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AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS (AUTO)BIOGRAPHIES:

the narratives of Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee

Belo Horizonte

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Dissertação intitulada *AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS (AUTO)BIOGRAPHIES: THE NARRATIVES OF SOJOURNER TRUTH AND JARENA LEE*, de autoria da Mestranda HANNA KAROLYNE SOUZA SIMÕES, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras: Estudos Literários.

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I dedicate this thesis to *all* women.

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“Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.” Percy Shelley (*A Defense of Poetry*)

“I sell the shadow to support the substance.” Sojourner Truth

RESUMO

O estudo de biografias e (auto)biografias explora como os seres humanos entendem e dão sentido a si mesmos, aos Outros e ao mundo por meio da escrita. A escrita da própria vida e da vida de outra pessoa é avaliada em um primeiro momento de acordo com a veracidade do que foi relatado. No entanto, a presença constante e necessária da ficção nas (auto)biografias tem como razão fundamental a violência e as experiências traumáticas que podem ser esquecidas, omitidas ou ignoradas. E no caso de narrativas afro-americanas, os eventos traumáticos devem ser eliminados ou suavizados para serem "adequados" ao gosto dos leitores brancos. Portanto, poder, memória e história desempenham papéis importantes na análise desta dissertação, pois esses conceitos ajudam a constituir a identidade do sujeito negro, bem como sua identidade coletiva. No entanto, existem alguns elementos cruciais para compreender o que torna algumas (auto)biografias mais promovidas do que outras. A *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) escrita por Sojourner Truth e Olive Gilbert, e a *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849), escrita por Jarena Lee, são exemplos de obras que foram excluídas do cânone (auto)biográfico. Por exemplo, ao responder à pergunta: o que significa ter duas religiosas afro-americanas do século XIX publicando suas narrativas de vida contra o pensamento hegemônico do período, examinamos como aspectos de gênero, raça e religião fornecem a sobreposição de interpretações às suas construções literárias (auto)biográficas que potencializam suas abordagens transgressivas e plurais. Diante disso, esta dissertação explora o lugar das mulheres negras na sociedade e como, não obstante a mediação de suas vivências por rótulos da sociedade a elas impostos, essas mulheres construíram um lugar de resistência ao resgatar o discurso religioso hegemônico e expor os preconceitos e a opressão endossados pelo Cristianismo em relação à gênero e raça.

Palavras-chave: Sojourner Truth; Jarena Lee; (auto)biografia; raça; gênero; religião

ABSTRACT

The study of biographies and (auto)biographies explores how humans understand and give meaning to themselves, to Others, and to the world through writing. The writing of one's life and the life of another person is at first evaluated according to the veracity of what has been reported. Yet, the constant and necessary presence of fiction in (auto)biographies have as a key reason the violence and traumatic experiences that can be forgotten, omitted, or ignored. And in the case of African American narratives, the traumatic events must be blurred or softened in order to be "adequate" to the white readers' taste. Hence, power, memory, and history play important roles in this thesis analysis as these concepts help to constitute the black subject's identity as well as their collective identity. However, there are some crucial elements to understand what makes some (auto)biographies more promoted than others. Sojourner Truth and Olive Gilbert's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) and Jarena Lee's *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849) are examples of works that have been excluded from (auto)biographical cannon. For instance, by answering the question: what does it mean to have two nineteenth century African American religious women publishing their life narratives against the period's hegemonic thought, we examinate how aspects of gender, race and religion provide overlapping interpretations to their (auto)biographical literary constructions that enhance their transgressive and plural approaches. In light of this, this thesis explores the place of black women in society and how, notwithstanding the mediation of their experiences by labels society thrust onto them, these women constructed a place of resistance by reclaiming the hegemonic religious discourse and exposing the prejudices and oppression Christianity endorsed regarding both gender and race.

Keywords: Sojourner Truth; Jarena Lee; (auto)biography; race; gender; religion

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INTRODUCTION

"I think if any creature has a right to praise God I have"

"I was feeble in both body and mind, but the Lord was with us according to promise, think not what ye shall say, but open thy mouth and I will fill it saith the Lord, he caused a shaking among the dry bones, that morning. I think if any creature has a right to praise God I have, and that in thankfulness, and I love him because he first loved me. Bless his name."
(Lee 53)

The study of biographies and (auto)biographies[1] explores how humans understand and give meaning to themselves, to each other, and to the world through writing. Beyond the presence of the term 'graph' (writing) in both words, it is the conception of 'bio' (life) that intertwines the controversies involving this literary genre. The writing of one's life and the life of another person arouses questions about the veracity of what has been reported since there is a constant interplay between presence and absence, between the revealed and what has been omitted. Thus, the valorization of a true reference raises at the same time the rejection of what is presented as false or as invented since this would establish another type of agreement between author and reader. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate the importance and specificities of the elements that constitute the characterization of African American religious (auto)biographies: race, gender, authorship, intermediation, stereotypes, and power structures. We will exemplify the questioning of these elements by analyzing two (auto)biographies: Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) and Jarena Lee's *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849).

[1] The use of (auto)biographies with the parenthesis is stressing the constructedness of the subject/self that is writing. Sometimes the parenthesis has been omitted due to the context, as when talking about theoreticians of the autobiographical field.

Being the most prominent genre for African Americans in the nineteenth century, African American (auto)biographies and slave narratives represent a curve in the line of (auto)biographical theories due to their singularities. And that is because they are a primary source to the events and "minds" of the oppressed peoples from Africa and their descendants. Such access, however questioned due to the intermediation of white people and the intentionality of the (auto)biographical writing, is nevertheless relevant as historical documents for they provide an approach that is not white centered. This latter point is generally considered a downside to these literary works and one of the reasons why they have been disregarded. In this thesis we aim to content the opposite: that African American (auto)biographies' invisibility is a symptom of a series of fictions/constructions, that have been elaborated by white people regarding black subjects. Regarding this, even though the social categories of race, class, and gender mark some of the complexities of African American narratives, they also need to be studied in relation to religion and region[2]. These categories are essential for they unmask the ideological construction of an "authentic racial blackness" that misconstrues the plurality of nineteenth century life narratives, as Carla Peterson has argued in her *"Doers of the Word" African-American Women Speakers & Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (4). The fact that Truth's and Lee's experiences take place in the Northeast states of the United States of America is a key element that breaks with the stereotypical visions of these narratives, since Southern states were classified as holders of a true account of slavery and therefore of black people. Jarena Lee was born free on February 11th, 1783 at Cape May, state of New Jersey and Sojourner Truth was born from enslaved parents around 1797 in Ulster County, New York. In light of this, this thesis will evaluate how religion, along with race and gender, provides different approaches to these (auto)biographical literary constructions.

[2] However, tt is not the aim of this thesis to investigate the aspects concerning region.

Emerging initially in 1760, black (auto)biography promoted abolitionist ideas through the direct accounts of slavery[3]. Truth and Lee's (auto)biographies are among the first literary works produced by black people in the nineteenth century, along with other prominent authors, such as the poets Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley; and the autobiographers Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, Maria Stewart, and Harriet Jacobs. Lee's work was first released in 1836, but it was extended by the author and republished in 1849. Regarding Truth's narrative, it was dictated by Truth to Olive Gilbert and it was first printed in 1850 – with editions being published until 1883. Within the sphere of female published (auto)biographies, Jacobs's work is the most scholarly addressed, whereas Truth's speeches and not her (auto)biography have given her a status of fame as well as a lot of scholarly comments as well[4]. Jarena Lee, on the other hand, is less studied and less known due to the confusion about her whereabouts after 1860[5]. These men and women pervaded the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by writing their predicaments and horrors into narratives that have had a cogent address towards their audiences. Their publications, as well as some other six thousand who have had their life narratives penned (Olney, "I Was Born" 46), have displayed the trajectories from the physical bondage, which kept them as chattels, to the awakening that would culminate in their freedom. These (auto)biographers had an important role in the process of convincing and arguing for African American racial, gender, and social equality in society.

The study of autobiographies is a fertile ground since it "offers a privileged access to an experience" (Olney, *Autobiography* 13). This access, however, must be considered within

[3] According to William Andrews (32), 1760 was the publishing year of the first African American autobiography: *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro man, - Servant to General Winslow of Marshfield, in New-England*, by Briton Hammon.

[4] Nell Irvin Painter (3) considers her "one of the two most famous African American women of the nineteenth century", the other famous woman for her is Harriet Tubman. In 2009 Sojourner Truth became the first African-American woman to be represented in the White House: http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2009/04/sojourner-truth-becomes-first-femalebust-installed-in-us-capitol-with-help-from-first-lady-michelle.html

[5] As exposed by Frederick Knight (2017) in "The Many Names for Jarena Lee."

the historical context of Truth and Lee, when black subjects were discredited and had to prove their integrity through certificates of character - commonly found in slave narratives and written by white people who could attest the veracity of the written material, and therefore have the reader trust the narratives. Sojourner Truth's (auto)biography, for example, has some of these certificates at the end of her 1850's version - among the authors of these endorsements are her former enslaver John Dumont and the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. In this way, if the veracity of the stories was highly regarded by the white readers who were at first skeptical about the texts due to the stereotyped notion of slaves as liars and intellectually inferior, the authors' main objective was to gain the readers' trust. Hence, to persuade the reader, African American (auto)biographers made use of strategies that would equalize the claim for truthfulness and the need for their self-preservation, stressing its distinctiveness as a literary subgenre.

Such a discredited position would influence how the African American (auto)biographical tradition, pervaded by power relations, recorded in a number of narratives the detailing processes of physical and spiritual freedom of enslaved people. These reports were first addressed to white readers, whose presence, as an authentic witness to their experiences, was intended to validate them (Andrews 33). So although it is possible to understand (auto)biography as "the simplest of literary enterprises and the commonest" as well as the "most elusive," as James Olney presents it (*Autobiography* 3), the class issue also manifests itself in the writing and publishing process of an (auto)biography, as Philippe Lejeune (2014) indicates that lower classes did not have the habit of expressing themselves through writing. Accordingly, this reinforces questions relating to the enslaved productions with the presence and power of white subjects in the process of writing, editing, publishing, and reception. Nell Irvin Painter's analysis of the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* points to such issues, as the writing, editing, and publishing processes were performed by white women,

especially Olive Gilbert (the amanuensis) and Frances Titus.[6] The discrediting of (auto)biographies of black subjects in the United States in the nineteenth century extended from the distrust of their authorship to the rejection of their capacity to be human and reinforces the stigmatization of slavery. Consequently, to pose a question such as "what does it matter who is speaking?" for this context as an analytical approach exposes and contrasts the blurred image white people painted of black people, for it asserts that these lives - and those who wrote and published life narratives – matter[7]. The author-function in ex-slave narratives leads to the resistance movement of being read, heard, and regarded as equals, unveiling the inequality and inferiority with which these reports and traumas were received. One example is William Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story* (1988), who exposes this discrepancy in trust between enslaved and white-written (auto)biographies: "As a class, no group of American autobiographers has been received with more skepticism and resistance than the ex-slave." (3). Therefore, the processes of publishing an (auto)biography is pervaded by class and racial issues present since the intention of writing her or his life.

In relation to gender, the search for an essentialist understanding of black subjects strengthens misconceptions, showing black people illogically only as men. The position of black women in society has been one of different status, for they were seen as the "outsiders within," according to Patricia Hill Collins (2014) and also of being mules of the world, as character Nanny tells Janie Crawford in 1937 book *Their Eyes were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. At first glance, they were seen as inferior according to the hegemonic standards held by white men and women, and yet were placed inside white houses as maids and servants, raising white people's children, offering "guidance to their employers, and frequently, became honorary members of their white 'families'"(Collins 14). Furthermore,

[6] Frances Titus edited the versions of the 1870s and 1880s (Painter 243).
[7] Such question was pointed by Michel Foucault in his lecture "What is an author?" (101).

African American women suffered double discrimination, for they were undervalued both as women and as black people: “among the blacks are women; among women there are blacks” (Painter 4). One reading of Sojourner Truth’s 1863 speech transcription enhances such discrimination as Frances Gage stresses in the repeated question: “Ain’t I A Woman?” (Jo 103–05). “Ain’t I a Woman?” or “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” is the name of the most famous speech spoken in 1851 at a women’s rights convention in Akron, Ohio. The repetitiveness of the question/title challenges the place of black women in society. However, another reading of this speech is possible, as presented by Katrine Smiet (2015), who conveys that if in a secular approach, the speech addresses gender and its exclusion according to race, religion can also be considered an axis of analysis, for religiosity inspired as well as provided women with the tools “to fight against injustices” in their lives through their preaching (12). It can be said, then, that both women symbolize the encounter between race, class, gender, and religion, and therefore, an intersectional approach focused on religion towards these (auto)biographies is necessary as a means to underline the different methods and strategies used by them to confront hegemonic discourses, for it was through religion that these women found ways to partially free themselves from class, gender, and racial oppressions.

Since its beginning, the (auto)biographical tradition of nineteenth-century African Americans has represented resistance to forms of silencing and oppression. With this, the enslaved person was the only one who could do justice to herself/himself, but she/he should do so in a way that would convince her/his white reader of the sincerity of the account and her/his ability to write it. Thus, having been classified as inferior and incapable by white subjects, the black author positioned herself/himself as the true author of the narrative and used her/his published account as the confirmation of her/his moral, spiritual, and intellectual equality under white people’s eyes, as presented by William Andrews: “the writing of autobiography became an attempt to open an intercourse with the white world” (17). Given

the impossibility of establishing an equal relationship with white subjects, black autobiographers saw the need to "invent devices and strategies to give their stories the appearance of authenticity" (Andrews 2). The hostility in the reception of their publications was a shadow that delimited the writing strategies, which sought to balance the relationship between reality and the fiction by selecting events in such a way so as not to provoke too much astonishment nor to undermine their lives as enslaved. African American (auto)biographies represent, then, the beginning of speaking and listening - even though these publications have been skewed due to white interference and the prevailing - and controversial - assumption that "a black narrator needs a white reader to complete [her/]his text " (Andrews 33). Such interventions highlight the power structures pervading these narratives but, at the same time, the hybridity of the resisting movements created by African American writers, whose ability to deal with white oppression forged a historical and literary identity.

In terms of *status quaestionis*, the critical fortune regarding both women has been developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. This is especially true concerning Sojourner Truth's life, narrative, and speeches. The historian Nell Irvin Painter stands out as her biographer and a researcher of these three mentioned aspects. In *Sojourner Truth, A Life, A Symbol* (1996), Painter not only deals with the lack of documents, archive, and a direct account of Truth, performing what she called "piecing" (38), but she also draws on Sojourner Truth's symbolism constructed around her image. This was further explored in Katrine Smiet's article "Post/secular truths: Sojourner Truth and the intersections of gender, race, and religion," in which she portrays three possible readings of Truth's famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman?": the secular reading of most black feminists; the religious reading of theologians; and the deconstructive reading of Donna Haraway in "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman,

and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape". Academic studies regarding Sojourner Truth's life and symbolism were developed at first to reaffirm her political role as the first black woman of the antebellum United States to address her intersectional status against the agenda of women's rights. Her political participation was further commented on by Imani Perry in the introduction to Barnes and Noble's edition of the *Narrative*, in which she indicated that Truth's ability transcended the "role white society accorded her" derived from her personal resemblance to the "majority of enslaved people" as a laborer, illiterate, female, and dark-skinned. This transcendence would culminate in her iconographic and symbolic image, produced by her photographs and the *carte-de-visite* she sold for financial self-sufficiency (Perry XXXV). Other sources of this distinctiveness and symbolism are found in Harriet Beecher Stowe's controversial article[8] "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sibyl" published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863, and in the "Book of Life" added by Frances Titus in the 1975 version of the *Narrative*. The latter consists of a collection of newspaper clippings and articles about Truth, correspondences, and signatures from prominent abolitionists, reformers, and suffragists.

Other academic commentaries of Truth stressed her religious involvement as a means to reflect on the "complicated (historical) relationship of the religious and the secular within feminist scholarship" (Smiet 7). Carla Peterson, in her *'Doers of the word' Theorizing African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the Antebellum North*, shows how black women's religious development intersected social and political actions. Peterson believes that Truth's literary expression "employed Africanisms, folk proverbs and sayings, and African-American idioms in her lectures, creating what dominant culture regarded as a quaint

[8] In her article, Stowe depicts Truth and her grandson, James Caldwell, as African "specimen", and even states that Truth is from the African continent. The many mistakes present in the text cannot be surpassed, however, by Stowe's belief that Truth had already passed away. Painter's analysis of the article reinforces that the accuracy of the narrative is sometimes eluded, but in spite of it, Stowe's fame helped Truth's story to reach a wide audience, turning Truth into a celebrity: "from a little-noted evangelist and reformer, she became a celebrity; her presence, of itself, was now news" (163).

idiosyncratic speech" (22). The use of such literary devices connects Truth's words to ancestry and orality, as a subversive action towards the dominant culture and logic. The relation to family history is further examined in Margaret Washington's introduction to the 1993 publication of the *Narrative*. Washington indicates family and a belief system as "two primary institutional components of community and culture" (XXII). From this, she calls attention to the New York slave family's difficulties due to their "forced separation, forced matings, frequent sales and loss of control over children's instruction" since "masters did not treat slaves as if they formed family units" (XXIII). Such disregard is described in Truth's *Narrative*, as the story of her family corroborates the assumption. Understanding Truth's mother, "Mau-Mau Bett," as "the preserver of family bonds," shed light on her resisting attitudes explored by Washington and described in the *Narrative* with a closer approach to her religiosity (Gilbert and Truth 12). These aspects stressed by these authors reflect the complexities and difficulties of studying Truth not only as an icon but also as a subject.

Regarding Jarena Lee's state of the critical material, on the other hand, she has had less scholarly attention and is considered to be a "marginalized writer" within black women (auto)biographers. According to William Andrews's *Sisters of the Spirit* (1986), "Jarena Lee, at the age of forty-four, traveled 2,325 miles and delivered 178 sermons. Much of that distance she covered on foot, the rest by wagon, ferryboat, and carriage" (Andrews et al. ix). The physical and spiritual exercise to deliver sermons, exhort, and preach, conforming to her role in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, has defined her as a pioneer. Her spiritual narrative has been commented on by Susan Houchins's *Spiritual Narratives* (1988) as containing an orality which singularizes her work as one extension of her vocation to "preach, teach, pray publicly, and testify" (xxx). Lee's writing was also studied as "a religious ritual" and as one presenting "some of the earliest documentation of women's participation in organized religious life in the United States," as stated by Maxine Sample in

her chapter about Jarena Lee (233). Even though these scholars have emphasized her religious and written works as opening up spaces for black women through writing and preaching, her role has not attracted as much attention as Truth's. One hypothesis for this difference is the inseparable aspect religion plays in Lee's defense of female's rights[9]. In this manner, religion cannot be detached from Jarena Lee's acts as much as it has been from Sojourner Truth's, and yet, it should not be examined separately either.

An intersection of religion and politics strengthens these women's acts as resistance and nurtures their symbolism in nineteenth-century African American history. If the political side of Truth and Lee has been highlighted by women such as by Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* (1983) and Djamila Ribeiro *O que é lugar de fala?* (2017), a converging approach to religion has been presented by Joy Bostic, who draws from Alton Pollard's *Mysticism and Social Change* (1992) the concept of mystical activism. In Bostic's *African American Female Mysticism: Nineteenth Century Religious Activism*, she studies the flexibility of Truth and Lee's religious practices "despite their stated commitments to a particular religious tradition" (xv). Therefore, religion stands as an important aspect of these women's private and public roles in society, reverberating in the symbolism drawn from their actions and speeches.

By being religious (auto)biographies, more than only "simple" (auto)biographies, the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) and *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849) represent how African Americans' religiosity becomes a way to approach and reverberate in black people's perspectives. Truth's and Lee's narratives have a religious emphasis that granted their authors a trustworthy status and proved they "qualified as the moral, spiritual, or intellectual peers of whites" (Andrews 2–3). Since both were born in the Northeastern states — Jarena Lee was born on February 11th in 1783 in New Jersey, and

[9] The use of female here is made to contrast with the popular women's rights movement.

Sojourner Truth (Isabella Baumfree) was born a slave around 1797 in the state of New York — their religious awareness was not as controlled as it would have been in the Southern states where, as Albert Raboteau says, "planters became less indifferent about their own religious involvement and, potentially, about that of their slaves" (132). Such spiritual narratives, texts that give emphasis to the works of the Spirit and to the closeness of their experience with Jesus, as named by Susan Houchins, had an important role in the political events preceding the abolition of slavery in the United States since they advocated for the brotherhood and sisterhood among all human beings, attesting for the equality of spirit of black and white people.

Both women lived through a revivalist time called the Second Great Awakening, which was a "wave of democratic enthusiasm and evangelical fervor" that occurred in the late eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth century (Bostic 15). This revival of Christian spiritualism had a profound effect on black people, for it represented "the dawning of a new day" for slaves. Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists were particularly involved and benefited from this revival, as they "did not insist on a well-educated clergy", they gathered many slaves who had "a converted heart and a gifted tongue," and it was "more important than the amount of theological training received" (Raboteau 133). Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee became Methodists during this period, and they expressed their religious enthusiasm strongly for the rest of their lives. Both were preachers and were considered to have a "gifted tongue." Jarena Lee, for example, was the first woman allowed to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; however, her request was not granted at first, for AME's founder, Richard Allen, pointed to "the church bylaws that made no provision for women preachers" (Knight 59). As for Sojourner Truth, her speeches were published in newspapers of the time, and she was welcomed to many houses and churches to preach and sell the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth (1850)*. Their religious lives and dedication bore fruit

during their lifetimes, especially for Truth. Whereas Lee lived her last years in a precarious way, for "she worked as a washerwoman but, tragically, also had to resort to 'begging'" (Knight 68), Truth, by contrast, was able to buy a house of her own and spend her last years in Battle Creek, Michigan.

In light of this, it is possible to state that their works invite an intersectional approach. Thence, we would like to explain the organization of this thesis for the following chapters will be divided according to the elements which characterize these narratives ((auto)biography, gender and race, and religion), but will interact with one another occasionally. The quotes from the books in the chapters' titles were selected in accordance with the theme of each chapter, as were the short extracts that follows the chapter's titles. These short citations also furnish illustrative examples on how the beforementioned elements here approached are in consonance with the target of this thesis: to locate the constructed nature of the ideological structures that characterize African American Female Religious (Auto)biographies and their authors as marginalized. And beyond that, to exemplify the questioning here proposed expounding the ways Truth and Lee have created to inscribe themselves in these structures by broadening and questioning the fictive narratives on race and gender through religious discourse.

The first, entitled "'Talk to us, old woman. Tell us your experience': the composition of (auto)biographies" addresses the theoretical map around the concept and elements of (auto)biography. By doing so some of its characteristics are stressed, when compared to what is understood as "slave narratives." The place of African American (auto)biographies emphasizes the ideological and discursive strategies to render these works as invisible or marginalized. As the title expresses, the telling of an experience is made through some processes involving power, memory, fiction, and orality. Thus, from a broader and flexible

vision of (auto)biography, we discuss the elements transgressing and distorting the rigid concepts. The exemplification of these transgressions in Lee's and Truth's books are based on the questioning of binary standards: individual vs. collective, regarding Lee; for Truth we exhibit a discussion concerning the orality and collaborative writing and narrative construction.

In the second chapter, "'I told them it was my business to preach': the socio-political aspects of black women preachers", we focus on the discussions around gender and race. We first draw from a historical perspective to shed light on the early literary enterprises by women in the English language. What we learn is that not only were these first writings embedded in religious discourse, but they were also transgressive. The medieval and modern examples given are central to analyze the place assigned to women. However, this does not encompass racial perspectives, and so we introduce the fictionality of race according to the hegemonic discourses of the modern period. The emergence of the concept of black derives from an individualism which, even though fomenting resistance movements from black subjects against the Subjects[10], it was consciously perpetrated in order to oppress and dehumanize the Others. A psychoanalytical approach becomes necessary here as the place of black women in society derives from an intersection of oppressions regarding gender as well as race. Truth and Lee's experiences as black women in their period suggest a series of trials which were creatively faced by them through their commitment to preaching as a business. Hence, the name of this chapter points to their struggles in society as black women. We address their relation to childhood, parents and siblings, marriage, motherhood, and their relationship to God. This analysis understands that their lives and perspectives in their (auto)biographies diverge from the common view on the private and public division.

[10] The use of capital letters to refer to the words Subject and Others stems from a psychoanalytical perspective of the subjects and the power relations. While the Subject is a white man, the Other refers to white women and black subjects, mainly black women.

Thence, in the third and last chapter, "'I felt as if I had three hearts': confluences between religion, gender and race," gathers the discussions previously discussed and evaluates their relation to the religious sphere. Such movement then gathers (auto)biographies, gender and race, and religion as the three main parts of this thesis. In this chapter the ideological construction of race is once more unveiled, as religious discourses were central to the maintenance of slavery and oppression. Here we also revisit the gendered and racial discussions to argue for the ambiguous place of black women in the church community. We suggest that the role of religion in Lee and Truth's lives, according to the revivalist experience, has provided the potential to resist and expand the possibilities for black women. The latency of their religious roles and rhetorical capacities maximizes their narratives as the manifestation of the authority provided by God, which in turn had effects upon abolitionist and women's rights movements.

CHAPTER ONE

"Talk to us, old woman. Tell us your experience": the composition of (auto)biographies

"As she commenced to sing, the young men made a rush towards her, and she was immediately encircled by a dense body of the rioters, many of them armed with sticks or clubs as their weapons of defence, if not of attack. As the circle narrowed around her, she ceased singing, and after a short pause, inquired, in a gentle but firm tone, 'Why do you come about me with clubs and sticks? I am not doing harm to any one.' 'We ar'n't a going to hurt you, old woman; we came to hear you sing,' cried many voices, simultaneously. 'Sing to us, old woman,' cries one. 'Talk to us, old woman,' says another. 'Pray, old woman,' says a third. 'Tell us your experience,' says a fourth." (Gilbert and Truth 80)

1.1 The autobiographical map – its indispensability and imperfections

What is an autobiography? Such an intricate question cannot be easily answered. The aspects involved in life history have many shades and perspectives. To draw an autobiographical map is an endeavor full of twists and curious ways. The definitions of autobiography produced have varied from rigid to flexible, and what they have stressed is the curious and complex meanings life narratives convey – to both readers and researchers. The autobiographical canon can be somewhat restrictive and reinforcing concerning its limits, boundaries, and scope. The idea of a contract or a pact evokes flaws that fall short of encompassing the wideness of the autobiographical goal. Life and its fictionality are challenged by conceptions of reality that set excluding obstacles to those who venture into the autobiographical enterprise. Fiction and history are placed as hard oppositions that can neither talk nor mingle with one another. However blurred are the lines dividing it, or at least limiting these realms, we must regard these limits closer in order to grasp the not-so-impermeable autobiographical territory.

Then, to answer "what is an autobiography?" elicits elements that have been thoroughly commented on and discussed across the years and from different perspectives. Renowned authors have established autobiographical pacts, contracts, spaces, and moments, comprehending the literary genre in a more or less rigid form. In light of this, we will first briefly expose these theoretical efforts in the hope that they provide a wide and encompassing understanding of the vast biographical territory. By doing so, we will go through the elements that produce and compose (auto)biographies, such as fiction, history, and authorship. These factors can be central to a written work whose main goal is to tell about someone's own life. Hence, it must be noted here that the use of the word *auto* between parenthesis is highlighting and questioning the rigidity of this element. At the same time, it marks and conveys an inquisitive (often negative) view of the self that writes the work; it also highlights and amplifies (positively) that it is the *I* who communicates. Therefore, there is a need to read attentively to what is being said. This latter movement will be significant to the second part of this chapter as it explores the peculiarities of two African American (auto)biographies and their transgressions to the hegemonic concept and its limits. The (auto)biographies of Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee are examples of transgressions that aim at stretching and making flexible what those rigid boundaries have hitherto marked and constricted. This chapter aims at exploring these limits as well as exemplifying the transgressions performed by Truth and Lee.

Definitions and differences

Disagreement around the concept of autobiographies is part of the critical literature, and this opens ground for transformations and flexibilities within academic discussions and autobiographical enterprises as well. How rigid or flexible are the elements that must be present in a text in order to make it an (auto)biography? What elements should be absent? Who can and cannot write it? Who is the I that speaks? If we are to answer these inquiries,

we should start from the basic view: what we know as an (auto)biography is a construct. As obvious as it seems, this is nonetheless important to be pointed, seen that it is this factor that determines which works are able to be under its umbrella.

Drawing from structuralist and post-structuralist views, autobiographies provide ground for many reflections. While Philippe Lejeune is famous for his autobiographical *pact:* "a relationship of identity between the *author*, *narrator* and *character*" (18) and reading *contract: "*the autobiographical genre is a contractual one" (53); James Olney will argue for an autobiographical *act:* "autobiography is a self-reflexive, a self-critical act" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 25); whereas Leonor Arfuch approaches the genre as a biographical *space* "understood as the confluence of multiple forms, genres, and horizons of expectations" (*O espaço biográfico* 58), and Paul De Man breaks with the general understanding by advocating for a tropological reading of autobiographies, one that sets an autobiographical *moment* rather than a genre: "The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution" (70). These views comprehend some of the rich discussions that have influenced this research.

Alongside these considerations upon the concept of autobiography, there are debates around components of autobiography as the effects of the *name* for autobiographies or written works in general. The most prominent authors with regard to the function of names are Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. While Bourdieu tackles the name concerning its relation to biography, Foucault addresses it in contemplation of power structures that direct and determine the effects of the author's name upon a text. The idea of an autobiographical moment, as exposed by De Man meets with Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the flaws around the (auto)biographical contract that is - literally - signed through the author's proper

name. Bourdieu's discussion in "The Biographical Illusion" (1986), for instance, can be linked to Michel Foucault's notion of authorship, or as he called it: author-function.

Debates that surround autobiographies, as well as biographies, - along with journals, diaries, and letters - are indeed instigating, for these texts belong to a group of writing that interrelates public and private spheres. Both types of writing (biography and (auto)biography) evoke an individual aspect that has not been valued equally. As Virginia Woolf has argued, "[t]he novelist is free; the biographer is tied" ("The Art of Biography" 151). Thence to the English author a biographer is not an artist, but a craftsman whose work is "something betwixt and between" the work of art (156). Biographies, then, had as function the exposure of exemplary men's history, along with "their nature, their sayings and customs" (Burke 91)[11]. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that biography is as complex and provocative as an (auto)biography because there is fiction in a biography as much as in the (auto)biographical enterprise, seen that the writers of those are tied to facts that pass through what Wolfgang Iser called the *fictionalizing acts*: selection, combination, and self-disclosure. According to Iser "selection results in intentionality; combination results in relatedness; and self-disclosure leads to what we have called bracketing" (20), meaning that the third act exposes the fictionality of the fiction that was set up by the two previous acts (selection and combination) and thus transgressed the represented world.

Such fictionalizing acts may illude us to think, at first, that impersonality in the writing of a biography makes it seem more trustworthy than an (auto)biography since this latter has the prefix *auto* as a heavy signifier which blurs any intention of presenting itself as true referential writing and highlights the necessary fictionality of representing one's own life. In fact, to be the author of a work about one's own life draws enough suspicion to the three roots that compound the word: *auto*, *bio*, and *graphy*, as we will briefly expose in this

[11] All the quotations from Portuguese and Spanish sources have been translated by me.

chapter. Even though this literary genre has been produced for centuries, the polemic around critical materials regarding autobiography has blossomed somewhat recently. James Olney indicates that, in the latter part of the 20th century, it has become a source of academic and public interest. However, the definitions of autobiography excluded a great number of works that do not fill in the categories described by literary critics. Such exclusion affects a great number of productions from African American authors in the nineteenth century, when it became the most prominent literary genre in this community. Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee are authors whose literary works have been devalued since their works focused on religious aspects and, in the case of Truth, had an amanuensis, transgressing the most rigid definitions of autobiography. As African American (auto)biographies became the means of communicating and exposing the violence and oppression, they began to be discredited and rendered not objective enough, according to the American aesthetic standards of the time, that demanded the black narrator to objectify him/herself and passivize her/his voice in order to be accepted.

In light of this, to write an autobiography there is a set of prerequisites that one needs to fulfill, containing so many complexities which are generally taken for granted. Considering the three roots of the word autobiography, it is possible to suggest that (1) there are expectations around the *life* that will be the basis of the text, (2) for one needs to *write* it according to aesthetic demands of the time so it will be read and found compelling to its cause, and (3) the self that lies in its core needs to balance her/his presence in the narrative, for "speaking too revealingly of the individual self, particularly if this did not correspond to white notions of the facts of black experience or the nature of the Negro, risked alienating white sponsors and readers, too" (Andrews 6). Pinpointing these general arguments challenges the common place we read and put (auto)biographies, which can be defined in different ways. It can be characterized as, according to Olney, "both the simplest of literary

enterprises and the commonest" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 3) or, as famously put by Lejeune, "a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality" (Lejeune 14) or yet, as written by Jean Starobinski, as "a biography of a person written by himself" (73). However we define it, the conditions for an autobiography "appear" as somewhat rigid: it is *simple* because the author is writing about his/her own life; it is *common* because every living person could write about his/her life. According to these definitions, we might be led to think that the order of events is also rigid, as they must be "a retrospective account," and regarding the style, they must be written in prose. Questioning these definitions uncovers a formalization of the exclusion effected through the outlining of (auto)biographies made by theoreticians and scholars.

For Olney, the autobiographical enterprise bears "no restraints, no necessary models, no obligatory observances" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 3). This is interesting as it confronts other strong preconceptions about what autobiographies are and how they should be regarding their form, as Olney has uncovered regarding "slave narratives". Lejeune's rigid definition of autobiography is highly criticized, even though his collaboration to the literary criticism around autobiography is beyond measurement. De Man, for instance, calls Lejeune's autobiographical pact a stubborn insistence, for it "does not seem to be founded in argument or evidence—that the identity of autobiography is not only representational and cognitive but contractual, grounded not in tropes but in speech acts." (De Man 71). In an opposite direction, Olney states that there are no rules for the writer and neither for the reader or the critic. The trustiness of the work for Lejeune is established in the pact the writer makes with the reader, his identity as the author, narrator, and character of the work. Lejeune's position is that of someone who wants to value autobiography, "the Cinderella of literature, without causing jealousy in the novel, the king genre." (126). What

the author seeks when defining the autobiography with such 'sharpness' is “of taking it seriously, of respecting it, of valuing it, of recognizing in it a territory of writing” and not placing it “outside the sacred field of creation” along with the “uninteresting servitudes of everyday life like paying taxes or brushing teeth.” (126). There is for Lejeune a clear disinterest in the genre, and this is what bothers him so much – especially those who take advantage of the pact without actually doing it, and those writers who “frequent this area, precisely because they always bump into autobiography, are the ones who most violently belittle and disown it: above all, let no one think they practice it!" (126–27). In his urge to protect autobiography Lejeune constructed a quite rigid view upon (auto)biography, one that considered specific categories to delimit the genre, as form of language; topic approached; author’s situation; and narrator’s position. He, however, has sought ways to expand his rigid definition after the first publication of *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975) by some revisions on his views in a second autobiographical pact in *Moi Aussi* (1986) and the culmination of a complete revisit to his pact, twenty-five years after it was published, in *Signes de Vie* (2005). Nevertheless, as early as 1980 in *Je est un autre,* Lejeune already exhibited a receptiveness towards the idea of “*The Autobiography* of *Those Who Do Not Write”*[12], showing that even rigid categories can be made flexible, as we are trying to investigate in this thesis.

Both Olney and De Man depict autobiography as more fluid and address the paradoxes and blurriness that permeate the autobiographical quest. Olney avoids defining autobiography, but he describes it as

> a recollective/narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in his life -the present-, looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how that past history has led to this present state of being. Exercising memory,

[12] This is the translated title of a chapter of his book *Je est un autre: l'autobiographie de la littérature aux medias* (1980), which was translated to Portuguese by Jovita Noronha and Maria Inês Guedes.

> in order that he may recollect and narrate, the autobiographer is not a neutral and passive recorder but rather a creative and active shaper. Recollection, or memory, in this way a most creative faculty, goes backward so that narrative, its twin and counterpart, may go forward: memory and narration move along the same line only in reverse directions. (Olney, "I Was Born" 47)

His take on the constructedness of the recollection approximate him to a more flexible understanding of (auto)biography. Notwithstanding this vision, his comprehension does not encompass slaves' narratives, for he argues that slavery narratives do not draw from memory as standard (auto)biographies. Olney defines slave narratives as

> a non-memorial description fitted to a preformed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there-virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances, and authentications-that carry over from narrative to narrative and give to them as a group the species character that we designate by the phrase "slave narrative". ("I Was Born" 49)

The black narrator's task to portray "slavery as it is" entangles the construction of slave narratives in a way that "the ex-slave narrator is debarred from the use of a memory that would make anything of his narrative beyond or other than the purely, merely episodic, and he is denied access, by the very nature and intent of his venture, to the configurational dimension of narrative" (Olney, "I Was Born" 48). The limits imposed by the white reader to the ex-slave narrator, replicated (in some measure) in Olney's text, does not encompass all definitions of slave narrative. Ashraf Rushdy, while discussing neo-slave narratives, approaches the characteristics of slave narratives in accordance to the social aspects of nineteenth century society, however, his vision narrows these works to autobiographies when he argues, using William Andrews, that "some slave narrators used a 'mode of autobiographical discourse that subtly reoriented a readers response'" (Rushdy, *Neo-Slave*

Narratives 119). The difference between slave narratives and (auto)biographies, can be stated first in relation to the self that writes, for slave narratives sought to "make the slave narrator an eyewitness, not an I-witness."(Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives* 119), while (auto)biographies inscribed the narrator as a subject whose point-of-view was present. Secondly, the labeling of a work as a slave narrative can limit the ways we value and evaluate the text, because we confine the author in the enslaved position, and furthermore, it isolates such works to a literary group that "lacks" originality or subjectivity, as Olney exposed. Thus, the sole designation of a work as slave narrative, reproduces segregation and marginalization to these literary works, for they are stigmatized as literary inferior and their authors are once more misrepresented as only slaves, and not subjects. Taking these arguments in consideration, a post-structuralist vision of (auto)biography enlarges the interpretative scopes works authored by black people can be read. For Paul De Man:

> [a]utobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. (De Man 70).

The definitions here exposed the question of fictionality, which is less developed in Lejeune and Olney than in De Man, who more openly inquires upon the highly problematic approaches to autobiographies. By arguing for a tropological reading of (auto)biography, De Man elicits prosopopoeia as the figure of speech that faces and defaces the autobiographical elements as life and the name of the author. The illusion of referentiality takes place due to the employment of metaphorical and metonymic structures that make a mimetic effect possible (Amaral 345–46). So for De Man, "the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable." (De Man 70). Accordingly, as the (auto)biographical critical tradition has considerably criticized and

addressed Lejeune's conception as restrictive, many movements to intentionally distort its limits have also appeared. Some examples of biographical forms that play with these boundaries are Roland Barthes' biographemes[13]: mobile particles that "might go beyond any fate and come to touch, like Epicurean atoms, some future body, destined to the same dispersion" (Barthes 9); and Serge Doubrovsky's autofiction: a curious and peculiar name and type of text, is an intersection between a novel and an autobiography, it has no intention of separating the truth from the lie, as there are no boundaries for its fictionality – which make it closer to the fictitious. These enterprises are examples of the shifts in perception – throughout time – of experiences of life, of the written initiative, and also of the person whose life is being exposed.

A contemporary vision of autobiography

Leonor Arfuch, a contemporary Argentinian scholar, brings forth an interdisciplinary approach to autobiography, and this is also the goal of this thesis: to show how, as a literary genre, it is imbued with sociological and historical approaches to the academic discussion. She expresses the multiple historical articulations between narratives of the self and a collective realm, promoting a dialectic relation, one that "'makes present what is absent' as a disconcerting reflection of Maurice Halbwachs (1992) in formulating his concept of 'collective memory': although there are experiences shared by a community, only individuals, people, remember" [14] (Arfuch, "(Auto)biografía, Memoria e Historia" 72). In the case of Truth and Lee, this approach enriches their texts by making evident some "layers" of meaning that were constructed for and by them (hence their transgressions to the "social" labels)—being women, black, and religious highlight different analyses that provide the interconnection between literature, history, and sociology.

[13] Barthes's biographemes have been studied and even used, but not thoroughly theorized by him.
[14] All quotes from Arfuch have been translated either from Spanish or Portuguese.

Arfuch's "biographical space" offers a broader and more contemporary approach to the expression and representativeness of a life. It pluralizes the methods and strategies of speaking articulation. Arfuch affirms, in relation to the biographical space: "a horizon of intelligibility to analyze what I read as a symptom: that cultural, media and even political turmoil that characterizes our present" is transforming "the person and his[/her] peculiar circumstance, his[/her] emotions and experiences, what happens in the becoming of a 'real life' or in the various inventions of the 'I,' a privileged narrative that often blurs and infringes the limits of the genders." (70). The limits of the Argentinian biographical space are fluid, for according to her, its outline is "open and imprecise", and, in its expansion, it has made use of the various technological sources to both mimic and contradict their literary predecessors or even some autobiography theorists, as we have exposed previously. This blur is precisely what we believe to be the main rupture with the labels that exclude autobiographies such as Truth's and Lee's from the African American (auto)biographical canon, or simply from the (auto)biographical canon at large.

Furthermore, the scope of the biographical space provides an alteration of "the thresholds between the public, the private and the intimate, and that account, beyond the specific analysis of their genres, of a true reconfiguration of contemporary subjectivity" (70). The identity concern in Arfuch's text derives from Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concept of heteroglossia, at work as a "fabulism of life," was encompassed by the Argentinian author as she argued for a "dialogic, triadic or polyphonic" construction of the (auto)biographical accounts in the world, strengthening the individual and social relevance of memories and their sociohistorical dimension. In this way, Arfuch's biographical space does not denote a heavy link between the *author* and the *narrator* or even to the "sameness" expressed by the proper name. Thus, the biographical space conveys knowledge and recognition to value

sociohistorical memories, especially of those which have been not only less documented but also silenced.

The silencing of voices, memories, and histories is a central form of oppression, both now and before. The mask of speechlessness, as portrayed in Grada Kilomba's book *Plantation Memories*, exposes, in addition to the literal inability to speak, how it symbolically represents the inability of black people to communicate or expand on their views of who they are, how their lives have been, or what sort of identity they desire or can establish. The incapacity of black people to speak is met, necessarily, with white's ineptitude to listen and confirms whites' mistrust of black subjects' account of what happened, as well as whites' contempt for the latter's views. Taking these problems of speaking and listening into consideration, we approach Arfuch's biographical space as a lens through which we can grasp Truth's and Lee's narratives regarding their subjectivity and literariness in a plural and open way. By being attentive to the singularities of their writings, it is possible to move from beyond the fixed place set before and explore the myriad spaces within such works.

According to Arfuch, the autobiographical interest and dissemination in Western society is not so much a

> utopian search for authenticity, self-assertion and uniqueness in the face of the uniformity and anonymity of our societies, which motivates the growing academic interest in (auto)biographical studies; but it is also the enormous importance that this space has acquired in relation to the spheres of reason, knowledge, and recognition, in all its dimensions: theoretical, aesthetic, ethical and political. (Arfuch, "(Auto)biografía, Memoria e Historia" 70).

Through this argument, we analyze Truth and Lee's narratives as more than individual autobiographies, but rather as literary works with multiple dimensions and voices. They become representatives of a past that was made invisible and draw our attention to the

fluidity of spaces in our society, including gender roles and racial stereotypes, as we will bring to light in this thesis.

1.2 Complexities related to *auto* in African American (auto)biographies

Some of the definitions of (auto)biography persuade us to disregard literary works by subjects such as Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee and classify them only as narratives or biographies, or even as (ex-)slave narratives and not as (auto)biographies. The complexities that the prefix *auto* evokes, especially in the limits between fiction and non-fiction, are central to this analysis as we try to contemplate the subject that lies[15] behind the most "common" form of life narrative and why this element calls for the classification of works as (auto)biographical. As fictional (not fictitious[16]) works, African American (auto)biographies represent good sources of analysis for some of the exclusive elements that are presented in theoretical discussions.

An example concerning African American nineteenth-century narrative classification is the decision by William Andrews, an important researcher in the field, to only include works written in the first-person singular in his book *To Tell a Free Story*. His reasoning is based not on the integrity of the amanuensis/editor but "the linguistic, structural, and tonal integrity of the narratives they produced"(Andrews 20). To Andrews, Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* does not convey the necessary features to be called an autobiography:

> it would be naive to accord dictated oral narratives the same discursive status as autobiographies composed and written by the subject of the stories themselves. There

[15] Here we are making use of the verb "to lay," but the second meaning is also welcomed as (auto)biographies are ambiguously seen as deceitful narratives.

[16] There is a fundamental difference between fictional and fictitious works. Even if both comprehend the imaginary realm, the latter enhances the explicit falsehood and trickery, while the former is related to a literary creation that bears a connection with reality or facts.

> is much that we do not know about the circumstances in which these oral narratives were dictated, for instance. Obviously the work was done in the context of a power relationship that gave the supposed passive amanuensis ultimate control over the fate of the manuscript and considerable influence over the immediate future of the narrator. (Andrews 21)

Whereas to Jarena Lee's text, Andrews grants it the autobiographical "title." But if we are to strictly follow such definitions, Lee's text is closer to a journal (a daily record of news and events of a personal nature, or a diary) than to an (auto)biography. Such resemblance is not inconsistent as it is explicitly exposed in its title: *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*.

Andrews's argument is extremely valid. However, as we intend to expose in this thesis, (auto)biographies are indeed elaborated not only by the person who writes them but also by the social discourses and ideologies. Hence, some of these definition restrictions do not consider a broader context from which these autobiographies are drawn. In light of this gap between the restrictions and a possible broader context, if we regard such texts as non-fictional works, it should be noted that these (auto)biographies provide historical elements and accounts that would not be accessed in any other way due to the exclusion that we are trying to expose. It also provides room to question the literariness of historical/factual writings, as exposed by historians such as Hayden White[17], and additionally to the space of orality in our society. White places historiography in conjunction with literary writing, according to him historic narratives are similar to fictional narratives. White's vision meets Iser's when the imaginary is placed as an intermediary to historical writing: "the older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of

[17] White most known books are *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978) where he argued on the literary influences upon the historical writing.

the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable." (White 98). Since orality was the original method for the reproduction of history as well as the literary texts, orality has, since Plato's Classical Age, according to Jacques Le Goff (1996) been discredited with the belief that it distorts memory and reason, and memory should be solidified through writing in order to be perpetuated. Yet, such an idea of solidifying memory through writing does not make it less of a construction. In light of this, besides fictional narratives, factual texts also came to be indications of the constructedness of events through language, both written and spoken. Early African American (auto)biographies, then, express the merging of these elements, the oral and the written. Hence, on the ground that this genre was the gateway through which African American subjects entered literary discourse, we shall explore the elements that do not find space in a general and Western vision of (auto)biography and how these (auto)biographers inscribed themselves both in literature as well as in history.

Memory

Memory will be the first element analyzed for it is intricately connected, both socially and individually, to history and identity. Since forgetting and omitting are frequent occurrences in life, the trustworthiness of memories and recollections is continually questioned. History is constructed not only of what it remembers but also of what it forgets. In this way, different hues are seen in the role of memory. Connected to this aspect are the collective and individual effects it has. When discussing (auto)biography, we are led to think only of the individual memories, but that is not the case because our memories are shared with our community. According to the Austrian sociologist Michael Pollak, memory is comprised of four components. The first refers to an individual's experience of actual occurrences; the second refers to the experiences shared by the social groupings to which an

individual belongs. These experiences are included by the group and are not necessarily experienced by that individual; notwithstanding, owing to their significance, they are integrated into the group's imagination in such a manner that “it’s almost impossible to know whether one participated in it or not” (Pollak 201). This property demonstrates the permeability of memories, both individual and collective, as Maurice Halbwachs argues: “the individual memory, in order to corroborate and make precise and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, the collective memory.” (51–52). Another aspect of memory is related to the individuals and characters whose connections have been obscured by the bearer of memory, as exposed by the Austrian sociologist. Although the presence of some people in one's life is not tangible, they are nevertheless there. The last element is related to memory locations, which, as Pollak explains, may be related to specific memories associated with a particular period in time. These components, as described by the French sociologist, are readily illustrated by one's early recollections. As a result, memories are formed and acquired by the individual experiencing events, as well as by the experiences shared with him/her via the groups to which he/she belongs. In both spheres, however, there is a selectiveness inherent to memory, seeing that humans, and consequently history, cannot remember everything. Such selection can be made consciously and unconsciously, and this is experienced both individually and collectively. Memory, then, is a disputed object that denotes power struggles between classes, groups, and individuals. Furthermore, as the French historian Jacques Le Goff exposes in his book *History and Memory*, in a socio-historical approach, this selectiveness becomes arbitrary as manipulations and strategies are applied by those who entitle themselves as the “master[s] of memory and forgetfulness” (54). Hence, the “things forgotten or not mentioned” are products of these mechanisms of manipulation of the dominating groups. The exercise of this selective power has the potential to exclude or control the participation of Others in the so-called

"official history"[18], one that is set according to white people's narratives and rules, and it also influences how these others will portray themselves.

Some historians, such as White, believe that the literariness of historical documents connects memory, identity, and history. Recognizing that there is always an intervention in these processes, the historian's task becomes "an inescapable intermediation" (Pollak 8). Such movements, however, are made from and for the hegemonic Subject. In this way, the selected memories and historical portrayals that have constructed our conceptions of women and of black people have been done through sexist and racist lenses, according to ideological and discursive strategies. Identity constructions are derived from this system, and this makes the (auto)biographical enterprise even more questionable. Paul De Man's vision, then, sheds light on the biased composition of life narratives when he says that:

> [w]e assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (De Man 69).

This quote provides room to inquire about the representation of the *self* or of the *auto* that is produced or reproduced by its author and expected by those who read this type of work. Such production of (auto)biographies, when further examined regarding the I that speaks in (auto)biographies, contributes to the analysis of how definitions of *auto* exclude African Americans, and that it led these subjects to resourcefully depict their lives in a mediating movement that enhances the blurriness of the line that separates fact and fiction.

[18] This idea of official history is also present in discussions around *testimony* and *testimonio*, the latter being an extra official historical record, seeing that governmental institutions – generally from authoritative origins or influence – seeks to control historical records (Seligmann-Silva, ""Zeugnis e 'Testimonio'" 127).

The Subject and the subject

The commonplace vision of autobiography in Western societies stresses the relevance of the *auto*. For this reason, when we think of those who compose an autobiography, we are regarding people who perceive themselves and are also perceived as an individual self. Considering that the eighteenth century gave rise to literary productions that focused on everyday activities and common people, instead of the mythical and imaginary or divine characters, novels and diaries became common literary productions, along with biographies and (auto)biographies. In this way, the general visions of autobiography were associated with private and feminine spheres, and to the style of a confession or exposure of exemplary lives, because the intimate private sphere was given an autonomous shape "regarding family and economic activities connected to it [the intimate sphere], providing another type of relationship between people" (Arfuch, *O espaço biográfico* 45). From this, it is significant to ask: who is entitled to write an (auto)biography? In reference to those definitions previously exposed, an ideological vision of autobiographies unfolds. Such conception is important when considering the discursive elements laid upon statements depicting a narrative of one's life as simple, common, and that any 'real' person can look at his/her life retrospectively and stress "his individual life and especially the history of his personality" (Lejeune 14). Consequently, the ideological vision promoted by the definitions of (auto)biography is diffused by hegemonic discourses, and, for this reason, to name a work an (auto)biography evokes social and psychoanalytical interpretations.

The subject underlying the self, and the *auto*, are not to be taken for granted. In light of this, we might consider two subjects, a Subject with a capital S, which encompasses the hegemonic discourse and possesses a position in society that acknowledges not only his[19]

[19] The use of *his* is made on purpose as to highlight the male domination in the public and private spheres, providing this sex alone the hierarchical capacities to command and own the means to do so.

individuality but his integrity. The Subject is a white man. This becomes even more apparent when we think of the canonical autobiographies before the nineteenth century: Benjamin Franklin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Saint Augustine,[20] to name a few. The other autobiographical productions, however, stem from subjects who were placed as the Others of the Self/Subject, who do not enjoy the privileges of white people and therefore endanger their status. Throughout this thesis, we analyze the different contempt mechanisms constructed and performed by Subjects to establish the places and positions of the subjects or Others in society.

African Americans and females are examples of these identity categories that are arranged according to the Subject's idea of these Others. Pollak's definition of identity as the "self-image, for oneself and others" (5), consists of three major elements: physical unity, the boundaries of a body or of a group; continuity in time; and the feeling of coherence, that "the different elements forming an individual are effectively unified" (5). According to the Austrian sociologist, "the creation of an identity is a phenomenon that is produced in reference to others, in reference to the criteria of acceptability, admissibility, credibility, and through direct negotiation with others" (5). Grada Kilomba draws from these classifications to highlight how, if the woman is the Other of the white man, the black woman is the Other of the Other, corroborating with Zora Neale Hurston's metonymical exposure that "[d]e nigger woman is de mule uh de world" for when "de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks", therefore stating the inferiority of black women in relation to white and also black men (Hurston 186). From this, the African American subject's resistance

[20] Saint Augustine of Hippo's skin color is controversial, some images portray him with a darker skin tone and "[s]cholars generally agree Augustine and his family were Berbers, an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa, but were heavily Romanized, speaking only Latin at home as a matter of pride and dignity." (Hollingworth 50–51). However, he is included in this "list" of white subjects as his most common representation is with a fairly white skin tone.

permeated the literary productions because his/her own identity had to be defended through rhetorical discourse. In their autobiographies, black subjects were intermediating the exigencies of the white-thrust identity to their own eye-witnessed history and events. Thus, when it is argued that they had no "life" or privacy, they were not free to confess, and their exemplariness was drawn from racially biased misconceptions of "what" they were, and what they could do, the reconstruction or representation of their past/stories is already labeled under "a mass refusal to see blacks as fully human or hear them as truth-tellers" (Andrews 17). Consequently, the arbitrary processes of memory/history of a black self-image were in the movement to be redefined and in constant transformation due to these resisting literary projects that tried to counterbalance the hegemonic discourse the white society created for them.

African American autobiographical strategies elicited a fictional use that, when associated with the distrust originated from the white-thrust identity, reinforce the suspicious academic approach. However, Hayden White's argument that historical writings are literary artifacts emphasizes the fictionality inherent to factual writings, along with their literary and subjective creation. Such emphasis sheds light on what Wolfgang Iser referred to as *fictionalizing acts*. According to his ideas, the fictive is an intermediate in the triad of the real, the imaginary, and the fictive. It "pass[es] from the diffuse to the precise" (3). This passage occurs from an act of transgression, of boundary crossing, performed by the fictionalizing acts, when the imaginary "take[s] on an essential quality of the real, for determinacy is a minimal definition of reality," because it was first experienced "in a diffuse, formless, and fluid way and without a referential object" (3). In this way, the fictional is noticed not only as a literary method but also as a component of the subjects' own identity, for "we do not live stories" (White 90). So by reproducing as well as producing their lives' narratives, African American subjects were establishing social connections that allowed them

to act upon their own histories, and consequently, they were also providing an individual experience to relate to a collective memory/history, for "trying to perceive myself better, I keep creating myself, I clean the drafts of my identity" (White 90). Thus, when Lejeune argues that "all men who walk the street are narrative men, that's why they can stand in two legs" (Lejeune 121), it sheds light upon the necessity of fiction as well as its underlying presence in life. These processes encourage the structuring of memory as well as its disputes around it, which confirm its changing and unchanging character. The political tone produced by the control of memory, history, and identity, reinforces the vision that the classification of African American life narratives as (auto)biographies implies not only in a widening of such definitions, but in the realization that such categorizations are imbued with ideological elements that should be revisited and reconsidered.

Authorship

By talking about identity and subjects, the issue of authorship is another element that is relevant regarding African American (auto)biographies. Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault are names that stand out due to their approach to the elements that give authority to a written work. A name bears a key role in an (auto)biographical work, as it is not only the signature but also the element that asserts the contract between the author and the reader, as Lejeune would argue. The weight of this element has many hues and is discussed differently by the two French scholars.

Bourdieu's argument of "The Biographical Illusion," the title of one of his renowned texts, exposes that a name does not hold or encompass the complete subject. In this way, autobiographies or any life narratives, for that matter, represent illusions or failed attempts at grasping someone's life by the identity effect a name bears. Two arguments that attract attention are against the cause-effect relation normally stemmed from texts that seek to tell

the story of a life. One argument concerns the analysis of the fields[21] in which the subject is included. When he asks, for example, "who would think to recall a trip without having an idea of the landscape in which it took place?" (216), he is creating an analogy in which to talk about a life, one must also talk about the historical context and agents as well as how these elements are connected to the autobiographies being analyzed:

> The understanding of movements leading from one position to another (from one professional post to another, from one publishing house to another, from one bishopric to another, etc.) is defined, from all the evidence, in the objective relation between the significance and the value of these positions within a directed space at the time they are considered." (215).

So, Bourdieu's vision of the real as discontinuous is key to his understanding of an autobiographical attempt. The other argument, which corroborates with the illusion assertion he advocates from such literary enterprises, derives from the rigidity of the name with which we institutionalize and fix the social existence as well as the social essence of a person. He affirms that the name is a sort of contract, one that attests to our identity, but only does so unrealistically:

> 'Rigid designator,' the proper name is the form *par excellence* of the arbitrary imposition operated by the rites of an institution, the attribution of a name and classification introduce clear-cut, absolute divisions, indifferent to circumstances and to individual accidents, amidst shifting biological and social realities. This is why the proper name cannot describe properties and conveys no information about that which it names; since what it designates is only a composite and disparate rhapsody of biological and social properties undergoing constant flux, all descriptions are valid

[21] Fields are "networks of relations between individuals and institutions competitively engaged in the dynamics of capital production, pursuit, consumption, and/pr accumulation" (qtd. in Bostic 4–5)

> only within the limits of a specific stage or place. In other words, it can only attest to the identity of the *personality*, as socially constituted individuality, at the price of an enormous abstraction. (Bourdieu 213)

Bourdieu's rigidity concerning the proper name provides us with a good analysis of Truth's relation to her own name, because by renaming herself, she was actively setting a new identity, one that matched her religious interests better. She was no longer Isabella, the former slave, she was from June 1st 1843. Truth depicts this fact in her *Narrative*, but it also represented in Harriet Beecher Stowe's "The Libyan Sibyl":

> My name was Isabella; but when I left the house of bondage, I left everything behind. I wa'n't goin' to keep nothin' of Egypt on me, an' so I went to the Lord an' asked him to give me a new name. And the Lord gave me Soujourner, because I was to travel up an' down the land, showing the people their sins, an' bein' a sign unto them. Afterward I told the Lord I wanted another name, 'cause everybody else had two names; And the Lord gave me Truth, because I wish to declare the truth to the people. (Gilbert and Truth 111).

Beyond the naming issue, we might also find it relevant that both women edited their (auto)biographies and increased what the French sociologist would inscribe in the discontinuity of reality. In this aspect, neither Truth nor Lee intends to register all their lives in their publications, but they published them so that they could not only witness their experiences but also furnish financial support for their exclusive dedication to preaching. Their religious (auto)biographical goal allowed them to be specific in their texts and provide material to prove this aspect on their trajectories.

The problem raised by the name is also addressed by Michel Foucault. He connects it to the authority it provides to texts and works. While Bourdieu was concerned with the illusion of representation of a person's many roles in different fields, Foucault draws a

genealogy of the use and association of a name to explore its mechanisms in relation to the existence, promotion, and diffusion of certain discourses in society. Hence, the proper name does not hold the same position as the author's name, for

> an author's name is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts. (Foucault 107)

In this way, authorship, authority, and authenticity become intertwined, as the name of the author signs specific roles that must be addressed specifically:

> the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say "this was written by so-and-so" or "so-and-so is its author," shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status." (Foucault 107)

Thus, the fact that some texts are associated with a particular name makes the person liable for what was written/expressed, which makes it side with another apparatus: censorship. Because authors could be made accountable for their productions, they could also be penalized if their discourses were transgressive. Such trait of the author-function was not so well developed, according to Roger Chartier, a French historian, who revisited Foucault's lecture thirty years after it was delivered. By calling attention to the origin of the production of the "author-function," he highlights that it had happened earlier than Foucault had stated and that it was paired with the differentiation between property and propriety, stressing the role not only of the author but also of the printers and editors who contended for the

copyright of works. In light of this, the author-function relation becomes more complex, and as Chartier exposes, it is linked not only to the order of discourses but also to the order of books, since it "makes the same object make legible the coherence or the incoherence of a work attributed to the same identity." (Chartier 61). From this, elements surrounding the name of African American authors and their productions gain different hues that comprise the argument we want to construct.

Therefore, if, according to what Bourdieu has exposed, a name does not bear an entire or rigid meaning of life, making it necessary to provide some contextualization of "the successive states of the field through which the[ir] trajectory has progressed." (215), these states must be analyzed regarding the power structures. Censorship, then, due to its connection to the "author function," as an authority or power exercise "the right to monitor, censor, judge and punish" (Chartier 37). Thus, when an afropessimist[22] approach to African American life narratives states that "[a]nyone who thinks nineteenth-century slave narratives are reports on the past isn't paying attention." (Wilderson 101), it is shedding light on the presence of the racial struggle not in past days, decades, or centuries, but in our present society. Adding to it there are mechanisms of selection and exclusion, which have the African American sufferings contradictorily placed as fetishized and at the same time unbearable:

> Imagine the resources of a violent structure that can deputize the whims of an entire race. Slave narratives have tried to imagine this violence, but they have also turned away at crucial moments; moments when it becomes clear that without a causal logic, the story could fall apart. In cases such as these, the solution has been to disavow the inconvenient truths and get on with narrative. (Wilderson 90)

[22] Afropessimism is a metatheory that holds that "*Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and non-Black fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures*" (Wilderson 15).

This perspective acknowledges the censorship along with the need of fiction/fictive elements ex-slaves and black people had to resort to in order to be heard. Those who would listen to their stories were holders of a power capable of rejecting their texts, no matter what name was written on the cover. To paraphrase Foucault, African American authors' names are not, therefore, just a proper name like the rest. In this way, the authorship of (auto)biographies, or slave narratives, is filled with suspicion, originated from a biased concept not of "What is an Author?" but of who is accepted as an author.

(Auto)biographies or slave narratives?

The influence (auto)biographies had in nineteenth-century society is latent in the historical events that took place. These writings aided the abolitionist cause by depicting the atrocities and terrible experiences endured by African Americans during that era and were also important in the post-Civil War development of an African American identity. These narratives evidenced the absence of historical and memorial documents, which were then expressed by individuals seeking to raise their voices in opposition to the many injustices they had sustained.

Attempting at reconstructing their life stories, African Americans saw themselves limited by the lack of information and memory records of their lives. Essential information such as date of birth, parents' names, and origin had been denied for them. According to James Olney (1984), the roughly 6,000 narratives of African Americans have several analogous characteristics: they always begin with the phrase "I was born," and they are frequently illustrated by "an engraved portrait or photograph of the subject of the narrative; and authenticating testimonial" ("I Was Born" 49). His point, however, is not that these voices have been suppressed, made invisible, or marginalized, but that these narratives are repetitious since by reading two or three of them, one has "a sense not of uniqueness, but of overwhelming *sameness*" ("I Was Born" 46)(italics in the original). Thus, in his view, slave

narratives cannot be considered (auto)biographies, as "the slave narrative, with very few exceptions, tends to exhibit a highly conventional, rigidly fixed form that bears much the same relationship to autobiography in a full sense as painting by numbers bears to painting as a creative act." ("I Was Born" 48). His contempt for African American literary works becomes clearer when one examines what is usually determined as an (auto)biography: a work by a white author. According to Olney, "ex-slaves do exercise memory in their narratives, but they never talk about it as Augustine does, as Rousseau does, as Wordsworth does, as Thoreau does, as Henry James does, as a hundred other autobiographers (not to say novelists like Proust) do" (Olney, "I Was Born" 48–49). His comparison is astonishing because these are the people whose identity was reinforced by the norm and the discursive systems, and thus their lives are set as exemplary. It is worth noting that Rousseau's *Confessions* influenced the development of an (auto)biographical model, contradicting Olney's assertion that only ex-slave narratives would have a rigorous structure. Thus, the term slave narrative (like *testimonio* in the Latin American tradition - as opposed to *testimony* in the Anglo-Saxon tradition) emphasizes its distinctive characteristics while also conveying an inferior label to such works, a label exacerbated by both the racial configuration of power and the derogatory position orality holds in the academic world.

As mentioned before in this chapter, the oral approach to memory and history was deemed inaccurate, emphasizing the need for recorded versions. The tension between oral and written narratives is also significant in the African American literary tradition, particularly among nineteenth century (auto)biographers, for

> [w]hile attaining the prohibited literacy is often cast as one of the crucial stages in the progress to freedom in slave narratives and later African American *Bildungsroman*, the written word is also a potent weapon against people of African descent. As Williams puts it in her preface to Dessa Rose, 'Afro-Americans, having survived by

> word of mouth – and made of that process a high art – remain at the mercy of literature and writing; often, these have betrayed us.' This ambivalent relationship with the written word has produced a kind of double consciousness which Robert Stepto describes as African American culture's simultaneous 'distrust of literacy' and 'abiding faith in it.' (Rushdy, "The Neo-Slave Narrative" 99)

This statement demonstrates how the mistrust of African American narratives and experiences derives from the unclear relationship these authors had with writing. The "distrust of literacy" carries the weight of the prohibition of learning to read and write, as well as the requirement to adhere to a "tight bind" intention when writing about their experiences, "to give a picture of *slavery as it is*" (Olney, "I Was Born" 48 italics added), and thus to gain the white sponsor's and reader's consent to spread their lives and horrors as a means to advocate against the inhumane treatment of enslaved and black subjects. This last element also encompasses the "abiding faith" expressed in literature and written works since this was the resisting practice to which they had access.

Memory serves as both a portal to the past and a way out from it. The view that slave narratives are "a non-memorial description fitted to a preformed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there - virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances, and authentications" (Olney, "I Was Born" 49) is a reductionist one which overlooks these works' peculiarities. The use of slave narratives must not imply inferiority or sameness but rather plurality and commendation. As a result, the usage of (auto)biography to refer to ex-slaves' literary works can be seen as a point of resistance, shedding light on how the canon is constructed and how some labels have the potential to reject works of literature that do not adhere to the Western written and white pattern. But the use of a Western centralized concept must evoke a mischaracterization of such works, expanding the awareness of their richness. A slave narrative as a type of literary production

cannot bind their authors to a stereotyped vision that slavery was the significant trait in their lives. Furthermore, the word slaves – or even ex-slaves- before narratives can help design a space that (not surprisingly) was not chosen by them but for them. Hence, we regard African American men and women's literary methods for getting their voices heard as evidence of their resilience, resistance, and resourcefulness in their modes to name and inscribe themselves in historical processes. Their approach to memory through these (auto)biographical works is inextricably linked to the formation of their identity, story, and history as White and Iser's fictionalizing acts have shown, and as we hope to cover in the following chapters.

Testimony and community in Jarena Lee's (auto)biography

Also known for being a pioneer, Jarena Lee is regarded as the first woman allowed to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal. However, her place is "restricted" to the religious scope in academic discussions. Hence, there are considerably less critical analyses of her (auto)biography. This, of course, does not mean that her book is not relevant, seen that it exemplifies the power structures of society, denouncing not only racial but also sexist issues. Included in *Spiritual Narratives*, a book edited by Susan Houchins, Lee appears as a lively preacher. Her religious background, however different from Truth's, led her to itinerant circuits and to public speeches, as she exposes in her narrative.

Her book *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, giving an account of her call to preach the gospel* published in 1849, provides an immersion into the Second Great Awakening context. It is the fruit of a revision and inclusion to her previous *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady*, published in 1836, which was twenty pages long. It had three short chapters chronologically situated; however, in 1849, the fourth chapter included was composed of a less chronological or organized account. The edition chosen for this analysis is the last one due to its length and content. It exposes testimony as

well as prophetic aspects of Lee, which, according to Susan Hubert, make it an (auto)biography connected to the black church community. An analysis of her narrative is one that evidences a transgressive approach to the (auto)biographical definition because, even if written in the first person singular, it omits and diverges from the general private exposure to a specific public one, focusing on her travelling's accounts . From this, we will examine not only the collective approach of her book but also her public positionings regarding her God-given right to preach, which in turn gives it a testimonial tone. Testimony, here follows Márcio Seligmann-Silva's differentiation between *testis* and *superstes*, while the first is centered in the visual aspect of testimony, the former is closer to a survivor, someone who has lived in and through the event: "The "staying in the fact" of the *superstes* refers to the unique situation of the survivor as someone who lives in the confines of an extreme event that brought him [or her] closer to death" (Seligmann-Silva, "O Local Do Testemunho" 5). Both ideas are connected since the testimonial and prophetic characteristics of the text are roots to investigate her (auto)biographical construction through sexism in the black church community.

Jarena Lee

Due to Lee's "invisibility" in non-religious academic discussions, presenting her is not as simple as one would imagine, and this is so for two reasons. The first is because she gave very little information about her childhood, origins, and close relatives. And secondly, apart from that, information on Jarena Lee after the publishing of her book is also scarce, and it has been argued that her whereabouts could only be traced due to some patterns of name mistakes, like "'Terania' or 'Gerania Lee'" (Knight 66). She was born on February 11th, 1783, in Cape May, State of New Jersey, but we do not know her maiden name or her parents' names or origins. Because she refused to tell her parents' names or any information thereof, Carla Peterson argues that they, "like Truth's parents, were firmly rooted in African

cultural tradition." (73). She was parted from her parents at the age of seven when she became a servant maid at a household "at a distance of about sixty miles from the place of [her] birth." (Lee 3). The selected information she shared is vague not only in the beginning but also throughout her book. Since her 1836 version is focused on exposing her call to preach along with her attempts at being allowed to preach, it is a bit more intimate than the second part she added in 1849. When she revised her narrative, she chose excerpts from her journal that would account for her divinely inspired work. In this way she would testify (individually) something that she wished to share through her narrative and her intermediation (both physically and spiritually/symbolically):

> But here I feel constrained to give over; as from the smallness of this pamphlet I cannot go through with the whole of my journal, as it would probably make a volume of two hundred pages; which, if the Lord be willing, may at some future day be published. But for the satisfaction of such as may follow after me, when I am no more, I have recorded how the Lord called me to his work, and how he has kept me from falling from grace, as I feared I should. (Lee 97)

In this passage, by implying that her recorded narrative will attest as proof of God's power to later generations, she is expanding her experience to all who also fear falling from grace, and granting a divine authority to her text, making it legitimate. In this point, she merges her individual experience to an exemplary model of unmistakable force. From her particular point of view, then, she focuses on the deeds God performed in her life to transform it into a point of connection to her readers and to the community to which she belonged. Such vision corroborates with Susan Houchins' argument that:

> The goal of black autobiography had never been just an attempt at an "objective reconstruction of an individual's past or a public demonstration of the qualities of selfhood or a private meditation on the meaning of a life of struggle." It had also

> sought to be discursive by initiating a dialogue with those who doubted the very existence of black folks' souls — not to mention the possibility of their redemption. (Houchins et al. xxix).

Therefore, when Hubert says that "[t]he historical context of *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* is, therefore, far more important than its literary form" (52), it corroborates with the testimonial aspect her book carries as well as its religious prophetic tone.

Her narrative is an example of God's power manifested on a woman. Jarena Lee evidences not only racial aspects of her society but also gender issues among her black brothers in the church, seen that its main focus is to show how God helped her through the trials she lived in order to be able to preach. Among the many religious excerpts included in her (auto)biography, the first one enhances her goal both in life and in her text: "And it shall come to pass … that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons, and your *daughters* shall prophecy." – Joel ii. 28." (Lee 3). The fact that she wrote daughters in italics indicates that her call to preach was not so easily fulfilled because "the same patriarchal structures that existed in society were operative in the African-American church." (Hubert 48). Lee depicts herself in many depreciative ways throughout the book, and this has to do with the religious fervor of the period, which valued the conversion from the assertion of the sinful nature of human beings, but it also displays the imagery associated to the female figure. She presented herself as a sinner and, after conversion, she questions her authority to speak on God's behalf. To illustrate this, we will examine two extracts. The first one contains her narration of the moment God called her and she hesitated. Such doubt is imbued with the gender relations established among those in clerical power positions:

> Between four and five years after my sanctification, on a certain time, an impressive silence fell upon me, and I stood as if some one was about to speak to me, yet I had no

> such thought in my heart.-- But to my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understand, which said to me, "Go preach the Gospel!" I immediately replied aloud, "No one will believe me," Again I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say-- "Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends." (Lee 10)

The following extract brings forth a common way she depicted herself. Sometimes as a worm, as in the quote, others as a feeble instrument, a servant. Such denominations are not unusual in religious relations; however, it informs the gender inferiority that had been imbued ever since her request to preach was denied by Richard Allen: “When I contemplate the goodness of God to the human family, in putting them in a proper capacity of choosing the way of salvation, I feel sometimes almost lost, to think that God has called such a worm as I to spread the common Saviour's name.” p.42 (Lee 42). Her narrative calls attention to the difficulties she encountered while preaching because of prejudices. Her denouncing of the struggles she faced has converged to an autobiographical portrayal that diverges significantly from that of churchmen, seen that what has been exposed in the first extract derives from a gender-based disbelief reverberates in the second quote, in which she calls herself a worm, which not necessarily holds a gender bias, for in terms of religious involvement humility is a valued trait. Such inferiority, however associated to her dedication to the divine call, is also linked to solitude.

The loneliness she expresses is an anaphorical aspect of the narrative. Along with her sickness, it is an element that highlights the consequences of her choice of devoting herself to a religious call. Such representations expose her involvement with church preachers, which enlarges her concept of family in one aspect, but on the other, due to her long trips and short dwellings, prevents her from creating roots. Her hometown, Philadelphia, is described mostly

in relation to her journeys rather than to her relatives. It was at Church that she wanted to belong, and it was because of her religious duty that she left her son first with her mother and later with Richard Allen. The first time she mentions the feeling of loneliness is after marrying Joseph Lee, a “pastor of a Society at Snow Hill, about sex miles from the city of Philadelphia” in 1811. In her short description of her marriage, distance stands out as an element that brings discomfort to Lee. The way she describes her departure from Philadelphia as “a great trial at first” strengthens her bond with those from her church family and depicts her marriage as an obstacle to her church communion. Such a depiction is contradictory since Joseph Lee was a pastor, but the “sweet fellowship” she enjoyed at Philadelphia and the company with which she “together drank bliss and happiness from the same fountain." (Lee 13) is energetically described as a reason for unhappiness. She mentions that “[t]he manners and customs of this place were somewhat different” (13), for these reasons her loneliness is evident. She expresses her discontent of being deprived of her acquaintances to the point of talking about it to her husband, to whom her request did not suit. Yet, she calls her wish an importunity: “I became discontented in the course of a year, and began to importune my husband to remove to the city” (13). In light of this, her affliction gave way to a dream with many biblical references - from the fair and white sheep to the "man of a grave and dignified countenance, dressed entirely in white, as it were in a robe" (13). The Jesus-like figure advises her to let her husband do his job, for it was necessary to keep the sheep from the wolf. She then wrote: “When I awoke I was convinced of my error, and immediately, with a glad heart, yielded to the right spirit in the Lord.” (13). Such dreamlike vision "awoke" her in both ways, as she "yielded to the right spirit in the Lord," which was in tune with her husband's wishes. Here she is placing her vocation (and her husband's duty) over her wishes. The fact that she addresses her will to return to Philadelphia as importunity shows how she as

a woman[23] was regarding her need as selfish and perhaps even childish. However, after Joseph Lee's death, she expresses that her sufferings would not be unanswered, because God was there with her. Another aspect from her experience as a married woman comes from the structure of her narrative. The chapter on her marriage is in between the chapters where she describes her two calls to preach, thus this chapter can represent a transformation in Lee's account and life. It is the threshold she crosses to fully dedicate her life to her divine call, to welcome iterant preaching and to attach herself only to God. This might be because of her new status as a widow and the desperate loneliness she experienced, especially as a mother of two: "I was now left alone in the world, with two infant children, one of the age of about two years, the other six months, with no other dependence than the promise of Him who hath said – I will be the widow's God, and a father to the fatherless" (Lee 14). Only after such an event that Lee made friends in Snow Hill. Therefore we can argue that her widowhood, a literal experience of loneliness, drew her closer to the people of Snow Hill, and it also made way for her pursuit of becoming a preacher.

From this, Lee's family concept grew bigger. The church came to mean family, and after she was accepted by Allen to preach, she wrote about many pastors she worked with in the itinerant Methodist circuits. She thoroughly described her journeys and how she was received by the pastors, how she was accompanied by a sister, and how she became needed on many deathbeds as she describes with joy the last-minute repentance of the sinners. Lee's loneliness description is more connected to the lack of acquaintances than to the distance between her and her family, as we can see in the passage:

> We accomplished the route the same day we started, and I found myself entirely among strangers. But I made inquiry for Methodist friends, and found brother

[23] Additional aspects involving gender, specifically her more direct confrontations, will be addressed in the following chapters.

> Streeter, a coloured family, very respectable, they treated me very kind; they were under the white Bishop, and I under the coloured. But the same faith, same doctrine, Same Baptism, same spirit. Glory to God. (Lee 47).

Her Methodists friends would make her feel more comfortable even if she did not know them, for she was in search of her kin.

We have briefly approached Lee's (auto)biography regarding the traits it bears due to some gender conflicts. This topic seems to be central to the author as she used religion as a means of authorization and eventually as self-empowerment. Her testimonial (auto)biography carries a trait that is both collective and individual, and to accomplish both tasks, this analysis has attempted at exemplifying how the social relations had rendered her an inferior position through outer censorship (by not letting her preach and not yielding to her dissatisfaction), and also from an inner suppression. Such movement demonstrated that even if Christianity was the source of confronting men-centered discourses and of personal and political empowerment, it also arose a tension within the institutions women like Lee were attempting to become official members. Gender struggle is the key element of the narrative: Lee's testimonial of her call by proving and providing material to sustain her arguments that she was able to speak to "the fallen sons and *daughters* of Adam." (Lee 43, italics added). The collectiveness derived from it attests to her pioneering role among church women "not only to strengthen an individual's faith but also to build the faith of the community." (qtd. in Hubert 47).

Orality in Truth's (auto)biography and speeches

Sojourner Truth is seen today as a symbol of intersectional feminism. She is certainly renowned in the United States, being considered along with Harriet Tubman, the two most famous African American women of the nineteenth century (Painter 3). In Brazil, however, her fame is almost limited to feminist circles and intersectional discussions, being mentioned

in relevant books as the starting point of discussions on the crossroads of race and gender, as it can be seen in Angela Davis' *Women, Race, and Class* (1983), Djamila Ribeiro's *O que é lugar de fala?* (2017) and Carla Akotirene's *Interseccionalidade* (2019). These books make an introductory approach to Truth's speech: "Ain't I A Woman?" (1851), which was transcribed and published in newspapers of the period. From this particular place in which Truth is located in feminist discussions, an assumption can be extracted: the 1851 speech "Ain't I A Woman?" was the gateway of awareness for most people concerning Sojourner Truth. Whether the supposition is accurate is not so relevant as the possibility of its accuracy. Most people who know or have heard of Truth have had the aforementioned speech as the first reference to Truth's words, thought, and power. The 1851 speech is a remarkable source of inquiries to its composition and reproduction, which leads to analyses of the representations of the self and the Other. With this in mind, we intend to analyze some elements pervading Truth's (auto)biography and speeches, with a focus on "Ain't I A Woman?". Such endeavor will help us understand the manufacturing of her identity, which makes her emerge as a symbol, through the differences in the speech transcriptions and also in her *Narrative*. The presence of stereotypes in her identity construction will make evident not only the racism imbued with it but also her place of resistance. The versions of the speeches come from Suzanne P. Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk's book *Sojourner Truth as orator: wit, story, and song* (1997), who have made a thorough compilation of Truth's speeches and songs; the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*'s "Book of Life," edited by Frances Titus which also includes an assemblage of newspaper articles and letters; and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (2007). Nell Irvin Painter's work *Sojourner Truth, A Life, A Symbol* (1996) is also very important for this thesis as she was one of the first scholars to address the differences between the speeches along with the symbolical construction upon Truth.

Sojourner Truth

The word is a central source of creation. Such assertion stems from both formalist and structuralist ideas that evoke the defamiliarization and the systematic order and analysis of language. The consequences of both concepts do not necessarily, reach a desirable outcome as social groups and people in general demand and desire forms of representation that change continuously. Thus, as we might say that the world is created and creates itself through language, it is also possible to state that the (notion of) Truth which is commonly known, has been created and creates itself. The analysis here proposed of Truth's speeches derive from this thought as defamiliarization and systematic analysis of her spoken and written words indicate that the binary division of *Life* and *Symbol* signaled in Painter's title are products of power relations. Our view here is that life and symbol are not as segregated as at first sight, but that they might share ideas even in their differences.

Truth's symbolical vision is the most publicized one, transmitted from the wide repercussion of her 1851 speech in its 1863 version. For this reason, there is a memorial website[24] with extracts comparing the transcriptions of her 1851 speech, which aims at promoting a critical reading as well as to propagate her words and history and her relation to music. Along with the comparison, there is a video of Alice Walker reading the 1863 version of "Ain't I A Woman?" on November 11, 2006, in Berkeley, California. The commentaries, both on the memorial website and in the video, strengthen the inaccuracy of the version of the speech. Their tones expressed the disrespectful approach to Truth's memory as she had been represented by Walker with a Southern accent, a characteristic that diverges from the "truth", because she was from the North and had a Dutch accent; and indicates a dreadful generalization and stereotypical version of Truth's manner of speaking. Their concerns are understandable, but what is striking is that Truth's fame derives from much misconceiving

[24] *https://sojournertruthmemorial.org/sojourner-truth/her-words/*

information, and it is partly because of that that she has stood out among many of her brothers and sisters. One example of inaccuracy is the 1863 text written by Harriet Beecher Stowe: "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl". Some of the mistakes include Stowe' writing that Truth's origin was the African continent and that she was dead. So the fact that these commentaries approach both the value of life and symbol so sharply provides room for examination.

The complication arises from the source of the words. As argued, the creativeness aspect of language through words is powerful, but one facet that is key to their understanding is the intermediation. Words are the primary intermediators of the world, but we must bear in mind who intermediates these intermediators. In the case of Truth, it is central for many different reasons, and for now, we will enumerate two. The first reason is not so propagated: Truth's mother tongue was Dutch and not English. Born in the state of New York, she was the property of a Dutch family and spoke low Dutch until she was about nine years old and had been sold to her third "master," from whom she suffered severe punishments due to problems of communication. This fact makes her accent quite unique and highlights the general disapproval of the Southern accent or broken English commonly associated with her[25] and other African American subjects. The second reason is Truth's illiteracy. Such fact encompasses the core of the symbolical constructedness of Truth as her language and herself were represented by intermediators. Who these intermediators were matter a great deal for a scientific analysis of the speeches, as they incorporate crystalized categories that came to compound her identity. In the case of Truth, not only had her speeches been transcribed but also her (auto)biography, which was composed in collaboration with Olive Gilbert as

[25] Regarding this issue, the website "The Sojourner Truth Project" came up with a more creative approach to the inaccuracies of the accent and version of the speech: it has a section to compare the two versions of the 1851 speech and another one with readings of the speech by women with different Afro-Dutch dialects. <*https://www.thesojournertruthproject.com/*>

amanuensis. Gilbert wrote a note in the first version of the publication stating that Truth could not see a proof of what was written and that this makes it possible that several errors would have been made. Besides that, Truth did not have access - in order to be able to critically evaluate - to anything that was written about her. Another character that intermediated Truth's image is Frances Titus. Her role as editor was key to the symbolical creation of Truth, as exposed by Painter: "Titus wanted to replace this persona [from the Narrative] with an antislavery lecturer and woman of the world. Her choices are with us still." (261). Titus's influence over Truth's figure is exhibited in our remembrance of her as a spokeswoman, not as the woman depicted in the *Narrative*: a woman whose life had been changed and guided by her religious belief. When it was reprinted in subsequent years, the text gained an appendix filled with newspaper articles on Truth, signatures, letters and other references that she kept in her "Book of Life." Moreover, after Truth's death in 1883, Titus, as a memory keeper included a memorialist chapter. These additions have certainly fomented the idea that Truth's deeds are faded into words which have been transcribed with less of her influence than her (auto)biography.

Such fact makes it quite interesting to grasp the movements of intermediation that create Truth as the *self* and as the *Other*, primarily because how she is seen today is the product of mediation[26]. Along with more direct intervention of others into the construction of the figure of Sojourner Truth, we must also bear in mind the rigid categories that describe an individual. To describe a person is to situate him or her into a personal and historical background. The rigid elements of birth are some of the most repeated ones, including name, parents, and date and place of birth. Historical figures, like Sojourner Truth, have been described and talked about countless times with reference to similar and fixed categories of

[26] These movements can also be exemplified by Aurélio Dantas's interference in Carolina Maria de Jesus's published texts.

her life. In the case of Truth, however, these previously mentioned categories are disfigured by the slavery system. It draws to forgetfulness some essential information which composes one's identity – as the year of birth and ancestral history – and at the same time, it stresses others, which also dehumanized those under its oppression – like the information of whose property she was. To introduce Truth brings a sort of uncanny feeling derived by the insidious repetition of these dehumanizing stereotypes that seem to be so crystalized to her image. In his book, *Many Thousands Gone*, Ira Berlin argument that "knowing that a person was a slave does not tell everything about him or her" exposes this uneasy feeling, since "understanding that a person was a slave is not the end of the story but the beginning, for the slaves' history was derived from experiences that differed from place to place and time to time and not from some unchanging transhistorical verity" (2–3). So, it must be emphasized that the period Truth lived in makes it more difficult to detach her image from slavery, as she was enslaved for many years and became an abolitionist advocate later in her life. Still, the identity configuration derived from it seems to enclose her image to a specific place and position in society, which is precisely what we want to contest. Even though we cannot escape from the information that "defines" her 'self,' we intend to explore and question those categories.

In order to introduce Sojourner Truth and question those rigid categories of identity, we start by examining the orality that pervades her life. As her *Narrative* was written collaboratively between 1846 to 1850, Truth is its main source. But the fact that she was not the one who put the words into paper impacts on the creation – although it should not discard or be an exclusive element to assert her authorship status. Thus, the orality present in the dictation/retelling of her life is displayed in aspects that are products of the oppressive system of enslavement, and also in other aspects that are incorporated by the oral history –with a heavy dependence on memory and its intertwined artifacts such as forgetfulness, selection,

and trauma. For instance, language and memory are connected to both oral and written literature and foment identity construction. James Olney's ("I Was Born") vision of slave narratives is imbued with a sameness that renders all narratives a rigid and immutable form. His vision highlights the other intermediator of words, the reader, whose presence had a regulatory effect. It is precisely in the so-called repetition of stories that sits the orality and the differences among "slave narratives," which normally complies with what we have called the rigid categories of identities. The most commonly inaccurate trait in African American (auto)biographies is the date of birth of enslaved subjects because it is derived from oral sources. The implication of such erasure of information is a mark of the psychological violence black subjects endured. The symbolical tree of forgetfulness Africans were made to circle seven times before entering the ships is a sad and relevant image of this identity violence. The forgotten past makes details mingle and fade, so Truth's date of birth, along with her parents' origin and last names, are not mentioned. According to Painter, one aspect of this is because:

> Truth's own means of communication blur her memory. She was preeminently a speaker, and we remember her first spontaneous commentary, not deeds. But the spoken word is notoriously unstable. Truth depended upon disparate amanuenses for the preservation of her identity. They represented her according to their own lights, often in dialect of their own invention. Depending on their reporter, Truth can appear as a northerner or a South inner, an insightful commentator or an ignoramus. The symbolic Truth lacks religion. (Painter 261).

However, her owner's first and last names are remembered, even if misspelled in the *Narrative*, providing another trait of orality: Colonel Johannes Hardenbergh referred to as Ardinburgh by Truth. As for her parents' names, the text provides nicknames and versions of their names: Truth's father was James, but he was called "Bomefree," meaning tree in low

Dutch “at least, this is Sojourner’s pronunciation of it” (Gilbert and Truth 10), and her mother was Elizabeth, but she was presented in the text as Betsey or as “Mau-mau Bett.” By presenting these details of her history in which oral features are employed, we can mark her presence and active construction of her (auto)biography. From these elements, Truth is creating her identity, which is later manifested in her renaming.

She was born around 1797 in Hurley in Ulster County, close to the Hudson River Valley in the state of New York. Truth’s birth name is Isabella, and, in books, she is commonly referred to as Isabella Bomefree or Baumfree. The fact that she renamed herself evokes an identity aspect of her orality. Berlin’s argument against slavery as an “unchanging transhistorical verity” is in tune with this passage of Truth’s life, and it sheds light on Pierre Bourdieu’s (2006) take on the biographical illusion present in the name since she actively transformed her identity through her name. Therefore, if, as we have seen, orality can be expressed as a reverberation of oppressive experiences, it can also be creative and redefine an identity and a subject’s history. Still in line with Bourdieu, he states that the biographical illusion occurs because the person and the institutionalized representation of a person (the name) are “pulled out of time and space” and does not expose the context of the person and his/her trajectory, or considers that the subjects are in constant changes. This argument is central to understand Painter’s perspective on the symbolical construction of Truth, which was made while she was alive but also reproduced in our contemporaneity. As a symbol, Truth is the cornerstone of the intersectional discussion, a strong and brave feminist advocate that epitomizes the multifaceted struggle of African American women. Thus, it would be utopian to believe that the name Sojourner Truth would ensure the understanding of her life “a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events” (Bourdieu 2015) since it has been an element of “fictional” constructions. However, when, on June 1, 1843, she renames herself as Sojourner Truth, after a religious experience in which she was called by

the spirit to travel East and preach the word of Jesus, she actively projects herself as a woman of faith and thus creates, through her name, a mark of change in her trajectory and identity (Gilbert and Truth 68). Sojourner Truth is an unusual name but bears a profound meaning. It is the symbol of her call to spread the truths of Christ, the pilgrim of truth. Therefore the name Sojourner Truth does not represent the whole of her life as a woman either, but by renaming herself, she constructed a meaning and a purpose that break with silencing strategies of the slavery hegemonic system. This change is crucial for her identity construction and represents an act of resistance, which culminates in her engagement with the abolitionist cause and for the rights of women. The act of renaming is an act of agency towards oneself. But from a person whose life had been previously "owned" and who is incapable of reading and writing, it is also an evidence of a self-construction that highlights her agency towards herself, also expressed in her *Narrative*:

> Having made what preparations for leaving she deemed necessary, … about an hour before she left, she informed Mrs. Whiting, the woman of the house where she was stopping, that her name was no longer Isabella, but SOJOURNER; and that she was going east. And to her inquiry, 'What are you going east for?' her answer was, 'The Spirit calls me there, and I must go.' (Gilbert and Truth 68)

Resistance forms of silencing strategies were also present and portrayed in Truth's recollections of her religious instructions. Religiosity, as exemplified in her name change, was very present in her life. Mau-mau Bett taught Isabella and her siblings to recite the Lord's Prayer in Dutch, and God was a constant companion to Betsey's sufferings due to the sale of her children. Orality is present in Truth's depiction of her parents, whose kinship was sadly constructed around pain so that Truth's parents would "sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing, as well as harrowing circumstance that taxed memory could supply, from the histories of those dear departed ones, of whom they had been robbed, and

for whom their hearts still bled." (11). The focus on her parents' sufferings and the strategies, through orality (prayer and recounting), had created an impression upon Truth of the religious discourse as a means to alleviate the toils she had suffered. An extract of a dialogue with her mother emphasizes the power of the word to connect and create:

> 'Oh Lord, how long?' 'Oh Lord, how long?' And in reply to Isabella's question—'What ails you, mau-mau?' her only answer was, 'Oh, a good deal ails me'—'Enough ails me.' Then again, she would point them to the stars, and say, in her peculiar language, 'Those are the same stars, and that is the same moon, that look down upon your brothers and sisters, and which they see as they look up to them, though they are ever so far away from us, and each other.' (Gilbert and Truth 12).

The trauma imbued in Mau-mau Bett's dialogue with her daughter is intersected by her elaboration of a connection to her offspring. It is interesting that in 1853 Truth's account of her mother's grief would be represented with oral traits and similar elements:

> My poor Mother would weep and say, in Dutch, "oh mein Got, mein Got" which means in English my God. "My poor children will be sold into Slavery." (…) She said "my poor child we are going to be sold, and we shant see one another again; when you are far away; remember that I shall see the same moon and stars that you look at, and, when we die, we shall both go to heaven among them." (Fitch and Mandziuk 109).

The presence of this conversation in the *Narrative* and the differences from her 1853 account of a similar episode demonstrate that expressing feelings was something mediated by words but that some oral aspects are heavily present, even with an intermediator. The reference to Dutch in the speech indicates a more subjective representation of Truth than the version exposed in her Narrative, which also characterizes Truth's mother enunciation as "peculiar." All things considered, these rigid categories (year of birth, name, and parents'

names), as we have tried to expose, do not define who Truth was, as it becomes clear by her renaming act. However, some traits derived by this information are incorporated by her, as for the Dutch accent, and the verbalized orality stemmed from her parents' sufferings and retelling of stories. Just as the name does not provide a person with a rigid identity, this brief introduction to Truth does not encompass who she is. This section attempted to give the reader a brief description of Truth and at the same time question these categories in order to expose the many gaps and complexities in the formation of an identity that was constructed through oral methods.

Memory and identity are profoundly entrenched in the African American experience, and (auto)biographies play an essential role in this. Slavery, being a painful experience that continues to exist today under a racist societal system, must be appropriately handled. Emphasizing the literary strategies employed by enslaved men and women in the construction and reconstruction of their memories and remembrances will, hopefully, open up space in the academic world for reflections on the places African American Literature has occupied and how these texts have been received and labeled.

These hegemonic power systems then interweave the identities of black people. However, it is conceivable to argue that the use of memory in African American (auto)biographies informs a movement of resistance. Despite the white audience's and publishers' enthusiasm for the horrible description of slavery, men and women used their written narratives to sensibly depict their progress as individuals through tough times. The experiences recalled by African Americans were chosen in relation to Iser's fictionalizing acts since there is a natural silencing and forgetting of traumatic occurrences.

As Pollak argues about the inheritance of memory, a link can be drawn between the writing of a book that promotes the one who wrote it and the collective aspect that a work such as an (auto)biography can have, because in the case of enslaved accounts, the writing

state of memory aids in the construction of the unofficial history of the marginalized. Writing about one's life is, in some ways, an effort to cement a preferred version of that existence. This practice is still challenging owing to white people's unwillingness to reconsider and confront the horrifying projections that have been foisted upon black people. As a result, there is a need to reconsider the canon and recognize that the creation of an identity does not have to imply the subjugation of the Other.

CHAPTER TWO

"I told them it was my business to preach": the socio-political aspects of black women preachers

"It was altogether a strange thing to hear a woman preach there, so it made quite an excitement, which made my labor very heavy, as the people were all eyes and prayed none." (Lee 87)

2.1 Women's writings – the social place of white and black women in literature

"For take my word for it, there is no libel
On women that the clergy will not paint.
Except when writing of a woman-saint,
But never good of other women, though.
Who called the lion savage? Do you know?
By God, if women had but written stories
Like those the clergy keep in oratories.
More had been written of man's wickedness
Than all the sons of Adam could redress."
The Wife of Bath – Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales

Women have been seeking liberty since their inchoate existence. From the biblical perspective of what would have been the first sin, women have been continually restrained. It can be said, in general terms, that when a woman was not physically locked in the attic (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*), she was subdued to the slave owner's violence. Such repressions have also perpetuated in women's verbal expressions, both in oral and written forms. Thus, in this chapter, we intend to briefly review the path constructed by both black and white women towards liberty and knowledge.

Drawing first from the history of white female writing of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, and later from the literary production and historical accounts of white and African American women, it will be possible to outline some continuities and discontinuities regarding female religious writing, (auto)biographical writings, and authorship. Both reminiscent acts will provide material to understand the 19th century (auto)biographies of Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee, indicating a conversion of their works

to other historically prominent publications and also providing room for an investigation upon the authorship status in relation to gender, broadening its collaborative aspect inside the so-called *autobiographical pact*.

Early writings in English by women

The imagery surrounding female characters has been quite influential in the ways women were perceived in society. The very early images of women in English language literature, as well as in society, have been widely questioned and thematized by men. Following Biblical descriptions, women have been criticized and cursed, regarding Eve; praised as redeemers of the original sin, regarding Mary, mother of Jesus; saved due to repentance, as "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out" (Coogan et al. 1484); and considered mediators and sources of inspiration, like the Muses to Renaissance writers. Most of these notions, however, portray women as objects of worship or solely as objects. The lack of subjectivity presented in these representations contains traces of misogyny that led to all sorts of mistreatments endured by women. It could be perceived in the case of courtly love writings where "the poet's or knight's service to the lady was often merely lip service, even in literary works that praised her powers." (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 8–9). In a more direct reference to women as evil perpetrators, they have been depicted as the mother of monsters, as in *Beowulf*, and as witches or wicked ladies, like Hecate, the Weyward Sisters, and Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. These images would be perpetuated in literary, cultural, and social representations, like ghosts who haunted and set the boundaries of medieval and renaissance women's lives.

Drawn from such biased imagery, the control over female bodies and lives is inflicted by basic social structures that have evolved and adapted throughout time. The institution of marriage, for example, has been of paramount social importance ever since the Classical Age,

even though the role reserved for women was one of subjugation. In the Middle Ages, some laws forbade divorce, female ownership of property and encouraged wife-beating. Besides this, women were also considered witches and heretics, accused of social illnesses, and were believed to adore strange gods, which would threaten the power of the church. The definition of unmarried woman and widow as *feme sole* and a married woman as *feme covert* determined women's liberties and activities. As wives, they worked and took an interest in their sons and husbands' duties, but they were limited to do so much as what was "shaped by a male-controlled socioeconomic system" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 12). Some sort of independence could only be achieved if one either became a widow or renounced the world to join a convent or dedicate to prayers or meditations.

Taking this into consideration, we will examine the strategies developed through English language literature by women within the coverture doctrine. The selection of examples focuses mostly on how *feme sole* sought ways to be in control over their own lives, but also how, even as married, they could resist and negotiate the terms of the patriarchal authority over their life.

It is no wonder then, that, in one end of this womanhood spectrum, one of the earliest works in English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer's tale "The Wife of Bath" from *The Canterbury Tales* tells the story of a "worthy woman" who "had had five husbands at the church-door"(Chaucer 31). Chaucer's experienced protagonist, Alisoun, encompasses this widowed woman stereotype by achieving a certain degree of freedom and material possession through her marriages, which Mary Carruthers points as "the key to survival" for it is "contracted for money, and the acquisition of money is equivalent to the attainment of honour, respect and independence" (Carruthers 31). The experience from which she tells her tale exposes her strategies and sufferings in her marriages, for "three of them [husbands]

were good and two were bad. The three that I call 'good' were rich and old." (Chaucer 281). This passage implies not only that her husbands could not keep their marital obligation to her (whose main characteristic is lust), but also that they would die shortly and she could remarry as she pleased, for after 1215 King John granted that widows "were no longer forced to remarry (as they had been before that year) according to the king's wishes" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 11). Therefore through her marriages, she saw the possibility to "obtain some degree of power, for she [the widow] usually received a third part of her husband's estate" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 11) even if, in her marriage to Jankyn, with whom she marries for love, she mislays "the sovereignty over herself that 'richesse' has brought her, she loses her freedom to love" (Carruthers 35). Through such experiences, as Carruthers argues[27], Alisoun gains authority to comically understand the delights of the Aesopian fable of the painting of the lion and "its essential untruthfulness" (36) for "the 'truth' of any picture often has more to do with the prejudices and predilections of the painter then with the 'reality' of the subject and that truthful art (and morality) must take account of this complexly mutual relationship" (22). Alisoun's character embodies the negative imagery regarding lust, mostly drawn from the use of the color red throughout her tale, but she also breaks from it as the value of experience makes her the protagonist of her story, even if it is only to assert the injustice underlying the painting of the lion, which she connects to her situation.

At the other end of this English medieval spectrum of *femes sole* lie those who devoted themselves to religious matters seeking some sort of liberty within that patriarchal society. By refusing to marry or being considered too old to do so, unmarried women were outcasts and could not provide for themselves without the intermediation of a male figure.

[27] Further perspectives can be found in Emma Lipton's "Contracts, Activist Feminism, and the Wife of Bath's Tale" (2019) and Lynne Dickson's "Deflection in the Mirror: Feminine Discourse in The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" (1993).

However, according to Gilbert and Gubar, “even the poorest medieval nunneries clearly functioned as communities of women, providing their inhabitants with an autonomy unmatched in the secular world.” (*The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 12–13). Women who entered convents “could educate themselves and tutor the daughters of wealthy families, where they were safe from harassment, and where their administrative, as well as intellectual abilities, were given scope” (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 12). From the few medieval women whose lives we have some sort of written records of we will briefly examine those of Dame Julian of Norwich (ca.1343 – 1416) and Margery Kempe (1373? - ?), who are representatives of women who sought liberty in religion and will provide material to argue for possibilities of resistance within medieval religious discourse.

The writings attributed to Dame Julian and Kempe, as women visionaries, show their religious dedication as a redressing of their position in society as women. As the first woman known to have written in English, Dame Julian recorded her visions and revelations in *A Book of Showings to Anchoress Julian of Norwich,* which has short and long versions, describing divine revelations she envisioned on May 13th, 1373 while sick (Julian 33). Her religious dedication followed a near-death experience in which she “underwent a rite of enclosure, which resembled a burial service for the soul that sought to die to the world in order to live more fully with Christ.” (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 37). As an anchorite, she “could dedicate herself to solitary meditation and silent prayer” (*The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 37), in this way her book became popular, and she came to be a renowned pious woman in the period. Dame Julian’s contemporary, Margery Kempe, had to create a different approach to devote herself to God and be relieved from her matrimony debt to John Kempe. Her story is described in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, considered to be “the earliest surviving autobiographical writing in

English" (Windeatt 9) after a fifteenth-century manuscript was found in 1934[28]. The book, which refers to Kempe in the third person, was written by probably two amanuenses, containing Kempe's recollections in a non-chronological order, and was revised and published around the 1430s. Unlike Julian of Norwich, she did not recluse herself in an anchor hold but traveled in many pilgrimages, including Jerusalem, Santiago of Compostela, Assisi, and Rome. Considering she could not divorce and was regularly traveling alone to such excursions, she was charged with heresy and imprisoned sometimes; therefore, she made a vow with her husband in order to live chastely and be married to God:

> Grant me that you will not come into my bed, and I grant you that I will pay your debts before I go to Jerusalem. And make my body free to God, so that you never make any claim on me requesting any conjugal debt after this day as long as you live - and I shall eat and drink on Fridays at your bidding. (Kempe 60)

It can be said, then, that the religious involvement of both women responded partially to the imagery commonly associated with women, as previously exposed in this chapter. However, the forms of contemplation they performed, as Dame Julian's fame and the act of writing a book and, especially, Kempe's celibacy and intimacy portrayed in her book, can be interpreted as defiance to the system defended by the Church. Even though the understanding of their corruptness as women corroborates to the sinful essence of women, as represented by Eve, their approach was one of repentance, personified by Mary Magdalene, to whom Kempe specifically had a strong connection: "'Ah, blissful Lord,' said she, 'I wish I were as worthy to be assured of your love as Mary Magdalene was.'" (216). Kempe's book is considered to have a mystical tone, for, as Barry Windeatt states in the book's introduction, she takes over "the mystical tradition of applying metaphors of sense perception to the mystic's experience

[28] According to Windeatt, the fifteenth century manuscript was in possession of an old Catholic family, the Butler-Bowdons (Windeatt 9).

of God and apply them with such concrete force as to risk losing the spiritual in the vigour of the real" (Windeatt 23–24). She envisions herself "in a series of Passion meditations," in which she "imagines herself present at the events of the first Easter from the betrayal of Christ through to the Resurrection, and not only present but actively involved as the busy and solicitous helper and handmaid of the Virgin." (Windeatt 14). By making their revelations known and living according to their beliefs in a time in which women were supposed to be devoted to their husbands, such books and lives assert these women's actions and trajectories as strong and challenging.

One intriguing and interesting challenge is presented in the status and mechanisms of authorship in the Middle Ages, especially concerning the place of the female author. In that period, as we may certainly assume, it meant something different, for the perception of the signature and authenticity given by an author's name was valued differently. To our modern concept, such difference questions the weight and system built around the author, as Michel Foucault has presented in many of his lectures, but especially in "What is an author?" (1969). The key elements of the medieval authorship were *Auctoritas* – "the recognition by others of a witnessing to time-honoured truths in a particular individual" (Dinshaw and Wallace 2) - and *tradition*. These elements elicit the elasticity such notion can endure when comparing to our modern concept of author. Collaborative texts, compilations, translations, and texts produced through patronage defy the rigid structure of the modern and individualized idea of the author. Understanding that the literacy in Latin, as it was measured in the period, among women was not common, Jennifer Summit argues that, due to the different perceptions of authority in medieval England, it is "possible to speak of medieval women authors" (Summit 91) for they could "register their creative influence on textual culture" (93). On the scope of collaborative writing, Margery Kempe represents visionary women who, even with the need for an amanuensis had their names identifying their texts, not with a signature (for this could

be manipulated), but through their self-effacement. Summit argues that these women are "authors by negation," for they attributed their writing to a heavenly source, thus enhancing their Christian humility and devotion, which can be exemplified by Kempe's account of having her book written by priests and men whom she believed to be sent by God, for she could not read or write: "Afterwards, when it pleased our Lord, he commanded and charged her that she should have written down her feelings and revelations, and her form of living, so that his goodness might be known to all the world" (Kempe 35) and by Julian of Norwich's saying: "I am a woman: leued [uneducated], febille and freyll" (qtd. in Summit 96). Another self-erasure aspect was the Church's fear of not being the only source of the divine will presented through the intervention of men as scribes and intermediators. This last element express the authority power the Church aimed at controlling

The mediation of men in the literary process was a symbol of validation because for a woman to write a book by herself was an affront to the Church, especially if it was written according to the self-annihilation claim that makes a woman the channel of communication, the intermediator, between God and men. Hence a textual mediator, as a scribe and other representatives of institutional literacy, became a fundamental part of the writing process of visionaries not only to validate the text but also to avoid suspicion and attacks, especially for women. For instance, Kempe's book was written by more than one amanuensis, and she is always referred to in the third person: " the creature had no writer who would fulfil her desire, nor give credence to her feelings" (Kempe 35). This can be interpreted as a strategy along with Summit's "author by negation" argument, for it evades the author's responsibility upon her experiences and draws attention to God speaking to her mind or her soul, and thus avoiding being charged with heresy. Therefore, her use of an amanuensis is not thought of as a negative or an obliterative aspect in the writing process. Still, other strategies disassociated women from the works they had done.

As exposed, collaborative writing was not uncommon, and so were anonymous texts, but considering the lack of female writers in this period, it becomes relevant to point out the invisibility produced by the signing as *anon* (the abbreviation of anonymous) usually found in many medieval texts. The lack of signature reverberates the objectified imagery of women as being incapable of doing sophisticated works such as translating, and also, as Virginia Woolf has stated, the difficulties imposed upon gifted girls who, in an attempt to write poetry, "would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty." (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 51). Thus, if the signature did not guarantee the authorship of the text for it could be manipulated and associated with names in order to apprehend the *auctoritas* status, its absence opened the possibility of widening the "sophisticated literary game" by the "indeterminacy of authorial gender" (Summit 95). Consequently, to say, like Virginia Woolf, that "Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (*A Room of One's Own* 50), means to widen the scope of English medieval female writings to more texts, translations, and compilations than Gilbert and Gubar have done in the "Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" which belongs to their *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, and comprise three literary periods – Old English Era, English Middle Ages, and the Renaissance – due to the lack of female authored texts.

Early Modern writings

The position literature occupied for women from the Middle Ages to Modernity has changed drastically. From a mediated or invisible literary experience, women have sought ways to write down their "feelings and revelations, and [their] form of living" (Kempe 35). As we have exposed, the first approach was moderated by men, mostly from the clergy, who had the institutional power and educational capacity to depict the rightful portrait of women, whereas the second one points to women's dedication to translations of devotional works and

to the writing of innumerous texts whose authorship has been stated as anonymous. As translators, women were either working on texts written by men or were excluding themselves from their production as a means to remain invisible and therefore avoid attacks from their insulting act of writing. Therefore women's direct contact with experience through writing was controlled symbolically in both ways. In the Early Modern period, however, even though there are some continuities, it is possible to point out some changes regarding female participation in intellectual and literary production.

The sociopolitical events that developed in the early modern period, especially the beginnings of liberalism, fostered the establishment of rights and the conception of individuals. This formation is linked to an apparent separation of the world regarding the public and private spheres. Deriving from the more general dichotomy between nature and culture, such (di)vision was gender-biased, with a hierarchical and social valuation of the feminine and masculine spheres - which indicated the limits and roles of each gender. Feminist scholars Erica Longfellow and Susan Okin approach such division as a means to question not only the vagueness that is generally imbued with the use of such terms, perpetuating the idea that "these spheres are sufficiently separate, and sufficiently different, that the public or political can be discussed in isolation from the private or personal" (Okin 116), but also how this lack of examination has perpetuated patriarchal tenets. For Longfellow, the attribution of gender to these spheres as "'public' equals men and 'private' equals women" (9) is a simplification of the complicated relations between men and women and the personal and political worlds. The dichotomy Okin refers to as "public/domestic" understands the economy as an ambiguous category for it is included in both divisions[29], and

[29] Okin argues that the two distinctions derived from public/private – state and society and non-domestic and domestic life – classify "the intermediate socioeconomic realm (what Hegel called 'civil society')" first as private and second as public (117).

therefore, the preconception that the domestic realm is associated with women is hindered by the patriarchy they are subjected to in their families.

In this scenario, the establishment of rights of individuals blurs the dichotomic separation that posits women in the domestic and private realm. There was an exclusive bias surrounding the formation of the Subject, for they "were assumed, and often explicitly stated, to be adult, male heads of households" (Okin 118). The individual rights such men were entitled to endorsed the explicit division of society, preventing private affairs from being interfered "by the state, or by the church, or from the prying neighbours," thus asserting this Subject's right to control those considered members of his private sphere "whether by reason of age, sex, or condition of servitude" (Okin 118). In this manner, the common understanding that the household was controlled by women is ambiguous, as patriarchy granted men the right to control the private and domestic realms and to participate in the public or non-domestic spheres. Family, which is very often classified as domestic and private, is, nevertheless, subdued to the figure of the male head of the household.

Enclosed to the patriarchal control, either from a father, a husband, or any other male figure, women continued to publish anonymously to avoid public reprimands. Having culture, and, therefore, knowledge placed in the masculine realm - according to the dichotomy of nature and culture, women writers experienced such division through the intrinsic reprobation of their works, for everything associated with females is generally conceived as negative and inferior. As pointed by Gilbert and Gubar, women's new profession of letters "subjected them to ridicule and censure" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 141), which is closely associated with the types of writing women were thought able to dedicate themselves. Such patriarchal reproaches, as Kimberly Coles argues, were not uniform, for a woman's experience was "always a result of economics, geography, social status, and religious affiliation" (Coles 7). Their writings, however, ranged from the

"domestic" styles, such as letters or diaries, to canonical forms, such as poetry and novels. Not surprisingly, women's works are normally rendered as less transgressive and inferior in terms of content and aesthetics. Thus, Kimberly Coles' assertion that "if women did not have a Renaissance, they at least had a Reformation" (Coles 6) is met with her defense of women's relevance in the intellectual, religious production that fostered the Protestant turmoil of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Protestantism's "revolutionary soteriology," which promoted an immediate and individual contact with God "above any mediations of the Church itself" (Coles 6), had a double effect upon women. It excluded female participation or "further subjected them to male regulation" and, at the same time, "implicitly provided precedents for questioning the conventional authorities who had defined women as the second sex" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 123). Coles appraisal of such religious movements over the Renaissance is key to the inclusion and valorization of women's intellectual and literary production at the time, for such mobilizations "reformed a social universe, authorising the religious utterances of women" who were "participants in the most important cultural dialogue that was taking place" (Coles 6). Nevertheless, understanding the relevance of female intellectual participation in the period brings to light two common associations, the first that classifies women's writings as *inferior* and less complex. The second association renders female works as *exceptional* – focusing on their irregularity and deviant source. Both aspects are present when a woman's work is considered '*celebrated'* rather than *influential,* for "the underpinning assumption is that they are not" (Coles 7). Cole's argument, then, discloses the common belief that early modern women's works should not be considered influential to the religious and political discussions taking place at the time because they were of inferior quality and few – in comparison to male writings. Hence, the devaluation of such works occurs through strategies that, along with the exceptional and celebrated labels, restrict

women to the patriarchal categories they were questioning. The same argument is met with a broader sense when considered through the aspect of race, as we will later examine.

The fact that there are more women writers and that education was somehow broadened to more women, other than aristocrats, is more famously sustained by the incorporation of letters and recipe books than to standard literary genres such as poetry, prose, and drama. Puritanism introduced a set of changes that promoted ideas of self-education and spiritual introspection that consequently broadened the value of education for both men and women. Such value was not equal, as male writers still excluded women in many texts containing liberal ideas. Jean Jacques Rousseau's book *Emile, or On Education* (1762), for example, characterizes such difference as he elaborates through most of his book the many forms in which boys should be educated, and only in the last chapter does he address the proper way to educate a girl called Sophie, whose principle as a woman is to be "passive and weak" (Rousseau 358). Such vision reverberated in the nineteenth century the imagery of female fragility, thus enhancing women's association to the domestic realm but segregating them according to class and, as we will see, race. Private or domestic writing came to be associated with women and ended up gaining some success, as canonical texts such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), who "presented his novels as collections of letters" and "involved a circle of female friends in his subtle analyses of emotional reactions, going so far as to send to a friend's daughters a copy of *Pamela* with blank pages interleaved for their corrections" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 143). The success of such books containing feminine subjects in the form of "feminine" literature encouraged women to "produce their own heroines in novels of manners and Gothic romances" (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 143). Being able to pursue a profession of letters was, for women, both a delight and a limitation, for they were understood to have a lot of free time but not enough competence as expressed by Lord

Lyttleton's words: "Seek to be good, but aim not to be great:/ A woman's noblest station is retreat:/ Her fairest virtues fly from public sight,/ Domestic wroth, that shuns too strong a light." (Gilbert and Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* 136). Such pursue, however, must also be inquired through intersectional lenses. Even though an intersectional approach was appointed by Sojourner Truth through her speech "Ain't I A Woman?" only in 1851, it is relevant to question who was able to pursue a profession in letters in the period and where the Other women were.

The fiction of race

Examining the place of women in anthologies of the literature from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is not perceived upfront that only white women are being referred to[30]. Thus inquiring where black women were in these periods and when they started getting access to literature as readers or authors reverberates many inequalities but most of all, how the black subject was and still is rendered in the exceptional label. Here, as previously presented, it is possible to see how the exceptionality of the few black voices of the period is met with its classification as deviant. The dehumanizing effect constructed by slavery reinforces this label, as it disregards the capacity of black people to produce literary works according to the standard level. At the same time, this effect does not make the few works produced influential, quite the opposite, for who had exposed their experiences or creativity stood out despite the general assumption that those who were not of European descent or white were not capable of writing influential texts. While, as exposed, this period fomented the rise of subjectivity that attempted at including hitherto social outcasts, leading to the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) with its "unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" it also culminated in the designation of citizenship only to white men. The distinction between subjects as black or white, as exposed by Dana Nelson, "came early in the American colonial period" in response to the "religious, economic, social, political, and psychological exigencies of early Anglo-American colonists" which stimulated the surging of "race" as a "resilient, persistent, and flexible" apparatus (Nelson viii). From this, analyzing race as a *fiction* rather than as a *fact* focuses on the active form with which race is fashioned, instead of masking its "generative deed or performance"

[30] The two famous anthologies used in this research have only portrayed white female writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Gilbert and Gubar's *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (2007) and *The Cambridge companion to early modern women's writing* (2009) organized by Laura Knoppers.

as it occurs with fact. This difference, drawn by Nelson from Donna Haraway, evidences the invention, description, promotion, and legislation mechanisms that compound a still ongoing process that benefits one group, in this case, white subjects. Hence, the resilient, persistent, and flexible characteristics of race manifest both its "arbitrary constructedness" and its "political efficacy of the concept" (Nelson ix), and, at the same time, it undermines the (pseudo)scientific categorization thrust upon race. To illustrate this argument, a brief analysis of the historical account of the arrival of the "first" subjects from Africa in 1619 to the yet-to-be state of Virginia in the United States of America will reveal the construction of the image of people of African descent according to the "exigencies of early Anglo-American colonists" (Nelson viii). Thus the relation between fact and fiction is elicited.

Revisiting the early history of slavery in the British Colonies unwinds and exposes how some historical markers that are commonplace must be questioned in order to better contextualize the events and refer to the way it has been described. Engle Sluiter, an American historian, presented an article on the origin of the misconception regarding the arrival of the first Africans to the colony that had been exposed in three letters of Englishmen: the first from Captain John Smith, the second from John Pory, secretary of state of the colony, and the third from John Rolfe, "pioneer Virginia tobacco planter (earlier the husband of Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's daughter)" (Sluiter 395). Rolfe's letter and description of the event has been the most circulated due to the details imbued in his description:

> About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of a 160 tunnes arriued at Point-Comfort, the Commandors name Capt Jope, his Pilott for the West Indies one Mr Marmaduke an Englishman. They mett wth the *Trier* in the West Indyes, and determyned to hold consort shipp hetherward, but in their passage lost one the other. He brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes, which the Governor

> and Cape Marchant bought for victualle (whereof he was in greate need as he pretended) at the best and easyest rate they could. He hadd a lardge and ample Commyssion from his Excellency to range and to take purchase in the West Indyes. (Sluiter 396).

According to Sluiter, historical evidences to say that "the blacks brought to Virginia in a Dutch ship in 1619 almost certainly came directly, in two stages, from Africa" contradicts the former idea that those subjects who were described as being odd were the "offspring of slaves from Africa brought to the region a generation or more earlier" (Sluiter 396). Michael Guasco, another historian, corroborates Sluiter's argument and goes further. In his 2017 article in the Smithsonian Magazine about human bondage in the early modern Atlantic world, Guasco adverts that the "official" date of arrival of the first African people in the British colonies "certainly wasn't the first time people of African descent made their mark and imposed their will on the land that would someday be part of the United States" (Guasco). And not only that, he adds that the story that is said to begin in 1619 is not historically responsible, for it "reflect[s] the worries and concerns of the world we inhabit rather than shedding useful light on the unique challenges of life in the early seventeenth century" (Guasco). The silencing perpetrated by such "official narrative" has "historical framing shap[ing] historical meaning," (Guasco) for the relation manifested in the 1619's letter about the arrival of the first black people in "American territory" "normalizes white Christian Europeans as historical constants and makes African actors little more than dependent variables" (Guasco). It can be said, then, that the historical framing given to black subjects in the description of their "first arrival" has promoted the stable division between "us" and "them" since colonization, perpetuating the stereotypical idea that race was something implicit and not created; and, at the same time, it endorsed the notion of dependency and incapacity, arguments that have fostered the creation of racially biased

slavery as being natural and for the benefit of those who could not take care of themselves. Consequently, this narrative exemplifies how the understanding of race as a fact promotes the construction of a double fictionality: one that is inside John Rolfe's letter that represents those with dark skin color to be passive and dependent, when in fact, the white European colonists were the ones who depended upon other people to farm and manage animals due to their incapacity to do so, and the other is in the selection and reverberation of this specific passage as the "historical beginning" of slavery in the USA.

The "20. and odd Negroes" who arrived off the coast of Jamestown, Chesapeake in the seventeenth century's British Colonies, were not only represented as being conformed with their "situation," but also had their peculiarities ignored, being classified as identical and sharing the same experience in bondage[31]. Such misconception has made room for stereotypical visions that are yet present in society. In the book, *Many thousands gone: the first two centuries of slavery in North America* (1998), historian Ira Berlin examines how race, slavery, and its differences have been constructed and how the irresponsible historical approach to such events and notions has provided material for generalizations that reproduce violence and oppression. His analysis places race as a social and historical construct, as it is set according to time and space. As this notion is constantly redefined, the experiences derived from it do not encompass a single and universal agenda. Slavery, like race, was always adapting and changing, and it was different everywhere. Thus, it is particularly important to stress that being a slave did not describe or define one's life. This is especially relevant for the scope of this master thesis, for as we have previously evidenced, African American (auto)biographies have been criticized for being repetitive and imbued with sameness (Olney, "I Was Born" 46). The social death, as Berlin states, that slavery

[31] Background information on the origins of these people can be found in Thornton, John. "The African Experience of the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia in 1619." The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 55, no. 3, 1998, pp. 421–434. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2674531. Accessed 1 July 2020.

symbolizes aimed at making those whose origin was beyond the Atlantic Ocean a blank canvas by withdrawing their identity, culture, and history. Yet, "understanding that a person was a slave is not the end of the story, but the beginning, for the slaves' history was derived from experiences that differed from place to place and time to time and not from some unchanging transhistorical verity" (Berlin 3). Therefore, the analysis of Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee's (auto)biographies that take place in this thesis aims at not only valuing these differences but also regarding similar points as elements that stem from older and collective roots regarding specifically their gender and race.

These misunderstandings associated with race led to the suppression of singularities and cultural traits and forced black people into the position of the psychoanalytical Other. Grada Kilomba explores how Black subjects came to be "the personification of the repressed aspects of the *white* 'self'"(19): Otherness. She describes whiteness "as a dependent identity that exists through the exploitation of the 'Other,' a relational identity constructed by *whites* defining themselves as unlike racial 'Others.'" (19). Consequently, it is possible to state that the exceptionality label is twofold regarding black subjects, for the focus on skin color leads them into a merging that determines this characteristic to be differential and unifying at the same time. On the one hand, when approached in the negative aspects, such as sloth, violence, and malice, according to what Kilomba named as the screen of projection (18), it can be said that one black person represents all black people. On the other hand, when one black person succeeds and stands out, this person's "achievement" (reaching the white Subject's expectations and producing something that is valued and highly regarded by white people) is not entirely laureated for it emerges from among a people whose achievements are disregarded, meaning that the individual who produced such a thing is only one detached from an ocean of nameless and faceless Others. This way, the white subject maintains the status as the 'self' and the "white fantasies of what Blackness should be like" (19). By the

same token, the two subjects whose works are the focus of this thesis bear the exceptional label. As Truth and Lee have outspoken their sufferings and their trajectories towards spiritual and financial liberty, they have become pioneers and the embodiment of resistance for black subjects, but especially for black women.

Given these points, it can be said that in Early Modern society, the historical account made of the subjects of African origin is an example of how race is fictionalized. Correspondingly, the invisibility imbued with it reinforces the mechanisms created that excluded and imposed a selected type of history and memory. The revolutions that took place during these years have, no doubt, fomented changes and provided components that would later be incorporated and embodied by both white and black subjects. Considering written discourse, the nineteenth-century autobiographical tradition, which has so many African American representatives, can be seen as the product of social and religious movements that originated from the period's revolutions. These movements influenced abolitionists and slave holders, for, just as previously mentioned regarding white women, it provided arguments for both exclusion and integration. Religiosity, especially, has been used both to support the difference of subjects of African descent and, at the same time, challenge it. The African American (auto)biographical tradition appears as a result of these opposite movements, which, as William Andrews has stated, had as the first task to advocate for their humanity through the possession of souls: "the black spiritual autobiographer had to lay the necessary intellectual groundwork by proving that black people were as much chosen by God for eternal Salvation as whites" (Andrews 7). This was achieved by the very sameness aspect that had been criticized. When these people and their works were labeled as exceptions, there was a need to collectively demonstrate their capacity and ability. Such movement was threatening to white people, thus they constructed ways to prevent black people's from gaining

consciousness, since by proving their equality before God, black people could seek some sort of reparation and make the oppression and abuse executed to them exposed.

The pursuit for some sort of rectification and the female (auto)biographical tradition started at the end of the eighteenth century[32] , according to Joanne Braxton, with Belinda Sutton's "as told to" petition from 1783[33] entitled "Belinda, or the Cruelty of Men Whose Faces Were Like the Moon" in which she pleads for an income from Isaac Royall, for whom she worked, because, due to her age (seventy years old approximately), she was unable to support herself (Braxton 2). Belinda's petition tells not only of her capture in West Africa while at prayer in "devotion to the great Orisha who made all things," and of the "dreaded "middle passage," but the complete disruption of the narrator's emotional and spiritual life and the corresponding loss of her sense of place, both physical and metaphysical" (Braxton 2). Belinda's story and pleads represent the struggle for African men and women to be heard and the difficulties to be "repaired" for all the exploitation and social death. The use of institutional agencies to demand her "compensation" through petitions that were told orally by her demonstrates some of the obstacles that were still in the way of African and African American people. Her crossing from the private to the public spheres through her usage of a foreign language and the political position she took "as spokesperson for millions of transported Africans" (Braxton 3) mark Belinda as a resisting voice that would later echo and gain volume in the antislavery movement of the following century. Thus, the questions "What did it mean for a Black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? And in our

[32] According to William L. Andrews, the initial appearance of the genre was in 1760 with *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Men.*

[33] Braxton indicated the year 1787 as the publication of the "short narrative petitioning the New York legislature for reparations" (Braxton 2), however, in 2015 a comprehensive database of Massachusetts antislavery petitions was announced including some of Belinda's petitions. The 1787 version that can be accessed online < https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/XFFLL> is another request linked to the one she moved in 1783, in which she was to receive fifteen pounds and twelve shillings from the estate of the late Isaac Royall. Taking in consideration the access to the original manuscripts from 1787 and 1783 < https://royallhouse.org/belinda-suttons-1783-petition-full-text/>, it is more accurate to date her petition narrative 1783.

great-grandmothers' day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood"[34] (Braxton 3) coupled with the questions previously mentioned: "where were black women in these periods and when did they start getting access to literature as readers or authors?," not only evoke the inequalities or the paradoxical exceptional label but, most of all, the violence these men and women experienced through generations. The voicing of such sufferings and the demand for reparation by Belinda and by other innumerous men and women (until today) is met with difficulty due to the white Subjects' denial in recognizing their part in creating and promoting the resilient, persistent and flexible category of race.

2.2 Truth and Lee's experiences as black women in the 19th century

"Among the blacks are women; among the women, there are blacks."
(Painter 4)

The argument developed hitherto has focused on the different ways *women* have sought and created to escape the imagery and social covenants that constricted them. The coverture doctrine is an example that still has elements reverberating in our society, even though most of its aspects were abolished in the nineteenth century. According to Susan Okin, "forced sexual relations within marriage have only been recognized as rape" by the end of the twentieth century in England and the U.S. (131). Thus, it is not too unbelievable to assume the ongoing influence of the ideology behind this doctrine that is expressed through many types of violence, especially in the domestic realm nowadays. The twentieth-century feminist slogan "The personal is political" has echoed in feminist studies as concerns on the centrality of family in society shed light on the patriarchal tenets supporting it. Okin's argument is that, despite John Locke's seventeenth-century definition of political power

[34] This question was quoted by Joanne Braxton from Alice Walker's book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* (New York: Hartcourt Brace Jovanivich, 1983), page 234.

evoking its distinction to the power relations operating within the household (and his oblivion to the effects on women), privacy is an important psychological need. The need for a private space, or more famously, for "a room of one's own"[35] is met with the rise of subjectivity. To question the place of women in society is to widen the possibilities for different perceptions and actions for both men and women. The common association of women to the household as caretakers and domestic workers is not so normal as first presented. Therefore, the constraining of female participation and liberty of choice in both private and public realms have been met by innumerous women who have creatively developed strategies to endure and resist. The examples given so far by Alisoun, in "The Wife of Bath," Dame Julian of Norwich, in *A Book of Showings*, Margery Kempe, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and Belinda Sutton, in her petition, represent some of the resisting points argued by Foucault in his theory of power.

The discussion concerning the place of women must uncover and bring to light who is included in this category. Since those who were entitled to escape the imagery constructed upon them were white women, it is important to clearly state the place of black women, but furthermore, to reveal how they have been marginalized in contradictory perspectives. Taking Okin's exemplification on rape, as forced sexual relations within marriage, exposes how the rules are race-biased. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a North American lawyer, argues that such a conception of rape, as in Okin's example, represents the "*white* male regulation of *white* female sexuality"(157) and of white women's chastity. Overshadowing the meaning that for non-white women, rape was "a weapon of racial terror." The lawyer argues that in the specific case of black women, "[t]heir femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection" (158–59). Thus,

[35] *A Room of One's Own* is a book written by the British author Virginia Woolf published in 1929. It is groundbreaking as it explores the importance and the lack of personal space for women. It must be noted, however, that it does not encompass black women's perspectives and experiences.

the distinction between public and private do not encompass black women, for "Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms" (156). In light of this intersectional approach that evidence the Otherness to which black women were subjugated, Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee appear as more than questioners, but as survivors and testimony of the contradictoriness of the womanhood myth. The symbolical question "Ain't I A Woman?," presented in the most literary transcription of her speech, is considered the cornerstone of intersectional studies because it challenges not only the patriarchy that excluded and marginalized Truth, but it is also a protest to the white female audience that heard her on May 29, 1851. To Angela Davis[36], the four times Truth posed the question "Ain't I A Woman?" it "exposed the class-bias and racism of the new women's movement. All women were not white and all women did not enjoy the material comfort of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie." (Davis 63). Accordingly, another relevant phrase that discloses the need to consider an intersectional approach is Julia Cooper's "[o]nly the Black Woman can say, when and where I enter... Then in there the whole race enters with me." (qtd. in Crenshaw 160). As Truth and Lee construct their places in society and become something close to *outsiders within*[37], they epitomize the movement that includes black women in economic, social, and religious spaces. Their positions as resistance subjects free black women from the constraints that have imposed upon them racial and gender subjugation, as we will investigate and exemplify in this chapter and the next.

Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth's literary works and life have expanded such movements as they explored their private and public experiences in their works. To talk about Lee and Truth in their context and through their works is to inquire if they perceived the

[36] Davis did not have access to later discussions concerning the fictionalizing elements from Gage's version in her book *Women, Race and Class* published in 1981. Nell Irvin Painter, who would disclose such analysis published her book in 1996.

[37] *Outsider within* is a term used by the scholar Patricia Hill Collins to define marginalized subjects who have a position in academic settings and make use of that to produce "Black feminist thought that reflects a special standpoint on self, family, and society." (Collins 14).

influence of patriarchal tenets in their lives and what were their thoughts and attitudes regarding it. Nevertheless, before trying to answer these questions, we must bear in mind the type of works they produced. The (auto)biographical genre is peculiar for it is situated in the middle of key intersections, such as fact and fiction and private and public. Considering that (auto)biographies are generally intended and written for a public audience, the presence of the reader is central. The omnipresence of the targeted audience of such works is intertwined with their fictionality – a trait that attracts and repulses readers and researchers. However, in light of these elements, it is necessary to expound that the (auto)biographical potency derives from these junctions, as there is something of private among all the public discourses, as well as traces of fact in between the fictionalized narrative.

Furthermore, an (auto)biography is generally about the life of a person who desires to make her/himself exemplary[38] due to important or relevant experiences in life. The perception of one's life as a model, connected to the (auto)biographical writing, foments the creation of a persona[39], which is a relevant viewpoint to understand privacy and the private realm. However, when considering black privacy, we should ask what are the differences black people encounter regarding the public and private realms? As previously mentioned, the assertion of the white male control was under "reasons of age, sex, or condition of servitude" (Okin 118); thus, Belinda Sutton's petition in 1783 is an example of how black people tried to question the public/private division by requiring reparation for all the violence suffered. The power exerted upon those "inferior" subjects had consequences on black families' constitution and understanding. Consequently, the construction of an (auto)biography by a black person not only explores the subjective process of a person but

[38] Which is also connected to the idea of defence - when the autobiographer makes use of the (auto)biographical genre to explain and give his perspective regarding specific issues – as William Andrews (4) points to John Henry Newman's writing of *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864).

[39] This persona is fruit of the fictionalization processes of the genre and its creation differs enormously from the diary, as the intention to publish is not a precondition of this genre.

also creates and officializes his/her history – and by doing so, black (auto)biographies regard memory as individual and collective constructions. The act of making lives known in texts allows a closer reading upon the configuration of families and the relations established with white and black subjects. Taking this into account, the investigation here proposed of Truth and Lee's (auto)biographies will focus on the interplay between private and public in their descriptions of specific elements that are closely related to family: childhood, parents and siblings, marriage, motherhood, and their relationship to God. The study of black female (auto)biographies exposes the attempts to evidence the absence of racially-based discussions about the private in the public division. By asking what it means to be a black woman preacher and what aspects itinerant preachers like Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee had to cope with in order to fulfill their religious call, problems related to finances, loneliness, and health issues are exposed, which express the sociopolitical aspects that circumscribed their actions as women in both private and public realms.

The exemplary intention behind Lee and Truth's works is connected to their classification as black religious (auto)biographies. According to William Andrews' description, the "protagonist wishes to escape sinfulness and ignorance in order to achieve righteousness and the knowledge of the saving grace of God" (7). Such vision corroborates with Lee and Truth's (auto)biographical construction. Jarena Lee, for example, in 1804 after listening to a Presbyterian missionary preach the following Psalms: "Lord, I am vile conceived in sin, Born unholy and unclean. Sprung from man, whose guilty fall Corrupts the race, and taints us all.," understood that "this description of [her] condition struck [her] to the heart, and made [her] to feel in some measure, the weight of [her] sins, and sinful nature." (Lee 3–4). For Truth, even though the mentioning of sins is less frequent, it also stresses the presence and need for godly approval through repentance. During her description of her religious experience "she became instantly conscious of her great sin in forgetting her

almighty Friend and 'ever-present help in time of trouble.'" (Gilbert and Truth 44). This marker is common for both works and it is also the intersection between the private and public realms, for religiosity fomented "an awakening of their awareness of their fundamental identity with and rightful participation in logos, whether understood as reason or its expression in speech or as divine spirit" (Andrews 7). Such awakening, in the form of conversion, instigated their actions as "instruments of God." Lee and Truth's desire to preach the gospel, the first as an AME preacher and the former as the traveler of the truth, removes them from the stereotyped vision of passivity associated with women. As black women, however, we must question the passive position associated with women, as it becomes evident with the reading of both (auto)biographies and Truth's 1851 speech, that black women have never occupied such position due to slavery and the patriarchal system. Their books are, then, evidences of a transformation that started from within their minds and souls and matured to public and concrete actions to fulfill the duty that was revealed to them by God. By saying: "I was the most ignorant creature in the world" (Lee 7), Jarena Lee is indicating, through the use of the past tense, that she had been enlightened by the holy words and sought salvation. Olive Gilbert, for instance, writes that "Sojourner declares of the slaves in their ignorance, that 'their thoughts are no longer than her finger'" (Gilbert and Truth 16). Such declaration is further exemplified when Truth talks about her parents difficulties as age became a problem for both slaveowner and enslaved person: "though ignorant, helpless, crushed in spirit, and weighed down with hardship and cruel bereavement, they were still human, and their human hearts beat within them with as true an affection as ever caused a human heart to beat." (13). The change of perspective in Truth has in its center the consciousness of the oppressive structure of slavery. Lee's request to preach the gospel as an official preacher among the Methodists and Truth's revelations and even renaming are

indications of transgression. The transformation both women underwent, in fact, led them to transform their private religious experiences and lives into published texts.

Another aspect that must be pointed is how the idea of "instrument" is similar to the "author by negation" previously presented by Jennifer Summit regarding Middle Age authors. Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee's involvement with religiosity through preaching would commonly be due to God's inspiration:

> If then, to preach the gospel, by the gift of heaven, comes by inspiration solely, is God straitened; must he take the man exclusively? May he not, did he not, and can he not inspire a female to preach the simple story of the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord, and accompany it too with power to the sinner's heart. As for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor according to what I have received, in his vineyard. (Lee 12).

In this passage, as well as in many others from Jarena Lee, this "preaching by negation" is presented as a means to indulge her connection with God. This trait indicates Lee's desire to render all the power and inspiration onto God and be valued as a true intermediator. Both women saw themselves as intermediators, but Lee most commonly denied her own part in it. She frequently said that: "The Lord was pleased to give me light and liberty among the people" (Lee 19) or "the good Master filled my mouth and gave me liberty among strangers" (Lee 26). The liberty to speak, according to Lee's (auto)biography is always connected to God's inspiration and presence. This position renders Lee some sort of invisibility in her own work, whereas Truth's autobiographical structure is centered on her attitudes and trials. Even though both works can be considered religious (auto)biographies, the divergences regarding structure and focus lead to the erasure of Jarena Lee's actions towards a more quantified and inspired commitment to her call to preach (due to her detailed descriptions of her performance as a preacher), whereas Sojourner Truth's account of her life, apart from the

religiosity involved, shed light on the subject who passed so many trials in life. Thus, the instrumentality with which women like Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Sojourner Truth, and Jarena Lee[40] exposed their commitment to their religious calls may be an attempt to escape from the patriarchal control, but was yet within the power of a male figure that would have borne infinite power as to be called "almighty."

Another element that derives from the (auto)biographical narrative structure is causality. The division of (auto)biographies is somehow standardized; the order of events is set to develop the story and reach the intended point. The causes of events are generally established at the beginning of narratives, with references to the narrator's parents, siblings, and childhood. The selection of memories from this period of life becomes a base of construction for the effects these choices will allow to emerge. Regarding black (auto)biographers, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, there is a prior deficit of information that is commonly found in white people's (auto)biographies; the year of birth is frequently absent or uncertain. As a dehumanizing effect, slavery supported the erasure of private information of those under its system. Name, date of birth, origin, parents, siblings, and other relatives were not conserved as a device to keep the system flowing, and so this information would not provide roots for those enduring the yoke. For Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth, family is presented differently, and it is linked to the distinctive objectives of each text.

In the case of Lee's (auto)biography, she knows her exact date of birth: "I was born February 11th, 1783," but little is mentioned of her childhood or of her parents. Her brief reference to her parents or childhood sheds little light on her infancy but tells us that even though she was not born a slave, "at the age of seven years [she] was parted from [her]

[40] These women, who lived in different eras and have different agendas share the category of "Otherness" in their own periods and contexts.

parents, and went to live as a servant maid" (Lee 3). The other only remark regarding her parents is in reference to religious instruction as "[her] parents being wholly ignorant of the knowledge of God, had not therefore instructed [her] in any degree in this great matter." (Lee 3). Such indication foretells the religious aim of her literary enterprise, hence the absence of information about her private life, and is counterposed by the importance she gives to her preaching trips, as she counts the miles traveled as well as the number of exhortations performed: "I have travelled, in four years, sixteen hundred miles and of that I walked two hundred and eleven miles, and preached the kingdom of God to the falling sons and daughters of Adam, counting it all joy for the sake of Jesus." (Lee 36). The focus on her work is typical of the (auto)biographical structure she constructed.

Regarding Sojourner Truth, the reminiscences she and Olive Gilbert have selected follow the "standard" pattern of (auto)biographies, some sort of chronological order, that created a line from her life. It is composed of recollections of Truth's childhood, her struggle with different slave owners, her marriage, and her religious and preaching experiences. The structural division of Truth's narrative differs profoundly from Lee's, as it contains thirty chapters, some dedicated to her mother, father, and brothers and sisters. The importance she gives to family description is key to sustain her (auto)biography as a construction of her personal history. Even though Truth's narrative is shorter[41] than Lee's, it bears more details of her private life. The hypothesis for such descriptive trait stems from the collaborative construction of the work – that is presented in Olive Gilbert's opinion and comments throughout the work, to Truth's desire to portray her life story as proof of all the hardships God helped her go through. Gilbert's role in the construction of the (auto)biography has been mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, but we must bear in mind that her presence does not obstruct Truth's engagement in the writing process.

[41] Here we are referring to Truth's (auto)biographical text without the additions made by Frances Titus.

In relation to Truth's reference to her childhood, a lot differs from Lee's account. The first and more discrepant fact is that Truth was born into slavery, as did her mother, Betsey (also called Mau Mau Bett), father, James (also called 'Bomefree'), and siblings. From this, it is no surprise when they inform the reader that she "was born, as near as she can now calculate, between the years 1797 and 1800" (13). A peculiar characteristic in Truth's narrative that has certainly had an effect on her absence in the canon of African American (auto)biographies derives from her portrayal of the slave owners. Nell Irvin Painter, one of Truth's researchers and biographers, has stated that "it ends not with indictment, but with the Christian forgiveness of a slaveholder" (Painter 109). However, not only does it end with Christian morale, but it also starts with one, since her earliest recollections portray Charles Ardinburgh as "the best of the family,--being, comparatively speaking, a kind master to his slaves" and that their lot – including her family and those other who were his property – "was a fortunate one" (Gilbert and Truth 9). Such conciliatory view is contrasted by her description of the accommodations assigned to his slaves:

> She carries in her mind, to this day, a vivid picture of this dismal chamber; its only lights consisting of a few panes of glass, through which she thinks the sun never shone, but with thrice reflected rays; and the space between the loose boards of the floor, and the uneven earth below, was often filled with mud and water, the uncomfortable splashings of which were as annoying as its noxious vapors must have been chilling and fatal to health. She shudders, even now, as she goes back in memory, and revisits this cellar, and sees its inmates, of both sexes and all ages, sleeping on those damp boards, like the horse, with a little straw and a blanket; and she wonders not at the rheumatisms, and fever-sores, and palsies, that distorted the limbs and racked the bodies of those fellow-slaves in after-life. (10)

In this passage, we can perceive Gilbert's inclusion of Truth's memories and feelings expressed by the recollection. As the Narrative is written in the third person singular, referring to Truth as "she", Gilbert makes both her presence and Truth's very explicit. The use of reported speech is evident, and it stresses the active role of Truth in the retelling of her own story. Yet, in some parts Gilbert's commentaries turn into a present voice of reprimand or of emphasis, especially when she addresses the reader. Drawing from it, Truth's criticism of slave owners in the text is not direct, as we can read right after the cellar's description:

> Still, she does not attribute this cruelty (…) so much to any innate or constitutional cruelty of the master, as to that gigantic inconsistency, that inherited habit among slave-holders, of expecting a willing and intelligent obedience from the slave, because he is a MAN--at the same time every thing belonging to the soul-harrowing system does its best to crush the last vestige of a man within him; and when it *is* crushed, and often before, he is denied the comforts of life, on the plea that he knows neither the want nor the use of them, and because he is considered to be little more or little *less* than a beast. (10) (Italics from the original).

Thus, Sojourner Truth's description of her "master" as kind (comparatively speaking) and of the cruelty he inflicted on those he enslaved expressed in the accommodations provided conflict with her mitigating attribution of the cruelty to the slavery system. The conciliatory tone Painter mentioned is met with Truth's attempt at exposing her transformation through Christian values as proof of her strength to endure the hardships and to forgive those who had caused her harm. Gilbert's role in this description must also be considered to interpret the text's tone. Nonetheless, it is through this exposure that the reader becomes aware of Truth's goal as an advocate for the humanity within those subjugated to "the soul-harrowing system," in consonance with the tradition of religious (auto)biographies.

Truth's portrayal of her family follows her goal of writing her own history as well as intertwining God's support throughout her life. The concept of motherhood will support this analysis, inasmuch as for African American women, motherhood meant different things. According to Stephanie Li, the violence of slavery "disrupts conventional meanings attached to words such as "mother" and "womanhood." What is motherhood for a woman deprived of the ability to care for and protect her child?" (Li 14). Especially in the case of Truth, for her model of motherhood that derived from Mau Mau Bett's suffering was connected to her religiosity to seek divine support. The first religious instruction she received came from her mother, who "in her humble way, did she endeavor to show them their Heavenly Father, as the only being who could protect them in their perilous condition" (12). Bearing in mind that "enslaved women and their children could be separated at any time, and even if they belonged to the same owner, strict labor policies and plantation regulations severely limited the development of their relationships" (Li 14). Mau Mau Bett's pain due to the separation from her children, a highlighted memory in the text, has in God a refuge, which she teaches her sons and daughters to seek. The suffering associated with Mau Mau Bett was due to the complex position motherhood had for enslaved women "because procreation by bondwomen can be regarded as both a means of perpetuating slavery and an act of love and self-sacrifice" (Li 14). In the narrative, the figure of Truth's father is not absent, and he too expresses his sorrow for the situation: "'They are all taken away from me! I have now not one to give me a cup of cold water - why should I live and not die?'" (Gilbert and Truth 15–16). The kinship of the family was sadly constructed around pain, so that Truth's parents would "sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing, as well as harrowing circumstance that taxed memory could supply, from the histories of those dear departed ones, of whom they had been robbed, and for whom their hearts still bled." (11). It was this faith that "would strengthen and brighten the chain of family affection, which she trusted extended itself sufficiently to

connect the widely scattered members of her precious flock." (12). The focus on her parent's sufferings and the strategies they have created to deal with it impressed upon Truth the religious discourse as a means to alleviate the toils she had suffered. Right after telling about her father's death, deserted and neglected, Truth focuses on her story, specifically in "commencement of Isabella's trials in life," which started with the auction that separated her from her parents and her younger brother. In this way, the family appears as an important element of Truth's text; it connects her to feelings of suffering and to the search for assistance in God. However, Truth's concentration on her mother's story is not reflected in her own telling of herself as a mother.

As previously exposed in what motherhood is concerned, the concept of marriage carries many hues. From this, we can pinpoint how Truth and Lee's experiences portrayed in their narratives are the products of many socio-political interactions. These experiences have made them question the social places determined by the power interactions, showing how they have placed themselves as women in the economic, geographical, social status, and religious realms of their period. Yet, for Truth and Lee, these experiences were indeed quite different, but with some similarities. A similar trace is that both women are very succinct and do not give a lot of details about their "husbands." The differences, however, derive from the contexts in which each woman was living. In Truth's (auto)biography, Olive Gilbert's position as the writer becomes evident and exposes her view on the "abominable state of things" (Gilbert and Truth 24) in slavery marriages, in which "slaves are neither husbands nor wives in law" (16). Gilbert's opinion is evident by the lack of reference to Truth's memories or opinion on the matter, stressed by the use of the personal pronoun "I" to express her view and "she" to tell Isabella's events concerning marriage. Therefore, the brief mentioning of Truth's marriage to a "fellow-slave" named Thomas is described by Gilbert as "a mere farce, a mock marriage, unrecognized by any civil law, and liable to be annulled any moment, when

the interest or caprice of the matter should dictate" (25). Even though it is exemplified by the fact that Thomas' previous two wives might have been "torn from him and sold far away" (24) and that Truth performed her own ceremony, Painter points, in a footnote of the (auto)biography, that Gilbert's view on enslaved marriage is a "mistakenly generaliz[ed] form Southern practices" for it was legally recognized in early nineteenth-century New York (Gilbert and Truth 249). Gilbert expresses her indignation towards the encouragement given by the slaveholder to the enslaved "to take another [wife/woman] at each successive sale" and also to the enslaved response that "under existing circumstances, he could do no better" (24). Such positioning corroborates Li's argument that "the sexuality of enslaved women and their relationship to their offspring must be understood as a complex negotiation involving individual agency, resistance, and power" (Li 14). Gilbert's critical opinion is seen all over the chapter dedicated to "Isabella's marriage," and Thomas is mentioned only a few times. As a mother, however, Truth is very dedicated, but she does not provide a lot of information on her five children, from whom Peter and Diana are the most mentioned ones. The former bears a special place in the narrative since his illegal sale caused a great deal of stress for his mother, who describes the many obstacles she had to face in order to have her son back. The fact that her sons and daughters were not emancipated as she had been may have influenced her exposure of details in the story. As indentured servants, her children became a connection to her former slaveholder, John Dumont, whom she visits in the last part of the book.

In relation to Jarena Lee's commentaries on her marriage, she also does not give many details of the husband. She got married in 1811 to Joseph Lee, a pastor in Snow Hill "about six miles from the city of Philadelphia" (Lee 13). It is relevant that she married a pastor, but it is also intriguing that she married a man who was not from her close religious' circle. It is the first experience of loneliness that she explicitly asserts in the book: "This was a great trial at first, as I knew no person at Snow Hill, except my husband" (Lee 13). The closeness of her

relations in Philadelphia is also stressed as she makes use of figures of speech to highlight its strength: "sweet fellowship" and "have together drank bliss and happiness from the same fountain" (Lee 13). Her discontent in being deprived of her acquaintances from Philadelphia became an importuner to the point that it is mentioned to her husband, meaning that she expressed her feelings as a means to have them heard and possibly induce some change. Her affliction and sadness gave way to a dream with many biblical references - from the fair and white sheep to the "man of a grave and dignified countenance, dressed entirely in white, as it were in a robe" (Lee 13). The Jesus-like figure of the man advises her to let her husband do his job, for it was necessary to keep the sheep from the wolf. Such dreamlike vision “awoke” her in both ways, as she “yielded to the right spirit in the Lord,” which was in tune with her husband's wishes (Lee 13). Thus, she is placing her husband's duty over her wishes. The fact that she addresses her will to return to Philadelphia as an importune show how she, as a woman, was disregarding her need.

In the second time she mentions her husband, she refers to his death. The other five people she said she lost over these six years in Snow Hill are not named, and no family ties were mentioned. She expresses her affliction over the death of Joseph Lee, especially because she was left with two infant children, “one of the age of about two years, the other six months” (Lee 14). This fact is an intriguing one, for after this she only mentions one son, who was being helped by Richard Allen to get a trade and also shared religious inclinations. Her economic situation is mentioned briefly and in reference to “the promise of Him who hath said-- I will be the widow's God, and a father to the fatherless” (Lee 14). Due to this situation, she says that God has sent her friends who have comforted and solaced her, meaning that after all these years lamenting her departure from her dear ones in Philadelphia, she finally got friends in Snow Hill. Such change is understood as a divine act, as she emphasizes her trust and belief in God as a source of help and provision for herself and her family both

spiritually and physically, whenever needed. It seems like in Snow Hill she had made her mind to follow her desire and saw herself forced to support the family economically due to her widowhood. She is very concise in the mentioning of her family relatives, and everything is directed to the purpose of strengthening and highlighting her faith and God's guidance. Of her mother, we know little. Right when she began preaching, her son became sick, and she decided to leave with her mother, the "poor sickly boy, while [she] departed to do [her] Master's will," after such mentioning, she is visited by Lee three times, according to the (auto)biography, the last being when her mother was 82 years of age and was very ill.

In conclusion, concerning the blurred division between private and public, the family appears as a key element to examine in (auto)biographies and in the society these works have been based on. It is particularly relevant when we consider the concept of family for black people who have traumatic experiences in this matter. The expression of these events will, most likely, be through the "language of trauma," as exposed by Kilomba in reference to Frantz Fanon's view on blackness deriving from the white imaginary (Kilomba 20). Therefore, when placing race in the middle of discussions about family and consequently in the private and public division, many gaps and complexities appear. A racial perspective on the private lives of these women has shown that motherhood and womanhood bear different meanings for African American women and especially for those who ventured into public life as preachers and exhorters. But as previously exposed, the lives of Truth and Lee and of those who came before and after them were deeply influenced by public sphere issues. As children, Lee and Truth were oppressed and worked since an early age, which meant that their relationship with their parents and siblings was one of rupture and trauma, as Truth's account evidence. Regarding marriage, other types of conflict appear. In Truth's narrative, the institution of marriage was one under control of the slaveholder who saw the possibility of

increasing the number of his property by encouraging enslaved men to take different women at each sale, but it could be broken at any time, according to the desires and needs of the slave owner. This flexibility in African American marriage indicates for Olive Gilbert that such mock unions were illegal. In relation to this, motherhood presented itself as challenging for both women, as they were always traveling and/or had their children as indentured servants. But one thing is clear from this analysis: they do not give a lot of details about those who shared the private sphere with them (husband and children), apart from Truth, who gives a thorough account of the sufferings and death of her parents.

Taking all into consideration, it is possible to state that the religiosity they developed and fomented in life influences their understanding and depiction of their private realm. The construction of an (auto)biography as a subjective process allows them to create and officialize their history, which becomes a defensive and creative mechanism. The fictionality of African American (auto)biographies enhances these fictional attributions as a construction that serves both collective and individual purposes, hence the need to prove the equality of African descents regarding their humanity and their souls. The fiction within an (auto)biography has a connection to the need to escape the tension of maintaining a (public) role - that evokes the psychoanalytical construction of the Other, according to what Kilomba has exposed. From this, we can understand the quote that entitles this chapter, “I told them it was my business to preach,” in consonance with the questionings that surrounded this chapter. Jarena Lee’s words evidence the hard and suffered way constructed by black women against all the prejudices and hardships. Her assertion appears as the product of centuries of creative strategies to express and seek a place in society apart from the ones that have been thrust upon women. If we separate the sentence into two parts, we have the first “I told them” as the positioning of someone who has a voice and wants to be heard. The second: “it was my business to preach,” states her occupation as a source of resistance to the place thrust upon

her. As an occupation it provided some financial support that is the focus of some of Lee's recurring topics and Truth's means to buy her house. By carrying out this business, they were also exposing themselves to unforeseen occurrences, such as the lack of lodgings, of food and of medical assistance. Lee, for instance, writes about many of these events and has suffered in her late years from severe illnesses that have converged to her misnaming in the census, as exhibited by Knight (2017). To preach, especially for a black woman in the 19th century, was not well seen, as Lee's experience tells us – the first woman to be allowed to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Sojourner Truth's renaming and involvement with women's rights and abolitionist movements are connected to such interpretation of resistance and active role in her life trajectory, as exposed in the previous chapter. The different transgressions both performed are tied to religiosity as an escape and also as subjugation to another patriarchal system, even if, as preachers, they would have had more liberty. Such transgressions were performed in different ways, by living the life they have lived, by publishing a text even though one of them was illiterate, by selling the publication and/or *cartes-de-visite* to sustain themselves financially, and by keep on preaching even if family matters or health issues were constant. Such examples may seem farfetched at times, but they indicate their commitment to never let God's words and power be questioned, because since they were doing his bidding, they would never be unassisted. So their ambition to have their experiences recorded, just like the writings from Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, in spite of all the difficulties they endured, are seen as forms of resistance, and their works should be read as influential to gendered and intersectional discussions.

CHAPTER THREE

"I felt as if I had three hearts": confluences between religion, gender, and race

> *"'Shall I run away and hide from the Devil? Me, a servant of the living God? Have I not faith enough to go out and quell that mob, when I know it is written – "One shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight"? I know there are not a thousand here; and I know I am a servant of the living God. I'll go to the rescue, and the Lord shall go with and protect me. 'Oh,' said she, 'I felt as if I had three hearts! and that they were so large, my body could hardly hold them!'"* (Gilbert and Truth 79)

Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee experienced a social phenomenon that has had a significant impact upon the history of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Great Awakenings have occupied a position as both agent and background panel for many events in the period here investigated. The First and the Second Great Awakenings are also known as Revivals. The revivalist movements focused not only on religious aspects but also, as we will try to expose, had an influence on the social and political movements of their era. Both women followed the revivalist wave that encompassed their period, and their narratives inform so. Thus, in this chapter, we will position these women into their religious, historical context. The religious path we intend to construct circumscribes aspects not only of history but also of religion's interaction with gender and race. By explaining what the Second Great Awakening was, we will make use of gendered and racialized lenses to pinpoint the scenario in a broader way. Hence, by the end of this chapter, we hope to have provided arguments to state not only that Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth were women ahead of their time, but also to delimitate their active roles in religious events as the cornerstone to black female religious and secular spaces in "public" discussions.

3.1 Religion and Gender

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between religion and gender was - and in many ways still is - present and rooted in Western Christian exegeses. With biblical foundations, the differentiation between man and woman takes on hierarchical tones, structuring a relation based on obedience and submission. Considering the development of mankind over a long period of time, it is possible to observe that this social order was not limited to the particularities exposed by gender but was also supported by the mistaken separation of race and class. Thus, the direct association between God, the Church, and (white) men made the latter holders of discourses of power that sought to oppress the diverse Others. As a result, the claim of differentiation between white and black men and, at the same time, white and black women conceived discourses that were increasingly elaborated to corroborate with male and white supremacy. The religious discourse, however, was questioned by women since the Middle Ages, as we located in the beginning of chapter 2.

These speeches of power produced malleable and resistant structures that were camouflaged and formalized, such as racism and sexism. In proposing an assessment of how religion relates to gender and race, we will seek at first to understand Christianity's approaches to women and how they positioned themselves within the church. In this way, we will understand some of the problems of the allegation of universality in women's rights advocates' agendas since the 19th century, stressing that they were, in fact, limited to white female guidelines and reproduced the structures of oppression that had oppressed them. In this way, we will contextualize the period in which black subjects added their particularities to the religious discourse and to the church itself, unmasking the myths that had been constructed and cultivated by white people about those with African ancestry.

Women's experiences in the Western world were largely mediated by the Christian religious representations that surrounded them. And, as we have exposed in the previous chapter, there are many examples that mark this relationship. When we look at the creation of human beings, as described in the Bible, we observe that God created the human being in His image and likeness. But the fact that the first woman, Eve, was the result of Adam's rib, the first man, weighed down the ways in which women are approached and understood. The subjugation narrative, however, takes shape in the initial sin in which Eve is attracted to the serpent, which opposes the speech of God, and urges her to eat from the tree of wisdom. The punishments applied by God to women become symbolic: first by associating the pains of childbirth as an act of punishment, even though giving birth is a feminine peculiarity that enables multiplication - believers included -; and, secondly, to the explicit command of the domination of man over woman: “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16). Both sanctions were added to Christian beliefs and ideas, as the religious community, organized into churches, elaborated an exclusive view of God as a man. In this way, the direct relationship established between God, the Church and man, found arguments that corroborated the power structure that oppressed women.

The timelessness universalism created by this view of man[42] allowed patriarchal societies to elaborate narratives that gave shape to the social issues experienced by women. Realizing, then, that theology and Christology[43] are deeply related to “social, political and economic realities of human existence” allows us to point out both the advances promoted by the questioning made by women and also by feminist theologians regarding the limitations of their guidelines (Grant 1). As pointed out by Jacquelyn Grant (1989), an American

[42] These universal aspects are still present in languages, as we refer to a mixed gender group of people as “tod*os*,” as we designate humanity also as *man*kind.

[43] Whereas theology is the study of the divine, Christology has Jesus Christ’s life as its center. According to Grant, Christology “represents the central doctrine in most of Christian theology” (1).

theologian, women sought to contextualize theology and Christology in order to reveal the oppressive role of the male image in the church and, while oppressed, became participants in the processes of theology and Christology to demystify this universal appeal, which proved to be exclusive. This discussion exposed how Western theology and Christology, and patriarchal ideology were articulated and, as a consequence, "perpetuate[d] the oppression of the oppressed" (Grant 1). Located in a position of submission in relation to men, it was necessary for women to discuss the gospel and, especially, to reframe the role of Jesus Christ as a savior "given the significance of being male throughout patriarchal history" (Grant 2). This contextualization carried out by women and theologians has become a way to face the oppressive aspects of religious justifications and to present and introduce new sources and interpretations. From the participation and experiences of women in the revivalist movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, a wave of questioning and unveiling began. They exposed the structures of oppression and cooperation between these tenets and Western theological and Christian articulations in relation to oppressed groups.

Even though feminist theology is a contemporary development, in the nineteenth century there were some activities concerning the religious oppression regarding gender. Women, such as Sarah and Angelina Grimke and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, evoked religion to address the oppressing structure it fomented. For instance, the Grimke sisters were authors of speeches that advocated for the equality of the sexes, and in the 1885 Annual Convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association, they, along with other women, joined in writing a reformist resolution:

> "WHEREAS, the dogmas incorporated in religious creeds derived from Judaism, teaching that woman was an afterthought in the creation, her sex a misfortune, marriage a condition of subordination, and maternity a curse, are contrary to the law of God (as revealed in nature), and to the precepts of Christ, and, "WHEREAS, these

> dogmas are insidious poison, sapping divide vitality of our civilization, blighting woman, and, through her, paralyzing humanity; therefore be it "Resolved, that we call on the Christian ministry, as leaders of thought, to teach and enforce the fundamental idea of creation, that man was made in the image of God, male and female, and given equal rights over the earth, but none over each other. And, furthermore, we ask their recognition of the scriptural declaration that, in the Christian religion, there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus." (qtd. in Grant 16).

Such a resolution was not accepted by the church, even though "its mere proposal reflected the growing belief that essentially, the problem regarding women is not with Christianity or the Bible, but with distortion of them." (Grant 17). In light of such a growing suspicion, the church focused on professing that the "[t]he power of woman is in her dependence" and that her weakness was a God-given protective measure (qtd. in Grant 15). Hence in the second half of the nineteenth century, women were claiming their space in the religious sphere. The development of such actions was only possible, however, by previous resistance and questioning. Both Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee were part of these movements, even if they are not broadly addressed in bibliographies.

Thus the women's movement for inclusion in theological and political action discussions had a limited scope. The universality to which they were critical regarding men was also being applied to women's experiences. The religious and secular female insertion in "public" discussions was biased by a racial cut that disregarded particularities so outstanding in American society from the 18th to the 19th centuries. Grada Kilomba's discussion on feminism shows how the white feminist perspective overlaps and falsely weaves the concept of sisterhood. The idea of a universal sisterhood among women, for the Portuguese author, represents yet another strategy of white subjects to save themselves "from acknowledging responsibility for racism and/or seeing themselves as practicing racism toward other groups

of women [and men]" (Kilomba 60). However, as has been pinpointed in the previous chapter, the structure of racism in western society, since its founding, has been presented in such a way that all white women benefit from racism and the economic profits that come from racial exploitation.

The erasure of the racial aspects from women's discussions and actions is a source of terrible problems for black women, as it often presents itself before gender-related issues. By failing to recognize the differences in oppressive experiences and consequently by not giving black women a voice in women's rights conventions, white women were not only making them invisible but reinforcing the racial oppression to which they are subjected:

> To misname themselves as "feminists" who appeal to "women's experience" is to do what oppressors always do; it is to define the rules and then solicit others to play the game. It is to presume a commonality with oppressed women that oppressed women themselves do not share. (Grant 200)

In the social sphere, it is possible to see how racism limits and ignores the inclusion of black women. Truth's 1851 speech clearly exposes the differences in treatment between black and white women and is therefore often referred to as the starting point for discussions on intersectionality:

> Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place every whar. Nobody eber help me intocarriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives any best place, and ar'n't I a woman? (Gilbert and Truth 92)

From this excerpt, we note that "the Victorian concept of ladyhood was not applied to [ex]slave women." (Grant 196). The conception of femininity that was aimed at white women was also at odds with the social spheres of work and motherhood. The prevailing idea indicated that white women "need[ed] protection from actual work and therefore should

function in a supervisory capacity" within the domestic sphere due to their fragility (Grant 198). Truth illustrates how the concept of work for black women was distorted and refutes these notions by saying, also in 1851, "Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—and ar'n't I a woman?" (Gilbert and Truth 92). In her Narrative, we observe how this treatment was different from having to work and take care of the children at the same time:

> When Isabella went to the field to work, she used to put her infant in a basket, tying a rope to each handle, and suspending the basket to a branch of a tree, set another small child to swing it. It was thus secure from reptiles, and was easily administered to, and even lulled to sleep, by a child too young for other labors. (Gilbert and Truth 26)

In this previous quote, the discrepancy with which fragility, protection, and motherhood were treated is latent. Kilomba and Grant point out how white women are also oppressors and that their treatment was never equal or of sisterhood, either during the period of enslavement or afterward. This is because black women continued to be relegated to manual and domestic work, according to the "racial-caste structure" (Grant 197). Another layer to discuss the complex relation between black men and women demonstrates that in the early decades of the twentieth century black men were not allowed to have full access to employment, while black women were placed in the service economy. It may lead us to think that, because of this insertion, black women would be "matriarchal leaders", however, as bell hooks explains "in actuality, black female workers often handed their paychecks over to the males who occupied the patriarchal space of leadership in the home. Simply working did not mean black women were free." (hooks 8). On the other side of the gendered racial spectrum when white women ironically seek space in the workplace, they need to delegate home care services to the *Other* women, who have always worked, but whose work is socially and

financially invisible. Thus, when women like Lee and Truth decide to dedicate themselves to the call of God and leave their maternal "obligations," there is a judgment. When, for example, Lee receives the divine call, she affirms, "No one will believe me" (Lee 10). And it was from her performance as a preacher that she could deliberately indulge fully in her duty: "I now began to think seriously of breaking up housekeeping, and forsaking all to preach the everlasting Gospel" (Lee 18). Even though these aspects are linked to issues of race and gender, they expose a small portion of the difficulties black women faced in giving themselves so intentionally to preaching.

In view of this, the womanist theology, starting from the experience of the black woman and arising from her three-dimensional reality (which encompasses race, gender, and class), acts in a multidimensional way. The meaning of womanist exposed by Alice Walker was interpreted by Grant as: "[a] womanist then is a strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as a domineering castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people." (205) Hence, to depart from women's experience, or moreover, from black women's experience, is to evidence the patriarchal system and constructs that have been imbued in such a way as to be apparently something other than arbitrary, but representing "'systematic,' 'objective,' 'ordered,' 'logical,' and 'rational' analyses" (Grant 68). This way, addressing religious black women's works and their connection with experience unveils the patriarchy inculcated "throughout history, but also within all aspects of our existence" (Grant 68), including black communities. To state the racism among women is to evidence the acceptance of racist ideologies by white women who stand beside the white men in order to "protect [their] place," which was ironically determined for them by the same white men who wish to maintain their position in society.

Accordingly, religious women's rights advocates from the nineteenth century have provided arguments to disarm patriarchy. But, as we have exposed, they did not extend this argument to encompass all women. This understanding adduces the account of Jarena Lee, who "used to watch my opportunity to read in the Bible; and this lady observing this, took the Bible from me and hid it, giving me a novel in its stead - which when I perceived, I refused to read" (Lee 4). Through this exhibition, we understand that for both women, religious reading was perceived as a form of liberation. For the white woman, however, this was undesirable because it was from the black woman's ignorance of certain knowledge that she, the white woman, would continue to enjoy her privileges. The intersect between religion and gender then enhances some power struggles. Women have sought ways to reinterpret religious elements but have not extended such initiative to the Other women. Gender roles in relation to religion are split within racial discussions. Therefore, we reaffirm, as Kilomba points out, that the emancipation of white women is at the expense of the submission of the black woman who has her position defined by her non-place as a woman because she is black. It is therefore not possible to disassociate these dimensions.

3.2 Religion and Race

The social order that made racism and enslavement viable was structured in legal, economic, and political spheres from the conjunction of ideologies perpetuated and promoted through religion, culture, education, and the media. The maintenance of white people's political privileges and opportunities provided by enslavement was based on the construction of myths about black people and these fabrications gave white society elements to justify domination under the argument of racial difference. Thus, the search for the legitimation of black labor exploitation pervaded the control of both material and physical as well as mental and symbolic productions. The religious community, as we will see, was an important

contributor to the proliferation of these myths and even added the same principles to its ideas and beliefs.

Christian values and perceptions were accepted and encouraged by slavocracy because they became a unified system. Katie Cannon (2004) argues that this indivisibility was present because both Christian values and slavocracy were “integral parts of the same system. The defense of one appeared to require the defense of the other.” (Cannon 413). Consequently, the questioning of the system was threatened by the strength of Christian values that also inhibited the identification of contradictions between social practices and Christian morals. The selectivity of these religious practices and ideologies impelled white Christian society to a "passive acceptance,” as Cannon points out, of the factors that led to slavery (Cannon 413). From the 17th century, in 1619, when the first black people arrived at what would become the United States, until 1830, when the abolitionist movement took a more aggressive position, Protestant churches, and the religious community, especially in the southern states, did not position themselves against the current system. Without suffering reproaches, the perpetuation of the ideals, rituals and values of this unified system supported and were supported by three “basic” premises: (1) those with dark skin are inferior and cursed; (2) because they are inferior, they must be enslaved; and (3) enslavement is a divine rescue alternative.

Such myths are interconnected. The myth of the inferiority of black subjects has several features that highlight the construction of this oppressive discourse. Its strongest element is the use of religious arguments to favor white people, especially men. The incongruity between declarations of equity of all human beings before God and the fact that “[m]ost church governing boards, denominational missionary societies, local churches, and clergy held the position that human beings by nature were free and endowed with natural rights” (Cannon 414), demonstrate how the myth was elaborated in order to naturalize

dehumanization. The strength of the contradiction that arises from this claim of inferiority is dismembered and reconstructed in an appropriate manner to legitimize oppression and enslavement. From the curse of Ham, reported in the Bible (Genesis 9: 25-27), the idea is created that black women and men have an “irredeemable nature” that classifies them as “a subpar species between animal and human” (Cannon 414). In this perspective, Ham becomes the progenitor of the black race and responsible for the subservience of all his disciples as slaves. The metonymic aspect of Ham's curse extends to the present day in the United States. The subordination of black people to the will and the construction of blackness by white people was fueled by interpretations that associate those who have black skin as “demonic, unholy, infectious progenitors of sin, full of animality and matriarchal proclivities” (Cannon 415). This projection of negative aspects to those whose skin is black is also addressed by Kilomba.

The concept of racism is linked to silencing and oppressing Others. Resistance, then, comes from the margins and the marginalized, from people who have been used as a “screen for projections of what the *white* society has made taboo” (Kilomba 44). In this way, interwoven ambiguities in the descriptions of black people go through contradictions that are “overlooked” because they are patriarchal/white interests. The adoption, at the beginning of the 18th century, of the *Partus Sequitur Ventrem* principle, which, with legal basis, indicated that the child follows the condition of the mother regardless of the father's race, reinforces three ideals that are added to the myth of black inferiority. Firstly, the brutalizing ideas associated with those with dark skin color becomes evident; we also observe how this dehumanization was linked to the commercial ideas of property and capital; and from these aspects, we can question how, as pointed out by Kilomba, in racist relations, black subjects become paradoxically equipped with the human capacity to conceive sons and daughters and at the same time animalized, as mere reproducers. This last ideal corroborates with our

argument in the last chapter that raping a black woman had less consequences and thus, was not considered a violence, doubling the traumatic experience being a slave mother encompassed. According to this logic, black bodies are available to the interests and convenience of white people in different areas of life, as long as they are always subordinate and subservient.

The second myth, however, appropriates the concept of the body and soul of those from the African continent. The lack of individuality of black people was, according to Western Christian discourse, supported by its pagan origin. The English term for *heathen*, as used by Cannon, addresses two interpretations. The first, religious, meaning is related to people or nations that do not recognize the God of the Bible; and the second, cultural, characterizes someone as barbarian, uncivilized, or savage. Under this classification, the African continent was the place of origin of depraved peoples who, according to the hegemonic discourse, were destined, by divine providence, to be enslaved: “It was claimed that God sent slavers to the wilds of Africa, a so-called depraved, savage, heathen world, in order to free Africans of ignorance, superstition, and corruption” (Cannon 415). Linking slavery to the privilege of being saved by Christians, “[m]any churches preached a gospel that declared that Black people were indebted to white Christians and bound to spend their lives in the service of whites; any provisions for food, clothes, shelter, medicine, or any other means of preservation were perceived not as legal requirement but as an act of Christian charity.” (Cannon 416–17). Cannon points out that several strands of Christianity shared these views, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Catholics, Quakers, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, and Anglicans. The strength of the identification of paganism as a threat that had the conversion to Christianity as salvation fostered what Cannon calls the "hermeneutical circle of Christian slave apologists" (Cannon 417). It is interesting to see how, later on, this classification and oppressions would be counterbalanced by the religious

awakening that culminated in the conversion of many black subjects and the consequent publication of spiritual autobiographies that provided the basis for narratives of escape from the enslaved to have the necessary appeal to the white reader, by exposing their suffering and resistance under so many cruelties. In this way, the (auto)biographical endeavor of these subjects was very important to highlight the differences within the spectrum of religiosity and how the black subjects seized the possibilities of showing their value and humanity.

The last ideological myth to be unveiled is actually the reconstruction of the myth of divine will. As part of the hermeneutic circle, it conflated divine law to the laws of men and manipulated the right to exploit black people. The biblical bases used included Jesus or his apostles' lack of objection to slavery, the presence of slaves in the Greco-Roman economic system, and references in the New Testament to servitude and subservience, as exposed in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6: 5-7). Thus, the appropriation of these ideals convinced both clergy and laity that "the human beings whom they violated or whose well-being they did not protect were unworthy of anything better" (Cannon 418). Preachings that distorted these premises were condemned and seen as "part of a traitorous and diabolical scheme that would eventually lead to the denial of biblical authority, the unfolding of rationalism, deistic philanthropism, pantheism, atheism, socialism, or Jacobinism" (Cannon 418). As we pointed out earlier, the manipulation of these ideals and values went through psychological aspects. However, the financial means also supported the construction of the moral superiority of white people. As myth builders, slave owners used the profits from exploitation to finance pastors, church properties, and working missionaries. In this way, divine and worldly laws were combined and formed a unity that transformed the system of enslavement into something that is "part of the cosmos" (Cannon 417), indicating its naturalness and inevitability. Religious institutions and their participants then became accomplices and co-conspirators, which allowed slave apologists to be "successful in

convincing at least five generations of white citizens that slavery, an essential and constitutionally protected institution, was consistent with the impulse of Christian charity" (Cannon 419). The political, economic, cultural, and religious contexts promoted the construction of concepts, language, and categories that corresponded to the normative appeals supporting an exploration that was distorted as natural and that was incorporated by several areas. By associating the idea of salvation with the servitude of those whose origin was considered to be condemned, the Christian charity was shaped by the "divine" precepts of enslavement.

However, it is necessary to stress that the camouflage added to Christian benevolence does not imply the passive acceptance of black subjects to the conversion experience. Albert Raboteau (2004) points out that there were some types of resistance to the act of conversion: the first can be exemplified by the 1724 account of William Tibbs, in the parish of Saint Paul in Baltimore County, Maryland, where "he baptized and taught some slaves, but that the majority refused instruction" or due to the fact that when they became Christians "all other slaves do laugh at them," as revealed by a missionary in South Carolina (Raboteau 121). Furthermore, the relationship established between farmers, missionaries, and slaves made the act of conversion more difficult, for, as it has been pointed out, the enslaved people criticized the duplicity of the farmers' actions and the missionaries "who [were] frequently reluctant to instruct [them] in the gospel" (Raboteau 120). Part of this refusal can be related to learning the language, especially for those who had been brought from the African continent and who had more difficulty (or hesitation) than those who were already born "in captivity." The last type of resistance to conversion that we will mention exposes the strategies created to escape obligations, but also the consequences of the teachings and how changes were produced from them. A 1723 account says that "some [slaves] have under pretence of going to Catechizing taken opportunity to absent from their Masters service many days." Rev. Charles Martyn of

South Carolina complained that some baptized slaves "became lazy and proud, entertaining too high an opinion of themselves, and neglecting their daily labour." (Raboteau 122–23). And what has been indicated as a "very high opinion of themselves" can be interpreted as reflections on the incongruities of biblical preaching and the racist discourse of the time. This consideration resulted in attempts at rebellion, as expounded by Raboteau in a 1731 quote from a reverend stating that

> notwithstanding all the precautions which the ministers took to assure them that baptism did not alter their servitude, the negroes fed themselves with a secret fancy that it did, and that the King designed that all Christians should be made free. And when they saw that baptism did not change their status they grew angry and saucy, and met in the nighttime in great numbers and talked of rising. (Raboteau 123)

With these acts of rebellion, we can see the beginning of religious dogmas' reversal, which had previously fostered the myths of inferiority and enslavement. The passive non-acceptance of black men and women to baptism and Christianity shows how, even though they suffered the consequences generated by the myths previously exposed, religious dogmas and social constructions were aimed especially at other white subjects, as a way of attesting the conformity of enslavement within Christianity.

3.3 The Great Awakenings

The split in American Protestantism was fueled by two religious' events: the First and the Second Great Awakening. The first occurred approximately between the years 1730 and 1760, and the second, to which Truth and Lee were contemporaries, happened around 1800 to 1830. To begin talking about the religious aspects of Lee and Truth in the nineteenth century, we would like to take some steps back and quickly look at the elements that composed the First and Second Great Awakenings.

We should, however, be aware that the Awakenings are a disputed place among historians. A discussion between a linear and a cyclical viewpoint of history provides a debate that questions the existence and the relation of these revivals to other historical events. R. C. Gordon-McCutchan has written about this dispute portraying the arguments from both sides and alluded to the cyclical view of history as more accurate concerning the data and the methods used to understand the events entitled as Great Awakenings. To pinpoint the revivalist movement as an isolate movement with its own life, as proposed by advocates of the linear model, - whose methods evoke a "'genetic' tradition of historiography" (85) -, does not encompass its social and cultural complexities. Gordon-McCutchan brings forth William McLoughlin's arguments and definition of the Great Awakenings. McLoughlin has brought a perspective of cultural awakening, which connected strictly historical matters to social and cultural outlooks. In light of this, the cyclical understanding of events such as the Awakenings allows us to draw more from literary sources to bridge with historical and sociological contexts.

Awakenings have a historical relevance because they had a transformative power and represented many political, economic, and racial changes in society. The First is normally set around 1730-60, and it came in between important social episodes; preceding it were the Western expansion and the adjustment to new ways of life in the colony, and the Revolutionary War was followed by the first revival. Hence it is also relevant to state here that the cyclical perspective towards the awakenings connects these circumstances not in a cause-and-effect mode, as it might appear at first, but moreover by understanding that there was a general common feeling that contributed to the religious ideological framework we are about to expose. This feeling will be similar concerning all Awakenings, as social strains appear as a common trait among these movements. The First Revival, for instance,

> has helped us to understand the shifts from a Calvinistic to an evangelical worldview in the eighteenth century; it has helped us to understand the new sense of American identity which emerged after 1735: it has thrown new light on the basic question of separation of church and state, on the shift from a corporate ideal of the state to an individualistic ideal, and from a top-down, deferential theory of politics toward a bottom-up, government-by-consent theory of politics and from admiration of England to anxiety over its corruption. (qtd. in Gordon-McCutchan 83).

Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Wesley are considered to be the religious founding fathers of the Unites States. It evokes the power of their influence upon the shaping of the American nation in the decades preceding the Revolution. Their influence transformed the way through which people interacted religiously. Whitefield, an English Anglican ordained preacher, for example, "deemphasized the institutional side of religion and emphasized the personal responsibility of the individual." (McLoughling 61). This way, "by 1720 the old ideological framework had lost its cultural legitimacy and the people needed new light from God by which to guide their behavior, measure their goals, and establish new sources of communal authority in church and state" (McLoughling 58). The value crisis McLoughlin addresses as "the old ideological framework" surrounded the family values, the guilt of mundane materialism (represented by the engrossment in trade and speculation), individualism, and stressed the conflict between the puritan perfectionism and the search for autonomy from the oppression associated with the father figure in the household as well as with God: "God's fatherhood is one of the most powerful symbols or metaphors in that tradition. In the Calvinist use of the metaphor, God is further defined as omniscient, stern, strict, and usually angry." (McLoughling 47). McLoughlin's interpretation of the influence of family values and precisely the power of the father figure foster the link between the religious and social changes that arose in the First Awakening.

The Second Great Awakening set around 1800-30 had different challenges. With the Proclamation of Independence, the newly formed American society was being formed and positioning itself within national and international affairs. Society became divided in relation to future actions, and many interests were being discussed. McLoughlin affirms that "America's First Great Awakening led to the creation of the American republic; our Second Awakening led to the solidification of the Union and the rise of Jacksonian participatory democracy" (11). His vision corroborates with Donald Mathews's view that the difference in development between the two waves was not so significant. In the religious sphere, Mathews saw that the "rethinking of church authority" provided by the First wave did not foment the expansion of the churches, a trait that would be largely evidenced in the Second wave, he states that" the Second Awakening was most noticeable in the undeniable quantitative fact that the Methodist and Baptist sects were not restructuring church life so much as extending it—they were recruiting new Christians by the tens of thousands." (26). This characteristic is one of the key elements in Jarena Lee's narrative.

Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee in the Second Great Awakening

In Lee's narrative, we have the exemplification of the quantitative aspect brought by the Methodist range of recruiting. Lee kept a strict record of her trips and frequently exposed her numbers to the reader. She kept her interlocutor informed of the distance between the cities and also how she traveled. In the beginning she would walk, and only by the middle to the end of her text did she start to ride to places, an aspect probably derived not only by her ventures in Canada but also by her health debility. A few times, mostly by the end of her narrative, she randomly presented the sum of the numbers she calculated herself:

> That year I travelled two thousand three hundred and twenty-five miles, and preached one hundred and seventy-eight sermons. Praise God for health and strength. (Lee 51)

> I commenced my journey of Canada, in 1832. From the second day of July to the fifteenth day of October, years following, 1833, I had preached 138 sermons, and travelled between 27 and 28 hundred miles. (Lee 75)
>
> In the year 1835 I travelled 721 miles, and preached 692 sermons. (Lee 77)
>
> In 1836 I travelled 556 miles, and preached 111 sermons. (Lee 77)
>
> After preaching one hundred and forty-six sermons and travelling nine hundred and ninety-nine miles. (Lee 82)

Truth's narrative has a different pattern. Only the last pages of her book are destined to her labors as an itinerant preacher. The chapter "The Cause of Her Leaving the City" is at the end of her book and expresses her desire to change her name and "to travel east and lecture" (Gilbert and Truth 68). Such revelation was fomented by an event in which she saw her attitude towards a poor man as "unfeeling, selfish and wicked," which made her reevaluate her relationship with material things. From this, even though we do not have a strong account of Truth's travels, since she became an itinerant preacher a short time after the publication of her narrative, both became committed to God's will and aimed at sharing their experience.

As instruments of God, Lee and Truth were not, in theory, discriminated. And this was so because the Calvinistic predestination was pointing towards the nation as a whole, and the people of this nation were to use the New Enlightenment to organize their society. The shift from Predestinarianism to Arminianism[44] and the possibility of salvation for all was highly significant for black people, for this had a deep connection to the construction of inferiority based on race. The revivalist feeling broke with the paradigms about the differentiation between whites and blacks and still made possible the contact with the divine experience without intermediation by pastors and in a direct and clear way: "The people came

[44] Arminianism, in opposition to Predestinarianism, emphasized human freedom of choice and "believed that all men could attain salvation by leading moral, honest, respectable lives" (McLoughling 69).

from all parts, without distinction of sex, size, or color, and the display of God's power commenced from singing" (Lee 45). Eddie S. Glaude (2014) adds that in this period, there was a "democratization of the emerging nation's religious life," enabling a fragmentation of religious strands based on "different and independent interpretations of the Gospel" (Glaude 34). This democratization has become a way of achieving freedom and awareness, both spiritual and physical. Ignorance was a trait emphasized by several subjects, including Truth and Lee. We perceive, then, that the awakenings made possible reinterpretations of discursive elements in religious and political spectrum.

The differences constructed and reproduced by Christianity were an important point that black subjects sought to counter. The revivalist fervor influenced the way in which the vacuum between black and white people was present in society and in the church. Thus, it was necessary to build strategies to deal with the conflicting experiences of being black and Christian, of being sons/daughters of God and Ham[45], because becoming a Christian was, in part, to comply with the hegemonic dogmas that structured the basis for practices of exploitation, racism, and sexism. Jarena Lee, for example, was often confronted by her position as a Methodist preacher. "I found the enemies were many, standing in opposition to female preaching, or preachers of any kind; but God always clears the way for his people" (Lee 94). One of the many oppositions she faced is present at the beginning of her preaching career:

> notwithstanding the opposition I had met with from brother Samuel R-- then on the circuit, the Lord supported the "Woman preacher" and my soul was cheered. On Thursday I walked fourteen miles, when the friends applied to the elder to let me talk for them, but his prejudices also, against women preaching were very strong, and tried

[45] From Ham's curse exposed in Genesis (9:25-27), would be the origin of the ascendancy of the black race and hence Ham's sinful action would make him responsible for the subservient status imposed upon the sons and daughters of Canaan.

> hard to disaffect the minds of the people. The dear man has since gone to stand before that God who knows the secrets of all hearts-- and where, I earnestly pray, he may find some who have been saved by grace through the instrumentality of female preaching. (Lee 33–34)

In this event, she tells us about two sequential oppositions by two men, who, on separate occasions, objected to her preaching. And she portrays her reaction to both of them as religiously supported: for the former she had the assistance of God, and for the latter, she took a humble, yet powerful, position to say that she prayed for him, as he needed some sort of salvation. By portraying her itinerant trajectory and giving her account of people's response to her preaching, we become closer to her beliefs and feelings more than with her own life. Considering that she does not give detailed scenery or elaborate descriptions of people or things, we hear a lot about her sentiments and feelings, especially as an intermediary of God's message.

Another strategy that is commonly used by preachers is the instrumentality of their labors; God spoke through them, and their subjectivity is invisible according to God's will. In this vision, Jarena Lee's ability is God given and her work is in His name: "the Lord gave light, life and liberty " (Lee 36). One of the strongest examples is Lee's defense of woman preaching, which as she advocated for the call of women to preach the Gospel, as she set this argument based on inspiration and her place as an instrument:

> May he not, did he not, and can he not inspire a female to preach the simple story of the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord, and accompany it too with power to the sinner's heart. As for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor according to what I have received, in his vineyard. If he has not, how could he consistently bear testimony in favor of my poor labors, in awakening and converting sinners? In my wanderings up and down among men, preaching according to my

> ability, I have frequently found families who told me that they had not for several years been to a meeting, and yet, while listening to hear what God would say by his poor female instrument, have believed with trembling-- tears rolling down their cheeks, the signs of contrition and repentance towards God. I firmly believe that I have sown seed, in the name of the Lord, which shall appear with its increase at the great day of accounts, when Christ shall come to make up his jewels. (Lee 12)

Thus, if in the nineteenth century, the new congregations enabled the formation of new discursive forms in the religious sphere, they did not break with all the precepts and oppressions presented but appropriated them in order to adapt and reintroduce them to social and religious configurations. According to Glaude, "black churches became the primary sites for the construction of troublesome notions of black masculinity that assumed the subordination of black women." (Glaude 45). The subjugation of black women by black men, in this respect, highlights their peculiar position in indicating, in power relations, the intersectionality of the oppressions suffered. The use of biblical arguments was also present to emphasize the feminine (black and white) place in churches:

> As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1Cor. 14:34-35)

Therefore, when women like Jarena Lee took a stand, through biblical arguments to resignify the place of women in the church, power discourses were exposed along with their oppressive configurations:

> If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear. Did not Mary *first*

> preach the risen Saviour, and is not the doctrine of the resurrection the very climax of Christianity—hangs not all our hope on this, as argued by St. Paul? Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? for she preached the resurrection of the crucified Son of God (Lee 11) (italics in the original).

Before being allowed to be one of the first preachers of the African Methodist Church (AME), she faced reprimand from men like Bishop Richard Allen, who refused her first request to preach, saying that "as to women preaching, he said that our Discipline knew nothing at all about it—that it did not call for women preachers." (Lee 11). When, eight years later, Lee took the opportunity to preach in place of Reverend Richard Williams who "seemed to have lost his spirit," she felt that her act would be offensive: "I imagined, that for this indecorum, as I feared it might be called, I should be expelled from the church." (Lee 17). The insistence and hard work of women like Lee and Truth made it possible to conquer spaces inside and outside the religious sphere.

With the founding of black Methodist and Baptist churches in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in the northern states of the United States, the relevance of freedom to worship opened the way to the freedom of constituting a black civil society. Such congregations became real shelters and support for those who were exploited and oppressed by society. However, the church's participation in forming a racially conscious community comes from the efforts of women like Lee: "I then went out in search of some of my own people of color, trying to find out if I could get a place to preach in on my return, as I felt anxious to call the falling sons and daughters of Adam." (Lee 92); and Truth: "Her mission was not merely to travel east, but to 'lecture,' as she designated it; 'testifying of the hope that was in her'—exhorting the people to embrace Jesus, and refrain from sin, the nature and origin of which she explained to them in accordance with her own most curious and original views" (Gilbert and Truth 68–69). The fruits of the individual efforts of these women

enabled a collective construction that often went unnoticed even by the black partners themselves, making it necessary to observe and value their daily and persistent work:

> As I look about me today in this veiled world of mine, despite the noisier and more spectacular advance of my brothers, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count. Black women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are . . . the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches; and they have with small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property. (W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* 1918)

The quote above, from one of the first and most prominent black American intellectuals of the 20th century, William Edward Burghardt "W. E. B." Du Bois exemplifies how female actions and movements fomented the creation of a community. The main focus of the excerpt is, initially, women since he considers them as "those who really matter regarding the advance of black people." However, it is at the end of the excerpt that the relationship between the roles of women in the church is evident as a cornerstone. From this excerpt, we can see how the relations between religion, gender, and race are interconnected. Identifying black women as pillars of the community, as the sociologist does, brings to light several power relations that have been instituted in the most diverse ways, since even before the grandmothers to which Du Bois refers. The relationship established between these women and the social and ideological organization fostered by the black congregations of the church expounds the roles of care and resistance that, in American society in the 18th and 19th centuries, reveal a struggle supported by "everyday forms of resistance to oppression and demoralization" instead of "dramatic protest" (Higginbotham 2).

As we have already exposed in previous chapters, these autobiographies are not of the common type. And this means that the written lives presented in the two books, *Religious Experience of Mrs. Jarena Lee* and *Narrative of Sojourner Truth,* encompass something more

than their worldly lives, for they wrote about the divine work God called them to take part, so their accomplishments would echo in the kingdom come, as they would put it. Apart from all the (auto)biographical issues and covenants, the two works here analyzed concern their divine call, their labors towards their spiritual lives, and the many trials they had to endure in order to keep their faith. By doing so, they have written less about their lives and more about their beliefs and divined inspired labors. There is an abyss of difference regarding the aspects we are highlighting concerning Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth's books, but these contrasts come from the different methods of writing applied.[46] As religious (auto)biographies, they have portrayed some of the values and events of the Second Great Awakening.

Even with two revivalist movements, the various Christian denominations fostered a kind of pact that united civil and religious society in favor of maintaining privileges and power. From this structuring to the massive black presence and performance in Christianity, it is possible to see an abyss that permeates, as we have observed, the aspects of race and gender. However, religion was also the gateway for arguments connecting and supporting black women preachers in their trajectories and their search for a place.

In a movement to return and confront the different silences imposed on different groups in Western societies, the search for a leading position and agency was presented in religious, literary, and artistic creations and representations. Although the oppression applied to different groups is centered on displacement, inferiority, erasure, violence, and submission, the performance and (auto)biographical production of women like Truth and Lee expose the strength and courage to face adversities in racial aspects, as well as of class and gender. Such mobilizations are fundamental to transmit agendas that reflect the particularities that provide them with an active and speaking place in the face of oppression. In this respect, the lack of

[46] Such methods have enlarged even more discussions on their (auto)biographical status, as we have exposed in the respective chapter.

consideration of intersectionality reinforces the subordination to which these women were marginalized. Having their (auto)biographies necessarily linked to the words *black* and *female* reveals how the place of black women in society (even today) is presented from conflicts in relation to the external and internal processes of the order of discourse. Being "black, poor, and woman" are conditions that, even in institutions that address the equality of all before God, are not covered with the necessary care and contextualization.

The role of the church for the black community, as well as the achievements of Truth and Lee, go beyond the religious sphere and incorporate secular agendas into religious actions. The religious discourse was the gateway through which oppressed peoples sought comfort, support, and knowledge. If, as Andrews (7) writes, religious autobiographies established ground for other types of autobiographies, it is through religious experience that resistance began to take shape, as exemplified in the Du Bois excerpt. It can be said that Truth's narrative focuses mainly on her relation to God and her religiosity, but Truth is best known for her speeches at women's conventions, leading to her recognition as a spokeswoman for black womanhood. Jarena Lee, on the other hand, focuses little on her private experiences and broadly describes how much she has given of herself, her time, her health, and literally her steps to the church and to God. But in both narratives, there is a Christian basis that, through the mediation of these women, reached different people who sought the embrace and acceptance of the church community. Consequently, both Truth and Lee are considered the "early women preachers," as they set an example, brought together and converted not only people to Christianity, but, above all, black people to church. The appreciation of the duty given to them by God only made their efforts stronger and more disciplined. The redefinition of the power of speech that became evident in their narratives and lives shows how a "womanist" vision aggregates both the secular and the religious bias to face the many oppressions of black women.

FINAL REMARKS

"But here I feel constrained to give over; as from the smallness of this pamphlet I cannot go through with the whole of my journal, as it would probably make a volume of two hundred pages; which, if the Lord be willing, may at some future day be published. But for the satisfaction of such as may follow after me, when I am no more, I have recorded how the Lord called me to his work, and how he has kept me from falling from grace, as I feared I should. In all things he has proved himself a God of truth to me; and in his service I am now as much determined to spend and be spent, as at the very first." (Lee 97)

This thesis has approached some elements which configure and characterize Truth's *Narrative* and Lee's *Religious Experience* according to the words used to describe these works: Female, African American, Religious, and (Auto)biographies. The intention of this text has been to regard attentively how these elements matter and what position such works and women have in literature; to evaluate if race and gender would have weight in rendering texts and women invisible; and to interrogate the definition of (auto)biography concerning texts written in collaboration. Through the analysis of their (auto)biographical words we approached how history and literature provide ground for textual and theoretical interpretations that corroborated with an intersectional view of (auto)biographies written by black women. We have found through a historical analysis that the insertion of black women in the literary world happened differently. Not only were black women's texts written later in a chronological view, but they were doubted and marginalized with more strength than white women's texts. Belinda Sutton's text and other early black female writings were about the oppression of slavery, this exemplifies how the effect of race on their lives constrained the ways they lived and expressed themselves.

Historicizing literary works, and grasping the principles with which they were labeled and are still read, unfolded power discourses which broadened our reading of Truth's and Lee's text. The biased constructedness of the fundamental concepts, such as author and

fiction, used to discuss (auto)biographies showed the imposed marginalization of African American works. Including the historical context in the analysis of these books shed light on the limitedness of the hegemonic and binary perspectives of our patriarchal societies. Revisiting the components surrounding (auto)biography as memory, fiction, history, authorship, and orality, we have advocated for a plural and inclusive awareness, which locates the value of these marginalized works and people in ways that are not exclusive. The label "slave narrative" for instance was exhibited as one that comprehends an outer vision of their narratives, as something which position such works in an inferior place due to the "single story" told about them by white Subjects. Even though we believe that the use of "slave narrative" may confine these texts to stereotypical views of slavery and the oppression that was reproduced, we must acknowledge that such classification has created paths of defiance of the hegemonic genres and norms. It has become the most famous literary tradition of African Americans and it has encompassed a complex type of writing, one that had to administrate the need and fear of a truthful narrative, the acceptance of the reader, the low or inexistent literacy, and the economic needs faced. Yet, seen that their productions evoke resisting and transgressive forms which must be read not only inside the text, but also by the lenses these texts were read along with their manufacturing process, these works called for a broadening of their interpretation, hence the need to classify these works as (auto)biographies. We advocate for the use of "(auto)biography", with the prefix *auto* between parenthesis, in order to enhance the questioning of the self that writes. In this way, we also challenge the canon and attempt to turn visible works that were not granted the status they actually have, for they encompass a historical perspective which should not be disregarded, since it is through this outlook that African American (auto)biographies manifest their affluence.

Religion, as a means to express and insert Lee and Truth in the world has had a double effect in this thesis. The first draws from the fact that religious black women were taking part in a religious revival. The second is that the places in which these women were located were still mediated by those who had power. In the case of Truth, we might declare that her amanuensis, editors, and transcribers eventually shaped Truth's imagery through her reasonings; for Lee, however, the relationship she exposed with her husband Joseph Lee, Richard Allen and the Methodist church preachers evidences the constraining she had to overcome. Such assumptions are, as we have emphasized, imbued with ideological misconceptions for, when we regard the place of black women through intersectional lenses, we illustrate the contradictions that would be rendered invisible by a single vision of race or of gender. Religion as a patriarchal institution has experienced the resisting strength of these women who have transgressed the norms and preconceptions in many ways. Their rhetorical ability has highlighted their presence in religious and non-religious institutions, and this had an impact on the path they had constructed to become preachers. They fought against racial and gendered prejudices from white men and women, and even from black churchmen, who also constrained their access to official church positions. Thus, it is by way of intersectional assessment that the exposure of the limits imposed and the expansions promoted by those women become widely acknowledged.

Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth represent a group of women which, through religion, inscribed their stories in resisting movements. Through the writing of their life narratives they have made use of past reminiscences to situate their present situation and, as an attempt, at a future use of such memorial enterprise. Each woman made this movement in their own way, and whereas Lee expected her narrative to leave "a lasting impression upon the minds of the impenitent" (Lee 97), Truth was more concerned with her parents' stories and situation and portrayed her many trials in life to set a Christian example. For this reason, to write about

their lives has an impact that reverberates in history. Seen that their enterprise has been one of struggle when we consider their (auto)biographical attempt, it is important to value their movements through literary writing: they have recollected and, furthermore, they have sought ways to make themselves remembered and heard in their times and in history. Their (auto)biographical enterprise, as well as other (auto)biographical works made by African Americans, enlarges the concept of (auto)biography because its plurality is inclusive. Whereas a white men's work brings forth an exemplary Subject, in an African American work, the exemplary of an individual merges itself with the community. The welcoming aspect of these excluded life narratives stands out on the rigidity of understanding we have of a written work whose author is talking about her/himself, but not only. The sameness which was pointed as a negative argument to "slave narratives" can be interpreted as a collective movement that resourcefully weaved their stories. For that reason, the aspects imbued in the approach to (auto)biography that we advocate encompass the social and political hues that are necessary to reveal the significance of marginalized texts and subjects.

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