

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Travelers in Skirts: Gender, Literature, and Travel in the Lives and Writings of
Nísia Floresta and Adèle Toussaint-Samson, Two Women in the Nineteenth-
Century Atlantic World.**

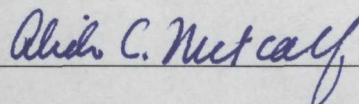
By

Ludmila de Souza Maia

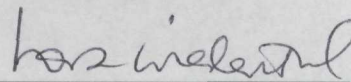
AN ARTICLE SUMMARY OF THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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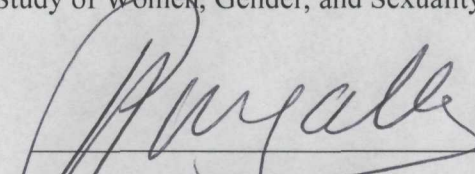
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ABSTRACT

Travelers in Skirts: Gender, Literature, and Travel in the Lives and Writings of Nísia Floresta and Adèle Toussaint-Samson, Two Women in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World.

By

Ludmila de Souza Maia

This dissertation investigates the relationships between gender and writing in the personal and intellectual trajectories of the Brazilian woman writer Nísia Floresta (Papary, 1810 - Rouen, 1885) and the French woman writer Adèle Toussaint-Samson (Paris, 1820-1911), in nineteenth-century Brazil and Europe. The core question of this research is how being a woman influenced their experiences as women writers and as female travellers. This work proposes a dialogue between these two writers who lived their long lives through the nineteenth century, shared similar spaces, performed Atlantic journeys, and thought through their writings about what they called the “feminine condition”. The dissertation is divided in three parts according to the chronological order of the authors’ lives and publications. In the first part, I discuss the relationship between domesticity and writing in the beginning of their production of texts and their awakening as authors. In the second part, I deal with the influence of travel both on their lives and in their writings. In the third and last part, I discuss the later years of the writers, analyzing the ways they addressed the subject of aging, the self memories they would leave for posterity, as well as their proximity to death. Throughout their lives, both of them had to negotiate their “female condition” with their performance as writers. This work is also a contribution to the History of Feminism, for through the empirical analysis of the lives of these two women, it adds one more chapter.

Article-length Summary of the Dissertation in the Second Language, as Required for the Rice-Unicamp Dual Degree program¹

This article is part of a dissertation that investigates the experience of two female authors as writers and travelers: the Brazilian Nísia Floresta (1810-1885) and the French woman Adèle Toussaint-Samson (1820-1911).² The objective is to create a dialogue between the two authors in order to discuss the relationship between writing and gender in a transnational perspective in the nineteenth century. They both lived in the same nineteenth-century world and they had both chosen to take their work as writers seriously, publishing many literary pieces throughout their long lives. Although one is French and the other is Brazilian, a comparative study of the lives and writings of Adèle Toussaint-Samson and Nísia Floresta reveals a new understanding of the experience of women writers and women's mobility as travelers through a transnational perspective in the nineteenth-century Atlantic World, particularly between Brazil and Europe. In addition, this dissertation aims to fill a gap in the historiography on nineteenth-century Brazilian women, a gap which is even deeper in the case of works on both native and foreign women who lived in and produced literature in Brazil.

Two Female Travelers in Brazil: Gender Views of Slavery and Free Women

In this article, I investigate Floresta and Toussaint's writings as they deal with the themes of slavery and upper-class women's lives in Rio de Janeiro. My analysis explores how they participated in a transatlantic debate about slavery and articulated gendered moral narratives about the roles of women--enslaved and free--in society. My focus is on one travel account by Toussaint, *Une Parisienne au Brésil* [A Parisian in Brazil],³ written during the dozen years she lived in Brazil, mostly in the 1850s, and published in France as newspaper articles in late 1870s and later as a book in French in 1883. The book was soon after translated into English and Portuguese.⁴ I also analyze two fictional short stories by Nísia

¹ I am deeply thankful to Dr. Alida Metcalf for her thoughtful comments on this article and for her whole support and intellectual contribution throughout my Rice-Unicamp dual Ph.D. program. I am grateful to the committee Dr. Lora Wildenthal and Beatriz González-Stephan for their wise comments to my work in different moments of graduate school. I also thank Rodrigo Bulamah and Ashley Evelyn for proofreading this article. My special acknowledgements to faculty, staff, and colleagues of the Rice History department.

² Ludmila de Souza Maia, "Viajantes de saias: gênero, literatura e viagem em Adèle Toussaint-Samson e Nísia Floresta (Europa e Brasil, século XIX)" (Ph.D.'s dissertation, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2016).

³ Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *Une Parisienne au Brésil* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1883).

⁴ Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil: the travel account of a Frenchwoman in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro*, translated by Emma Toussaint (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2001). Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, translated from the French by Madame Emma Toussaint (Boston: James H. Earle, 1891).

Floresta, one entitled “Passeio ao Aqueduto da Carioca” [A Promenade to the Carioca Aqueduct],⁵ and the other “Páginas de uma vida obscura” [Pages of an Obscure Life],⁶ both published in the newspaper *O Brasil Illustrado* of Rio de Janeiro in 1855. The discussion also considers *Opúsculo Humanitário* [Humanitarian Opusculum],⁷ a treatise on women’s education by Nísia Floresta that was published in the city of Rio de Janeiro as newspaper articles and then as a book in 1853. From all the archival and bibliographical work I have conducted, these literary works appear to be the most significant pieces these authors dedicated to the themes I will explore in the following text. My goal is to use these women’s experiences as authors in the male-dominated Brazilian public sphere to achieve new understandings of gendered expressions in their transatlantic space. Such analysis reveals the ways their articulations of transatlantic ideas shaped their arguments about slavery and womanhood, as well as their own participation in Atlantic public debates. Although women’s importance in the nineteenth-century Atlantic abolitionism movement has been well explored, in the Brazilian context, the place of women’s contributions to the movement is rather minimal when compared to that observed in abolitionist studies from other parts of the Atlantic world. This article seeks to fill part of this historiographical gap while bringing new contributions to studies about the experiences of those whose voices have been largely disregarded in the making of the Atlantic world.

Different routes

Nísia Floresta was the oldest daughter of the Portuguese lawyer Dionísio Gonçalves Pinto and the Brazilian widow Dona Antonia Clara Freire. She belonged to a family that biographers claimed to be white, in a society where racial mixing was frequent and in which anti-blackness dominated the public sphere. She grew up in rural Brazil where virtually everyone was illiterate, but her family did own property. If the general population was unschooled, for women the disadvantage was even more dramatic. The majority of women, including those from upper classes, were largely excluded from any kind of instruction during

Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *Uma Parisiense no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Capivara, 2003). Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *Viagem de uma parisiense ao Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia de J. Villeneuve, 1883).

⁵ Nísia Floresta, “Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca,” *O Brasil Illustrado*, Rio de Janeiro, 07/15/1855, Accessed October 28, 2014, www.bn.br/hemerotecadigital. Nísia Floresta, “Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca” in *Inéditos e dispersos de Nísia Floresta*, edited by Constância Lima Duarte (Natal: EDUFRRN, 2009).

⁶ Nísia Floresta, “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” *O Brasil Illustrado*, Rio de Janeiro, March 31, 1855, 04/15/1855, 04/30/1855, 05/15/1855, 05/31/1855, 06/16/1855, 06/30/1855, accessed November 23, 2014, www.bn.br/hemerotecadigital. Nísia Floresta, “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” in *Inéditos e dispersos de Nísia Floresta*, edited by Constância Lima Duarte (Natal: EDUFRRN, 2009).

⁷ Nísia Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário* (São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1989).

the entire colonial period and even in the first decades after the independence.⁸ A few could read poorly, but almost none could write. This fact made Brazil unique when compared to its Latin American neighbors where there were many more examples of educated, upper-class female authors.⁹ Floresta's father, however, was educated and ensured that she learned how to read and write, a habit that would not spread among upper classes until a few decades later.

By the age of 18, Floresta became the *de facto* head of the family after her father was assassinated. His unexpected death brought about her intellectual development because she had to become a private tutor to earn money and to help the family. That same year, she met a man who fathered her two children, and that she claimed to be her husband. He died suddenly after they had been together for four years. Along with her ephemeral partnership with her husband--himself a law student--Floresta managed to become a translator, a schoolteacher, a school principal and owner, and later a writer. Before making her first trip to Europe in 1849, Floresta had lived in various parts of Brazil, in four very different provinces. After 1849, she started a life of traveling, and in 1856 she moved definitively to Europe, where she published books, visited many regions of the continent, and made the acquaintance of famous literary and scientific figures.¹⁰ Throughout her work, she dedicates her reflections to themes such as: the condition of women, race and slavery, and comparisons between Brazilian and Europeans societies, with a close emphasis on notions of progress and civilization.

On the other side of the Atlantic and ten years after Floresta's birth, Adèle Samson was born in 1820 in the heart of Paris.¹¹ Belonging to a white French artistic family, she grew up in the city, where her father was one of the most famous actors of the nineteenth-century Parisian Opera. She was educated at home with her siblings by her father, and from a very young age she was surrounded by great performers and artists with whom she became socially and affectively close. In such a propitious environment for artistic creation, she started to

⁸ Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *Caetana Says No, Women's Stories from a Brazilian Slave Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83-84). John Luccock, "Nem ler, nem escrever," in *A condição feminina no Rio de Janeiro Século XIX*, edited by Miriam Moreira Leite, (São Paulo: Hucitec, EDUSP, 1984), 68. Emanuel Araújo, "A arte da sedução: Sexualidade feminina na Colônia" in *História das Mulheres no Brasil*, edited by Mary Del Priore (São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 1997), 46-47. Alida C Metcalf, "Women and Means: Women and Family Property in Colonial Brazil," *Journal of Social History* 24, n. 2 (1990): 277-98.

⁹ In Hispanic Latin America, there is a variety of upper-class educated women and famous female writers such as Flora Tristan or Gertrude Gomez de Avellaneda. For more examples see: Stella Maris Scatena, *Peregrinas de Otrora: viajantes latino-americanas no século XIX* (Florianópolis: Editora Mulheres, 2008).

¹⁰ Aduauto da Câmara, *História de Nísia Floresta* (Rio de Janeiro: Irmãos Pongetti, 1941). Constância Lima Duarte, *Nísia Floresta: vida e obra*, 1st edition (Natal: UFRN Editora Universitária, 1995). Sônia Valéria Marinho Lúcio, "Uma viajante Brasileira na Itália do *Risorgimento*: tradução comentada do livro *Trois ans en Italie* suivi d'un voyage en Grèce de Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta (vol.I, 1864, vol. II, s.d.)" (Ph.D.'s dissertation, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 1999). Charlotte Matthews, *Gender, Race and Patriotism in the Works of Nísia Floresta* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2012).

¹¹ Marie Adèle Samson, *État Civil, Naissances*, July 13, 1820, Archives de Paris, Paris, France.

write at a young age, as did her oldest sister. Toussaint-Samson began with romantic poems and then moral short stories, becoming a prolific writer in the following years. She married the ballet dancer Jules Toussaint in the 1840s and, in 1849, they moved together to Brazil in order to seek their fortune in the New World. After twelve years, she returned to Paris and published a series of texts, including a traveler's account of her twelve-year-stay in Brazil. Throughout her life, she had many pregnancies, but only two sons reached adulthood.¹² Similar to Floresta, in her narratives she prioritized issues related to gender, maternity, womanhood, race, slavery, and comparisons between the different societies she lived in.

Visions of Slavery in Brazil: The Making of an Atlantic Female Perspective

International pressure from British associations spread petitions for a world free from slavery throughout the Atlantic.¹³ These struggles gave way to the enactment of a law in 1850 interdicting transatlantic slave commerce, thereby outlawing the entrance of captives into Brazil. Although masters did lose the battle for international trade, they worked throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century to make slavery last indefinitely in Brazil.¹⁴ The domestic slave trade, for example, was starting to fill the demand of coffee producers in the countryside in the expanding province of São Paulo. At that time, most of Brazilian society had a difficult time foreseeing a future without slavery. During their whole lives, slaves had been expected to serve and show deference towards their masters--all for no payment.

During the course of the 1850s, the abolition of slavery did not evoke significant discussions in Brazilian newspapers despite its being a very relevant issue in many parts of the Atlantic world. However, the topic of slavery itself abounded in the daily Brazilian press. Many of these newspapers, while not exactly opposing slavery, did denounce cruel facts about the institution on a daily basis, describing captivity and what one contemporary

¹² Correspondence of Madame Arnould-Plessy, Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Paris, France. Jacqueline Penjon, "Une intellectuelle française à Rio" in J.M. Farre; F. Martinez; I. Olivares, *Hommes de Science et intellectuels européens en Amérique Latine (XIXe-XXe siècles)* (Paris: Manuscrits, 2005), 145-160. Correspondence of Samson, Mademoiselle Rachel, Madame Allan-Depréaux, and Madame Arnould-Plessy, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Site Richelieu, "Arts du Spectacles" and "Manuscrits," Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, Paris, France.

Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *Mémoires de Samson de la Comédie française* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff Editeur, 1882), accessed November 15, 2014, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k204369w/f2.item>. Veuve Samson, *Rachel et Samson: souvenirs de théâtre* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff Editeur, 1898), accessed October 20, 2014, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k204370t/f1.item.r=rachel%20et%20samson>. Leon Séche, *Etudes d'histoire romantique, Alfred de Musset: (documents inédits), II Les Femmes* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1907), 152-207, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2058491.r=Etudes%20d%27histoire%20romantique%20alfred%20musset>

¹³ Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: the British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, 1st Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 119-152.

¹⁴ Sidney Chalhou, *A força da escravidão: ilegalidade e costume no Brasil oitocentista* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012), 13-31.

described as “its excessive procedures.” It was common for the press to publish articles on dramatic scenes of slavery, as did the *Revista de Santos* in an article that described a slave auction and its dramatic scenes of family separation.¹⁵ Some articles also reported daily examples of cruel aggressions, undue physical punishment for a trivial crime, or even desperate acts of violence or suicide which the enslaved committed in hopes of escaping slavery.¹⁶ Criticism of slavery and general observations about the lives of slaves formed part of the public discourse, which surpassed both the boundaries of the Brazilian nation and the expected limits of the fiction and non-fictional literary genres in the mid-nineteenth century.

In their writings during the 1850s, Adèle Toussaint and Nísia Floresta also described the institution of slavery in Brazil. Despite their differences in style, time of publication, and nationality, their interpretations of Brazilian slavery demonstrate fundamental similarities, partially due to the gendered perspectives they had on the subject. They both avoided placing slaves into one homogeneous category, highlighting instead their ethnicities and other complexities in order to construct them as individuals who experienced slavery in different ways. By doing this, they represented slavery and its victims in a way that took the differences in the experiences of enslaved men and women into account. Emphasizing the fundamental differences between male and female slaves was common among those outside Brazil who denounced the excessive cruelty of masters and dealers, and this approach functioned as an important argument in many anti-slavery discourses. By exploring a gendered narrative of slavery in Brazil, Floresta and Toussaint assumed a different point of view from other accounts both of and in Brazil. Their writings participated in a profitable circulation of ideas in literature and press. They engaged in a trend of fictionalization of real slave life in the pages of newspapers. At the same time, they also engaged in a literary movement to produce enslaved characters as real beings.

The Slave Auction and the Theme of Family Separation

In her travel account of Rio de Janeiro, Adèle Toussaint gives an account of a slave auction she witnessed upon her arrival in Brazil, giving special attention to the difficulty of watching slaves separated from their families. Toussaint describes how “this sight of slavery was, during the first years of my sojourn in Brazil, one of the torments of my life, and it did

¹⁵ The article by the *Revista de Santos* was reproduced in a Francophone newspaper of Rio de Janeiro. “Fait Divers,” *Courrier du Brésil*, Rio de Janeiro, Accessed May 18, 1856, <http://memoria.bn.br/DOCREADER/docreader.aspx?BIB=709719>.

¹⁶ On the theme of death and suicide in the Atlantic slave societies, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

not in a little contribute to give me homesickness, of which I expected to die.”¹⁷ She also recounts how she was repulsed by scenes of slave auctions, in which “poor negroes, standing upon a table, were put up at auction, and examined by their teeth and their legs, like horses or mules.”¹⁸ The animal-like treatment given to enslaved black men shocked the sensibilities of the Parisian newcomer, and these scenes fueled her accusations of exoticism and barbarism in Brazilian society. In the 1880s, when she published her travel accounts, the analogy of “the human flesh market” and the horrifying scenes of people being sold like animals had already been exhaustively denounced by movements against slavery throughout the Atlantic.¹⁹ Adding to those voices, Toussaint goes back to her memories of the 1850s to explore her uneasiness with scenes of slavery, giving a first person account of its brutality through her compassionate and empathetic view of enslaved subjects.

Empathy towards enslaved people also plays a role in Nísia Floresta’s works, as seen in both her treatise on female education and in her fictional short stories. Floresta returned to Brazil after her first trip to Europe in 1852, and from this moment on she started to write about slavery. The absence of slaves in Europe had changed her perception upon her return to Brazil, and slavery would subsequently play an important role in almost all the texts she wrote during the 1850s. The experience of traveling had granted her the possibility of interpreting Brazilian social life through a foreigner’s eyes. For instance, in the treatise *Opúsculo Humanitário*, published as a book in Brazil in 1853, Floresta reminds readers of the human condition of the enslaved by emphasizing their family ties: “those who are oppressed with labor and ill-treatment, denying them even the liberty to think, they are mothers, children, siblings, etc., who suffer in silence without any other defense than their own tears.”²⁰ Similar to Toussaint, Floresta regards slaves as individuals who could not be reduced to their legal condition. They had kinship ties, and the fact that they had families could not be ignored.

Two years later, in the short story “Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca” [Promenade to the Carioca Aqueduct] of 1855, published in the newspaper *O Brasil Ilustrado*, the author deals with the same subject through a fictional enslaved worker who laments his family's separation. She transcribes the slave’s expression of sorrows in rhyming verses through the voice of a black quarryman who remembers his joyful past in Africa, only to then describe the

¹⁷ Adèle Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil: the travel account of a Frenchwoman in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2001), 44.

¹⁸ Toussaint-samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 44.

¹⁹ Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, 119-152.

²⁰ “A quem se oprime com trabalho e maus-tratos, negando-se-lhe até a liberdade de refletir, existem mães, filhos, irmãos, etc., que sofrem em silêncio sem outra defesa que suas lágrimas,” Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 161.

exhausting and inhumane labor under slavery after the Middle Passage.²¹ He concludes with grief that a portion of humankind should be designated to endless manual labor and condemned to the cruelties of slavery. After this digression, Floresta's narrator demands the regeneration of this unfortunate race that has been destined to the indignity of the enslaved condition. The narrative also portrays evil masters and morally judges them for these dishonorable conditions. Her evocative message, however, did not call for the end of slavery, but rather for its humanization and for benevolence from paternalistic masters.

In Nísia's "Páginas de uma vida obscura," [Pages of an Obscure Life] a short story dedicated to the theme of slavery and published in 1855 in the same *O Brasil Ilustrado*,²² the theme of family destruction emerges through the story of a slave who is a friend and unhappy companion of the main character Domingos. He tells Domingos: "I had a wife and children; they sold them to different masters when I least expected it. My tears, my pleas only led to me being treated more harshly."²³ As the plot unfolds, Domingos himself goes through similar pain when he sees his beloved Maria sold and sent to an unknown place. After many years, he again experiences another separation when the mother of his son is sold and sent away from them. Despite the adversities of life, the enslaved hero does not lose his moral qualities and in fact, he becomes nobler through the sufferings of a life in bondage. From the masters' point of view, Floresta depicts Domingos as a perfect slave. He is passive, obedient, devoted, submissive, and shares Christian values.²⁴ Floresta's narrative invites the reader to identify him/herself with the fate of blacks in order to humanize them through the sentiment of empathy in addition to a strong religious component. Domingos' faith strengthens his humanity in a way that builds a connection between enslaved blacks and the free white audience. She emphasizes a brotherhood among all Christians--black and white, slave and free.

Scholar Charlotte Mathews points out that Nísia Floresta opposes the general nineteenth-century belief that blacks were unable to build family ties and create strong affective relations, an argument that was very often used to justify slavery.²⁵ In the 1850s, the

²¹ Floresta, "Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca," 38-39.

²² Floresta, "Páginas de uma vida obscura," *O Brasil Ilustrado*.

²³ "Eu tinha mulher e filhos; venderam-nos quando menos o pensava a diferentes senhores. Minhas lágrimas, minhas súplicas só me obtiveram maiores rigores," Floresta, "Páginas de uma vida obscura" in *Inéditos e dispersos de Nísia Floresta*, 62-63.

²⁴ For a relevant analysis of "Páginas de uma vida obscura" see, Constância Lima Duarte, *Nísia Floresta: vida e obra*, 2nd Edition (Natal: EDUFRN, 2008), 100-140.

²⁵ Robert Slenes, "The Brazilian internal slave trade, 1850-1888. Regional economies, slave experience, and the politics of a peculiar market" in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trade in the Americas*, edited by Walter Johnson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 325-370.

critique of the rhetoric on enslaved people's lack of family ties had very little strength in the Brazilian context. With the end of the transatlantic slave trade, public discourses started to gain ground in denouncing the separation of enslaved families.²⁶ In the same decade as Floresta's publication, there were two bills discussed in the Brazilian Parlia

ment against the separation of enslaved couples, which eventually became law in the late 1860s.²⁷

Floresta demonstrates in "Páginas de uma vida obscura" that she was a well-traveled woman capable of engaging with Atlantic debates and their different contexts. Her text was published just two years after the first edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the successful novel by the American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe.²⁸ According to the scholar Ann Douglas, Stowe's novel was largely motivated by a fight against slavery's destruction of souls and families.²⁹ Stowe's denunciations of mother-child separations found an important response in the Anglo-Saxon female reading public and became one of the major symbols of anti-slavery movements.³⁰

Floresta came into contact with these ideas while she was traveling in Europe between 1849 and 1852. She might have read the novel during her stay in England in late 1851, when unofficial copies of the American novel were republished and had a major impact among those involved in England's Abolitionist movement.³¹ She returned to Brazil in 1852 and a few months later, she published her *Opúsculo Humanitário*, one of its chapters making an emphatic interpretation of Stowe's prominent novel.³² In 1855, she reproduced many of Stowe's ideas in her short story "Páginas de uma vida obscura," in which her main character is described as the "Brazilian Tom."³³

Stowe's narrative reproduced the tensions present in U.S. slavery through the character of Tom, a Christian slave and passive victim of the cruelties of captivity. The following passage of the novel describes the slave auction, in which Tom is sold to someone from what the characters consider, the dreaded Deep South:

²⁶ Matthews, *Gender, Race and Patriotism*, 130

²⁷ Chalhoub, *A força da escravidão*, 258-259 and 272. Robert Conrad, *The destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850-1888*, (Malabar: Krieger Publishing, 1993), 27.

²⁸ Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, 119-152.

²⁹ Ann Douglas, quoted by Matthews, *Gender, Race and Patriotism in the Works of Nísia Floresta*, 134.

³⁰ The rhetoric about motherhood and enslaved family became an important theme of abolitionist movements in Brazil during the 1880s, with the participation of women in anti-slavery demonstrations. Camillia Cowling, "O fundo de emancipação "Livro de ouro" e as mulheres escravizadas: gênero, abolição e os significados da liberdade na Corte, anos 1880," in: *Mulheres negras no Brasil escravista e do pós-emancipação*, edited by Giovanna Cortêz et al (São Paulo: Selo Negro Edições, 2012), 213-226.

³¹ Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, 119-152.

³² Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 99.

³³ Floresta, "Páginas de uma vida obscura." *Inéditos e dispersos*, 81.

A little before the sale commenced, a short, broad, muscular man, in a checked shirt considerably open at the bosom, and pantaloons much the worse for dirt and wear, elbowed his way through the crowd, like one who is going actively into a business; and, coming up to the group, began to examine them systematically. From the moment that Tom saw him approaching, he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he came near. This man proceeded to a very free personal examination of the lot. He seized Tom by the jaw, and pulled open his mouth to inspect his teeth; made him strip up his sleeve, to show his muscle; turned him round, made him jump and spring, to show his paces.³⁴

Similar to Toussaint's description of a slave auction, in Stowe's work, the plot's hero goes through the humiliating scene of examination as if he were a pack animal. The novel's villain is the slave master and dealer whose evil look suggests his infamous character.

Tom's sale leads him into a series of events that resemble a descent into hell, in a hero's own Calvary. On his way down, the plot depicts the ordeals of Tom in slavery, and a series of surrounding stories as tragic as his own shed new light on family separation, slave auctions, and the immorality of slavery. The novel's narrative has a strong religious component personified in the Christian features of Tom. It is not a coincidence that Stowe's father and husband were protestant pastors and that she herself was a religious activist.³⁵

Engendered Aspects of Slave Life

From the scene of a slave auction, the author moves to the theme of the sexual exploitation of young enslaved women by their masters. The novel presents this common practice in Atlantic slavery as a crime, targeting female readers and engaging them in the moral struggle against slavery. In the following passage, Tom's master buys a female slave for the "use" of his overseer:

"Here you Sambo", said Legree, "here's a gal I've got for you", said he, as he separated the mulatto woman from Emmeline, and pushed her towards him; - I promised to bring you one, you know. The woman gave a sudden start, and, drawing back, said, suddenly, - "O mas'r! I left my old man in New Orleans." "What of that, you -; Won't you want one here? None o' your words, - go long!" said Legree, raising the whip.³⁶

³⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Live among the Lowly*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 416-417.

³⁵ Hélio de Seixas Guimarães, "Pai Tomás no romantismo brasileiro," *Teresa Revista de Literatura Brasileira*. n.12/13. São Paulo, (2013), 421-429.

³⁶ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 433.

Stowe's novel clearly interpreted slavery as an anti-Christian and immoral institution, a view that would become symbolic of women's abolitionist movements, particularly in the U.S. and in Great Britain.³⁷ The descriptions of slavery in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* served as a reservoir of literary images and dramatized situations, which set the tone for the fictionalization of similar scenes of slavery in other parts of the world.

Although the American novel had a groundbreaking impact in anti-slavery discourses, in the era of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* publication, there were already many biographies and autobiographies of former male and female slaves published throughout the Atlantic. These texts were meant to persuade readers to join the cause of abolition. Many of these books were written by abolitionists or former slaves themselves, and antislavery movements sponsored their production and publication. Some of these works reached numerous audiences, and in the case of autobiographies by freed women, the stories of their experience of sexual exploitation gathered great attention. Among the most prominent autobiography to deal with slavery from a female perspective is Mary Prince's 1831 novel entitled *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*.³⁸ This text is not about separation of a fictional slave family, but is Prince's own story with dates, family names, and real facts. Prince used this rhetorical strategy to convince readers of the truth of her testimony.

Other women also exposed themselves through the publishing world in the different ways they discussed slavery. Sojourner Truth, a former American slave, preferred to keep silent about the intimate exploitation she experienced during her life in bondage in her memoirs "For Motives of Delicacy." Harriet Jacobs, on the other hand, decided to publicize the sexual exploitation she endured while enslaved in her 1850 autobiography. This was only two years before Stowe published her internationally acclaimed book, a work that certainly took inspiration from these real stories to create a similar, yet fictional drama. In the Anglophone world, these stories of sexual exploitation engaged controversial debates on abolition, whether through demonstrating solidarity with the enslaved victims or blaming them for the violence they suffered. In her descriptions of slave auctions that were published in her memoirs in the late 1870s in France, Toussaint also addresses the theme of the sexual exploitation of female slaves, employing a similar rhetoric on women's sexual exploitation. She recalls her outrage over seeing a young enslaved woman "being handed over to the *fazendeiro* [plantation owner], who would reserve her for his 'intimate' service, while her

³⁷ Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, 119-152. Guimarães, "Pai Tomás no romantismo brasileiro."

³⁸ Mary Prince, *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, related by herself* (London: F. Westley And A. H. Davis, 1831), accessed August 6, 2015, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17851>

little child was sometimes sold to another master.”³⁹ She reports how “[she] was obliged to do [her] violence to not screaming to all these men who were making a traffic in human flesh, *Carrascos!* [Tormentors]”⁴⁰ Her indignation against the “men” who were responsible for that trade shows a form of gender solidarity with enslaved women that crosses boundaries of class, race, and nationality, holding the male sex accountable for the horrible scenes where women became the worst victims of slavery. Toussaint expressed a bold opinion compared to other public discourses on slavery in mid-nineteenth-century Brazil. Yet, her memoirs were published decades later and outside Brazil at a moment when the immoralities of slavery, especially those related to the particularities of women’s slavery already had been broadly denounced in various parts of the Atlantic world. In part, Toussaint’s censuring the cruelties of slavery would reproduce Stowe’s success to spread both fictional and verisimilar images of intimate exploitation of women in the pages of her novel.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin directly influenced Nísia Floresta’s “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” but in her narrative, Nísia Floresta refuses to directly approach the topic of masters’ sexual abuse of slaves by masters, mostly due to the silence which the Brazilian public held on the theme. In the following passage, her nineteenth-century readers could only guess that sexual abuse was one of the afflictions that Domingos’ son’s mother endured:

She was a weak soul who could not bear, as had the noble black [Domingos], to remain intact from the abjectness generated by a long life in bondage. Sold many times to different masters, the poor female slave had gone through all stages of suffering, which in mediocre souls tends to degenerate almost every time into vile torpor and in giving up all feelings of human dignity.⁴¹

If it is true that the author is silent on the issue of sexual violence, she leaves it to the reader to fill the gaps of information and to draw conclusions as to why the sufferings of female slaves were of a different nature from those of male slaves, such as Domingos. However, her acceptance of Stowe’s work is limited and partial, and in “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” again, the narrative does not call for the end of slavery, but rather advocates its humanization and moralization, through the support of good and paternalistic masters, which would consequently lead to the extinction of evil and patriarchal ones.

³⁹ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 44.

⁴⁰ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, Ibid.

⁴¹ “Era uma alma fraca que não havia podido, como a do nobre negro, permanecer intacta da abjeção a que geralmente conduz um longo cativeiro. Vendida por muitas vezes a diferentes senhores, a pobre escrava havia percorrido toda a escala dos sofrimentos que nas almas medíocres degenera quase sempre em vil torpor e em abnegação de todos os sentimentos de dignidade pessoal,” Floresta, “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” *Inéditos e dispersos*, 81.

If Floresta avoids the subject of masters' particular use of female slaves in her short story, in her treatise on women's education, published two years earlier, the question is addressed in another way. In her allusions to the intimate relations among masters and female slaves, the author attributes it to black women's hypersexual nature. Floresta disregards gender inequalities and social hierarchies among masters and slaves. She is particularly concerned with the lack of separation between slaves and Brazilian white families. She writes, "among the sad and inevitable results of the constant contact of boys with slaves are the no less evil consequences to their education, being one of the most outrageous the low respect we cultivate among us towards innocence."⁴² In this passage, she reproduces an idea present in many European travel accounts written about Brazil at the time. Yet, she does recognize that the bad example given to children comes from fathers, noting "a disgraceful treatment given by some fathers to their children."⁴³ In order to discuss sexual intercourse among slaves and masters, Floresta appeals to a foreign author, the French Dr. Rendu, who wrote about Brazilians in his accounts about the country: "young Brazilians are often perverted soon after childhood; they have the example of their fathers who they have before their eyes, boys and girls, masters and slaves spend the majority of their day half dressed; the heat of the weather accelerates the moment of puberty."⁴⁴

In this passage, however, it is clear that Floresta does not picture enslaved women as victims. On the contrary, young boys are viewed as the real victims of the bad example of their fathers, implying that while these relations were asymmetrical for enslaved women and girls, they were not violent in character. Sexual exploitation was a widely spread practice in virtually all nineteenth-century slave societies.⁴⁵ However, in the case of Brazil, very few public discourses in the 1850s explicated the fate of enslaved women in the hands of masters. Floresta's opinion is proof that she shares contemporary ideas of Black women as hypersexualized and immoral. On the other hand, she openly denounced the conditions of indigenous women in colonial Brazil who were victims of sexual violence by colonizers. Nevertheless, the public debate on slavery in Brazil was much more limited than elsewhere at

⁴² "Aos tristes inevitáveis resultados do constante viver dos meninos em contato com escravos reúnem-se outros escolhos não menos funestos à sua educação, sendo um dos mais revoltantes o pouco respeito havido entre nós para com a inocência," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 99.

⁴³ "uma conduta desregrada dada por alguns pais a seus filhos," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 99.

⁴⁴ "Les jeunes Brésiliens sont souvent pervertis presque au sortir de l'enfance; outre l'exemple de leurs pères qu'ils ont sous les yeux, garçons et filles, maîtres et esclaves passent ensemble la plus grande partie de la journée à demi vêtus; la chaleur du climat hâte le moment de la puberté." Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 99.

⁴⁵ Margaret Washington, "'From motives of delicacy,' Sexuality and Morality in the narratives of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs" *The Journal of African American History*, v. 92, n. 1, (2007), 57-73.

that time, and it is possible that her interpretations of slaves' sexual exploitation in 1850 were constrained by what would be acceptable to her audience. Soon after she had moved to Europe in 1856, her change in location would be accompanied by a move to openly address the cause of abolition.

Although Nísia keeps silent about the sexual exploitation of captives, she does condemn another sort of gender exploitation suffered by domestic slaves. In the treatise, she makes a critique against the use of wet-nurses by rich families in Brazil and at the same time she claims breastfeeding from upper-class women as a maternal duty. She considers wet-nursing as inhumane labor because it required an unnatural separation of the enslaved mother from her newborn child, a theme that was also explored in Stowe's novel.⁴⁶ Floresta argues that wet-nurses belong to the "unhappy race, demoralized by slavery and condemned to the education of the whip." She shows disapproval of these families' ungrateful treatment of these enslaved women, who were often rented out, sold or treated in some way as disposable after playing the mother's role and feeding the master's children:

It is not rare to see her [a girl] (we say this with horror) inflicting the most cruel punishment to her own enslaved nanny who had breastfed her, who is indifferently rented or sold as a useless burden, soon after she is no longer needed. This revolting ingratitude is one of the most despised examples set for the girl, who will one day be a mother and therefore will transmit it to her own children.⁴⁷

In this passage, Nísia shows empathy for enslaved wet-nurses, in whom she recognized humanity and maternal devotion. The author is sympathetic to the cause of slaves, a sympathy which suggests that Floresta held some degree of gender solidarity with the female slaves. Her approach to the problem appears to be in dialogue with Stowe's descriptions which explore the fate of female slaves and the separation between mother and child.⁴⁸

At the same time, Floresta strongly criticizes women from upper classes like herself. She takes some distance from these women in order to make a moral judgement about their disinterest in breastfeeding. For Nísia Floresta, mothers were supposed to assume breastfeeding as a symbol of maternal devotion and as part of their social duty as female citizens. Her argument revolving around the public duties of women that are based in the

⁴⁶ "infeliz raça, desmoralizada pelo cativo e condenada à educação do chicote," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 96.

⁴⁷ "Não é raro ver ela [a menina] (com horror o dizemos) infligir o mais cruel tratamento à própria ama que a amamentou, a qual é alguma vez indiferentemente vendida ou alugada como um fardo inútil, apenas acaba de ser-lhe necessária. Esta revoltante ingratidão é um dos mais detestáveis exemplos dados à menina, que, tendo um dia de ser mãe, o transmite por seu turno a seus filhos," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 96.

⁴⁸ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

domestic sphere is very similar to the argument made by contemporary European feminists, as Charlotte Liddel points out in her article.⁴⁹

In many of her writings from the 1850s, Floresta explains the vicious conduct of slaves that resulted from the cruel conditions of slavery: “It does not occur to them that the brutalization of slaves, who are kept from any moral or religious education, should excuse them from a great number of their faults.”⁵⁰ The struggle against the immorality of slavery is again rephrased by Floresta, echoing an Atlantic rhetoric. In addition, she pushes readers to feel empathy for slaves by uncovering their intimate feelings: “many masters do not want to recognize that, under the rough appearance of the black man beats a noble heart, generous and capable of great virtues that bring honor to humankind.”⁵¹ She depicts the other side of the coin by denouncing the cruelty of white women towards slavery, an occurrence which became commonplace in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature.⁵²

Both Adèle Toussaint and Nísia Floresta share a despise for bad slave conditions, and Toussaint particularly stresses incidents of severe treatment among female masters in her accounts on Brazil. In one passage, Toussaint gives the example of a lady who spends the day whipping her slaves:

We had a neighbor in Rosario Street, in the upper story, a Spanish señora, who had at her service three or four slaves. Every day the most terrible scenes took place over our head. For the least omission, for the least fault of either of them, the señora would beat them or give them blows with the *palmtoria* (a sort of little palette pierced with holes), and we would hear these poor negresses throw themselves on their knees crying, “Mercy! Señora!” But the pitiless mistress would never be touched, and gave without pity the number of blows she consider necessary to be given.⁵³

Like many travelers, Toussaint reported the violence employed by women against their domestic slaves, depicting them as rough and unsophisticated because of the violent behavior they performed on a daily basis. This was a common stereotype of Brazilian women from the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ However, Adèle’s disapproval of slavery did not

⁴⁹ Charlotte Liddell, “Nature, Nurture and Nation, Nísia Floresta’s engagement in the breast-feeding debate in Brazil and France,” *Feminist Review*, 79, (2005), 69-82.

⁵⁰ “Não se refletindo que o embrutecimento dos escravos, privados de toda a educação moral e religiosa, deve escusá-los de grande número de suas faltas,” Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 96.

⁵¹ “muitos senhores, não querendo reconhecer que, sob o invólucro grosseiro do preto bate muita vez um coração nobre, generoso e capaz das maiores virtudes que honram a humanidade,” Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 96.

⁵² Suely Gomes Costa, “Entre práticas escravistas e caritativas, transformações da gestualidade feminina. (Rio de Janeiro, primeira metade do século XIX),” *Gênero*, v.1, (2000) 55-61.

⁵³ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 43

⁵⁴ Míriam Moreira Leite, “A documentação da literatura de viagem,” in *A condição feminina no Rio de Janeiro Século XIX* (São Paulo: Hucitec, EDUSP, 1984), 17-34.

prevent her from employing slaves in her house during her time in Brazil, as was the practice among locals at that time. The image of the evil female master became part of a fictional imagination throughout nineteenth-century Brazil. According to Suely Gomes da Costa, this idea emerged in travel reports that criticized women for their habits and their gestures, emphasizing their violent behavior against slaves.⁵⁵

While Toussaint observed local free women, she also wrote many pages on enslaved women as well, and was a keen observer of gendered aspects of slavery. Toussaint was shocked to report the fear and suffering experienced by a pregnant slave who was about to delivery her baby:

One should believe they are more brave than us whites, due to the harsh lives they have. Not at all. I asked myself more than once how come those creatures, who were exposed to all forms of seasonal inclement weather, who were whipped and suffered all sorts of privations, could be seen as so weak in the time of the delivery of a child”⁵⁶

She reveals her astonishment at the weakness these women displayed during the hour of giving birth to a child. She did not expect them to feel the same pain as she would. She then provides the reader with an explanation for the fact that enslaved mothers are less brave than European or white free mothers at the time of delivery:

When we give birth to a child, what encourage us in our pain is the idea of that small being whom we are soon going to hold in our arms, whom we will love and educate; but those poor female slaves, from where could they take their braveness to support their spirit? They realize the child they bear will be put into slavery. They will be taken from them after birth. [A female slave] does not wish this for the child, and sometimes, she aspires to his or her death. This is what slavery produces.⁵⁷

By explaining the reasons to justify the weakness of these mothers, Toussaint gets into the minds of slave women, and invite her readers to place themselves in the position of these

⁵⁵ Costa. “Entre práticas escravistas e caritativas, transformações da gestualidade feminina,” 55-61.

⁵⁶ “J’ai assisté plusieurs fois à l’accouchement de ces malheureuses. Il ne faut pas croire qu’élèves à la dure, comme elles le sont. Elles aient plus de courage dans ces moments-là que nous autres blanches : point du tout. Je me suis demandé plus d’une fois comment il se faisait que ces créatures, exposées à toutes les intempéries de la saison, qui recevaient des coups de fouet et souffraient toutes les privations, se montrassent si faibles devant les douleurs de la maternité,” This part is not included in the English version by the translator. Toussaint-Samson, *Une Parisienne au Brésil*, 112-113, my translation.

⁵⁷ “Quand nous mettons un enfant au monde, ce qui nous soutient dans nos douleurs, c’est l’idée de ce petit être que nous allons bientôt presser sur notre cœur, que nous aimerons, que nous élèverons; mais ces pauvres esclaves, où peuvent-elles puiser du courage pour relever leur moral? Elles songent que l’enfant qui va naître d’elles est destiné à l’esclavage aussi, qu’il leur sera enlevé peu après sa naissance, qu’elles le verront souffrir de toute façon. Cela leur est bien égal qu’il vive ou qu’il meure; elles n’appellent pas sa venue, et beaucoup, au contraire, lui souhaitent la mort. Voilà ce que produit l’esclavage,” This part was not included in the English version by the translator. Toussaint-Samson, *Une Parisienne au Brésil*, 113, my translation.

unfortunate mothers. Toussaint's observations on childbirth starts with a fundamental division between free white women and black enslaved ones. She expected the harshness of slave life to make them stronger. The second movement of the narrative is the empathy the author builds towards them, who seem at first glance so different from the author. The lack of dutifulness of enslaved mothers results from unwanted or violent sexual relations, as well as from the idea that slavery is the future for their offspring. Her explanations to European readers on slave motherhood draw the conclusion that the difference among women emerges from social position, and the distinctions between white and enslaved mothers in relation to motherhood results from the harsh conditions slave women face in bondage.

At other moments, Toussaint's narrative examines the captives of Rio de Janeiro as components of an exotic urban landscape. She describes them carefully and bases her observations in the accounts of previous travelers through direct or indirect quotes.⁵⁸ She observes their clothing in detail, describes their bodies, all the while describing the ethnic differences that constituted the varied groups of slaves in Rio. She does not hide her admiration for the elegance of Mina women, yet her prejudiced descriptions clearly regard their beauty as inferior to that of European women. Even though Adèle disapproves of the ill treatments masters showed their slaves, this fact does not prevent her from portraying them as inferior individuals, echoing the opinion of many contemporary authors. Even abolitionist activists fought against slavery but saw no contradiction between their activism and a belief in the superiority of European patterns of culture and civilization. Her protests against the institution of slavery did not prevent her from having a derogatory opinion of blacks, especially women, as in what follows:

Many men find these negresses handsome; as for me, I acknowledge that their curled wool, which does duty for hair, their low and debased forehead, their blood-shot eyes, their enormous mouth with bestial lips, their disjointed teeth, like those of deer, as well as their flattened nose, have never appeared to me to constitute but a very ugly type.⁵⁹

She creates an image of slaves as beasts by animalizing their physical features, reproducing European and imperialistic ideas of beauty. Yet for Toussaint, it was not only appearance or physical traits that made slaves inferior beings.

She also stresses what she considers to be their vicious misconduct: "There is nothing more debauched than these Mina Negresses; they are the ones who deprave and corrupt the

⁵⁸ Charles Expilly, *Mulheres e costumes do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1935), 168-169.

⁵⁹ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 34.

young people of Rio de Janeiro.” She reports how they were immoral: “When one desires these creatures, one only has to signal, and they follow.” And she affirms that she herself had employed slave women who escaped at night in order to “give themselves up to this fine trade.” For the slaves, this was a form of making money: “I must go and earn something with which to buy a piece of lace.”⁶⁰ Adèle Toussaint’s narrative moves from physical depreciation to a moral condemnation of enslaved women. Like Floresta, Toussaint addresses the theme of the promiscuous lives of enslaved women by placing emphasis on racial differences that led to immorality and the excessive sexuality of black female bodies. Besides the regular limitations of a life in bondage, these women still faced the constraints of gender restrictions and moral assumptions on their conduct as women.⁶¹ What Toussaint interpreted as misconduct or prostitution of female slaves can also be interpreted as an opportunity these enslaved women found to develop their agency and autonomy, building a life outside slavery through emotional ties and informal paid activities. Toussaint’s European ideal of seclusion was intensely defended in her work but it did not spare her from receiving critiques from European literary critics who found her excessive morals to be tiring and inappropriate.⁶²

Paradoxical Views of Slaves

In *Opúsculo Humanitário*, Floresta also reveals her views of slaves as a source of immorality. In this book, she warns Brazilian families about the dangers of contamination through the employment of domestic slaves. By describing the advantages that families had in sending girls to schools, Floresta argues that being away from the pernicious contact of slaves is one of them. It is also a requirement for a girl to acquire a good education. Floresta claims the harm of living together with slaves started with the employment of wet-nurses. There was no mediation between their experience of imprisonment or physical punishment and the room of an innocent baby. Therefore, Floresta warns against the dangers of contamination through this impure milk that is able to infect both the physical body and the moral spirit of young children. Yet she recognizes that slave immorality emerges mainly due to slavery itself and she does not base it in racial arguments. The harm of contact between girls and slaves continues when they grow older:

⁶⁰ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 34-35.

⁶¹ Machado discusses the gender restrictions in the lives of female slaves in nineteenth-century Brazil. Maria Helena Machado, “Corpo, gênero e identidade no limiar da Abolição: a história de Benedicta Maria Albina da Ilha ou Ovídia, escrava (Sudeste, 1880),” *Afro-Ásia* (42), Salvador, (2010), 157-193.

⁶² Joël Cherbuliez, *Revue critique des livres Nouveaux* (Geneve: imprimerie Rambo et Schuchardt. Paris: Chez Joel Cherbuliez Librairie, 1858), accessed October 15, 2014, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6348182q/f9.item.r=brasileirA.zoom>.

A great part of these [Brazilians] still see without repugnance their children in the immoral arms of enslaved women or, accompanied by them, going everywhere in the house and outside of it. How many times have we seen and have we lamented these small creatures being contaminated by the evil habits of bad companies.⁶³

Floresta's treatise is not precise in her explanation about the immoral habits girls would learn from sharing the same domestic environment with slaves, but one could guess she is referring to the danger of dishonor and the lack of decency, features that went against the bourgeois ideal of seclusion. Floresta's writing, as that of Adèle Toussaint, characterizes this dualism at the same time it recognizes the moral and physical inferiority of blacks, all the while acknowledging that such degradation was the result of the conditions they were exposed to through slavery. Therefore, it is remarkable that Floresta denies biological arguments when dealing with moral differences between whites and blacks.

In "Páginas de uma vida obscura," however, she accepts the ideal of racial inferiority based on a physiological argument at the same time that she denies that this different physical feature has any influence on the human demeanor:

Men who believed that color, this feature of the degeneration of human races due to the atmospheric influences, should impact the sentiments of one's heart, the aspirations of one's soul, and be excluded from the consideration of society: pay attention to this eloquent portrait in which the black man shows his virtue.⁶⁴

She acknowledges the racial difference but did not connect it to any influence on the non-physical aspects of personality. This was indeed a very bold argument for a time when degeneration and both moral and physical inferiority formed a disseminated and hegemonic discourse about black people throughout the Atlantic. In the case of Floresta, her argument reproduces a scientific vocabulary acquired after her first trip to Europe, when she took courses at the *Collège de France*, and transported her fascination with the world of natural sciences to her literary texts.⁶⁵

⁶³ "grande parte destes [brasileiros] vê ainda sem repugnância seus filhos nos braços de desmoralizadas escravas ou, por elas acompanhadas, irem de uma a outra parte na habitação e fora dela. Quanta vez temos tido ocasião de ver e lamentar essas criaturinhas [meninas] impregnadas do hábito contagioso das más companhias [escravas]," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 95-96.

⁶⁴ "Homens que acreditais que a cor, esse característico da degeneração das raças humanas devido a influencias atmosféricas deve influir nos sentimentos do coração, nas inspirações da alma, e ser excluída da consideração da sociedade: atentai para esse eloquente quadro em que o negro se apresenta virtuoso," Floresta, "Páginas de uma vida obscura," 55.

⁶⁵ Floresta attended free courses at the Collège de France, during her stay in Paris. *Revue française* (1861), Tome 4eme (Paris: Bureaux de la revue française, 1863), 128-129, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63444472/f1.item.r=encontre%20de%20dames>. She was fascinated by the study of natural history as I have demonstrated in my dissertation. Ludmila de Souza Maia, "Viajantes de saias:

Nísia Floresta's and Adèle Toussaint's opinions fluctuate from one extreme to another, revealing a paradoxical approach to thinking about the situation of slaves and the institution of slavery. While both condemn the cruelty of slavery, showing sympathy to slaves and for female captives in particular, they also display an extremely negative opinion of slaves, considering them to be vicious, immoral, and hypersexualized inferiors or animalized beings. Still, they acknowledge that their conduct is the result of their life in bondage. These paradoxical views about slavery were common contemporary opinions about slaves and slavery circulating in the Atlantic.⁶⁶

In Floresta's fictional narrative of "Páginas de uma vida obscura" about the life of Domingos, or in the fictional text "Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca" about the slave lament in the quarry, or even in the passages of her treatise on the education of girls, she never advocates for the abolition of slavery. She criticizes the evil masters and the inhumanity of the institution and the excessive exploitation of slaves. Domingos served his master unconditionally, but never received anything but harshness in exchange for his goodness and devotion. Likewise, the slave in the quarry laments his fate of exploitation until the end without further outcomes. In the treatise, she calls for the withdrawal of domestic slaves from the homes of Brazilian families, yet she makes no similar demand for slaves in the fields. The presence of slaves inside domestic spaces was a subject of Nísia Floresta's pen as soon as she came back from Europe. She regarded domestic slaves to be both a sign of a lack of civilization and a contradiction to her national project for Brazil. In a personal letter to a friend, a famous zoologist in Paris, she says her books are her contribution to make Brazil progress towards civilization. In addition to that, she seems to defend the mistreatment of slaves by evil masters, while simultaneously calling for the humanization of slavery. One reason for this standpoint was the end of the transatlantic slave trade that made acquiring new slaves impossible, thereby putting the very existence of slavery at risk. Still, it is undeniable that Floresta's arguments on slavery were constrained by Brazilian conservative discourses of that time.

Adèle Toussaint likewise condemns the ill treatment of blacks and judges slavery to be an uncivilized aspect of Brazil, yet she justified its existence as the only possible form of work for that moment. She argues that the Emperor is not guilty of maintaining slavery:

One must not accuse the Emperor of Brazil for this state of things.
He is, on the contrary, full of kindness, and his slaves are treated

gênero, literatura e viagem em Adèle Toussaint-Samson e Nísia Floresta (Europa e Brasil, século XIX)" (Ph.D.'s dissertation, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2016), 123-125.

⁶⁶ As the example of José Bonifácio. See Chalhoub, *A força da escravidão*, 42-43.

with great mildness; but he had found these customs established in mounting upon the throne, and could not modify in a day these customs of the country; he had to close his eyes on the slave trade, for they alone were able to bear the labors of tillage under this burning sun.⁶⁷

Therefore, she justifies slavery in Brazil as a consequence of the adaptability of blacks to the weather and the lack of free laborers to work under the tropical sun. She attributes racial reasons for the employment of slaves and as a way to justify all negative aspects of the institution. Her opinion on the goodness of the Brazilian Emperor relies on a positive and well-disseminated image of the monarch, which was built by himself through a careful process of public advertisement and reached many parts of the North Atlantic.⁶⁸ The fact that her husband was also the dance instructor of the princess probably made Toussaint take careful measures when describing the Emperor.

Floresta and Toussaint engaged in the public debate about slavery by exploring the theme through engendered narratives, which critically discussed ideas that circulated in other parts of nineteenth-century Atlantic. In the 1850s, abolition of slavery was not a major theme in public discussions in Brazil, so descriptions of slave-family separations or sexual exploitation of enslaved women could consequently have a different meaning outside of an anti-slavery argument. By calling attention to women, both Nísia Floresta and Adèle Toussaint demanded that slavery be more humane. In that context, this call could be a struggle for the durability of slavery through the internal reproduction of slavery. In their fictional and non-fictional narratives, Floresta and Toussaint were aware that enslaved women had the power to stop reproduction, directly influencing the institution of slavery. Nevertheless, taking into account their differences, the true motivation of their writings is still open to question: did Floresta and Toussaint share abolitionist ideas of a world free of slavery or were they indirectly advocating for ways to make slavery last indefinitely?

Observing the Carioca Women

A variety of nineteenth-century travelers describe upper-class Brazilian women as secluded, superstitious, lazy, evil masters of slaves and totally submitted to the patriarchal rule of fathers, husbands, and sons. According to Miriam Moreira Leite, the habits of Brazilian women played an important role in the majority of foreign travel accounts. If locals disregarded the place of women in Brazilian society, travelers demonstrated great interest on

⁶⁷ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 45.

⁶⁸ Ana Maria Mauad, "Imagem e auto-imagem do Império," In *História da vida privada: Império: a corte e a modernidade nacional* 2, edited by L.F. Alencastro et al (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 181-232.

the subject, due to their different customs.⁶⁹ British Maria Graham was the preceptor of the princess Maria da Glória, and she portrays the princess as a small tyrant who had the cruel habit of punishing her slaves.⁷⁰ Graham's description is one of the most famous accounts of Brazil and her derogatory opinions on Brazilian women were overly repeated, re-elaborated, and contested in posterior works throughout the century.⁷¹

French traveler Charles Expilly,⁷² one of the authors quoted by Adèle Toussaint, describes Brazilian ladies and their religious beliefs through what he considers superstitious practices of Catholicism, and their silly belief that one could talk directly to the Holy Virgin Maria by writing and then burning a letter addressed to her. Other European travelers emphasized women's lack of knowledge and depicted them as loud babblers, who could not sustain an instructive conversation, but who were able to say "trivialities nicely," apart from "their loud tone" used to give orders to slaves.⁷³ Charles Expilly also agrees with this vision of Brazilian women as ignorant beings. He is ironic in saying that their education is complete when they can read and write correctly, make candies, sing a few songs, play the piano, and, most importantly, when they are able to "handle the whip."⁷⁴

These general assumptions that depicted Brazilian free and upper-class women as lazy, uneducated, superstitious, and violent masters are opinions that both Nísia Floresta and Adèle Toussaint share. However, by exploring other aspects of women's lives in Brazil they also create a complex image of these women and their position in Brazilian society, a movement not so different from their descriptions about enslaved people. Nísia Floresta, for instance, depicts Brazilian women in her *Opúsculo Humanitário* by drawing inspiration from contemporary European travel accounts at the same time that she offers her own interpretations about the condition of women in Brazil. Adèle Toussaint, on her side, also reproduces many of these general ideas about Brazilian ladies at the same time that she uncovers, like Floresta, what was unseen at first glance by male travelers.

Toussaint describes in many passages of her *A Parisian in Brazil* the infamous seclusion of upper-class Brazilian ladies that was noticed by the majority of foreign

⁶⁹ Leite, *A condição feminina no Rio de Janeiro Século XIX*, 19.

⁷⁰ Maria Graham, *Diário de uma viagem ao Brasil e de uma estada nesse país durante parte dos anos de 1821, 1822 e 1823* (1956), accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.brasiliana.com.br/obras/diario-de-uma-viagem-ao-brasil-e-de-uma-estada-nesse-pais-durante-parte-dos-anos-de-1821-1822-e-1823/pagina/121>

⁷¹ Leite, *A condição feminina no Rio de Janeiro Século XIX*, 17-34.

⁷² Expilly, *Mulheres e costumes do Brasil*, 168-169.

⁷³ D.P. Kidder and J.C. Fletcher, "Preparo das mães," in *A condição feminina no Rio de Janeiro Século XIX*, edited by Leite, p.72.

⁷⁴ Expilly, *Mulheres e costumes do Brasil*, 168-169, my translation.

travelers.⁷⁵ She lived in Brazil from 1849 until the beginning of the next decade, and she argues that rich women were never seen on the streets by themselves during that time. According to her, they spend their lives locked inside their houses by their husbands, living among children and slaves, never going out by themselves. She describes how they would only leave the house accompanied by slaves or servants to go to church or to participate in religious processions. Adèle Toussaint argues that this general state of seclusion was even stricter in the Brazilian countryside, where no outsider could ever meet the lady of a *fazenda* (rural property).⁷⁶ According to historian of Brazil Sandra Graham, until the 1850s, Brazilians in general shared the idea that the street and the house were different social spheres and that high ranking women needed to be restricted to domestic spaces. Graham explains that the reason why these women would only leave the house accompanied by servants is that such company extended the protection of the home to the external world of the street.⁷⁷ Adèle Toussaint observed this particular habit of Brazilians contrasting it to her own public social life as a Parisian woman.

Besides seclusion, Adèle also emphasized the submission and dependency of Brazilian women to their husbands, and therefore settles upon a difference between them and European women:

When the Brazilian comes home he finds in his house a dutiful wife, who he treats and spoils like a child, bringing her dresses, jewels, and ornaments of all kinds; but this woman is not associated with him, neither in his business, his preoccupations, nor in his thoughts.⁷⁸

She continues with an argument shared by other travelers: “It is a doll whom he dresses for an occasion, and who, in reality, is but the first slave of the house.”⁷⁹ The comparison between white upper-class wives and slaves is justified because both of them shared comparable conditions, such as the lack of rights and autonomy. Besides, before the law or in the political sphere, women and slaves were considered beings in a state of minority.

Despite the fact that she is Brazilian, Floresta shares the same opinion as Europeans who see Brazilian women as uneducated:

⁷⁵ For an analysis of Toussaint’s observations about free and enslaved women, see: June Edith Hahner. “Adèle Toussaint-Samson, a Parisien in a Slavocrat Society,” *Women through Women’s Eyes, Latin American Women in Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Press, 1998), 81-102.

⁷⁶ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 81.

⁷⁷ Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *The House and the Street, The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 14-16.

⁷⁸ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 81.

⁷⁹ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, Ibid.

We have seen nothing, however, or almost nothing that aims to remove the obstacles that delay progress towards the education of our women, with the purpose of surpassing the darkness that obscures their intelligence, so that they may know the infinite sweetness of intellectual life.⁸⁰

In her treatise, Floresta shows the lack of development of women's education in her country, and she demonstrates how aside from being the result of the ignorance of locals, this situation was also a clear political position of the Brazilian government. In order to prove her argument, she transcribes the report on education written by the president of the Province of Minas Gerais who envisioned a particular utility for the education of girls: "one should teach girls everything that is adequate to a woman, who has to be her own servant and that of her husband."⁸¹ Nísia Floresta opposes this backward view with that of her modern vision of education as a way to develop women's intellectual life. Her modern Atlantic vision clashes with local beliefs that women are meant to serve themselves and their husbands, thereby being a servant of her family. Even though she is a strong supporter of the domestic duties that women have as mothers and wives, she perceives intellectual development and education as necessary for a better performance of these activities. Not ignoring the "infinite sweetness of intellectual life," Nísia also highlights that the current education offered to these women since childhood make them indolent due to seclusion and submission. As she states:

Instead of exercising, of doing promenades in the countryside, and pleasant, small activities that are truly fitted to childhood, they make her accustomed to an indolent languor, which cause her to have precocious diseases; she ends up depending for even the simplest things on the help of female slaves, without whom the Brazilian woman can neither do anything nor know how to do it.⁸²

Floresta would be a great supporter of physical exercise for women as a way to avoid aging, obesity, and precocious loss of vitality, all common among Brazilian upper-class women. This prescription opposes the ideal of seclusion discussed by Graham that was widespread in mid-nineteenth-century Brazilian society.

In "Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca," Floresta rephrases similar denunciations:

⁸⁰ "Nada porém, ou quase nada temos visto fazer-se para remover os obstáculos que retardam os progressos da educação das nossas mulheres, a fim de que elas possam vencer as trevas que lhes obscurecem a inteligência, e conhecer as doçuras infinitas da vida intelectual," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 44.

⁸¹ "deve-se ensinar às meninas tudo quanto convém que saiba uma mulher, que tem de ser criada de si e de seu marido," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 82.

⁸² "Em vez dos jogos de exercício, dos passeios campestres e de pequenos agradáveis trabalhos de uma utilidade real para a infância, acostumam-na a uma indolente languidez que a faz por vezes contrair males precoces, a depender inteiramente, ainda nas coisas mais fáceis, do auxílio das escravas, sem as quais a mulher brasileira assim habituada nada poder nem sabe fazer," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 117.

A portion of our women continues to be imprisoned in domestic life, exposed to all diseases this lifestyle causes, and they spend their lives in an indolent indifference, or dedicated to a work that the lack of method turns into a hard task that is many times without any real benefit; the other part of our women prefers to show off their charm, or the elegance of their clothes, in the most attended balls, rather than to come to breathe the living air of these mountains under these verdant natural domes, which are prolonged by the charming bends which shape the aqueduct. In the city, these elegant women are followed by gallants, poets, and even our wise men!⁸³

Floresta criticizes two types of women she identifies in Rio de Janeiro: those who are secluded at home in an indolent life and keep an unorganized routine of domestic work, and those women who live the leisure and frivolities of the public life. By criticizing the two possibilities of women's conduct in Brazil, she suggests nature walks as the most moral practice of spiritual elevation. Nature appears as a third way to avoid seclusion and its sedentary life, a means of evading the vicious habits of public sociability. Building on romantic practices of spiritual elevation through the contemplation of ruins in Europe, and on the contemplation of nature in Latin America,⁸⁴ Floresta transports romantic ideas to Brazil, where nature replaces the lack of old monuments.⁸⁵ Even though she goes to the aqueduct to appreciate nature, she also sees the monument as an inheritance from the colonial past. Her walk to visit this site is only complete when she arrives at the forests on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.⁸⁶

Both Toussaint and Floresta write about the lack of opportunities for Brazilian women, for whom marriage was one of very few means of making a living. Adèle Toussaint reports a dialogue between herself and the wife of a *fazenda* administrator during an excursion to the countryside of Brazil. Toussaint was shocked at the story of Maria, a woman whose husband forced her to receive enslaved women in her bed, where he caresses them in full view of his wife.⁸⁷ The woman was clearly distressed, feeling she had no other choice but to submit to her husband's demands: "When I refuse to watch, he beats me up and his

⁸³ "Uma parte das nossas mulheres continua estacionada na vida caseira, exposta às enfermidades que ela acarreta, e passa a vida em indolente indiferença, ou entregue ao trabalho, que a falta de método torna árduo e muitas vezes sem proveito real; a outra prefere ostentar os seus encantos, ou a elegância do seu trajar, nos empoeirados bairros prediletos da multidão, a vir respirar o ar vivificador destas montanhas sob as verdes abóbadas naturais que se prolongam pelas engraçadas curvas que formam o aqueduto. Lá seguem-nas os galanteadores, os poetas, e até os nossos sábios!" Floresta, "Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca," 43-44.

⁸⁴ Darlene Sandlier, *Brazil Imagined, 1500 to the Present* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008). Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1973).

⁸⁵ Lúcio, Introduction of "Uma viajante Brasileira na Itália do *Risorgimento*," XXI-LXXXVII.

⁸⁶ Nísia Floresta, "Passeio ao aqueduto da Carioca," 33.

⁸⁷ "Quand je m'y refuse, il me frappe et ses maîtresses m'insultent," excerpt excluded from the English translation Toussaint-Samson, *Une Parisienne au Brésil*, 148. My translation.

mistresses insult me.”⁸⁸ Toussaint describes the anger she felt upon hearing the report of the mistreated wife. After advising Maria to leave her husband, she was surprised to hear her response:

“Leave my husband!” she uttered. “And how should I live?” “I do not know how to earn money; and my children?” “That is all very well for you French women, who know how to earn your bread,” she finally said; “but we, to whom nothing has been taught, we are obliged to be the servants of our husbands.”⁸⁹

Through this dialogue with Maria, Toussaint displays Brazilian women's ignorance and submission, which she contrasts with the freedom of upper-class Parisian women like herself. Again, she makes it clear that there were few possibilities for Brazilian wives who seemed trapped in patriarchal customs, a situation she strategically contrasts with the freedom and independence that her Frenchness has allowed her.

In *Opúsculo Humanitário*, Floresta takes a similar view and denounces the same sort of dangers experienced by Brazilian women who faced abandonment outside the married life: “awaiting all the comforts and pleasantries she desired from her husband, a right she considered as indisputably given, considering her role as mother of the husband’s children.”⁹⁰ In order to support her defense of the necessity of women’s financial independence, Floresta tells the story of an unhappy woman of one of the most honored and wealthy families of Rio de Janeiro. She describes her as a dutiful wife and loving mother who perished in poverty after she was abandoned by the father of her five children:

Time passed... and the poor mother who had always been a loyal wife perished miserably, abandoned in a small house in the same city where her husband and children were ostentatiously enjoying wealth and the luxuries of high society, only showing up in her last days to make the moment of her passing away even more painful.⁹¹

This passage emphasizes Floresta’s moral struggle for women's education and professionalization so that Brazilian women might be prepared to face difficulties in life, such as widowhood, abandonment, or financial ruin. She adds that the mother’s poverty could consequently cause the children’s misery, placing the stability of the whole family at risk.

⁸⁸ “Quand je m’y refuse, il me frappe et ses maîtresses m’insultent,” excerpt excluded from the English translation. Toussaint-Samson, *Une Parisienne au Brésil*, 148.

⁸⁹ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 72-73.

⁹⁰ “esperando do marido todas as suas comodidades e a satisfação de todos os seus caprichos, direito que julga indisputavelmente firmado constituindo-se simples mãe de seus filhos,” Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 125-126.

⁹¹ “Volveu o tempo... e a pobre mãe, que nunca tinha deixado de ser esposa fiel, pereceu abandonada e miseravelmente em uma pequena casa da mesma cidade, onde o esposo e seus próprios filhos, ostentando o luxo e a consideração da alta sociedade, só lhe apareceram em seus últimos dias para tornar-lhe mais dolorosa a hora do passamento,” Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 125-126.

Nísia Floresta is surely alluding to her own experience as a young woman who lost her father at the age of 18 and later her husband when she had two small children. She had to face these two moments while she was working as a schoolteacher and a tutor. After her trip to Europe, this idea of women's professionalization became more central to her argument. While in Paris, she had contact with rich, noble, and educated ladies in the classroom of the free courses offered at the *Collège de France*.⁹² For Floresta, the ignorance among Brazilian elite women was both purposeless and dangerous for Brazilian families, something quite different from what she witnessed in North Atlantic societies where upper-class women received instruction and had more possibilities to develop their own autonomy.

By describing situations of oppression, submission, and violence among secluded, ignorant, indolent, and even child-like Brazilian women, both authors uncover other motivations which are related to their personal position as authors. Adèle Toussaint uses the passage about Brazilian women to empower her authorship. By labeling herself as French or even as a Parisian woman she automatically granted herself adjectives such as free, autonomous, independent from the husband, professional and educated, following an older tradition of many European travelers to the Americas who stated their superiority towards locals.⁹³ In the case of Floresta, her experience as a traveler in search for knowledge separated her path from those of her compatriots confined into patriarchal rules.

Once again, in the dialogue with the administrator's wife, Adèle Toussaint suggests a change in the life of the unhappy Maria and offers her a job. By doing so, she places herself in a position superior to Maria, and then she praises her own goodwill: "I could well see that I had enlightened this soul, and opened new longings before her."⁹⁴ Afterwards, when the wife left the husband and asked Toussaint to find her an occupation, the author concludes that she had achieved her goal, developing in Maria's soul a sense of dignity, teaching her to make a living through work, rehabilitating her morally and healing her physical injuries.⁹⁵ She points out to the reader the difference between herself, a French educated woman, and the other Brazilian women, at the same time revealing her skills for enlightening their paths by replacing the darkness of their archaic customs. In so doing, by describing the backwards habits of local women Toussaint inferred opposite qualities for herself in a form of rhetorical construction inspired by the dualism of civilization and barbarism.

⁹² *Revue française* (1861), Tome 4eme (Paris: Bureaux de la revue française, 1863), 128-129, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63444472/f1.item.r=enceinte%20de%20dames>.

⁹³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel writing and transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 15-37.

⁹⁴ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 73.

⁹⁵ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, Ibid.

The fact that Nísia Floresta was Brazilian did not prevent her from employing a similar rhetorical device, whether in public or private writings. She acknowledges in her treatise on women's education that foreign opinion on Brazil about Brazilian women was accurate enough to be disregarded.⁹⁶ Building on these foreign opinions about women in her own country, Nísia Floresta tells the story of a six-year-old girl who studied in a school in Rio de Janeiro. For Floresta's readers who knew she was a schoolteacher, it is obvious that she was sharing an autobiographical experience.⁹⁷ Floresta narrates in the third person:

Seeing her breathe with difficulty every time she entered the classroom, [the schoolteacher] took care to untighten her corset that was strongly oppressing her chest. Many times, she explained to the mother of this innocent tormented girl the fatal consequences that could result from the compression of her fragile organs.⁹⁸

The story ends tragically and the poor little girl dies as a victim of her mother's vanity, as it was her mother's idea to make her daughter notorious through her body appearance. Implicitly, Floresta builds her image as distinct from the majority of her compatriots who were imprisoned in ignorance and the frivolous world of women. Unlike Toussaint, who succeeds by changing the life of Maria, Nísia, on the other hand, acknowledges her failure to provide a good education to girls, whose families insisted on undoing her work as an educator.

Floresta projects herself as different from women who were her contemporaries, but this was not only in her published texts. In the rare personal documents she bequeathed, she stresses the same intellectual and material differences between herself and other average Brazilian women. For instance, in a letter addressed to her friend and famous French zoologist Louis Duvernoy in 1855, Floresta commented on her Brazilian female friend Germaine, who had decided to travel to London and Paris. Nísia considered her friend as unfit to understand the marvels of Europe because she was unable "to appreciate these great [European] assemblages of intelligence and force."⁹⁹ In her opinion, Germaine could not enjoy what the Old World had to offer because she lacked intelligence, study, and perhaps manners. In

⁹⁶ Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 100.

⁹⁷ For more autobiographical aspects of Floresta's work, see Scatena, *Peregrinas de Outrora*, 69.

⁹⁸ "vendo-a respirar com dificuldade sempre que entrava para as classes, tinha o cuidado de afrouxar-lhe o espartilho que lhe oprimia o peito a tal ponto. Por vezes ponderou à mãe da inocente supliciada as funestas consequências que podiam resultar de lhe comprimir assim os tenros órgãos," Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário*, 106-107.

⁹⁹ "apprécier ces grands basars d'intelligences et de force." Augusta Brasileira [Nísia Floresta] to George-Louis Duvernoy, March 2, 1855, Correspondence Louis Duvernoy, MS 2743, Bibliothèque Central - Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France.

another passage of the letter one can see how Floresta, along with not arranging the meeting between Germaine and Duvernoy, managed to avoid the encounter:

I did not sent you a letter through her [Germaine], because I was afraid of bothering you and distracting you from your serious occupations to give her some of your precious moments. I sent her to the good Mrs. Delhorbe to guide her in Paris, and this good woman had many problems because of that, according to a letter she wrote me about the subject.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Germaine managed to meet the prominent professor, as the fact that she brought back his letter from Paris to Floresta reveals. In the passage, it is obvious that Floresta judged Germaine as incapable of behaving properly in French society. Floresta did not think it worthwhile that she, who had ventured to Europe by herself and had become acquainted with many important European figures, should mediate her friend's meeting with someone as important as this or any other intellectual. In her writings, Floresta claims to be one of the rare enlightened women in Brazil, if not the only one. This belief became stronger after her first trip to Europe, which only heightened her own idea that she was a pioneer--a stance observable in a number of her later writings.

Toussaint, on the other hand, believes the majority of Brazilian women lived in a state of intellectual inferiority when compared to her own. Nevertheless, during her time in Rio de Janeiro she did meet and socialize with other intellectual women. She wrote a poem, for example, to Joana Manso Noronha, a contemporary play writer and journalist who seemed to be close to her, and published it in the *Jornal das Senhoras*, a newspaper written and headed by local intellectual women in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁰¹ Although Toussaint befriended many intellectual women in real life, in her memoirs on Brazil she only describes Brazilian women as backward.

Although Toussaint repeated the prejudiced assumptions that foreigners held about Brazilian women, she also tried to show the side of their lives that was hidden from public view. As a woman, Toussaint could get into the secret lives of Brazilian ladies, witnessing things that were hidden from male travelers. According to her,

It takes a long time to know the meanderings of the private life of secluded women; Besides, the appearances are so well guarded that one must live years in the land to even begin to know the inner life

¹⁰⁰ “je ne vous ai point écrit par elle craignant de vous gêner en vous arrachant à vos serieuses occupations pour lui donner quelques uns de vos moments précieux. Je l’ai adressé à la complaisante madame Delhorbe pour la diriger à Paris, et cette bonne personne a eu, d’après une lettre qu’elle m’écrit la dessus, bien d’embarras pour cela.” Augusta Brasileira [Nísia Floresta] to George-Louis Duvernoy, March 2, 1855, Correspondence Louis Duvernoy, MS 2743, Bibliothèque Central - Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France.

¹⁰¹ *Jornal das Senhoras*, Rio de Janeiro, 1852-1855, accessed June 1, 2015, www.bn.br/hemerotecadigital.

of these homes, of such patriarchal customs and habits, at first sight, where frequently three generations live together under the same roof in the most perfect concord.¹⁰²

Being a woman and having lived for twelve years in Brazil provided Toussaint the opportunity to access the obscure private life of upper-class Brazilian families. However, she observes that this patriarchal prescription of seclusion did not prevent deviation from moral rules:

As for the Brazilian ladies, penned up as they are by their husbands in the enclosure of their houses, in the midst of their children and their slaves, never going out unaccompanied to either Mass or processions, one must not imagine, on that account, that they are more virtuous than others, only that they have the art of appearing so.¹⁰³

She acidly denounces the immoralities practiced under the cover of seclusion:

Everything is done mysteriously in these impenetrable abodes, where the lash has made the slave as silent as the tomb. Under the cloak of the family even, many things are hidden. All this *is*, or at least *was* (for several years now Brazilian ladies go out alone), - all this is fruit of the sequestration imposed upon women.¹⁰⁴

Adèle Toussaint concludes that seclusion did not prevent upper-class ladies from infringing strict social norms, as one could think at first glance, but quite the contrary. Seclusion led women to behave immorally and out of sight of their patriarchal husbands, sometimes even with the cooperation of slaves, “as silent as the tomb.”

In another passage, Toussaint criticizes the idea that Brazilian ladies are indolent. Through her knowledge of the private lives of Brazilian families, she realizes that one of the most prevalent opinions on the Brazilian women is that they are lazy and that they do nothing. Although she affirms that this image is not entirely wrong, she explains the other side, showing that these ladies did nothing by themselves, but distributed orders to enslaved servants. As Toussaint states, rich women in Brazil out of self-respect never let themselves be caught in any sort of work.¹⁰⁵ Yet, she reveals that under an apparent idleness, lay a laborious routine:

However, when one is admitted into any of her intimacy, one finds her in the morning, her bare feet in *tamancas*, a dressing-gown of muslin for dress, presiding at the making of *doces* (preserves of all sorts), of the *cocada* (cocoa jelly [sic]), and arranging them on the

¹⁰² Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 80.

¹⁰³ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, *ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁵ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, *ibid.*

taboleiro (large wooden platter) of her negresses or negroes, who soon leave to sell in the city the doces, the fruits, the vegetables of the plantation.¹⁰⁶

Besides food preparation, they also dedicated themselves to needlework. She explains how these tasks of coordinating slave work performed in the privacy of domestic seclusion could result in these women's financial independence:

Each one of the slaves, called *ganho*, must bring back to his mistress a certain designated sum at the end of each day, and many are beaten when they return without the sum. This is what constitutes the pocket-money of Brazilian ladies, and allows them to satisfy their whims.¹⁰⁷

By uncovering the mysteries of Brazilian homes, Toussaint shows what is behind the role of apparent submission, dependency, and indolence. The examination of these women reveals skills to overcome social rules by acquiring financial independence (sometimes along with enslaved servants) and a desire to pursue their will while maintaining the public image of a submissive, dependent, and child-like wife. The author uncovers the ways upper-class women reached financial independence from their husbands or patriarchs through a direct exploitation of slave labor. What it is more important in this report on Brazilian women is Adèle Toussaint's empowerment of her own narrative, which is a valuable addition to the corpus of travel narratives from the era. As a female author, Toussaint is able to see and describe what other European travelers--limited by their gender--could not.

On multiple occasions, Floresta and Toussaint discussed the role of women in Brazilian society. By looking at the lives of other women, they engaged in a public debate about the social position of women in society, comparing the situation they encountered in Brazil with other societies they knew through their own spatial travels or through the circulation of ideas in the Atlantic. They demanded changes and stimulated their readers to accept new gender standards for female social conduct through their writings. Their advantaged position as women who were educated and well-traveled gave them a rhetorical distance on the Brazilian women they discussed in their work. In exposing these women's realities, they drew on their own identities in a way that simultaneously reinforced their unique right to speak as authors on the subject of women's place in society.

As contradictory as it may seem, both authors opposed slavery for its cruelty at the same time that they shared derogatory views of enslaved people. In relation to women, they reproduced a current image of Brazilian women as passive prisoners with archaic habits who

¹⁰⁶ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁷ Toussaint-Samson, *A Parisian in Brazil*, 82-83.

were ignorant in comparison to the autonomous, emancipated women of Europe. They wrote about Rio de Janeiro's inhabitants and in the meantime, they established themselves as well-traveled authors, knowledgeable about other societies, capable of evaluating the labor of other individuals, such as housewives and slaves. Such positioning allowed them to criticize the lives of free women who were of upper-class positions. All of this considered, each of them also had their own unique interpretations on these matters. In this article, my goal was to engage with the contradictions and complexities in Nísia Floresta's and Adèle Toussaint's writings and personal lives, not viewing them as marginal opinions within a unified body of literature, but taking these complexities into account as constitutive parts of their formation as authors. While they lived in the capital of the Brazilian Empire during the 1850s, they made judgements on slaves' and women's lives, and both authors used their writing to start a transatlantic dialogue about the place of slavery and the role of women in nineteenth-century Brazilian society and abroad.

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