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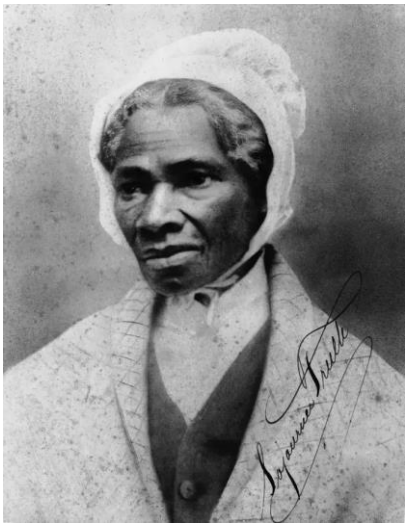
Representing Enslaved Women: 19th-Century Female Slave Narratives and 20th-Century Former Slave Women Interviews in Comparative Perspective



MÉMOIRE DE MASTER 2 RECHERCHE

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Introduction

Here is what a formerly enslaved woman living in Georgia, Mary Colbert, said to her interviewer in 1936: "Honey, don't flatter me. Don't you know a little girl 10 years old can't remember everything that went on far back."[1] This statement sums up one of the issues related to former American slaves' interviews led by the Work Progress Administration between 1936 and 1938. Indeed, Mary Colbert seems well aware that her age at the time of her emancipation – ten years old – prevents her from being a reliable witness of slave life. The issue of former slaves' memory within the scope of the reconstitution of slave history has been much written about since the 1960s and continues to cause divisions among historians today.

Although testimonies from former slave women[2] abound in these interviews, their history has not been as thoroughly explored as that of slave men since the end of slavery. Indeed, slave women have endured an overlong invisibility throughout the decades not only due to their status, but also to their gender. When they were not completely ignored by scholars, their experiences were blended with those of their male counterparts whereas, in fact, they were a separate group of individuals with their own history and perceptions. With the rise of feminist studies in the 1980s, slave women gradually emerged from the shadows. Angela Davis and Deborah Gray White, in particular, have been pioneers in the discovery of their history. Nonetheless, since their invisibility within society and history had the negative effect of denying them any opportunity to speak out, these women locked themselves within secrecy and preserved their intimacy. Indeed, as E. Frances White argues:

> Morrison reminds us that even as these writers of slave narratives attempted to represent the race, they dropped a protective veil over their interior lives. 'In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they forgot many other things. There was a careful selection of the instances that they would record and a careful rendering of those that they chose to describe.' (1990:301)[3]

[1] Mary Colbert, interview by Sarah H. Hall, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 222.

[2] The adjective "enslaved" is preferable to the noun "slave" as the latter is nowadays perceived as reducing enslaved people's identity to their condition. However, I did not choose to entirely reject this term in this thesis for a question of fluidity. https://naacpculpeper.org/resources/writing-about-slavery-this-might-help/.

[3] E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 153.

This was even truer for the female writers of slave narratives, suggesting that, even now that light is shed on slave women, they remain surrounded by a part of mystery that may never be completely unveiled. Be that as it may, we can still focus on the sources that exist in the attempt of unveiling slave women's experiences.

My aim is therefore to contribute to the recent current that unveiled slave women's lives and voices. In my previous research, I focused on slave women representations in male slave narratives as well as in travel narratives taking place in Louisiana. I found out that, in fact, stereotypes related to slave women did not only come from white Southerners but also from male slaves who internalised them. The authors' origins and the specificities of the place influenced female slave representations, producing new stereotypes that have not always been countered by historians. More importantly, this study revealed that the slave woman is not a simple but a complex character which is at the heart of various and often competing representations. Consequently, these findings led me to wonder what representations were conveyed by slave women themselves and whether they corroborate the images I analysed last year.

This time, I wish to go slightly deeper in the study of slave women representations by working almost exclusively on their own perceptions within two different chronological corpuses. Indeed, the main sources involving slave women testimonies are 19th-century slave women narratives and the WPA Slave Narrative Collection of former slaves' interviews led in the 1930s. Yet, both corpuses have their own contexts and characteristics. They produce similarities as well as discrepancies in the representations which are worth analysing further. To be more specific, my purpose is to rely on the comparative method to compare the enslaved women's representations from the two corpuses. As I will subsequently develop, the chronological gap between the sources will enable me to see if the representations have evolved between the 19th and the 20th centuries and how their inherent contexts influenced the representations. To conduct this comparative analysis, selecting 19th-century female slave autobiographies was necessary since the majority of slave women accounts was written during this era, in other words, during the height of slavery. Although the WPA slave interviews have been much written about by historians, I selected former slave women's interviews to compare with seven female slave narratives because no comparative study has been conducted between the representations from these sources so far. However, studying slave women's representations was not something new, for this topic has been developed since the 1980s onward. In historiography, both types of sources have been mostly studied separately, but the representations found in the 20th-century interviews were also used to confirm or refute

assumptions made by the 19th-century narratives so as to build a general history of slave women. Therefore, these sources were not studied for themselves, for their subjective representations. It may now be interesting to study their representations together and to confront their subjective viewpoints. If some images will be similar, the interviews will convey new representations that are not present in the 19th-century narratives, thus expanding and complexifying our general perception of the bondwoman while debunking oversimplified stereotypes. The point is no longer to determine whether their representations are reliable or not, but rather to interpret them and analyse how they were created. The different contexts surrounding the sources will produce specific representations while, at the same time, these representations will tell us something about their contexts.

In the present thesis, I will first examine the historiography of female slave representations and female slave narratives. I will then review scholars' works on the WPA Slave Narrative Collection in general before focusing on their study of former slave women interviews more specifically. This will lead me to assess the comparisons that have been made by historians between the two sources so far. Then, the methodology of the comparative study, which is at the heart of my research, will be defined. I will carry out a general review of the comparative method and then apply it to my own work. This will lead me to highlight the interest of my study and the problems resulting from it which will be addressed throughout my research. The next step will be to introduce my first corpus, slave women narratives published between 1831 and 1863, and its specificities. I will do the same with my second corpus which includes former slave women interviews from 1936-1938. After justifying the comparison between the two bodies of sources, I will start the analysis of the corpuses. This analysis will constitute a progressive demonstration from enslaved women's reification to their empowerment. First, I will examine the different ways in which both corpuses depict slave women's dehumanisation. Then, the image of motherhood will be studied before I focus on the representation of the female slave community. After I discuss slave women's agency, I will go further by exploring the various female slave representations after freedom.

1-Theoretical Framework

Before starting any analysis, I need to review the academic literature and historiography on the subject so as to build the background for my own study. My purpose here will be first to examine the interest shown by scholars in female slave representations in slave narratives in general and then in slave women narratives. Then, since I am not only interested in slave narratives but also in the Work Progress Administration Slave Narrative Collection from the 1930s, I will focus on academics' assessment of these sources. This is important to better understand the caution that needs to be exerted when it comes to analysing these sources. Throughout this review, I will also evaluate the particular attention given to slave women in these historians' studies.

1-1 Slave Women's Representations in Historiography

The historians' interest in slave narratives is quite recent as it started in the 1950s.[4] Before, most scholars focused on the perspective expressed by the planters in their journals and testimonies to study slavery and they completely ignored slave narratives, in other words the victims' point of view.[5] The shift from slaveholders' perspective to that of slaves – and thus from top-down to bottom-up history – occurred in historiography in the 1960s and 1970s when slave narratives were republished and attention was finally paid to former slaves' interviews.[6] From then on, slaves' experiences were mostly studied by male historians such as Stanley Elkins, John W. Blassingame, Eugene D. Genovese, or Stanley L. Engerman. They focused mainly on male slaves' testimonies and did not always distinguish their experiences from those of slave women, leading to a distortion of the latter's history. When they did mention slave women in their studies, they were peripheral in slave history, put to male slaves' side, and confined within simplistic roles such as the maternal role.[7]

Therefore, no independent, specific studies were conducted on slave women's voices in the narratives until the 1980s and 1990s with the works of Jacqueline Jones, Frances Foster, Deborah Gray White, and Patricia Morton. Indeed, these female historians included the

[4] David Bailey, "A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery," *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 3 (1980): 382.
[5] Bailey, 382.
[6] Bailey, 382.
[7] Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 20-22.

testimonies of slave women in their corpuses and endeavoured to differentiate their experiences from those of male slaves. This new literature stemmed from another shift in historiography: from then on, scholars tended to highlight the agency of the people who were the victims of the dominant group. They rediscovered sources produced by excluded groups and that had been overlooked, namely enslaved women's narratives in our case. In sum, they highlighted their agency and widened the part they played in the slave community beyond their mother role. This enabled them to deepen, nuance, and complexify slave women's representations and led to a more accurate history of female slaves. They were no longer subordinate to male slaves' history and in their shadow.

Among the main representations of the slave woman that were found was the sexually and physically abused victim of her white master widely stereotyped by slave narratives.[8] Slave women endured physical abuse when their work did not satisfy their masters, or when they failed to find a balance between their duties as mothers and slaves.[9] But more typical to slave women than to male slave was the sexual abuse they suffered from their masters: sexual exploitation by the masters was commonplace on plantations. This abuse, excused by the Jezebel stereotype,[10] was not always direct and explicit: bondwomen were sometimes forced to offer themselves in exchange for something else.[11] It was also made legitimate by the fact that the rape of a black woman by a white man was not punished by Southern laws.[12]

The Mammy was the opposite of Jezebel: this slave woman was represented as an asexual house servant in adequation with the Victorian ideal of motherhood.[13] Thus, she was a sort of substitute mother to the black and white children she nursed.[14] However, she remains a stereotype that scholars have not always been able to debunk: she was in fact a shield constructed mainly after the Civil War by nostalgic former slaveholders in order to rehabilitate the institution of slavery. Deborah Gray White debunked this stereotype by showing that the reality of female domestic service differed from the Mammy myth.[15]

Historians also focused on the slave woman's central capacity for childbearing. Indeed, as the bondwoman's value rested on her capacity to bear children and raise them, thus

[8] Frances Foster, ""In Respect to Females...": Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators," *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 2 (1981): 67.
[9] Deborah Gray White, 113.
[10] Deborah Gray White, 61.
[11] Deborah Gray White, 34.
[12] Deborah Gray White, 78.
[13] Deborah Gray White, 56.
[14] Deborah Gray White, 49.
[15] Deborah Gray White, 55-56.

increasing the slaveowner's property, he perceived the slave family as primarily composed of a woman and her children.[16] This assumption is supported by testimonies that showed that owners were more likely to sell single men and husbands rather than mothers and their children.[17] If, for the owner, the slave woman was more important to the family than the male slave, scholars have debunked the myth that the bondwoman dominated slave unions and family relationships.[18] Deborah Gray White argues that both husband and wife had equal and complementary roles.[19] As the husband did not own any property, given his slave condition, his wife was not dependent on him.[20] As a consequence, they both made economic contributions to the family and no one was more dependent on the other.[21]

To finish with this academic review of slave women's representations, it is important to mention female agency and power highlighted by recent historians. Although there was not a significant number of female slaves who endeavoured to escape, scholars have demonstrated the other various means that slave women used to resist abuses. Some were able to make a "strategic use of their sexual power"[22], in other words to use their bodies and attractiveness to enhance their status. Others chose to sabotage their own work and to fake illness for instance.[23] Finally, the female slave community was a source of help for slave women within the plantation as the nature of female slavery led them to rely on each other to survive.[24] Their cooperation was salient in resistance: Deborah Gray White refers to testimonies about women who united to plead to their mistress;[25] or about midwives and patients suspected of covering abortions for example.[26]

[16] Deborah Gray White, 98.
[17] Deborah Gray White, 145.
[18] Deborah Gray White, 166.
[19] Deborah Gray White, 155.
[20] Deborah Gray White, 153.
[21] Deborah Gray White, 156.
[22] Kenneth Aslakson, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 726.
[23] Wilma King, "The Mistress and her Maids: White and Black Women in a Louisiana Household," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 87, 90.
[24] Deborah Gray White, 141.
[25] Deborah Gray White, 125.
[26] Deborah Gray White, 125.

1-2 The WPA Slave Narrative Collection in Historiography

Now that I have reviewed academic works on slave women's representations mostly dug out from 19th-century slave narratives, attention must be paid more particularly to the historiographic survey of the second body of sources I am going to use: the WPA Slave Narratives. As I said, although these former slave interviews took place in the 1930s, they received little attention until George Rawick, Eugene Genovese, Leon Liwack, and Comer Van Woodward started to rely on them in the 1960s and 1970s in order to elaborate a more accurate history of slavery. However, they did not really question the problems inherent in these testimonies as historical sources,[27] or, if they did, they continued to use these sources in their interpretation of slave life.[28] They were nevertheless acknowledged as valuable sources since they gave access to a broader range of testimonies more representative of slave life than the few 19th-century slave narratives available.[29]

It was in 1975 that John Blassingame started to question their reliability as historical sources and even refused to use them in *The Slave Community*.[30] The problem was that these testimonies were full of biases related to their context of production that I will develop later. These biases were said to distort the slave history that emerged from these sources. Later, in the 1980s, Paul D. Escott also exposed the problematic biases of these sources, although he endeavoured to rehabilitate them by providing a guide for their use. His solution was to systematically compare the testimonies with quantitative data and methods to support or deny the former slaves' interpretations of their lives in slavery.[31] This suggests that this method would be useful in order to reconstruct a more objective history of slave life and to overcome the subjectivity of former slaves' perspective. Along with John Blassingame, more recent researchers from the 1990s-2010s highlighted and warned against the methodological problems posed by these sources, but without systematically dismissing them from their analysis as John

[27] Sharon Musher, "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It': Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2001): 23.
[28] Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (1996): 249.
[29] John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (1975): 480.
[30] Stephanie J. Shaw, "Using the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives to Study the Impact of the Great Depression," *The Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 3 (2003): 624.
[31] Paul D. Escott, "The Art and Science of Reading WPA Slave Narratives," in *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 46.

Blassingame did. Donna J. Spindel, Lori A. Garner, Sharon Musher, Lori Lee and, more recently, Ellen Hampton argue that the racial context of the interviews in the 1930s involved many prejudices as well as editing which could impair the reliability of these sources. Consequently, they attempted to take these problems into account in their studies of the interviews. Donna J. Spindel, for instance, relied on the field of psychology and empirical studies to emphasise their flaws as historical sources and debunk earlier historians' arguments. Nevertheless, none of these historians particularly tackled former female slave interviews.

Although Loucynda E. Sandeen recently acknowledged the strengths of former slave interviews to study female slaves' voices, representations, and experiences,[32] academic studies relying exclusively on former slave women interviews remain scarce. She is among the few who used evidence from female slave narratives and interviews in her thesis on enslaved women's claim of their bodies. However, even if she used the interviews in continuity with the slave narratives, she did not compare these two bodies of sources on their representations of slave women. Hélène Lecaudey, for her part, used exclusively these feminine sources in 1996 already: former female slave interviews were useful to evaluate not only the influence of the interviewer's race on the narratives, but also that of his/her gender. She demonstrated that former female slaves were even more disadvantaged than their male counterparts: they were perceived as inferior by white interviewers as they were black, women, and former slaves.[33] Furthermore, she compared interviews led by a white man and a black woman. She came to the conclusion that the stories told to the white interviewer were less detailed and dealt less with blacks' perspective. On the contrary, with the female black interviewer, former slave women emphasised the emotion, sufferings, and resistance of their black relatives and they talked more freely. At some point in her work, Stephanie J. Shaw focused on former slave women's poverty at the time of the interviews and on the difficulty they had to access jobs compared to men. This led her to suggest how this context affected the way these women remembered slavery positively as it was a time when they could rely on their families, as opposed to the 1930s when the latter were no longer around them.

As for the review of comparisons made between 19th-century slave narratives and WPA former slave interviews, John Blassingame and David Bailey can be cited. They both made a

[32] Loucynda Elayne Sandeen, "Who Owns This Body? Enslaved Women's Claim on Themselves" (PhD diss., Portland State University, 2013), 30-31.

[33] Hélène Lecaudey, "Behind the Mask: Ex-Slave Women and Interracial Sexual Relations," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 265.

comparative study of the reliability of slave narratives and interviews and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of both types of black testimony on slavery, underscoring their complementarity. They concluded that both sources were subject to biases either related to the abolitionist design of slave narratives or to the racial and segregationist context surrounding the interviews. Nevertheless, once again, these comparative works ignored slave and former slave women's perspective as they referred exclusively to male slave narratives and interviews. The next section will introduce the methodology and the corpuses used to conduct this study.

2-Methodology and corpuses

2-1 The Comparative Method

John Blassingame and David Bailey relied on the comparative method to carry out their studies, and this method will be at the heart of the present thesis. In history, there has been a long tradition of considering history in a national perspective. Historians tended to write a national narrative through a very limited lens. However, during the second half of the 20th century, scholars insisted on the extreme efficiency of comparative topics to better understand some subjects such as colonial empires, slave societies, and abolition. The use of the comparative method complexified the reflection as it provided a wide access to what was written in different countries, diversifying perspectives. In fact, it enables researchers to delve into much more complex interpretations and analyses instead of drawing generalities: "La comparaison a deux fonctions importantes : rechercher et comprendre les aspects spécifiques et généraux de chaque phénomène mais aussi aider comprendre les causes et les origines des phénomènes."[1] Thus, the comparative method helps researchers go beyond description.[2] Cécile Vigour also discusses the benefits of comparison:

> En replaçant son objet de recherche dans une perspective temporelle plus longue ou en le confrontant à d'autres réalités géographiques et culturelles, le comparatiste étend son champ d'observation. [...] La comparaison doit ainsi être conçue comme une démarche, un état d'esprit destiné à déplacer le regard du chercheur. Comparer, c'est en effet non seulement accepter de se décentrer, mais également rendre plus exigeants la formulation d'hypothèses et le travail de théorisation.[3]

This method involves a certain number of rules to be efficient. First, according to Olivier Remaud, Jean-Frederic Schaub, and Isabelle Thireau, it is very important to determine what we want to compare and highlight, for the rest of the study will ensue from the goal of the comparison.[4] Nancy Green relies on a comparative approach of the history of migration as an example to highlight the other main rules that the method requires. The choice of units of comparison is central. There need to be variables that can be geographical, social, and

[1] Nancy L. Green, « L'histoire comparative et le champ des études migratoires, » *Annales Economie Sociétés Civilisations*, 45e année, no. 6 (1990): 1336.
[2] Green, 1336.
[3] Cécile Vigour, *La Comparaison Dans Les Sciences Sociales : Pratiques Et Méthodes* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 17-18
[4] Olivier Remaud, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, and Isabelle Thireau, *Faire Des Sciences Sociales* (Paris: Éd. De L'École Des Hautes Études En Sciences Sociales, 2012), 13.

chronological for instance.[5] Nonetheless, the choice of these units of comparison must be guided by a common element. To put it differently, for the comparison to work, we have to compare things that are compatible and comparable. Indeed, Marc Bloch states that the comparison involves two requirements: "une certaine similitude entre les faits observés - cela va de soi - et une certaine dissemblance entre les milieux où ils se sont produits."[6] There has to be something in common: a period, an institution, a social group… In my thesis, I chose to study the representations of one social group, slave women, in two different periods of time: the 19th century (1831-1863) and the 1930s. Therefore, the chronological variable will enable me to highlight similarities as well as particularities and ruptures in the representations of enslaved women. The slave women representations will be the subjects impacted by the effects of the different contexts of the 19th and 20th centuries. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the heterogeneity of the sources can be an issue in comparative research according to Elise Julien.[7] In fact, we must always ask ourselves if the differences found are not due to the inequalities between the corpuses.[8] Applied to my research, this issue is relevant since the 20th-century interviews are much shorter than the slave narratives, suggesting that some representations will be unequally addressed between the sources, thus entailing differences. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between the two corpuses with many more testimonies in the second one. Therefore, once the rules enumerated are followed, the comparative method becomes a useful tool to expand our perception of the slave woman between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Although I have shown that slave women narratives and interviews have been used – yet rarely – to study the American slave woman more broadly, I argue that the interest of my study lies in the fact that there has been, so far, no comparative study of the representation of slave women in female slave narratives and former female slave interviews. Thus, my purpose will be to make a comparative analysis of perceptions on slave women in female slave narratives from 1831 to 1863 and in former slave women interviews from the 1930s. Since I chose to rely on two different periods, the antebellum 19th century and the 1930s, the interest will be to see if the self-representations have evolved after the abolition of slavery as well as during the

[5] Green, 1338.
[6] Marc Bloch, « Pour Une Histoire Comparée Des Sociétés Européennes, » *Revue de synthèse historique* 46 (1928): 17.
[7] Elise Julien, « Le comparatisme en histoire. Rappels historiographiques et approches méthodologiques, » *Hypothèses* 8, no. 1 (2005): 197.
[8] Julien, 197.

development of First-wave feminism. I will bring to light not only the potential variations but also the similarities in the perceptions between the two bodies of sources. In this respect, it will be interesting to see if the discourses from the 1930s were influenced by the events that happened between the two periods of time and whose aim was to alter stereotypes on Blacks; I think about former slave Sojourner Truth's speech in 1851 or the Harlem Renaissance, for example. I will also try to examine how stereotypes in relation to slave women have fared until the 1930s. Once the comparisons made, attention will be paid to the analysis of the representations that will be uncovered. Indeed, it will be important to interpret these representations in relation to the context of production of the sources, assessing how the latter influences the discourses on slave women both in the 19th century and in the 1930s. Even if some representations will be maintained before and after Emancipation, what is interesting is that the analyses will vary because of their different contexts. However, the weight of the past and the fact that some 19th-century stereotypes remain deeply rooted can explain, at times, similarities in the images of the slave woman in both types of sources. Finally, it will be useful to mention the issue of intersectionality weighing on slave women's representations. E. Frances White's double definition of "representation" will be of use in this thesis:

> As I have suggested, representation has two meanings: the act of symbolically standing for a group and the act of revealing the nature of a group. To represent is to symbolically stand for those who have no voice, on one hand, and to make clear the character of a group of people, on the other hand.[9]

This definition is two-fold. It means that the narrators represent slave women in the sense that they depict them, and, by so doing, they represent them in the sense that they speak for them as a sort of collective voice.

To answer these questions, I will resort to comparative methods. In this respect, I will first compare the similarities and discrepancies in slave women representations from 19th-century slave narratives (1831-1863). Then, I will pay attention to the different representations that can be found in former slave interviews between 1936 and 1938. Finally, I will compare and contrast the representations between slave narratives from 1831-1863 and former slave interviews. However, it will be necessary to bear in mind the contexts of production of both bodies of sources – that I will introduce later – in order not to flatten their specificities. As I said, my study will aim to underscore the similarities and differences in the representations and to provide explanations and analyses regarding those representations in order to learn more

[9] E. Frances White, 51.

about slave women's perceptions. I chose to make a chronological comparison between data from two different periods of time: the 19th century and the 1930s. Indeed, my hypothesis is that the representations may have evolved thanks to the abolition of slavery and the development of feminist movements which granted more agency to former slave women. Nevertheless, it will also be all the more interesting to see how the racial and economic context of the 1930s may have influenced the representations and reinforced some stereotypes instead of surpassing them. For my corpuses, I selected black women voices from the 19th century and from the 1930s, as opposed to the sources of my first study. I made this choice because, in a research which focuses on slave women representations, it is essential to examine the viewpoints of the concerned people, in other words slave women. Yet, I may also include some male slaves' representations of slave women that I studied last year as a counterpoint. This will serve me to see whether, in fact, slave men were the ones who had most internalised whites' stereotypes on slave women. This time, I want to see how 19th-century slave women and 20th-century former slave women represent themselves and their relatives during slavery. Moreover, as Loucynda Sandeen argues: "A successful history of enslaved women's experiences in the antebellum South (1830-1861) would, without doubt, preferably be created from their own voices."[10] I agree with her statement although the aim here is not so much to collect objective points of view on slave women's experiences but rather subjective representations.

2-2 Slave Women Narratives (1831-1863)

I am now going to introduce my sources and their specificities. The first data that will be used are antebellum female slave narratives published between 1831 and 1863. My original idea was principally to refer to autobiographies written by fugitive slave women themselves after their escape from the South because they are the most reliable kind of source to study slave women's perspective. Nonetheless, I quickly came to understand that such sources were scarce since slave women had even less access to education than male slaves. Moreover, it was difficult for them to be published in a racist and patriarchal society which devalued female expression:[11] "For an African American woman in the nineteenth century, publishing a book was virtually a miraculous event, as we learned from Harriet Wilson."[12] If they did write about their lives, their invisibility throughout the decades made the discovery of these documents more and more

[10] Sandeen, 25.
[11] Dominique Aurélia, « Voix du Sud : étude de trois autobiographies de femmes esclaves, » *Transatlantica* 2 (2012): 3.
[12] Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2002), lxiii.

unlikely. Therefore, I added dictated narratives, interviews and even biographies – as long as they were written with the help of the slave woman concerned – even though slave women's perspectives are not entirely unpolluted by external, and often masculine, voices in these accounts. Following my first study, when I selected male slave narratives, I chose this time to rely on antebellum female slave narratives to see what viewpoint they could have on themselves in their turn. Moreover, they are the main useful sources to study slave women's experiences as they were contemporary to slavery. As for the chronology, I want to be slightly more accurate by saying that the stories I picked took place between the end of the 18th century and 1860 but, more importantly, that they were published before the abolition of slavery (1831-1863). Indeed, I was interested in studying slave women's representations during the height of slavery, when abolitionist movements were campaigning particularly through such narratives. In this respect, selecting narratives following the abolition was not possible as the goal of these narratives was different from that of the antebellum ones. This would have diversified the variables too much. Due to the scarcity of antebellum feminine sources, I did not restrain myself to a particular state when I selected the narratives, contrary to what I did in my first work on Louisiana. Most stories take place in the antebellum South, yet, again the lack of sources led me to extend the geographical area: I selected some narratives from the North and one from the West Indies. However, this is not an issue since I do not really want to study the stereotypes produced in the South in particular, but those produced by formerly enslaved women, whatever their origin. I tried to choose narratives which were the least possible edited by actors of the period – such as abolitionists for instance – and in which the slave woman's perspective could be heard. That is why I did not include biographies written by other people as they do not reflect slave women's voices. Consequently, my first corpus, that will be introduced below, includes various types of narratives: there are autobiographies, interviews, fictions etc. which have nevertheless in common to have involved slave women at some point in the writing.

I am first going to study female slave autobiographies, either written by themselves or dictated. The authors of the sources present a variety of situations: some are runaway slave women while others were legally emancipated. It will thus be interesting to see if this changes anything in the representations. In this corpus, four narratives come from women who ran away from their plantations. In chronological order of publication, I will start with Mary Prince's narrative: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*[13]. Contrary to

[13] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831).

the other narratives, Mary Prince was born in Bermuda in 1788 and was a slave in the West Indies. Her story is the first about a slave woman to have been published in the United Kingdom, in 1831, when slavery in the British Caribbean colonies had not yet been abolished. Her transcribed story, "taken down from Mary's own lips"[14], is eloquent about the abuses she endured when she was enslaved in Bermuda, the Turks Islands, and Antigua, before she travelled to England with her last owners and managed to leave them. This narrative stands out from my American Southern corpus but, as she lived close to this geographic area and relates her enslaved condition as a woman, it is still relevant for my analysis. Furthermore, these areas are culturally close since the United States used to be a British colony until the end of the 18th century. Nonetheless, we should bear in mind that the context remains different from the other stories as it refers to slavery in the British West Indies especially.

Then comes the Crafts' narrative. William and Ellen Craft were born in slavery in Georgia in the 1820s. Their fame stems from the plan they elaborated to escape to the North in 1848: thanks to her white complexion, Ellen disguised as William's master which enabled them not to get caught. This cunning plan made them famous at that time since it turned class, gender, and race boundaries upside-down with Ellen passing as her own husband's white "master". Besides, their account emphasises the horrors of slavery as well as the cruel and unjust Southern laws against slaves. Published in 1860, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*[15] is a first-person narrative which seems to have been mainly written by William. However, this source is worth adding to my corpus if we consider that Ellen participated to the writing. Indeed, in most academic works, the book is referred to as "theirs" and they mention William or William and Ellen without making any difference when they speak about its authorship. Therefore, her voice can be made out at time even though it cannot be entirely asserted.

A third female slave narrative selected, and the most famous one, is Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* published in 1861.[16] Born in North Carolina in 1813, she remained enslaved until 1842 when she finally managed to escape. Her account is the most detailed, novel-like slave narrative written by a former slave woman in which she stages herself as Linda Brent. Sexually harassed by her master, Dr Flint, she is famous for resisting him by giving herself to another white man who was not her master. She is also well-known for having

[14] Prince, iii.
[15] William Craft and Ellen Craft. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: William Tweedie, 1860).
[16] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2018).

remained hidden seven years in her grand-mother's attic before she escaped to the North. Her narrative displays the horrors of slavery – in particular the burdens that weighed on slave women, jeopardising their virtue – to a Northern feminine audience so as to kindle sympathy and make them work for abolitionism.

Finally, Hannah Crafts is the last fugitive slave of my corpus. *The Bondwoman's Narrative* is a fictionalised narrative whose manuscript was discovered by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in 2001.[17] Written in the mid-19th century, it was attributed to a fugitive slave under the pseudonym of Hanna Crafts who escaped slavery in North Carolina. Nonetheless, not much is known about her identity and the authorship of this narrative remains a source of debate. This narrative is filled with Gothic imagery and influences from Dickens and the Brontës.[18] However, since it appears to have been written by a slave woman, it is still useful for my purpose. Indeed, even though it is fiction, it features the words of a female slave who chose to make specific representations of slave women. This source would have been faulty had my point been to collect objective, realistic slave women representations and quantitative data, but it is not the case here.

The three last sources of the first corpus come from women who were made legally free. The first to be published was *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave*[19] in 1850. She was born a slave in New York in 1797 and was freed by her last master. She then campaigned for abolition and women's rights while she was also a preacher. She gave a famous speech in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, entitled "Ain't I a Woman", in which she used her experience as an example to rehabilitate black women's status within the 19th-century unequal society which denied rights for women and put them in an inferior position. I will use this speech for my analysis as well. She dictated her story to her friend, Olive Gilbert. This account is ambivalent as it is a third-person narrative and has the form of a biography. However, although she did not write it herself, she took part in the writing and is also frequently directly quoted in the narrative, making it representative of her voice. Thus, that source is close to the interviews because some are also in the 3rd person.

Is also included in this corpus Louisa Picquet's narrative.[20] This source differs from the others in the fact that it is the transcription of an interview she gave to Hiram Mattison, which

[17] Celeste-Marie Bernier and Judie Newman, "'The Bondwoman's Narrative': Text, Paratext, Intertext and Hypertext," *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 2 (2005): 148.
[18] Bernier and Newman, 154.
[19] Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave* (Boston: The Author, 1850).
[20] Hiram Mattison, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life* (New York: Published by The Author), 1861.

makes it close to the second corpus. Louisa Picquet was a racially mixed slave born in 1828 in South Carolina. We first learn about her resistance to the sexual advances of one of her masters, then about her life as John Williams's concubine in New Orleans before he emancipated her. The interview then relates her struggle to buy her mother out of bondage. The narrative includes questions from Hiram Mattison and Louisa Picquet's first-person answers. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Louisa Picquet's perspective and the memories she chose to relate were mostly influenced by Mattison's questions, often oriented towards her virtue and that of other slave women stained by the slave institution. Thus, the purpose of this interview was to demonstrate to a Northern audience the immorality of Southern slavery which undermined slave women's purity and made them sexual victims. Although it is not an autobiography in the same way as Harriet Jacobs's or Mary Prince's stories, Louisa Picquet's voice is still discernible, making this source relevant for my purpose.

The last narrative of this corpus is Elizabeth's. Old Elizabeth was born a slave in Maryland in 1766 and dictated her story when she was 97 years old. *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, A Colored Woman*[21] is a very short dictated narrative published in 1863 which relates the story of her life from her early years in slavery, when she experienced a religious epiphany, until she was freed by her master at 30 years old. It also depicts her resistance as a black female minister against church opposition after she gained her freedom.

Now that I have explained the specificities of each source, it is necessary to take into account their context of production. Indeed, slave narratives in general should be studied cautiously as the goal of these narratives, before 1865, was to use slaves' personal stories as a means to expose the general nature and the evils of slavery to a Northern audience. Dominique Aurélia states that this kind of narratives developed mostly after the abolition of the transatlantic trade in 1807, when abolitionists came to understand that this measure was not sufficient to bring slavery down.[22] They insisted on horrific whipping scenes in order to raise sympathy among the readers and incite them to get involved in abolitionist movements. Starting from their own stories, the slave narrators progressively became a collective voice for Southern slaves by denouncing their general living conditions and the injustices they all endured collectively.[23] Moreover, these narratives were used to show that slaves deserved to live as free people in a free society and to rehabilitate themselves. Therefore, it is obvious that some facts

[21] Old Elizabeth, *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1863).
[22] Aurélia, 1.
[23] Lawrence Aje, "Fugitive Slave Narratives and the (Re)presentation of the Self? The Cases of Frederick Douglass and William Brown," *L'Ordinaire des Amériques*, no. 215 (2013): 10.

may have been exaggerated or invented to achieve these purposes. The fiction in some narratives is also visible through the fact that some are filled with detailed dialogues and very accurate facts which make historians doubt the veracity of some arguments. The goals of the narratives contributed to the construction of archetypal slave narratives which share similar elements: generally, the narrative tells the story of the slave from childhood to (wo)manhood, realistic flogging scenes are recurrent, and the characters are often separated according to a Manichean dichotomy between the good, human slave and the bad, tyrannical master.[24] Furthermore, another important element, common to male and female slave narratives, was that it was likely that they had sometimes been edited by abolitionist editors. Thus, fugitive slaves' self-expression was censored both by direct editing of their texts and by what their abolitionist friends asked them to write.[25]

Then, female slave narratives had specific purposes which made them differ from male slave narratives. Indeed, they addressed a feminine Northern readership to arouse solidarity and sympathy in their "sisters". Through their narratives, they intended to prove that slave women could conform to the white feminine ideals of the 19th century that slavery denied them.[26] Finally, some of them countered and debunked stereotypes related to them such as the powerless victim and the fallen woman.[27] As a consequence, these contextual elements may have some impact on slave women's representations. In the female slave narratives I have introduced, my purpose will be to study the way these women represent themselves, their fellow slave women, and their experiences before drawing any comparison with my next body of sources. In attempting to account for their experiences, these women became the collective voice and representatives of slave women.

At that point, it seems relevant to reflect on the issue of the extent of slave women's involvement in their narratives: how to distinguish the author's voice from that of the editor? Many narratives, such as Mary Prince's and Elizabeth's, claim to have been taken from the slave woman's lips. In the case of Harriet Jacobs's narrative, her editor, Lydia Child, insisted on the fact that she made little to no alterations in it.[28] However, it is difficult to evaluate the degree of modification in these narratives as external influences are often subtle: we know that abolitionists asked slaves to insist on certain aspects of their experience while they erased some

[24] Aje, 2, 7.
[25] Aje, 2.
[26] Winifred Morgan, "Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass," *American Studies* 35, no. 2 (1994): 90.
[27] Morgan, 76.
[28] Morgan, 88.

passages to serve their political agenda, but those alterations and influences are not systematically apparent in the narratives themselves. More particularly, although Sojourner Truth's biography includes direct quotations from her, making the narrative more authentic, it is certain that Olive Gilbert manipulated it. Fortunately, it appears that, today, computer science starts to be of help to evaluate the place taken by the editor's voice in slave narratives. Marie-Pierre Baduel relied on textometry to determine whether Louisa Picquet's narrative was worth adding to the corpus of her dissertation. Upon reading the narrative, Louisa Picquet's' voice is more distinguishable than the voice of the slave women of the other sources. Marie-Pierre Baduel noticed a difference of style between Louisa Picquet's and her interviewer's voices: Louisa's sentences are shorter and Mattison added corrections between brackets.[29] The textometry software helped her confirm this intuition as she came to the conclusion that the difference between the two voices was indeed discernible and significant. In other words, Mattison's influence on Louisa's discourse is visible thanks to his style and the vocabulary he uses that is fairly different from Louisa Picquet's. The software highlighted a range of vocabulary that was specific to each voice. Although this does not help for the other narratives of my corpus, this is already a step forward that enables historians to assess the slave narrators' involvement in their narratives.

When it is relevant, I will also refer to primary sources from John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony*[30] such as slave women's letters and interviews published in books and magazines before Emancipation. Concerning slave women's letters, they differ from the narratives in the sense that they were not supposed to be published nor did they have any abolitionist purpose. Thus, we can expect less mediation in their accounts. Nonetheless, this will depend on whom the letters were addressed to since one can argue that slave women were more genuine in their correspondence to their relatives than to their masters. Finally, white slaveholders' voices and stereotypes will be heard at times since they are recurrent in slave women narratives. For instance, they provide us with stereotypes linked to slave women that the latter attempted to counter.

[29] Marie-Pierre Baduel, « Justification du corpus des récits dictés : Louisa Picquet et Boyereau Brinch, » (unpublished work, April, 3 2020), 1.
[30] John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

2-3 The WPA Former Slave Women Interviews

The second corpus of sources that I have selected to compare with 19th-century female slave narratives is composed of former female slave interviews led by the Work Progress Administration in the 1930s. I made this choice because these interviews are important sources, beside slave narratives, to learn about slaves' experiences, and even more about those of slave women, thus making the two corpuses comparable. These testimonies are invaluable sources to rebuild slave women's history due to the scarcity of surviving sources about them. Indeed, in these interviews, slave women's voices are much more abundant than in slave narratives, mostly written by men.[31] Therefore, one can argue that the interviews complete slave narratives on this particular point. However, former slave interviews are not devoid of weaknesses: compared to slave narratives, these testimonies are much shorter and the personality traits of the interviewees are thus less discernible.[32] I will take a specific interest in the stories that former female slaves tell about their life in slavery and in those told to them by other female relatives. Still, similarly as with 19th-century slave narratives, there is a specific context of production linked to the interviews that must be taken into account. It may indeed trigger some variations in female slave representations in comparison to those in slave narratives. The hypothesis would be that now that the abolition of slavery had been ratified and that there were no longer white abolitionists to control their expression, former slaves were freer to express themselves on the subject of slavery. Nevertheless, it seems that other forms of oppression emerged on their discourses.

If there are many elements that make the 19th-century female slave narratives and WPA former female slave interviews comparable, they differ, however, on certain elements such as their nature and their goals. Indeed, between 1936 and 1938, the Work Progress Administration hired fieldworkers who recorded tales from former female and male slaves in many Southern and border states.[33] The documents under scrutiny are the written transcriptions of these interviews. They were then gathered to form the Slave Narrative Collection, an oral history of slave life in the 19th century. The aim of the interviews was to describe and preserve former slaves' experiences in slavery as the questions revolved around slave marriage, funerals, treatment, food, housing etc. They also had a cultural dimension as the goal was to collect local

[31] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 490.
[32] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 491.
[33] Escott, 41.

stories and folklore through songs and testimonies on superstitions for instance.[34] Consequently, it appears that these goals differ from those of 19th-century slave narratives as the former slaves interviewed were less pressured to denounce the institution.[35] To give an example, this leads to the fact that fewer depictions of terrible flogging scenes can be found.

If I made this choice, it is also because the chronology of these sources is close to that of the slave narratives from the 19th century. Although the interviews were conducted in the 1930s, the recorded memories come from before the Civil War, when the informants were children or very young adults in slavery. Moreover, they sometimes refer to older stories from their relatives such as their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts. These stories may then have been contemporary to those told by Harriet Jacobs, for example. Nonetheless, time had passed since the publication of slave narratives and slave women from 20th-century former slaves' stories were likely to be depicted differently. As more than a thousand interviews were recorded, I needed to choose variables to restrict my corpus for the purpose of the exercise. I first selected only former slave women's interviews to have, once again, the viewpoint of the people concerned about slave women representations. Then, I chose to study interviews led in the states where the 19th-century slave women writers from my first corpus came from: Maryland, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. These choices favour the coherence of the comparison and avoid excessive regional variations. Therefore, about 400 interviews were selected and studied.

Just as with 19th-century slave narratives, it is important to take into account the context of production which impacted the proceedings of the interviews. Indeed, even though they were produced long after the Emancipation, when Southern former slaves were finally free, black people's social and economic situation had not much improved yet as many were still dependent on white people. More importantly, the 1930s saw the devastating impacts of the Great Depression. The informants were already discriminated against by their race and old age, and the economic crisis damaged even further their financial situation, as they had even less access to the labour market. Thus, many scholars have argued that they may have accepted to say whatever the interviewers wanted, hoping this would give them access to social aids, in the form for money or food. Moreover, the interviews were conducted during the segregation era, when the Jim Crow laws were subjugating Blacks and making them the victims of hate crimes, lynching, and attacks. The Lost Cause ideology was also preeminent in those years, which is

[34] Ellen Hampton, "'Lawdy! I was sho' happy when I was a slave!': Manipulative editing in the WPA former-slave narratives from Mississippi," *L'Ordinaire des Amériques*, no. 215 (2013): 2.
[35] Bailey, 402.

why paternalistic memories of slavery can often be found. It is likely that the aim of the interviewers supporting this ideology was to rehabilitate slavery through their oriented questions. If the respondent was afraid of reprisals, he or she may have conformed to this ideology in his or her testimony. Consequently, a certain amount of cautiousness stems from this particular context.

Indeed, according to scholarly works written since the 1970s, the interviews involve methodological problems that I must be aware of when resorting to these sources. These issues concern both male and female slave interviews and most likely female slave interviews even more. The "challenges of working with slave narratives"[36] come from the fact that they pose a problem of historical objectivity: the interviews were influenced by a number of biases which make scholars wonder if they actually reflect the former slave's point of view.[37] More practically, the documents are a written transcription of an oral discourse based on notes.[38] Therefore, this is not a verbatim transcription which may have altered, in some cases, what the former slave actually said. Furthermore, it is a known fact that interviewers and editors operated modifications, edited and sometimes rewrote the testimonies. These are external influences on former slaves' discourses, damaging their reliability as historical sources.

After this external censorship, there were biases which indirectly and sometimes unconsciously impacted former slaves' discourse. The interviewers were blamed for distorting the memories of the former slaves. First, the race of the interviewer may have impacted former slaves' recollections.[39] Indeed, due to the racial and segregationist context of the 1930s, Blacks may have mistrusted their interviewers if they were white. If they did not know them, they may have censored negative descriptions of slavery and masters to protect themselves from potential reprisals.[40] This thus led to paternalistic, stereotyped descriptions of kind masters.[41] This issue is especially visible in one interviewer's comment about her informant, Minnie Davis: "giving the impression that every word was carefully weighed before it was uttered."[42] This shows that, for some reasons, Minnie Davis did not feel safe enough to talk freely in her interviewer's

[36] Lori Lee, "Discourse of Slavery: Freedom and the Negotiation of Power and Identity in Context," *Transatlantica* 2 (2012): 2.
[37] Hampton, 2.
[38] Escott, 41.
[39] Comer Van Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," Review of *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, by George P. Rawick. *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (1974): 473.
[40] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 485.
[41] Lee, 13.
[42] Minnie Davis, interview by Sadie B. Hornsby, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 253.

presence. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the interviews involving same race interviewers and respondents did not necessarily lead to fewer paternalist comments on the slave past.[43] Then, the issues linked to the gender of the interviewers are particularly significant for my study. Indeed, power dynamics were particularly at stake when the interviewer was a white man interviewing a black woman as suggested by Hélène Lecaudey's findings. As opposed to former male slaves, the female ones were dismissed not only because of their race but also because of their gender. Consequently, this may have led women to keep even quieter on certain topics – rape, masters' treatments of them and abuses – in the presence of a white male interviewer. On the contrary, it seems that same sex interviewers and informants may have produced more revealing testimonies.[44] These controversial topics were also likely to be censored and minimised by the respondents when they had a specific relationship with their interviewers: in some cases when the former slave, his/her family or ancestors had served the interviewer's family or neighbours in the past for instance. Furthermore, since the interviewers often led the interviews in their own neighbourhoods, their influence within their community may have produced fears in the respondents.[45] Therefore, the three biases mentioned above can be reunited as they created a non-conducive atmosphere for the interviews and led to self-censorship – conscious or not – from the informants themselves.[46] This creates a major difference with 19th-century slave narratives: contrary to the latter which revealed abuses and mistreatments, the WPA slave interviews were more often silent on such topics due to the pressure exerted by the context in which they were produced. The informants, living in a Southern segregationist society, were not as protected as 19th-century authors who were for the most part safe in the North among their abolitionist friends. Consequently, Toni Morrison's statement that the writers of slave narratives carefully selected events to record also applies to the former slave women that were interviewed.

However, other biases, more internalised by the former slaves, bothered scholars since they also affected the reliability of their discourse. The influence of the age of the informants both in slavery and at the time of the interview was particularly significant. Indeed, the authors of 19th-century slave narratives wrote their stories at a younger age than that of the former slaves when their memories were recorded. Moreover, all the women from the first corpus gained their freedom when they were over twenty so they were able to describe slavery through adult eyes

[43] Lori A. Garner, "Representations of Speech in the WPA Slave Narratives of Florida and the Writings of Zora Neale Hurston," *Western Folklore* 59, no. 3/4 (2000): 227.
[44] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 487-488.
[45] Lecaudey, 264.
[46] Hampton, 3.

and also depict what it was like for grown up slaves.[47] Conversely, the former slaves recorded their testimonies when they were old, between the age of seventy and a hundred, which may have affected their recollections. Nevertheless, the same thing could be reproached to Elizabeth's testimony since it was recorded when she was 97. The informants were also very young before the war, they thus witnessed slavery from a child's perspective and related their experiences accordingly. According to Paul D. Escott and Hélène Lecaudey, their experiences were less representative of slavery than those of adults, as this was a happier time for children and as they did not have time to fully experience slavery.[48]

Then, the geographical context could have affected former slaves' recollections, especially if they had moved after Emancipation from where they lived as slave children. Donna J. Spindel relied on psychology to study the impact of the geographical context on memory and came up with the notion of "context dependency"[49]: it means that people remember best what they learnt in their original context. In other words, if they learn something in a specific place and then move to another place, it is likely that they will have trouble remembering what they learnt in this different place. Applied to my study, this means that former slaves who migrated from the plantation where they grew up will have trouble remembering life on plantation as they are no longer living in this geographical place which would have rekindled some memories. Former slaves who did not immediately migrate from the neighbourhood of their former masters may have participated in the Great Migration starting in the 1910s towards the North or industrial cities to find jobs. Nonetheless, this hypothesis must be qualified, as most interviews were conducted in the South and scholars have argued that many former slaves interviewed were still living in the neighbourhood of the descendants of their former masters.[50] Thus, not all the former slaves were living far from their former plantations at the time of the interviews.

Eventually, as John Blassingame argues: "Attitudes towards the past were so intertwined with the present."[51] This means that former slaves' economic and health situation at the time of the interviews impacted their memories. Donna J. Spindel adds that the past is remembered depending on one's current state of mind.[52] Most of the former slaves, and in particular old black women, had been victims of the Great Depression in the 1930s and failed

[47] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 490-491.
[48] Escott, 41; Lecaudey, 263.
[49] Spindel, 255.
[50] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 482.
[51] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 482.
[52] Spindel, 256.

to find jobs due to their old age.[53] This therefore led to a romanticisation and an embellishment of the slave past and masters' treatment of them.[54] This is visible through the repetitions of "now" in many interviews which indicate an unconscious comparison between the past and the present.[55] As a matter of fact, slave writers from the 19th century wrote down their accounts when they were in a relatively stable situation as opposed to former slaves from the 20th century who, for the most part, were interviewed when they were in a precarious financial situation. To give an example, this had an influence on food descriptions: in many testimonies, there are references to an excessive abundance of food provided to slaves during their bondage, radically differing from 19th-century accounts.[56] It thus suggests that, for a former slave from the 1930s, the advantages of being free did no longer supersede economic hardships as it did for fugitive slaves in the 19th century.[57] Yet, this does not mean that all positive statements on slavery must be dismissed: such assessments on food were not necessarily faulty because, during slavery, these people were children whose relatives made sure that they received enough food.[58] Moreover, it is unlikely that they endured the same punishments as adult slaves.[59] In fact, those who were truly well treated in slavery found themselves in a worse situation after their emancipation, struggling to provide for themselves.[60] As a consequence, what comes out from this analysis of the biases impacting former slaves' accounts is that both the interviewers and the respondents were editors of the discourse, more or less consciously.

According to the historians I cited, it is only by keeping these biases in mind that an effective and more objective study of the WPA slave narratives can be led and that we can finally make out the respondent's voice. Since memory means the reconstruction of the past in the present, one can argue that slave autobiographies are supposed to be unreliable as well because they are built on the memory and subjective interpretation of their authors, not on facts. However, the point of my research is not so much to gather objective viewpoints on slave women but rather to study their own subjective representations, no matter how biased they are. Actually, these biases can be an interesting starting point in the analysis of certain female slave representations. In this respect, I do not need to resort to quantitative methods so as to check the reliability of female slaves' perceptions as Paul Escott recommends because, following the

[53] Shaw, 637.
[54] Shaw, 636.
[55] Shaw, 630.
[56] Bailey, 388-389.
[57] Shaw, 634.
[58] Shaw, 632-633.
[59] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 488.
[60] Lee, 14-15.

shift in historiography that did no longer oppose objectivity and subjectivity, I am not looking for objective and truthful representations of these women. Even if they were influenced, these remain their own personal voices on the subject and I am interested in seeing what drove these women to draw particular representations. As with 19th-century slave women narratives, my aim in this particular corpus will be to study the way in which 20th-century former slave women represent their female relatives in slavery such as their mothers, sisters, aunts, fellow slaves, and sometimes themselves.

I have shown that my two corpuses are comparable as they deal with a same theme, that is to say slave women, their representations, and their experiences. However, they were produced in entirely different contexts and circumstances which produced biases inherent in both kinds of sources that I must keep in mind in my analyses and comparisons. Despite these influences and criticism, both sources may be the only surviving narratives that enable us to hear slave women themselves on their experiences,[61] besides police and judicial records. I am now moving to the analysis proper, starting with the representations that were the most common in the 19th-century discourse, those presenting slave women as victims.

[61] Sandeen, 25.

3-Slave Women's Dehumanisation

Most slave narratives related by men reduced enslaved women to sexually exploited and physically abused persons. This is how they were mostly represented in Henry Bibb's and Frederick Douglass's narratives, for instance, and it soon became a stereotype. Even if Frances Foster argues that female slave narrators delt less with this representation, it remains nevertheless ever-present in their narratives due to their condition. I will start with the representation of enslaved women's physical abuse in the 19th-century narratives before moving to their sexual exploitation. Then, after dealing with the various representations of their objectification, I will focus on old slave women's mistreatment specifically in both corpuses.

3-1 Slave Women's Physical Abuse

Mary Prince is so eloquent on physical violence that it is difficult to take only one example among her descriptions: "I was licked and flogged and pinched by her pitiless fingers in the neck and arms."; "To strip me naked—to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin."[1] In this realistic depiction of her whipping, the repetition of the conjunction "and" creates an accumulation effect to insist on the fact that her abuse is relentless and that she is given no respite. She multiplies the descriptions of flogging scenes through a "acharnement narratif" to such a point that they almost become exaggerated. However, this is done on purpose as these representations are in keeping with the archetypal and stereotyped flogging scenes that are recurrent in slave narratives in general. This scene is reminiscent of Patsey's description by Solomon Northup: "She was terribly lacerated,"[2] "the lash was wet with blood."[3] Therefore, it appears that female slave narratives are similar to male slave narratives on this particular point. Hannah Crafts relies on the Gothic genre to reinforce the horror of the description of abused slave women. At the beginning of the narrative, she relates the story of the Linden Tree on her plantation where an old slave woman was gibbeted alive and left there until she died as ordered by her master: "And thus suspended between heaven and earth in a posture the [sic] most unimaginably painful both hung through the long long days and the longer nights. […] Then her rigid features assumed a collapsed and corpse-like hue and appearance, her eyes seemed

[1] Prince, 7.
[2] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave, A True Story of Betrayal, Kidnap and Slavery* (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2013), 158.
[3] Northup, 158.

starting from their sockets, and her protruding tongue refused to articulate a sound."[4] The use of a Gothic rhetoric through the horror imagery helps build this gory and bloody representation of an old slave woman's abuse. Such representations were key to the political purpose of slave narratives that was to raise sympathy in their readership. If women were considered as defenceless creatures in the 19th century, the slave woman was not perceived as feminine, contrary to white women. Thus, the narratives represent them as defenceless, similarly to white women, so as to make their abuse still less acceptable. Indeed, on reading such scenes of women beaten like men, the narrators hoped the readers would be outraged and get involved in the abolitionist movement. More particularly, Hannah Crafts relies on Gothic conventions to create a real Gothic villain, Mr Trappe, of whom slave women are the victims, therefore insisting on their passivity. As Hannah and her mistress are represented as women in distress, one can argue that the author reverses the codes of Gothic fiction by making black women the heroines of her story. By so doing, these women are assimilated to the usual white and pure heroines, reinforcing their womanhood.

The interviews also fuel the image of the slave woman as a passive victim. In Virginia, for instance, Minnie Fulkes relates the story of her mother who "did suffer misert."[5] Indeed, the overseer used to tie her up in the barn with her arms over her head while she stood on a block, then he would remove the block so that she could not touch the floor. He would also beat her naked "til the blood run down her heels."[6] Moreover, many of the formerly enslaved women interviewed refer to the fact that slave women were overworked because they had additional duties to carry out compared to male slaves. In addition to field work, they had to cook, make clothes for the family and they often went to bed long after the men.[7] Hence testimonies about women from their community who had to make clothes at night for their families. To be more specific, Fannie Moore insists on the fact that her mother worked in the field all day and quilted all night. She adds that she does not know how her mother could stand such hard work.[8] Finally, I found a few representations of bondwomen who were murdered by their masters or overseers.

Nonetheless, Adeline Hodges made an important remark to her interviewer in Alabama: "Aunt Adeline said that life was very hard not so much for herself, but she saw how hard the

[4] Crafts, 23.
[5] Minnie Fulkes, interview by Susie Byrd, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XVII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 11.
[6] Fulkes, 11.
[7] Deborah Gray White, 122.
[8] Fannie Moore, interview by Marjorie Jones, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 130.

other slaves worked."[9] This reminds us that, contrary to the 19th-century narrators, the former slave women interviewed did not necessarily experience these abuses themselves, since most of them were too young to suffer such ordeals. Moreover, there are not as many details about the abuses in the interviews as in the 19th-century sources. This may be due to the format of the interviews which was very short compared to the narratives. Furthermore, the topics of the interviews were varied (slave work, culture, superstitions, marriage…), so they could not dwell for a long time on their treatment. Nonetheless, the following testimony evokes another interpretation: "'Did you stay with him [her master] the year after freedom?' 'Ho, he didn't treat my mother right.'"[10] This is all that is said about her mother's treatment. One can wonder what led Mary Scott not to give more details on this. Interestingly enough, her interviewer does not ask for more details either, which is not encouraging. A few hypotheses can be drawn: first, in the racial context of the 1930s, it is possible that Mary was afraid of her interviewer and did not dare to dwell on Whites' mistreatments because of her vulnerability. She did not stand a chance because she was a poor black old female. Furthermore, she may have been living close to her former plantation, and thus she may have remained in contact with the descendants of her former master. If her interviewer was influential in her community, as was often the case, she may have been cautious of what she chose to say. Since former slaveholding families were still influential in their communities, former slave women could have been afraid of reprisals if they talked too much. Finally, it is important to note that her interviewer was a white man while she was a black woman. Hélène Lecaudey suggests that the women spent less time talking about their mistreatment in this configuration than in the presence of a female interviewer and this assumption may be confirmed by Mary Scott's interview. As a consequence, these hypotheses could have created a non-conducive atmosphere for the interview. Lori Lee's argument that "brevity is a strategy of self-protection"[11] can be at work here, meaning that Mary Scott may have cut this topic short to avoid saying too much and jeopardising her life. Similarly, the interviews from Alabama remain vague about the identities of the authors of slave women's mistreatment. Mandy McCullough is unclear about the location of the abuse of a slave woman she heard about: "One woman on a plantation not so far from us, was expectin', an' they tied

[9] Adeline Hodges, interview by Ila B. Prine, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 182.
[10] Mary Scott, interview by Lucile Young and H. Grady Davis, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 86.
[11] Lee, 15.

her up under a hack-a-berry tree, an' whipped her until she died."[12] The pronoun "they" makes us wonder whom she is referring to: the masters or the overseers? In fact, the majority of the Alabama interviews that mention bondwomen's mistreatments accuse the overseers rather than the masters. Therefore, if the 19th-century slave narratives remain clear on the fact that white slaveholders were accountable for slave women's abuses, it is because their purpose was to bring slavery down, but also because they were relatively safe in the North among their abolitionist friends. By contrast, the purpose of the interviews as well as their context of production were different. Indeed, since slavery was over, it was not important to denounce planters anymore. Then, for the reasons I evoked for Mary Scott's silence, holding the overseers (instead of the masters) responsible for mistreatments on the plantations had less consequences. Most of them were considered as "poor white trash" by the former slaves and were not as influent as slaveholders. Thus, these interpretations explain why the representation of slave women's abuse is not as developed in the interviews as in the 19th-century narratives. Nonetheless, the Virginia interviews are an exception: compared to the interviews from the other states of the corpus, it is striking to see how eloquent the former slave women are on their mistreatment. One hypothesis is that it is related to their interviewers' skin colour. Indeed, as most of them were Blacks,[13] it is therefore possible that the interviewees felt more at ease to reveal their abuses to them than to white interviewers. In other words, power dynamics were less at work in same race interviewers and respondents.

3-2 Slave Women's Sexual Exploitation

It seems that the representation of sexual abuse overlapped with slave women's physical abuse: "[…] exposed me to the view of those who attended the vendue. I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words—as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts."[14] This quotation taken from Prince's narrative features a sexual undertone: the words "exposed" and "handled" refer to the fact that slave women's bodies were exposed during slave auctions so that potential buyers could examine their capacity for childbearing. Furthermore, this sexual double-entendre also

[12] Mandy McCullough, interview by Margaret Fowler, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 91.
[13] Lecaudey, 264.
[14] Prince, 4.

endows famous whipping scenes of stripped slave women.[15] Both corpuses make it clear that abuses were gendered as this abuse was specific to slave women. Indeed, as Harriet Jacobs puts it: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own."[16] In Virginia, Fannie Berry also "points to gendered particulars"[17]: "Us Colored women had to go through a plenty, I tell you."[18]

First of all, the place given to the representation of female slaves' sexual abuse varies in the 19th-century narratives. For instance, this representation is completely absent from Elizabeth's and Sojourner Truth's narratives. This may be explained by the fact that both narrators focus mainly on religion, a topic which leaves little room for the representation of molestation. Mary Prince, as I showed, mostly refers to slave women's physical abuse. In Hannah Crafts's narrative, it only occurs at the end: she is forced to be the partner of another slave who attempts to rape her, leading her to run away. However, this representation is salient in Harriet Jacobs's, Ellen Craft's and Louisa Picquet's narratives, although it is interesting to see that they never mention "rape". If Louisa Picquet deals with the sexual abuse she experienced, it is due to the oriented questions of her interviewer who seems strongly interested in her virtue. First, she relates that her master, Mr Cook, attempted several times to draw her into his room. The fact that she mentions her age at that time, 14 years old, suggests that she is conscious of the horror of the situation. He then treats her like a prostitute as he gives her money to coax her to comply with his wishes. Louisa Picquet finds herself repeatedly naked when she is beaten but also during slave auctions. As a matter of fact, she endures the same exposition as Mary Prince when she is put to sale: "They put all the men in one room, and all the women in another; and then whoever want to buy come and examine, and ask you whole lot of questions. They began to take the clothes off of me, and a gentleman said they needn't do that, and told them to take me out."[19] Later, she is blackmailed by her new master to become his concubine. Contrary to Antoinette in Ellen Craft's narrative, it seems that life was more important to her because she surrendered and chose not to kill herself. However, she was unwilling as she says:

> After a while he got so disagreeable that I told him, one day, I wished he would sell me, or 'put me in his pocket'—that's the way we say—because I had no peace at all. I rather

[15] Suzanne Fraysse, « Force de la pudeur, » *Transatlantica* 2 (2012): 3.
[16] Jacobs, 68.
[17] Sandeen, 2.
[18] Fannie Berry, interview by Susie Byrd, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938,* Vol. XVII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 2.
[19] Mattison, 16.

> die than live in that way. Then he got awful mad, and said nothin' but death should separate us; and, if I run off, he'd blow my brains out. Then I thought, if that be the way, all I could do was just to pray for him to die.[20]

It seems that she cannot bear what must be considered as repeated rapes. She also mentions her mother, who had children with Mr Cook, but nothing is said about her consent. We can assume that she was forced. Finally, she moves from her particular experience to talk about other women's sexual abuse and fate in general: "Q.—'Do not the slave women usually have husbands, or those they call their husbands?' A.— 'Yes, sir; some of them do; but some of them do not. They can't have any husbands, because their masters have them all the time.'"[21] As for Harriet Jacobs, she is the victim of Dr Flint's constant harassment although she claims in her narrative that she never yielded. Like Louisa Picquet, her individual story enables her to tackle female slaves' inevitable sexual abuse:

> The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are dear to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is hopeless.[22]

The use of the simple present suggests that she is stating a general truth about female slaves' fate. The idea of a stained virtue is also found in Ellen Craft's narrative. She did not endure such abuses herself, but she mentions the fate of other slave women: "the more pious, beautiful, and virtuous the girls are, the greater the price they bring, and that too for the most infamous purposes."[23] The euphemism "infamous purposes" means that some slave women were bought to be sexual slaves. She means that slave women were capable of being virtuous but they were prevented by Southerners' immoral deeds.

Nevertheless, contrary to the other narratives, the slave man's perspective is included in Ellen Craft's account of sexual abuse (Mattison's voice is discernible in general in Louisa Picquet's narrative, but rather in his questions): "Oh! if there is any one thing under the wide canopy of heaven, horrible enough to stir a man's soul, and to make his very blood boil, it is the thought of his dear wife, his unprotected sister, or his young and virtuous daughters,

[20] Mattison, 19.
[21] Mattison, 21.
[22] Jacobs, 47.
[23] Craft, 16.

struggling to save themselves from falling a prey to such demons!"[24] This quotation may stem from William's voice, positioning slave men as also impacted by slave women's abuse. He brings slave men's feelings to the fore by highlighting their inability protect the women of their families due to the slave institution. Frances Foster sums up this issue as follows: "It does remind us that maltreatment of women is often considered an affront to the men with whom the women are associated."[25] Consequently, this representation of a male slave's perspective is most certainly due to the fact that the narrative was written both by William and Ellen.

To account for the representation of slave women's abuse, it seems that those three narrators' aim was to show to their readers how slavery corrupted slave women who endeavoured to remain pure. They insist on the fact that this abuse is inevitable and slave women's only destiny. Either they surrender or death is their only way out. Through this representation, they also try to counter the Jezebel stereotype. This stereotype comes from white Southerners' fantasised image of the bondwoman: in their narratives, she is described as lascivious, inviting sexual overtures herself, and entirely governed by her libido.[26] It is interesting to understand where this myth comes from, and how it was constructed. For many historians, the living condition of slave women favoured such a stereotype. Owners rarely cared to properly dress their female field workers who wore ragged clothes, were barely dressed with skirts which usually rode up on their knees, and who were often compelled to undress because of the heat.[27] Therefore, their nudity was often associated with promiscuity.[28] Added to bareness, whites' observation of slaves' attitudes towards sex, which were different from whites', made them think that slave women had an easy virtue: many had sex before starting a long-term relationship, in casual relations, since this was not considered as sin as for whites.[29] Thus, white males perceived the female slave as profligate. Finally, since slaveowners expected them to have children, reproduction and fecundity were correlated with sensuality.[30] Just like their bodies, their sexual lives were both exposed and a topic of public discussion.[31] This Jezebel stereotype was constructed in opposition to the pious, chaste, and moral image of white women or, to put it differently, at the antipodes of the Victorian lady.[32] Consequently, although

[24] Craft, 8.
[25] Foster, 67.
[26] Deborah Gray White, 29-30.
[27] Deborah Gray White, 32.
[28] Deborah Gray White, 33.
[29] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 154.
[30] Deborah Gray White, 31.
[31] Deborah Gray White, 31.
[32] Deborah Gray White, 29.

they were women, bondwomen did not enjoy the full status of their gender because of their race: according to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, they could not expect the same protection as that surrounding white women, or earn the same respect, because they were black and therefore generally slaves.[33] No matter how inaccurate it was, the Jezebel myth allowed Southerners to excuse miscegenation and the sexual exploitation of black women.[34] They had nothing in common with the pious white women and thus did not benefit from the sanctification that surrounded their white counterparts. The Jezebel image presented bondwomen as always consenting and even aggressively tempting men, therefore legitimating abuse. For white mistresses, this supposedly aggressive behaviour was handy as it excused the adultery of their husbands. An historian of the Old South, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, best clarified the Southern rationalisation of slave women's exploitation: sexually attractive enslaved women "performed a useful service: their availability made possible sexual license of men without jeopardizing the purity of white women. Prostitutes performed that convenient service in free societies; fallen women, it was thought, kept the rest of the world in good moral order. Slave companions did the same in the Old South."[35] In other words, female slaves were seen as prostitutes performing some sort of moral act that contributed to maintaining Southern society in order. This also enabled them to counter Northern accusations of moral degeneracy as the Civil War was getting closer. When they refused sexual intercourse with white men, the latter took their refusal as being faked because of their conception of the lascivious slave woman.[36] More practically, their sexual exploitation was also legitimated by the fact that the rape of a black woman by a white man was not recognised as a crime by Southern laws.[37] As a consequence, the fantasised image of slave women as Jezebels, born out of a misconception of their slave condition, favoured sexual abuses.

However, Louisa Picquet, Harriet Jacobs and Ellen Craft indicate that slave women do not yield to their masters' wishes willingly and thus are not Jezebels. Throughout the narratives, the issue of slave women's virtue and purity is recurrent, especially in Harriet Jacobs's narrative: "I had resolved that I would be virtuous, though I was a slave."[38] This argument implicitly refers to the Jezebel stereotype that she attempts to debunk like the other slave women

[33] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 194.
[34] Deborah Gray White, 61.
[35] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 97.
[36] Deborah Gray White, 30.
[37] Deborah Gray White, 78.
[38] Jacobs, 51.

narrators, showing that, despite stereotypes, slave women did care for their virtue but that the slave society prevented them from preserving it.[39] The emphasis on slave women's purity also debunks the stereotype of the wild Black and turns it upside-down: they represent the slave woman as human, struggling to preserve her purity against a wild, tyrannical master that is dehumanised in his turn.[40] By so doing, they stress their humanity and make their abuse still less acceptable. Nevertheless, one can argue that Harriet Jacobs took a risk in writing her narrative: contrary to the other narrators of my corpus who insist on slave women's absence of consent and on the fact that they were forced to yield to their masters' wishes, Jacobs dared to show to her readership that she willingly gave herself to another white man. This could have jeopardised the purpose of her narrative that was to highlight the fact that slave women's profligate reputation stemmed from the sexual abuse they endured. Yet, she reminds her reader that, indirectly, it is slavery which prompted her to do that, as she did it only to escape from her master's harassment.

The interviews are rather silent on slave women's sexual abuse. Many 20th-century former slave women seem to be the daughters of their masters, which raises the question of their mothers' consent. However, they do not linger on this important dimension of slave women's experiences. A few testimonies mention bondwomen who suffered from "rapes" or who were kept for base purposes, but such representations are isolated and thus not as salient as in the 19th-century narratives. This difference between the two corpuses can be due to the different purposes of the sources: unlike the 19th-centy narrators, the 20th-century former slave women did no longer need to insist of the South's degeneracy through the representation of slave women's molestation so as to put an end to slavery. This may also be explained by the fact that slave women's sexual abuse was more taboo than their physical abuse on which the interviews are more eloquent. As most of the formerly enslaved women were too young to have experienced sexual mistreatment themselves, it is likely that the older women around them who had suffered from it did not mention it to their children. The following quotation may be in keeping with this analysis: "I asked mother, what she done fer 'en to beat and do her so? She said, nothin' tother than she refused to be wife to dis man."[41] The mother's explanation looks like a justification given to a child. In fact, she may have resorted to a euphemism (slave women could not legally "be wives" to white people) to avoid telling the truth by reticence: in reality, she refused to have sex with the overseer. Therefore, this quotation underlines the fact that slave

[39] Fraysse, 8.
[40] Fraysse, 12.
[41] Fulkes, 11.

women's sexual abuse was not a topic that could be freely and plainly explained to their children.

3-3 Slave Women's Objectification

Female slaves' objectification is represented through their assimilation to property in the sources. In the 19th-century narratives, the narrators represent themselves as objectified through different linguistic devices. Consider the following quotation: "When he told me that I was made for his use."[42] The word "use" objectifies Harriet Jacobs. The passive voice is also recurrent, for example: "At this memorable time, Isabella was struck off, for the sum of one hundred dollars, to one John Nealy, of Ulster County, New York; and she has an impression that in this sale she was connected with a lot of sheep."[43] The use of the passive voice is significant in these narratives as it helps the narrators emphasise their identity as property. Indeed, the fact that the agent is erased ("Isabella was struck off [by]") suggests that the emphasis is put on the result, on the fact that she is sold, rather than on the person who sells her. The image of the reified victim is conveyed by the interviews through kidnapping stories which represent them as trade objects. For instance, Julia Woodberry[44] and Carrie Pollard[45] relate the stories of their mother and aunt who were born free but kidnapped by slave traders. In a similar way, Hannah Crasson refers to her grandmother who was taken from Africa.[46] Many 20th-century former slave women testify that they were given as wedding gifts to their young mistresses. It is visible in Delia Thompson's interview: "She give old mistress a hug and a kiss, and thank her for de present, dat present was me."[47]

Furthermore, both corpuses depict slave women as animals, reinforcing their representation as property and dehumanised women. Carrie Davis, a former enslaved woman from Alabama, told her interviewer: "And if marster wanted to mix his stock of slaves wid a strong stock on 'nother plantation, dey would do de mens an' women jest lak horses."[48] This

[42] Jacobs, 19.
[43] Truth, *The Narrative*, 26.
[44] Julia Woodberry, interview by Annie Ruth Davis, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 229.
[45] Carrie Pollard, interview by Ruby Pickens Tartt, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 318.
[46] Hannah Crasson, interview by T. Pat Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 190.
[47] Delia Thompson, interview by W. W. Dixon, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 161.
[48] Carrie Davis, interview by Preston Klein, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 107.

representation echoes the following quotation from Harriet Jacobs's narrative with the use of the same vocabulary: "Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock."[49] More particularly, the sources present common representations of female slaves as horses: "after I had lived with them for thirteen years, and worked for them like a horse."[50] / "Man come dere to buy my Gran'mudder a'ter Massa Ben Gause die en tell her to open she mouth so he 'xamine her teeth. Say she say, 'I won' do it.' Wanna know effen dey waz sound 'fore he buy her. Dat de way dey do when dey sell hosses."[51] In the 19th-century narratives, slave women are generally compared to cattle so as to denounce their dehumanisation and condition as slaves. They reappropriated terms used by slaveholders and turned those terms against them by raising the reader's sympathy. It appears that this representation persisted until the 1930s. In a 1861 interview taken from John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony,* Lavinia Bell assimilates a slave woman to another kind of animal:

> At another time, she was left for a number of days without any thing to eat or drink. She says she tried to tear her eyes out to eat them, she was so hungry. […] At another time, several of her teeth were knocked out by a hammer, she having bitten off a part of her master's nose, and at another time she was knocked down with a whip, leaving a scar of more than three inches in length on her cheek.[52]

This slave woman is represented as behaving like a wild beast, suggesting the way slavery dehumanised bondwomen. The fact that this example comes from an interview makes this source close to the 20th-century interviews.

These assimilations to animals lead me to the representation of women's productive value. In Sojourner Truth's narrative, this representation is expressed by the voice of her own master who praises and emphasises her productive value:

> He stimulated her ambition by his commendation, by boasting of her to his friends, telling them that 'that wench' (pointing to Isabel) is better to me than a man —for she will do a good family's washing in the night, and be ready in the morning to go into the field, where she will do as much at raking and binding as my best hands.[53]

A similar representation is found in Susan Hamilton's interview: "In de days of slavery woman wus jus' given time 'nough to deliver dere babies. Dey deliver de baby 'bout eight in de mornin'

[49] Jacobs, 45.
[50] Prince, 19-20.
[51] Genia Woodberry, interview by Annie Ruth Davis, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 225.
[52] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 343.
[53] Truth, *The Narrative*, 32-33.

an' twelve had to be back to work."[54] These examples hint at the fact that slave women's productive value overlapped and was intertwined with their reproductive value.

Indeed, if slave women are often associated to cows, it is also related to their reproductive value that is much dwelt upon in both corpuses along with their productive value. Within the image of the reified woman, they are represented as breeding women which is in keeping with their salient representation as mothers to which I will subsequently come back. Even if a slave woman could provide benefits as a worker, her value as a slave depended entirely on her capacity to have children. For slaveowners, slave women were more important in the slave family than male slaves: they perceived the slave family as being primarily composed of a woman and her children because the latter would later be converted into additional labour force on their plantations and therefore in money.[55] This is explained by the fact that the institution of slavery hinged on women's reproductive capacity after Congress outlawed transatlantic slave trade in 1807.[56] Therefore, their sexual lives were mostly manipulated by owners who devised stratagems to create couples and form unions between their slaves.[57] They were threatened by the masters when they refused to cooperate and forced to take another husband as soon as their previous one died or was sold away.[58] The central value of a woman's capacity for childbearing is especially visible through the evidence that barren women were often immediately sold by their owner.[59] On the other hand, women considered as good breeders were preciously kept and often rewarded.[60] Their value increased according to the number of children they had.[61] Even after their childbearing years, they remained important on the plantation for their knowledge in nurturing and taking care of children.[62]

The 19th-century sources depict the commodification of slave women and their bodies: a neighbouring master refused Sojourner Truth's marriage with one of his slaves and he justifies himself saying that he prefers his slave to marry a woman from his own plantation. It implies that he wanted the slave woman's baby to be his property and not that of Sojourner Truth's master, presenting women as breeders. Besides, slave women are objectified in the narrative if we pay attention to the vocabulary used to refer to them: "And it is more than probable, that he

[54] Susan Hamilton, interview by Augustus Ladson, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 236.
[55] Deborah Gray White, 98.
[56] Deborah Gray White, 80.
[57] Deborah Gray White, 98-99.
[58] Deborah Gray White, 101-103.
[59] Deborah Gray White, 101.
[60] Deborah Gray White, 100.
[61] Deborah Gray White, 132.
[62] Deborah Gray White, 132.

was not only allowed but encouraged to take another at each successive sale."[63] ; "In process of time, Isabella found herself the mother of five children, and she rejoiced in being permitted to be the instrument of increasing the property of her oppressors!"[64] The verb "take" and the noun "instrument" clearly objectify bondwomen. This last quote is interesting as Sojourner Truth's joy at giving children to her master indicates that she internalised this breeding role at that time. Slave women's reproductive value is also directly tackled in Harriet Jacobs's narrative through the same imagery of property: "Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock."[65] Finally, I mentioned earlier that Mary Prince's and Louisa Picquet's bodies were exposed during slave auctions so that slaveholders could determine whether they could bring them many children.

This representation is even more recurrent in the interviews. Indeed, many interviewees from North Carolina spend a great deal of time at depicting the importance of slave women's reproductive value. To give but a few examples: "I was worth a heap to Marse George kaze I had so many chillun. De more chillum a slave had de more dey was worth."[66] Just like Sojourner Truth, it seems that Tempie Herdon Durham was proud of this role and internalised it. Annaliza Foster uses her grandmother as an example to show the value of slaves: she was sold on the block four times and was considered valuable because she could have children and work on. It is striking to see that it is all that is said about slave women in her testimony, meaning that this representation was the most important for her. This may be related to the gender of her interviewer who was a woman. Hattie Rogers spends time on this representation as well: "If a woman was a good breeder she brought a good price on the auction block. The slave buyers would come around and jab them in the stomach and look them over and if they thought they would have children fast they brought a good price."[67] If this representation is salient in the North Carolina interviews, it may be because the interviewers there asked a specific question about slave women's role as breeders for slaveholders. To conclude on female slaves' (re)productive value, it is useful to refer to the practice of wet-nursing which coupled both slave women's productive and reproductive value:

[63] Truth, *The Narrative*, 36.
[64] Truth, *The Narrative*, 37.
[65] Jacobs, 45.
[66] Tempie Herdon Durham, interview by Travis Jordan, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 288.
[67] Hattie Rogers, interview by T. Pat Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 229.

> The practice uniquely and literally encompasses the intersection of reproductive exploitation based on the ability to bear children; and the exploitation of women's labour where they provided both their time and their milk supply to those who held them in bondage. It therefore symbolizes the meeting point of enslaved mothers' dual exploitation as labourers and reproducers.[68]

Even once their reproductive value or sexual attraction were no longer at stake, slave women were still depicted as victims of the enslavers' oppression.

3-4 Old Slave Women's Mistreatment

Concerning this first image in relation to bondwomen, it must be noticed that both corpuses chose to represent the abuse of old slave women. In the 19th-century narratives, Mary Prince refers to a little old woman who was almost past work and not fast enough for the overseer. She was beaten and flung into the prickly-pear brushes and died a few days later. Hannah Crafts draws a realistic description of an old slave woman from her plantation who was crucified by her master because she did not want to kill a dog left to her by her daughter. At last, the representation is found in Harriet Jacobs's narrative:

> Slaveholders have a method, peculiar to their institution, of getting rid of old slaves, whose lives have been worn out in their service. I knew an old woman, who for seventy years faithfully served her master. She had become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease. Her owners moved to Alabama, and the old black woman was left to be sold to anybody who would give twenty dollars for her.[69]

It is interesting to note Jacobs's argumentative strategy in this quotation: she starts from a general truth before moving to a particular example to prove her point. Similarly, the 20th-century interviews are not at all silent on this issue. Roberta Manson says that, when her owners learnt that freedom was coming, they treated their slaves worse. The old men and women unable to work were neglected until they died when they were not killed by beating or burning.[70] To interpret this common representation, one can argue that it was used in both sources to debunk the Mammy myth. The Mammy was the complete opposite of Jezebel: she was usually an old house servant seen as a surrogate mother for black and white children that she helped raise.[71] Deborah Gray White argues that she corresponded to the maternal and Victorian ideal of

[68] Emily West and Erin Shearer, "Fertility control, shared nurturing, and dual exploitation: the lives of enslaved mothers in the antebellum United States," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 6 (2018): 1015.
[69] Jacobs, 18.
[70] Roberta Manson, interview by T. Pat Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 102.
[71] Deborah Gray White, 49.

womanhood prevalent in 19th-century America and came from a romantic view of female domestics.[72] White children often addressed her for love and security as she sometimes displayed more care and attention to them than their own parents.[73] She intervened in favour of the children, nursed them from their early age, but was also able to punish them when they misbehaved.[74] Therefore, she had an influence on the child's thoughts, behaviour, and even language,[75] which was somehow problematic in a Southern slaveholding society. In charge of the household, the Mammy benefited from the trust of her masters,[76] and could also exercise authority: when there was a struggle between the mistress and a servant, her intervention could ease tensions.[77] Nevertheless, this representation seems hardly compatible with a slaveholding society which valued blacks as nothing more than cattle. In my sources, old slave women are far from being represented as powerful, respected, and well cared for as they were in white Southerners' accounts. They are rather depicted as abandoned and neglected slaves, in other words, they are rather portrayed as passive victims. If the Mammy stereotype already existed during slavery, it became even more widespread after the end of slavery in former slaveholders' nostalgic reminiscences of slavery. This can explain why old slave women's abuse was still represented in the 20th-century interviews. The former slave women interviewed thus felt the need to debunk it as well. Moreover, a different analysis can be brought forward: given that the former slaves were old at the time of the interviews, it is possible that they unconsciously drew a parallel between old slave women's mistreatment and their difficult current situation. They may have felt socially and economically abandoned by the government and interpreted it as a sort of abuse. Therefore, the fact that they spend time talking about old slave women's abuse seems as if they felt in the same situation as them: neglected by the people who were supposed to take care of them. Overall, the image of the victim is common to both corpuses and thus justifies the comparison. This first image already suggests that the two corpuses will not display completely different images of the slave woman. In fact, the images will be similar and even overlap. Nonetheless, the representations – in other words, the ways in which the narrators convey these particular images – will be different depending on the context of production and on the context in which the narratives were produced. I am now going to turn to the image of

[72] Deborah Gray White, 50, 56.
[73] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 266.
[74] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 266.
[75] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 266.
[76] Deborah Gray White, 47-48.
[77] Fox-Genovese, 164.

motherhood, which is predominant in the sources and functions as a first step towards the development of enslaved women's agency.

4-The Image of Motherhood

The general purpose of slave accounts, putting forward their humanity, stemmed from slaves' reification by slavery. In the case of slave women's narratives, more particularly, the aim was to emphasise their womanhood. This was first achieved through the image of motherhood which balances their reification as breeders by showing that slave women were not limited to their reproductive value as they developed emotional bonds with their children. This chapter enables us to move towards enslaved women's empowerment as Toni Morrison argues that, for slave women, having a child was an act of profound freedom in itself:

> For certain women, to be able to be responsible for their children was the most freedom, the most identity, the most dangerous thing that they could do. And those were slave women whose children they did not own. They could have the child, but it wasn't theirs. It could be sold at any moment, taken away at any age. So to actually have your child, bear it, and be responsible for it, was an act of such revolutionary proportions.[1]

I will show that, although this image is common to the 19th-century narratives and the interviews, the representations will not be necessarily similar. I will first deal with the representation of the emotional bond between slave women and their offspring. The discussion of maternal traumas will then lead me to address the representation of family separations in the corpuses. After focusing on enslaved women's role as nurturers, I will qualify some representations by bringing forward the issue of slave women's inability to protect their children.

4-1 The Emotional Bond Between Slave Women and their Children

Firstly, the 19th-century narratives represent slave women as mothers emotionally attached to their children. For instance, Harriet Jacobs's story focuses on her children for whom she risks her life. She displays her maternal instinct to her feminine readership: "She never made any complaint about her own inconveniences and troubles; but a mother's observing eye easily perceived that she was not happy."[2] She is able to find out how her daughter really feels beneath what she tells her. However, the motherhood image is not limited to herself, as she also represents the maternal figure of her grandmother. A few chapters from Sojourner Truth's narrative focus on her legal struggle to retrieve her son that was taken from her and sold, and

[1] Toni Morrison, "In Depth with Toni Morrison," interview by Susan Swain, *Book TV,* C-SPAN, February 4, 2001.
[2] Jacobs, 148.

she succeeds. She displays her determination: "'I cannot wait; I must have him now, whilst he is to be had.'[…] She assured him, that she had not been seeking money, neither would money satisfy her; it was her son, and her son alone she wanted, and her son she must have."[3] A formerly enslaved woman from North Carolina, Charity Bowery, commented in 1847:

> Sixteen children I've had, first and last; and twelve I've nursed for my mistress. From the time my first baby was born, I always set my heart upon buying freedom for some of my children. I thought it was of more consequence to them than to me; for I was old and used to being a slave. But mistress McKinley wouldn't let me have my children. One after another –one after another– she sold'em away from me. Oh, how many times that woman broke my heart!" Here her voice choked, and the tears began to flow. She wiped them quickly with the corner of her apron, and continued; "I tried every way I could to lay up a copper, to buy my children; but I found it pretty hard; for mistress kept me at work all the time.[4]

Like Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth, she represents herself as a mother who was ready to make sacrifices for the sake of her children. This testimony relies on pathos to demonstrate Charity Bowery's love for her children. Mary Prince and Louisa Picquet rather dwell on their bond with their own mothers: Mary Prince seeks refuge in her mother's house after enduring abuses from her master while Louisa Picquet, after having been legally emancipated, does everything she can to purchase her mother out of bondage.

Contrary to Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth, who highlight their role as mothers, the 20th-century former slave women interviewed represent themselves almost exclusively as little girls protected by their mothers during slavery. This different representation stems from the fact that most of these women, who were children at the time of Emancipation, experienced slavery with their mothers. This may have created a strong bond between them, while they became mothers only after abolition. This emotional bond is particularly emphasised in the interviews from Georgia. For instance, Julia Cole recalls that she wanted to die when her mother passed away and that she jumped in her grave, while Adeline Willis's first memory is her love for her mother: "The first thing I recollect is my love for my Mother - I loved her so and would cry when I couldn't be with her, and as I growed up I kept on loving her jest that a-way even after I married and had children of my own."[5] The former slave women's love for the maternal figures around them is also demonstrated through their admiration for them. It looks as if they were paying tribute to them. Fanny Moore's testimony reveals her admiration for her mother's

[3] Truth, *The Narrative*, 49-50.
[4] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 263.
[5] Adeline Willis, interview by Sadie B. Hornsby, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 162.

resistance from a child's perspective: "Ole granny Moore grab de cowhide and slash mammy cross de back but mammy nebber yell. She jes go back to de fiel a singin'."[6] In South Carolina, Mary Smith gives her interviewer a very descriptive, vivid memory of her grandmother's regal appearance: "Granny lender was good looking. She wore purty beads, earrings and bracelets, and wrapped her head up in a red cloth. Her eyes and teeth flashed and she was always Jolly."[7] As a result, the two corpuses mirror one another as the representations from the interviews work as an inverted reflection of the 19th representations. To put it differently, the 19th-century narrators represent themselves as mothers protecting their children, while the interviewees insist more on their role as little girls protected by their mothers. The representation of mother love is a first step towards the humanisation of slave women.

Nonetheless, we should bear in mind that historiography has long described family bonds as inexistant in the slave community because slavery destroyed the nuclear slave family through repeated sales. Thus, the argument of the existence of emotional bonds between mothers and daughters is quite recent and represents a radical revision of history. There are some testimonies of former slave women interviewed about their role as nurses for children as they were not strong enough to carry out heavy tasks. One can argue that they could have felt some maternal instinct. However, they were too young to be mothers or interested in motherhood and they nursed children who were not their own (either those of their masters or those of slave women working in the fields). Hence the absence of the representation of any motherly instinct felt by them in the interviews.

4-2 Maternal Traumas

The 20th-century former slave women's exclusive representation as daughters attached to their mothers leads this thesis to another representation: these women evoke the traumas they experienced in relation to their mothers. These traumas take several forms depending on the testimonies. What we find most often are accounts of former slave women who witnessed the abuse of their mothers: "She said her master used to tie her mother to a post, strip the clothes from her back, and whip her until the blood came. She said that her mother's clothes would stick to her back after she had been whipped because she 'bleeded' so much. She said that she wanted to cry while her mother was being whipped, but that she was afraid that she would get

[6] Moore, 130.
[7] Mary Smith, interview by Caldwell Sims, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 114.

whipped if she cried."[8] Although it is a 3rd person account made by the interviewer, we can imagine that Victoria Perry's own description was close to the one transcribed as the quote "bleeded" suggests. We can only imagine the shock for a little girl to witness such a scene, a shock that is visible through this highly descriptive depiction. Another example is Katherine Eppes who remembers that her mother nursed white children who used to call her "mammy". The fact that she remembers this and chose to mention it in the interview may suggest that, as a child, she may have felt some pain at sharing her own mother. Since most of the narrators from my first corpus were separated from their mothers at an early age, it appears that they did not witness such traumatic events which explains that I did not find similar accounts. Moreover, depicting themselves as mothers (rather than daughters) improved the latter's image as corresponding to the Victorian ideal. They would win their feminine readership's trust[9] because they showed that they shared roles.[10] "Since women narrators could not show that they had been the 'perfect wives' that the cult of domesticity demanded, they emphasized instead the ways in which their relationships with their families allied them with their white reading audience."[11] Winifred Morgan suggests here that representing themselves as mothers was an alternate strategy to show that they could also correspond to the feminine ideal.

4-3 Family Separations

The emotional bond between the slave mother and her daughter can be found in both corpuses through the narrators' emphasis on the horror of family separations during slave auctions. Given that the slave woman, as we showed, was perceived as nothing more than a breeder by slaveholders, her children became calves and their separation was therefore of no consequence for the owners.[12] In the 19th-century narratives, Elizabeth comments that she thought of suicide after she was separated from her mother. Mary Prince, for her part, insists on her mother's pain when they are separated: "But who cared for that? Did one of the many by-standers, who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones?"[13] These inevitable separations led Ellen Craft and Hannah Crafts to refuse being mothers as long as they were slaves. It shows that they were aware of the

[8] Victoria Perry, interview by F. S. DuPre, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 260.
[9] Aurélia, 8.
[10] Morgan, 76.
[11] Morgan, 90.
[12] Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 7.
[13] Prince, 4.

condition of slave mothers, of the fact that they and their children were not at all protected from auction. The representation of traumatic family separations is a common representation between female slave's and male slave's narratives. For instance, Solomon Northup represents Eliza as a woman whose separation from her children changes her forever. It suggests the importance of her children and her role as a mother in her life. She undergoes a physical transformation from that moment onward. Solomon Northup first noticed her elegance and force: "She stood erect, and in her silks and jewels, presented a picture of graceful strength and elegance."[14] After her separation from her children, he emphasises her old agedness, weakness, and shadow-like appearance: "bowed down, as if bearing the weight of a hundred years."[15] The 20th-century interviews display plenty of testimonies about slave women's separation from their offspring. There are no regional variations on this point, and it is the representation we find most in the image of motherhood. Nonetheless, given the format of the interviews, the pain and suffering of the mothers are less developed than in the 19th-century narratives which are more dramatic in their accounts. These women relate their separation from their mothers during slave auctions but also when they were taken by their mistresses to the Big House. Sarah Debro was taken away from her mother to live with her mistress. After freedom, when her mother wanted to have her back, Sarah resisted and was taken by force.[16] This testimony highlights the consequences of these separations: they disrupt the mother-daughter relationship and bond. This is in keeping with other numerous testimonies of 20th-century former slaves who considered their mistresses as their second mothers. Consequently, such examples support Dominique Aurélia's thesis that the maternal representations were not simplistic and Manichean, pitting the evil white mistress against the good slave mother.[17] In both corpuses, the representation of the separation can be interpreted as a trauma experienced by these women, both as mothers and children.

However, as opposed to the 19th-century narratives, this representation is the most prevalent in the general image of motherhood in the interviews. This can be explained by the fact that the former slave women interviewed recorded memories from their childhood. The selling of mothers away from their children was recurrent in slavery, thus, from children's perspective, the separation from their mothers was even more traumatic for them. Since they were slaves during their childhood, this particular event was the main trauma they could have experienced in slavery, contrary to the 19th-century narrators who remained slaves until their

[14] Northup, 96.
[15] Northup, 96.
[16] Sarah Debro, interview by Travis Jordan, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938,* Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 251-252.
[17] Aurélia, 10.

adulthood and who had thus more memories to record in relation to motherhood. In North Carolina, Josephine Smith testified: "Bout de wust thing dat eber I seed do' a slave 'oman at Louisburg who had been sold off from her three weeks old baby, an' wuz bein' inarched ter New Orleans."[18] The fact that it is the worst thing she remembers in relation to slave women is testimony to how separations were the most traumatic events for these little girls who witnessed and experienced them from a child's perspective. All in all, Suzanne Fraysse argues that "Les récits d'esclaves martèlent alors l'idée selon laquelle les maîtres, par leur commerce, subvertissent l'idée même de la famille, conçue comme microcosme social et comme fondement de la société, qu'ils sont cependant si prompts à revendiquer dans leur défense de l'esclavage."[19] I would also apply her argument to the 20th-century interviews for the representations of family separations are equivalent. More precisely, her argument works with slave women's narratives and formerly enslaved women's interviews through the representation of mother-daughter parting. In other words, this representation enables the female narrators to denounce the destruction of the mother-daughter relationship by slaveholders.

4-4 The Slave Mother's Role as a Nurturer

Despite these recurring separations, it appears that some narrators may have benefited from their mothers' education. In the sources, we find portraits of maternal figures carrying out their duty as moral educators. It is Harriet Jacobs's grandmother who "instill[s]"[20] her moral principles. Sojourner Truth's mother is depicted as her educator and moral guardian, transmitting religious values to her offspring. Subsequently, Sojourner Truth takes up that role with her own children: following what her mother taught her, she forbids her children to steal food for instance. One century later, we find the same reference to this maternal role in the interviews: Lucy McCullough's mother once told her that her skirt was too short and she wove more cloth on it.[21] Sylvia Cannon's mother made her moral education – just like Sojourner Truth's mother – and advised her to always tell the truth.[22] In both corpuses, these testimonies

[18] Josephine Smith, interview by Mary A. Hicks, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 283.
[19] Fraysse, 6.
[20] Jacobs, 27.
[21] Lucy McCullough, interview by Sarah H. Hall, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 69.
[22] Sylvia Cannon, interview by Annie Ruth Davis, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 184.

reveal the slave mother's role as a moral, religious, and sexual educator for their daughters. Even if the context has changed, this role seems to remain intemporal and still as important in the 1930s.

If the image of motherhood is salient in both corpuses, the representations will be different because of the contexts in which they were produced. On the one hand, the representation of motherhood in the 19th-century narratives was used to debunk the stereotype of slave women as neglecting their offspring as expressed in Sojourner Truth's narrative: "She wishes that all who would fain believe that slave parents have not natural affection for their offspring could have listed as she did."[23] To understand this stereotype, it is important to recall the fact that slave women could not give full care to their families due to their role as nurses for their masters' children and their work in the fields.[24] Although they had to find a balance between family and work, the balance was more likely to bend towards their work than towards their family duties. Consequently, these women were held responsible for abandoning their offspring and for their deaths. Furthermore, in the Victorian era, slave women could not be considered as loving mother due to their hyper sexualisation through the Jezebel stereotype. To put it differently, the bondwoman could not be both a mother and sexualised. It is interesting to spot that this opposition did not only stem from Whites' discourses but also from male slaves' narratives. Indeed, in Henry Bibb's narrative, there is a clear shift between Malinda's representation as a mother throughout the narrative and her representation as a sexual object at the end, when Henry Bibb relates the infidelity she commits with her master. "She has ever since been regarded as theoretically and practically dead to me as a wife,"[25] this statement suggesting that her transformation into a sexual being by her owner prevents her from being a mother. It thus seems that the bondwoman could be either a Jezebel or, at the other end of the scale, a Virgin Mary, with no in-between.

For this reason, the 19th-century narrators endeavoured to prove that they could fulfil their role as mothers despite their inevitable sexualisation by the slave institution. This is even truer for Jacobs who gave herself to a white man. About the slave woman, she writes: "She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies."[26] Through the representation of their role as moral educators, these women try to prove that slave women can

[23] Truth, *The Narrative*, 15.
[24] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 179-180.
[25] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (New York: published by the author; 5 spruce street, 1849), 22.
[26] Jacobs, 17-18.

conform to the Victorian norms of femininity which viewed the mother as responsible for the religious and moral education of their children in the domestic sphere. In their descriptions, they represent themselves with these qualities because it was their view of a woman's place and because it was to what a 19th-century woman had to tend at that time. By presenting them as fitting to the Victorian model of maternity, they counter the stereotype of the fallen woman and make their sexual exploitation and abuse unacceptable. This purpose is clear in Sojourner Truth's narrative:

> Of course, it was not in her power to make to herself a home, around whose sacred hearth atone she could collect her family, as they gradually emerged from their prison-house of bondage; a home, where she could cultivate their affection, administer to their wants, and instil into the opening minds of her children those principles of virtue, and that love of purity, truth and benevolence, which must ever form the foundation of a life of usefulness and happiness.[27]

In this quotation, she reveals that she is eager to fulfil the role of the ideal Victorian mother (i.e., gathering her family around her, being a moral guardian and a nurturing mother, both literally and figuratively) but that slavery prevents her from accessing this ideal. However, it seems that Harriet Jacobs was finally able to conform to this role as she writes at the end of her narrative: "The winter passed pleasantly, while I was busy with my needle, and my children with their books."[28] Through this idyllic image of the perfect lady and of domestic happiness, she shows her readership that she can conform to conventions indeed. The representation of motherhood also enabled slave women to assert their womanhood[29] as Sojourner Truth's famous speech in Akron suggests: "And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"[30] This repeated rhetorical question indicates that her role as a mother and the pain she felt because of her separation from her children make her a real woman despite stereotypes that represented slave women as unfeminine. This speech and Sojourner Truth's representation of motherhood may have influenced Harriet Jacobs's narrative since it was published in 1861 and motherhood is paramount in her account.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, the representation of motherhood differs in the interviews because of the different social, cultural, and economic context in which they were

[27] Truth, *The Narrative*, 71-72.
[28] Jacobs, 151.
[29] Xiomara Santamarina, "Black womanhood in North American women's slave narratives," in *The Cambridge Companion to The African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 234.
[30] Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman" (speech, Akron, Ohio, 1851).

produced. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding the importance of mothering for women at that time, the formerly enslaved women did no longer need to conform to the Victorian norms in the 1930s. the American society was much less impregnated with Victorian values and women's role was considered differently due to the impact of first-wave feminism at the end of the 19th century. In the interviews, there are many descriptions of maternal nurturing figures. Addie Vinson's mother is represented as a food provider: "Many's de time I'se seed my Mammy come back from Barber's Crick wid a string of fish draggin' from her shoulders down to de ground."[31] Carrie Williams makes a similar portrait of her mother in her interview: "Der mammies would come in from de field about ten o'clock to nurse 'em and den later in de day, my mammy would feed de youngest on pot-licker and de older ones on greens and pot-licker […]. Mammy saw dat I always got my share."[32] But more than just food and clothes, it seems that these maternal figures transmit their passions and competences to their daughters, reinforcing their bond: Alice Lewis tells her interviewer that she got her taste to sew from her mother,[33] while Lina Anne's mother transmitted her her curing recipes.[34] Finally, it is important to mention that their mothers also provided them with stories from slavery as they were adult figures who, like the narrators from my 19th-century corpus, experienced slavery from childhood to adulthood. Since the former slave women interviewed were too young to have fully experienced slavery, they often make it clear at the beginning of the interviews that what they remember are the stories told to them by their mothers. Thus, in the testimonies, these slave mothers take the role of storytellers, figuratively "feeding" their offspring with their tales.

Such testimonies of nurturing mothers have to do with the specific context in which the interviews were produced, hence the fact that I did not find similar accounts in my 19th-century corpus except in Harriet Jacobs's narrative. Indeed, this representation reveals the nostalgia of these 20th-century formerly enslaved women for the protection they had from their mothers when they were children in slavery. Stephanie Shaw pointed to the gender difference of the economic situation of former male and female slaves in the 1930s: since the women were not able to earn as much money as their male counterparts, they found themselves more dependent on their families and friends in their old age. Nonetheless, the fact that some of them repeat

[31] Addie Vinson, interview by Sadie B. Hornsby, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 102.
[32] Carrie Williams, interview by Mary A. Poole, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), Alabama, 426.
[33] Alice Lewis, interview by Ellen B. Warfield, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. VIII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 46.
[34] Lina Anne, interview by Caldwell Sims, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 249

several times that "All my people are dead, I is de only one left,"[35] suggests their despair and solitude in the context of the Great Depression. Consequently, this positive representation of motherhood expresses a regret for their childhood, when these women were relatively protected and cared for according to their testimonies. Conversely, the 19th-century narrators narrated their stories when they were in a position of economic independence and relatively protected by their abolitionist friends. This analysis thus shows the influence of the economic context in which the interviews were produced on the maternal representations. However, this representation can also be related to the persistence of the stereotype of the unloving slave woman: like the 19th-century narrators, these women try to counter it by insisting on their mothers' protection. It suggests that this stereotype, already salient during slavery, persisted in the 1930s in relation to the black woman.

4-5 The Slave Mother's Inability to Protect her Children

If the motherhood image is common to both corpuses, there are diverging elements in it: while the former slave women interviewed are very positive in their descriptions of their mothers, the antebellum representations are more nuanced. In fact, despite the strong relationship that some slave women display with their mothers, we can identify a more critical, implicit, and less obvious portrait beneath. First, it is interesting to see that, in Mary Prince's narrative, it is her own mother who leads her children to the auction block. In addition to that, she writes: "At length the vendue master, who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle, arrived, and asked my mother which was the eldest. She said nothing, but pointed to me."[36] This scene is symbolically reminiscent of Judas's betrayal of Christ in the Bible. Even if her mother was in an impasse, it is likely that Mary Prince's naïve perspective as a child may have interpreted her mother's action as a betrayal and she chose to represent what she felt by drawing a parallel with this Biblical episode. Slave women's inability to rescue their offspring is also visible in Louisa Picquet's narrative: her mother cannot save her from her master's sexual harassment of which she is also a victim. Paradoxically, it is Louisa who saves her mother from slavery by buying her out of bondage, entailing a reversal of mother/daughter conventional roles. Furthermore, the representation of infanticide in Hannah Crafts's story reinforces this ambivalent representation and can be incongruous, given the strength with which these women

[35] Adeline Crump, interview by T. Pat Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 205.
[36] Prince, 4.

try to assert the slave woman's motherhood. Her friend Lizzie relates the story of a slave woman who was the mistress of her master. When the latter threatened to sell her, she decided to commit an infanticide out of despair:

> At length one of the youngest and most beautiful, with an infant at her breast hastily dried her tears. Her eyes had a wild phrenzied look, and with a motion so sudden that no one could prevent it, she snatched a sharp knife which a servant had carelessly left after cutting butcher's meat, and stabbing the infant threw it with one toss into the arms of its father. Before he had time to recover from his astonishment, she had run the knife into her own body, and fell at his feet bathing them in her blood.[37]

This gory description represents a desperate act, suggesting that it is the only way for bondwomen to rescue their children. Unable to face her incapacity to save her child from separation and slavery, it seems that that woman preferred to kill him, as opposed to the mothers we studied earlier that surrendered and led their children to the auction. It is a way for these women to get back control and to make a choice for their children in a position of choicelessness. This issue is similar to the act of suicide, but I will come back to it later on. Like Sethe in *Beloved*,[38] for them it feels as if they were giving freedom to their children although this choice is questionable. Although Harriet Jacobs does not commit such an act, she acknowledges that, for a time, she considered death for her children: "When I lay down beside my child, I felt how much easier it would be to see her die than to see her master beat her about, as I daily saw him beat other little ones. The spirit of the mothers was so crushed by the lash, that they stood by, without courage to remonstrate."[39] This last sentence clearly reflects the slave mother's helplessness when it comes to rescuing and defending her children. In fact, the positive portraits of motherhood that we studied earlier compensated slave mothers' incapacity to save their children because of slavery.

The goal of this nuanced representation was not to blame the slave mother but, on the contrary, to elicit sympathy in the northern readership by showing them that she could not fulfil her role of protector. The slave institution prevented her from conforming to this archetypal role. The representation of infanticides is even more radical as it emphasises slave mothers' despair whose only recourse to save their children was to kill them. Thus, it was also a way to denounce slavery for the narrators and their abolitionist friends. This nuance is hardly perceptible in the interviews due to the context of production which was different: at that time, slavery had been abolished and thus it was not as necessary as before to denounce it. Moreover,

[37] Crafts, 182-183.
[38] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2004).
[39] Jacobs, 75-76.

since the purpose of the interviews was to preserve slaves' memory and culture, it is possible that the interviewees chose to build a very positive image of the slave mother to preserve her memory, even to rehabilitate her. There are some accounts which counter this positive portrait, but they are in insufficient number to allow any interpretation. However, the fact that the representation of motherhood is not as qualified in the interviews as in the 19th-century narratives gives the impression that the stereotype of the neglecting slave and black mother is replaced by a new one. This may be due to the mode of production: the transcribed interviews are the result of the interviewers' and editors' interpretation of the testimonies they collected. They may have edited these testimonies, put their own voices on those of the former slaves, and thus erased potential nuances. I mentioned that, in slavery, the slave mother was likely to be separated from her offspring, either when she was sold away, or when she had to work all day. In the meantime, she could nevertheless count on her female slave community to support her. In our general progression towards enslaved women's empowerment, the next chapter will focus on female bonding which helped slave women survive and assert themselves as women.

5-The Female Slave Community

The present chapter about the female slave community will start with the representation of substitute mothers. Slave women's cooperation on plantations will then be discussed, leading to the female slave narrators' and interviewees' role as a collective voice for the women of their community. The end of this section will focus on more negative representations of the community, especially on disunions and rivalry between female slaves.

5-1 Substitute Mothers

Some women, often called "Aunt" or "Granny", took up the role of substitute mothers for the slave children whether they were kin or not. When Mary Prince reaches at her new plantation, she is immediately taken care of by a slave girl, Hettie, whom she describes as follows: "I liked to look at her and watch all her doings, for hers was the only friendly face I had as yet seen, and I felt glad that she was there. She gave me my supper of potatoes and milk, and a blanket to sleep upon, which she spread for me in the passage before the door of Mrs. I——'s chamber."[1] Mary Prince feels close to her, although they do not share blood ties. In this representation, Hettie feeds her and therefore acts as a substitute mother for Mary. After the death of Harriet Jacobs's mother, her grandmother becomes like a mother to her: "She promised to be a mother to her grandchildren"[2]; "Ah, yes, that blessed old grandmother, who for seventy-three years had borne the pelting storms of a slave-mother's life."[3] Subsequently, her grandmother takes care of Harriet Jacobs's children when she hides in the attic. In the interviews, there is this same reference to substitute mothers, but this role is almost always undertaken by the former slaves' grandmothers as opposed to Mary Prince's narrative. For instance, Della Briscoe's grandmother "posed as their mother"[4] while her mother worked in the fields. In Alabama, Angie Garrett said that she used to live with her grandmother.[5] However, her testimony also mentioned her mother who lived a few miles away. Thus, we do not know whether she lived with her grandmother because she had been separated from her mother or

[1] Prince, 6.
[2] Jacobs, 13.
[3] Jacobs, 122-123.
[4] Della Briscoe, interview by Adella S. Dixon, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 125.
[5] Angie Garrett, interview by Ruby Pickens Tartt, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 133.

because it was her own choice. This difference between the two corpuses is entailed by the fact that the 20th-century former slave women were children in slavery who needed to be taken care of. Since adult slave women worked all day long, it was the eldest slave women who could no longer do heavy tasks (as well as young slave girls) who looked after the children. By contrast, Mary Prince was older when she met Hettie; she was old enough to work and thus did not need to be taken care of. Therefore, this slave woman is rather associated to metaphorical motherhood. Hettie does not literally take up that role.

5-2 Enslaved Women's Cooperation on Plantation

Beyond this role as substitute mothers, the narratives show that enslaved women could count on one another for support and help. Their close relationship on the plantation helped them survive abuses. Dominique Aurélia addresses this feminine cooperation:

> Ainsi les femmes esclaves ont pu, au sein de ces fonctions séparées, développer une entraide, une solidarité féminines et transmettre un savoir-faire. Dans la plantation, les femmes esclaves évoluent généralement dans un univers féminin dans lequel s'établissent des relations d'interdépendance et de coopération (accouchement, soins etc.) Lorsqu'elles travaillent dans un même espace, les fonctions domestiques (cuisinière, matrone, accoucheuse) se transmettent de mère en fille.[6]

Her argument is corroborated by examples of female bonding in the interviews. Dellie Lewis's grandmother was a midwife who used to give women cloves and whiskey to ease pain.[7] Additionally, Lizzie Baker refers to a woman of colour from her community who stole food for her mother who was a cripple.[8] The 19th-century narratives display a similar representation that is most overpowering in Hannah Crafts's narrative. Indeed, the first part of her story relates her escape with her "mistress" who is, in fact, a slave woman who was raised as a white lady and whose identity is threatened to be revealed by Mr Trappe, the villain of the story. A first demonstration of sorority is the fact that Hannah chose not to betray her secret. Hannah's sympathy and solidarity for her mistress is much dwelt upon:

> I cannot tell why it was that I forgot that moment the disparity in our conditions, and that I approached and spoke to her as though she had been my sister or a very dear friend, but sorrow and affliction and death make us all equal, and I felt it so the more when she

[6] Aurélia, 6.
[7] Dellie Lewis, interview by Mary A. Poole, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938,* Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 256.
[8] Lizzie Baker, interview by T. Pat Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 67.

> sunk down beside me on the floor in her deep distress, clasped me in her arms, and rocking her frame to and fro, entreated me to pity and save her if I could.[9]

In other words, she takes up her role as a supportive friend. While her mistress used to be above Hannah in the social scale, the fact that she knows her secret and real identity makes them equal and this is metaphorically embodied by her mistress's fall on the floor. This erasing of class differences enables them to support one another from then on. Throughout the narrative, Hannah insists on their bond and mutual help as they hide in the woods and endure imprisonment. More specifically, Hannah supports her mistress psychologically as well as physically as she tells her: "Lean on me if you are weary. I am much the stronger."[10] To go further, their affection sometimes falls on the verge of homoeroticism: "The blood gushed afresh, staining my hands and clothes, as I stooped yet lower to embrace her, and kissed her pallid brow, now damp with dews of death. "The Lord bless and sustain you" she articulated whispering with the greatest difficulty. 'Don't speak dearest, it will make you worse.'"[11]

The 19th-century narratives go even further than the interviews as they represent another kind of cooperation between slave women, namely a network of fugitive slave women. In Harriet Jacobs's narrative, Betty, a maid from another plantation, helps her hide in her mistress's house, making sure that the other maids do not discover her. After she escapes, Harriet Jacobs finds shelter at different friends' houses. Moreover, Louisa Picquet adds that she sheltered and helped fugitive slaves, giving the example of Mary White whom she boarded and helped get away to Canada. Thus, it seems that her condition as a legally emancipated slave did not influence her representations as she shows that she fuelled a network of fugitive slave women. By contrast, the two other legally freed slaves from my corpus, Elizabeth and Sojourner Truth, do not mention any help provided to female fugitive slaves. If no such representations of fugitive slave networks can be found in the interviews, it is due to their context of production: once again, the former slave women were too young in slavery to have been able to provide any help to fugitive slave women and none of them were fugitive slaves who could have benefited from help.

The representation of slave women's interdependence in the 19th-century narratives has been analysed by Winifred Morgan:

> Relationships also play a central role in women's novels of the period. According to Beth Maclay Doriani, Jacobs and her contemporary, novelist Harriet Wilson, both

[9] Crafts, 45.
[10] Crafts, 54.
[11] Crafts, 103.

> reshaped the slave narrative as it had been written by men in order to show 'the world of the black woman—as a person inextricably bound up with others yet responsible for her own survival, emotionally, economically, and politically' (emphasis added) (207). While male fugitives stressed their individuality, their ability to stand alone and assume adult male responsibility for themselves, women fugitives generally saw themselves as part of their communities. […] For the most part, Jacobs feels she has no other resource than her relationships with family members and close friends and no other weapon than low cunning. Recognizing the hopelessness of overt opposition, Jacobs's narrative glories in her ability and that of other oppressed slaves to subvert the will of their oppressors.[12]

Although she refers to Harriet Jacobs's narrative in particular, I would argue that her argument also applies to other slave women's narratives, namely Hannah Crafts's and Louisa Picquet's. Since, as we saw in the previous chapter, slavery destroyed family relationships, these women suggest that slave women compensated these losses by forging strong ties with the women of their community. Moreover, at a metafictional level, the process of writing can be perceived as a means to symbolically rebuild the slave family – extended to the female slave community – which was dashed by the slave market.[13] Therefore, this representation is part of the political purpose of the narratives: to denounce the slave institution and counter it. Moreover, they aim at distinguishing their narratives from the usual male slave narratives. While male slaves have, for a long time, dominated the writing of slave narratives, these women aim to build a new kind of slave narratives, more faithful to the slave woman's experience through the representation of strong ties between bondwomen. Indeed, such representations of female solidarity are almost absent from male slave narratives. For instance, I did not find any in Solomon Northup's and Henry Bibb's narratives.

Nevertheless, concerning the representations from the interviews, another interpretation can be drawn because of the different economic and social context in which they were produced. First, the interviews were not slave narratives and the purpose of the representation of solidarity between slave women thus could not be to build a more feminine kind of slave narratives. The interpretation is quite the same as the one I made for the representation of protective mothers. Most of the formerly enslaved women were poor or ill when they gave their interviews: many of them mention the fact that they are alone, that they have lost their husbands while their children either died early or left them to seek jobs in towns. I found some women saying they do not know where their son or daughter were. Thus, the representation of support between the

[12] Morgan, 83-85.
[13] Fraysse, 7.

slave women of their former community is elicited by a nostalgia for a time when they could rely on each other, as opposed to the present context when they had no one to support them.

5-3 Bondwomen's Role as a Collective Voice

More interestingly, it seems that the narrators from the 19th-century corpus and the 20th-century former slave women assume the role of witnesses of the horrors of slavery for their fellow slave women by telling their stories. This representation is not specific to slave women narratives, however, as male narrators assume this role as well. I would argue that, while male slave narrators insist on their role as witnesses for male slaves and the slave community in general, the female narrators rather focus on the slave women of their community. This is another representation of the help and support between slave women. What is common to both corpuses is that the narrators and the informants display their role as witnesses by including stories from other slave women in their accounts. Ellen Craft includes the heart-breaking story of Antoinette, a slave girl who was bought by a man "for his own use"[14], and who chose to kill herself rather than endure repeated rapes. Harriet Jacobs's role as a witness – and even a voyeur – is explicitly demonstrated when she remains in the attic and witnesses incidents no one else was supposed to see: "Another time I saw a woman rush wildly by, pursued by two men. She was a slave, the wet nurse of her mistress's children. For some trifling offence her mistress ordered her to be stripped and whipped. To escape the degradation and the torture, she rushed to the river, jumped in, and ended her wrongs in death."[15] One can argue that she chose to write down what she witnessed as if to rehabilitate that woman, to give her justice, and to preserve her memory so that she may not sink into oblivion. As for the interviews, since most of the former slave women interviewed were young children during slavery, the great majority of their accounts comes from stories told to them by their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other slave women they met. Consequently, the narratives, involving a polyphony of voices, become channels for the stories of other female slaves who did not have the opportunity to raise their voices. The narrators from both corpuses act as repositories for the stories of their female slave community. Writing the stories of these women inscribes them into history and gives them an identity back. Moreover, in the 20th-century interviews especially, some former slave women use their own bodies as direct witnesses of slavery. In so doing, they make their bodies

[14] Craft, 21.
[15] Jacobs, 103.

discursive.[16] Cornelia Andrews exposed her flogged body to her interviewer and narrated her physical abuse while an anonymous woman from Georgia showed her broken leg and related how it was broken. Nonetheless, in exposing their own bodies, these former slave women represent only their personal experience and their own sufferings.

On the contrary, it seems that, in the 19th-century narratives, the narrators are conscious of their role as a collective voice for their fellow slave women and of the fact that they have the duty to speak for them, to stand for them, and to represent them through their narratives. This collective role is paradoxical for autobiographies are supposed to be about one individual. Nevertheless, this idea is in keeping with one of the peculiar purposes of slave autobiographies as stated by Toni Morrison: "Whatever the style and circumstances of these [slave] narratives, they were written to say principally two things. One: 'This is my historical life -my singular, special example that is personal, but that also represents the race."[17] Applied to slave women narratives, it means that they are not just an account of their individual lives as slaves but also a way to represent the experiences of other slave women. To put it differently, the female slave narrators start from "I" as individual subjects witnessing slavery from their own perspective, to then become "eye-witnesses" for slavery in general,[18] and for other female slaves.

This duty is expressed in Mary Prince's narrative: "But the truth ought to be told of it; and what my eyes have seen I think it is my duty to relate; for few people in England know what slavery is. I have been a slave—I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows; and I would have all the good people in England to know it too, that they may break our chains, and set us free."[19] It appears that she is willing to take up her duty to open the eyes of her readers. After relating the beating of an old slave woman, she adds: "In telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves—for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs."[20] It is interesting to pay attention to linguistics: she passes from "I" to "theirs", suggesting that she is conscious of her role as a collective voice and a representative for other slave women. She identifies herself with other slaves. Consequently, the collective overrides the individual. While Mary Prince speaks for slaves in general, Harriet Jacobs dedicates her story to female slaves' experiences in particular, just like Hannah Crafts. She does not include her name in the title of her narrative, unlike Sojourner Truth, Mary Prince,

[16] Lee, 10.
[17] Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 86.
[18] Aje, 10.
[19] Prince, 11.
[20] Prince, 12.

Louisa Picquet, and the Crafts. Furthermore, the use of the indefinite article reveals that her story will be representative of that of slave girls in general. She chose not to put herself forward to highlight the fact that what happened to her is, in fact, what happened to many slave girls. Thus, she steps aside for them, for the collective. This interpretation is in keeping with the content of her narrative: "Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others."[21] According to Lawrence Aje, the use of an indefinite article by slave authors is a means to suggest that he or she "is the representative of the notional class of slaves."[22] Applied to Harriet Jacobs's narrative, it means that she refers to the class of slave women more specifically, suggesting that she is their voice. However, it should be made clear that there is one exception in the 19th-century corpus: Elizabeth does not represent herself as a collective voice for slave women in her narrative. This is related to the fact that she focuses on her religious awakening, recentring her narrative around her subject rather than on her slave and female community. By so doing, these women represent the other slave women of their community according to E. Frances White's definition: "As I have suggested, representation has two meanings: the act of symbolically standing for a group […]. To represent is to symbolically stand for those who have no voice, […]."[23] The narrators thus give a voice to the women of their group, especially to those who did not have a chance to speak out – and they were many – thanks to their testimonies.

Even if the interviews, as it was said, include the voices of other slave women and testimonies of what they saw in relation to them, few are dedicated to slave women's experiences like Harriet Jacobs's narrative for instance. Furthermore, contrary to the 19th-century narratives, I did not find the same consciousness of a certain duty to speak for their community. We can rely on the different contexts of production to account for this difference of representation. On the one hand, the goal of slave narratives was to denounce the horrors of slavery. More precisely, the female slave narratives mainly focused on slave women's experiences. The narrators initiated their narratives and took the role of witnesses willingly, by themselves, with the help of their abolitionist friends. On the other hand, the interviews were not exclusively limited to the account of slave women's experiences and the goal was no longer to denounce slavery but rather to preserve the slave memory and culture in general. Therefore, for the interviewers, the former slaves were indeed supposed to be witnesses of slavery, but not necessarily of the abuses or mistreatments. Rather, they were expected to account for slave life,

[21] Jacobs, 51.
[22] Aje, 3.
[23] E. Frances White, 51.

work, and cultural practices. Moreover, it was the interviewers who approached the former slaves, so the latter did not take the initiative to speak in the first place as opposed to the female slave narrators. Some could have been afraid of reprisals from white people if they showed that they had witnessed too much, thus they did not undertake that role willingly and did not develop their testimonies. In conclusion, the corpuses display two different representations of witnesses due to the different purposes of the sources.

5-4 Slave Women's Disunions and Rivalry

Finally, notwithstanding this image of a united female slave community, there are some accounts of disunions between slave women that must not be overlooked. In the antebellum corpus, Mary Prince is abused because of a quarrel she had with another slave woman while Sojourner Truth recalls the jealousy of other slaves. Additionally, Harriet Jacobs describes Jenny as a greedy "mischievous housemaid."[24] She tried to enter her room while she was concealed in a white lady's house and she almost discovered her when she was hiding in her grandmother's: "She was one of those base characters that would have jumped to betray a suffering fellow being for the sake of thirty pieces of silver."[25] These examples show that the female slave community was not exclusively characterised by a sense of solidarity and community. However, I would argue that such representations are isolated and rare in these narratives since, as I said earlier, slave women's narratives are characterised by the representation of strong relationships between the women of the community. By contrast, the representation of rivalry between slave women is much more salient in the interviews. As a matter of fact, this rivalry was related to class. According to a formerly enslaved woman from Maryland, Caroline Hammond, her mother was a house servant who enjoyed certain privileges that farm slaves did not.[26] Not so far from there, Annie Young Henson argues that she was second nurse for the doctor's family, adding that her position was of better quality than that of the field hands.[27]

One can argue that this particular representation is elicited by the context in which the interviews were produced: by contrast with their current poor financial situation, it seems that

[24] Jacobs, 128.
[25] Jacobs, 129-130.
[26] Caroline Hammond, interview by Rogers, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938,* Vol. VIII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 19.
[27] Annie Young Henson, interview by Rogers, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. VIII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 26.

the respondents needed to brag about a more glorious, flattering past to enhance their status. By insisting on their former house servant position or origin, they aimed to show that they used to occupy a good social position in the slave society whereas, in the 1930s, they were situated at the lowest social scale since they were black, female, and poor. For the 19th-century narrators who worked in the fields and did hard work, namely Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs, this position was not something to be ashamed of at that time since it enabled them to insist on their mistreatment, therefore matching their political agenda. Ellen Thomas's testimony enables me to bring another analysis for this representation: "Judge Kimball Insisted that the house servants use good English, she said. Thus brought up as a child among the Kimball children, and because of her duties as a house servants, she mingled little with the field hands and acquired none of their dialect."[28] Considering this account, it appears that house servants were more educated than field hands, due to their close contact with their masters. By contrast, field hands did not see their masters often as they worked all day in the fields, their cabins were at some distance from the big house, and they did not benefit from any education. Thus, some 20th-century former slave women may emphasise this house servant representation to break away from the stereotype of the average uneducated black slave so that they appear in a good light in their testimonies. Yet, another interpretation would be that this rivalry may have also been emphasised by the interviewers and editors rather than by the interviewees themselves. Indeed, in many testimonies we find interviewers' own comments on the former slaves' class:

> Among the few ex-slaves still living, irrespective of their age at the close of the War Between the States, the line is still very closely drawn between house servants and their children, and the field hands. Old white-haired Abbey Mishow has "misplaced de paper" telling her age but though she claims to have been very small when the war broke out she still maintains the dignity of a descendant of a house servant, nor will she permit her listeners to forget this fact for an instant.[29]

In this third person account, it is difficult to differentiate between what Abbey Mishow actually said and what her interviewer chose to add and emphasise. It is possible that the interviewer imprinted her own prejudices on Abbey Mishow's voice.

Interestingly enough, this class issue already existed in the 19th century as it is represented in Hannah Crafts's narrative. Hannah had always been a house servant but, after a quarrel with her new mistress's favourite maid, she was sent to work in the fields and to live in

[28] Ellen Thomas, interview by Mary A. Poole, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 377.
[29] Abbey Mishow, interview by Jessie A. Butler, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 197.

the slave cabins with the other field hands. The following passage pointedly addresses the class difference between her and her new female companions:

> It was reeking with filth and impurity of every kind, and already occupied by near a dozen women and children, who were sitting on the ground, or coiled on piles of rags and straw in the corner. They regarded me curiously as I entered, grinned with malicious satisfaction that I had been brought down to their level, and made some remarks at my expense; while the children kicked, and yelled, and clawed each other, scratching each other's faces, and pulling each other's hair I stumbled to a bench I supposed designed for a seat, when one of the woman [sic] arose, seized me by the hair, and without ceremony dragged me to the ground, gave me a furious kick and made use of highly improper and indecent language.[30]

Underlying this description, Hannah's judgment is clearly distinguishable. These women and their children are described as having a wild behaviour, as if they were a herd of beasts living on top of one another. Some of them rejoice at Hannah's change of class. The difference of language, too, is noticed by Hannah: "improper and indecent language". This change of class is in fact associated to a descent to hell: "impurity', "malicious", "brought down to their level", "dragged me to the ground." Consequently, despite Hannah Crafts's representation of female slave solidarity throughout her narrative, she stereotypes female field hands, suggesting that slave women's narratives sometimes reinforced existing stereotypes instead of debunking them. The previous representations suggested that, despite slave women's reification by the slave society, they displayed first signs of agency thanks to their role as mothers as well as their role within the female slave community. This leads me to tackle the representation of enslaved women's empowerment in the two corpuses.

[30] Crafts, 215.

6-Slave Women's Empowerment and Agency

In male slave narratives, the slave woman is primarily depicted as an anonymous victim, subjected to her master's depravation, and she is shown as still more dehumanised than her male counterpart.[1] Women narrators, by contrast, present more complex portraits of themselves: instead of emphasising their sufferings and burdens, they dwell on how they coped and proved resilient to them.[2] Dominique Aurélia adds:

> Parce que les femmes sont au centre du récit, l'image que nous proposent ces narratrices est plus complexe. Ces auteures développent ainsi des portraits plus élaborés des personnages féminins et s'attachent davantage à l'esprit de résistance qu'au corps victimisé : quand elles décrivent leurs expériences malheureuses c'est pour en puiser force et ténacité.[3]

Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that the study of slave women's agency is quite recent and revisionist in historiography. Indeed, their victimisation and reification have been overly written about by scholars until the 1970s. Slave women were mostly approached through this representation, since it was salient in male slaves' narratives which had been more studied by historians. The interest shifted in the 1970s and 1980s, when the latter turned to other kinds of sources to study slavery, especially sources produced by slave women themselves. Thus appeared the notion of a new agency of the people who were the victims of the dominant group. It should be reminded that slave women were considered as doubly victim: on the one hand, they were subjected to white slaveholders' exploitation, and, on the other hand, they were also discredited by male slave narrators who mainly relate male stories. These "small pieces of freedom"[4] that female slaves could take out of slavery are compared to Harriet Jacobs's confinement in her attic by Loucynda Sandeen: "Jacobs and her family quite literally created a space where there was no space, which is a parallel to the way that she created a method of control over her intimate self, where she had not been given any control."[5] Just like Harriet Jacobs, slave women were paradoxically able to get some control over their lives in a society in which their bodies did not belong to them and were exploited. I will start this chapter by referring to slave women's open resistance to their exploitation, as well as their physical

[1] Aurélia, 6.
[2] Foster, 67.
[3] Aurélia, 9-10.
[4] Sandeen, 70.
[5] Sandeen, 71.

strength. However, I will show that such representations jeopardised their femininity. I will then turn to more implicit forms of resistance before I mention representations of empowerment specific to each corpus. Finally, I will go further in time by addressing slave women's representations after the obtention of their freedom.

6-1 Physical and Open Resistance

First, it seems that slave women did not always surrender to their fate. In both corpuses, there are testimonies of slave women who displayed their strength by fighting back. This open resistance to abuses was both physical and verbal. Harriet Jacobs, Ellen Craft, Hannah Crafts, and Mary Prince are enslaved women who resist by escaping from their masters. Except for Ellen Crafts, they assert their refusal to be treated as sexual objects, reinforcing their humanity.[6] Harriet Jacobs's will to resist is expressed by the imagery of war throughout her narrative: "The war of my life had begun; and though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered."[7] She thus poses as a soldier fighting a war against Dr Flint whom she verbally resists: "Sometimes I so openly expressed my contempt for him that he would become violently enraged, and I wondered why he did not strike me."[8] Moreover, she manages to thwart his schemes: when it comes to Flint's knowledge that she can read, he gives her obscene letters that she feign to be unable to read. Finally, her ultimate form of resistance is her escape to the North. Revenge stories against masters are also recurrent in the 19th-century narratives:

> The mistress died before the old woman, and, when dying, entreated her husband not to permit any one of her slaves to look on her after death. A slave who had nursed her children, and had still a child in her care, watched her chance, and stole with it in her arms to the room where lay her dead mistress. She gazed a while on her, then raised her hand and dealt two blows on her face, saying, as she did so, "The devil is got you now!"[9]

It appears that some dared to wreak their revenge on their masters when the latter were still alive. Although Sojourner Truth was legally emancipated, she includes a still more violent depiction of a slave woman's revenge in her account:

> She was very strong, and was therefore selected to support her master, as he sat up in bed, by putting her arms around, while she stood behind him. […] It was then that she did her best to wreak her vengeance on him. She would clutch his feeble frame in her iron grasp, as in a vice; and, when her mistress did not see, would give him a squeeze,

[6] Fraysse, 5.
[7] Jacobs, 20.
[8] Jacobs, 30.
[9] Jacobs, 44.

> a shake, and lifting him up, set him down again, as hard as possible. If his breathing betrayed too tight a grasp, and her mistress said, "Be careful, don't hurt him, Soan!" her ever-ready answer was, "Oh no, Missus, no," in her most pleasant tone—and then, as soon as Missus's eyes and ears were engaged away, another grasp—another shake—another bounce.[10]

It is interesting to note the reversal of power in this description: Soan is described as having an unusual strength, which positions her as active, and she seems even to enjoy the moment, while it is her master who takes the role of the passive victim. Such violent stories of retribution are not at all absent from the interviews:

> I will tell you dough 'bout a mean man who whupped a cullid woman near 'bout to death. She got so mad at him dat she tuk his baby chile whut was playin' roun de yard and grab him up an' th'owed it in a pot of lye dat she was usin' to wash wid. His wife come a-hollin' an' run her arms down im de boilin' lye to git de chile out, an' she near 'bout burnt her arms off, but it didn't do no good 'caze when she jerked de chile out he was daid.[11]

In Georgia, an anonymous woman told her interviewer how she fought back after being beaten by the jailkeeper's daughter: "Whenever they sent you to the courthouse to be whipped the jail keeper's daughter give you a kick after they put you in the stocks. She kicked me once and when they took me out I sho did beat her. I scratched her everwhere I could and I knowed they would beat me again, but I didn't care so long as I had fixed her."[12] Furthermore, Fannie Berry said that she scratched the faces of the men who attempted to rape her.[13] Consequently, the interviews display similar portraits of slave women who physically resisted and fought back, in contrast with the image of the passive victim. These two last examples show that, although most of the respondents were children in slavery, there were exceptions who were old enough to experience resistance themselves. Having said that, their stories are mainly about women from their community (rather than themselves) who ran away from their plantations. In Jessie Sparrow's interview, I found an interesting example of a different form of escape experienced by a slave woman:

> My mammy been de house girl in my white folks house. She marry when she ain' but 13 year old. Bat wha' she tell me. She say she marry to ge' outer de big house. Dat how come she to marry so soon. Say de white folks take she way from she mammy when she

[10] Truth, *The Narrative*, 83-84.
[11] Amy Chapman, interview by Ruby P. Tartt, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 60.
[12] Compilation Richmond County Ex-Slaves Interviews, interviews by Louise Oliphant, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 298.
[13] Berry, 2.

> won' but uh little small girl em make she sleep right dere on uh pallet in de Missus room aw de time 'fore she marry. Coase a'ter she marry, she been de house girl right on but she never stay in de Missus house when night come.[14]

While the usual runaway stories depict slave women who escaped to the North, this account features the case of a house servant who figuratively escaped from the Big House thanks to her union with another slave, implying that her metaphoric flight was due to a lack of intimacy as well as privacy.

6-2 Enslaved Women's Strength at Work

Furthermore, slave women's striking physical strength is not only displayed when they resist but also when they work. Mary Prince does not explicitly acknowledge her strength, but the description of her occupations on plantation suggests that she must have been tough to carry out all these duties and to maintain such a rhythm:

> My work was planting and hoeing sweet-potatoes, Indian corn, plantains, bananas, cabbages, pumpkins, onions, &c. I did all the household work, and attended upon a horse and cow besides, —going also upon all errands. I had to curry the horse—to clean and feed him—and sometimes to ride him a little. I had more than enough to do—but still it was not so very bad as Turk's Island.[15]

In Sojourner Truth's narrative, her strength is praised by the lips of her own master "Her master insisted that she could do as much work as half a dozen common people, and do it well, too;"[16] while Mary Raines acknowledges her own vigour: "I was a strong gal, went to de field when I's twelve years old, hoe my acre of cotton, 'long wid de grown ones, and pick my 150 pounds of cotton. As I wasn't scared of de cows, they set me to milkin' and churnin'."[17]

This strength was, however, ambivalent and not necessarily positive as it implied that these women were overworked. Thus, this seemingly positive and strong representation is tied to their victimisation. The frontier is blurred between power and powerlessness. Moreover, in both corpuses, their physical strength is associated to a certain unfemininity. As a matter of fact, Sojourner Truth's master compares her to a man, saying that "that wench (pointing to Isabel) is better to me than a man —for she will do a good family's washing in the night, and be ready in

[14] Jessie Sparrow, interview by Annie Ruth Davis, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 126.
[15] Prince, 13.
[16] Truth, *The Narrative*, 31.
[17] Mary Raines, interview by W. W. Dixon, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 2.

the morning to go into the field, where she will do as much at raking and binding as my best hands."[18] Similarly, one century later, Susan Matthews says that her mother "done the cooking and the washing fer the family and she could work in the fields jes lak a man. She could pick her three hundred pounds of cotton or pull as much fodder as any man."[19]

6-3 Jeopardising Slave Women's Femininity

Both testimonies indicate that, if the representation of slave women's vigour (either at work or in resistance) and violence may appear positive at first sight, suggesting that they could acquire some power, at the same time, it jeopardised their womanhood as it made them appear unfeminine. Xiomara Santamarina addresses this issue: "Furthermore, while resisting women may appear heroic to modern readers historically and rhetorically, a woman who resisted, verbally or physically, could also potentially compromise her womanhood and jeopardize her readers' sympathy."[20] To put it differently, such representations jeopardised their womanhood and the reader's support in an era which valued women's silence and submission. These women could scare their Northern readership and this reinforced slave women's stereotype as unfeminine. Ellen Craft's gender and social transformation was still more dangerous as she became socially above her husband thanks to her disguise as a white slaveholder. This was at odds with the gender conventions of the 19th century which represented women as submitted to their husbands. They thus turned gender conventions upside-down. However, they try to solve this contradiction by suggesting that it was just a play and a role. Indeed, throughout the narration of their travel to the North, Ellen is represented as strong, self-composed, and firm, while she is referred to as "he" and "my master" by William. Even so, one can argue that there is a shift in the representation once they succeed in their escape: William reverts to "my wife" and she is represented as weeping like a child, bursting into tears. "She was in reality so weak and faint that she could scarcely stand alone,"[21] this quotation suggesting that she abandons her male disguise and goes back into her feminine role, conforming to the expected female qualities of the era. Moreover, "in reality" highlights the gap between her former deceptive appearance and her real identity as a woman.

[18] Truth, *The Narrative*, 31-33.
[19] Susan Matthews, interview by Ruth H. Sanford, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 116.
[20] Santamarina, 237.
[21] Craft, 79.

Therefore, how can we account for such controversial representations of slave women's resistance and strength? As the 19th-century narrators were the protagonists of their stories, they were expected to display heroic qualities just like the narrators of male slave narratives. The female narrators aimed to prove that they were not solely victims and that they could fight back, which was part of the political purpose of their narratives. It is important to note that they always remind the reader that it is slavery who led them to act in such a way: for instance, Mary Prince says "I told him where I had been, and that I should never have gone away had I not been driven out by my owners."[22] In other words, she implies that it is her owners' behaviour that drove her to escape, she did not do it by herself. Therefore, enslaved women's violent and resistant behaviour is always justified by slavery, a justification that was imperative if they hoped to be integrated in the free society and to win their readers' sympathy. The representation of slave women's open resistance was less problematic in the 20th century since the American society was less impregnated with Victorian feminine values. After first-wave feminism and the development of feminist movements, such behaviours became more valued and praised. Moreover, the 20th-century respondents who mention the resistance of the women of their family display, in fact, their admiration for them. Nonetheless, some former slave women's emphasis on the fact that bondwomen worked "just like men" implies that it was still something odd in the 20th century as gender divisions were still prominent at work.

One can argue that the purpose of Ellen's passing as a man was paradoxically to assert her womanhood. Indeed, in order to debunk the stereotype of slave women as unfeminine and to reinforce their humanity, the slave narrators endeavoured to assert their femininity within their narratives. This stereotype is echoed in Hannah Crafts's narrative. Her friend Lizzie relates the story of a mistress who discovered her husband's favourites. However, she did not realise that they were slaves at first: "The page appeared. 'Go, and request those ladies in the arbor to come to me.' 'Ladies' echoed the page with a broad grin 'why they're slaves.'"[23] This dialogue evokes "the ideological contradiction between 'black' and 'female.'"[24] Since "black" meant "slave" in the first place, it seems that "slave" and "woman" were perceived as opposed concepts. Thus, the page's quotation implies that a slave woman was primarily perceived as a slave and her femininity, which is part of the definition of a "lady", was laid aside. The origin of this stereotype has been often debated. On the one hand, it may stem from the non-division of labour according to gender on the plantation. While the 19th-century society was divided

[22] Prince, 20.
[23] Crafts, 179.
[24] E. Frances White, 56.

between the public sphere, that of men, and the private sphere in which women were confined, this division did not exist between slaves. By giving slave women the same tasks as male slaves, slave owners violated gender norms.[25] Their race devalued their identity as women, or, in other words, race prevailed over gender and slaves were not distinguished by their sex.[26] It is as if they were not even represented as women since they were assigned tasks that were considered as unfit for women according to the gender conventions of that time. However, E. Frances White countered this argument by drawing attention to the fact that, at the same time, a gender division of labour did exist. For instance, few women could be skilled assistants as they could not provide regular work because of childbearing and mothering.[27] Larger plantations, especially, could afford to organise their slaves by gender because they had more field hands.[28] Domestic chores were mostly performed by slave women, often in female gangs. Another reason for slave women's stereotype as unfeminine may come from their dehumanisation: since they were dehumanised by the slave institution which emphasised their productive and reproductive value, they could not have a female identity. Thus, as slaves, they did not benefit from the advantages and the protection that other women enjoyed as Truth denounced it in her famous speech: "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?"[29] Going back to Ellen Craft's passing, if it jeopardized her womanhood, in reality she chose it to reinforce her womanhood in a society which denied it to her: "She saw that the laws under which we lived did not recognize her to be a woman, but a mere chattel, to be bought and sold, or otherwise dealt with as her owner might see fit."[30] Xiomara Santamarina discusses this ambivalent means of asserting womanhood: "If slavery prevents her from realizing her womanhood, then by literally enacting this de-gendering she can emerge on the other side as a proper woman."[31] According to her, passing as a man enables Ellen Craft to escape from a society that denied her womanhood to become a proper woman in the North. To go further, this also applies to Hannah Crafts who chooses to disguise as a man to escape as well. It seems that she achieves her purpose as she describes her life as a free married woman after she succeeded, thus conforming to the

[25] Fox-Genovese, 193.
[26] Jacqueline Jones, ""My Mother Was Much of a Woman": Black Women, Work, and the Family under Slavery," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 249.
[27] Jones, 242-243.
[28] Fox-Genovese, 175.
[29] Truth, "Ain't I a Woman."
[30] Craft, 30.
[31] Santamarina, 239.

19th-century conventions of femininity. However, I did not find such account of gender subversion in the interviews given that none of the interviewees were fugitive slaves. The 19th-century narrators, and in particular Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth, also attempt to assert their womanhood and to conform to the feminine ideology by representing themselves as mothers as I said earlier. Nonetheless, in doing so, these women accept and internalise this gender-differentiated system without questioning it, as Suzanne Fraysse argues: "Mais surtout, l'adhésion aux valeurs culturelles du lectorat abolitionniste se fait dans ses récits au prix de l'acceptation de tout un système de différences (Noirs-Blancs, femmes-hommes, animal-humain) dont les esclaves sont les premières victimes et qu'ils ne parviennent jamais véritablement à remettre en question."[32]

6-4 Slave Women's Implicit Resistance and Empowerment

Now that I have tackled the representation of slave women's open resistance to abuses and stereotypes, I will turn to more implicit forms of empowerment. Indeed, while this was more prevalent in male slaves' accounts, most slave women were not able to physically resist their condition by fighting back or escaping. Consequently, the sources represent female slaves who turned to other, less obvious forms of resistance which were not less significant. First, even though slaves were not allowed to read and write as it is repeatedly expressed in the interviews ("You better not let 'em kotch you wid a book"[33]), it appears that slave women resisted and attempted to acquire some control through knowledge. Harriet Jacobs, for instance, is caught teaching herself to read and write. Paradoxically, this knowledge turns against her since Flint takes the opportunity to writes her obscene messages. From the beginning of her narrative, Hannah Crafts displays her strong desire and determination to learn: "I had from the first an instinctive desire for knowledge and the means of mental improvement. Though neglected and a slave, I felt the immortal longings in me. In the absence of books and teachers and schools I determined to learn if not in a regular, approved, and scientific way."[34] In the next century, Alice Green remembers that her mother always kept a book hidden in her bosom. Then, when white children came home from school, she asked them a lot of questions and they taught her how to read and write.[35] Chaney Hews's mother was less fortunate as she was whipped because

[32] Fraysse, 12.
[33] Carrie Davis, 112.
[34] Crafts, 6.
[35] Alice Green, interview by Corry Fowler, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 33-34.

her masters discovered that she was trying to learn.[36] It thus seems that some women endeavoured to acquire knowledge sometimes at the risk of their lives. Therefore, in both corpuses, these women display a thirst for knowledge, suggesting that they understood it as key to their empowerment. "In contrast with Douglass, Jacobs does not find language much of a weapon. Although literate, Jacobs makes only limited use of reading and writing to distract her enemy, Dr. Flint."[37] While this may be true for Harriet Jacobs's narrative, I would disagree with this argument because these women's determination to learn, highlighted by the examples, suggests that they were conscious that knowledge was power. Additionally, Sojourner Truth and Hannah Crafts transform their invisibility – both as slaves and women – into power by including in their narratives private conversations they witnessed. These private exchanges are made public: for instance, Hannah discloses Mr Trappe's villainy by transcribing the conversation she overheard between him and her mistress. Nonetheless, this argument is true only provided that these dialogues are accurate. In fact, it is important to bear in mind that dialogues in slave narratives may have been fictionalised to match the authors' political agenda, all the more so in Hannah Crafts's narrative since it is an acknowledged fiction compared to the other sources.

In the interviews, more specifically, slave women's empowerment is reflected by their competences: Annie Young Henson was a nurse for the doctor's family[38] while Isabella Dorroh comments that she used to be well-known among the best white families as a cook.[39] In other words, her competence elevated her socially. These skills enabled enslaved females to acquire some economic power. In South Carolina, Rebecca Jane Grant recalls that her mother was

> an unusually good washer and ironer. De white folks had been sayin', 'Wonder who it is that's makin' de clothes look so good.' Well, bout dis time, dey found out; and dey would come bringin' her plenty of washin' to do. And when dey would come dey would bring her a pan full of food for us Chilians. Soon de other white folks from round about heard of her and she was getting' all de washin' she needed. She would wash for de Missus durin' de day, and for de other folks at night. And dey all was good to her.[40]

[36] Chaney Hews, interview by T. Patt Matthews, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 407.
[37] Morgan, 85.
[38] Henson, 26.
[39] Isabella Dorroh, interview by G. L. Summer, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. VIII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 328.
[40] Rebecca Jane Grant, interview by Phoebe Faucette, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 181.

Even if nothing is said about a potential wage, she could have received some money for her work, just like Easter Huff's mother who earned her own money by knitting socks and patching clothes at night.[41] This economic emancipation and empowerment is also at work in Mary Prince's narrative as she washed and sold coffee, so as to earn money and purchase her freedom. At the same time, Betsey Madison, a formerly enslaved woman interviewed in 1827, was able to acquire a little cash to buy herself free as well: "At the end of two years this master also died, and when his slaves were about to be sold, Betsey succeeded with some difficulty in hiring her time, and in little more than a year, by washing and other labour, she acquired sufficient property to purchase her freedom, for which she paid 250 dollars."[42] Earning money was a way for these women to gain a form of control on their own bodies. As we can see, this representation of slave women's economic empowerment is more present in the interviews than in the 19th-century narratives. This can be explained by the fact that former slaves' memories were shaped by the present. It seems that they mentioned this power more than the other sources because it was more common for women to work in the 20th century than in the 19th century. First-wave feminism redefined women's place within society and normalised slightly more women's involvement in the economy of their homes as well as their economic independence. Since the slave women from the first corpus were trying to conform to feminine gender roles, it would have been odd for them to show that they could be economically independent in a society which valued women's submission and dependence. Mary Prince is an exception.

After this economic power, bondwomen are depicted as being able to acquire some social power thanks to their physical attractivity. This form of empowerment already existed in male slaves' narratives. In his narrative, Solomon Northup indicates that slave women could get some power out of their condition, relying on the example of Maria, a good-looking slave who wishes to be purchased by a wealthy master, so as to offer herself to him in the hope of living a comfortable life. She is among the category of slaves who wanted to willingly bargain their bodies in exchange for something. She seems to have power and control over her body then, she is conscious of the economic and social power her body can give her, so she wants to trade it. Similarly, in the 20th-century corpus, Elizabeth Sparks's master had a favourite slave girl named Betty Lilly that Elizabeth always saw wearing good clothes and having privileges.[43] In another interview, Hattie Rogers says that her master bought a woman who had two little

[41] Easter Huff, interview by Sadie B. Hornsby, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 246.
[42] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 186-187.
[43] Elizabeth Sparks, interview by Claude Anderson, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. VII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 54.

girls and took one of them, Lucy, for a house girl and had children with her. When he died, he left all his property to her. "All the missus I ever had was a slave, and she was this same Lucy."[44] As a consequence, these are non-nuanced representations of these women's social uplift. Having said that, today we have some hindsight enabling us to spot some ambiguity in these accounts – as opposed to the one about Maria – because we do not know for sure whether they willingly became their masters' mistresses or not. Since the interviews do not give access to the thoughts of the women mentioned, it is also possible that their masters abused them to pressure them to consent to their wishes. No details are given because the interviewees witnessed these situations from the outside. They represent ambiguous examples which show that, again, the frontier between slave women's power and powerlessness was blurred. In the 19th-century female slave narratives, there are slave women who also have sexual relationships with their masters that could lead to a social uplift. As we saw earlier, Louisa Picquet becomes the concubine of her master. Moreover, it seems that Harriet Jacobs is not completely defenceless in front of her master's desires as she deliberately gives herself to another white man in exchange for protection against her master. She has some control over her own situation.[45] She thus becomes the mistress of a wealthy white man although he is not her master. One last example is Hannah Crafts who writes the story of a group of kept slave women who were the favourites of their master. Nevertheless, these antebellum representations are more nuanced than in the interviews, for these slave women do not enjoy the advantages that should come with that position and that Maria hopes for: Louisa Picquet loathes Williams and does not refer to any advantage brought by her position; Harriet Jacobs's "lover" does not protect her and their children from their tyrannical master, neither are the children of the women from Hannah Crafts's story protected from being sold. Therefore, the idea of slave women's social power acquired thanks to their bodies is ambivalent, as it is hard to differentiate between abuse and consent. Furthermore, the 19th-century female narrators remind their readers that being the mistress of a powerful slaveholder does not necessarily bring opportunities. The interviewees were not able to bring forth such a nuance since they were children who did not experience this position themselves contrary to the 19th-century narrators. They could not have any insight into the true feelings of slave women that underwent this position. Finally, we must bear in mind that this so-called empowerment is controversial as it contributes to reinforcing the stereotype of female slave's excessive sexuality.[46]

[44] Rogers, 230.
[45] Foster, 68.
[46] Aslakson, 726.

6-5 The Different Forms of Slave Women's Agency

Now that I have discussed representations of slave women's empowerment common to the two corpuses, I will turn to different representations specific to each corpus. The 19th-century narratives represent slave women's empowerment in a particular way. If Harriet Jacobs's choice of her sexual partner seems as if she recaptured a form of control over her body, this power is ambivalent for she made this choice in a position of choicelessness. Indeed, she clearly states that she made this choice because she did not want to surrender to her master's sexual harassment. She would not have done it otherwise. Consequently, this is a form of empowerment that remains controversial. Louisa Picquet was also able to make a choice in a position of choicelessness: Mr Cook, her master, asks her several times to come to his room at night. Here is Louisa's thinking: "Then I came to conclusion he could not do anything but whip me-he could not kill me for it; an' I made up my mind to take the whippin'. So I didn't go that night."[47] Even though this is a hard choice since she has to choose between two forms of abuse (whipping or rape), it suggests that Louisa Picquet has some room for agency on her life. It remains an act of power and resistance as she chooses for herself. The descriptions of suicide, finally, can also be considered as representing some implicit form of agency for slave women, although it remains questionable. This idea of empowerment through suicide is prominent in Antoinette's story from the Crafts' narrative. Indeed, Antoinette was bought by her master to be a sexual slave, but she chooses to commit suicide to escape sexual humiliation. "The brave Antoinette"[48], "unpolluted body;"[49] these quotes place Antoinette as a heroine and imply that she regains control over her body. To put it differently, she was able to preserve her virtue through suicide. In addition, her suicide can be interpreted as a form of escape, a means to freedom, however desperate. These choices, only found in the 19th-century feminine narratives, inevitably lead to sacrifices: Harriet Jacobs sacrifices her purity, Louisa Picquet consents to be beaten, and Antoinette sacrifices her life. This is why they are ambivalent. Nonetheless, these women demonstrate some power in their actions for they have room to decide for themselves. It is also true for Mary Prince who is compelled to sell herself: she has some influence on her own sale although, at the same time, this is reminiscent of prostitution. While they were usually seen as passive, they become actors of their own lives. For Louisa Picquet's mother, naming

[47] Mattison, 12.
[48] Craft, 21.
[49] Craft, 21.

becomes a power strategy. Contrary to what slaves generally do, she states that her mother never changed her name, Ramsey, to take that of her owner. This choice, which seems irrelevant in appearance, is, in fact, full of meaning according to Richard H. King: "Choosing a name is an act of profound personal, social and political significance. It is a way of accepting or rejecting a world and one's place in that world."[50] By keeping her own name, she expresses her refusal to be associated to her master and, by extension, to be identified primarily as a slave. Thus, she symbolically claims her own identity which is another form of agency and an act of freedom.

In the interviews, the image of the powerful female slave is reached through the representation of their African origins: Hannah Crasson displays her admiration for her aunt who was a "royal slave"[51] and she celebrates African customs: "she could dance all over de place wid a tumbler of water on her head, widout spilling it."[52] Ann Parker's mother was also a queen in Africa who had been captured.[53] The other slaves used to bow to her and do what she said while her witchcraft was related to her African roots. Upon reading these testimonies, it seems that these African roots grant power and a certain aura to the bondwomen depicted. The celebration of African slave women may stem from the influence of the Harlem Renaissance which started from the 1920s onward. This movement put forward the African heritage and got inspiration from African folklore. The references to African-rooted slave women are found in the North Carolina interviews more than in any other state of my corpus. Along with Virginia and Maryland, this state was located closer to the cradle of the Harlem Renaissance than the states from the Deep South, meaning that it may have been more influenced by this movement than the other Southern states of the corpus. It is thus not surprising that such references are not present in the South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia interviews. The former slave women from North Carolina may have been influenced by this movement to accentuate and brag about the African connections of their female slave relatives. Nevertheless, the representation of slave women's power and agency is qualified in the interviews, as it sometimes falls on the verge of stereotyping. If the witchcraft of Ann Parker's mother was perceived as positive because connected to the African heritage and folklore, this power is represented differently in other interviews:

[50] Richard H. King, "Citizenship and Self-Respect: The Experience of Politics in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 18.
[51] Crasson, 191.
[52] Crasson, 191.
[53] Ann Parker, interview by Mary A. Hicks, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XI, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 157.

> During slavery time there was a family that had a daughter after she married and ebby body said she wuz a witch cause at night dey sed she would turn her skin inside out and go round riding folks horses. Der next morning der horses manes would be tied up'. Now her husband didn't know she was a witch so somebody tole him he could tell ty cutting off one of her limbs so one night the wife changed to a cat and the husband cut off her forefinger what had a ring on it. After that der wife would keep her hand hid cause her finger wuz cut off; and she knowed her husband would find out that she wuz the witch. […][54]
>
> He told me too bout a 'oman fixing her husband. This 'oman saw anudder man she wonted so she had her husband fixed so he would throw his arms up get on his knees and bark just like a dog.[55]

In Amanda Styles's description, these women are represented as evil. Their witchcraft is derogatorily represented as a means to do evil, reinforcing the stereotype of the witch-like woman. Therefore, slave women's power is turned into something negative and even scary. Overall, telling their stories was a way for the female narrators and 20th-century former slave women to resist the invisibility that was imposed on them because of their intersecting identity as (former) slaves and women (and poor subjects for the former slave women), and thus to reappropriate their own lives.[56] It is a way for them to claim that they were not solely reified and that they did exist within history as subjects.[57]

This thesis demonstrated that the image of the resisting slave woman, able to take power out of her condition, is frequent in both corpuses although it is built up through different representations depending on the context. It balances the widely spread image of the passive, dehumanised victim that was tackled in the first chapter. However, we must qualify our argument by making it clear that, overall, this image is more salient in the 19th-century narratives than in the interviews. In other words, the former slaves do not put themselves forward as active agents of their lives as much as the 19th-century narrators. Indeed, we can speak of a political recession in the interviews. As I explained, the 19th-century narrators were expected to represent themselves as heroic as they were the main protagonists of their narratives. Moreover, these women were in Northern cities (or in England in the case of Mary Prince) when they wrote and dictated their stories, and they were involved in activist networks. Thus, they were surrounded by a strong intellectual ferment mingling the abolitionist as well as the feminist cause, especially for the narrators who published after the 1850s. This may have

[54] Amanda Styles, interview by Minnie B. Ross, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. IV, part. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 343.
[55] Styles, 345.
[56] Anne Stefani, Introduction, "(Hi)Stories of American Women: Writings and Re-writings," *Transatlantica* 2 (2017): 3.
[57] Lee, 18.

encouraged such representations of female agency which had a reparative function ("fonction de réparation")[58]: they aimed to re-establish their womanhood in a society which denied it. Conversely, the purpose of the interviews was no longer to put forward strong slave portraits but rather to draw a general picture of slave life and culture. Most of the interviewees were located in the rural South, still affected by the Lost Cause ideology and the heritage of slavery, which had not been considerably influenced by the urban Northern progressive movements of the first half of the 20th century due to the distance. My argument about North Carolina and the Harlem Renaissance may have been an exception, although it is difficult to prove, for lack of documentation, that the movement had influences in more remote locations and among less educated groups. These movements were led by young African American figures while the interviewees were already old in the 1920s. The age gap between their generation and the younger generation is repeatedly emphasised by the former slaves, as many regret the fact that young people cannot know what it is to have a hard life. Therefore, this suggests that the interviewees did not feel overly concerned by the political and cultural movements of their time, contrary to the 19th-century narrators.

6-6 Enslaved Women's Representations After Freedom

Finally, although the focus of my thesis was to study slave women's representations in slavery, it appears that there are other interesting representations once the narrators reached freedom. In both corpuses, the representations of slave women are not limited to slavery, it may thus be interesting to see if the obtention of liberty changed anything to the representations. We will study the extent to which the representations of bondwomen after freedom vary depending on the sources.

If the purpose of the 19th-century narratives was to help bring slavery down by focusing on slaves' experiences, it appears that, more than the male narrators, the female narrators continue to develop their stories after the obtention of their freedom. In fact, Elizabeth spends more time on her life after she is legally freed than on her experience as a slave woman. Her narrative depicts her empowerment through religion and her fight to be accepted as a female preacher of colour while she raises her voice against slavery. Sojourner Truth, who was made legally free as well, gives herself a new identity through the name "Sojourner Truth," suggesting that she wants to move on from slavery. Like Elizabeth, she describes her beginnings as a preacher and a speaker against slavery. Finally, after Harriet Jacobs made it to the North, she

[58] Fraysse, 10.

shows her reader her efforts to retrieve her children. She finds herself a job as a nurse, pointing to the fact that she can make ends meet. Moreover, her psychological evolution is reflected in the following quotation: "My narrow mind also began to expand under the influences of her intelligent conversation, and the opportunities for reading, which were gladly allowed me whenever I had leisure from my duties. I gradually became more energetic and more cheerful."[59] Through the account of their lives after freedom, these female narrators aim to show that their lives and their identity are not limited to slavery. In other words, freedom is not an end in itself as it seems that they still have a purpose. For Harriet Jacobs, it is to show that she can support herself and her children, suggesting that she will not be a burden to Northern society. Sojourner Truth's and Elizabeth's purpose, on the other hand, is to spread religion and fight for the abolitionist cause. Although they obtained legal freedom, these purposes are a way for them to achieve another form of emancipation. The previous representations showed that, despite their victimisation, slave women could achieve some agency on their lives. These positive accounts of life after freedom complete their evolution as empowered women that had already started during slavery. Having said that, these positive accounts of empowerment must be qualified. It is not simplistic: just as slave women were not completely subjugated in slavery, they are not entirely represented as free after freedom. Indeed, contrary to Sojourner Truth and Elizabeth, Harriet Jacobs was not made legally free at first. Thus, she was still in danger even in the North as her former masters remained her legal owners and planned to have her back. However, she fights the identity imposed on her as a "piece of property"[60] by refusing that her employers purchase her freedom, but her desire is overlooked as they buy her free against her will. Harriet Jacobs feels bitter for this action, even if it was to help, acknowledges her nature as property. The fact that someone else gave money to her owner for her repeats the process of the selling of a slave at a slave auction and, thus, qualifies her evolution as a free woman. It makes her passive again just like in slavery. Moreover, she regrets the fact that she can only be dependent on white people as they were the only persons that succeeded in buying her free, contrary to her own family: "I remembered how my poor father had tried to buy me, when I was a small child, and how he had been disappointed. I hoped his spirit was rejoicing over me now. I remembered how my good old grandmother had laid up her earnings to purchase me in later years, and how often her plans had been frustrated." Similarly, the representation of Ellen Craft's empowerment after freedom is qualified: although she took her destiny into her own

[59] Jacobs, 141.
[60] Jacobs, 154.

hands by passing as a white slaveholder to save herself, the fact that she and her husband sold an engraving of her disguised as a man to buy William's mother out of bondage reduces her to a mere piece of property even after freedom.

If we focus on the image of slave women after freedom in the interviews, the representations are contrasted. In fact, the shift from slavery to freedom is represented as rather difficult for the former slaves interviewed as we can see through the comparisons they make between their life in slavery and the present. "All de slave chilluns had a grown nigger woman and a young gal 'bout sixteen to look atter dem, We alls had a good time an' us was happy and secure."[61] In this example, Jennie Bowen's reference to security implies that she feels that she lost it after Emancipation. In Alabama, Mollie Tillman's self-representation after freedom is still more pessimistic: "Dem wuz good days, chile; mighty good days. I wuz happy den, but since 'mancipation I has jes' had to scuffle an' work an' do de bes' I kin."[62] In these testimonies, the former slave women refer to their evolution from an idle, peaceful life, to a life of toil after they were freed. Abolition thus had an impact on the representations. This is due to the fact that these women were children in slavery who did not have to work or suffer much. Slave children were not always conscious of their status as slaves. Emancipation meant the end of childhood for them as they had to provide for themselves. Thus, they did not enjoy the full advantages of freedom, contrary to the 19th-century narrators whose freedom intervened when they were grown-ups. The latter experienced hardships related to slavery long enough to fully enjoy the obtention of their freedom. It surpassed the problem of providing for themselves. They considered that anything was better than to remain a slave and they had to prove it as it was tied to the political purpose of their narratives. This independence was not perceived as positive and as a form of empowerment for the 20th-century former slaves whose representations are rather pessimistic: they represent themselves as toiling women who tried to make ends meet all their lives long, and who find themselves almost abandoned in their old age. Moreover, the different ways in which they obtained their liberty have a role to play in these representations. On the one hand, the 19th-century narrators were eager to obtain their freedom. It is true for the women who fought for their freedom, namely Mary Prince, Harriet Jacobs, Hannah Crafts, and Ellen Craft, but also for those who obtained it legally: Louisa Picquet says that she prayed for Mr Williams's death so she could finally be free. On the contrary, most of the former slave women

[61] Jennie Bowen, interview by Mary A. Poole, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 43.
[62] Mollie Tillman, interview by Susie R. O'Brien, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 381.

from the interviews did not fight for their liberty since they were too young. Contrary to the other narrators, some of the former slave women obtained something they were not especially willing to have, which may have impacted the representations. This explains why some represent themselves as unfortunate women after Emancipation and are less eloquent on this part of their lives. We can therefore speak of inverted representations between the two corpuses.

Nevertheless, such pessimistic post-abolition representations of slave women are more salient in Alabama than in any other state of my corpus. Indeed, the interviews from Alabama are globally nostalgic of slavery and eloquent on masters' good treatments. This may stem from the fact that this state is located in the Deep South in which the Lost Cause ideology was overpowering. In addition, the hard economic context of life in Alabama during the Great Depression could have made the interviewees look upon their former lives with nostalgia. The context of production of the interviews can also be used to account for these representations: it seems that many former slaves knew their interviewers, which may have led to positive accounts of slavery to avoid troubles. A final interpretation would be that the interviewers and the editors put their own voices on those of former slaves to insist on the nostalgia for slavery. Consequently, the context of production of the interviews may have influenced the female slave representations after the abolition. In the interviews from the other states, there are some exceptions which bear similarities with the 19th-century female slave representations. There were formerly enslaved women who fared well after their emancipation, as it was the case for M. S. Fayman in Maryland. Indeed, when she was a slave, she could not speak English, so she was made the private companion for the children of a slaveowner to teach them French. After 1864, she completed her high school education, graduated from Fisk University, and taught French there until 1883.[63] M. S. Fayman's account suggests that she took advantage of her experience as a slave to make a living and finally become independent after freedom. In South Carolina, Lucretia Heyward was also able to become independent as she says that, after Emancipation, she worked for the Yankees which enabled her to bought herself a parcel of land.[64] Finally, the following statement is interesting to analyse: "Us had nine chillun. Us moved 'round from pillar to post, always needy but always happy."[65] Manda Walker's comment

[63] M. S. Fayman, interview by Rogers, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. VIII (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 13.
[64] Lucretia Heyward, interview by Chlotilde R. Martin, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 280.
[65] Manda Walker, interview by W. W. Dixon, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*, Vol. XIV, part. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2001), 173.

can be interpreted in contrast with her slave days: she may mean that, in freedom, she and her family were poor, yet happy, while, as a slave, she used to be admittedly protected and well cared for but unhappy. Therefore, freedom is presented as having positive impacts on herself. This chapter showed that the representations of enslaved women after freedom are contrasted in the two corpuses. In the 19th-century narratives, the representations are generally positive since freedom represents the long-desired life for these women and marks the final stage of their empowerment. Conversely, the 20th-century corpus is more pessimistic on these representations due to the economic and social context in which the interviews were produced as well as their context of production. However, we find in both corpuses nuances that qualify these general assumptions and complexify the post-freedom representations. Be that as it may, the positive representations that are found in the narratives and interviews are related to enslaved women's agency since these women display their – often economic – self-sufficiency after their emancipation.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chronological comparative analysis explored diverse viewpoints on female slaves, suggesting that their portrait is not simple but ambiguous, complex, and sometimes involving competing images. If slave women are presented as passive victims, they are also depicted as strong and powerful; if some yield to suicide, others choose to resist their condition. From enslaved women's reification to empowerment, this progressive demonstration confirms the most recent historiography on the topic of slave women: the notions of empowerment, agency, and intersectionality are key to women and gender studies in the United States nowadays.[1] However, the comparative method helped us go beyond generalities towards the particular. In fact, it enabled us to highlight nuances in the representations from both corpuses. After comparing and contrasting the representations between slave narratives from 1831-1863 and former slave women interviews, it appears that they bear similarities as well as discrepancies. To interpret and analyse them, it was necessary to consider their respective contexts. Thus, on the one hand, the Victorian values that impregnated the 19th century as well as the context of production of the slave narratives provide interpretations for many representations present in the narratives. On the other hand, it is the racial and economic context of the 1930s, the heritage of the Harlem Renaissance, and the specific context of production of the interviews that influenced the representations between 1936 and 1938. In other words, if some representations are maintained before and after Emancipation, it seems that the analyses vary due to the different contexts. Moreover, the similarities in the representations suggest that some 19th-century stereotypes remained ever-present in the 20th century, despite the progressist social movements of the late 19th century.

This leads me to my initial hypothesis that the representations may have evolved thanks to the abolition of slavery and the development of feminist movements which gave more agency to former slave women. Now that I have delved into the analysis of the corpuses, I argue that this assumption is not verified. Indeed, although the representations from the interviews emphasise more strongly formerly enslaved women's economic independence, for instance, suggesting the evolution of women's economic contribution to their homes since the 19th century, I argue that the interviewees' representations convey a backward movement compared to those from the slave narratives. This demonstration ended on the representation of slave women's agency and empowerment, yet, this representation is not salient in the 20th-century

[1] Stefani, 1.

corpus since slave women are not the main focus of the interviews. This phenomenon can also be analysed in the light of the context of production of the interviews whose purpose was different from that of the slave narratives. Finally, the heterogeneity of the sources can account for this recession: the interviews are so short that they prevent formerly enslaved women from lingering over certain topics.

Focusing on different Southern states, this research sometimes underscored state variations in the representations found in the interviews. To be more specific, the former slave women interviewed in Virginia, for instance, are more eloquent on their abuses than in any other state of the corpus. I assume that it is related to the skin colour of the interviewers who were mostly Black. Furthermore, the interviews from Alabama give more nostalgic accounts of slavery, maybe due to the predominance of the Lost Cause ideology in this Deep South state and the particular impact of the Great Depression there. More generally, I noticed that the Georgia and North Carolina interviews were more militant and blamed slavery more strongly; as opposed to those from South Carolina for example. This concurs with John Blassingame's argument that the South Carolina interviewers were mostly white, leading to positive accounts of slave life.[2] Nonetheless, these remain hypotheses because I did not deal with the WPA Slave Narrative Collection exclusively. Therefore, a more systematic analysis, involving the interviews from the other states, would maybe highlight more regional variations.

Women being the centre of the analysis, this thesis can be seen as a "feminist undertaking in itself."[3] Indeed, the goal was to help lift the veil on enslaved women by letting their voices be heard, although there is still a long way to go before their experiences are completely unveiled. Within the trend of bottom-up history, I chose to leave aside the institution – which has been widely studied by the grand history – and to focus on the people and their inner lives:

> The big problem is that slavery is so intricate and so immense and so long and so unprecedented, that you can let slavery be the story, the plot, and we know what that story is and it is predictable. […] The center of it becomes the institution and not the people. So if you focus on the characters and their interior life, it's like putting the authority back into the hands of the slave rather than the slaveholder.[4]

[2] Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 488-489.
[3] Stefani, 5.
[4] Toni Morrison, "Toni Morrison On Capturing A Mother's 'Compulsion' To Nurture in *Beloved*," interview by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, PBS NewsHour, September 29, 1987.

Applied to slave women especially, this is a way to complete female slaves' empowerment: by making slave women the focal point, such studies give them back an authority that was denied to them because of their sex, race, and class.

That being said, a shadow remains on slave women's lives for many reasons. Although female slave narratives are of crucial importance to learn about slave women's experiences, some aspects of their lives were hushed to match abolitionists' political agenda. Additionally, the social context of the 19th century led them to remain silent on certain topics such as sexuality. Similarly, the context of production as well as the social context of the 20th-century interviews created a veil on certain facets of former slave women's lives. Paradoxically, it seems that, today, African American fiction takes over these narratives. Taking the example of Toni Morrison, the intertextuality between *Beloved* and slave narratives helps fill in those blanks.[5] More specifically, Claudine Raynaud argues that Toni Morrison's fiction starts where slave narratives stop and even continues them.[6] Fictions like *Beloved* tear this veil that enslaved women put on their experiences, so as to go deeper into their subjectivity and interiority.[7] In fact, this novel represents the emotional aftermaths of a former slave woman's infanticide. We learn about Sethe's repressed guilt which returns in the form of her dead daughter, Beloved. Such inner representations are completely absent from formerly enslaved women's accounts that feature infanticides, which is why one can argue that these fictions, paradoxically based on historical facts, complete slave narratives on slave women's experiences while they expand their representations.

[5] Adèle Van Reeth, « 'Beloved' de Toni Morrison : vivre avec les fantômes de l'esclavage, » *Les Chemins de la Philosophie*, France Culture, May 12, 2021, https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie-emission-du-mercredi-12-mai-2021.
[6] Van Reeth.
[7] Van Reeth.

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