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A QUEST FOR RIGHTS: THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY UNITED STATES OF AMERICA[1]

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Abstract

The institution of slavery was one of the most challenging problems in the history of the United States of America. Created as part of the idea of white supremacy, slavery was in essence based on race difference or racial inferiority of the black race. These ideas led to the enslavement of Africans who were uprooted from their own lands and transported to the North American continent. Since its inception as a nation, the United States disregarded the rights of black people (or other ethic groups) on its land in all of its founding documents. However, the intriguing point was that the same years also witnessed the formation and dissemination of a process of enculturation through the ideology of domesticity, which promoted the significance of the idea of home for the white Americans. While such ideals were meant to shape the lives of particularly white middle-class women, black female slaves were suffering from homelessness and tortures in the very same houses. Observing this discrepancy between such cultural ideals of the nation and the enslaved conditions of thousands of Africans, abolitionists dedicated themselves to produce potential antidotes to end slavery, also paving the way to the achievement of both female and human rights. The purpose of this article is thus to examine the selected texts that address the relation of the nineteenth-century American slavery to the conventional ideas of domesticity in the context of abolitionism. Abolitionists centered on the dysfunctional nature of the ideology of domesticity by questioning and subverting the complicated function of domesticity in relation to the institution of slavery. They stressed in their works the fact that racial slavery is a part of the history of the United States and that it is a state of homelessness and oppression in an era when domestic ideals are gratified by the middle class. This article discusses how the texts written in the abolitionist vein produce an effective response to complex private and social questions posed by slavery, and how they made a significant breakthrough to precipitate change and reformation in society.

Keywords: Slavery, Abolitionism, Domesticity, Female Rights, Human Rights, The Nineteenth Century, The United States of America.

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Bir Hak Arayışı: On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinde Kölelik Karşıtlığı Hareket

Özet

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri tarihindeki en zorlu sorunlardan biri kölelik kurumudur. Beyaz ırkın üstünlüğü fikriyle ortaya çıkan kölelik, uygulayıcıları tarafından esas olarak ırk farkı ve siyahların ırksal olarak daha aşağı olduğu düşüncesine dayandırılmıştır. Bu fikirler Afrika halklarının topraklarından koparılarak kuzey Amerika kıtasında senelerce köleleştirilerek, kimliksiz ve yurtsuz bırakılmalarına neden olmuştur. Birleşik Devletler bir ulus olarak kurulduğu ilk günden itibaren beyaz göçmen Avrupalı halklar dışındaki diğer hiçbir halkın haklarını tanımamış ve bu halklara ülkenin hiçbir yasal kurucu belgesinde yer vermemiştir. Amerikan tarihindeki bu dönem ile ilgili ilgi çekici nokta ise on dokuzuncu yüzyılın aynı zamanda toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının belirlendiği, ev ve ev hayatı kavramlarının beyaz Amerikalılar, özellikle kadınlar, için yüceltildiği ve Amerikan kültürel yapısının bu doğrultuda şekillendirildiği bir dönem olmasıdır. Ancak, beyaz kadınlar için idealleştirilen ve Amerikan ulusunun temeli olarak düşünülen ev kavramı siyah kadınlar için evsizliğin ve köleliğin merkezi olmuştur. Bu sosyal farklılık kölelik karşıtlığı akımının temel ifade noktalarından biri olarak, kölelik karşıtlarının hem insan haklarının hem de kadın haklarının kazanılması için birçok eylemde bulunmasına öncülük etmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, bu makale on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Birleşik Devletlerindeki kölelik kurumunun kültürel bir norm olarak ortaya çıkan ve kadın kimliğinin belirlenmesinde önemli bir rol oynayan ev hayatı kavramı ile ilişkisini kölelik karşıtlığı akımı bağlamında seçilen eserlerde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kölelik karşıtı yazarlar, ev hayatı kavramının siyah köle halk için geçerli olmadığını vurgulamış, köleliğin Birleşik Devletler tarihinin bir parçası olduğunu ve ev hayatına dayandırılan kültürel şekillenmenin yaşandığı bu dönemde ev kavramının siyah köleler için sadece evsizlik ve boyunduruk anlamına geldiğini dile getirmişlerdir. Bu açılardan, bu çalışmada kölelik karşıtı yazının hangi açılardan köleliğin yarattığı kişisel ve sosyal sorunlara yanıt verdiği ve toplumda ne tür bir değişim ve yenilik sağladığı tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kölelik, Kölelik Karşıtlığı, Ev Hayatı, Kadın Hakları, İnsan Hakları, On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri.

I have heard much respecting the horrors of slavery; but may Heaven forbid that the generality of my color throughout these United States should experience any more of its horrors than to be a servant of servants, or hewers of wood and drawers of water!
Maria W. Stewart, *Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall*, 1832

Thine for the oppressed in the bonds of womanhood.
Sarah M. Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of Sexes, and the Condition of Women*, 1837

The nineteenth century introduced various social as well as cultural changes for the people of the nascent American nation. The whole century presented the coexistence of cultural values such as domesticity and true womanhood for white middle-class women and the conflict that the issue of slavery created on the sociopolitical agenda of the American nation. The nineteenth century was also a time of nation building when the United States was going through a social turmoil due to the institution of slavery and the Civil War (1861-1865). While a sense of construction flourished for the burgeoning American nation with the promotion of such cultural values among white people, enslavement of thousands of black people and the Civil War were destroying and dividing the same nation. The process of enculturation provided by the concept of domesticity introduced the ideology of separate spheres (the domestic versus the public) based on gender, which became a hallmark of the nineteenth-century United States in both cultural and literary terms. Domestic sphere, alienated from public spaces that were assigned to male authority according to the ideology of separate spheres, was construed as the mere domain on which to build new ideals for womanhood and family life. The notion of domesticity became a fundamental principle of quotidian female experience and a life style for the white middle-class people and in particular women of mainly British or European descent. Nevertheless, one of the most problematic social conflicts was rooted in the fact that domestic ideals and slavery cohabited throughout the nineteenth century in the slave plantation households, and that domesticity as a cultural norm helped maintain slavery in its institutionalized form. The implementation of slavery nurtured the rapidly disseminating sentiment of racial prejudice that was entrenched deeper into the minds and manners of both Southern and Northern communities. While entertaining themselves with their roles as great homemakers and dutiful mothers, and glorifying their position at homes as a holy profession in the service of the American family and the nation, white middle-class bourgeois American women accommodated women of African descent in their houses as

their servants. It was in these households that the plight of slave women stood in marked contrast with the fashionable lives of white women.

This conflict revealed that the notion of domesticity rejected any inclusion of women of color in the American houses as homemakers or owners. As Joseph A. Conforti remarks, domestic slaves in either urban or rural settlements were "typically cramped into attics and small back rooms" (160) where they could not enjoy domestic comfort. Nevertheless, this segregation and unequal condition based on racial slavery brought along the collapse of the slave plantation households in various ways: white sexual coercion, physical violence, psychological torture, and separation of slave families by either public or private sale. Homelessness all worsened the condition of black people, pushing black people or the crusaders for abolitionism to alternate polities so as to remedy this social ill. The critical point of domestic life as a social and political question lied in the fact that the concept and applicability of domesticity were in a serious conflict with the homelessness and nationlessness of the enslaved people in both the antebellum and postbellum United States. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese contends that the struggle of the abolitionist movement and the defiance of slave women, "who embodied the core psychological dynamic of all resistance" (329), provided promising paths of equality and liberty for the colored people to tread although these paths would be thorny and toilsome. Making their own policies and composing counter-discourses to the conservative façade of domesticity and the cruel practices of the institution of slavery, abolitionists as writers or activists became the crusaders for freedom for the enslaved thousands living amidst the paradoxical social climate of nineteenth-century American society.

The print culture of the nineteenth century hosted two distinct veins of writing at the same time: the popular women's writings of the time promoted and glorified the domestic ideals which produced the effect of a "mass medium" (9), as Ann Douglas argues, and the abolitionist writing that sought to draw attention to the conflicts between the ideology of domesticity and the institution of slavery. Though this mass medium had an immense effect on the reading public, it could not evade the equally overwhelming impact of the abolitionist movement. While domesticity as a practice of enculturation aimed at leaving a collective impression on the whole nation, the antislavery crusaders viewed the idealistic representations of home life as problematic; since, such illustrations did not include other ethnic or racial identities in the country. In this respect, it is crucial to observe the ways in which domestic ideology had a thorny relation to race and gender in the nineteenth-century United States. In the first place, domesticity was but an intricate convention in the eyes of black people and, in particular, black women. Claudia Tate asserts that it was principally because "the economy of slavery demanded slave women to be

bearers of human chattel" (25) and "slave families existed outside legally secure and institutional constructions of marriage, motherhood, family, and household or home" (25). Furthermore, the "typical white family household of husband and wife, children, and kin" (Tate 25) was deconstructed, and a severe rupture of family relations and kinship ties took place under slavery's dominance. Drew G. Faust explains that since "white men and women of the antebellum South had defined and understood themselves in relation to a number of categories" (3) like race that "marked the difference between bound and free, superior and inferior" (3) or gender that "was designed to distinguish independent from dependent, patriarch from subordinate" (3-4) and class that is "more subtle and more hidden in a society that rested within a democratizing America but present nonetheless in distinctions of wealth, power, education, and refinement, in claims to honor and gentility" (4), everyday lives of antebellum American people were shaped according to these artificial but dynamically working social mechanisms. Therefore, race, gender and class that are "evident in skin color, dress, hairstyle, language, and prescribed behavior" (Faust 4) became "both the markers and the principal determinants of power, as well as the stuff of self-definition" (Faust 4). All of these social categories identified both American homes and social life in ways that are alien to the ideal definitions of home, family, and society represented on the antebellum print materials. While domestic ideology portrayed adorable pictures of family life and houses, early American nation witnessed domestic spaces that were vexed with agonies of slaves. Domesticity, which was viewed as the blissful home life for white women, housed miseries of thousands of slaves who were living under physical and emotional chains.

Domestic ideology was essentially a patriarchal convention designed by men who organized social spaces and work places according to conventional gender norms. Though white women's lives and the American household were portrayed as filled with joy and harmony in the popular magazines of the time, restrictive rules of patriarchy were also valid for white women and reigned in the life style of white communities. Similarly, slavery was also a patriarchal construct that influenced both racial and gender affairs structuring the nation's sociopolitical agenda. Though slavery "took its toll on both men and women," (Clinton 35) the problems of female slaves and "the exploitation of female labor force" were quite "extraordinary" (Clinton 35) in terms of labor and sexual exploitation. Not unlike domesticity's patriarchal characteristic, slavery as a patriarchal apparatus worked mercilessly against female slaves and produced domestic tragedies that led African American women to formulate strategies to attain freedom and equal life conditions just like their white peers. Whereas "house slaves broadened the gentry's investment in domestic comfort and social privilege" (Conforti 176), the terms which are expressive of domesticity such as piety, purity or more general conceptual frames such as womanhood and motherhood failed to function in the lives of female slaves. The abuse, rape,

sexual coercion, and violence performed by the slave masters brought various problems like childbearing that forced female slaves to become “breeders, like farm livestock” (Tate 25), while taking away from them their rights to get married, establish families or claim their womanhood and motherhood. Black women were but “public commodities of exchange whose market value was exclusively indexed as the production material wealth, whereas white women were private individuals who circulated in patriarchal society for producing heirs and regulating moral, spiritual, and emotional values” (Tate 25). In addition to sexual coercion, brutal torture and harsh working conditions multiplied the unremitting plight of female slaves. Female slaves were thus regarded “as laborers, and their daily lives were shaped mainly by work, conditions that bred illness, and violence” (Lewis and Lewis xvii). In other words, the private sphere that was so dear to white middle-class women did not produce any cure for black female slaves. Instead, it caused various physical and psychological damages: unbearable physical work on plantations, domestic chores like cleaning, sewing, cooking, childcare, breastfeeding, separation from families and offspring, and unavoidable sexual coercion rendered slavery’s houses dangerous domestic spheres for female slaves.

This visible discrepancy between these two social concepts also exposed the problems within political principles that were held dear in the American nation. Slavery was institutionalized through various laws and legal regulations, which toughened racial and gender relations in the American social life. Furthermore, slavery negated all of the idyllic codes of domesticity, quotidian life, and the constitutional principles of equality and liberty in a country that boasted of these virtues, which legally endowed its people with “unalienable rights” (The Declaration of Independence, 1776). As Ezra Tawil expresses, the Constitution offered “the importation of slaves by individual states before the year 1808; and the provision requiring that fugitive slaves be returned to their masters even across states” (28). What is more, the Constitution strikingly achieved this “without ever naming the institution in question” (Tawil 28). The people who were legally recognized were only white communities and those who were defined as “other Persons”, “such persons”, “all other Persons” or “Person held to Service or Labour” (The Constitution of the United States) in the U.S. Constitution were exempt from any constitutional rights and privileges. However, this fact, which is implanted in the first legal social contract of the United States with a euphemistic expression, signaled a division grounded on discrimination or eligibility for citizenship based on skin color. This was the point that stimulated the debate on the issues of freedom and liberty among a group of people called abolitionists who strained every nerve to make abolitionism possible for the enslaved people. The abolitionists came up with organized resistance to amend what legality failed to correct and rehabilitate in the lives of black slaves.

The resurgence of the abolitionist movement in the early nineteenth century introduced hopes of freedom in anti-slavery tracts, pamphlets, and meetings of anti-slavery societies despite the pessimism the social and political facts furnishing the minds of slaves. Robert Fanuzzi clarifies that the first abolitionists were "the free black members of an anti-colonization movement, which sought to debunk the colonization policy championed by so-called liberal whites as the best answer to the slavery question" (9). Accordingly, the abolition of slavery meant "an express alternative to colonization that entailed not just the liberation of the enslaved but also the coexistence of whites and blacks" (Fanuzzi 9). This idea of coexistence composed the key element of the abolitionist movement: the liberty of African Americans and the harmonious cohabitation of African Americans at their own homes as the neighbors of white American citizens. In a country established upon the principles of liberty and equality, the idea of home was deemed as the foundation and metonymy of the American nation that would provide all basic humanitarian values for its entire people. However, the lack of housing and citizenship pointed to the biggest "*paradoxical* structure of independence and free will […] announced in the founding document of the United States?" (Downes 15). In almost all of the public events or written records of the abolitionist cause, nonetheless, abolitionists challenged the codes of freedom and equality in the founding documents of the nation such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Unites States. Thus, the abolitionist movement became the most rapidly enlarging civil organization that confronted the paradoxical social and political implementations of the American nation. When white women's efforts to empower home and the American nation were so widely illustrated and promoted in the popular print materials of the time, the abolitionists saw the urgent need to emphasize that the domestic ideology was already a political system that on the one hand promoted the white supremacist ideas, and on the other enslaved black people as part of the nation's imperialist notions.

Abolitionism was also a thorny yet productive path to women's rights in the nineteenth-century United States. Rooted in a language free from divisions and restrictions, the abolitionism went viral and spread among both white and black women who came together for the rights of oppressed female slaves. As the historian Nancy F. Cott explains in *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (1977), since the 1830s, the rise of feminist activism which "attempted to remove sex-specific limits on women's opportunities and capacities" (5) aimed to contest the conservative and tyrannical façade of domesticity. Perhaps, more notably, as another historian Linda K. Kerber specifies in her book *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1986), antislavery cause emerged as a more vigorous revolutionary movement when "women's abolitionist petitions" "flooded the Congress

in the 1830s and forced confrontation of the slavery issue" (112-113). Literary critics Ruth Bogin and Jean Fagan Yellin in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (1994) note that women's antislavery organizations did not only work for white women's rights as conservative bourgeois white women did, but they "offered equal membership to both black and white women" (10), and "created a gender-specific organizational structure that posed an institutional challenge to American racism" (10). Throughout the long decades of struggle, black and white abolitionist women marched out of their private spheres, claiming that domesticity is in fact imbued with political elements such as racism and slavery. Hence, both feminist and abolitionist movements flourished concurrently and homed in on political issues on the national agenda, shifting the traditional social boundaries that the female gender was taught to belong to.

Abolitionists knew well that slavery was eventually a problem of homelessness and nationlessness, and thus domestic ideology created, maintained, and reinforced by many white people was to be disputed so as to recuperate the losses black women and people were suffering in terms of identity, freedom, home and nationhood. The most effective tool abolitionists made use of was to go public, deliver speeches on their cause before the white people, and share their opinions on the fallibility of proslavery ideas which defended that racial slavery was righteous due to the assumed inferiority of the black race. It was a time when abolitionists Maria Stewart, Lydia Maria Child, Angelina Grimké and Sarah Grimké, Lucretia Mott and William Lloyd Garrison were spiritedly defending the rights of blacks through various communicative means. Carolyn Williams states that some "male abolitionists, like other men of this era, generally accepted the 'cult of true womanhood,' which prescribed separate spheres for each gender" (159). For this very reason, women were asked to attend anti-slavery meetings only as witnesses (Williams 159). Yet, active participation of women was the primary goal for these abolitionists who themselves pushed cultural limits placed on gender norms by encouraging effective involvement of women in the organized meetings.

The scholar Phillip Lapsansky maintains that the spread of the antislavery societies, active contribution of blacks to all sorts of activities in abolition groups, and women's public participation in the antislavery struggle were new to the movement in the 1830s (202). The key figure of the abolitionist movement in the North, the co-founder and editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator,* William Lloyd Garrison initiated the publication activities of *The Liberator* with Isaac Knapp in 1831 in Boston. *The Liberator* became one of the primary vehicles of media that supported the abolitionist cause and women's active participation in it. The newspaper further contributed to women's resistance in the special column entitled "Ladies'

Department", through which Garrison justified reasons for women's involvement in the cause and voiced the problems related to female slaves. On July 14, 1832 issue of *The Liberator*, Garrison wrote that the abolitionists should not "overlook or depreciate the influence of women in the promotion of this cause" (110), as he believed that "the cause of bleeding humanity is always, legitimately, the cause of woman" (110). Pointing to the need for assistance of women, Garrison maintained in his column that

> A million females in this country, are recognized and held as property – liable to be sold or used for the gratification of the lust or avarice or convenience of unprincipled speculators – without the least protection for their chastity – cruelly scourged for the most trifling offences – and subjected to unseemly and merciless tasks, to severe privations, and to brutish ignorance! (*The Liberator*, July 14, 1832 110).

This reminder to his readers became the ground on which Garrison announced the establishment of the first "'Female Anti-Slavery Society' in New-England" (110), which he believed to be "the forerunner of a multitude of similar other associations" (110). During a convention held in Philadelphia in 1833, Garrison helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society that became an organ to promote many other anti-slavery organizations such as Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in their abolitionist campaigns. Conventions of these women's organizations were "principal agents in promoting women's equal inclusion in the abolitionist campaign and in creating a women's rights campaign" (Williams 160). Garrison's determination in initiating a national society aimed to "bring together all abolitionists and all antislavery societies in the United States, allowing them to pool their resources in terms of money and talent and thus facilitate their collective ability to speak out against slavery with a unified voice" (Upchurch 31).

Resistance and perseverance were key concepts in both the development of the abolitionist movement and in slave women's lives. While antislavery activists made a noteworthy progress in their abolitionist campaigns in the North, they faced the threats of proslavery mobs that were determined to undermine the ground the abolitionist movement was gaining. Abolitionists were disappointed on the day when the Pennsylvania Hall was burnt down in 1838 by a racist mob during the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. The burning of the Pennsylvania Hall signified disenchantment in the first place, yet later it became a source of motivation for the abolitionists to be more active in their cause and a remarkable landmark in antislavery movement. Beverly C. Tomek argues that the Pennsylvania Hall, which was called the Temple of Liberty, "symbolized anti-slavery and racial 'amalgamation" (mixing) to the attackers" (x). Since this

amalgamation was perceived to be an extreme threat to the racial integrity of whiteness and because "most white Americans saw abolitionists as dangerous radicals who recklessly threatened the security of the nation for an undesirable goal" (Tomek xi), the abolitionist activities were met by hatred and malice. The location of the Pennsylvania Hall was also critical in that the Independence Hall, where America's first democratic foundation was laid and which was considered to be the symbol of freedom and free speech, was located only within a very short distance. Though anti-slavery activities raised abhorrence and violent responses among some white northerners, as the historian David Grimsted contends, "the mobs against abolitionism in the mid-1830s influenced antislavery development and its relation to changing Northern attitudes and national tensions" (34). The burning of the Pennsylvania Hall was one of these incidents that fueled the desire for abolitionism: the event "contributed to an awakening of the Northern public that was essential to the defeat of slavery" (Tomek xvi) and helped overcome the lingering racist feelings left over after the abolition of slavery in the North.

Furthermore, growing resistance to proslavery thoughts and events sprang to life in the publishing activities, anti-slavery societies and their meetings, and in these societies' constitutions and pamphlets. William Lloyd Garrison was the leading figure in the organization of the meeting in the Pennsylvania Hall and publicized the abolitionist cause with an unprecedented zeal that encouraged many abolitionists to stick to their activities after the destruction of the Pennsylvania Hall. On June 1, 1838 issue of the paper, Garrison gathered together pieces of the abolitionist voices from other papers to boost the morale of the abolitionists, emphasizing that the freedom of speech and human rights were violated in the "mob-ruled and law-abandoned city of Philadelphia" (*The Liberator* 86) during the destructive event in the Pennsylvania Hall in an excerpt entitled "The Voice of the People" from *the Pennsylvania Freeman*. Garrison himself noted that "the abolitionists, […], are not the man, ay, or the women, to be deterred from holding their meetings, either in the day-time, or evening, by 'the fear of a mob'. It is the mob who fear them, not they the mob" (*The Liberator* [June 1, 1838] 87). Garrison's words kept the spirits of the abolitionists high and promoted all the public activities taking place in organized meetings of antislavery societies.

The resistance to slavery publicly materialized in the abolitionists' persistence in the violation of the private/public dichotomy and in the struggle for slaves' rights and freedom in the public sphere and in their zeal to produce activities and writings on recovering their rights. One of the striking turning points of these series of resistances began on the day of the first convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 in Philadelphia. The Society declared its "Constitution" and "Declaration of Sentiments" through which the community stimulated

followers of the cause. According to the "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848), it was affirmed that the Society and its organs would do their utmost to

> overthrow the most execrable system of slavery that has ever been witnessed upon earth; to deliver our land from its deadliest curse; to wipe out the foulest stain which rests upon our national escutcheon; and to secure to the colored population of the United States, all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men, and as Americans—come what may to our persons, our interests, or our reputation—whether we live to witness the triumph of Liberty, Justice and Humanity, or perish untimely as martyrs in this great, benevolent, and holy cause (13).

For such ultimate purposes, the Society declared to "organize Anti-Slavery Societies, if possible, in every city, town and village in our land" (12), to "send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, and of rebuke" (12), and to "circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals" (12). Similarly, the members of the American Anti-Slavery Society jotted down in the Constitution that the objective of the Society aimed for the "entire abolition of slavery in the United States" (3). The Society aimed to "convince all our fellow-citizens, by arguments addressed to their understandings and consciences that slaveholding is a heinous crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation" (Article II) (4). Expatriation is a key word in the formation of the immediate objective of the American Anti-Slavery Society. To expatriate meant to shun a harmonious living with black communities and to abstain from endowing them with the right to live equally with the white people. Yet, the American Anti-Slavery Society as the biggest national abolitionist organization sought ways to facilitate the cohabitation of the black and the white together, as is stated in the "Article III" of their Constitution, by elevating "the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral, and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice" (4) so that the black people "may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges" (4). And, the Society resolved to put all the Articles of its Constitution into practice, stating that it would never countenance "the oppressed in vindicating their rights by resorting to physical force" (4).

As can be observed in both the "Declaration of Sentiments" and the "Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society", abolitionist resistance did not count on violence as a vehicle of expression or solution. Both of the documents of the American Anti-Slavery Society "laid out a laundry list of supporting reasons for the necessity of its creation that stemmed mainly from the

Bible and the U.S. Declaration of Independence" (Upchurch 30). The principles adopted as constitutional beliefs of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the individual thoughts and deeds of abolitionists defended the establishment of equal rights and living conditions, the improvement of educational rights without ever considering expatriation to be a possible solution. "The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society" evinces that housing Africans not as slaves but as members of the American nation with the Constitutional rights given to the white would be the primary purpose of the abolitionist cause.

All of these abolitionist ideas questioned the validity of the perception of cultural concepts such as domesticity and true womanhood, providing nineteenth-century public with distinct perspectives to evaluate the cultural shape American social structure took under such popular beliefs. Garrisonian abolitionism and literary abolitionism evolved normative approaches towards domesticity and womanhood, commencing a new era of evaluation of cultural norms taken for granted since the inception of the American nation. The dominance of the terms like domesticity or true womanhood were questioned regarding slave women's conditions and were viewed under critical light, whereas stereotypes of black femininity were defied, and female humanitarianism rather than racial understanding of femininity was placed at the center of discussions. Such considerations formed what came to be known as feminist abolitionism by both black and white women who were responsive enough to sympathize with black women's enslaved condition. In this enterprise, as Anne M. Boylan argues, "the formation of women's anti-slavery societies in the 1830s brought black and white women together in an unprecedented fashion" (119). These women (and also although few in number men), who committed themselves equally to sexual and racial equality, were conscious that "ideals of feminine respectability" which were "very powerful in the antebellum North" (where most antislavery societies were founded) "took a toll on black women" (Boylan 120). The reason for this was that "unlike white women, who enjoyed the presumption that they were 'virtuous' until proven otherwise, free black women were uniformly slandered as "degraded (that is, sexually promiscuous) because of their race" (Boylan 20).

Early in 1831, Sarah Forten of Philadelphia (the pen name Ada) and other African American women in the city became "the moving force behind the founding of the Female Literary Association", whose members, Julie Winch states, announced their duty "as daughters of a despised race … to cultivate the talents entrusted to [their] keeping, that … [they might] break down the strong barrier of prejudice, and raise [them]selves to an equality with those of [their] fellow beings who differ from [them] in complexion" (108). The Female Literary Association took further steps for the initiation of larger organizations with other women who were "at each other's homes once a month for a mental feast of moral and religious meditation, conversation,

reading and speaking, sympathizing over the fate of the unhappy slaves, improving their own minds" (Winch 104-105). All of these activities that shaped the educational opportunities available for African American women became alternative cultural identifications in place of popular white bourgeois ideals of domesticity and womanhood. Improvement of one's mind in societal activities and producing literary or non-literary works would mean to feel "not less but more womanly" (Winch 106). In a similar manner, the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, established in 1833 by black and white women, emphasized in its Annual Report "the dissemination of *truth* on the subject of slavery" (102) and "the improvement of moral and intellectual character of the colored population" (102) as the leading commitment of the Society. The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society became further "involved in governmental affairs in 1836 by coordinating a multistate petition campaign among female abolition societies in New England" (Gold Hansen 51).

The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society played the key role in the organization of the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in New York City in 1837. All of the dialogues of women in the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women helped form women's political culture, thereby underscoring the "extent to which antislavery activity in the United States carried women into new forms of political expressions" (Sklar 328-329). During the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Lydia Maria Child, Sarah M. Grimké, Angelina Grimké, and many other women were all vocal, though they received negative comments from the local press (Gold Hansen 52). They pointed to the sufferings of slaves and the discrepancy between slaveholder's religiosity and the pain they caused in the lives of slaves, and reached many resolutions that would be announced to the public. Angelina Grimké elucidated in the convention that women's concerns needed to shift from raising children for the imperial objectives of the American nation to a desire to defeat the implementation of human bondage in the United States by crushing the limits of the domestic sphere and by stepping out of the prescribed roles (1837 9). As is later jotted down in the *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women* (held in the city of New-York, May 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1837), this situation is resolved by a motion proposed by Angelina Grimké:

> The time has come for woman to move in that sphere which Providence has assigned to her, and no longer remain satisfied in her circumscribed limits with such corrupt custom and a perverted application of Scripture have encircled her; therefore it is the duty of woman, and the province of woman, to plead the cause of the oppressed in our land, to do all that she can by her voice, and her pen, and

> her purse, and the influence of her example, to overthrow the horrible system of slavery (1837 9).

Grimké's words suggest that the new duty of women in contradistinction to the one proposed in the popular magazines should channel all the efforts of women to one cause, abolitionism. Signifying both the oppression of the female sex and the black race, yet never prioritizing the one over the other, Grimké, as a dedicated feminist abolitionist, declared that women did not "intend to allow their sex to restrict the sphere in which they moved" (Williams 171). Lydia Maria Child, likewise, offered the resolution that women should "stand pledged to each other and the world to unite our [their] efforts for the accomplishment of the holy object" of the association "until liberty is proclaimed to the captive, and the opening of the prison doors to those that are bound" (18). Angelina Grimké's sister, Sarah M. Grimké's thoughts on the role of women in the abolitionist cause were also well received and accepted as a recommendation to mothers who are now expected "to educate their children in the principles of peace, and special abhorrence of that warfare, which gives aid to the oppressor against the oppressed" (12). Child and the Grimké sisters' contemplations symbolize the new phase the abolitionist sisterhood opened on the way to adoption of new ideas about the nature of womanhood and the meaning of domestic life that should be free from discrimination, prejudice, and oppression both in sexual and racial terms.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké and Lydia Maria Child were all key figures in the advancement of the abolitionist cause in the United States. They pictured the realities of enslavement without fear or favor in their public activism and writings. Like her sister Angelina, Sarah M. Grimké drew on the incongruity arising from the Christian beliefs of the slaveholders and the viciousness of the slaveholding practices as she says, "In Christian America, the slave has no refuge from unbridled cruelty and lust" (52) in her *Letters on the Equality of Sexes, or the Condition of Woman* (1838) too. Throughout her *Letters*, she openly interrogates the state of the female slaves whose condition stirred up "the deepest shame and sorrow" (51). She draws attention to the miseries of the female slaves and their physical as well as psychological degradation in the South, declaring, "Our southern cities are whelmed beneath a tide of pollution; the virtue of female slaves is wholly at the mercy of irresponsible tyrants, and women are bought and sold in our slave markets, to gratify the lust of those who bear the name of Christians" (51). As a Southern witness to slavery, Grimké's "written testimony against the horrors of slavery in the domestic circle is unique in antislavery literature" (Lerner xix). She voices the "intense" "physical and mental" "sufferings of some females" (52), and invites her audience to defy "authority" that must be "called into exercise by resistance" (88). Grimké is one of the earliest

abolitionists who placed feminism and abolitionism within the same frame that highlighted the significance of resistance as a powerful tool in the struggle for women's rights. Likewise, Angelina Grimké was among those who followed her sister's footsteps by linking the anti-slavery cause to feminism as she combined feminism and abolitionism "to explore slavery imaginatively from a woman's perspective" (Yellin 31). Grimké "blazed a trail from abolitionism to feminism along which other women could proceed" (Yellin 31), a route where she identified herself as a white woman with the suffering of the black slave women in chains. Grimké sisters' "consistent, quiet practice of public support for Blacks and their long-standing friendships with several African-American women expressed their convictions as eloquently as did their writings and convention resolutions against racism" (Lerner xix).

Another significant figure in the cause is the novelist, editor and founder of the children's magazine *Juvenile Miscellany*, and the author of domestic manuals, Lydia Maria Child, who came to adopt the spirit and activism of abolitionism at the cost of losing her fame and many subscribers to the magazine. In the eyes of white people, she became notorious for her abolitionist activism when she published her antislavery tract, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* in 1833. Child never felt regretful for her fall from fame due to her support of the cause after the publication of the tract. Even when she received letters of damnation for her criticism of slavery like the one she received from Governor Wise's wife Mrs. Mason of Virginia, she replied such letters in detail without retorting upon the damnations consigned to her. In her letter of 11 November, Mrs. Mason accuses Child and her antislavery writings of being hypocritical, concluding that "no Southerner ought, […], to read a line of your composition, or to touch a magazine which bears your name in its list of contributors; and in this we hope for the 'sympathy,' at least of those at the North who deserve the name of woman" (17-18). Yet Child, who was harshly and ironically criticized for not being womanly enough to advocate slavery and who was intimidated and even threatened by a woman of her own sex that her publications would fall from grace, replied that she had "great satisfaction in the consciousness of having nothing to lose in that quarter" (252). For Child, as she maintains in her letter, her antislavery tract "influenced the minds of several young men, afterward conspicuous in public life, through whose agency the cause was better served than it could have been by me" (252). Her selflessness in the cause was apparent in her words, as she states in the same letter that "literary popularity was never a paramount object with me, even in my youth" (252) and "if I [she] cared for the exclusion you [Mrs. Mason] threaten, I should at least have the consolation of being exiled with honorable company" (252). As Child's biographer Carolyn L. Karcher indicates, the *Appeal*, which can be regarded as "the most comprehensive indictment of slavery ever written by a white abolitionist" (136) and "the first American book to call for immediate emancipation, an end to all forms of

racial discrimination, and the integration of African Americans as equal citizens" (136), "propelled Child to the forefront of the abolitionist movement, elevating her to a position of unparalleled political influence for a woman" (137). Child then moved to New York City and became the editor of the antislavery newspaper "the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, where she became a "consensus builder who sought to encourage any kind of political action that would aid in the destruction of slavery" (Cullen Sizer 34).

Of the free black women who contributed actively to the abolitionist cause, Maria W. Stewart, a black activist and abolitionist, delivered the first public speech by a black woman, making one of the initial efforts of female abolitionists when she spoke out against slavery on September 21, 1832, in Boston. Referring to the constrictive nature of slavery and racial prejudices in her speech "Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall", Stewart cried out, as "one of the wretched and miserable daughters of the descendants of fallen Africa", the strong "desire to rise above the condition of servants and drudges" (47) and to end the "miserable existence of servitude from the cradle to the grave" (48). For Stewart, if there is anything derogatory in the nature of the black soul, it is slavery that pushes black men and women to "continual hard labor" (47) that "deadens the energies of the soul, and benumbs the faculties of the mind" (47). Stewart asserts that it is under the condition of enslavement that "the ideas become confined, the mind barren, and, like the scorching sands of Arabia, produces nothing; or, like the uncultivated soil, brings forth thorns and thistles" (47). As Marilyn Richardson stresses, Stewart's "religious vision and her socio-political agenda were intrinsically bound together" (9) in her appeal to white Christian women whom she invites to respond to the cries of black people and take pity on them. Stewart challenges both the political and religious hypocrisy in her references to Christianity and the Constitution of the United States. In "An Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America" (1832), Stewart declares that when the abolitionist cause would reach its end, it will be "a day of terror and dismay to hypocrites and unbelievers" (50) for those Christians who "have too long slumbered and slept" (51) before the crime of human bondage. In a similar manner, she emphasizes the political basics of "the land of freedom" such as the liberty of the press and speech in her anti-slavery tract "Religion And The Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation On Which We Must Build" published in *The Liberator* on 8 October 1831. Reminding her readers of the fact that "according to the Constitution of these United States, he [God] hath made all men free and equal" (29), she accentuates that "it is not the color of the skin that makes the man, but it is the principles formed within the soul" (29). In her speeches and anti-slavery tracts, Stewart firmly believed that it is not the enslavement of the other race but the "resistance to oppression" (Richardson 9) that is "the highest form of obedience to God" (Richardson 9). Thus, Stewart manifested the abolitionist reaction to the discrepancy in the

political principles of the United States and the hypocrisy of the religious slaveholders by reminding her audience once again of the necessity to disseminate the legitimacy of resistance to slavery and racism.

During the antebellum period, the abolitionists' vision of resistance was a marker of a promising future. The abolitionist movement on both local and national levels awakened the people of the North and the South by leading them to consider deeper meanings of slavery's wrongs along with the nation's promises of liberty and equality and the slaveholders' hypocritical religious beliefs. Though democratic ideals and egalitarian social politics of the American nation failed to work effectively due to slavery in the nineteenth century, women writers, activists and abolitionists of the time were the leading figures of reformations needed in the postbellum American life. These antislavery crusaders articulated their mounting concerns about the political issues and led to social awareness in the minds and consciences of people with common sense. Not only did these abolitionists fight selflessly for the antislavery cause but they also illuminated the women of the time about the fact that women's mere concern is not the domestic life itself.

As the abolitionist movement gained more impetus day by day with the help of meetings held throughout the United States, abolitionist crusaders grew stronger to disseminate and record their thoughts, arguments and experiences. Recording their confrontations with oppression in different forms of literature offered the chance for the abolitionists to give expression to repressed voices that previously remained hidden, unheard, denied, or unregistered. Antislavery activism or abolitionist writing in general became the most influential tool to clearly illustrate and archive the unrecorded experiences of the oppressed. Abolitionist voices powerfully acted as testaments to political, social, and historical crises at a time when notions of racial identity and gender were formed. Ultimately, the abolitionists' perseverance and their fight and cries for equality and freedom revealed that their efforts were not in vain as their activism and writings produced an increased sociopolitical consciousness and responsiveness in the years to come.

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