, during and after the partition. She persists in re-scripting the survivors' account and her own contemporary resonance within this historical juncture. Peter Novick, a historian of holocaust memories maintains that to understand our narratives historically 'is to be aware of its complexity, to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists, motives and behavior'. (Novick, 3)

The intensity of the aftermath of partition within Kapil's text is rooted and embedded within psychological layers of what has been identified as three partitions culminating with the partition of 1947. From 1940 onwards the winds of discontent had blown in as the Muslim League started making demands for a 'Pakistan' with its requisite autonomy. It was to be a Muslim run state to counter a Hindu dominated Hindustan. The aim of Pakistan (the pure land) was viewed as the Muslim response to Hindu repression and capitalism. In November 1942, Hassan Suhrawardy pronounced:

> The Pakistan movement, as envisaged by Mr. Jinnah does not require any uprooting of associations and ties of homeland which have existed for generations by an interchange of populations from the Hindu majority Provinces to the Muslim majority Provinces. (Sherwani, 36)

To further accentuate the unexpected long term devastation of these partitions, in 1946-7, in his paper Remembering Partition, Gyanendra Pandey recalls how a Muslim student at Lucknow University had remarked that:

> Nobody thought in terms of migration in those days: Muslims all thought that everything would remain the same, Punjab would remain Punjab, Sindh would remain Sindh, there won't be any demographic changes – no drastic changes anyway – the Hindus and Sikhs would continue to live in Pakistan….and we would continue to live in India. (Pandey, 1)

The second subliminal layer that underscores Schizophrene is the second partition which translated into separating the Muslim strong provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Punjab was to be partitioned into a Muslim dominance and Hindu/Sikh majority and the same principle was to be applied to Bengal. The British colonial rule however allocated sovereign states to Muslims and Hindus leaving the Sikhs out in the cold. Furthermore, territorial demarcations meant that Sikh shrines were left within borders that excluded them. Mountbatten, who has been credited as being the master surgeon in slicing India into its political and constitutional quagmire, had, with the support of that imperial arsenal, reached a decision in June 1947 to formally partition and sever the British India ties. By the time August 1947 happened, it had been clearly preceded by tense political moments which also implicated the British. To read August 1947 separately from the other partitions is to evacuate and minimize the impact of these overlapping, reliant moments on how Kapil frames not only her literary lexicon but the contemporary psychological space of her text. Pandey asserts that:

> They flow into one another, overlap and depend upon each other. What is involved here is more than the drawing of new lines on a map, the unfurling of new national flags and the installation of new national governments. What we are dealing with is the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic and cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities; and the gradual realization that this tearing apart was permanent - and it necessitated new borders, communities, identities and histories. (Pandey, 43)

Although it is evident that Jacobs and Kapil's texts exist in their own respective contexts and scholarships, there is a place where these scripts meet and also where they can be read in parallel. This paper will locate this place that seems to allow a shared gendered reading of these autobiographies, a space that according to Braxton has the ability to 'place the black woman at the center of critical discourse and her own literary experience' (Braxton, 1). This is the place where as Johnnie Stover asserts;

> the autobiography is one that best presents itself as a vehicle for the establishment of self while at the same time allowing black women the capability of attacking the sociological, political, and literary systems that attempt to bury that self. The creative aspects of autobiography suggest the importance that place and time has on the development of the author and on the way in which that author then reinterprets the self for the reading of others. The self of the author is very much a part of the autobiography, so we as readers need to know out of what social, spatial, and temporal locations that self-emerged. Autobiography, especially black women's autobiography, engages us because it is interdisciplinary, forcing the diligent scholar to reject attempts to categorize it merely as literature or merely as history, seeing it instead as literary writing that grew out of and reflects the socio-political characteristics that shaped both it and its writer (Stover, 134).

It is then in this context that this paper reads both texts as autobiographies and is able to tease the parallels between Jacobs' enslaved and Kapil's partition narratives.

1.4 READING JACOBS AND KAPIL

'We are above all,
eternal spectators/looking upon
never from/the place itself
We are the/ essence of it.
We construct it.

It falls apart.
We reconstruct it
and fall apart ourselves'
(Rilke, 1)

Although these autobiographies are written from different contextual, historical and temporal vantage points, both women articulate how they re-write their moments of historical struggle and thus participate in a dialogue that seeks to violate them (again) by altering their stories. In claiming their consciousness and memories both authors refuse to evacuate the dominant discourse of its messy past by finding agency in giving a voice to silenced experiences. Whilst Jacobs' 19th century approach is didactic and conceals only to reveal, Kapil opts for a text that is contemporary in how it 'decolonises reading' with its dislocations, its uncomfortable pauses and silences (Ngugi, 1). Both texts remain doggedly engaged in the inquiry about their respective subjects (slavery and partition). Jacobs and Kapil represent how women have always and continue to inscribe themselves within a narrative that is contestable. I am drawn to how women from different eras seem to pass on the baton of agency and literary strategies over time in an attempt not only to forward their versions of their truths but also to capsize the prevailing truth. I am pulled towards the various themes and representations of self-inscription and hegemony that are captured by both autobiographies. Both successfully capture the battle of self but also the communal struggle as well thus rendering adequate scope for exploration.

Jacobs authors Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in the latter part of legalized slavery in the United States, pre-civil war. She writes at a time when there is a growing corpus of slave narratives (Frederick Douglass, William Grimes, Nat Turner's confessions, Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown) that is met with critical interest by both abolitionists and committed pro-slavery authors (William Gilmore Simms, Caroline Hentz, John Pendletton Kennedy, Mary Henderson Eastman). Frances Smith Foster surmises that because Jacobs 'anticipated a

hostile and incredulous reception to her narrative' and thus 'created a transcultural text that begged, borrowed, stole and devised the techniques that would allow her maximum freedom to tell her story in her own way and to her own ends' (Foster, 57-75) Although influenced by pro-abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe and the canon of anti-slavery writing, Jacobs breathes a new political life to her characters and according to Harryette Mullen introduces 'the sass, spunk and infuriating impudence of slaves who individually and collectively refused to know their place' (Mullen, 244-64). The reception and reading of Jacobs' text in 1861 speaks to the political and literary thermometer of her time: an antebellum south that is the breeding ground for patriarchal white domination, a community of the enslaved that, even through their brutalized selves, exploits the inconsistencies and openings afforded by the self-righteous paternalism of the master. The range of slave narratives of the time comprise of authors who are busy writing themselves into humanity, authorship that is deliberately veiled in omissions/revelations, whilst pro-slavery texts find gratuitous perversion in demonstrating the benefits of slavery and extinguishing anti-slavery fires that were being ignited by abolitionists. Although her male contemporaries before her had already broached the full range of slavocratic brutalities, Jacobs elevates the gender discourse, despite the scantiness of black female authorship and the prevalent view of writing as a uniquely male domain. Sidonie Smith remarks that Jacobs writes at a time when the self-embodiment of the 'I' in an autobiography is flagrantly 'white, Eurocentric, colonizing in its deployment' (Smith, 80). The full impact of Jacobs' authorship is not only dimmed by the impending civil war but its authenticity is also questioned by pro-slavers, publishers and by some of those paternalistic abolitionists as well. What remains untarnished is the fact that her autobiography is the most important slave narrative authored by a woman of colour pre-civil war and one that becomes the forerunner of black feminist narratives. She builds on her contemporaries' repertoire and further bears a rendition of sexual, racial, gender, psychological and familial torment in the

19th century south. Whereas her peers paint a landscape of exploitation and subjugation with a male brush, Jacobs dots her motif with female strokes accounting for her own experiences, time and context. She dares to tell her untold story in an environment that according to Carolyn Dinshaw sees women more as tokens, gifts and commodities.

When Bhanu Kapil writes Schizophrene in 2011, there is already a sea of literary representations engaged on trauma, silence, gendered, physical and psychological violence of the 1947 Indian Partition. Kapil joins a litany of authors (Gyanendra Pandey, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasi, Urvashi Butali, Anita Desai, Samina Ali, Salman Rushdie) in lending her truth and offering an alternate understanding to the 1947 Partition. Partition scholars Jill Didur and Nandi Bhatia assert that partition literature has the uncanny ability to subvert the hegemony of prevalent and official narratives. Didur further argues that literature not only has the 'power to upturn such historical narratives but that literature itself must also be scrutinized as a narrative, ideologically motivated and politically interested' (Didur, 53). Whilst all these texts pose and address uncomfortable questions on Partition and its contemporary haunting, Pandey addresses the historical and official void on violence and particularly on 'historians history of Partition violence (which is) non-narrated in order to distance us from it' (Pandey, 1). He maintains that the nationalist narrative on Partition only tends to produce a prose of 'otherness' in the manner in which it re-tells communal brutality. Both Pandey and Kumar remark that such historical/national silences and erasures are thought to be a hindrance to the construction of a new psyche, a new Indian nation. Thus everything that dares to remember and is stretched beyond the official script is 'othered'. Pandey laments the history of partition as 'a history of crisis for the Indian nation and the nationalist leadership' (Pandey, 1). On the other end, feminist authors and scholars Menon, Bhasin and Butalia re-interrogate the Partition from survivors' memories. Their texts are located at a junction where feminist discourse intersects with agency, where voice meets silence. They implant their scripts in

and outside of their familial zones. It is within this Partition landscape that Kapil produces an autobiographical prose that deftly captures the emotional landscape of the 1947 Partition in India, the ensuing psychological, emotional and physical violence coupled with the brutality of displacement. She employs her text not only as a metaphor for the violence of the immigrant repertoire but Kapil indexes it to address what Lucy Bierderman refers to as 'various other themes like (re) writing, partition and the body in physical space' (Bierderman, 4) and possibly how mental illness is a mere part of society's other constructions.

Although there are other feminist authors who come before Kapil, her authorship is received as a transcendent contemporary feminist autobiographical prose experiment that is intense in the manner in which the text (re) builds its affective and historical narrative as well as how it pulls, pushes and creates traumatic insistence yet remains contingent. The autobiography presents a textual lexicon that refuses to separate untold violence from Partition and persists in writing moments of struggle forward back into history thus emancipating both the narrator's truth of the 1947 Partition but also its affective geography that is strewn across varied geo-political terrains.

> 'This writing is personal because this history has engendered me,
> because 'the knowledge
> of the other marks me'
>
> (Hartman, 4)

In employing revisionist and feminist perspectives in the reading of these texts, this project seems to concur with Stover's assertion that 'the autobiography lends itself to a hybridity in its theoretical framing' (Stover, 1). African-American critic Mae Gwendolyn Henderson also affirms the use of different theories in studying writing by women of colour, arguing that 'the critical insights of one reading might well become the blind spots on another reading'

(Henderson, 117). A select theoretical grounding would take away from the complexities of these autobiographies' respective narratives, aesthetics, history and politics, from the different time and place that locates, detaches yet binds these seemingly unlikely texts.

The groundbreaking work of Gloria Hull, Barbara Smith, Mary Helen Washington and Toni Cade Bambara in black women's history and their considerations on black feminist criticism demonstrates that the task of deconstructing and rebuilding black women's narratives is a feminist project. They address the ways in which black women suffered under multilayered oppressions but built their own intellectual forts needing neither the recognition nor the support of patriarchy. They examine how black women have historically subverted the dominant voice in order to advance their own political agendas. On the other hand, a critical feminist agenda offers a critique and an analysis of inequalities, power and gender dynamics that abound in various texts and contexts. Both of these selected texts value women's experiences and contest Lawrence Kohlberg's' theory which insinuates that 'few people matured fully in their moral reasoning…but women hardly ever did' (Solomon & Higgins, 275). A feminist theoretical outlook allows this paper breadth to examine how these authors shift, re-interpret and broaden the frame of feminist reference whilst introducing new models and insights. It presents a challenge to the dominant narrative and offers an alternative voice within a discourse that positions Jacobs and Kapil as fully present contenders. On the other hand, the revisionist perspective allows both texts to recompose the historical and literary milieu in ways that recoup that which the dominant narrative erases. Revisionism allows these authors to influence how their history is written and calls to scrutiny the discontinuities and disruptions of contending truths. In revising the prevalent script, both these authors offer alternative realities thus exposing not only the fluidity of history and fiction but also the truth.

A gendered focus in subversion and resistance by women of colour more specifically within Jacobs and Kapil's texts (Carby, 1978; Smith, 1982; Johnson 1997; Baker, 1984; McKittrick, 2006: Etter-Lewis, 1994; Fox-Genovese, 1990; Gilmore, 1994; Henderson, 1991; hooks, 1989; Smith, 1987;) has meant a revision of memory and the historical script. These critics all recognize women of colour as what Foster calls a 'viable and resourceful community of resisters' (Foster, 83) with polyvocal intensity, able to occupy spaces of subversion that elude the master's gaze. It is within these shadows and crevices that dissemblance blossoms. Although a critical body of work has examined voices of dissent in this discursive field, there has not been an extended study of women of colour across and within disparate geo-political landscapes. As such, this project provides additional insight into how women of colour from nineteenth century African American and contemporary Asian-American texts unsettle dominant discourse by providing an alternate means to effect their agency using the autobiography as a literary cache. The analytic and comparative focus of these two texts provides yet another contribution. This study examines how women of colour participated and have over the years continued to partake in their own self-inscription, not only within the literary space but also within the historical narrative as well (White, 1985; Giddings, 1984; Fox-Genovese, 1987; Clark Hine, 1995).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on nineteenth century black female self-emancipation, no comparative and analytic attention has been done examining the paradox of hegemony and the implications of black female subjectivity within these autobiographies. This project addresses this by demonstrating how these texts not only capsized assertions by the mere stroke of the pen but also by the mental asylum of the autobiographers' persistent memories and how these enable them to re-narrate, contest and reconfigure their scripts.

This essay will then seek to bring all the literary perspectives together whilst simultaneously addressing those aspects that pull towards and away from texts located in dissimilar places and times. Ideas will be drawn from abundant essays, theories and critics to articulate not just the process of subversion and agency but how these texts translate their hegemonic itch into transcendent literary masterpieces.

This report has been organized into 3 Chapters:

Chapter 1 will interrogate how autobiographies from two disparate geo-political landscapes shift, transgress and redefine hegemonic discursive control. It will look at how, these two female autobiographers from across different temporal locations have, inspite of historical, political and social limitations, assumed literary control of their personal narratives and challenged the prevailing bastions of influence and power. It will investigate the strategies and devices that both women use in shaping their texts and contexts. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate how these texts have attempted to narrow the historical gaps, pauses and silences that have been left agape by those who have the clout to (mis) interpret and (mis) represent a narrative not of their own. In so doing, these autobiographers insert themselves into their national projects and construct a discourse that contests, challenges and subverts the authorized script.

Chapter 2 will review how both texts occupy physical and psychological spaces as a means of containing and controlling their environments, thus entering into and constructing an alternate discourse with the dominant geography: how these autobiographies forge a rapport with the geography that confines them. It will describe the nuanced concession and power play that these authors employ as they build spaces wherein they engage their freedom within their boundaries. Moreover, this chapter will explore how these texts claim space and present it as a site of oppression and contestation hence enabling a disarticulation from the prevailing

geography towards a more transgressive, albeit ambiguous possibility. Within the context of these texts, questions will be posed and answered on the so called marginal spaces that women of colour have been allocated historically and whether this marginal space grants these women a vantage point from which to challenge leading power bases.

Chapter 3 will connect the preceding chapters and draw a conclusion on positions that have been advanced.

CHAPTER 2

IN MY OWN VOICE

'I was looking for a word that captured migrant attitudes
or
the idea of migrants with attitude,
a generation of migrants
who don't feel the need
to be silent to protect themselves'.

(Patel, 1)

2.1 JACOBS' VOICE

In The Philosophy of History in 1813, Hegel scoffs at black people's lack of collective history and by implication, their lack of civilization. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Charles Davis remark that 'black people responded by writing themselves into individual histories' (Gates and Davis, 288) thus unsettling the narrative of erasure and the notion that a certain aesthetic could be developed completely unaffected by the presence of black people. The enslaved had to explain their presence, make sense of an intellectual project existing outside of the official culture. Jacobs' autobiography reminds us that slave memory is not just a marginally haunting presence, is more than a mere constructed white narrative, but a critical part of global memory. It assumes an important political status as it not only reconstructs a history but it also constructs a counter-memory thus dissenting from the prevalent monologue, proving that 'illegitimate speakers have a way of exposing instability'.(Smith & Watson, xx). Fox-Genovese supports this assertion as she adds that 'black women's autobiographies suggest a tension in black women's relations to various dominant discourses' (Fox-Genovese, 179). In line with Fox-Genovese, clearly Jacobs builds a relationship between the political tensions of the past and present and masterfully demonstrates that the

collective history moulds the personal narrative. This self-representation and humanity collides with the tired tale of the voiceless and offers us a curious textual, historical and contextual tug of war. Importantly, Jacobs contributes to the black woman's incomplete historical script whilst subliminally highlighting the differences and similarities in black women and black men's narratives. Through her autobiography, Jacobs uncannily participates in the abolitionist discourse whilst positing her existence and identity. And although Frederick Douglass' early narratives were lauded for epitomizing the total black experience, Fox-Genovese counters this assertion and argues that the experiences of black women were 'in some essential way, emblematic of the system as a whole' (Fox-Genovese, 467) The most enduring and harrowing tale of slavery is the unabated sexual trauma and the fragmentation of the family unit. In as much as Jacobs' narrative recuperates an alternate hi(story) and partakes in a national literary discourse, she also thrusts at us the complexity and the burden of enslaved women as both the inheritors and bequethers of slavery by the virtue of their gender. Jacobs herself exclaims that 'Slavery is terrible for men but far more terrible for women' (Braxton, 77). Joanne M. Braxton and Sharon Zuber support Jacobs' assertion and name the slave woman as 'the most systematically silenced segment of antebellum America' (Braxton and Zuber, 146).

Despite what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar term as 'anxiety of authorship' seen through the opposition that female authors received in the nineteenth century due to hegemony that embraced authorship as a male birthright, Jacobs' assertion of self begins when she decides to pen her autobiography thereby not only negotiating the assertion of her voice but also destabilizing and capsizing the power of her audience by intelligently mediating an alternative voice of dissent in the face of nineteenth century sacred cows. She waltzes into a space wherein she first imagines, then sabotages and finally readapts literary paradigms that

have their roots initially firmly planted in white hegemony and ultimately in the black male experience. She glides into places wherein she refuses to give up her story and more potently, refuses to be silenced by the staid Victorian sensibilities that are fraught with their own internal contradictions. She meets the swoon prone audience where they are at: on the surface, she seemingly coyly plays within the unspoken sexual space but delivers a narrative so utterable in its deliberate gaps and silences that she confronts her readers to (re)cover not only their scripts but her contexts and codes as well. Braxton and Zuber assert that:

> while her narrative breaks silence….. it also inscribes silences of its own by incorporating the 'not said' within the text. Silence becomes an instrument for the assertion of her personal and sexual autonomy. To inscribe these silences requires that she risks her reputation among those readers (including the Northern white women to whom she wants her book to appeal) who will find both her decisions, and her candor about her own sexual past, challenging to those claims of respectability that…..she has now come to value. They require that she overcomes prejudice with the sheer power of her narrative art' (Braxton and Zuber, 146)

On a material level, this pioneering black subversive author, employs her text not only to right the wrongs of the body of work written about black women but she also discourses with the dominant phallocratic dialogue by appropriating silences whilst reworking the script. In her authorship, she inserts herself within the heart of the master's discourse and unravels it in her quest to re-inscribe a narrative of her own. In stating that 'it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history' (Jacobs, 1), Jacobs' need for silence, in spite of her aesthetics and politics, reveals an acute awareness of a system that refuses her, her being, and a language that the master foregrounds and dangles as a weapon of mass sexual oppression. Audre Lorde maintains that Harriet realizes that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 98). Not only does Harriet reject the master's lewd advances and manipulate the power that comes with silence to control Flint,

she again exerts her authority over him by claiming her sexuality (choosing Sands over Flint). Yet again, she tightens her grip over the master's proverbial jewels as she subjects herself to physical and psychological anguish in the garret and as she watches him flit from South to North, she not only controls but manipulates the master's discourse through the letters she sends to Flint. Her resonant silence is discerned first in her material and physical silence, in the present testimony of her text and profoundly echoed by Flint's obsessive desperation to find her. Educational theorists, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo reveal that Harriet gains 'critical literacy' (Freire and Macedo, 159) as she attempts to move beyond the master's tool. They further state that critical literacy allows individuals 'to transform the social and political structures that imprison them in their culture of silence (Freire and Macedo, 159). Literacy becomes a lot more than just words but assumes a transformative role of enabling Jacobs to read her world. It 'becomes a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to re-appropriate their history, culture and language practices' (Freire and Macedo, 159) and by implication 'a person is literate to the extent he/she is able to use language for social re-construction' (Freire and Macedo, 159). Thus the triumph for Harriet Jacobs becomes her ability to read and write the world and in a profound sense, she claims her agency as she elevates herself from bowing down to hegemony to transforming it.

Instead of perpetuating white stereotypes, constructs and definitions of black capitulation and control, Jacobs produces a narrative that struggles and resists an enshrined representation of a psychologically and physically broken black body, a narrative at crossroads between her private account and socio-political yearning. Her displays of violent landscapes in her autobiography depict not only her traumatic memory but also provide us with a narrative structure that deviates from traditional slave narratives. Whilst she engages in social, political and religious commentary, she also intricately weaves in the humanity of black women into

this tapestry. Claudia Tate remarks that 'traumatic narratives are demonstrative of a subconscious revelation; and the fictive recuperation of trauma occurs for the individual to cope psychologically with past traumatic events' (Tate, 96). Hence, although there are gaps and adjustments in what Jacobs chooses to narrate, these are not borne only out of a need to seduce the delicate Northern white woman, but she 'modifies traumatic memories to precisely control and invest textual scenes of violence with her desire for self-mastery as well as bodily autonomy. On the one hand, she challenges the social definitions and limitations of black identity while on the other hand, creates a means through which she lays a claim to her subjectivity' (Tweedy, 21). She recounts her self-identity from being an object into a self-defined subject but always with some dregs of the unconscious in her narrative as she pens her text under big brother's libidinous eye. To metamorphosize from being the object of right wing discourse to being a player within the historic and literary space brings complexities to Jacobs as an author yet she forges on and employs her autobiography to re-stage her shame and powerlessness into a site of defiance and agency thus creating a new and discursive identity for black women. In a Franklinalesque errata manner, she relocates the white marks singed on her womanhood to flagrant black marks in her text.

In Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Jacobs essentially employs her disturbingly violent experiences to assemble an autobiographical location for defiance. Together with the Northern women, we are cajoled to observe psychological superiority at work, the proverbial veiling and unveiling of the reader as the conductor aligns and harmonises her choir with each swift movement of her baton. Royster maintains that black women authors often place themselves in a position 'not always to act on their own, but more often than not to influence the power, authority and actions of others' (Royster, 176). David Aberbach argues that 'creativity, the affirmation of the wholly individual ability to imagine, may act as a vital part

of survival, of re-emergence of the whole and unique human being' (Aberbach, 3). The writing process, the act of breaking through the frigidity inflicted by slavery permits Jacobs the authorial gravitas of not only telling her story in her own terms but also of being able to re-characterise her individual self and the collective selves of black women she represents. Jacobs inscribes her worthiness as a black woman, an author, a human being and a citizen. Jacob Arlow contends that 'victims of trauma recreate and modify violent experiences to regain control over the powerlessness of their bodies' (Arlow, 31). Jacobs remodels the non-humans and presents an abundantly more wholesome and fluid alternative for these voiceless creatures. She refuses to be muted and rather opts to enter that contested American history with all its nooks and crevices.

Jacobs' agency extends to the title she chooses for her autobiography Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. In this, she defies simple categorization as she somewhat muddies the boundaries between fiction and a slave narrative, more revealingly, she admits to her deliberate absences and gaps. She selects the moments she wants to share with her reader, controls autobiographical omissions and absences and brings the reader along on a journey that she navigates. The 'slave girl' in the title of her autobiography also veils the naming of the author, Harriet Jacobs, whilst also giving a name to each enslaved woman, child and man. Carby reads this as a textual control of her recollections, her identity, her body and her experiences. In her letter to Amy Post, she discloses that 'there are some things I might have included, but there are some things that I might have made plainer – woman can whisper her cruel wrongs in the ear of a dear friend much easier than she could record them for the world to read' (Jacobs, 2*).* Jacobs opts to be economic with her revelations and even whilst she reveals some incidents in the narrative, some of these are still shrouded disclosures. Then, there is the manner in which Jacobs usurps her power as the author of her autobiography from

Child. Firstly, they only accept her manuscript four years after its completion and also only under the condition that Child is responsible not just for its introductory note but also for its arrangement. Child appropriates power and responsibility from Jacobs and almost assumes the coveted power of slave patriarchy. However, in her preface, Jacobs wrestles her authority back from Child as she asserts that 'I have concealed the names of places and given persons fictitious names' (Jacobs, 2). 'More importantly, while Child contends that she presents the 'veil withdrawn' (Jacobs, 3). Jacobs undermines Child's confidence….and insists that her 'descriptions fall far short of the facts' (Jacobs, 3). Similarly, Jacobs almost renders the obligatory testimonials and advocacy letters laughable in the face of the first five words of her narrative: 'I was born a slave' (Jacobs, 6). Therein lies the power of a personal narrative. In its ability to facilitate a metaphorical re-birth where the author has vested power to re-choreograph her memories thus constructing what Etter-Lewis calls 'safe means of telling one's life story through layers of camouflage' (Etter-Lewis,163). Yet through the autobiography, Jacobs re-inscribes her agency by refuting her status as a mere slave. She recreates herself through her protagonist, Linda Brent and vacillates between being an object and subject, between a rock and a hard place in search of some psychological resolution, in her quest to influence her destiny. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis maintains that slave women are challenged by 'a crippling double bind which made it difficult if not impossible for these women to freely speak or write about their lives in any form but especially in autobiography' (Etter-Lewis, 159). But, Jacobs is given adequate grace to wrestle with her traumatic past and she inverts the intrusion of this double bind, thus buoying herself into an autobiography. Her coup de grace is not in writing her narrative per se, but it is how she becomes the master puppeteer, determining how far to pull and when to pull the strings. She draws us in to a 'rhetorical strategy of disclosure and concealment' (Etter-Lewis, 159), plugging her private gulf with another's account, which becomes a representative story and hence a metaphor of

her own life. 'I once saw two beautiful children….One was a white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister….She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink' (Jacobs, 29). In this way, she creates the necessary psychological distance between Harriet and Linda, shaping and controlling her narrative whilst binding the author and protagonist in an inseparable tale of triumph but also a tale that constantly negotiates its place between shame, agency and authorial consciousness.

Jacobs' control of her narrative through this play with difference is not unusual. Indeed contemporary scholarship in women's autobiography has examined how women negotiate autobiographical discourse as an attempt to re-order their peripheral positions and engage in literary discourse. Shari Benstock maintains that women battle against being outsiders by telling their stories from the perspective of their relationships with the other' (Benstock, 3), a reading that can also be applied to Jacob's text. Benstock continues to show how women's autobiographies offer an absent or decentred self, whilst allowing the author to delve into the connection between enslavement and the absence of self in the text. This is borne out of what Fanon identified as a psychological dilemma of the black self in a white world, the marginalized black self at odds with her own image in his seminal Black Skin, White Mask. This ambiguity and strain is further reinforced by W.E. Du Bois, a sociologist and historian who in The Souls of Black Folk describes this cerebral divide as a 'double consciousness':

> It is a peculiar feeling, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 215).

Jacobs writes her autobiography at the dawn of the Civil War and this seems to burden and compound her inner turmoil. This condition is further complicated by the feuding North and South and as she escapes from one condition to the other, she epitomizes the mobility and fragmentation of the nation. Yet the autobiography persists to explicitly and clandestinely frustrate any effort to muzzle the nineteenth century black female voice. Instead, her autobiographical voice relentlessly interrupts the dominant ideology's fictional narrative. It refashions its own characteristics and yet co-mingles with a coercive white male authorial milieu. Gregory Jay alerts us that when this group called themselves Americans, they did not quite mean flatulent women of colour but advantaged flatulent white men. Rather, they coined this name to 'reinforce the illusion that there is a transcendental core of values and experiences essentially American' (Jay, 264). Hence the black female autobiography arose as a means to decodify society's effort at assigning women of colour marginal literary and material spaces. With all its continuities and discontinuities, Jacobs' text steps out and becomes the centre that defines the margin. Henry Louis Gates affirms Jacobs' bold move and points out that as the margin is defined by the centre, the dominant discourse controls the margin's 'privileged site of cultural critique' (Gates, 288). He further contends that as long as the margin foregrounds the centre and employs it as a yard stick, a point of comparison, it will remain arrested in a treadmill that continues 'breeding new margins within margins' (Gates, 288) leading to further disintegration and alienation. Keating concurs with this position but further asks 'what happens when the self-identified other neither dissolves nor maintains all inside/outside oppositions. (Keating, 23). Perhaps the answer is the emergence of more black female authors, with varying experiences and differing viewpoints to challenge, sap and unhinge the hegemonic centre.

‘I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation’ (Jacobs, 384)

When Linda realizes that there are no longer any avenues open to thwart Dr. Flint’s predatory advances, she is ‘determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet. What could I do? I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge in the abyss’ (Jacobs, 48). In her choice to sleep with Mr Sands, (who is not entirely indistinguishable from Dr Flint) she ‘plunges in the abyss’ but she also automatically re-interprets her loss of purity, relocating and transferring the burden of guilt to Dr Flint. Her transgressions are not self-willed, they are imposed on her by the slavocratic landscape. In her decision to opt for Mr Sands, she thus yields control over her sexual economy and through a carefully stage managed plot, she not only challenges white hegemony but she reverses Dr Flint’s control over herself and her body. Houston Baker Jnr argues that ‘This new code of ethics emphasizes a woman’s prerogative to control her own sexuality – to govern the integrity of her body’ (Baker, 52). In consenting to Mr Sands’ advances, Brent shows resistance, a passive aggressive behavior that obstructs Dr Flint’s plans. She asserts that in her choice of Mr Sands ‘It seems less degrading to one’s self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you…. There may be sophistry in all this; but the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible’ (Jacobs, 52). Linda represents what Baker calls a ‘community of women that controls its own sexuality, successfully negotiates its liberation from a crude patriarchy, and achieves expressive fullness through the literate voice of the black female author’ (Baker, 55). To claim this choice gives Brent some agency but this choice is not without its own burdens for it is a decision achieved by ‘calling upon a terrible energy borne of alienation,

injury, hopelessness and anger, surrendering all prospects of a virtuous life as her grandmother defines it' (Green-Barteet, 8). In using her sexuality to evade Dr. Flint, she gains access to a newly defined sexual geography – a place where she is neither a Jezebel, nobody's wife nor pure. Her relationship with Mr Sands, indeed, this particular chapter entitled 'A perilous passage in the slave girl's life' not only gives Brent the symbolic space to challenge Dr. Flint and the deeply contaminated codes of true womanhood, but she makes a psychological leap from a defensive to an offensive stance. She deliberately rejects the subordinate sexual identity that Dr Flint tries to force on her, choosing instead the seed that would facilitate the birth of her illegitimate children. And later on in the narrative, as Brent clearly opts for her children and herself to be bought by the wealthy Mr Sands, she inverts Dr. Flint's power and cancels any possibility of the cruel New Year's day separation that also impacts her but on her terms. That Linda Brent realizes her agency, no matter how troubled, is evident. What is remarkable about the attainment of this agency especially within the sexual sphere is her courage to choose the lesser of two evils. This choice contaminates her somewhat as John Blassingame's states 'slave women were literally forced to offer themselves willingly' (Blassingame, 4) – as Dr Flint's rapacious behavior escalates, Brent is forced to surrender herself 'willingly' to Mr Sands who comes from the same civilized corps as Dr Flint. Both view Brent as a sex object and propose to her when she is a mere child. What she has with Mr Sands comes to represent a 'critical difference between passive resignation and proactive rebellion' (Randle, 49) – even though she has no legal claim over him. As much as she disrupts Dr Flint's sexual authority over her, she however fails to alter the slave economy. Her children remain the property of Mr Sands as his wealth multiplies as a result of her children.

Furthermore in stating 'I knew what I did and did it with deliberate calculation', she not only refuses to suture over her choices, instead she acknowledges her feelings of empowerment and thus re-inscribes her agency. Jacobs' autobiography also grapples with the anxieties of female sexual familiarity and agency, themes that were disallowed by the nineteenth century script of female virtue and decorum. To understand this anxiety, it is important to place Jacobs within the ideology of 'true womanhood' which was a dominant social discourse and construct of her time. To compound this anxiety, 'Jacobs's naming of Black female/white male sexual intercourse disrupted multiple taboos regarding sexual desire, interracial sex, and rape' (Laffrade, 21). She not only infringes on the purity of 'true womanhood' but she also violates its element of meekness by refusing to embody herself as a victim and instead she complicates the condemnation she would otherwise receive by directing an affective response from her readers, eliciting sympathy and compassion instead. She sends out instructively camouflaged messages about a slave woman's hardships but she also opens a door to a consciousness, a political will that gently coerces the reader to somehow alleviate the plight of the slave woman. Jacobs' autobiography thus is 'a powerful expression of the often entwined nineteeth century reform causes of abolitionism and feminism' (Fleischner, 61). Having presented an alternative morality to that of the accepted 'true womanhood', Jacobs then asserts that 'The condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible' (Jacobs, 385). In this, she defies, as Carby states 'an ideology that would condemn her as immoral (and unfeminine)' (Carby, 58). Furthermore, Mercer asserts that the purity of mind (and body) is unavailable to virtuous black women. She discredits the image of the sexualized (and thus impure) black woman by demonstrating that it was the licentious habits of white men that forced her into 'premature knowledge' of the evil ways of the world' (Mercer, 4). Clearly as Johnson asserts, Jacobs is asking for a 'new definition of the true woman' (Johnson, 27). Spelman remarks that she almost 'needs to

have the members of her audience understand that she and others are suffering, but she is highly attuned to the power that their knowledge of her suffering can give them, and so she simultaneously instructs them how to feel. She insists on her right to have an authoritative—though not unchallengeable—take on the meaning of her suffering.' (Spelman, 60).

2.2 KAPIL'S VOICE

'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you'

(Angelou, 1)

Colonial discourse often represents the story of the 1947 Indian Partition as a site of savagery amongst Indian communities whilst the nationalist script posits it as illegitimate and fundamentally un-Indian in its ensuing violence. Infact, this reverie continues to reject the Partition at times as a history *not our own.* This is the fissure that gives Kapil the impetus to pen her prosed autobiography. In the opening section of her embattled manuscript, she recounts in 'Passive Notes', that she 'threw it – in the form of a notebook, a hand written final draft – into the garden of my house…' (Kapil, 1), perhaps too burdened to fully write through her inherited and (re)experienced traumas, she leaves it to fester in the winter snow thus subliminally allowing herself the psychological latitude to be drenched by the historical ghosts that nag her to tell a different narrative and to come to terms with history's brutality and emotional cost. What she jettisons into the snow is her ambivalence, 'the possibility of representing unspeakable things unspoken, that which is beyond language' (Edwards, 119), her self-doubt and incapacity to articulate adequately a subject so personal, so warped and so fresh in the psyches and bodies of the descendants and Indian Partition migrants. As she resolves to retrieve her notes, 'from the fragments, the phrases and lines still legible on

the warped, decayed but curiously rigid pages' (Kapil, 1), she finds her affirmation to work through her reservations and courageously re-tell her story from those 'rigid pages' that simply refuse to be denied their story. Lauren Russell asserts that 'Schizophrene is a palimpsest, a text constructed from successive layers and erasures' (Russell, 2). Thus her journey to reconstitute and recuperate not just her past, but a past that is not her own begins. Andrea Quaid notes that 'while the resilient pages turn away writer and word, they also absorb and preserve the story that, in epic fashion articulates not an individual sorrow but the tale of a now dispersed community' (Quaid, 2). Her inherited trauma represents a transgressive space where she can no longer remain an un-entered territory, a place where communal ghosts have come begging to live with her, side by side and to live with her fear of them. To account for what happened during Partition and post India, to confront her history in the text, is part of Kapil's morbid inheritance. She recounts how:

> My mother's mother put a hand over my mother's mouth, but my mom saw peeking between slats of the cart, row after row of women tied to the border trees. 'Their stomachs were cut out', said my mother. This story, which really wasn't a story but an image, was repeated to me at many bedtimes of my own childhood. Sometimes I think it was not an image at all but a way of conveying information' (Kapil, 40).

Wilkinson asserts that Kapil's insistence on retelling stories from the women in her life serves to mark the beginning of a deeper and meaningful engagement with her history and gender – 'a new method of writing and processing and an alternative means to meditation' (Wilkinson, 1). This was always her story to re-tell, to re-imagine and a story upon which to build a textual monument of memory. Mark Freeman contends that much of our remembrance is peppered with that which others remember and their memory is in-turn

informed by narratives read, seen and imagined (Freeman, 263). In 'Electrobion', she confesses that 'There is a word for this, I can't recall' (Kapil, 30). Her inability to recall speaks to the immense internal and external turmoil of having to name the loss. Yet, in that moment of forgetfulness she names this loss. The author employs the title of her text Schizophrene as a metaphor for the trauma experienced by displaced identities, the corresponding untold history of domestic violence and mental illness amongst migrant communities. In so doing, she unsettles the nation state's 'aestheticising impulse' (Pandey, 4) and offers us a raw unfiltered depiction of the sentiments of the aftermath of 1947 Partition of India. Kapil's writing process itself, the disturbing manner in which she fragments her narrative and violates boundaries between the material, conceptual and textual lexicon speaks to the heart of schizophrenia, where the difference between what is real and unreal is muddied. In this uncomfortable aesthetic, she flits between India, the UK and America not only to highlight schizophrenia as a political condition but she also departs and returns to these geographical maps of separation to demonstrate how their respective ideological disjunctures further breed a shattered migrant experience, more acutely Kapil states 'all trajectories are psychotic in their reliance upon arrivals' (Kapil, 6), by implication not to arrive to that place called home means that departure never takes place. Perhaps this sense of discontinuity and evanescence is a subliminal buffer not only to the pain of the displaced but also a precursor to what crescendos into a psychological, geographical and familial rupture. She writes that 'these notes are directed towards the region I wanted to perceive but could not' (Kapil, 5). So in finally writing her story, she retrieves the rupture of her homelessness, through her text she attempts to suture the disjointed lives of migrants. This suturing is supported by Said who argues that **'**we must map territories beyond those mapped by literature of exile itself….turn our attention…. to the unaccountable masses for whom the UN agencies have been created' (Said, 178). He maintains that 'exile is strongly compelling to

think about but terrible to experience. To think of exile in humanistic, aesthetic or religious terms risks trivialising the suffering it inflicts' (Said, 178). Hence, the narrator begins to unpack a historical trousseau of painful split memories and these do not give her any reprieve from being fully present in her past present trauma. Her exiled narrative is unrelenting in its retrieval of hurt-filled memories, of boundaries she attempts to freeze in the snow, in fear that once she allows a window to these harrowing parts of herself, her history, she will lose her mind. These memories however allow us to imaginatively partake in the migrant project. Trauma reunites her with herself. Ruth Leys submits that:

> owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time refuses to be represented as past, but it is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present (Leys, 2).

The condition of schizophrenia helps the narrator to suppress her reality, but reality simply does not relent. It systematically disquietens. In choosing to write again, she gives herself the permission to honour a communal trauma and in deploying these fragments as a poignant narrative strategy, Levi suggests that these are (employed) not (as) a deluge of memories, 'not self-contained….but pregnant, full of significance, ask more questions….shout and clamor to be understood' (Levi, 41). The use of a frayed prose as part of the narrative structure not only alludes to the manner in which the narrator's traumatic memories impose themselves piecemeal upon her consciousness but their fractured nature is congruent with her dislocated psychic character. Kapil does not present us with a linear and plottable narrative of remembrance but incoherent post traumatic interludes of layered images both present and

past: the searing textures, the vibrant colours, the grating sounds, unimaginable sights, the maddening repetitions and the constant certifiable back and forth movements. The reader is pulled into this onslaught of leaking memories, dragged into the author's bewildered place where there is a realization that fear of the past does not give us freedom from it. The displaced are physically and mentally trapped in places and times, held hostage by a history and pain that is memorialized in the psyche. Marie Kruger maintains that 'the visual and (textual) quality…. re-enacts the fragmented texture of human memory, while also signifying the physical conditions under which the competing archives…… are established' (Kruger, 136).

> Kapil's deployment of the past is not merely for its traumatic sake but the past's role in making possible the development of alternatives in so far as the narrator's consciousness is concerned. 'The exiled not only sees with sharpened eyes, but ultimately gives birth to a new form of consciousness, the consciousness of those who are 'housed' by virtue of being 'unhoused' (Lal, 32). Migrants are clothed in their past and heavily wear it in the present. The use of continuities and discontinuities between the past and present destabilizes memory and privilege the absoluteness of trauma. In a work spanning three continents, the juxtapositions of narrative fragments and the placement of space marks border crossings as reoccurring images of maps and grids document movements, locations, and violence, the relative positions of bodies (Russell, 1).

When we make ourselves believe that there is a way around the ache of the soul, that we can avoid it and lose nothing of ourselves in the process, we are simply paving a way for an onslaught of dire memories and madness. Kapil chooses to go through the ache and this pathway allows her to envision an alternative map even if it means traversing solitary undefended exiles through schizophrenia. Ironically, it is the absence of familial foundations

of belonging and connection that give the narrator the needed buoyancy to search for an alternative subjectivity, those:

> multi-layered fragments of memory, odd bits of debris from the past, dream elements, gaping absences, convincing and also unconvincing stories, a history of discontinuities and unresolved questions, of traumas, things unsaid, and memories actively destroyed (Freeman, 181).

After all, home and exile are bound by an incestuous dichotomy, an illicit co-habitation with neither a beginning nor an end: 'Exile… marks space by either crossing it or…..enduring its loss. In setting the exiled as always looking in, home is turned into an inside space that is ensconced cosily within fixed borders, fencing familiar territory' (Ling, 136). Therein lies the tension; somewhere between neither-nor (ness) and the in-betweens of her identity. Although the narrator maddeningly maps out her family's genealogy in her autobiography, it does not address the question of migrant identities on a political level nor does it deal with the impact of identity on a personal and emotional place. The determiners of identity in the autobiography such as race, language, class, home concept and its connotations are at times conflicted thus sparking further anxiety in the already burdened voice of the narrator. Sometimes these determiners do not synergise and are misaligned to the larger equally dysfunctional landscapes. Thus the issue of identity in the text presents both an internal and external disquiet for the narrator. In asking 'who am I', the narrator cannot avoid asking 'where am I'. This exploration of a thread-bare self and the environment augments the alienation of the exiled. Fanon gives expression to the suppressive conditions:

> I came into the world imbued with the will to find meaning in things, my spirit filled with a desire to attain to the source of the world. And then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood….the movements, the attitudes, the

> glances of the other fixed me there….I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (Fanon, 109).

There is a sense in the text that the narrator, in her maddening psychological place, is in constant search of her becoming and belonging. A sense that she is constantly trying to put the pieces of her puzzle together, re-arrange the fragments of her constructed identity. As alienating as all these fragments are to the narrative, movement outside of the prescribed context allows the narrator to see reality. As the narrator uproots from one memory to the other, she retains remnants, traces of her old places and people. The consciousness of who the migrant is, is pushed backwards and forwards as she interweaves a horizontal and vertical narrative. Travel both psychic and real, no matter how traumatic, opens up her eyes to the migrant struggle. Mountain Oriah Dreamer remarks that

> Wisdom is often born in the shadows, frequently more visible in darkness. We need to move into darker places if we are to find the wisdom we need. To meet wisdom in dark places, we must be willing to hold all that life gives us – exclude nothing of ourselves or the world, to tell ourselves the truth. Wisdom will stretch us far beyond where we thought we could go or wanted to go. She will show us what we cannot change or control, reveal what is hard to know about ourselves and the world. It will tear down illusions of what we think we know until we are surrounded by the vastness of the mystery. Wisdom asks us to choose life and not just continue to survive but to experience life actively (Dreamer, 41).

As the author meanders from one schizoid place to the other, there is a sense that the author foregrounds migrant displacement through mental illness. She refashions schizophrenia and like borders presents it as hegemonic construct. There also is an authorial keenness within the text to alert the reader to the integrational aspect of trauma – that it cannot be contained in a single epoch. Erasure by the national script and silence about the sheer violence of Partition and its subsequent social migrant history can no longer cover up the mental cracks.

The author infuses intense restraint as her literary signature thus escalating the depth of the silent white spaces and lonely liminal words dotted in her text. This she does to heighten the narrator's alienation not just from herself but also from a history that is not hers. In the midst of her bewildering schizophrenic ramblings, we are also drawn to politics of silence: history's attempt to silence and erase the story of Partition, the silence of the mental condition, of the 'Other: the stranger, the outsider, the foreigner, the immigrant, the border-crosser, or even what Spivak might call the subaltern, whose ability to signify in the terms of dominant discourse goes unrecognised' (Wilkinson, 4). Silence does not mean lack of agency. Wilkinson states that 'psychic life of the schizophrene is the shift to one of personal memory and history, to lineage and immigration, to violence recounted and remembered – and the infinite subtle and lasting effects on the subject thereof, both ephemeral and pronounced' (Wilkinson, 5). In this journey, the narrator is offered a knowledge of herself and since the consciousness of her pain is heightened as the text unravels, the reader is offered glimpses of the 'wisdom held in the story our life is telling the world' (Dreamer, 1).

In an effort to touch the debilitating impact of displacement, the author locates Schizophrene as a site of untold violence 'He dragged her down the stairs by her hair to the room where we were eating' (Kapil, 47). There is something wholly distressing about the illicit co-habitation of violence and the nurturing act of eating. Even when the author speaks of her mother who, during Partition, sees women tied to border trees and their stomachs cut out, she again hones in on the absolute madness and violence on women. What is disemboweled is not just decency and sanity but women's ovaries, that sacred centre of life. Kapil thus cancels her statement in the chapter entitled 'Abiogenesis' wherein she describes Schizophrene as 'a book without purpose/with a dead start' (Kapil, 24). Perhaps the start is dead as the prose is predicated on ghosts lingering in trains, on blood stained railway lines and dignity reduced to

expletives 'You fucking Paki, what do you think you're doing'? This is England, you bleeding animal' (Kapil, 49). Kapil's text has a purpose. None of the situations in which we engage the narrator diminishes her human capacity to exercise her subjectivity. She does so in a manner that is raw and deeply felt. Levi wrote 'We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to certain death, but we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength for it is the last – the power to refuse consent' (Levi, 41). In the text, the power of refusal to consent to a truth shy history becomes her catharsis, a part of her remembering, a part of her mourning and healing. Schizophrene presents problems that are not addressed by the mainstream discourse and in that sense the text locates itself outside of its narrative. The lingering diabolical continuity of the past, present, serves to highlight the historically accusing reality of Partition and its related pathology. The act of writing, the act of a story told, allows an organic healing of self. The history of displacement carries on plaguing the narrator's memory; the history of humanity is incomplete as denialist scripts still abound. As Kapil transports us into a past that is forever situated in the present, it poses a challenge to the dominant dialogue and its ability to mediate a past painfully located in the present complexities of trans-generational memory. What is evident in Kapil's location of inter-generational memory is how she presents the past, present and future as an intricate knot of identity, temporality and materiality. Seemingly she employs 'inner time(,) moves within more multilayered and multidirectional topologies—folding and unfolding from the moment to full extension, winding and unwinding from fast to slow, conflating past and present into one perception, or uncoiling into the distant future…' (Hoffmann,104). She inhabits the spectres and ghosts of 'the shreddedness of the lived experience' (Bollas, 118) of…. 'inner landscapes…. peopled with the burdens of history ... a history not of [her own] choosing unfolds in the deepest recesses of the mind' (Rose, 6). Hoffman points out that part of the anxiety for the second generation is that they only inherit the shadows and not

the experience and wrestling with shadows can be more frightening, more confusing, than struggling with solid realities' (Hoffman, 411). Frosh maintains that the relentless dialogue with the world (what is told, imagined and read) enables internal representations and these are immersed into the mind as part of the unconscious. The prevalent dialogue forecloses on this trauma, deep forensic remembrance is at odds with denials, a tension exists between memory and politics, between individual subjectivities and national imperatives. The author cannot invest in amnesia as her memories deny her forgetfulness. To arrive at a place of healing, she chooses an unedited truth and renders the hegemonic diatribe a historical casualty. For the author, being displaced does not begin nor end with schizophrenia (as a place nor a condition) but it allows her a choice to re-map and re-orient exile to a relentless vision of something more than her condition. Said holds that the exiled are uniquely placed for dissidence – the experience of different exiles lends itself to a 'contrapuntal awareness of simultaneous realities' (Said, 33). Barbour further expands on Said's sentiments stating that 'because an exiled life is nomadic, de-centred and lived on the periphery of the established order, he must create his own structures of meaning' (Barbour, 295).

What the author manages to do is to expose an experimental way of representing trauma and memory in literature and the fact that she positions her text outside of the prevalent scholarship underscores the brilliance of her work. We are all inflected by the past, by what Abraham and Torok term 'trans-generational haunting' (Abraham and Torok, 171). Kapil decides not to capitulate to the ghosts but rather crosses into their threshold and meets them where they are at: madness.

It has been made evident that this chapter draws parallels between two disparate feminist autobiographies, from a hegemonic tower that persist in denying the other their humanity. Although located in different socio-political and even temporal backdrops, Jacobs merely

passes the baton over to Kapil so that 'future generations that might otherwise succumb to the cultural amnesia that has begun to re-enslave us all in social and literary texts that impoverish our imaginations' (McDowell, 161) might be averted. Both transgress and delineate boundaries defined by the dominant discourse and both use a unique and distinctive voice to tell a story. Susan Sheridan is accurate in her assertion that times and contexts might have changed 'but that its lines of continuity are real and demonstrable, and its tasks are still far from accomplished—it is no mere passing fashion' (Sheridan, 36). Both these authors use their voices to deconstruct and interrogate female representation within contexts that marginalize and minimize their beings whilst repositioning the self within a historical narrative.

CHAPTER 3

ABRACADEBRA: THE ALCHEMY IN THE GEOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN OF COLOUR

'An act of chance or disaster
produced a divergence
or
an aberration from the expected
and usual course of invisibility
and catapulted her from
the underground to
the surface of discourse'
(Hartman, 2)

3.1 JACOBS' MAGIC

That William Cowper's 1784 poem, 'The Task', is the site of Jacob's intertextual reference is not coincidental. Already, his poetry had been employed in both slave and anti-slavery narratives. Cowper finds a strategic vantage point from where he is able to view the world and its despair. He writes that:

'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat,
To peep at such a world……
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanc'd
To some secure and more than mortal height
That lib'rates and exempts me from them all'
(Cowper, 184)

Jacobs' loophole of retreat is the garret, a space creatively fabricated to provide Brent with refuge, a transitory site that imprisons Brent for seven years above her grandmother's shed. A loophole, that space which allows a way out, a way to re-imagine, transgress and reinscribe but a punitive space should her position and body be found. Teresa de Lauretis draws a parallel between the loophole and feminist agency observing it as 'the elsewhere of discourse,

social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power/knowledge apparati' (de Lauretis, 25). Brent employs space as a mediating site between herself/children and Flint. Irrespective of the inadequacy of the garret, Jacobs remarks that 'the first time since my childhood that I had experienced any real happiness' (Jacobs, 437). The garret presents a transgressive space in which improvisation becomes a possibility yet this present geography does not fully resolve her desire for freedom as it is a spatial choice borne of slavery. Yet, she cleverly presents her place of concealment as a marginal space right in the centre of Flint's hegemonic stronghold. She hides in plain sight to patronise and cancel Flint's imaginary control over her, her body and indeed his territory. Burnham observes that 'those seemingly monolithic methods of surveillance that ostensibly make escape from detection impossible may finally enable escape by the very fact that they make it seem so impossible' (Burnham, 157). Brent makes a strategic but forced choice to hide in the garret but what is incisive is her ability to choose not only who she has always been, but who she is becoming. Although she is rendered invisible within the shadows of the garret, Brent's interface with this space offers her different psychological and material possibilities. The garret, that bare liminal symbol of subjugation and marginalization becomes a canvas upon which her identity is strengthened and her character reclaimed from slavery. Through this tactic, the author allows us a glimpse of the slaves' spatial maps and their alternative locations of self. Moreover, her text builds a counter-hegemonic narrative, one that again allows her to transgress the dominant monologue by seizing textual loopholes undetected by the nervous institution. The body she conceals in the garret is laid bare, hypervisible in her words, a visual replica of her embodied self within the autobiography. The garret comes to symbolize a reframing of history in its ability to retrieve a narrative of resistance, of sheer genius, outside of the doctored vitriol. In its attempt to monopolise the narrative frontier, hegemonic narratives buoy the slave narratives to the centre of historic

discourse and contestation. Foucault maintains that subdued knowledges are historically water-logged and 'disguised in functionalist coherence or formal systematisation' (Foucault, 82). These are not limited only to 'a whole set of knowledge that has been disqualified...a particular, local, regional knowledge… which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed to everything surrounding it' (Foucault, 82). He further asserts that this obstruction only serves 'to recover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle' (Foucault, 82).

The memory of the enslaved is very often hidden in forms that do not always readily give up the story. Paradoxically, the theme of concealment is a pervasive feature of Jacobs' autobiography and also a striking feature of the enslaved' survival. Concealment presents an anxiety for Flint and doggedness for Brent who refuses to be fully absorbed into a distorted representation of self. It serves to ensnare Flint in his own mental asylum of obsession, where there is neither geographical nor physical escape from Brent. In a perverted sense the master and slave are joined in what Jean-Paul Sartre calls 'a relentless reciprocity that binds the colonizer to the colonized' (Sartre, 17) – the other's product, each other's fate and destruction. Memmi validates Sartre's position and exclaims that

> no one can treat a man like a dog without first regarding him as a man. The impossible dehumanization of the oppressed on the other side of the coin becomes the alienation of the oppressor. It is the oppressor himself who restores, with the slightest gesture, the humanity he seeks to destroy, and since he denies humanity in others, he regards it everywhere as his enemy (Memmi, 6-7).

By the time she hides in the garret, Brent has arrived and departed from these places of concealment so many times in an attempt to out-maneuver Flint. These arrivals and departures reinforce her psyche's awareness of her reality and this in-turn re-inscribes her

determination to escape. She departs from the racist and sexualised script of her constructed identity by the 'other' into a realm of possibilities in the garret. She 'relives a certain punishing recognition that reassures us not only of our place but also the presence of the order out of which that identity was forged, and to which we remain perversely beholden' (Brown, 56). The garret however allows her identity to be contingent, allows an alternative sensibility, a counter-narrative response. Thomas Tweed asserts that the garret provides tropes in which humans are able to map spaces they occupy and normative analogies of how to cross to other spaces.[i] The garret represents the compartmentalization of slave life and the underlying political, power and social props that underpin this spatial formation. Brent's loophole of retreat thus comes to represent the physical and psychological space that cannot be accessed nor controlled by white power structures.

Drawing on J.Z. Smith's Maps is not a Territory, Tweed distinguishes between three ways of mapping the world – the 'locative' which highlights a sense of belonging to a centre, a 'supralocative' that has notions of transcending space rather than being located in any one place and lastly 'translocative', which facilitates the back and forth movement in history and geography – a constant negotiation between a 'constructed past and an imagined future' (Tweed, 1). It is impossible to locate and essentialise Jacobs' position within the autobiography because she is always in motion, never still both geographically and psychologically. Each of the distinctive typologies are afforded moments in the autobiography that ensure her arrivals and departures are never contained in a particular time and place.

'There was no admission for either light or air. To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total…..'(Jacobs, xxi)

Upon entering the suffocating precinct of the garret, Linda Brent paradoxically begins to construct for herself a contained space that not only allows her to maneuver what remains visible/invisible to the master but poignantly what is visible/invisible about the slaves as well. The garret becomes a place where freedom is characterized by its own limits, where it works with prevailing geographies of oppression to assemble an alternate geographic map. Jacobs' autobiography presents us with a different geographical narrative, one that posits Linda Brent's location in the garret as a complex paradoxical mediation between concealment/revelation, confinement/access, observation/invisibility and between freedom/surveillance - all this taking place not only within the wider context of slavery but also being played out within the delicate context of nuanced concession and power. Equally as pertinent is how the garret seems to shadow the margins of physical and metaphorical duality. Within the garret, Linda finds a negotiated freedom, a freedom that permits her to occupy an unlivable but albeit lived space. She shifts, transgresses and redefines the margins placed on her by the confines of the garret and also by the fragility of her freedom in the garret. With each stitch of the garments she knits for her children, Linda reshapes and re-imagines her space, transforming it from a place of death to a space of action. In The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau maintains that the simple, almost banal practices of daily life like knitting and observing, contains unconscious means of escaping expected patterns of behavior. Within the confines of the garret, she finds a burdened calm, a mother's affirmation and determination. Through the trajectory of the garret, new possibilities are opened up that 'free' Linda but hold the master captive as he relentlessly searches for her. The master has strategies in place that he believes regulate behavior and movement thus making the landscape predictable. Certeau maintains that tactics on the other end are those everyday practices that strategy has not been able to domesticate and thus represent the partiality of its control. In the garret, Linda refuses to internalize Flint's demeaning

representation of self and unveils his slippery grasp on her. The master's strategy of control falls flat in the face Brent's control of self as she somehow transcends the limitations of the garret. . The garret overturns the ideological text that inscribes slave spaces as sites of 'difference', 'inferiority' and 'filth'. It is with comic irony that this useless spatial divide in her grandmother's den serves not only as a site for self- assertion but an animated historical discursive space. As much as this narrow place estranges and dehumanizes her, she imprints her subjectivity on it, mutilating the master's constructions of her. She becomes more than a spectator of her captivity but her growing consciousness allows her to be an actor within her script. The depravity of the garret becomes a breeding ground for a quiet mental subversiveness.

Linda Brent defines her concealment into the garret as a 'loophole of retreat' and her first real move towards her literal freedom. McKittrick describes the garret as a 'usable paradoxical space' (McKittrick, 36) – that inspite of the debilitating physical impact of confinement, the space provides Linda with both presence and absence. She remains a part of her environment but is not totally subjected to its usual brutalities. She watches her children play, drills holes in Dr Flint's psyche, as she usurps the control of the one who sees without being seen. Afterall, she does retreat to the garret to save her children from being 'broken in' at the plantation and Randle points out that Linda 'leaves her children in order to stay with them' (Randle, 43). McKittrick further asserts that Linda's 'seeable presence is crucial to Flint's sense of place' (McKittrick, 309) and that 'hierarchies of racial power and knowledge are spatially organized' (McKittrick, 309) around the controller and the controlled. She inhabits varied and what appears to be disjointed places to redirect and overturn the power of who sees whilst simultaneously sabotaging the master's construct of the black female's hypervisibility. Hence, the garret becomes not only a site of oppression but also a location of

contestation where the protagonist inverts Dr Flint's previous licentious glares and turns the garret into a place of observation. She watches him and according to Foucault interrupts the mutual relationship between being seen and seeing. 'Dissociating the see/being seen: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen' (Foucault, 202) Brent's self-captivity grants her a vantage point from which she not only surveys and challenges the master/slave power structure but she also controls the movement of her master as he fleets between the South and North in search of her. Marilyn Wesley remarks that 'his mobility functions as a kind of imprisonment, whereas her immobility allows a measure of genuine control' (Wesley, 57). She becomes what Anne Anlin Cheng refers to as 'at once the ultimate outsider and insider, making visible the contingency of division and perverting the lines of power – or at least, exposing power as positionality' (Cheng, 121). Despite the fact that Linda chooses what McKittrick terms a 'painful spatial choice' (McKittrick, 40) where physically taxing concealment is chosen over slavery, this choice is what allows her to construct the garret as her loophole of retreat, a space of battle, a space of psychological and emotional movement. She retreats to the garret to 'demonstrate an unresolved, but workable, opposition to geographic domination' (McKittrick, 40). This place, which McKittrick refers to as 'oppositional' space enables Harriet to also produce a 'workable and insurgent' geography in line with the workings of hegemony. She not only manipulates freedom and slavery to co-habit side by side, but she further inscribes herself into the garret as a spatial strategy to defy history's attempt at constructing slave victims and rather, through occupying the garret, presents us with a 'different' geography that challenges the hegemony of the master. She defiantly maintains that 'I have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave' (Jacobs, xxi) thus reclaiming her power, revealing her agency by resisting the master.

McKittrick examines the geographies of black women and marginal spaces that are occupied by black people as a whole. She maintains that

> A margin is not a legitimate area of deep social or geographic inquiry – it is a site of dispossession, it is an ungeographic space, it is all too often a fleeting academic utterance, and therefore easy to empty out, ignore and add on in times of multicultural crises (McKittrick, 58)

She further remarks that on an allegorical level geographies are 'actually inhabited by subaltern communities' (McKittrick, 58) who produce depth within important geographic scope that is often unsung in traditional geographies. Thus the idea of a garret can be mustered as a substitute for marginal spaces providing 'depth of experience and important geographic work that occurs within populations and spaces that might be dismissed as marginal in traditional geographies' (McKittrick, 62). She asserts that black women remain replete and have always had a 'meaningful relationship to geography' (McKittrick, 40) and that these women's lives are 'underwritten by ongoing and innovative spatial practices that have always occurred, not on the margins, but right in the middle of our historically present landscape'(McKittrick, 41). Symbolically then, to understand Brent's retreat into the alternative geography of the garret is to understand her relationship not just with the garret but also with her slavocratic landscape. She does not '*exist* outside of or on the margin of traditional geographic understanding, but rather across (within and without, subject to but not dominated by) the geographies of power present in landscapes of subjection and slavery' (McKittrick, 62). McKittrick further states that 'different' geographies are not 'necessarily marginal but are central to how we know and understand space and place' (McKittrick, 42). Thus, the manner in which Brent mediates her geographic space in the autobiography lends meaning not just to the garret, but also to how she occupies this space. This she manages

whilst also rendering an astute critique on the prevailing landscape of geographical power and the incestuous nature of the traditional and alternative geographies. In-between these geographies, exists the manner in which Brent negotiates between the master's power and her individual mobility thus creating space for her freedom through being able to inhabit a confined space and challenge leading power bases.

Ultimately, the garret comes to symbolize more than a space for freedom but becomes a space within a space where dominant and dissident thought collides. Brent trades oppression for restricted freedom, a freedom that allows Jacobs to write against a powerful geographic discourse. She realizes that ''the master's tools would never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 1) and she finds alternative means to affect her agency. Her narrative is clearly not without spaces and tensions, which if read differently, could symbolize possibilities where there are none. She wrestles her narrative agency from the prevailing nineteenth century discourse and creates/controls her subjective experiences and representations. She speaks the unspoken and 'dares to penetrate into the dark and disremembered sources of the humiliated and traumatic memories and feelings that continue to haunt the African American cultural imagination'… (Bousson, 1). Her narrative then becomes more than a political ticket as it metamorphosises into a literary cure. Jacobs succeeds in mediating a space and an authorial voice that challenges the social constructs of the black body and psyche. Through her varied tactics, she dismantles negative perceptions about black women as mothers, as sexual beings and as worthy opponents. What the narrative ultimately represents is a psychological tension between Jacob's authorial desires and the possibilities and limitations of slave women's agency.

3.2 THE MAGIC OF KAPIL

'I think that madness is something horrible - people suffer - and I've always found it false to try and identify some liberating dimension in madness' (Zizek, 48)

And yet Felman counters Zizek's assertion and maintains that 'madness has today been recognized as the most subversive of all cultural questions' (Felman, 12). In the text, the narrator herself does indeed offer some liberating dimension in madness. To enable her to recuperate the migrant trauma, she enters a geographical place in the autobiography wherein she is able to appropriate the condition of schizophrenia, by staking a profound claim on both its literal and metaphorical legitimacy. She subverts society's deviant attempts 'to keep apart the other against whose apartness [society] asserts its sameness and redefines itself as sane' (Felman, 5). Since the deranged are a microcosm of their own dysfunctional environments, they 'embody and symbolically transform the values and aspirations of (a) society (that) renounces them, as well as their delusions, cruelty and violence, even in (their) inner flight' (Feder, 4). From her schizophrenic vantage point, the narrator usurps her condition and locates it a dizzying spatial and physical sphere that allows her to confront her shadows whilst extending her intellectual agency. She reconfigures a liberating script of healing within a border that society categorises as troubled. In her concluding notes Kapil herself remarks that 'From cross cultural psychiatry, I learned that light touch, regularly and impersonally repeated, in the exchange of devotional objects, was as healing, for non-white subjects (schizophrenics) as anti-psychotic medication. In making a book that barely said anything, I hoped to offer this quality of touch' (Kapil, 71). Her schizophrenic disruptions and discontinuities within the text allow her to unsettle the clinical view of schizophrenia which credit patients with a reduced capacity to order their lives. Indeed, she offers a

seemingly incoherent and fractured narrative, 'In correspondence. In the involuntary response to being touched. On a plate' (Kapil, 22) but this strategy paradoxically allows her to re-orient, to reconstruct a collective consciousness and to gain agency in re-authoring her history. The narrator stubbornly affirms that 'Fragments attract each other……I stroke them with my finger so they scatter then relax' (Kapil, 22). From this alternative geography of schizophrenia, recovery becomes a real possibility. Through her text, she shifts the national illness of denials and silence to reclaiming her people's refuted humanity. She poignantly asks 'Is it a right thing or a mad thing not to want to re-connect, to avoid reading or writing because of what those will bring (Kapil, 28). Roe and Davidson note that

> within the context of a condition as multidimensional and complex as schizophrenia, narrative is one of the few tools available that enable the person to weave back together a sense of who she is that both incorporates and yet extends beyond who she used to be prior to illness and who she has become due to illness (Roe and Davidson, 2).

Kapil overturns the previously-rejected voice as she pevertedly 'continues to communicate with madness – with what has been included, decreed abnormal, unacceptable, or senseless – by dramatizing a dynamically renewed, revitalized relation between sense and nonsense, between reason and unreason, between the readable and the unreadable' (Felman, 5). Through language, the narrator pieces her sanity together, indeed the sanity of the displaced, 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life' (Treichler, 113). Therein lies Kapil's authorial superiority, in her immaculate understanding of psycho-analysis, in her ability to 'enable us to believe and to be moved by what in a sense does not exist, by fictions, imaginations, hallucination, inner voices' (Thiher, 1). She has an uncanny ability to make us engage with her ability to write through madness. Felman concurs

in his summation that the author is able to pull the threads between literature and madness as both can 'be defined as that which speaks, precisely, out of what reduces it to silence' (Felman, 17). Clinically, there is healing to be found in the narratives of self and in recomposing a requiem for the displaced. Ridgway examines evidence of recuperation in patients who through penning their struggles moved from 'despair to hope, from withdrawal to engagement, and from passive adjustment to active coping and the reclaiming of a positive sense of self, meaning and purpose' (Jacobson, 335–43). His study is underscored by Jacobson whose analysis of patients evidenced 'four central dimensions: recognising the problem; transforming the self; reconciling with the system, and reaching out to others' (Jacobson, 248–54). In opting to write from a place of schizophrenia, Kapil situates her text at the intersection of catharsis and political activism. Niall Williams captures an author's painstaking and deliberate writing process, for even in a seemingly confused literary masterpiece, Kapil herself has to come to terms with the emotional choice of re-inserting historical omissions and unveiling the unimaginable:

> How do I write? One word at a time. The first sentence feels like the tip of a thread. I pull it very gently. Another sentence. And again I try, teasing out phrase after phrase and hoping that the thread will not break. It is as if before me there is an invisible garment of which one thread can be seen. Each day I draw it out a little further (Wright and Bolton, 48)

What adds further burden to Kapil is not just the gendered nature of her text and how as a woman she deconstructs madness whilst exposing the denials and silence as a form of communal oppression but also what Estelle Jelineck refers to as 'a multidimensional, fragmented self-image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation' (Beilke, 29-30). Benstock maintains that to write about selves already disjointed 'can only trace fissures of discontinuity' (Benstock, 29). What is left for Kapil is to go back to that space of seeming delusion, the ultra violet lights, the grid, aeroplanes and infrared lights in order to re-inscribe

the migrant's trauma for as Anaïs Nin states, 'it is easier to excavate on one's own property' (Long, 38). The author uses classical clinical disruptions of schizophrenia (externally generated voices, loss of history and agency) to trap herself within her madness only to hold it hostage in a narrative that re-engages madness itself. Thus her narrative is 'narrated only through a kind of aesthetic violation' (Clark, 4).

The space that the narrator occupies in her narrative is an (in)-between space and this is an aesthetic that allows her to be immersed in and to temporarily manage the trauma of being displaced. Fragmented fantasies become the author's daily escape from her painful reality – submerging her into further disjointed dreams and experiences. This in-between space is hard to pin down, is unstable and it does not promise any resolution for Kapil's existential dilemma. There is so much of herself, her family and community in all her fantasies that it is not possible for her to walk away – not even madness provides her with reprieve. Jacqueline Rose (1998) submits that fantasies are not a departure from reality; they paradoxically push the narrator away from the torment of trauma toward exactly what she has left behind. This space in-between becomes a 'sticky psychic glue' (Rose, 4) that binds her reality and schizophrenia. The logic of fantasy though is such that the features of its narrative tend to resist revelation because of its socially unsettling tone – this transgressive dimension of fantasy serves to free but implicate Kapil in her madness. The manner in which the narrator articulates her trauma, both its pain and search for redemption, is shaped by her madness, thus the way in which she engages her environment is structured by her fantasies. She departs from the denialist/racist script of her constructed identity of the 'other' into a realm of possibilities not offered by sanity. Again, madness allows her identity to be contingent, allows an alternative sensibility, another path. Freud supports this assertion in that he maintains that fantasies denote a schema that mediates between publicly affirmed ideals and a

darker side of aspirations and aims – a side that subjects would rather not consciously/officially affirm· (Glynos, 7) Her fractured narrative is riddled with ambiguities and uncertainties and these induce anxiety as they provide no solution – her arrivals and departures reinforce her psyche's attachment to this reality and this in-turn re-inscribes the conditions that make her trauma possible. Faludi brings some reprieve when she states that fantasies allow for the disarticulation of the truth from reality and its re-articulation to an ethical state – for the narrator, these ambiguities ironically open up possibilities for critical distance and alternative becomings – including alternative political pathways. (Faludi, 23-57) The issue is not so much the narrator's madness more than the way she engages with this fantastical space. The challenge and strength of her engagement lie in her ability to question her history, to interrogate told stories, to be buoyed by the dichotomies of madness which leave and return to reality, demanding new ways of thinking, of being. Psychologists call this in-between space a 'place where boundaries dissolve a little and we stand there on the threshold, getting ourselves ready to move across the limits of what we were, into what we are to be' (Durand, 26). As with all other trans-nationalist literature, schizophrenia becomes a continuous process of estrangement to the narrator, a repeat of arrivals and departures, both literal and metaphorical. The use of madness as a metaphor for mental illness is nothing new as Susan Sontag also employs metaphor in her work on AIDS, cancer and tuberculosis. She contends that for an author to locate herself within this marginal space mirrors profound communal fears but simultaneously provokes society to confront that which is not cured. For Kapil, the use of schizophrenia assumes a double consciousness, her metaphor becomes a space within a space – not only does she scrutinize the unseen aspect of migrant trauma but she gives it a name that people can touch, feel and remember. More significantly, she speaks to the onlookers, to their estrangement and their distress of this narrative of madness but also those exiled by displacement, their alienation and pain. She un-silences private knowledge

and gives it a public platform thus adding depth to the textual, contextual and psychological scope of Partition. Segal alerts us to how schizophrenics blur the lines between a symbol and the symbolized and how this fissure then becomes concrete. Kapil presents a narrative of ambivalent madness, a journey without an end - a space of both empowerment and capitulation that allows her to slip between India, America and England, between private value and public use, between 'home' and 'home', between politics of remembrance and a yearning for some therapy, for some transmutation of Segal's concrete madness. Somehow, the narrator does not fulfill Victor Turner's idea of separation and reincorporation. She is caught in a conflict as her supposed madness only brings her closer to a need to reclaim those things she has left behind. The schizophrenic space complicates any efforts of reincorporation into places she never leaves nor arrives at.

The alchemy in the geographies of women of colour, both within the garret and within the condition of schizophrenia lies in the violent terrain upon which a battle ensues between hegemony and the two texts, between the dominant discourse and authors' symbolic bodies/minds. It lies in narratives of empowerment that highlight 'particular acts of agency within an oppressive and degrading system' (McDowell, 160). Both texts deconstruct power and control through a narrative that reshackles Jacobs and commits Kapil to re-interpret and revise their respective truths, bearing in mind that even their truth is subjective as it remains a representation of their limited experiences. The marginal spaces they choose to occupy free them/us from the shrouded historical claim as they re-remember the blanked out face of oppression and trauma. They inhabit spaces wherein they incarcerate the master within his territory and outside of the very spaces the narrators occupy. They produce material and discursive borders of exclusion which re-enact the boundaries that have led them to these spaces – whilst Jacobs wields her control within the visible borders of a garret; Kapil situates herself within an umarked space of madness. Both these spaces complicate these authors'

marginality as the occupation of these places is calculated. These liminal spaces are contentious as well as providing an alternative path and this duality confuses the experience of marginal spaces.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

‘What happens when only one aspect of a language is allowed you?
as woman—as Black?
What happens when the language of ideas is completely removed
and nothing is given to replace it?

(Phillip, 21-22)

What happens in the texts of Jacobs and Kapil is that they bypass that which is removed and take for themselves the language of ideas by recovering authority through their respective autobiographies. Whilst Jacobs is trapped by the limitations of the nineteenth century racist patriarchy, Kapil’s text is complicated by the double bind of a hypnotised national script and silenced migrants. These authors replace their historical gaps and silences by not ‘committing further violence’ (Hartman, 2) how they tell their stories, how they ‘retriev(e) what remains dormant’ (Hartman, 2). Hartman further asserts that they listen out ‘for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigures lives’(Hartman, 2-3)with a singular focus ‘of redressing the violence that produced (mere) numbers, fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the (displaced) and the enslaved’ (Hartman, 3). In both texts, the narrators disturb our engagement with them but more pertinently, they set a tone for a complex textual translation of wounds fully felt, not left to consume one from inside. Both authors ground their discourse and literary lineage in autobiographical techniques and characters that are as relevant in 2016 as they were in the nineteenth century and which continue to shape subsequent autobiographical narratives. What is important about both texts is that they are unable to separate their aesthetics and politics as they reconstruct and subvert hegemony, power and gender. They problematize not

only the voices of women of colour but also the space that these women occupy as they insert themselves in the centre of their respective national memoirs. Armed with their female subjectivities, they articulate their realities within the ambit of their competing allegiances: mother, daughter, communal voice, sister, grand-parent and whilst Jacobs posits her story in a certain time, Kapil vacillates between the present, past and future. Both imaginatively thwart the illegitimate intrusion of that which seeks to contain them within a Manichean paradigm and instead they stage textual masterpieces of metaphors, contradictions, echoes and inflections. Whilst Jacobs reminds us that white civilization is difficult to imagine without black existence, Kapil's registers of narration speak to the anxiety of being a survivor and a victim. What is remarkable about both Jacobs and Kapil's work is how both narrate textual spectacles that not only inflect modes of telling otherwise inaudible stories, but this black performance also marks a juncture in the re-committal of their humanness. They decontaminate an already troubled hegemonic space by confronting uncomfortable images of violence and memory.

The study does not set out to romanticize the plight of the enslaved nor patronizingly find Feldman's liberation in madness but it does wish to capture the nuanced vantage point from which the texts are written. It attempts to represent an alternative narrative of slavery and partition that does not quarantine the realities of slavery/partition history to a one dimensional tier of pathos but wishes to capture the psychological complexities that are at odds with the idea of a simplistic historical monologue. The narrators in both texts layer their respective autobiographies with heightened metaphors, discontinuities and gaps to drive this historical contingence home but also to manage the tensions and perversions between the repressed and patriarchy. Both authors' account of an alternative narrative present an uncanny paradox as their stories are filled with the 'other's silence. The authors take the literary stage and it is

only through their memories that these autobiographies play themselves out. Their performative process of telling their truth provides us with a stage closure but forecloses on other elements. They alone are able to contest their historical legacies; they alone control the moral (im) balance between hegemony and the survivors. The paradoxical relationship between master and the oppressed creates a degree of anxiety that further reinforces the burden of these narratives. Ultimately, they tell their stories 'Because it is psychotic not to know where you are in a national space' (Kapil, 41).

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