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INSIGHTS INTO VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE IN BLACK WOMEN'S SLAVE *TESTIMONIOS*

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ABSTRACT

Transatlantic slave trade and slavery was a common phenomenon witnessed by the world in human history which led to the subjugation and oppression of black Africans for many centuries. Black slave women were the worst sufferers of slavery as they were triply oppressed and endured violence in many forms. To study different facets and forms of violence-physical and psychological violence, social coercion, and implicit violence, and black slave women's strategies of resistance to it, the present paper critically examines and analyses slave narratives of three black slave women as testimonios.

Analysis of Mary Prince's The History of Mary Prince(1831) discusses the concept of physical and psychological violence, its impact on the lives of black slave women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the West Indies, and Mary Prince's struggle to seek freedom from her cruel slave-owner by approaching Anti-Slavery society in England. Harriet Jacob's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl(1861) depicts her life journey as a black slave girl from North Carolina from a happy childhood through disturbing girlhood to struggling motherhood and then to an activist in the light of the concept of social coercion. Critical examination of Kate Drumgoold's A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold(1898) seeks to uncover the struggle of Kate Drumgoold who strives to achieve a sense of 'victorhood' by following the path of Evangelical Christianity with a strong faith in God before and after the Civil War era in the United States of America.

Keywords: *Testimonio, Physical And Psychological Violence, Social Coercion, Victorhood, Oppression, Resistance.*

Introduction

Testimonio is a Spanish term which means "witness account" (Mora) in English involves an "act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense" (Beverley 26). *Testimonio* defined as "a novel or novella length narrative in book or

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pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or significant life experience" (Beverley 30-31) is associated with "Latin American atrocity narratives" (Nayar 84).

In many cases, the narrator uses *testimonio* as "resistance literature" (Harlow qtd. in Beverley 31) as it exists ". . . at the margin of literature, representing, in particular, those subjects—the child, 'the native', the woman, the insane, the criminal, the proletarian—excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing for themselves" (Williams qtd. in Beverley 25). The marginalised people use writing to refute their predetermined cultural, economic, and sociological roles enforced by the dominant culture. And *testimonio*, a literary genre, is a means to facilitate the voices of the subaltern subjects to be heard, who are often kept outside the official history of the country.

Black slave women used slave narratives as a medium to narrate their experiences of bondage as active agents who transformed their defeats and difficulties into triumph through resistance, courage, and spirituality, simultaneously fighting for their survival and also that of the family. Black women's slave narratives highlight how the bodies of black slave women were cruelly exploited, sexually abused, chained, bruised, and exposed to grim working conditions: "In slavery, the black female body served as one of the prime technologies of reproduction and commodification….Demonized, debased, raped and dismissed" (Bennett and Dickerson 13).

Black slave women resisted slavery and violence by writing about the experiences of their exploitation in the cotton fields of the United States of America and the sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean. Against this background, the present research paper analyses the various facets of violence in the form of physical and psychological violence, social coercion and implicit form of violence in the *testimonios* of three black slave women: Mary Prince's The *History of Mary Prince*(1831), Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*(1861) and Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold*(1898).

Violence is a negative destructive intentional force with the tendency to demolish and shatter the world of the victim. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "violence" means "the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, person or property" (qtd. in Bufacchi 18). Consequently, violence is the exertion of force to physically injure or abuse which leads to physical, emotional, psychological, and material damage to an individual. In the case of black slave women as victims, the act of violence involved 'intentionality' because white slave-owners purposely and forcefully directed physical injury and suffering to black slaves: "violence is the intentional infliction of physical or psychological injury on a person or persons" (Steger 13).

The History of Mary Prince, the first-person narrative of the life of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave of African origin, gives insight into not only her sufferings as a slave but also her partial emancipation. Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* enfolds her life story beginning as a black slave in Bermuda, Turks Island, Antigua and as a domestic servant in London. Her narrative underscores her quest and struggle for freedom from the brutal control of her owner Mr. Wood after accompanying him to London in 1828.

Mary Prince lived a contented and carefree childhood with her siblings as she had no memory of physical and mental abuse in Williams's household but as a black slave girl, she served the purpose of a playmate to Miss Betsey, the daughter of Mrs. Williams. She was not allowed to receive formal education but was taught to read and write first by Miss Betsey and then by her temporary owner Mrs. Prudent's daughter Miss Fanny.

Mary Prince began experiencing the reality of being a slave when as a transferable property she was used by her master to fulfil the financial obligations that emerged due to his second marriage: "Mary, you will have to go home directly; your master is going to be married, and he means to sell you and two of your sisters to raise money for the wedding" (*THMP* 9).

The sale of Mary Prince, her siblings, and her mother was a psychologically tormenting event for the whole family in Hamble Town, Bermuda as they were physically examined in public by the "vendue master" (11). Besides, her intense pain and trauma due to her separation from her mother and siblings: "Oh, my mother! my mother!' I kept saying to myself, 'Oh, my mammy and my sisters and my brothers shall I never see you again!" (*THMP* 13) reflects the violation of the integrity of the souls of black slave women and their children.

Mary Prince's confrontation with the evils of slavery and suffering as a twelve-year-old black female slave began with her arrival at her new owner, Captain I—'s house at Spanish Point in Bermuda. Mrs. I— was a cruel lady who used physical violence and punishment to control and exercise her authority on Mary Prince: ". . .she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin, when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand. . .She was a fearful woman, and a savage mistress to her slaves" (14). In another incident of brutality, Captain I— brutally whipped Mary Prince: "I cannot remember how many licks he gave me then, but he beat me till he himself was weary" (*THMP* 17). The punishment inflicted upon the naked flesh of Mary Prince was an act of physical and psychological violence which was socially sanctioned by the white supremacist society which revealed the "deep hatred of woman that had been embedded in the white colonizer's psyche by patriarchal ideology and anti-woman religious teachings both motivated and sanctioned white male brutality against black women" (hooks *Ain't I* 53).

Mary Prince resisted and protested against the brutal treatment of her unkind

slave-owner by escaping from Captain I—'s household to her mother: "My poor mother was both grieved and glad to see me. . .She dared not receive me into the house, but she hid me up in a hole in the rocks near, and brought me food at night, after everybody was asleep" (18). The mother-daughter reunion and her mother's support gave Mary Prince confidence and strength. Later, unlike other slaves, she was able to speak and defend her actions in front of Captain I—.

Black slave women were "Often deprived of family ties, they (black slaves) were deprived as well of inheritance and of the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor. Those to whom they belonged, who extracted their unpaid labor, denied them their full humanity" (Mbemble 47). Mary Prince, being in bondage developed a strong desire to buy her freedom from her last owner Mr. Wood and she saved enough money to purchase her freedom: "I asked my master and mistress to let me buy my own freedom. . .for it was agreed that I should afterwards serve Mr Burchell a while, for the cash he was to advance for me" (31), but the Woods' outrageously refused her: "Mrs Wood was very angry – she grew quite outrageous" (31) and called Mary Prince "a black devil" (31), though, "She sold five slaves whilst I was with her" (*THMP* 30). Mr. and Mrs. Wood psychologically harassed Mary Prince first by deliberately giving her false hopes of granting freedom to her, and then by refusing to sell her to other slaveholders.

Mary Prince travelled to England along with Woods. English law allowed her to be a free black person in England but as laws pertaining to abolition were not fully implemented in the West Indies yet, Mary Prince could be captured as a black slave if she returned to her native place Antigua. The atrocities and brutalities of the Woods' family on her continued in England too: "I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go, or how to get my living; and therefore, I did not like to leave the house" (33). Due to her recent arrival in a foreign land where she knew no one and despite her being a free black woman Mary Prince had to bore torture and violence inflicted by Woods for a few months in England but Woods' lack of compassion, inhumane treatment, humiliation and torture forced her to leave their household forever:

. . .'Stop, before you take up this trunk, and hear what I have to say before these people. I am going out of this house, as I was ordered; but I have done no wrong at all to my owners, neither here nor in the West Indies. I always worked very hard to please them. . .I told my mistress I was sick, and yet she has ordered me out of doors. This is the fourth time; and now I am going out.' (*THMP* 33)

After leaving her last slave-owner Mr. Wood's household in London, Mary Prince came in contact with Anti-Slavery Society and was hired as a domestic servant by Thomas Pringle, who was secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. The scarred and bruised body of Mary Prince examined by Susanna Strickland, Thomas Pringle's wife and others testified to the physical violence endured by Mary Prince:

. . .the whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were,

chequered, with the vestiges of severe floggings. Besides this, there are many large scars on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with gashes, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands. (THMP 64)

In 1831 Mary Prince dictated her narrative to Susanna Strickland and *The History of Mary Prince* was published the same year.

Mary Prince in her *testimonio* recounted her strategies to overcome and survive the hardships through acts of resistance. She took control of her speech, body, and space numerous times by talking back and articulating her voice to her owners. Thus, she deconstructed the prevalent stereotypes about the silenced and passive enslaved black women. In this regard, Lean'tin L. Bracks states: "While some form of covert resistance among slaves consisted of stealing, dissembling, and arson, Mary moves beyond those responses to a more overt and politically aggressive stance. She progresses swiftly to a position of confrontation" (36). Mary Prince protested and resisted the institution of slavery when she responded to Mr. D—'s inappropriate behaviour by confronting him: "I told him I would not live longer with him, for he was a very indecent man—very spiteful; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh" (*THMP* 24). Refusing to bathe her naked master Mr. D—and afterwards confronting him for the same, implied black slave women's emphasis on modesty and good moral behaviour which was denied to them due to racism and white supremacy.

Social coercion is another tool of violence used by white slave-owners to exercise power over black slave women during slavery. Coercion is "the application of actual physical violence, or (b) the application of sanctions sufficiently strong to make the individual abandon a course of action or inaction dictated by his own strong and enduring motives and wishes" (Bay 93). The coercer approaches the victim(coerce) with specific threats with a wrongful intention to make the coercee suffer as "one is *forced* to do what one does *not want to do*" (Anderson 9). Therefore, coercee has to oblige forcefully or with conditions to the coercer's demand to perform the coercer's desired act. During slavery, black slave women were coerced physically, sexually, and psychologically in the societal set up of American North and South to meet the demand of free labour.

Harriet Jacobs in her slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* describes how she suffered social coercion at the hands of her owner Mr. Flint. Her awareness of being a slave unfolded at the tender age of six with the death of her mother: "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away" (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 7). Written under the pseudonym Linda Brent, Harriet Jacobs cherished memories of her happy childhood which she spent with her kind mistress after her mother's death. However, Linda's happy childhood days were short lived as her mistress died when Linda was twelve years

old. Linda's hope of being free from the bondage of slavery was shattered when the will of her late mistress was disclosed: "she had bequeathed me to her sister's daughter" (*ILSG* 10).

The sexual assault and coercion of black slave girls were common in the American South as "institutionalized sexism . . . (socially) legitimized sexual exploitation of black females" (hooks *Ain't I* 41). Linda highlights the issue of sexual vulnerability and harassment of black slave women as she became a victim of Dr. Flint's seduction and sexual violence as soon as she entered puberty. Dr. Flint attempted to pollute Linda Brent's innocent mind by whispering to her in sexually explicit language: "For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood" (*ILSG* 60). Therefore, with the onset of puberty of black slave girls, the vulnerability and threat of sexual assault and harassment by white slaveholders increased. This aggravated the degree of oppression due to race, gender, and class faced by black slave girls.

Linda wanted to confess to someone the torments, brutalities, and trauma she suffered in the Flint household. However, she was threatened by her manipulative master: "Dr. Flint swore he would kill me, if I was not as silent as the grave" (32). Linda tried to maintain her self-esteem and was determined to protect herself "had resolved that I would be virtuous, though I was but a slave" (62). However, she was aware of the legal system of the American South which provided black slave women and their children no right to protect their dignity, and virtues: "No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death" (*ILSG* 30). The black slave girls either fathered by black men or white slave-owners, lacked the legal and social rights conferred to a human being.

Linda Brent suffered double victimization. She bore constant sexual coercion and harassment by Dr. Flint; also, at the same time endured the wrath, jealousy, and psychological abuse from Mrs. Flint. For Mrs. Flint, Linda was a threat to her as "She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed" (*ILSG* 37).

White women had the right to marriage which was denied to black slave women who were not allowed to marry another black slave or black free slave without seeking permission from the master. Linda fell in love with a free black slave and wished to marry him but Dr. Flint dismissed her plea for marriage: "I'll soon convince you whether I am your master, or the nigger fellow you honor so highly. If you must have a husband, you may take up with one of my slaves" (43). Linda's plea "Don't you suppose, sir, that a slave can have some preference about marrying? Do you suppose that all men are alike to her?" (43) fell on

deaf ears. Instead, he planned to make Linda his concubine and built a separate cottage for her where he promised to keep her comfortable: "he told me that he was going to build a small house for me, in a secluded place, four miles away from the town" (*ILSG* 59) highlighting that: "White male slave owners usually tried to bribe black women as preparation for sexual overtures so as to place them in the role of prostitute" (hooks *Ain't I* 25). However, Linda was determined: "I would never enter it. I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living Death" (*ILSG* 59).

In an attempt to escape seduction Linda "plunge[d] into the abyss" (59) by initiating an affair with a kind, sympathetic "white unmarried gentleman" (60), Mr. Sands who was equal in class hierarchy to Dr. Flint. Refusing to become a sexual object of Dr. Flint, she took control of her own body by indulging in an affair with Mr. Sands. Her journey from the innocence of youth to the experience of sexuality without entering into marriage with Mr. Sands filled her heart with "shame and sorrow" (61) and eventually resulted in the birth of two children: "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (*ILSG* 61).

In the American South, "state legislatures adopted the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*—the child follows the condition of the mother" (Davis ch.1 13). Although, Linda Brent was able to resist Dr. Flint's sexual advances she remained unsuccessful in protecting her children from the legal control of Dr. Flint because as per Southern state laws, her slave status was automatically granted to her children.

Linda risked her life by fleeing from Dr. Flint's plantation when she became aware of Dr. Flint's plan to send her children Benny and Ellen to work on plantations. To acquire freedom for her children and herself, she lived in a small crawl space in her grandmother's attic for seven years. She suffered the pain of separation from her children: "Through my peeping-hole I could watch the children, and when they were near enough, I could hear their talk" (*ILSG* 80).

To facilitate the sale of her children to her family from Dr. Flint, Linda managed to use her literacy and language as a medium to trick Dr. Flint into believing that she had escaped to the American North while she was living hidden in her grandmother's house. She managed to send letters written by her to Dr. Flint and made him falsely believe that these letters were sent from the American North: "In order to make him believe that I was in New York, I resolved to write him a letter dated from that place. . .would carry such a letter to New York, and put it in the post office there" (*ILSG* 142). After freeing her children from the legal control of Dr. Flint and living seven years hidden in a small space in her grandmother's house, Linda rebelled against the system of slavery by fleeing to the American North by boat to escape from the control of Dr. Flint,

who continued his search for Linda and was never ready to sell her.

In American North Linda worked as a nursemaid in Mr. and Mrs. Bruce's household. Mrs. Bruce was an Englishwoman who despised slavery. She was kind to Linda and established a friendly and sisterly bond with her. She came to her rescue whenever she had a fear of recapture from Dr. Flint's arrival in the North. The quest to purchase her own and her children's freedom ceased after Mr. Bruce's second wife Mrs. Bruce purchased her from Mrs. Emily Flint and set her free.

Another dimension of violence during pre and post-Civil war era can be witnessed implicitly in the form of black slave women's transgression from slave status to employed servants in white households. Many black slave women and their children who were victims of slavery in early childhood embraced Evangelical Christianity to find solace and peace. According to the Christian religion: "Victorhood is Christ-focused, not self-focused. The Victors see their identity as complete in Christ" (Curtis). Despite hardships, injustices, oppression, and loss experienced by black slave women in the pre and post-Civil war era in America, their strong Evangelical faith in Jesus Christ facilitated them to avert the sense of victimhood and to embrace the notion of victorhood.

Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* gives an account of her experiences as an enslaved child during the American Civil War (1861-1865), her struggles as a growing up girl, her role as an educator and preacher to African-Americans in the post-American Civil war era.

Kate Drumgoold's mother and her seventeen siblings were scattered to distant places due to their sale to different owners. Mr. House, Kate Drumgoold's owner, needed money, therefore, Kate's mother Mrs. Drumgoold became the victim of the institution of slavery when she ". . .was sold at the beginning of the war, from all of her little ones, after the death of the lady that she belonged to" (4). Kate Drumgoold's brother James also met the same fate and was sent to the war: "The gentleman that my dear brother belonged to was a Methodist and a minister. He did not want to go to the war and so he sent my poor brother to defend what belonged to him" (*SGS* 29).

The separation of Kate Drumgoold from her mother impacted her psyche: "the saddest thought to me was to know which way she (black mother) had gone. . .I saw a clear place in the sky, and it seemed to me the way she had gone, and I watched it three and half years" (*SGS* 5). She tried to fill the gap of pain, loss, and separation from her mother by searching for her in the sky as Heather Andrea Williams remarks: "In a sky as vast as her grief, the child fixed her mind on a clear place to help her grapple with the dislocation brought on by her mother's abrupt disappearance" (24). She spent her childhood engrossed in the memory of dual loss: loss due to separation from her mother and loss due to the death of the white mistress.

In childhood Kate Drumgoold "was baptized by Rev. David Moore, the pastor of

the Washington Avenue Church" (*SGS* 17) as "In a culture that placed black females at the bottom of a hierarchy of human value, conversion gave black women a sense of self-esteem, personal worth, and dignity rooted in God's validation of their humanity" (Lindley 180). In Evangelical Christianity she found a means to face the injustice and oppression that many African-Americans encountered based on race, class, and gender: "I look to Jesus. I have given my life and He can hold me in the power of His might and keep me from failing" (*SGS* 17). Kate Drumoold was able to acquire the strength to resist the injustices due to her strong faith in Jesus Christ.

Kate Drumgoold developed cordial relations with Mrs. Bettie House and her strong faith in God "helped me to find love and favor with all after my white mother was gone from this earth" (14). She fostered a relationship of love, kindness, and motherly bond with most of her white employers: "It was there that I met Mrs. Sarah Potter. She has been all of a mother to me to give me all the encouragement she could bestow on me" (34). She "learned to love as mother" (*SGS* 37) Mrs. Haseltine, a lady from Boston. Her good relations with whites are not only indicative of the development of motherly bonds with whites but also depict Kate Drumgoold's moving away from oppression resulting from slavery. Mrs. Bettie House's love and kind treatment towards her negated and opposed the ideology of racial and class discrimination.

The abolition of slavery in America initiated new challenges and struggles for newly freed African-Americans: "the source of oppression was deeper than the racial discrimination that produced unemployment, shoddy housing, inadequate education and substandard medical care" (Davis). The only choice African-Americans were left with was to again work in agricultural land, plantations, and white households as low-wage servants or slaves.

To acquire education and literacy became compulsory for African-Americans after the abolition of slavery. Being aware of this fact, Kate enrolled herself in school amidst poverty and the unavailability of resources. In between her studies, she had to drop out of school to earn the required money by working as domestic help for her formal education: "to earn money to go off to school" (*SGS* 24).

As soon as she completed her schooling, she followed her passion by becoming a school teacher to educate African-Americans for eleven years. She believed learning to be an opportunity to "refine and elevate the mind" (27) to "cultivate our hearts and minds and live to bless those we meet" (*SGS* 27). Despite limited resources, Kate Drumgoold's optimism and strong faith in God aided her in continuing to teach African-Americans.

In her early childhood, Kate Drumgoold suffered the brunt of separation from her family and the trauma of slavery forced her to find solace in God for love, warmth, and comfort. Her *testimonio* is replete with lines wherein she expresses faith and gratitude for her achievements in life. She emerged as a victor who tried to forget and transform the trauma of

childhood memories of separation from her mother into love for humanity and God.

These women's slave *testimonios* provide an opportunity to explore the injustice and cruelty endured by black slave women as they give voice to the previously silenced voices of black slave women in the official history of the United States of America and the West Indies. Black women's *testimonio* in the form of slave narratives documented black slave women's "personal account[s] of life in bondage and their struggle to be free" (Foster 95) with the "purported goal. . .to reveal the 'truth' about slavery by describing a representative personal history, one which might stand in for the experiences of all slaves" (Drake 95).

Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* highlight the violence and coercion experienced and witnessed by the black slave women in West Indian and American society during the nineteenth century. Due to the inferior status of black slave women in white patriarchal slaveholding society, they were subjugated and marginalised through the implementation of coercive social, economic, legal, and religious systems. Thus, these women became victims of white patriarchy and racism due to state sanctioned violence and socially legitimised coercion by European colonisers in the West Indies and the United States of America.

Mary Prince in *The History of Mary Prince* testified her experience as a black slave woman in the colonies of the British West Indies. Her *testimonio* gives insights into incidents of physical violence and psychological abuse inflicted on her in the form of beatings and whippings. Her individual suffering represented the acts of "terroristic torture" (Paquet 143) suffered by black slave women, men, and children who were stripped naked, whipped, and brutalised.

Mary Prince protested against the institution of slavery by resisting physical violence and psychological abuse. She demonstrated a spirit of resistance against violence and slavery by articulating her voice: "I then took courage and said that I could stand the floggings no longer; that I was weary of my life, and therefore I had ran away to my mother" (*THMP* 18). She married against the wishes of Woods and left Woods' family in England as she refused to accept her slave status.

Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* has narrated violence against black slave women in the form of social coercion during the nineteenth century in the American South. The slaveholders employed different methods to physically and legally coerce black slave men and women to work as labourers in the plantations of the Southern states. Harriet Jacobs articulated the voices of millions of fugitive black slave women by sharing her varied experiences of suffering "those who encounter oppression through the body, the body becomes an important site not only of suffering but also . . . resistance" (Camp 28), which she exhibited by writing and publishing her *testimonio*.

Kate Drumgoold's *testimonio A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* has foregrounded the slave women's experience of slavery during and after the American Civil War. Kate Drumgoold has depicted the violence of slavery as she suffered the trauma of family separation during her childhood. Her separation from her mother and the company of her white mistress, whom she addressed as a white mother left an indelible impact on her psyche. This maternal bond with her white mistress helped her transcend the oppression associated with the race, gender, and class hierarchy established by white slaveholders.

The three *testimonios* underscore that the idea of "reading life" (Gist 245) gives space to black women to communicate their own experiences to find means of empowerment within the context of social, racial, and gendered injustices. As a means to empower black women, Black feminism constituted the history of the United States of America. In this regard, Taylor declared, "the historical evolution of black feminism in the United States not only developed out of Black women's antagonistic and dialectical engagement with White women but also out of their need to ameliorate conditions for empowerment on their own terms" (235). The exploration of racial and gendered experiences of violence of black slave women in their *testimonios* in the historical context and contemporary literature emphasises how personal experiences of slavery connect with theory to challenge and evaluate varied structures of domination.

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