Concluding Remarks

The outbreak of World War I 'sadly knocked [...] to pieces' the grand ambitions of Willy Pogány's poster discussed in Chapter 2 (Stanton Coit 1916, 91). By 1916, IWSA Headquarters was eager to get bundles of the picture off their hands. The last use the design did find was the front page of the October issue of the French edition of *Jus Suffragii* in 1914. Now, it appeared alongside a translation of the 'International Manifesto of Women' which Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Chrystal Macmillan had drawn up in the days after the outbreak of the war. The text spoke in name of the 'women of the world', who at this time found themselves bound by the 'almost unbearable' fate 'of seeing all that they most reverence and treasure, the home, the family, the race, subjected not merely to risks, but to certain and extensive damage which they are powerless either to avert or to assuage' (Fawcett and Macmillan 2012 [1914], 366).

With the wave transformed into the impending destruction of war, the image visualised women's shared concerns for the 'real welfare of nations' (Fawcett and Macmillan 2012 [1914], 366). At the same time, the broken shackles came to illustrate the story of women's progress so far – now imperilled by overwhelming odds. With the outbreak of World War I, international suffragists' steady assertions of sisterhood, scribbled, assembled in moveable type, or lisped in a foreign lingua franca, came under duress. Free travel and communications were suspended and much of the activity of the ICW and the IWSA was halted for the time being, while among many layers of society, internationalism was viewed with suspicion, if not outright hostility (Oldfield 2003; Forestell and Moynagh 2012, 354). At this moment, the sense of sisterhood the IWSA

had sought to foster clashed painfully with what male politicians defined as the national interest. With suffrage bills passed, without much fanfare, close on the heels of the war, suffragists in these contexts lost their unifying impetus and went into 'abeyance' – before feminist agitation returned with a global vengeance in the 1960s and 70s and changed the parameters of feminism, feminist internationalism, and, indeed, of sisterhood itself (Taylor 1989).[1] Seemingly more often than not, this new generation wanted little to do with the white, middle-class, Christian, or worse, *bourgeois-liberal* ideas they imputed to first-wave predecessors (Nolan and Daley 1994, 6–7).

This book set out to study the role memories of antislavery played in the nineteenth-century construction of an international women's movement. One of the abiding questions involved in studying these women is how, in the face of legal, practical, and customary limitations, they found a common language in which to formulate demands and set out strategy (e.g., Rendall 1985; Bosch and Kloosterman 1990; Anderson 2007; Boussahba-Bravard 2021). Rather than analysing the rhetoric of this language, I have made a case for paying attention to the memory work which created its reference. As they forged bonds, personal and imagined, across borders, women's rights advocates also worked to make antislavery part of their shared usable past. Elizabeth Cady Stanton called on the fruits of this work when she addressed the problem of common language in evocative tones at the international founding conference of the ICW:

> There is a language of universal significance, more subtle than that used in the busy marts of trade, that should be called the mother-tongue, by which with a sigh or a tear, a gesture, a glance of the eye, we know the experiences of each other in the varied forms of slavery. With the spirit forever in bondage, it is the same whether housed in golden cages, with every want supplied, or wandering the dreary deserts of life friendless and forsaken. (Quoted in Bosch and Kloosterman 1990, 2)

Stanton's reference to a mother-tongue did not just build intimacy by claiming an intuitive understanding of any other woman's experience of subjection (though she did that, too). She also reminded listeners of their

[1] Various legislations towards full suffrage were passed in the UK, the US, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland between 1917 and 1919. This was not yet the case in France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania, or Bulgaria. In Offen's estimation, French feminists had to patiently chip away at a particularly persistent reactionary trend, reinforced by post-war population disbalance (2018). For the lack of celebrations of suffrage, Bosch 2021 and DuBois 1994, 252–253.

shared possession of an expressive set of commonplaces which women's rights advocates had been moulding for decades, as they articulated the relationship of their cause to that of abolition. Without this work, the statement would have signified little and reassured none as to the potential of an organisation like the ICW. Much like the IWSA's image, women's rights advocates cut, reframed, and recontextualised memories of slavery to serve different purposes – and their selections and manipulations left indelible grooves in the history of antislavery, as well as feminism.

RETROSPECTIVE

At the same time that feminist abolitionists began to formulate women's rights critiques in the US (a development Stanton and several other veterans would remind visitors of some days later at the ICW, in the morning session devoted to 'Pioneers'), European women in the orbit of romantic socialism also looked to the struggle against slavery. Saint-Simonian and Fourierist pamphlets and periodicals discussed both the cause of the enslaved and the future of women, and the circle behind the *Tribune des femmes* went beyond the woman–slave analogy as they connected the two and called for the 'intervention of *woman* in human affairs' ('Le fait' 1833, 57). The most sustained record of these imaginative relationships occurs in fictional works, a rare accepted outlet in which female reformers could develop their thought, and on their own terms. Sand and Mühlbach's novels and Tristan's romanticised travel writing not only testify to a sense of connection with antislavery history, they are also creative feats of memory work, as the authors wove into their texts memories of English abolitionism and women's historic contribution to the antislavery tradition. Taking confident ownership of sentimental antislavery motifs, as Sand did with her blatant update of *Paul et Virginie*, they criticised societies run without women's voices, finding their own expression for broader romantic socialist tenets. Moreover, they invited readers, particularly female readers, into a complex web of identifications with the abolitionist impulse, the enslaved, and their sisters abroad, and called on women to claim their place in public affairs. By placing texts like Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* (1837) and Lydia Maria Child's editorials in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1843) into this wider web, and observing the cross-fertilisation, it becomes clear that this preoccupation was not just an Anglo-American affair, but part of a transnational formation. While, after 1848, Mühlbach turned to

more docile historical topics, Tristan and especially Sand continued to attract admiration among progressive readerships, ensuring readers for their early critiques of marriage and of masculine politics.

Fourteen years after *Tribune des femmes* ceased operations, with the events of 1848 opening new but short-lived vistas for women's advocates, a Parisian women's circle once again found inspiration in antislavery. Prominent voices among them, including Jeanne Deroin, had been part of the Saint Simonian community in the early 1830s. However, they not only looked at the motifs of sentimental antislavery, but also promoted among their peers reports, and even documents, of radical Garrisonian abolitionism as they called for the 'complete abolition of all privileges of sex, race, birth, caste and fortune' (À nos abonnés' 1849, 1). Anne Knight was a driving in factor in this, publicly presenting herself as the embodiment of a profound connection between the movements and bringing with her detailed knowledge and materials of the American and English campaigns. As hopes for political changes granting female enfranchisement and more educational, employment and organisational opportunities waned, Deroin and her collaborators turned towards the international movement. They wrote to colleagues in America and UK, using abolition as a common horizon, and Deroin included in her almanacs a steady supply of materials related to antislavery to serve as a resource for better times. Though Knight and Deroin produced their variety of materials under adverse circumstances and had no political clout, their recorded readership continued for years and extended into the United States, contributing to a common store of ideas and their expressions.

With the beginning of lasting organisational efforts in the 1860s, as the Woman Question became a structural topic of public debate (and ridicule), women's rights advocates regularly made a case for the relationship between the causes of abolition and women's rights. In doing so, European writers relied on widely read cultural materials, particularly *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Their characterisations of the relationship were subject to internal debate, particularly the parallels between women and the enslaved in the United States. The legacy of the abolition movement was debated too, including the role played by written propaganda like that produced by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Before the 1890s, most discussions were in the vein of making common cause with the struggle against chattel slavery, while the turn of the century saw a new influx of expressions of competition or even animosity. Across the board, the repertoire of memories was limited and dictated by a set of commonplaces.

Much of the history of antislavery was ignored. Structurally, women's rights advocates did not recall the emancipatory activities of the enslaved themselves because it did not serve their various arguments or because it exceeded the limits of their imagination. Memories of antislavery could serve a variety of demands and were recalled across periodicals with liberal-conservative, socialist, and radical leanings, though the verdict on particular stories varied. The discussions of antislavery and the use of the woman–slave analogy, which was inflected by them, were neither received rhetoric nor zealous idiosyncrasy on the part of particular writers – they were a structural part of the international movement culture women's rights advocates constructed. Stowe's fame contributed to the lasting association of women and antislavery in the public imagination and some works, like Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* and particularly Mill's *Subjection of Women*, made different woman–slave analogies part of public debate. But it was in the internal debates, reflected in articles, editorials, and reader letters, that women's rights advocates consolidated a shared, if contested, usable past. Their efforts were not only directed towards the status of woman, but also to the strategic action appropriate and licensed to change it.

With the publication of the first volume of the *History of Woman Suffrage* (*HWS*) Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton offered a powerful, unifying foundational myth to the ranks of increasingly well-organised international suffragists. With the exception of socialist feminists like Clara Zetkin, who pointedly did not include their biographies in *Die Gleichheit*, most women's rights advocates in Europe were glad to grant these enterprising Americans the status of pioneers, or even founding mothers. Their version of events at the 1840 World's Anti-Slavery Convention circulated widely, as European suffragists reproduced it in their own comparative movement histories. By narrating the story in emotive ways, writers made it serve several functions, including emphasising a liberal, philanthropic genealogy of their movement, framing feminism in terms of the goal of suffrage, and encouraging affective ties with colleagues abroad. The antislavery origin myth travelled far and wide, showing up in academic histories, small-scale pamphlets, and novels. The editors of the *HWS* wanted their project to make an impact in Europe, and it did. The books proved a vector for importing particular American indignant narratives of racial antagonism that had flared up in the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) in the 1860s into European reform contexts which considered themselves historically benevolent to the cause of the enslaved (based on, rather than

in spite of, their respective imperial ideologies). The proliferation of this story, despite being about a key moment of intersection and solidarity between the two causes, contributed to the 'political limitations of Euro-American feminism' which women from both ethnic and ideological minorities found themselves running up against (Amos and Parmar 1984, 3).

LANGUAGES OF SISTERHOOD

As historians have pointed out, feminist internationalists in the nineteenth century had several transnational registers available to them, including '[r]adical Christianity' (Anderson 2000, 83), citizenship, and imperialism – and they also quickly constructed their own language of sisterhood and shared suffering. The language of slavery, though not specifically chattel slavery, was perhaps the oldest of them. Calls for women's 'emancipation' and 'free women' were sexualised during the taunting backlash against the increasingly outlandish claims of the Saint Simonian leadership and fell out of use not just in France, but in surrounding countries as well. Despite some efforts to popularise the French 'féminisme' in the 1880s, this word would remain contentious until the twentieth century. Comparisons of women with the enslaved, however, be these married women, marriageable girls, or prostitutes, were a constant, and perhaps expected, feature of different women's rights advocacies.

Women's rights advocates knew well that the persuasive force of these arguments lay with other women, not with lawmakers. After the public ventures of Sand and Tristan, much of the later initiative turned inwards. Knight describes her experiences trying to convince dignitaries of her point of view, but many of the vehicles for the invocation of antislavery history were in first instance produced for other women. The editorial practices of women's rights periodicals make particularly clear how writers and editors were determined to publicise a sense of historical connection, and this way to develop a specific usable past among the movement. As J. S. Mill's reception suggests, he was widely beloved among women's rights advocates not only for the cogency and sparkle of his arguments, but also for his rare resolve in using his celebrity to draw certain comparisons between women's situation and chattel slavery and place these before the general public.

Complementing Ana Stevenson's findings on the cross-class appeal of the woman–slave analogy in American reform discourse with other horizons, this study suggests a revaluation of the status of invoking slavery

in the course of women's rights advocacy. It was not a feature of heated rhetoric at critical junctures, such as 1848 (hyperbolic though it was). Instead, it emerges as a fundamental, transnational figure of thought, which women's rights advocates constantly contested and reworked. It was also not merely a residue of previous activism, though built from the materials that the antislavery campaign provided. Looking at the memory work of women's rights advocates as they gathered materials and invested their means and reputations into contested comparisons, the women's rights campaign also takes a different shape. The metrics of success change, as much of this work was oriented towards other women, rather than formal political gains. Similarly, the timeline changes. This work took on special prominence when windows of political opportunity closed, but represented a more sustained axis of women's rights agitation. More fundamentally, one could wonder where to draw the line between active agitation and self-historicisation altogether – as the authors of the *HWS* well knew.

IMPERIAL FEMINISMS

In the Anglo-American context, references to chattel slavery in feminist rhetoric have often been interpreted in the light of the feminist imperialism of prominent Victorians, with their Orientalism, assertions of superiority, and preoccupation with white women's role in the national project. This account finds some of the same patterns in Western Europe, but also complicates this story. Continental women's engagement with antislavery history was not intrinsically linked to any national imperial project, nor was it the remit of a particular class or ideology. In fact, women's rights advocates were often happy to defer to British and American victories in order to make their point. In the context of the self-conscious internationalism of many of the protagonists of this study, these histories could be made part of the same story – and at any rate, women could not afford to be chauvinist in constructing their usable past.

Particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the main framework for women's assertions of their social significance was not the nation state, but a fledgling transnational reform culture in which antislavery featured prominently. Though steeped in French imperial reality, Sand and Tristan's protagonists travelled to find foreign havens where they could exert their liberated influence as women, not French women. Neither they, nor Mühlbach, felt any compunction in asking readers to memorialise British examples as they pinpointed the relationship

between oppression in the home and in the world and formulated ways forward. After their initial hopefulness that the February Revolution would change the status quo faded, Deroin and Knight purposefully worked to popularise English and American memories of antislavery that not only belied, but aided an active resistance against French Republican triumphalist narratives.

The cosmopolitan attitude these women displayed did not spring from their class background. It was inspired by the romantic socialist circles they moved in, in which distinct antislavery arguments were brewing. In the second half of the century, with the advent of a liberal style of women's rights advocacy which strove for more general respectability and the waxing movement against legal prostitution, traditions of remembering antislavery developed that fit more neatly into the mould of imperial feminism described. Perhaps this trend was nowhere clearer than in the organisers' decision, for their women's fair of 1898, to include an exhibit of a Dutch women's antislavery petition not in the section devoted to the West Indies, but in the Hall of Social Work, alongside a bust of Josephine Butler and a call for woman suffrage (Van den Elzen 2025).

Other traditions, however, continued unabated and developed apace. Whether in tonalities of solidarity or of competition, socialist and radical women's rights authors were more likely to emphasise a form of kinship with the enslaved than to revel in the victories of a supposed reformist impulse which had come to be connoted as bourgeois. Later on, as expressions of indignation and frustration became more common among radical suffragists, writers like Frances Power Cobbe and Käthe Schirmacher indulged in an outright animosity which showed little of the general condescension of imperial feminism, but fed on anxieties over migration.

Invocations of slavery and abolition were not promoted by a single ideological outlook or governed by a single master logic. Following the memory work involved in keeping alive, or resurrecting, particular accounts reveals different genealogies as well as much messier, but more generative, fields of ongoing discussion. It seems there was an imperial feminism motivated by nineteenth-century reform culture, rather than national frames. Unpacking its constituent commonplaces and their different temporalities reveals moments of earnest cosmopolitanism, like Knight's connective efforts, as well as deeper roots of the self-mythologisation that produced the hegemonic feminist internationalism that affronted many 'sisters' in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Overall, a tendency

towards sympathy and expressions of solidarity, however limited, was replaced by more strident assertions of fundamental difference and of incompatibility.

MEMORY WORK AND THE LEGACY OF ABOLITIONISM

The diverse memories of antislavery that circulated in Continental discussions of the Woman Question had important commonalities, which have also been pointed out in the Anglo-American context. They adopted abolitionist motifs which ignored the impetus of the enslaved themselves and they implicitly took victims of chattel slavery to be male. Even when rhetoric of sisterhood at the turn of the century trumpeted universal, multicoloured alliances, this dream left historical enslaved foremothers behind, who after all, as Anna Julia Cooper reminded audiences at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 'could but suffer, and struggle, and be silent' (Cooper 1894, 712). This last structural amnesia is especially poignant in light of women abolitionists' original focus on the plight of enslaved women, which survived into the fiction discussed in Chapter 2. Part of the explanation lies in how the nature of the suffering endured by enslaved women fundamentally undercut its potential as a shared imaginary. While the pornographic horrors of what enslaved men could be made to endure were broadly cited, those specific to women only resurfaced in the white slave trade discussions of the campaign to abolish prostitution – when they could be comfortably projected onto other philanthropic subjects.

A final noteworthy trend is that, overwhelmingly, references were to British and American enslaving, not to their European counterparts. In part, this had to do with comfortable distance, which powered Stowe's unremitting popularity in European contexts even when the events of the Civil War reduced American readership of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But another factor was that certain narrative logics had been projected onto the one which had not been enunciated for the other. It was stories of abolitionism, its controversies in the US, its opportunities for humanitarian women, and its supposedly Christian victory in the UK dominions, that drove much remembrance of slavery in the international women's movement. These stories from the past could live side by side, as they were invoked to buttress different calls for the future. They did not occasion, however, genuine interest in the dark pages of women's own national histories.

The affiliation of women's rights advocates with antislavery left its mark on the legacy of abolitionism, as well as on the history of feminism.

The women in this book were strident and well-spoken and, in a spirit of ebullient internationalism, lent their skills to multiple causes at once. Women's recall of antislavery to express the difficulties of their lives, and to form a common store of tactics for political action, helped to shape the global culture of reform. It is felt in the romantic socialism and democratic discourse of the 1830s and 1840s, in the mid-century competing bourgeois and socialist imaginings of global citizenship, and, at the turn of the twentieth century, in the cultural fascination with white slavery and the dogged push for political representation. Current historiography of the women's movement can hardly escape the grooves drawn by the memory work of previous women, as they told certain stories and not others and archived certain texts and not others. Lucy Delap has recently suggested that since history will not simply be the judge, 'usable' histories of feminism might self-consciously attend to the ways in which 'feminisms have been put to use, rhetorically, intellectually, and materially, in the lives of historical actors' (2020, 23). Paying attention to how historical interpretations of abolitionism have influenced modern conceptions of our duties as citizens of the world seems equally worthwhile.